

Transforming Islamic Religious Education through a Love-Based Curriculum: A Holistic Approach to Strengthening the Profile of Character-Based Students

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Abstract

The transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is increasingly necessary to address the moral, social, and spiritual challenges faced by students in the twenty-first century. This study aims to examine the philosophical foundation, implementation, and contribution of a Love-Based Curriculum in strengthening the profile of character-based students within Islamic Religious Education. The study employed a qualitative library research design by reviewing scholarly literature, books, and international educational reports published primarily between 2020 and 2025. Data were collected through systematic literature searches and analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring concepts related to holistic education, character development, Islamic educational philosophy, and compassionate pedagogy. The findings indicate that a Love-Based Curriculum integrates cognitive, emotional, spiritual, social, and moral dimensions into a unified educational framework grounded in the Islamic principles of *rahmah* (compassion), justice, empathy, sincerity, and respect for human dignity. Its implementation promotes caring teacher-student relationships, inclusive school cultures, reflective learning, collaborative engagement, and authentic value internalization.

Keywords

Compassion-Based Learning; Islamic Religious Education; Holistic Education; Love-Based Curriculum; Student Character Development



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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping learners who possess not only cognitive competence but also noble character, emotional maturity, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility. In the contemporary educational landscape, however, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education often remains predominantly oriented toward the transmission of religious knowledge and ritual practices, while the cultivation of values such as compassion, empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and integrity receives comparatively less emphasis. The rapid advancement of technology, globalization, and digital culture has transformed the ways students interact, communicate, and

construct their identities, exposing them to complex moral challenges that require more than theoretical religious understanding. Consequently, Islamic education must evolve from a knowledge-centered paradigm toward a holistic educational model that nurtures intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual development simultaneously. Such transformation aligns with global educational discourse emphasizing character education as an essential component of twenty-first-century learning, where educational institutions are expected to produce graduates who are morally grounded, socially responsible, and capable of contributing positively to society. Therefore, innovative educational frameworks that integrate Islamic values with comprehensive character formation have become increasingly important in addressing the educational needs of modern learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

One promising innovation in Islamic Religious Education is the implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum, an educational approach that places compassion, empathy, respect, sincerity, justice, and human dignity at the center of teaching and learning processes. Rooted in Islamic teachings that emphasize *rahmah* (mercy) as a universal principle, the Love-Based Curriculum seeks to transform educational interactions into meaningful experiences characterized by care, inclusion, collaboration, and mutual respect. Rather than focusing solely on academic achievement, this curriculum encourages teachers to become facilitators of moral growth by modeling ethical behavior, fostering positive relationships, and creating emotionally supportive learning environments. Students are encouraged to internalize Islamic values through authentic experiences, reflective learning, community engagement, and daily interactions rather than through memorization alone. This pedagogical orientation resonates with recent educational theories highlighting the importance of social-emotional learning, positive school climate, and values-based education in promoting holistic student development. The integration of love as an educational principle also strengthens students' intrinsic motivation to practice Islamic values voluntarily, making religious education more meaningful and relevant to their everyday lives (CASEL, 2020; OECD, 2021).

The implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum is closely associated with efforts to strengthen the profile of character-based students. Character education has become a major priority in many educational systems because academic excellence alone is insufficient to prepare learners for increasingly complex social realities. Character-based students are expected to demonstrate honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, resilience, critical thinking, and respect for diversity while maintaining strong spiritual foundations. Within Islamic education, these competencies correspond with the objectives of forming individuals who embody *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character) and contribute constructively to society. The Love-Based Curriculum provides a practical framework through which Islamic values can be translated into observable behaviors and lifelong habits. By integrating cognitive learning with emotional engagement and ethical practice, this approach enables students to experience religion as a living guide rather than merely an academic subject. Consequently, character formation becomes an integral outcome of every educational activity, reinforcing the

interconnected dimensions of faith (iman), worship (ibadah), and moral conduct (akhlaq) that define holistic Islamic education (Lickona, 2021; Berkowitz & Bier, 2022).

