

The Role of Teachers in Implementing the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) to Shape the Religious and Caring Character of Islamic Elementary School (MI) Students

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Abstract

The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta/KBC) in Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah/MI) requires teachers to move beyond knowledge transmission toward relational, ethical, and character-oriented pedagogy. This article examines the role of teachers in translating KBC principles into learning practices that nurture students' religious and caring character. A qualitative library research design was employed through systematic reading and thematic synthesis of the 2025 KBC policy guidance and recent scholarly studies on KBC, character education, teacher-student relationships, caring pedagogy, and social-emotional learning. The synthesis indicates that teachers function as value models, curriculum interpreters, designers of compassionate learning, facilitators of reflective religious practice, managers of inclusive classroom relationships, and partners with families and school communities. Religious character is strengthened through consistent example, habituation, meaningful worship, moral dialogue, and reflection, while caring character grows through empathy, cooperation, respectful communication, service, and responsible action toward others and the environment. The literature also shows that teacher capacity, school culture, assessment alignment, parental expectations, and sustained professional development determine whether KBC becomes a lived educational culture rather than a symbolic curriculum label. The article concludes that teachers are the central mediating actors in KBC implementation and that successful implementation requires coherence between teacher modeling, classroom practice, assessment, school culture, and family engagement.

Keywords

Caring pedagogy; Character education; Islamic elementary school; Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta; Teacher role

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INTRODUCTION

Education in Islamic elementary schools is expected to develop learners intellectually, spiritually, socially, and morally. In the Indonesian madrasah context, this expectation has become increasingly explicit through the introduction of the Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta/KBC). The Ministry of Religious Affairs

positions KBC as an orientation that places love and compassion at the center of educational transformation while strengthening humanistic, national, natural, tolerant, and religious character (Direktorat KSKK Madrasah, 2025). The policy is important because character formation cannot be achieved through the delivery of moral concepts alone. Students encounter values through relationships, routines, language, classroom norms, examples, and opportunities to practice ethical behavior. Thus, the teacher becomes the key actor who translates an abstract curriculum orientation into everyday educational experiences.

The KBC framework is closely related to the idea that education should develop the whole person rather than separate cognitive achievement from affective and moral development. Recent literature identifies the Panca Cinta orientation as a value structure encompassing love for God and His Messenger, love for knowledge, love for oneself and others, love for the environment, and love for the homeland (Jubaedah et al., 2026). Kholidin and Sunhaji (2025) similarly argue that KBC can provide a foundation for character education in madrasahs by integrating spiritual and humanistic values into curriculum and school culture. Basori et al. (2025) emphasize that implementation also requires management arrangements that connect curriculum planning, teacher practice, and institutional support. Therefore, KBC should not be reduced to an additional theme in lesson plans; it should become a way of organizing relationships, learning experiences, and institutional decisions.

The centrality of the teacher is supported by established theories of learning and moral development. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory explains that children learn behaviors by observing models and the consequences associated with those behaviors. In an MI classroom, the teacher's manner of speaking, responding to mistakes, resolving conflict, showing respect, and practicing worship can therefore become a powerful source of behavioral learning. Vygotsky (1978) further emphasizes that development occurs through social interaction and mediated activity, suggesting that teachers shape students' moral and intellectual growth through guided participation. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective adds that children's development is influenced by interconnected settings, meaning that teacher practices are most effective when supported by family, peer, school, and community environments.

The concept of care provides another important theoretical foundation. Noddings (2005, 2013) places caring relationships at the center of ethical education and argues that schools should cultivate responsiveness, attention, dialogue, and genuine concern for learners. This perspective complements character education theory, which views

good character as involving moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1991). In practical terms, a caring teacher does not merely tell students to be compassionate; the teacher creates repeated situations in which students experience respect and are expected to practice respect toward others. Evidence from broader educational research also indicates that positive teacher–student relationships are associated with multiple student outcomes, including engagement, motivation, well-being, behavior, and achievement (Emslander et al., 2025).

