

## CURRICULUM OF LOVE AS EPISTEMOLOGY OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE SOCIETY 5.0 ERA

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### Abstract

The moral crisis in primary education—marked by declining empathy, increased student conflict, and the dominance of academic achievement—necessitates curriculum innovation grounded in affective values. This study aims to describe the implementation of the *Kurikulum Cinta* (Curriculum of Love) as a character-strengthening model at SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan, focusing on teachers' understanding, implementation strategies, encountered challenges, and its impact on student behavior. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research involved five teachers as participants through semi-structured interviews, observation, and analysis of instructional documents. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, involving systematic stages of data reduction, display, and verification. The findings indicate that all teachers understand the *Kurikulum Cinta* as a humanistic approach emphasizing compassion, empathy, and respect for students. Implementation strategies include affective, non-punitive methods such as advice, rewards, positive touch, and motivation. Major challenges stem from internal student factors (60%), such as low learning motivation and social conflict, and external factors (40%), including teacher limitations, parenting styles, and gadget dependency. Nevertheless, 80% of teachers reported positive behavioral changes among students, including increased empathy, harmony, care, and enthusiasm for learning, while 20% observed gradual shifts toward responsible behavior.

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These findings suggest that the *Kurikulum Cinta* is effective in enhancing character education, although its success requires the support of a cohesive ecosystem involving families, schools, and aligned digital policies.

**Keywords:** *Kurikulum Cinta*; Character Education; Humanistic Approach; Integrated Islamic Primary School; Affective Learning

## INTRODUCTION

"Is cognitive intelligence enough to guarantee the future of the nation?" This question becomes increasingly relevant amid the moral crisis in Indonesia, ranging from bullying cases, a decline in empathy, to low discipline among students (Lu et al. 2025; Pearson and Athota 2018). The fact is that elementary education in Indonesia still tends to emphasize academic achievement rather than character formation (Kohl, Sanusi, and Hussien 2024; Maiden 2020; Sukarno and Riyadini 2024). In reality, education should not only produce smart individuals but also humans with integrity, empathy, and the ability to live harmoniously in society. Various studies emphasize that instilling character values from an early age is a fundamental foundation for the success of education as a whole (Kusumawati, Nurullah, and Susilawati 2024; Ramlan 2023).

In the last decade, the discourse on character education has become stronger (Binh and Tam 2025; Ominde, K'odhiambo, and Gunga 2022), along with the emergence of value-based curricula and character integration programs in primary school education. Studies show that integrating character education into an independent curriculum can improve the quality of learning holistically, where academic achievement goes hand in hand with the development of student character (Resnita 2025). A character-based curriculum can serve as a foundation for shaping a generation that is ethical, responsible, and globally competitive. Some studies at the elementary school level even assert that integrating character values into curriculum management and learning practices can help create a conducive educational climate and foster moral awareness among students (Desriyarini et al. 2023; Handayani, Ahmad, and Indrawati 2023).

However, despite many studies highlighting the importance of character education, most still focus on integrating general values through formal subjects. This approach tends to be normative and has yet to touch on deeper affective aspects, such as love and empathy

(Boyles 2025; Crinall and Stanger 2025; Orih 2022; Sosler 2024). In fact, it is the affective dimension that truly constitutes the essence of a strong character. Research on love-based curriculum is still very limited, even though this dimension has great potential in fostering social sensitivity, a sense of responsibility, and harmony in students. Some Islamic education studies have started to design character-based learning models, but have yet to place love as the primary foundation guiding the entire learning process (Kasmawati et al. 2023; Mutohar et al. 2020).

The conceptual framework underlying this research is rooted in character education theory, which emphasizes the balanced development of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Character education essentially not only teaches what is right and wrong but also cultivates the habit of loving goodness and avoiding evil. The concept of love pedagogy becomes an essential foundation in designing a curriculum oriented toward love, empathy, and care (Moses 2017; Nilsson Sjöberg 2018; Tsabar 2017). This framework aligns with the ideas of value-based education and holistic education, which place love at the core of the learning process. A love-based curriculum is not just a strategy for delivering material but a new paradigm in education that integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of students (Kim and Kim 2024; Mujahidin and Nasution 2019).