Despite growing recognition of holistic education, many schools continue to encounter challenges in integrating character education effectively into Islamic Religious Education. Classroom practices frequently prioritize curriculum completion and standardized assessments, leaving limited opportunities for experiential learning, reflective dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and emotional development. Teachers may also experience difficulties in implementing learner-centered approaches due to limited professional training, insufficient institutional support, and conventional pedagogical traditions that emphasize teacher authority over student participation. Furthermore, increasing cases of bullying, intolerance, cyber misconduct, declining empathy, and weakening social responsibility among students indicate that character education requires more innovative and transformative educational strategies. These challenges highlight the need for curriculum models capable of fostering positive relationships between teachers and students while embedding Islamic values within authentic educational experiences. The Love-Based Curriculum addresses these concerns by promoting educational environments where affection, trust, respect, and compassion become integral components of learning, thereby facilitating sustainable character development across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2023).

Transforming Islamic Religious Education through a Love-Based Curriculum therefore represents a comprehensive educational reform aimed at producing learners who excel academically while embodying strong moral integrity and compassionate citizenship. This transformation requires curriculum redesign, teacher professional development, supportive school culture, active family participation, and meaningful community involvement to ensure that character formation becomes a shared educational responsibility. A holistic approach emphasizes that students develop most effectively when intellectual growth is integrated with emotional well-being, spiritual maturity, ethical reflection, and positive social interaction. The present study seeks to examine how the Love-Based Curriculum contributes to strengthening the profile of character-based students within the context of Islamic Religious Education by exploring its philosophical foundations, pedagogical principles, implementation strategies, and educational outcomes. The findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to contemporary Islamic educational discourse while offering practical recommendations for educators, curriculum developers, policymakers, and educational institutions committed to cultivating compassionate, resilient, and morally responsible generations capable of responding constructively to future societal challenges (Fullan et al., 2020; Hattie, 2023).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative library research design to explore the transformation of Islamic Religious Education through a Love-Based Curriculum as a holistic approach to strengthening the profile of character-based students. The research collected data from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, conference proceedings, and international

reports published primarily between 2020 and 2025. Relevant literature was identified through databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Dimensions using keywords such as Islamic Religious Education, Love-Based Curriculum, character education, holistic education, social-emotional learning, and student character development. The selected sources met inclusion criteria emphasizing relevance, scholarly credibility, empirical evidence, and conceptual contributions to Islamic education and character formation. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, involving data reduction, coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, and synthesis to identify recurring concepts related to curriculum transformation, pedagogical practices, values internalization, and student character development. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing perspectives from educational theories, Islamic educational philosophy, and recent empirical studies. The analysis focused on constructing an integrated conceptual framework that explains how a Love-Based Curriculum can promote cognitive, emotional, spiritual, moral, and social development simultaneously, thereby strengthening the profile of character-based students within contemporary Islamic Religious Education (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Miles et al., 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Philosophical Foundation and Implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum in Transforming Islamic Religious Education

The transformation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has become increasingly important in response to the rapid social, technological, and cultural changes influencing learners in the twenty-first century. While conventional Islamic education has successfully transmitted theological knowledge and ritual practices, contemporary educational challenges require a broader pedagogical orientation that also develops students' emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, social responsibility, and spiritual maturity. The emergence of digital technology, multicultural interaction, and global citizenship demands that Islamic Religious Education move beyond content mastery toward holistic character formation. This transformation is consistent with the philosophy of Islamic education, which seeks to nurture balanced individuals (*insan kāmīl*) who integrate intellectual excellence with moral integrity and spiritual awareness. Consequently, educational reform should not merely revise learning materials but also redefine the educational philosophy, classroom culture, and teacher–student relationships that shape students' personal development. Such transformation aligns with global educational frameworks emphasizing holistic learning, well-being, and values-based education as essential competencies for sustainable human development (UNESCO, 2021; Hattie, 2023).