Recent KBC studies reinforce the relevance of this relational approach in Islamic education. Afifah et al. (2026) found that teacher training can strengthen teachers' conceptual understanding and practical competence in implementing KBC, although resource limitations and uneven implementation support remain challenges. Amin et al. (2026) reported that teachers who understand KBC more deeply tend to design learning that is more empathetic, participatory, and oriented toward positive reinforcement. In an MI context, Syukran et al. (2026) identified compassionate and differentiated classroom practice, dialogic assessment, and a school ecology based on dignity and spiritual growth as important expressions of KBC. Sulastri et al. (2026) likewise demonstrated that a learning model integrating mercy, empathy, manners, reflection, and character reinforcement can strengthen character outcomes. These findings indicate that the teacher is not simply an implementer of curriculum documents but the principal mediator between policy, pedagogy, and student character.

Despite these developments, an important problem remains: the implementation of KBC can become symbolic when teachers focus on adding the word “love” to lesson plans without changing classroom interactions, assessment practices, or school culture. Murtadho et al. (2026) show that KBC can contribute to student character when it is connected with school culture and teacher practice, while Mujib et al. (2026) demonstrate the relevance of compassion, empathy, respect, religious practice, teacher role modeling, and humanistic school culture in preventing bullying. The broader literature on social-emotional learning also shows that relational and social-emotional interventions can improve students' skills, attitudes, behavior, school climate, and academic outcomes, but implementation quality matters (Durlak et al., 2011; Cipriano et al., 2023). This suggests that the effectiveness of KBC depends less on curriculum labeling and more on how consistently teachers enact its values.

Based on this background, the purpose of this article is to analyze the role of teachers in implementing KBC to shape the religious and caring character of MI students. The article specifically asks: (1) what teacher roles are most relevant to KBC

implementation; (2) how those roles contribute to religious and caring character; and (3) what conditions support or constrain implementation. The contribution of the article lies in synthesizing policy guidance, recent KBC scholarship, and established educational theories into an integrated teacher-role framework for Islamic elementary education.

METHODS

This study employed qualitative library research. The method was selected because the objective was to interpret the role of teachers across policy guidance, recent KBC studies, and established theories of character, caring, learning, and teacher–student relationships rather than to measure a single school population. The primary policy source was the 2025 Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta issued by the Directorate of KSKK Madrasah, Directorate General of Islamic Education, Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. Scholarly sources were selected purposively based on their relevance to KBC, Islamic elementary education, teacher roles, character education, caring pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and relational learning.

The analysis followed three stages. First, relevant sources were read to identify explicit descriptions of KBC values, teacher practices, student character, and implementation conditions. Second, the findings were coded thematically into teacher modeling, curriculum interpretation, compassionate pedagogy, religious habituation, caring social interaction, assessment, classroom management, and school–family partnership. Third, the themes were compared with established theoretical perspectives from Bandura (1977), Vygotsky (1978), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Noddings (2005, 2013), and Lickona (1991). The synthesis did not treat findings from individual studies as direct evidence about all MI schools; instead, they were interpreted as patterns that help explain how KBC can operate in educational settings. The conceptual framework developed from this analysis is presented in Figure 1.

