

## Love-Based Curriculum as a Humanistic Approach to Islamic Religious Education in the Era of Independent Learning

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### Abstract

The background of this study is rooted in the need to transform Islamic Religious Education from a predominantly doctrinal and cognitive model into a more humane, student-centered, and value-oriented learning process that responds to the moral, emotional, and social challenges of contemporary education. This study examines the Love-Based Curriculum as a humanistic approach to Islamic Religious Education in the era of Independent Learning. Using a qualitative library research design, this study analyzes books, journal articles, and relevant academic publications published from 2020 onward, focusing on the intersection of humanistic education, Islamic Religious Education, curriculum development, and the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia. The findings show that the Love-Based Curriculum provides a relevant conceptual framework for strengthening Islamic Religious Education by integrating the values of love, compassion, empathy, mercy, and human dignity into curriculum objectives, learning processes, and educational relationships. This approach aligns closely with the principles of Independent Learning, particularly in promoting student-centered learning, contextual instruction, reflective practice, and holistic character formation. The study also finds that the Love-Based Curriculum has important pedagogical implications, including the transformation of teacher roles from knowledge transmitters to compassionate facilitators, the use of dialogical and experiential learning methods, and the development of authentic assessments that capture both cognitive achievement and value internalization.

### Keywords

Curriculum Innovation; Humanistic Education; Islamic Religious Education; Independent Learning; Love-Based Curriculum.



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## INTRODUCTION

Education in the twenty-first century is increasingly challenged to respond not only to academic demands but also to the moral, emotional, and social crises experienced by students. In the Indonesian context, these challenges are particularly relevant to Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which is expected to cultivate faith, morality, and social responsibility while simultaneously preparing learners to live in a plural, digital, and rapidly changing society. However, conventional IRE practices have often been criticized for being overly cognitive,

doctrinal, and teacher-centered, leaving limited space for empathy, dialogue, emotional growth, and the development of humane relationships in the classroom. In this situation, the emergence of the Love-Based Curriculum offers a promising alternative because it seeks to reposition education as a process of nurturing compassion, dignity, tolerance, and spiritual maturity. Rather than focusing solely on the transfer of religious knowledge, this approach emphasizes the internalization of love, mercy, and humanistic values as the essence of Islamic teaching and educational practice. Such a perspective is highly relevant in the era of Independent Learning, which encourages flexibility, learner autonomy, and meaningful learning experiences centered on students' needs and potential (Sunarya & Sassi, 2025; Aliyya et al., 2025).

The discourse on a Love-Based Curriculum has gained significant attention in recent studies on Islamic education in Indonesia, especially as scholars seek ways to humanize religious learning amid the rise of intolerance, dehumanization, and formalistic religiosity. A Love-Based Curriculum is grounded in the belief that education should not merely transmit doctrine but should shape learners into compassionate, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible individuals. In Islamic educational thought, this orientation is closely related to the values of *rahmah* (compassion), *mahabbah* (love), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *adab* (ethical conduct), which frame the relationship between human beings, God, and the wider community. Contemporary studies argue that this curriculum model can serve as an inclusive-humanistic paradigm for madrasas and schools because it integrates Islamic spirituality with empathy, multicultural awareness, and social harmony. It is therefore not only a pedagogical innovation but also a strategic response to the fragmentation of moral education and the tendency of religious instruction to prioritize memorization over character formation. By centering love as a foundational principle, the curriculum provides a transformative space where learners can experience religion as a source of peace, respect, and personal growth rather than merely a body of formal obligations (Mukhsin et al., 2025; Danil et al., 2025; Misbakhuddin et al., 2026).

At the same time, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka or Independent Learning in Indonesia has opened new opportunities for rethinking the role of Islamic Religious Education. Independent Learning promotes flexibility in curriculum design, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the recognition of students' diverse interests, abilities, and learning trajectories. These principles resonate strongly with humanistic education, which views learners as whole persons with emotional, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions that must be nurtured holistically. In this framework, teachers are not merely transmitters of content but facilitators of growth who create caring, dialogical, and participatory learning environments. Several recent studies have shown that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education can be strengthened when it is interpreted through a humanistic lens, because such a perspective aligns curriculum flexibility with self-actualization, learner agency, and meaningful value internalization. Consequently, the Love-Based Curriculum can be positioned as a humanistic approach that complements the philosophy of Independent Learning by ensuring that curricular freedom does not become merely technical flexibility, but also a moral and

relational commitment to students' well-being and character development (Nadhuha et al., 2025; Hamidalloh & Muluk, 2026).

