

Revitalization of Islamic Basic Education Through The Integration of The Independent Curriculum and Love Based Curriculum in MI

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Abstract

The transformation of Indonesia's national education through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum represents a strategic governmental effort to align the education system with the rapidly changing demands of the 21st century. Meanwhile, Islamic educational institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) face the unique challenge of balancing academic freedom with the preservation of spiritual and moral values rooted in Islamic teachings. This study aims to describe and conceptualize an integrative model between the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum as an approach to revitalizing Islamic elementary education. Employing a qualitative descriptive design through a library research method, data were collected from books, scientific journals, and official educational policy documents. The findings indicate that both curricula share common philosophical foundations in promoting humanity, spirituality, and freedom of thought. The integration of these two frameworks produces a pedagogical model that nurtures empathy, compassion, and autonomous learning within the ethical and spiritual framework of Islam. The synthesized model positions Love-Based Education as the core, surrounded by four interrelated dimensions: Freedom to Learn, Spirituality, Humanity, and Pedagogical Innovation. The study further emphasizes the role of teachers as *murabbi* educators who teach with heart, wisdom, and affection. In conclusion, the synergy between the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum offers a transformative pathway toward revitalizing Islamic education that is humanistic, spiritual, and contextually aligned with the holistic needs of 21st-century learners

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Love-Based Curriculum, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Islamic Education, Humanistic Learning

Introduction

The transformation of national education through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum represents a strategic step by the government to align the education system with the increasingly complex and dynamic challenges of the modern era. The Merdeka Curriculum emerges as a response to the need for learners to study according to their individual characteristics, interests, and potentials. Its core principles emphasize learning freedom, flexibility, and student-centered learning. Through the Project for Strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students (P5), the Merdeka Curriculum aims to instill character values, independence, and social awareness (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

With this approach, education is expected not only to produce cognitively intelligent individuals but also those with strong character and global competitiveness.

However, within the context of Islamic education, particularly in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum encounters more complex challenges (Nur Hasanah & Kristiyah, 2023). MI is responsible not only for developing students' academic abilities but also for cultivating the spiritual and moral values that form the essence of Islamic education (Khobir et al., 2021). A major challenge that arises is how to integrate the principles of learning freedom with religious values and Islamic ethics. Without being balanced by a strong spiritual foundation, learning freedom may lose its direction and meaning. Therefore, an approach that touches the inner and affective dimensions is needed to ensure that the goals of Islamic education are fully achieved (Al-Attas, 1991; Baharuddin & Wahyuni, 2018)

In this context emerges the idea of the Love Based Curriculum (LBC) as an effort to balance the rational and spiritual dimensions of education. This curriculum places love as the main foundation of the learning process love for God, for fellow human beings, and for the environment. According to Noddings (2013), true education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but the process of building humane and caring relationships between teachers and learners (Mumtaz & Hasanah, 2024). The concept of love in education is also aligned with the Islamic values of *rahmah*, which emphasize gentleness, compassion, and respect for all of God's creation (Suyadi, 2021). Thus, love-based education can serve as a harmonious bridge between freedom of thought and spiritual depth.

Islamic education has a far broader orientation compared to general education. Its primary aim is not only to produce intelligent and competent learners but also to form individuals who are faithful, virtuous, and compassionate. Values such as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, compassion, and tolerance are central to the vision of Islamic education (Hidayat, 2020). Therefore, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MI must be synergized with Islamic values so that it does not lose its identity. By incorporating the Love-Based Curriculum, teachers serve not only as instructors but also as *murabbi* and models of compassion who guide students with gentleness and sincerity.

The synergy between the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum is believed to revitalize Islamic elementary education in the modern era. The integration of both produces a learning system that is more humane, contextual, and relevant to contemporary needs. The Merdeka Curriculum provides space for students to express themselves and develop their potentials, while the Love-Based Curriculum strengthens their spiritual and emotional dimensions. Consequently, education in MI is not solely oriented toward academic achievement but also toward shaping holistic individuals intelligent, well-mannered, and morally grounded. This represents the essence of revitalizing Islamic education founded upon love and responsible freedom ((Dewantara, 2011; Suyadi, 2023)

Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the library research method. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the objective of the study, namely exploring, examining, and analyzing the philosophical and practical concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum within the context of revitalizing Islamic elementary education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning and providing in-depth interpretations of the phenomena under study, rather than merely measuring quantitative cause-and-effect relationships.