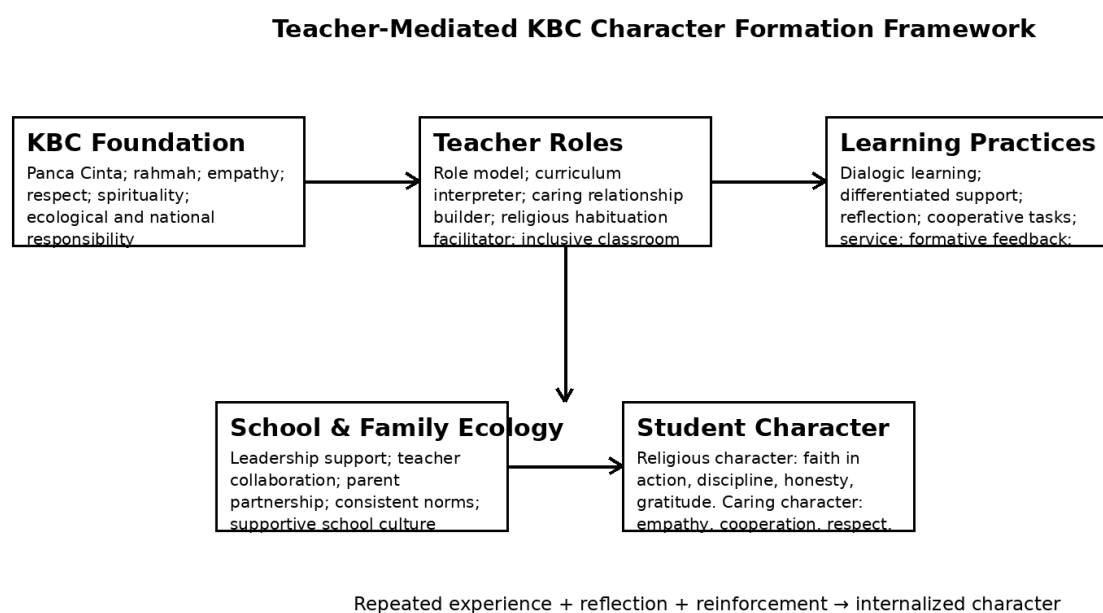


Figure 1. Teacher-mediated framework for implementing KBC to shape religious and caring character.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The synthesis produced six interconnected teacher roles: (1) moral and religious role model, (2) curriculum interpreter and learning designer, (3) caring relationship builder, (4) facilitator of religious habituation and moral reflection, (5) designer of inclusive and participatory classroom culture, and (6) evaluator and partner in character development. These roles should be understood as mutually reinforcing rather than as separate teacher tasks.

First, the teacher acts as a moral and religious role model. In KBC, students should encounter religious values as lived practices rather than only as definitions. Teachers demonstrate punctuality, honesty, respectful speech, responsibility, fairness, gratitude, environmental responsibility, and appropriate religious practices. This role is strongly supported by social learning theory because children observe and imitate meaningful adult behavior (Bandura, 1977). In Islamic elementary education, teacher modeling is particularly important because students are developing habits and moral identities. The teacher's consistency therefore becomes an implicit curriculum: how the teacher corrects a student may communicate more about compassion than a lesson about compassion itself. KBC implementation becomes credible when students see coherence between what teachers teach and how they behave.

Second, teachers serve as curriculum interpreters and learning designers. Policy documents provide direction, but classroom implementation requires professional judgment. Teachers translate the values of Panca Cinta into learning objectives, activities, classroom language, projects, and assessments. Jubaedah et al. (2026) describe KBC as a value-based model that can strengthen spirituality, empathy, tolerance, ecological awareness, literacy, and inclusive nationalism. This requires teachers to identify opportunities for value integration across subjects rather than treating character as the exclusive responsibility of religious education. For example, science can connect knowledge with environmental stewardship; Indonesian language can develop respectful dialogue and empathy; mathematics can develop honesty and perseverance; and social studies can connect learning with responsibility toward the community. Such integration reflects Vygotsky's (1978) view that learning is mediated through meaningful social and cultural activity.

Third, teachers build caring relationships. Noddings (2005, 2013) explains that care in education is relational: it requires attention to the learner, responsiveness, dialogue, and recognition of the learner as a person. In MI classrooms, caring can be operationalized through greeting students warmly, listening to their concerns, using non-humiliating correction, recognizing differences in learning readiness, and providing constructive support when students fail. Syukran et al. (2026) identify compassionate and differentiated practice as a core expression of KBC, while Amin et al. (2026) report shifts toward warmer and more meaningful pedagogical relationships after teachers strengthened their understanding of KBC. The importance of relationships is also supported by the broader evidence base. Emslander et al. (2025) found meaningful relationships between teacher–student relationship quality and academic, behavioral, motivational, engagement, and well-being outcomes. Thus, caring is not an optional emotional addition to teaching; it is part of the learning environment in which character develops.

Fourth, teachers facilitate religious habituation and moral reflection. Religious character is not adequately formed through memorization alone. Students need repeated opportunities to practice prayer, gratitude, honesty, responsibility, respect, self-discipline, and service, followed by reflection on why these behaviors matter. Teachers can begin lessons with brief spiritual orientation, integrate ethical questions into subject matter, provide structured opportunities for worship and service, and use reflective conversations after students encounter moral dilemmas. Lickona (1991) argues that character education must connect moral knowledge with moral feeling and moral action. In KBC, this connection can be strengthened by asking students not only

what Islamic teachings say, but also how those teachings should shape their decisions and relationships. The result is a form of religious character that is visible in conduct rather than limited to declarative knowledge.