A Love-Based Curriculum offers a philosophical foundation capable of supporting this transformation by positioning love, compassion (*rahmah*), empathy, justice, sincerity, and respect as the central principles guiding educational processes. In Islamic teachings, the concept of *rahmah* represents one of the most fundamental characteristics of Allah and serves

as the ethical basis for human relationships. The Qur'an repeatedly describes Prophet Muhammad as "rahmatan lil-'alamin" (a mercy to all creation), illustrating that education inspired by Islamic values should cultivate mercy not only toward fellow Muslims but toward humanity and the natural environment. Therefore, love within Islamic education should not be interpreted merely as emotional affection but as an active commitment to nurturing human dignity, promoting social harmony, encouraging forgiveness, and fostering collective responsibility. A Love-Based Curriculum integrates these theological principles into educational practice, ensuring that every learning experience contributes to the development of compassionate and morally responsible individuals. Such an approach also resonates with positive psychology and humanistic educational theories, which argue that students learn most effectively when they experience belonging, emotional security, and supportive interpersonal relationships (Seligman, 2021; Noddings, 2021).

The philosophical orientation of a Love-Based Curriculum also reflects the integration of cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual domains of learning. Traditional instructional approaches frequently prioritize cognitive achievement through examinations and memorization, whereas holistic education recognizes that meaningful learning occurs when knowledge is internalized through emotional engagement, ethical reflection, and authentic practice. Islamic Religious Education should therefore encourage learners to understand religious teachings intellectually while simultaneously experiencing their practical relevance in everyday life. Activities such as collaborative learning, reflective dialogue, service learning, community engagement, and problem-based learning enable students to translate Islamic values into observable behaviors. In this context, teachers function not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as mentors, role models, facilitators, and moral exemplars who embody the values they seek to cultivate. Such pedagogical transformation strengthens students' intrinsic motivation to practice honesty, compassion, humility, discipline, and social responsibility voluntarily rather than through external enforcement. Consequently, the Love-Based Curriculum supports lifelong character development rather than short-term academic performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2023).

Teacher professionalism constitutes another essential dimension in implementing a Love-Based Curriculum within Islamic Religious Education. The effectiveness of character education depends largely on teachers' capacity to establish positive interpersonal relationships and create emotionally supportive classroom environments. Research consistently demonstrates that caring teacher-student relationships contribute significantly to learners' academic engagement, emotional resilience, psychological well-being, and ethical development. Within Islamic educational philosophy, teachers (murabbi) are expected to nurture learners comprehensively through wisdom, patience, compassion, and exemplary conduct. Therefore, professional development programs should not only improve teachers' pedagogical competence but also strengthen their emotional intelligence, communication skills, reflective practice, and commitment to ethical leadership. Teachers implementing a Love-Based Curriculum must demonstrate empathy toward students' diverse backgrounds,

encourage inclusive participation, resolve conflicts peacefully, and facilitate collaborative learning experiences that promote mutual respect. These practices reinforce students' sense of belonging while fostering positive school climates that enhance both academic achievement and character formation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2020; Hattie, 2023).

School culture likewise plays a decisive role in translating the philosophy of love into everyday educational practice. A curriculum emphasizing compassion cannot succeed if implemented within institutional environments characterized by authoritarian leadership, excessive competition, discrimination, or emotional neglect. Instead, schools should cultivate organizational cultures grounded in trust, cooperation, inclusivity, respect for diversity, and shared moral responsibility. Islamic Religious Education should extend beyond classroom instruction by embedding ethical values throughout extracurricular activities, school traditions, peer interactions, counseling services, and community partnerships. Daily practices such as collaborative worship, social service programs, environmental stewardship, peer mentoring, conflict mediation, and charitable initiatives provide authentic opportunities for students to experience and practice Islamic values. Such experiences enable learners to understand that religion is not confined to ritual observance but constitutes a comprehensive ethical framework guiding social interaction and civic responsibility. This whole-school approach reflects international recommendations emphasizing that character education becomes most effective when integrated across institutional structures rather than isolated within individual subjects (Berkowitz & Bier, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