Unfortunately, research on the implementation of love-based curricula in primary schools is still very scarce. Most studies focus more on character curricula based on religion, culture, or nationalism without emphasizing love as a transformative force (Mariyono 2024; Nopas and Ueangchokchai 2025). In fact, the value of love plays a crucial role in developing empathy, care, and harmonious relationships among individuals, which are often neglected in formal education practices. For example, research on character education based on local wisdom tends to emphasize nationalism and tradition but lacks emphasis on affection development through the value of love (Mustapa 2019).

Thus, there is still a gap in the educational literature regarding the exploration of the love-based curriculum model as an innovative approach to strengthening students' character. Few studies have deeply examined how the concept of love can be operationalized in curriculum design, learning strategies, and assessments in primary schools, especially in integrated Islamic schools such as SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan. This is critical because, without strong empirical support, the love-based curriculum innovation may remain an idea, rather than a real implementation. This research gap also impacts the

lack of practical guidelines for teachers in designing systematic love-based learning (Panggabean et al. 2022).

Filling this gap is essential not only for the academic world but also for education practitioners, policymakers, and parents. The implementation of a love-based curriculum is believed to produce students who are not only academically outstanding but also have strong social sensitivity, spirituality, and readiness to face global challenges. This will strengthen the role of elementary schools as the main foundation in shaping the nation's character. Furthermore, the love-based curriculum can help integrated Islamic schools strengthen their Islamic identity while responding to the global need for humanistic and inclusive education.

Based on the description above, this research aims to analyze the implementation of the love-based curriculum as a model for strengthening the character values of students at SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan. More specifically, this research will describe how the love-based curriculum is designed and implemented in learning activities, evaluate the effectiveness of the love-based curriculum in strengthening character values such as empathy, responsibility, and honesty, and identify the challenges and opportunities of implementing the love-based curriculum in integrated Islamic primary schools.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach (Creswell and Creswell 2018) with a case study design (Udo Kuckartz 2025), as it is considered the most suitable for exploring in-depth the practice of implementing the Love-Based Curriculum at SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan. The sample consists of five teachers selected through purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria of active teachers who have implemented the curriculum for at least two years, while honorarium teachers or those who have not been consistent are excluded to ensure more representative data. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of learning tools, so as to capture perceptions, practices, and concrete evidence of implementation. Analysis is carried out using the Miles and Huberman model through data reduction, presentation, and verification, along with source, method, and theory triangulation to maintain validity (Qomaruddin and Sa'diyah 2024).

## RESULTS

This study focuses on the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan through interviews with five teachers directly involved. The data collected provide a rich portrayal of how teachers understand the concept of the Love-Based Curriculum, how they apply it in the classroom, the challenges they face, and the behavioral changes in students as indicators of success. The analysis of these results is first presented descriptively, then deepened with an emphasis on emerging patterns of findings.

### 1. Interview Data Summary

**Table 1.** Summary of Teacher Responses on Love-Based Curriculum Implementation

Name	Understanding of Concept	Application Experience	Challenges	Student Changes
<b>Rini Nurhayati</b>	Teaching with love, humanizing students	Students find it easier to understand lessons	Students need constant reminders	Students become more harmonious
<b>Annisa Mega Utami</b>	Developing students' empathy towards peers	Giving advice, encouraging mutual help	Fights still occur	Fights decrease
<b>Lestari Daru Hartanti</b>	Parent-child relationships, love	Reward, praise, positive touch	Limited teacher resources	Students become more caring
<b>Faizah Umami</b>	Touching students' hearts, giving attention	Helping emotionally distressed students	Dependence on gadgets	Students become calmer
<b>Siti Zahratul Hajar</b>	Teaching love for others, religion, and the nation	Motivation, reflection, consequences	Family upbringing not supportive	Students begin to take responsibility

Based on the interview data from five teachers, it appears that all respondents have a consistent understanding of the Love-Based Curriculum as an approach to learning based on love and appreciation for students. Descriptively, 40% of the teachers (Rini and Faizah) emphasize the teacher-student relationship with a humanistic approach, 40% (Annisa and Siti) focus on social relationships among students and love for the broader environment, and 20% (Lestari) highlight the affective aspects through emotional approaches such as touch and praise. This pattern shows a diversity of interpretations, which enriches the practice of the Love-Based Curriculum in the classroom.