Fifth, teachers design an inclusive and participatory classroom culture. Caring character develops when students are given structured opportunities to listen, cooperate, help others, resolve disagreements, and take responsibility for shared tasks. This is consistent with KBC's emphasis on love for oneself and others and love for the environment (Direktorat KSKK Madrasah, 2025). Sulastris et al. (2026) describe an instructional model that combines empathy-driven introductions, experiential exploration, reflection, and character reinforcement. Mujib et al. (2026) similarly show that compassion, respect, religious practice, teacher modeling, and humanistic school culture can contribute to positive social interaction and bullying prevention. These patterns suggest that caring character should be designed into classroom routines: cooperative work, peer assistance, service projects, restorative dialogue, and environmental care can become recurring learning structures rather than occasional activities.

Sixth, teachers function as evaluators and partners in character development. KBC requires assessment that is sensitive to affective, social, spiritual, and behavioral development. Teachers can document observable indicators such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, cooperation, respectful communication, religious participation, and care for the environment. Assessment should emphasize formative feedback and reflection rather than labeling children as "good" or "bad." Syukran et al. (2026) emphasize dialogic and formative assessment, while Afifah et al. (2026) highlight the need for teacher competence and sustained training. Teachers also need to communicate with parents because children experience values across multiple ecological settings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that development is shaped by interconnected environments; therefore, inconsistent messages between school and home can weaken habituation. Family dialogue can help align expectations and create continuity between classroom and home practices.

The synthesis also identifies five supporting conditions. First is teacher competence. Teachers need conceptual understanding of KBC, practical strategies for differentiated and caring instruction, and reflective skills. Second is school culture. KBC cannot depend on individual teachers if institutional rules, communication patterns, and leadership contradict its values. Basori et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of management and institutional arrangements in implementation. Third is assessment alignment. If schools evaluate success almost exclusively through

examination scores, teachers may have little incentive to invest in relational and character outcomes. Fourth is parental understanding. Families need to understand that religious and caring character are legitimate educational outcomes, not distractions from academic achievement. Fifth is professional development. Afifah et al. (2026) show that structured and sustainable teacher training is important, while Amin et al. (2026) highlight the value of strengthening pedagogical understanding.

These findings can be summarized in the framework presented in Figure 1. KBC policy and Panca Cinta values provide the normative foundation; teachers mediate those values through modeling, learning design, caring relationships, religious habituation, inclusive classroom culture, and formative assessment; school and family contexts provide reinforcement; and students' repeated experiences contribute to religious and caring character. The framework emphasizes that character outcomes emerge through a process rather than a single intervention.

The synthesis also reveals implementation risks. A first risk is superficiality, in which KBC is reduced to slogans, posters, or isolated activities. A second is inconsistency, when teachers promote compassion but rely on humiliating discipline. A third is cognitive dominance, when character language is included in lesson plans but not reflected in assessment. A fourth is teacher overload, particularly when documentation requirements expand without adequate mentoring or resources. A fifth is mismatch between school and family expectations. These challenges are consistent with recent KBC literature, which reports uneven teacher capacity, resource limitations, documentation burden, and examination-oriented parental preferences (Afifah et al., 2026; Syukran et al., 2026). The implication is that KBC implementation should be approached as organizational change and professional learning, not simply as curriculum compliance.

The role of teachers can therefore be conceptualized as a mediating role between curriculum values and student character. The teacher receives policy values, interprets them professionally, embodies them relationally, embeds them pedagogically, observes student responses, and adjusts practice through reflection. This process resembles the logic of social-emotional learning, where program quality and implementation conditions influence outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Cipriano et al., 2023). It also resonates with self-determination theory: supportive relationships can create conditions in which students experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness, strengthening intrinsic motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). KBC is therefore most powerful when love is experienced as a pedagogical structure rather than merely stated as a moral aspiration.