The relevance of a Love-Based Curriculum becomes even more urgent in the contemporary era marked by digital acceleration, social polarization, and the weakening of interpersonal sensitivity among young people. In many educational settings, students are exposed to excessive competition, cyberbullying, intolerance, and shallow forms of religious understanding that can reduce religion to rigid identity markers rather than a path of ethical transformation. Islamic Religious Education, therefore, must move beyond normative instruction toward a pedagogical model that restores the human dimension of religion. Recent literature highlights that the internalization of mahabbah values in the curriculum can function as a preventive strategy against dehumanization by cultivating divine awareness, human solidarity, scientific responsibility, and ecological consciousness. Likewise, studies on the construction of love-based Islamic curricula emphasize the need to synthesize contextual Qur'anic interpretation, religious moderation, and social empathy in classroom learning. These developments suggest that the Love-Based Curriculum is not an abstract ideal but a practical framework for rebuilding Islamic education as a space of mercy, moderation, and ethical engagement with contemporary life (Rofiq et al., 2026; Firmansyah et al., 2026).

Within this context, examining Love-Based Curriculum as a humanistic approach to Islamic Religious Education in the era of Independent Learning becomes academically and practically important. Academically, it contributes to the growing discourse on curriculum innovation in Islamic education by connecting humanistic pedagogy, Islamic ethical values, and national curriculum reform. Practically, it offers a conceptual foundation for teachers, schools, and policymakers to redesign IRE learning so that it is more inclusive, compassionate, student-centered, and relevant to the needs of contemporary learners. The Love-Based Curriculum invites educators to see students not as passive recipients of religious content, but as human beings who need to be guided with empathy, respect, and meaningful experiences that shape both their faith and humanity. Therefore, this study is important to explore how the values, principles, and practices of the Love-Based Curriculum can strengthen Islamic Religious Education within the framework of Independent Learning, and how this approach can contribute to the formation of learners who are spiritually grounded, emotionally mature, and socially humane in facing the complexities of modern life (Amin et al., 2026; Alsayd et al., 2025).

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative library research design to examine the concept of the Love-Based Curriculum as a humanistic approach to Islamic Religious Education in the era of Independent Learning. The study focused on analyzing contemporary scholarly literature, policy documents, and conceptual works related to humanistic education, Islamic Religious Education, curriculum development, and the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia. Data were collected from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government regulations, and relevant academic publications indexed in Google Scholar, particularly those

published from 2020 onward to ensure contextual relevance to current educational reforms. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive-analytical and content analysis techniques, in which the researcher identified key themes, concepts, and relationships concerning the values of love, compassion, empathy, student-centered learning, and the transformation of Islamic Religious Education in contemporary learning environments. To strengthen the validity of interpretation, the study applied source triangulation by comparing perspectives from Islamic educational theory, humanistic learning theory, and recent studies on Independent Learning policy and practice. Through this method, the research aimed to construct a comprehensive conceptual understanding of how the Love-Based Curriculum can function as a humanistic pedagogical framework that supports the development of spiritually grounded, emotionally mature, and socially responsible learners in Islamic education.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Philosophical and Humanistic Foundations of the Love-Based Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education**

The Love-Based Curriculum (LBC) emerges as a significant response to the need for a more humane and transformative orientation in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). In many educational contexts, IRE has long been dominated by normative, doctrinal, and cognitive approaches that prioritize memorization of concepts, legalistic religious instruction, and the completion of curriculum targets, often at the expense of students' emotional development, empathy, and social sensitivity. The Love-Based Curriculum offers a different philosophical direction by placing love, compassion, mercy, and respect for human dignity at the center of educational design. In this framework, the educational process is not merely a transmission of religious knowledge but a cultivation of humane consciousness that connects devotion to God with care for fellow human beings, the environment, and knowledge itself. This paradigm is deeply relevant to Islamic Religious Education because Islam itself presents rahmah, mahabbah, and akhlaq as central foundations of human formation. Therefore, the Love-Based Curriculum can be understood as a humanistic reformulation of IRE that attempts to reconcile Islamic spirituality with the psychological, emotional, and social needs of contemporary learners (Sunarya & Sassi, 2025; Aliyya et al., 2025).

