

LOVE-BASED CURRICULUM MEETS DEEP LEARNING: TRANSFORMING ISLAMIC EDUCATION AT SMAN 3 PALEMBANG

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the integration of the Love-Based Curriculum (LBC) and the Deep Learning Approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMAN 3 Palembang. The LBC emphasizes the cultivation of love, empathy, and care toward God, humanity, nature, and the nation, while the deep learning approach focuses on meaningful, reflective, and conscious learning that enables students to internalize Islamic values holistically rather than merely memorizing them. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with PAI teachers, and analysis of lesson documents. The findings indicate that the implementation of LBC and deep learning in PAI successfully integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in a balanced way. The values of love (mahabbah), compassion (rahmah), and brotherhood (ukhuwah) are not only transmitted cognitively but also manifested in school culture and social practices. This integration creates a reflective, empathetic, and transformative learning atmosphere consistent with the principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin and Indonesia's national vision of character education. Theoretically, this study enriches contemporary Islamic education discourse by presenting a holistic pedagogical model that bridges affective, spiritual, and intellectual aspects through the synergy of LBC and deep learning. It marks a paradigm shift from knowledge transmission toward affective-spiritual character formation grounded in Islamic humanism. Practically, the study provides educators and policymakers with a conceptual framework for developing Islamic education curricula that foster compassion, reflection, and social responsibility, making it adaptable to broader educational settings.

Keywords: Love-Based Curriculum; Deep Learning; Islamic Education; Character Formation

A. Introduction

The transformation of education in the 21st century necessitates a profound paradigm shift from traditional knowledge transmission toward the cultivation of character, empathy, and humanistic values. Contemporary education faces unprecedented challenges, including rapid technological advancements, globalization, and the growing demand for social-emotional skills, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Freire, 1970). In this context, education must not only equip students with cognitive competence but also foster moral and spiritual development, preparing them to navigate complex societal challenges while upholding ethical and humanistic principles. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) occupies a central position in this transformative landscape, as it offers a holistic framework for nurturing students' moral, emotional, and spiritual intelligences. However, traditional approaches to PAI in many Indonesian schools have emphasized cognitive mastery and rote memorization, often neglecting reflective awareness, affective engagement, and the cultivation of inner moral consciousness (Hidayat, 2022).

The concept of a Love-Based Curriculum (LBC) emerges as an innovative response to these limitations, positioning love (*mahabbah*) toward God, fellow human beings, and the environment at the core of educational practice (Nasution, 2021). In Islamic education, love is not merely an emotional or sentimental quality; it functions as a moral force that drives compassion, empathy, and social responsibility. Zubaidi (2023) emphasizes that character education rooted in love produces holistic learners who are spiritually grounded, ethically sensitive, and socially responsible. This aligns with Noddings' (2012) *Ethics of Care*, which conceptualizes education as a relational and moral endeavor, highlighting the importance of empathy, care, and meaningful engagement between educators and learners. By situating love as the foundation of pedagogy, LBC encourages students to internalize values and act upon them in ways that promote social cohesion and moral integrity.

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education's *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) reinforces the move toward student-centered, reflective, and experiential learning (Kemdikbud, 2025). The curriculum encourages project-based activities, collaborative inquiry, and real-life problem solving, all of which foster social, ethical, and moral responsibility. When harmonized with Islamic educational principles, such approaches advance the vision of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, emphasizing universal compassion, balance, and justice in human relations (Azra, 2019). The integration of LBC within the framework of *Kurikulum Merdeka* exemplifies a contextualized, values-based educational model that addresses both local cultural and religious realities as well as global educational imperatives.

Complementing LBC, the Deep Learning Approach provides a systematic framework for promoting higher-order thinking, reflective capacities, and the authentic application of knowledge (Marzano & Kendall, 2017). In the context of PAI, deep learning encourages students to connect Qur'anic and prophetic teachings with lived experiences, societal challenges, and ethical dilemmas (Nata, 2020). Through reflective inquiry, collaborative engagement, and experiential activities, learners move beyond rote memorization to develop moral reasoning, self-awareness, and social empathy. Deep learning thus transforms religious knowledge into actionable understanding, enabling students to perceive Islamic teachings as a dynamic moral compass guiding both personal and communal life.

