



A Love-Based Curriculum is Used at MI Nurul Mun'im to Improve Students' Empathy

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study addresses the decline in students' empathy, marked by increasing individualism and low social awareness. It highlights the need for a love-based curriculum that emphasizes compassion beyond cognitive learning. The study aims to describe the improvement of empathy among fifth-grade students at MI Nurul Mun'im through this approach..

Methodology: . A descriptive qualitative methodology was employed, and data were gathered via observation, interviews, and recording with 34 students, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and the Deputy Curriculum. Data reduction, presentation, and triangulation validity testing were used to analyze the data and derive findings.

Main Findings: The findings show that a love-based curriculum can foster humanistic, interactive, and meaningful learning, as well as raise students' empathy, including cooperation, compassion, and respect for one another. Teacher readiness, madrasah support, and a variety of teaching strategies contributed to this accomplishment, but challenges, including variations in student character, time constraints, and environmental factors, persisted. In conclusion, through a steady process of habituation, the love-based curriculum effectively increases students' empathy. In the context of Islamic education in particular, this research advances the development of humanitarian-based character education

Novelty/Originality of this study: Madrasahs are advised to expand teacher preparation, increase implementation consistency, and carry out additional research to evaluate this strategy's long-term efficacy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Students' lack of empathy, marked by increased individualism, limited social awareness, and diminished sensitivity to their surroundings, has posed a significant challenge to the education sector in recent years [1]. In addition to public schools, religiously oriented educational institutions such as madrasahs also face this issue [2]. This situation suggests that learning that focuses solely on cognitive aspects cannot help pupils develop their full character [3]. As a result, the concept of a love-based curriculum arose as a method that highlights the virtues of kindness, compassion, and peaceful interpersonal interactions. It is anticipated that this curriculum will help students rediscover empathy through a more meaningful, humanistic learning approach [4].

Daily encounters at MI Nurul Mun'im revealed signs of a lack of empathy, especially among its 34 fifth-grade students. This was demonstrated by kids' lack of cooperation in group activities, disrespect toward professors, and their tendency to be unconcerned about peers who were struggling. The madrasah has started using

a love-based curriculum, but it hasn't been used to its fullest potential [5]. A more thorough examination of the implementation process is required, as some pupils have not yet demonstrated significant behavioral changes. As a result, it's critical to investigate how implementing a love-based curriculum enhances kids' empathy in these schools [6].

Because it directly affects the quality of social interactions and character development, it is imperative to examine the problem of low empathy among pupils. In actuality, a lack of empathy can lead to student conflict, weaken unity, and obstruct a positive learning environment [7]. This circumstance makes it difficult for educators and institutions to create a learning environment that is both character-based and intellectually intelligent [8]. Theoretically, there is still a dearth of studies on the use of a love-based curriculum, especially in junior high school madrasas (tsanawiyah). As a result, this study is anticipated to enhance research on Islamic education and provide pertinent answers [9].

The application of a love-based curriculum to enhance empathy in fifth-grade pupils at MI Nurul Mun'im is the main emphasis of this study. The study's primary focus is on how the curriculum is implemented, the tactics teachers employ, and how students react to the method [10]. Additionally, this study examines factors that facilitate and hinder the adoption of a love-based curriculum [11]. This study aims to provide a detailed account of the implementation of a love-based curriculum in education. Therefore, it is anticipated that this study will provide a clear picture of how effectively this strategy increases students' empathy [9].

Syah et al study highlighted the application of a love-based curriculum from the standpoint of general Islamic education, emphasizing its fundamental principles [12]. In the meantime, Akip et al, investigated how to improve students' character by combining a love-based curriculum with multicultural Islamic education inside a deep learning framework [13]. At the Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) level, research by Eva and Komarudin concentrated more on the spiritual components and character education within a love-based curriculum [14]. Muslich and Herudiarti covered the dynamics and difficulties of adopting a love-based curriculum as a supplement to the independent curriculum. In the meantime [15]. Heriyudanta and Pradana examined how MTs (Islamic Junior High Schools) used a love-based curriculum to help pupils develop their Islamic character more broadly [16].