The library research method is used because the study emphasizes the exploration of theories, ideas, and policies relevant to contemporary Islamic education issues. Data were obtained from various scholarly sources such as textbooks, reputable journal articles, conference proceedings, dissertations, as well as official documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum and conceptual literature on the Love-Based Curriculum. The selection of data sources was conducted purposively, based on relevance, credibility, and the currency of information. Moleong (2017) states that library research is an integral part of qualitative research in building a comprehensive and in-depth conceptual framework.

The data collection procedure was carried out through four main stages: (1) literature identification, by selecting relevant primary and secondary sources; (2) information organization, by categorizing data according to major themes such as curriculum concepts, the principle of love in education, and its application in madrasah; (3) data analysis, conducted through data reduction, data display, and inductive conclusion drawing; and (4) synthesis of findings, aimed at connecting theories with educational practices in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The analytical stages refer to the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which emphasizes the continuity between data collection and data analysis.

In addition, to maintain data validity, source and theory triangulation techniques were employed. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing various literatures that provide different perspectives on the concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum, while theory triangulation was conducted by linking the findings with theories of Islamic, humanistic, and constructivist education. Through this process, the research findings are expected to achieve a high level of validity and depth of analysis (Sugiyono, 2019).

This descriptive qualitative approach provides opportunities for the researcher to understand educational phenomena more contextually, particularly in synthesizing humanistic and Islamic spiritual values within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. Through this method, the research results are not only theoretical but also practical, thus serving as a reference for teachers, curriculum developers, and Islamic educational institutions in effectively implementing the Love-Based Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

Discussion

1. Philosophical Analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum

The literature analysis shows that the Merdeka Curriculum is rooted in the philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, which positions learners as autonomous subjects in the learning process. Its primary goal is to shape the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, namely learners who are faithful, noble in character, critical thinkers, creative, independent, and cooperative (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The principle of “freedom to learn” reflects the value of humanizing education, focusing on intellectual independence, self-directed learning, and contextual educational experiences.

Meanwhile, the Love-Based Curriculum (Suyadi, 2021) emphasizes spiritual values, compassion, and human care (*rahmah*) as the foundation of Islamic education. This curriculum is grounded in the paradigm of *education by heart*, which seeks to cultivate affective and moral awareness within learners. Its core principle is “educating with love to nurture individuals who love goodness.”

Findings from the philosophical comparison (Table 1) reveal a convergence between the two curricula, as both position learners as active subjects who need to grow in learning environments that promote freedom as well as compassion.

Table 1. Philosophical Comparison of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum

Aspect	Merdeka Curriculum	Love-Based Curriculum	Point of Convergence
Philosophical Foundation	Humanistic and constructivist	Spiritual–humanistic (<i>rahmatan lil ‘alamin</i>)	Education that liberates and nurtures compassion
Goals	<i>Profil Pelajar Pancasila</i>	Individuals of noble character filled with love and compassion	Character formation and moral development
Role of Teachers	Learning facilitator	<i>Murabbi</i> and model of love	Teachers as caring educators
Orientation	Independence and creativity	Gentleness and empathy	Cognitive–affective balance
Core Value	Freedom to learn	Learning with love	Humanizing education

The synthesis indicates that the Merdeka Curriculum serves as a strategic platform for integrating the values of the Love-Based Curriculum, especially within Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), which possesses a strong religious and spiritual character.

2. Synthesis of Love-Based Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Based on the literature review, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MI requires teachers to use differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and project-based learning (P5). Within the context of Islamic elementary education, these approaches can be harmonized with the values of love as taught in the Love-Based Curriculum love for Allah, love for others, and love for knowledge.