Previous studies have discussed either Love-Based Curriculum as a framework for affective education or Deep Learning as a strategy for promoting critical and reflective thinking. However, no prior research has simultaneously examined the integration of both approaches within the specific context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia's public high schools. This gap leaves unanswered how these two pedagogical paradigms can be harmonized to promote holistic learning that unites cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in practice.

This study specifically investigates the implementation of these integrated pedagogical approaches at SMAN 3 Palembang, examining their practical application, impact on students' moral and reflective capacities, and the challenges encountered in fostering a love-oriented and deeply reflective learning environment. Empirical observation and qualitative analysis provide insights into how teachers translate LBC and deep learning principles into classroom practices, curriculum design, and student engagement strategies. The study also explores how such practices influence students' internalization of Islamic ethical values, self-reflection, and social empathy, offering evidence of tangible transformations in student behavior and character formation.

The significance of this research lies in its dual contribution to theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on Islamic pedagogy, humanistic education, and character formation by demonstrating how love-based and deep learning frameworks can be harmonized within a contemporary Islamic educational context. Practically, it offers actionable strategies for schools seeking to foster compassionate, reflective, and ethically oriented learning environments, addressing the global demand for education that is inclusive, sustainable, and socially responsible (Noddings, 2012; Tilaar, 2020). By examining real-world implementation, the study provides empirical evidence on how value-driven pedagogies can reshape the culture of learning, promoting a holistic approach that integrates knowledge, character, and spirituality.

Ultimately, the integration of Love-Based Curriculum and Deep Learning in PAI exemplifies a transformative educational paradigm that aligns moral formation, emotional intelligence, and cognitive development. It underscores the importance of education as a relational, ethical, and spiritual endeavor, highlighting how pedagogical innovations rooted in love, reflection, and active engagement can cultivate students who are not only knowledgeable but also compassionate, reflective, and socially responsible. This research thereby contributes to broader discussions on ethical, human-centered education, offering a model that may inform both local and international practices in values-based and holistic learning.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum (LBC) and the Deep Learning Approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMAN 3 Palembang, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, meanings, and values constructed by teachers and students within their educational context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research focused on how LBC principles and reflective pedagogies were enacted, experienced, and perceived within the school's cultural and instructional practices.

The research was conducted at SMAN 3 Palembang, a public senior high school known for its commitment to character-based and religious education. The participants consisted of:

1. Three Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers,
2. Thirty students from grades X and XI, and
3. The vice principal for curriculum affairs.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in the planning, teaching, or evaluation of PAI learning activities integrating love and reflection. This sampling strategy allowed the researcher to access rich, information-dense cases relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015)

Data were gathered using triangulation methods, including:

- a. Classroom Observations: conducted over six weeks to capture real teaching practices, classroom interactions, and students' affective responses. Field notes were used to record patterns of communication, emotional climate, and learning engagement.
- b. Semi-Structured Interviews: carried out with teachers, students, and administrators to gain insights into their perceptions, challenges, and reflections on implementing LBC and Deep Learning. Each interview lasted between 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent.
- c. Document Analysis: focused on lesson plans (RPP), school programs, and policy documents related to value-based and reflective education. This helped contextualize the practical application of both approaches within the curriculum framework.

Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019) interactive model, consisting of:

- a. Data condensation: selecting, simplifying, and coding the data relevant to themes of love-based education, reflection, and affective transformation.
- b. Data display: organizing findings in matrices and narrative forms to highlight relationships between values, pedagogical strategies, and outcomes.
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification: interpreting emerging themes and validating them through triangulation between observations, interviews, and documents.