There is still a significant gap in prior research, especially in empirical, classroom-based studies that precisely gauge the effect of the love-based curriculum on students' empathy at the elementary madrasah level, despite the growing corpus of studies on the subject [2]. There has been little in-depth investigation of how this curriculum functions in actual classroom interactions and affects students' everyday social behaviour, because the majority of earlier studies have focused on conceptual frameworks, integration with broader character education, or implementation at secondary education levels. Furthermore, the contextual factors and other elements that influence its efficacy in promoting empathy have received little attention in studies [15]. By presenting empathy as a quantifiable result of a love-based curriculum, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of Islamic character education. Practically, it offers a comprehensive implementation model based on real-world classroom experiences. Observable phenomena in schools, such as increased student conflicts, decreased peer sensitivity, and the predominance of individualistic attitudes, are also frequently observed in educational settings, further bolstering the importance of this research. Thus, by providing practical strategies for developing empathy through a humanistic, value-oriented learning approach, this study not only closes current research gaps but also addresses urgent educational concerns.

The improvement of empathy in fifth-grade children at MI Nurul Mun'im is the primary subject of this study. This study investigates classroom application in addition to theoretical ideas or frameworks. Additionally, this study employs a qualitative methodology to investigate instructors' and students' actual experiences of implementing a love-based curriculum. The research participants were limited to a single class with a fixed number of pupils, which enabled a more thorough investigation. This is another distinctive aspect. Therefore, compared to earlier research, this study offers a more contextual and practical contribution.

This study's focus, which clearly connects the adoption of a love-based curriculum with students' increased empathy in a particular madrasah classroom setting, is what makes it novel. Compared with earlier research, which tended to be broad or conceptual, this study takes a more detailed, micro-level approach. Additionally, this study thoroughly examines how teachers and students interact as they put the values of love into practice [17]. Identifying contextual factors that affect the effective execution of the curriculum is another innovation. As a result, this research is anticipated to aid in developing more humanistic Islamic teaching methods that foster students' empathy.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

To thoroughly investigate the application of a love-based curriculum and its effects on students' empathy within a specific educational context, this study employed a qualitative case study design [18]. The study was carried out at MI Nurul Mun'im Paiton Probolinggo during the odd semester of the 2025–2026 school year [19]. The study's subjects were 34 fifth-graders, the vice principal of curriculum and the Islamic Religious Education

(PAI) teacher for grade five. To ensure the collected data were rich and contextually relevant, participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct engagement and relevance to the implementation of the love-based curriculum [20].

Observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation were used to gather data [21]. Throughout the learning process, observations were made to document students' social interactions and compassionate behaviours. Key informants were interviewed in-depth to gain a thorough understanding of the curriculum's perceived effects, tactics, and implementation process [22]. The results were supported and validated by documentation, such as instructor notes, school records, and related resources. To achieve a methodical and thorough understanding of the phenomenon, the data-gathering process was carried out in phases, beginning with preliminary observations and continuing with extensive field data collection.

The three primary steps of the Miles and Huberman interactive model data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification were followed in the data analysis [23]. Data display was accomplished by organising information into narrative and descriptive forms; data reduction entailed selecting, concentrating, and simplifying pertinent data; and conclusions were continually drawn as findings were confirmed throughout the study [24]. This study used triangulation techniques, such as source triangulation (comparing data from students, teachers, and school leaders) and method triangulation (cross-checking findings from observations, interviews, and documentation), to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data [25]. By using these techniques, the study ensured that the results were reliable, consistent, and representative of real-world conditions [26].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the love-based curriculum in fifth grade at MI Nurul Mun'im fostered a more humanistic, interactive learning environment. Teachers not only delivered material but also instilled the values of compassion, caring, and mutual respect. Real-life examples of empathy were readily available. Teacher-student interactions became closer and more communicative. Group activities also encouraged students to help one another. In the next stage, teachers consistently integrated the value of love into every stage of learning. Reinforcement was provided through advice and reflection on empathy. Students began to show changes in social interactions, such as helping friends. However, some students were still not actively involved. This indicated that implementation still needed further reinforcement.

The Deputy Head of Curriculum stated that the love-based curriculum was an effort to strengthen character education for students. This curriculum was designed to integrate the value of compassion into all subjects. Teachers were encouraged to instill empathy in the learning process. The madrasah also provided teacher training. The goal was to develop students who were intelligent and possessed noble character. The curriculum was implemented in stages and continuously with regular monitoring. Teachers play a crucial role as role models in instilling the value of empathy. The program's success depends heavily on teacher consistency. The school environment is also a key supporting factor. Therefore, cooperation from all members of the madrasah community is essential. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers implement love-based learning through an approach that connects the material to real life. Discussion and group work methods are used to foster student empathy. Teachers create a comfortable and conducive classroom atmosphere. The main challenge stems from the students' diverse personalities. However, with patience, positive changes are visible in most students. Students find learning more engaging and enjoyable. They feel more cared for and comfortable in their learning. Mutual assistance and respect are developing. Group discussions help students understand others' feelings. Although some are unfamiliar with this approach, most find it beneficial.