This implementation emerges across three key domains:

a. Cognitive Domain:

Thematic learning in MI can integrate project-based learning with values of compassion and social care. Examples include projects such as “Sharing with Friends” or “Maintaining the School Mosque’s Cleanliness,” which not only enhance thinking skills but also cultivate empathy and responsibility.

b. Affective Domain:

MI teachers act as role models of love by creating a warm and caring classroom environment. Suyadi (Suyadi, 2023) emphasizes that learning grounded in love fosters students’ intrinsic motivation.

c. Psychomotor Domain:

Activities such as Islamic-themed class meetings, Islamic arts, and socio-religious programs serve as practical platforms for instilling values of love and togetherness.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that implementing the Love-Based Curriculum within the Merdeka Curriculum does not alter the curriculum structure but strengthens its spiritual and emotional dimensions. This also addresses current challenges in character education, particularly the decline of moral sensitivity and empathy in the digital era.

3. Model for Revitalizing the Love-Based Curriculum within the *Merdeka Belajar* Framework

The final stage of this research produces a conceptual model of curriculum revitalization (Figure 1), synthesizing the values of *Merdeka Belajar* and the Love-Based Curriculum. This model emphasizes four main dimensions:

- a. **Love as the Philosophical Foundation** – Education is grounded in love for God, humanity, and knowledge.
- b. **Freedom as the Pedagogical Principle** – Students are given the freedom to express themselves, think critically, and choose their learning methods.
- c. **Integration of Spirituality and Humanity** – All learning activities aim to balance intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence.
- d. **Teacher Transformation as Educators of Love** – Teachers not only transfer knowledge but also nurture compassion, empathy, and exemplary moral character.

Figure 1. Synthesis Model of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

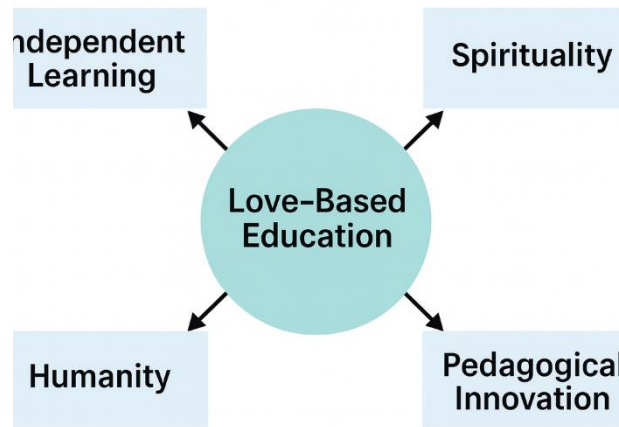


Figure 1. Synthesis Model of Love-Based Education and Merdeka Curriculum in an Ibtidaiyah

This model is expected to serve as a revitalization strategy for Islamic primary curriculum that is relevant to the dynamics of 21st-century education, in which cognitive and affective dimensions must progress in balance. This integration also strengthens the role of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah as an educational institution for character formation grounded in the Islamic values of *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*.

Discussion

The findings of this study support the main hypothesis that the integration between the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum can revitalize Islamic primary education in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) through learning that fosters both freedom and compassion (Rosida et al., 2024). Likewise, the secondary hypothesis that the Love-Based Curriculum can serve as the spiritual core of the Merdeka Curriculum is also supported by the results of the conceptual analysis. The synthesis of the two reveals a synergistic relationship between intellectual freedom and spiritual compassion as two essential dimensions in modern Islamic education.

These findings reinforce Ki Hadjar Dewantara (1935) view that education must “liberate the human being both outwardly and inwardly,” while extending this idea into an Islamic framework through the approach of love and compassion (*rahmah*). This aligns with Noddings (Noddings, 2013) assertion that education grounded in care fosters deeper character and empathy in learners. In the context of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, this approach provides a theoretical foundation that freedom in learning does not diminish spiritual values; rather, it harmonizes with the compassion embedded in Islamic teachings .