The identify recurring categories such as *spiritual empathy*, *reflective engagement*, *compassionate behavior*, and *instructional challenges*.

To ensure **credibility**, multiple validation techniques were applied:

- a. Member checking: Participants reviewed transcripts and summaries for accuracy.
- b. Peer debriefing: Discussions with two education researchers verified thematic consistency.
- c. Triangulation: Comparison across data sources (observation, interview, documentation) strengthened interpretive validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- d. Audit trail: Detailed documentation of data collection and analysis ensured transparency and confirmability.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

a. Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at SMAN 3 Palembang

Field observations revealed that SMAN 3 Palembang has consistently implemented the Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta, KBC) within Islamic Religious Education (PAI) across multiple grade levels. PAI teachers played a central role in both the design and execution of lessons that emphasized compassion, empathy, and spiritual awareness. Classroom atmospheres were notably calm, inclusive, and conducive to reflective engagement. Teachers initiated lessons with personalized greetings, inquiries about students' well-being, and brief collective prayers, thereby establishing an environment of care and attentiveness from the outset.

Lesson plans were deliberately structured around thematic content such as *love for God*, *love for the Prophet*, and *love for fellow human beings*. These themes were consistently integrated into instructional materials, guided discussions, and assessment rubrics. Students actively participated in dialogue, often sharing personal experiences related to kindness, respect, and forgiveness. Many students reported that this pedagogical approach rendered religious education more relevant and closely connected to their daily lives. Lessons frequently concluded with short reflective exercises, allowing students to express gratitude, identify personal areas for growth, and internalize moral principles through self-reflection.

Beyond classroom instruction, the school strategically embedded love-based values into the broader institutional culture. Programs such as *Jumat Berbagi* (Friday Sharing),

Gerakan Cinta Lingkungan (Environmental Love Movement), and *Sahabat Iman* (Faith Companions) promoted cooperation, empathy, and environmental stewardship. These initiatives encouraged students to engage actively with their communities, fostering social responsibility and reinforcing the internalization of ethical values. Observations indicated that participation in these programs strengthened students' sense of belonging, collective responsibility, and care for others, demonstrating a deliberate alignment between curricular content and school-wide cultural practices.

b. Application of Deep Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Teachers at SMAN 3 Palembang implemented *deep learning* strategies during PAI lessons through structured, iterative pedagogical processes. Observations across three instructional sessions revealed a consistent pattern: lessons began with connecting content to students' lived experiences, followed by collaborative interpretation of Qur'anic verses, and concluded with reflective group discussions.

For instance, during a session on Q.S. *Al-Hujurat:13*, students worked in small groups to explore their experiences of diversity and tolerance within the school environment. They subsequently presented their reflections to the class, engaging in open-ended dialogue guided by the teacher rather than receiving direct instruction, which fostered both critical thinking and moral reflection.

Interviews with teachers indicated that this approach facilitated deeper understanding of ethical values, encouraging students to translate religious teachings into practical behaviors. Students reported that such pedagogical strategies promoted critical self-reflection, particularly regarding interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution. Several students noted that they began to approach disagreements with peers through empathy and dialogue, emphasizing communication over confrontation. Learning documentation further corroborated these outcomes, demonstrating the incorporation of community engagement assignments, small-scale charity projects, and weekly reflective journals designed to monitor students' emotional, social, and spiritual development.

c. Synergy Between Love-Based Curriculum and Deep Learning

The integration of KBC and deep learning produced a synergistic and transformative learning ecosystem, where emotional intelligence, spiritual awareness, and cognitive depth operated as interconnected domains. The synergy was especially visible during thematic project weeks, where PAI lessons were intentionally linked to environmental and social activities.

For example, students participated in a program titled *Cinta Alam dan Sesama* (Love for Nature and Humanity), which involved cleaning public areas surrounding the school while reflecting on responsibility and stewardship. Subsequent classroom discussions encouraged students to articulate emotional experiences, moral insights, and personal commitments, reinforcing both cognitive and affective learning outcomes.