From a humanistic educational perspective, the Love-Based Curriculum is closely aligned with the view that learners are whole persons who possess intellectual, emotional, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. Humanistic education emphasizes self-actualization, meaningful relationships, empathy, and the creation of learning environments that support students' growth as persons rather than as passive recipients of information. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this

perspective becomes especially important because the purpose of learning religion is not only to know religious doctrines but also to internalize values and embody them in everyday conduct. A humanistic approach encourages the teacher to become a facilitator, moral companion, and caring guide who helps students understand religion as a source of peace, compassion, and ethical responsibility. The Love-Based Curriculum strengthens this orientation by making love the organizing principle of curriculum goals, learning interactions, and value internalization. It seeks to ensure that religious learning does not produce rigid religiosity, but rather spiritually grounded and socially humane individuals who can live constructively in pluralistic societies (Mukhsin et al., 2025; Rofiq et al., 2025).

The philosophical strength of the Love-Based Curriculum also lies in its Qur'anic and ethical foundations. Islamic education cannot be separated from the normative teachings of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, both of which consistently present love, mercy, justice, and compassion as the basis of human interaction. Recent studies on the Qur'anic foundation of the Love-Based Curriculum show that love in Islamic education is not merely emotional sentiment, but a comprehensive theological and ethical orientation that includes love for God, love for the Prophet, love for fellow human beings, love for knowledge, and love for the natural world. These dimensions broaden the mission of Islamic Religious Education beyond ritual competence into the development of holistic consciousness. When such values are embedded in curriculum design, learning objectives, and pedagogical relationships, students are invited to experience religion as a force of moral transformation rather than as a rigid system of rules. This gives the Love-Based Curriculum a strong legitimacy within Islamic educational discourse, because it is rooted not only in contemporary pedagogical theory but also in the normative vision of Islam itself (Misbakhuddin et al., 2026; Sukiman et al., 2021).

Another important dimension of the Love-Based Curriculum is its relevance as an antidote to dehumanization in the digital and post-truth era. Students today are exposed to social fragmentation, online hostility, cyberbullying, performative religiosity, and the weakening of direct interpersonal empathy. In such conditions, Islamic Religious Education cannot remain confined to textbook-based religious instruction, because the moral challenges facing students are deeply connected to how they perceive others, handle differences, and regulate emotions in social and digital spaces. The Love-Based Curriculum addresses this issue by emphasizing the internalization of mahabbah values in four interconnected dimensions: divine, humanistic, scientific, and ecological. These dimensions allow IRE to educate students

not only to worship properly, but also to relate compassionately, think responsibly, and act ethically in society. Thus, the Love-Based Curriculum represents a philosophical renewal that reorients Islamic Religious Education toward the formation of learners who are faithful, reflective, tolerant, and socially responsive in the face of contemporary dehumanizing tendencies (Rofiq et al., 2025; Danil et al., 2025).

### **The Relevance of the Love-Based Curriculum to Independent Learning in Islamic Religious Education**

The implementation of Independent Learning (Kurikulum Merdeka) in Indonesia has created a new educational landscape that places flexibility, learner autonomy, contextual learning, and holistic development at the center of curriculum practice. This shift has important implications for Islamic Religious Education because it opens space for the redesign of learning from a rigid, content-heavy model into a more meaningful, student-centered, and value-based process. In this context, the Love-Based Curriculum is highly relevant because it provides an ethical and pedagogical framework for ensuring that curricular flexibility is directed toward humane educational purposes. Independent Learning encourages teachers to adapt learning to students' needs, interests, and developmental stages, while the Love-Based Curriculum ensures that this adaptation is grounded in compassion, empathy, respect, and moral responsibility. The combination of these two paradigms creates a stronger foundation for Islamic Religious Education, where freedom in learning is balanced by care for students' emotional and spiritual well-being (Hamidalloh & Muluk, 2026; Nadhuha et al., 2025).