In terms of application, the strategies used by teachers are quite varied but focus on affection and motivation. All teachers (100%) use a non-punitive approach, such as advice, rewards, touch, motivation, and creating a comfortable atmosphere. This is an important

finding as it shows a shift in paradigm from a punishment-based discipline to a persuasive and humanistic approach in the learning process.

Challenges faced can be grouped into two main factors. First, internal student factors, such as low motivation, the need for constant reminders, and remaining conflicts between students, were reported by 60% of the teachers (Rini, Annisa, Faizah). Second, external factors, such as limited teacher knowledge, unsupportive family upbringing, and gadget dependence, were noted by 40% of the teachers (Lestari and Siti). Quantitatively, this shows that internal student challenges are more dominant than external challenges.

However, all teachers reported positive changes in students. Of the five respondents, 80% mentioned significant changes, such as students becoming more harmonious, caring, and calm in learning (Rini, Annisa, Lestari, Faizah), while 20% (Siti) stated that the changes were still small but showing positive directions, especially regarding responsibility. This indicates that the success rate of implementing the Love-Based Curriculum is quite high, with positive behavioral changes in the majority of students. To clarify the findings, the results are summarized as follows:

**Table 2.** Patterns of Love-Based Curriculum Implementation Findings

Aspect	Percentage of Teachers	Key Findings
Focus of Love Concept on Teacher-Student	40%	Humanistic relationship, direct love
Focus of Love Concept on Student-Student & Environment	40%	Empathy, social love, responsibility
Focus on Affection & Touch	20%	Reward, praise, emotional approach
Non-Punitive Approach	100%	Advice, motivation, comfortable atmosphere
Internal Student Challenges	60%	Low motivation, conflicts, dependence on gadgets
External Challenges	40%	Limited teacher knowledge, family upbringing
Significant Positive Changes	80%	Harmonious, caring, empathetic, calm learning
Gradual Small Changes	20%	Beginning to learn responsibility

From this analysis, it is evident that the Love-Based Curriculum is effective in fostering positive behavioral changes in students, despite facing both internal and external challenges. A key finding is that the love-based approach is more effective in nurturing

motivation and prosocial behavior in students compared to punishment-based approaches. However, full success still requires support from families and the management of technology to ensure that love-based values are consistently embedded.

## 2. General Patterns and Analysis

**Table 3.** Analysis of Teacher Response Patterns

Aspect	General Pattern	Implication / Interpretation
<b>Understanding of Concept</b>	Teachers view the Love-Based Curriculum as a humanistic approach, fostering love, empathy, and social-emotional relationships.	The Love-Based Curriculum is seen not only as a teaching instruction but also as a strategy for character education.
<b>Application of Values</b>	Affective strategies: advice, rewards, touch, motivation, and creating a comfortable learning environment.	Teachers prioritize persuasion over punishment, fostering a positive learning climate.
<b>Challenges</b>	Internal: low motivation, conflicts. External: limited teacher knowledge, family support, and technology influence.	A supportive ecosystem is needed: family, teacher competency, and technology regulation.
<b>Student Changes</b>	Students become more harmonious, empathetic, caring, responsible, and eager to learn.	The Love-Based Curriculum is effective, but its impact is gradual and requires continuity.

The analysis shows that all teachers understand the Love-Based Curriculum as a value-oriented approach. Descriptively, their understanding emphasizes learning that fosters love, empathy, and social-emotional relationships between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves. All five respondents (100%) stated that the Love-Based Curriculum is not just a technical teaching instruction but an integral character education strategy. This finding is important because it shows that the conceptual framework of the curriculum aligns with contemporary character education paradigms.