Critically, this synergy **shifted student learning orientation** from *rote religiosity* to *living faith* that is, the embodiment of Islamic ethical values in daily conduct. The combination of love-centered pedagogy and deep reflection encouraged students to move beyond mere moral awareness toward moral action. Teachers observed that students

displayed greater empathy, reduced disciplinary incidents, and improved collaborative behavior.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this integration represents a humanistic reconstruction of religious education, aligning with transformative learning theory: affective engagement becomes the entry point to intellectual and spiritual maturity. Hence, the KBC-deep learning synergy does not merely transmit values it reconfigures students' moral agency through internalization, reflection, and praxis.

d. Challenges in Implementation

Despite its success, several challenges emerged. Time allocation was a recurring issue, as teachers had to balance reflective and experiential activities with syllabus demands. Some students initially hesitated to share personal reflections in group settings, requiring gradual trust-building.

Assessment also posed difficulty. Measuring affective and spiritual growth objectively remained problematic, despite the use of reflective journals and behavioral checklists. Infrastructure and resource limitations occasionally constrained outdoor or experiential projects. Teacher readiness varied: while some embraced emotionally oriented pedagogy, others preferred traditional expository teaching. To mitigate these issues, the administration organized monthly professional development, peer mentoring, and collaborative lesson design. Over time, teacher competence and confidence improved, leading to higher levels of student engagement and cohesion between curricular and extracurricular love-based practices. Descriptive results affirm the successful implementation of both frameworks, a more critical reading reveals that the transformative power lies in their interaction. Love-based values provide the emotional and ethical foundation, while deep learning offers the cognitive and reflective structure. This duality operationalizes *tazkiyah al-nafs* (self-purification) within an educational context—students learn to know, feel, and act morally in unity.

In essence, the synergy between KBC and deep learning at SMAN 3 Palembang represents a contextual re-interpretation of Islamic pedagogy for modern schooling: human-centered, participatory, and emotionally intelligent. It transforms religious education from a doctrinal subject into a lifelong moral formation process, aligning well with the goals of Indonesia's *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile).

Table.1 Summary of Major Findings

Theme	Key Observations	Impact on Studets	Analytical Insight
Love-Based Curriculum (KBC)	Compassion-centered instruction, thematic values of love for God, Prophet, and humans	Increased empathy, gratitude, reflective habits	Embeds emotional literacy into spiritual education
Deep Learning in PAI	Experiential reflection on Qur'anic verses, peer discussion, moral reasoning	Improved critical thinking, empathy, and conflict resolution	Facilitates transformation from knowledge acquisition to ethical practice
Synergy of KBC + Deep Learning	Integration during thematic projects (e.g., <i>Cinta Alam dan Sesama</i>)	Heightened moral awareness, collective responsibility	Creates holistic moral agency and aligns affective-cognitive domains
Institutional Culture	Extracurricular programs reinforcing love-based values	Strengthened school identity, cooperation, and care	Sustains long-term ethical and communal impact
Challenges	Limited time, assessment difficulties, varied teacher readiness	Uneven depth of implementation	Requires systemic support, professional training, and evaluative innovation

2. Discussion

a. Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum (LBC)

Field findings show that the integration of the values of *mahabbah* (love), *rahmah* (compassion), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) into lesson plans (RPP) and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) practices at SMAN 3 Palembang is not merely a thematic inclusion but a genuine institutional effort to cultivate values. This is evident through school programs such as *Jumat Berbagi* (Friday Sharing), *Gerakan Cinta Lingkungan* (Love for the Environment Movement), and *Sahabat Iman* (Faith Companions), which link classroom learning with real social actions. Theoretically, this pattern aligns with value-based pedagogy, which emphasizes the infusion of moral values into the school culture to ensure sustainable moral education rather than incidental activities (Kaur et al., 2023). Furthermore, the *rahmatan lil 'alamin* paradigm widely adopted as an action-pedagogical framework in Islamic educational institutions asserts that the goal of religious education extends beyond ritual aspects; it is directed toward fostering social empathy and ecological responsibility. The practices observed at SMAN 3 Palembang (social fundraising, environmental initiatives, personal reflection) reflect the application of these *rahmatan* principles on a school scale. Studies elaborating this paradigm in educational contexts reinforce this interpretation (Khosiin et al., 2023).