One of the most important meeting points between the Love-Based Curriculum and Independent Learning lies in their shared rejection of authoritarian and one-directional instruction. Independent Learning views students as active subjects who should be given opportunities to explore, ask questions, reflect, collaborate, and construct meaning from learning experiences. Similarly, the Love-Based Curriculum rejects educational practices that rely solely on command, fear, and discipline without affection. Instead, it promotes dialogical relationships, emotional safety, and respect for student uniqueness. In Islamic Religious Education, this has profound implications because religious understanding develops more meaningfully when students are invited to reflect on values, relate religious teachings to real-life experiences, and participate in compassionate learning communities. Therefore, the Love-Based Curriculum does not stand outside the Independent Learning agenda; rather, it enriches it by providing the moral orientation necessary for implementing student-

centered learning in ways that remain rooted in Islamic ethics and human dignity (Amin et al., 2026; Rosadah et al., 2025).

The relevance of the Love-Based Curriculum to Independent Learning is also visible in the transformation of learning objectives in Islamic Religious Education. Under a conventional paradigm, the objectives of IRE are often formulated in terms of students' mastery of doctrinal content, ritual knowledge, and formal religious competence. While these remain important, the Independent Learning framework encourages broader outcomes such as character formation, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and meaningful application of knowledge. The Love-Based Curriculum strengthens this orientation by emphasizing that Islamic Religious Education should also cultivate compassion, emotional intelligence, tolerance, social responsibility, and ecological awareness. This means that the goals of IRE are no longer limited to "knowing religion" but expand toward "living religion humanely." In practical terms, students are expected not only to understand Qur'anic verses about compassion, but also to demonstrate empathy toward peers, respect diversity, resolve conflicts peacefully, and contribute positively to society. Such a transformation is essential if IRE is to remain relevant in the era of Independent Learning and rapid social change (Mukhsin et al., 2025; Sukiman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Independent Learning emphasizes contextualization and project-based experiences, which provide fertile ground for the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in IRE classrooms. Through projects, collaborative tasks, reflective journals, and problem-based learning, Islamic Religious Education can move beyond abstract moral preaching toward concrete acts of compassion and responsibility. Students can be engaged in projects related to social care, interreligious respect, environmental stewardship, anti-bullying campaigns, or digital ethics, all of which can be framed through Islamic values of mercy and human solidarity. In this way, the Love-Based Curriculum helps translate the flexibility of Independent Learning into real pedagogical practices that touch students' lives. It also enables Islamic Religious Education to become more experiential and transformative, because students learn values not only by hearing them explained, but by practicing them in meaningful social contexts. As a result, the integration of Love-Based Curriculum principles into Independent Learning can strengthen both the relevance and the impact of Islamic Religious Education in schools and madrasahs (Danil et al., 2025; Hamidalloh & Muluk, 2026).

**Pedagogical Implications of the Love-Based Curriculum for the Transformation of Islamic Religious Education**

The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education requires a pedagogical transformation that begins with the repositioning of the teacher. In a love-based and humanistic classroom, the teacher is no longer understood merely as a transmitter of religious information or a controller of discipline, but as a compassionate educator who accompanies students in their intellectual, moral, and emotional development. This role demands pedagogical sensitivity, empathy, patience, and the ability to build trustful relationships with learners. Recent studies emphasize that the success of a Love-Based Curriculum depends greatly on teachers' pedagogical understanding, because love-based values cannot be integrated only at the level of curriculum documents; they must be embodied in daily interactions, communication patterns, classroom management, and assessment practices. Teachers need to demonstrate how Islamic values of mercy, fairness, humility, and care operate in concrete educational relationships. In this sense, the transformation of Islamic Religious Education through the Love-Based Curriculum is inseparable from teacher transformation itself (Amin et al., 2026; Nadhuha et al., 2025).