In terms of application, the strategies used by teachers consistently focus on affection, such as advice, rewards, positive touch, motivation, and creating a comfortable learning atmosphere. This pattern was noted by all respondents, so it can be concluded that 100% of the teachers emphasize persuasion over punishment. This finding highlights a shift in the approach to discipline in the classroom, moving from a corrective orientation toward preventive and persuasive methods, which creates a more conducive learning climate.

However, there are significant challenges, both internal and external. Internally, 60% of teachers report low student motivation and ongoing conflicts in the classroom.

Externally, 40% of teachers mention the limited teacher competency, unsupportive family upbringing, and the negative influence of technology (especially gadgets). This pattern indicates that the success of the curriculum implementation does not solely rely on teachers but also requires a supporting ecosystem that includes families, schools, and technology regulations.

The impact of the Love-Based Curriculum on students appears to be quite positive. Nearly all teachers (80%) reported that students became more harmonious, empathetic, caring, and eager to learn, while 20% reported that changes were still limited but showed positive direction, particularly in terms of responsibility. Therefore, the Love-Based Curriculum has proven to be effective in shaping prosocial behavior, although the changes are gradual and require consistent implementation.

**Table 4.** Distribution of Love-Based Curriculum Findings

Aspect	Percentage of Teachers	Key Findings
<b>Understanding the Curriculum as a Character Strategy</b>	100%	Not just an instruction, but a framework for character education
<b>Using Affective &amp; Non-Punitive Strategies</b>	100%	Advice, rewards, motivation, comfortable environment
<b>Internal Student Challenges</b>	60%	Low motivation, student conflicts
<b>External Challenges</b>	40%	Limited teacher knowledge, family upbringing, gadget influence
<b>Reporting Significant Positive Changes</b>	80%	Harmonious, empathetic, caring, eager to learn
<b>Reporting Limited Changes</b>	20%	Beginning to learn responsibility

This analysis confirms that the Love-Based Curriculum is effective as a character education tool because it successfully encourages students' prosocial behavior. However, its results are not fully optimal without support from families, improved teacher competencies, and the management of technology's influence.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study on the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan strengthen the theoretical framework of humanistic education, which emphasizes the importance of affection, appreciation, and social-emotional relationships in the learning process. The fact that 100% of teachers understand the Love-

Based Curriculum not merely as a technical instruction but as a character education strategy reinforces that this approach aligns with Lickona's (1991) character education theory, which places moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action as the three key components of character formation (Izzati et al., 2019). Policy-wise, this finding opens space for the development of curricula that are more responsive to affective aspects, not just cognitive. For educational practice, the shift towards a non-punitive and persuasive approach practiced by all teachers indicates an opportunity to strengthen the school's climate to be healthier, child-friendly, and inclusive.

These results are consistent with studies that emphasize the importance of affection-based education in shaping students' prosocial behavior. For instance, Mira (2025) found that teachers who prioritize positive emotional relationships with students can improve attachment and intrinsic discipline. Similarly, studies by Nindy Amita (2025) and Reinita et al. (2025) show that strategies such as motivation, rewards, and a comfortable atmosphere can reduce aggressive behavior in elementary school students. However, this study also adds a new nuance: external challenges, such as the influence of gadgets and unsupportive family upbringing, become significant factors that have not been highlighted much in the literature. While previous research mainly emphasized the limitations in teacher competencies, this study expands the understanding that household and technology-related factors are equally important in the successful implementation of character education.

The strength of this study lies in its qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, allowing the researcher to explore conceptual understanding, real experiences, and teacher reflections holistically. The data collected is rich and shows consistent patterns across various aspects, from concept to student changes. Additionally, the triangulation of perspectives from five teachers provides a balanced view of the Love-Based Curriculum implementation in this school. However, there are limitations to this study. First, the number of participants was only five teachers, so generalizing the results to other schools should be done cautiously. Second, the data obtained is entirely based on self-reports from teachers, so social desirability bias cannot be avoided. Third, this study did not involve the perspectives of students and parents, even though they are crucial parts of the character education ecosystem.