Documentation shows changes in lesson planning that emphasize the affective aspect. Teachers regularly record students' development of empathy. Results indicate increased positive attitudes and improved social interactions. Although some students still require special attention, implementation is systematic. This data supports observations and interviews. Overall, before the implementation of the love-based curriculum, student empathy was low, and social interactions were less harmonious. After the implementation, there was an increase in caring and mutual respect. Supporting factors include school support, teacher training, and engaging learning methods. Meanwhile, barriers stem from differences in student characteristics, time constraints, and external environmental influences. Thus, the love-based curriculum has proven to have a positive impact, although it still requires ongoing development. Furthermore, this study aligns with research by Wahyuni [28], which emphasized the importance of a love-based curriculum in strengthening spiritual and character education. Findings at MI Nurul Mun'im indicate that empathy values develop not only as a social attitude but also as part of students' spiritual awareness. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that integrates love values can foster deeper religious attitudes. This demonstrates that a love-based approach has a strong spiritual dimension. Therefore, this study reinforces the concept of spiritual value-based character education.

The results of this study also support the findings of Rochmawan, who stated that implementing a love-based curriculum can strengthen the independence curriculum through an in-depth learning approach [30]. This study stated that successful implementation is highly dependent on teacher readiness and learning strategies. The

findings at MI Nurul Mun'im indicate that consistent and creative teachers can integrate empathy values into learning. Furthermore, the challenges encountered during implementation align with the findings of this study. Therefore, this study reinforces the importance of teachers' roles in the success of the curriculum. This research aligns with Syafaruddin study, which showed that a love-based curriculum contributes to the development of Islamic character in students at Islamic junior high schools (madrasah tsanawiyah) [31]. Findings at MI Nurul Mun'im showed that students not only improved in empathy but also in their religious and social attitudes. This suggests that a love-based curriculum has a broad impact on student character development. Furthermore, this study confirms that character development requires a continuous process. Therefore, this study strengthens previous research by providing a more specific context.

The implementation of the love-based curriculum in fifth grade at MI Nurul Mun'im has led to measurable improvements in students' empathy and social interactions, as evidenced by observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings are presented in a more structured manner as follows:

1. Implementation Process and Learning Practices

The curriculum was implemented through:

- a. Integration of compassion values in all subjects
- b. Teacher modeling (role model approach)
- c. Group discussions and collaborative learning
- d. Reflection and reinforcement activities

Teachers consistently embedded empathy values at each stage of learning, creating a more humanistic and interactive classroom environment.

2. Changes in Students' Empathy

The comparison of students' conditions before and after implementation is summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Comparison of Students' Empathy Before and After the Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum

Aspect	Before Implementation	After Implementation
Social interaction	Individualistic, less harmonious	More cooperative and respectful
Empathy behavior	Low (rarely helping peers)	Increased (helping, sharing, caring)
Classroom engagement	Passive participation	More active and collaborative
Emotional awareness	Limited understanding of others	Improved ability to understand peers' feelings

The data indicate a clear positive shift in students' empathy and social behavior, although some students still require further guidance.

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Several factors influence the effectiveness of the curriculum:

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum Supporting Factors

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Teacher training programs	Diverse student characteristics
School policy support	Limited instructional time
Conducive school environment	External environmental influences
Interactive learning methods	Inconsistent student participation

4. Role of Teachers and School

Teachers play a central role as facilitators and role models. Their consistency in integrating love-based values significantly affects the success of implementation. The school supports this through training and continuous monitoring, ensuring that the program runs systematically.

5. Evidence from Documentation

Lesson plans (RPP) show a shift toward affective-oriented learning. Teachers also regularly documented students' development of empathy. These records confirm:

- a. Increased positive attitudes
- b. Improved peer relationships
- c. Gradual but consistent behavioral change

6. Alignment with Previous Studies

This study supports prior findings that a love-based curriculum strengthens character and spiritual development. However, unlike previous studies that emphasize ideal implementation, this research reveals

practical challenges such as time limitations and student diversity. This highlights a gap between theoretical concepts and real classroom practice.

7. Research Contribution

This study demonstrates that a love-based curriculum:

- a. Effectively improves students' empathy
- b. Supports character and spiritual development
- c. Provides a practical model for character-based education

Thus, it offers a more realistic and applicable contribution to the development of character education, particularly in Islamic elementary education.