The successful implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum also requires collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Character formation is a continuous developmental process influenced by multiple social environments; therefore, educational institutions cannot work in isolation. Parents reinforce values introduced at school through consistent parenting practices, emotional support, and ethical role modeling, while community organizations provide authentic contexts for students to practice compassion, cooperation, and civic engagement. Islamic Religious Education becomes significantly more meaningful when learners observe coherence between religious teachings, family values, and community practices. Digital technology may further strengthen these partnerships through continuous communication, collaborative learning platforms, and parent engagement programs that encourage shared responsibility for students' moral development. Ultimately, transforming Islamic Religious Education through a Love-Based Curriculum represents more than curricular innovation; it constitutes a comprehensive educational paradigm that integrates Islamic philosophy, holistic pedagogy, caring teacher professionalism, supportive school culture, and collaborative community participation to cultivate learners who possess intellectual competence, emotional maturity, spiritual depth, and exemplary moral character capable of contributing positively to contemporary society (Epstein, 2021; Fullan et al., 2020).

3.2 The Contribution of a Love-Based Curriculum to Strengthening the Profile of Character-Based Students

The implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum significantly contributes to strengthening the profile of character-based students by creating educational experiences that integrate moral, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development into a unified learning process. Contemporary education increasingly recognizes that academic achievement alone cannot adequately prepare students to navigate the ethical dilemmas, social diversity, and technological disruptions characterizing the twenty-first century. Consequently, schools are expected to cultivate learners who demonstrate integrity, empathy, responsibility, resilience, collaboration, and respect for human dignity. Within Islamic Religious Education (IRE), these competencies are closely associated with the development of *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character), where faith is reflected through ethical behavior rather than merely religious knowledge. A Love-Based Curriculum encourages students to internalize Islamic values through meaningful interactions, reflective experiences, and authentic social engagement, allowing character development to emerge naturally from daily educational practices. This learner-centered approach strengthens students' moral awareness while fostering a deeper sense of responsibility toward themselves, others, society, and the environment (Nucci et al., 2021; Tirri, 2023).

One of the most significant contributions of the Love-Based Curriculum is the development of students' social-emotional competencies, which form the foundation of sustainable character education. Emotional intelligence enables learners to recognize their emotions, regulate behavior, demonstrate empathy, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and establish healthy relationships. Islamic teachings similarly emphasize emotional balance through concepts such as patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadhu'*), and forgiveness (*afw*), all of which contribute to psychological well-being and moral maturity. By integrating these values into classroom interactions, collaborative learning, reflective discussions, and community-based activities, students gradually develop emotional resilience alongside ethical sensitivity. Learning environments characterized by mutual respect and compassion also reduce anxiety, encourage active participation, and strengthen students' intrinsic motivation to engage positively with peers and teachers. Consequently, the Love-Based Curriculum enhances not only academic engagement but also emotional well-being, enabling students to become compassionate individuals capable of contributing constructively within increasingly diverse societies (Brackett, 2020; Elias, 2021).

Another important contribution lies in promoting moral reasoning and ethical decision-making among learners. Rather than emphasizing obedience based solely on external authority, a Love-Based Curriculum encourages students to understand the ethical principles underlying Islamic teachings and apply them independently in real-life situations. This educational orientation develops reflective thinking, allowing learners to evaluate actions according to justice, compassion, honesty, and public benefit (*maslahah*). Students are encouraged to discuss ethical dilemmas, analyze social problems from Islamic perspectives, and identify practical solutions consistent with religious values and universal human rights. Such reflective learning strengthens students' capacity to make responsible decisions in both

personal and social contexts. Furthermore, integrating ethical reflection into classroom discussions helps students appreciate the relevance of Islamic teachings in addressing contemporary issues such as environmental sustainability, digital citizenship, social inclusion, and intercultural dialogue. Consequently, moral education becomes an active process of value internalization rather than passive acceptance of doctrinal instruction (Kristjánsson, 2021; Arthur et al., 2022).