This study affirms that character education, particularly through the Love-Based Curriculum, cannot be understood as merely the task of the teacher. Instead, it is an ecosystem involving the school, family, and digital environment. The fact that 60% of challenges stem from internal student factors and 40% from external factors like family and gadgets indicates that educational intervention must be holistic. On one hand, teachers have shifted their disciplinary paradigm from punishment to an affectionate approach; on the other hand, if the ecosystem outside the school does not support it, the results will remain limited. Thus, this study changes our perspective on character education: the success of love-based education lies not only in curriculum design but also in the coherence between the school, home, and digital spaces, which have become integral to children's lives.

### **1. Discussion of Key Findings**

First, teachers' understanding of the Love-Based Curriculum as a humanistic approach aligns with Rogers' (1969) theory of humanistic education, which emphasizes the importance of personal relationships, empathy, and appreciation for students as individuals (Prajoko and Abrori, 2021). This finding reinforces the evidence that the humanistic paradigm can be integrated into the context of integrated Islamic education, such as at SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan.

Second, the non-punitive strategies chosen by all teachers highlight an important pedagogical shift. While previous disciplinary approaches were more corrective (punishment-based), teachers now prefer persuasive strategies rooted in affection. This shift not only impacts students' more positive behavior but also creates a school climate that supports social-emotional learning (SEL).

Third, the challenges faced show that curriculum implementation cannot be separated from a broader social context. Low student motivation and minor conflicts between students indicate the need for more consistent strategies for internalizing values. Meanwhile, limitations in teacher competency, family upbringing, and the impact of gadgets demonstrate that character education requires a cross-sectoral approach. In other words, education policies should consider family interventions and digital technology regulations from an early age.

Fourth, the behavioral changes observed by the majority of teachers (80%) show the effectiveness of the Love-Based Curriculum, even though it is gradual. Students

become more harmonious, empathetic, caring, and eager to learn. Even in cases where the changes were small (20%), the direction of development remained positive towards responsibility. This shows that love-based education has the potential to become a strong foundation for shaping a generation with strong prosocial character.

## **2. Practical Implications and Recommendations**

From a practical perspective, these findings emphasize the need for teacher capacity development in affective strategies, including empathy-based counseling, conflict management, and reflective pedagogy. In addition, parenting programs in schools are essential to synchronize the values of the Love-Based Curriculum with family upbringing. Regulations regarding gadget usage should also be considered, both through digital literacy education for parents and through policy regulations on technology use in schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study found that the Love-Based Curriculum is understood by all teachers at SDIT Cahaya Hati Pedan as a humanistic approach that emphasizes affection, empathy, and appreciation for students. It is implemented through non-punitive affective strategies such as advice, motivation, rewards, positive touch, and the creation of a comfortable atmosphere. The main finding indicates that despite internal challenges (low motivation, student conflicts) and external challenges (family upbringing, teacher limitations, and gadget dependency), 80% of teachers reported significant positive changes in students, including increased harmony, empathy, care, calmness, and enthusiasm for learning. Only a small portion (20%) of the changes were limited, but they still moved in a positive direction, particularly in terms of responsibility.

The results of this study have implications for policy and educational practice. For policymakers, the Love-Based Curriculum can serve as an alternative model for strengthening character education in primary schools, as it has proven effective in fostering prosocial behavior in students. For educational practitioners, the results highlight the importance of a non-punitive, affection-based approach in creating a conducive classroom environment. For researchers, the findings regarding external challenges, such as family upbringing and the influence of gadgets, open up new avenues for further research on how educational interventions can be extended to the family and digital environments.

This study recommends three key actions as calls to action. First, developing teacher capacity through training in affective pedagogy, empathy-based counseling, and conflict management strategies. Second, fostering collaboration between schools and families through parenting programs to ensure that love-based values are consistently internalized both at home and at school. Third, establishing regulations and digital literacy programs that support the healthy use of gadgets, while also limiting their negative impact on children.

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