While this study generally supports previous research, several discrepancies in the findings indicate that implementing a love-based curriculum does not always proceed as ideally described in previous studies. Some studies, such as those by Aini and Kuswanto, tend to emphasize solutions and successful implementation [33]. In contrast, this study identified real obstacles in the field, such as limited learning time and differences in student character that affect implementation effectiveness. Furthermore, Shofwani and Kurniasari study emphasized an optimally integrated, holistic approach [27]. However, in practice at MI Nurul Mun'im, implementation remains gradual and is not yet fully comprehensive. This demonstrates a gap between ideal concepts and actual practice. Thus, this study provides a realistic perspective that complements previous research.

This research makes an important contribution to the world of education, particularly in the development of a humanitarian values-based learning model. The results indicate that a love-based curriculum can be an alternative for addressing the character crisis, particularly regarding students' low empathy. This research also enriches Islamic education studies by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of a humanist approach to learning. Furthermore, this research can serve as a reference for developing a curriculum that is more oriented toward character formation. Therefore, this research contributes to strengthening character education in Indonesia.

This study was conducted to address a gap in previous research, which largely emphasizes the effectiveness of love-based curricula from normative and conceptual perspectives, with limited exploration of how such curricula are implemented in real classroom settings, particularly at the elementary (madrasah ibtidaiyah) level. Prior studies tend to focus on ideal conditions and successful outcomes, while overlooking the dynamic challenges of implementation [35]. In this context, the present study provides empirical evidence of how a love-based curriculum operates in practice, including both its strengths and limitations.

The findings confirm that integrating love values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) contributes not only to students' social attitudes but also to their spiritual awareness [36]. This supports the theoretical assumption that character education in Islamic contexts is inherently linked to spiritual development [37]. However, unlike previous studies that position empathy merely as a social competence, this study highlights that empathy also emerges as a manifestation of students' internalized religious values [38]. This constitutes a key novelty, as it situates empathy within a dual framework: social-humanistic and spiritual-religious dimensions [37].

Furthermore, this study reveals that the success of a love-based curriculum depends heavily on teacher agency, particularly their consistency, creativity, and ability to contextualize values in real-life learning situations [30]. While previous research acknowledges the importance of teachers, this study critically shows that teacher readiness is not merely a supporting factor but a determining variable. Inconsistent implementation leads to uneven student outcomes, indicating that the curriculum cannot function optimally without sustained pedagogical commitment [32].

Another important finding relates to the discrepancy between conceptual design and practical implementation [33]. While earlier studies often describe love-based curricula as holistic and fully integrated, this study demonstrates that implementation is typically gradual and partial [38]. Constraints such as limited instructional time, diverse student characteristics, and external environmental factors significantly affect the program's effectiveness [27]. This highlights a critical gap between theory and practice, suggesting that curriculum models need to be more adaptive and context-sensitive rather than idealistic [39].

In addition, this study avoids overgeneralizing the curriculum's positive impact by showing that changes in students' empathy occur gradually and require continuous habituation [40]. This challenges the assumption found in some prior studies that character transformation can be achieved in a relatively short time. Instead, the findings emphasize that character education is a long-term process that must be reinforced through consistent practice and supportive environments.

This study offers several important implications. First, theoretically, it strengthens the concept of character education by integrating humanistic and spiritual dimensions within a love-based curriculum framework. Second, practically, it provides guidance for teachers and schools to implement value-based learning more effectively by emphasizing the importance of teacher modeling, reflective activities, and contextual learning strategies [41]. Third, at the policy level, the findings suggest that curriculum development should consider implementation readiness, including teacher training and institutional support, to ensure sustainability.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it is limited to a single madrasah context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relies on qualitative data, which, while

rich in depth, may not capture measurable changes in students' empathy quantitatively. Third, the study's duration may not be sufficient to fully observe long-term character development. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve multiple institutions, adopt mixed-method approaches, and conduct longitudinal studies to obtain more comprehensive insights.

4. CONCLUSION

According to the study's findings, MI Nurul Mun'im established a more engaging and humanistic learning environment by using a love-based curriculum. Through talks, group projects, and real-world examples, teachers not only imparted knowledge but also fostered the qualities of compassion, caring, and respect for one another. Students felt more at ease learning as teacher-student interactions grew closer and more communicative. As a result, pupils began to show greater empathy, lending a hand to friends, cooperating, and appreciating differences. Some pupils were still not actively using empathy, though. This curriculum was successfully implemented thanks to training, madrasah support, teacher preparedness, and a variety of engaging teaching strategies. However, several challenges emerged, including differences in student character, time constraints on learning, and external influences. Students' empathy gradually changed, necessitating a steady habituation process. All things considered, research has demonstrated that a love-based curriculum increases students' empathy. To achieve more ideal and equitable outcomes, its implementation still needs improvement.

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