The Love-Based Curriculum also strengthens students' spiritual identity by fostering meaningful relationships between religious belief and everyday practice. Spirituality within Islamic education extends beyond ritual observance and encompasses awareness of divine presence, personal accountability, gratitude, compassion, and service to humanity. Learning activities that incorporate reflection, contemplation, worship, and acts of kindness enable students to experience religion as a transformative force shaping their attitudes and behaviors. Such experiences reinforce the integration of faith (iman), worship (ibadah), and morality (akhlaq), thereby supporting holistic personal development. Students gradually recognize that Islamic values provide guidance not only for individual spirituality but also for social interaction, environmental stewardship, and civic responsibility. This holistic understanding strengthens learners' sense of purpose and encourages lifelong commitment to ethical conduct, making character education a continuous developmental journey rather than a temporary educational objective (Halstead, 2022; Alkouatli, 2023).

Furthermore, the Love-Based Curriculum contributes substantially to the establishment of inclusive and peaceful school environments where diversity is respected and every learner feels valued. Contemporary educational institutions increasingly serve students from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, requiring pedagogical approaches that promote tolerance, dialogue, and mutual understanding. By emphasizing compassion and human dignity, a Love-Based Curriculum encourages students to appreciate differences while rejecting discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance. Cooperative learning activities, peer mentoring, restorative dialogue, and community service projects provide practical opportunities for learners to develop intercultural competence and democratic participation. These experiences strengthen students' communication skills, collaborative abilities, and civic engagement while reinforcing Islamic principles of justice, equality, and universal brotherhood. As a result, schools implementing a Love-Based Curriculum become learning communities where positive relationships support both academic success and character formation simultaneously (Banks, 2021; Schaps & Lewis, 2022).

The long-term contribution of the Love-Based Curriculum extends beyond formal schooling by preparing students to become ethical leaders capable of responding constructively to future societal challenges. Graduates possessing strong moral character, emotional intelligence, and spiritual resilience are better equipped to navigate complex professional environments, technological transformation, and global social change without compromising their ethical principles. Leadership cultivated through love emphasizes service, collaboration, humility, integrity, and accountability rather than domination or personal

achievement. Such leadership reflects Islamic educational objectives of producing individuals who contribute to the common good while maintaining commitment to justice and compassion. Therefore, strengthening the profile of character-based students through a Love-Based Curriculum represents a strategic investment in sustainable human development, supporting the creation of future generations who combine academic excellence with moral responsibility, social empathy, spiritual depth, and global citizenship. Ultimately, this holistic educational model demonstrates that transformative Islamic Religious Education can effectively address contemporary educational challenges while preserving the enduring ethical values that remain central to Islamic civilization and human flourishing (Biesta, 2022; Miller, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Transforming Islamic Religious Education through a Love-Based Curriculum represents a holistic educational approach that effectively integrates cognitive, emotional, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of learning to strengthen the profile of character-based students. By positioning love, compassion, empathy, respect, justice, and responsibility as fundamental educational principles, this curriculum shifts the focus of Islamic education from the mere transmission of religious knowledge toward the cultivation of noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*) and lifelong ethical behavior. Its successful implementation requires the active involvement of teachers, schools, families, and communities in creating supportive learning environments where Islamic values are experienced through meaningful relationships, reflective practices, and authentic social engagement. Consequently, students develop not only stronger religious understanding but also emotional intelligence, moral reasoning, inclusive attitudes, leadership capacity, and social responsibility that prepare them to navigate contemporary challenges with integrity and resilience. Therefore, the Love-Based Curriculum offers a sustainable and relevant model for transforming Islamic Religious Education into a comprehensive character-building process capable of producing compassionate, responsible, and globally minded Muslim citizens while remaining firmly rooted in the universal values of Islam.

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