Pedagogically, the Love-Based Curriculum also encourages a shift from purely content-oriented learning toward reflective, dialogical, and experiential learning. Islamic Religious Education often struggles when it is taught primarily through lectures, memorization, and standard tests, because these methods do not always facilitate deep internalization of values. A love-based approach invites the use of discussion, storytelling, reflective writing, collaborative learning, case analysis, spiritual reflection, and community-based activities that help students connect religious teachings with lived experiences. For example, lessons on compassion in Islam can be linked to real cases of bullying, family conflict, poverty, or environmental damage, so that students are challenged to interpret Islamic values in relation to contemporary moral issues. This kind of pedagogy supports both cognitive understanding and affective engagement, which is crucial for the aims of Islamic Religious Education. When students are given space to feel, reflect, question, and act, religious learning becomes more transformative and aligned with the spirit of both humanistic education and Independent Learning (Rosadah et al., 2025; Aliyya et al., 2025).

Another important implication concerns the culture of assessment in Islamic Religious Education. In many schools, assessment still focuses heavily on written tests, memorization of verses or concepts, and the measurement of factual knowledge. Although cognitive assessment remains necessary, the Love-Based Curriculum calls

for a broader and more authentic approach to evaluating learning outcomes. If the goal of IRE is to form compassionate, responsible, and ethically aware learners, then assessment should also pay attention to attitudes, participation, empathy, reflection, collaborative behavior, and social engagement. This does not mean reducing academic rigor, but rather expanding the meaning of achievement in Islamic Religious Education. Reflective journals, project portfolios, peer feedback, observation of character practices, and community service documentation can become important tools for assessing the internalization of values. Such assessment practices are more compatible with the humanistic spirit of the Love-Based Curriculum because they recognize students as developing persons whose growth cannot be fully captured through standardized tests alone (Sunarya & Sassi, 2025; Mukhsin et al., 2025).

Finally, the pedagogical transformation encouraged by the Love-Based Curriculum has broader implications for the identity of Islamic Religious Education itself. It suggests that IRE should no longer be understood merely as a subject for transmitting doctrinal correctness, but as a transformative educational space for nurturing spiritually rooted, emotionally mature, intellectually responsible, and socially compassionate human beings. In the era of Independent Learning, this transformation is particularly urgent because students need not only religious knowledge but also moral resilience, empathy, and the ability to live constructively in complex social realities. The Love-Based Curriculum offers a framework through which Islamic Religious Education can answer these needs by integrating divine devotion with human solidarity, personal piety with social responsibility, and cognitive learning with emotional and ethical growth. Therefore, its pedagogical significance lies not only in introducing a new curriculum model, but in reimagining the very mission of Islamic Religious Education as a humanizing force within contemporary schooling (Misbakhuddin et al., 2026; Rofiq et al., 2025; Hamidalloh & Muluk, 2026)

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Love-Based Curriculum represents a relevant and transformative humanistic approach to Islamic Religious Education in the era of Independent Learning because it reorients religious learning from a merely doctrinal and cognitive process toward a holistic educational experience that nurtures spiritual awareness, emotional maturity, moral responsibility, and social compassion. By grounding Islamic Religious Education in the values of love, mercy, empathy, respect, and human dignity, this curriculum strengthens the humanistic mission of education while remaining deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Its relevance to the Independent Learning framework lies in its ability to support student-

centered, flexible, contextual, and meaningful learning, where learners are viewed not only as recipients of knowledge but as whole persons who must be guided toward self-development and ethical responsibility. Furthermore, the Love-Based Curriculum has important pedagogical implications for the transformation of Islamic Religious Education through the redefinition of teacher roles, the use of reflective and experiential learning methods, and the adoption of authentic assessments that measure not only cognitive achievement but also value internalization and character formation. Therefore, the Love-Based Curriculum can be positioned as an important conceptual and pedagogical foundation for developing Islamic Religious Education that is more inclusive, compassionate, relevant, and capable of forming learners who are spiritually grounded, socially humane, and prepared to face the moral and cultural challenges of contemporary life.

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