Compared with previous studies, these findings offer a new direction. For instance, Suyadi (Suyadi, 2021) and Zainuddin (2020) emphasize the importance of love-

based Islamic education as an effort to counter moral and spiritual crises in schools. However, the present study expands this idea by positioning love not only as a moral value but also as a pedagogical principle guiding instructional design, assessment, and teacher–student interactions. Thus, the concept of “learning with love” transcends the affective domain and extends into the methodological dimension of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

Theoretically, these results strengthen the humanistic-theological perspective in Islamic education, in which spiritual and rational dimensions are not dichotomized (Abdullah, 2018). The integrated model produced (Figure 1) illustrates that love-based education can serve as a new paradigm for designing 21st-century learning that remains grounded in Islamic values. This approach responds to criticism that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has sometimes overemphasized cognitive aspects while paying insufficient attention to moral and spiritual development. By adopting love as a foundational value, the Merdeka Curriculum becomes more aligned with the character of Islamic educational institutions.

Nevertheless, several practical challenges must be considered. First, the readiness of MI teachers to internalize love-based values in their pedagogical practices varies widely. Many teachers remain focused primarily on academic achievement and have not received specific training to implement a spiritual humanistic approach. Second, the lack of official technical guidelines regulating the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum makes implementation highly dependent on school initiatives. This condition provides opportunities for future research to develop implementable models and love-based assessment instruments that are measurable yet remain meaningful in the affective domain.

Practically, these findings imply the need for teacher training centered on heart-based education, the strengthening of school culture that fosters empathy and compassion, and innovation in learning materials that balance cognitive and spiritual dimensions. *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* holds significant potential to become a pioneer of character education that cultivates love not merely compliance. In a broader context, this synthesis also contributes conceptually to the development of a more holistic Islamic educational theory that is relevant to global challenges while remaining firmly rooted in divine values.

Conclusion

This study aims to revitalize Islamic primary education through the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI). Based on the findings of the literature review and descriptive qualitative analysis, it can be concluded that the synergy between the two curricula is not only feasible but also highly relevant in addressing the challenges of 21st-century education, which demands a balance between intellectual freedom and sincerity of heart.

First, from a philosophical perspective, the Merdeka Curriculum is grounded in the principle of humanizing education, positioning learners as active, creative subjects

with freedom of thought. In contrast, the Love-Based Curriculum is rooted in Islamic spirituality, emphasizing compassion, empathy, and heart-based education as the core of character formation. These two approaches converge on shared values of humanity and spiritual freedom that affirm human dignity.

Second, from an implementation standpoint, the findings indicate that integration can be achieved through three main domains: (1) the cognitive domain, by developing project-based learning infused with values of empathy and social care; (2) the affective domain, through teacher role modeling and the creation of a warm, caring learning environment; and (3) the psychomotor domain, through social and religious activities that cultivate love for others and the environment. Together, these domains strengthen the mission of Islamic education as a process of humanizing and loving life.

Third, theoretically, this study enriches the humanistic concept of Islamic education by presenting a new conceptual model the Synthesis Model of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (Figure 1). This model positions “Love-Based Education” at the center, supporting four main pillars: Merdeka Belajar, Spirituality, Humanity, and Pedagogical Innovation. It affirms that freedom in learning must always be guided by love as the moral and spiritual force that animates the educational process.

Fourth, in practical terms, the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum requires teachers to act as *murabbi*, true educators who not only transfer knowledge but also cultivate compassion in every learning interaction. Therefore, teacher training based on *education by heart* and the development of a school culture that emphasizes empathy are urgent needs for implementing this model effectively in MI.

Fifth, the findings have strategic implications for Islamic education policy in Indonesia. Integrating the value of love into the Merdeka Curriculum can serve as a national strategy to address moral crises, enhance students’ mental well-being, and strengthen national character grounded in *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*. Furthermore, this model may also serve as a reference in curriculum development for other Islamic educational institutions such as MTs and MA.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that true Islamic education is not merely about knowledge acquisition, but about how love becomes the fundamental energy that animates the learning process and shapes human beings who are faithful, knowledgeable, and virtuous. Therefore, the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* represents a concrete step toward revitalizing Islamic education that is humanistic, spiritual, and civilizationally grounded.

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