To maintain consistency in implementing LBC, it is necessary to (a) formulate clear affective behavioral indicators, (b) align lesson plans with cross-curricular activities, and (c) strengthen the school culture to facilitate measurable social action routines.

b. Application of the Deep Learning Approach in Islamic Religious Education

Observation and document analysis indicate that PAI teachers employ a series of strategies leading to deep learning: contextual apperception, text exploration, reflective discussion, real-life action, and personal reflection. In the context of religious education, deep learning emphasizes dialogical interaction, value reflection, and practical application, enabling students to shift from *surface learning* (memorization) to *deep learning* (internalization of meaning and action). This is supported by international studies discussing deep learning in religious and worldview education (Bråten, 2020).

Social action projects and reflective journals practiced at SMAN 3 Palembang reveal behavioral transformation such as more empathetic conflict resolution and improved student collaboration. These findings provide operational evidence that deep learning affects not only the cognitive domain but also affective and behavioral dimensions. To ensure the sustainability of deep learning, educators need to design learning experiences that allow time for reflection, develop assessment rubrics incorporating affective indicators, and integrate subjects through large-scale social projects.

c. The Synergy of LBC and Deep Learning

Findings indicate that when LBC is combined with deep learning strategies, a balance between *head* (intellect), *heart* (emotion), and *hands* (action) is achieved. Theoretically, this synthesis aligns with the concept of transformational learning, which promotes perspective and behavioral change through critical reflection and praxis experience. Practically, thematic activities such as the *Love for Nature and Humanity Project* serve as opportunities for students to interpret religious texts and connect them with collective actions, creating holistic and contextual learning experiences (Khosiin et al., 2023). Increased classroom participation, mutual respect, and student-led social initiatives illustrate the synergistic effect of strengthening values through experiential learning.

The synergy between LBC and deep learning transforms Islamic education into a holistic and transformative process, where intellect, emotion, and action coexist harmoniously. This reflects the Islamic educational paradigm of unifying intellectual and spiritual dimensions (Azra, 2019) and realizes the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* as an expression of love toward God, humanity, and nature (Nasution, 2021; Qardhawi, 2016).

d. Implementation Challenges and Theoretical Framework for Solutions

Interview and observation data reveal several challenges: limited instructional time, traditional learning habits among students and teachers, the absence of valid affective assessment tools, and insufficient supporting facilities. The Cognitive Load Theory warns that overloaded curricula may reduce opportunities for deep reflection; therefore, workload and time allocation must be redesigned to allow reflective space. Additionally, literature on affective and spiritual assessment highlights the need for valid and reliable instruments, such as self-report scales, observation rubrics, and structured reflection journals to systematically measure behavioral and attitudinal change (Rohmad, 2022). Collaborative rubric development through teacher professional communities, continuous

training in reflective pedagogy, and intentional scheduling for exploration and reflection phases are crucial solutions.

E. Conclusion

The implementation of the *Love-Based Curriculum (LBC)* and the *Deep Learning Approach* in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMAN 3 Palembang has successfully integrated cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in a harmonious manner. This study contributes to Islamic education theory by positioning love (*mahabbah*) as a foundational epistemic and pedagogical principle. The integration of the Love-Based Curriculum (LBC) and Deep Learning expands the traditional focus of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) from doctrinal teaching toward holistic formation that unites cognition, emotion, and spirituality. It proposes a new theoretical model where love functions as the core of curriculum design, reflection, and moral development, offering a humanistic and transformative vision for Islamic pedagogy.

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