Table 1. Teacher roles in implementing KBC and expected character outcomes

Teacher role	Core practice	Character mechanism	Expected student outcome
Role model	Demonstrates honesty, respectful speech, worship, fairness, responsibility	Observation, imitation, consistency	Religious conduct; integrity; discipline
Curriculum interpreter	Integrates Panca Cinta into subjects, tasks, and learning goals	Meaningful value connection	Values become relevant across learning
Caring relationship builder	Listens, responds, supports differences, corrects without humiliation	Trust, belonging, emotional safety	Empathy; respect; prosocial behavior
Religious habituation facilitator	Guides worship, reflection, gratitude, moral dialogue, and service	Practice + reflection + reinforcement	Faith translated into daily behavior
Inclusive classroom designer	Uses cooperation, peer support, dialogue, restorative discipline	Repeated social practice	Care; cooperation; tolerance; responsibility
Character evaluator & partner	Uses formative assessment and communicates with families	Feedback, continuity, shared expectations	Sustained character development

Source: Author synthesis based on Direktorat KSKK Madrasah (2025) and the cited literature.

Discussion

The findings position the teacher as the central human mechanism through which KBC becomes educationally meaningful. This is consistent with Noddings' (2005,

2013) conception of caring education, in which relationships are not peripheral to schooling but constitute part of the educational process itself. The teacher's role as model is especially significant because religious and caring character are embodied values. Students may forget an explanation of empathy, but repeated experiences of being listened to, corrected respectfully, trusted with responsibility, and invited to help others can become durable patterns of conduct. Bandura's (1977) theory explains this through observational learning, while Lickona's (1991) framework clarifies why knowing a value must be connected with feeling and acting on that value.

The religious dimension of KBC should also be interpreted as integrated moral practice rather than ritual performance alone. Religious character is visible when students translate faith into honesty, discipline, gratitude, compassion, responsibility, and respect. This interpretation is important for MI because religious identity is formed within everyday interactions. Teachers can connect Qur'anic and prophetic values to concrete classroom situations and guide students to reflect on the consequences of their choices. Such pedagogy avoids a false separation between religious instruction and general character education.

The caring dimension likewise requires more than kindness. It includes attention to difference, protection of dignity, willingness to help, ecological responsibility, and constructive participation in community life. The KBC framework's five love orientations provides a broad structure for connecting these dimensions (Direktorat KSKK Madrasah, 2025). Recent studies at madrasah and Islamic school levels similarly associate KBC with empathy, respect, humanistic interaction, and character strengthening (Mujib et al., 2026; Murtadho et al., 2026; Sulastrri et al., 2026). The consistency across these studies strengthens the argument that KBC is most relevant when implemented through concrete relational practices.

At the same time, KBC should not be romanticized as an automatically effective approach. Evidence from teacher training and implementation studies indicates that teacher capacity, resources, mentoring, documentation, and school-level support matter (Afifah et al., 2026; Amin et al., 2026). A caring curriculum can also become emotionally demanding for teachers if responsibility for every student's well-being is individualized without organizational support. Schools therefore need shared procedures, collaborative planning, peer reflection, leadership support, and realistic assessment systems. This is where Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective is useful: student character develops within interconnected systems, so teachers should not be expected to carry the entire burden alone.

The strongest implication is that KBC implementation should be assessed through coherence. Policy, teacher behavior, learning activities, discipline, assessment, school leadership, and family communication should communicate the same core message: every learner has dignity, learning is meaningful, religious values guide conduct, and care is a shared responsibility. When these elements are coherent, KBC can support both religious identity and prosocial character. When they are contradictory, students receive competing messages. Therefore, professional development should focus not only on understanding the KBC document but also on practicing difficult relational skills such as listening, conflict resolution, restorative discipline, differentiated support, and reflective assessment.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that teachers occupy a decisive mediating position in implementing the Love-Based Curriculum at Islamic Elementary Schools. Their contribution is expressed through six interconnected roles: modeling religious and caring behavior, interpreting curriculum values, designing compassionate learning, facilitating religious habituation and moral reflection, creating inclusive classroom relationships, and assessing character development while partnering with families. Religious character grows when students repeatedly experience faith translated into ethical action, while caring character develops through empathy, respect, cooperation, responsibility, and service. The success of KBC therefore depends on more than curriculum documents; it requires teacher competence, coherent school culture, aligned assessment, family engagement, and sustained professional development. Future research should test the proposed framework empirically across diverse MI settings and develop validated indicators for measuring religious and caring character outcomes.

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