



A Conceptual Study on the Formation of Characters Respecting Differences through the Implementation of the Love Curriculum in Elementary Madrasahs

Ramdanil Mubarak^{1*}, Anggra Prima²



^{1,2} Tarbiyah Department, STAI Sangatta, East Kutai, Indonesia

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ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini mengkaji secara konseptual bagaimana pembentukan karakter menghargai perbedaan dapat dibangun melalui penerapan Kurikulum Cinta di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Di tengah tantangan keberagaman dan meningkatnya sikap intoleran di masyarakat, pendidikan dasar perlu menanamkan nilai-nilai kebersamaan dan kasih sayang sejak dini. Kurikulum Cinta yang dicanangkan oleh Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia mengandung nilai-nilai penting seperti cinta kepada Tuhan (hablum minallah), cinta kepada sesama manusia (hablum minannas), cinta lingkungan (hablum bil bi'ah), dan cinta tanah air (habbul wathan). Melalui metode penelitian kepustakaan (library research), tulisan ini mendeskripsikan potensi Kurikulum Cinta dalam membentuk karakter siswa yang toleran dan inklusif. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan Kurikulum Cinta di madrasah, khususnya melalui Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI), memiliki dasar teoretis dan spiritual yang kuat untuk menumbuhkan karakter menghargai perbedaan. Agar efektif, kurikulum ini perlu diimplementasikan melalui pembelajaran yang kontekstual, dialogis, dan terintegrasi dalam budaya sekolah..

ABSTRACT

This paper conceptually examines how character formation that respects differences can be built through implementing the Love Curriculum in Islamic Elementary Schools. Amidst the challenges of diversity and increasing intolerance in society, basic education must instill the values of togetherness and compassion from an early age. The Love

Curriculum, launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, contains important values such as love for God (hablum minallah), love for fellow human beings (hablum minannas), love for the environment (hablum bil bi'ah), and love for the homeland (habbul wathan). Through library research methods, this paper describes the potential of the Love Curriculum in shaping tolerant and inclusive student character. The study results indicate that implementing the Love Curriculum in Islamic elementary schools, particularly through Islamic Religious Education (PAI), has a strong theoretical and spiritual basis for fostering a character that respects differences. This curriculum needs to be implemented through contextual, dialogical learning and integrated into the school culture to be effective.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic nation known for its diversity of ethnicities, religions, races, and cultures. This diversity is a national treasure and a challenge in maintaining social harmony (Ufie et al., 2021; Shuhufi & Purkon, 2023). In a pluralistic society, education plays a strategic role in shaping a generation that is academically intelligent, socially sensitive, and tolerant (Suryani & Muslim, 2024; Firdaus & Suwendi, 2025). Basic education, including Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), serves as an important foundation in character building, particularly in instilling values of respect for differences from an early age.

Cultural Islamic education focuses on applying Islamic values in the context of cultural diversity, emphasizing tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding of differences. This positively impacts student character development, particularly in developing tolerance, empathy, and openness to cultural diversity (Barsihanor et al., 2024). Applying tolerance to increase students' multicultural awareness through Islamic education learning has been successful. Students recognize differences and believe that differences are part of multiculturalism and must be responded to with a tolerant attitude (Wajdi & Tobroni, 2020). Inclusive Islamic religious education has been implemented systematically and integratively

through institutional policies, planning, inclusive multicultural learning models, and comprehensive evaluation (Hakim & Muhid, 2025).

Unfortunately, various phenomena of intolerance still occur, even involving school-age students. A report by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) shows that cases of intolerance and bullying based on differences in background are still high at the elementary education level. This shows that existing learning has not fully succeeded in forming students' characters who are open and respectful of diversity. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia developed the Love Curriculum in response to this phenomenon. This educational approach emphasizes four main values: love for God (*hablum minallah*), love for fellow human beings (*hablum minannas*), love for the environment (*hablum bil bi'ah*), and love for the homeland (*hubbul wathan*). This approach is oriented towards the cognitive aspects of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and emphasizes students' spiritual and social character formation. Specifically, the value of *Hablum Minannas*, the Love Curriculum, offers a strong conceptual foundation for building students' character to appreciate differences and live peacefully together in a pluralistic society.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of religious moderation education in developing a tolerant character. For example, research by (Hasan et al., 2022; Hidayah et al., 2023) confirmed that the application of moderate Islamic values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tawazun* (balance) is highly relevant in multicultural education. Furthermore, research by (Shofiyuddin et al., 2024; Bisri et al., 2023) found that understanding religious moderation significantly increases students' tolerance, although family and social factors also influence this. However, few studies examine the Love Curriculum's potential in developing a character that respects differences at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, particularly through a conceptual approach based on Islamic Religious Education. Most studies focus more on implementation aspects in secondary schools or general education contexts, rather than madrasas and Islamic-based education at the elementary level.

Although various studies have discussed the importance of character education and tolerance values in Islamic education, there is still a lack of conceptual linkage between the Love Curriculum and the development of respect for diversity in elementary schools. Most existing research focuses on practical or implementative aspects at the secondary level, while conceptual development at the elementary level has not been explored in depth. Furthermore, there is little exploration of how the Love Curriculum values, particularly *hablum minannas* (love for others), can be systematically and contextually internalized in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the elementary level. However, the early childhood education process is crucial for long-term character development.

This research offers novel theoretical and practical contributions through a conceptual study that integrates the values of the Love Curriculum with Islamic character education at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level. Furthermore, it offers Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategies to strengthen tolerance and respect for differences. It provides a basis for teachers and policymakers in designing a curriculum based on compassion and diversity in Islamic schools.

2. METHOD

This study employed a library research approach (Mann, 2015). Data were collected by reviewing relevant literature, including books on Islamic education theory, scientific journals, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' policies regarding the Love Curriculum, and academic works discussing character education, tolerance, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the elementary level. The analysis used a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the

relationship between the Love Curriculum concept and developing a character that values respect for diversity in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary school) environment.

Data Collection

This study employed a library research approach with a descriptive-analytical method, operationalized through three main stages: data collection, classification, and analysis (Boote & Beile, 2005). Data were obtained from various literature sources, including Islamic education theory books, national and international scientific journals, Ministry of Religious Affairs policies related to the Love Curriculum, and academic works discussing character education, tolerance, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the elementary level. The literature was collected through databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, SpringerLink, Portal Garuda, and SINTA, with selection criteria based on relevance, credibility, and currency (over the past 10 years). After collection, the literature was classified thematically to facilitate analysis, specifically on the Love Curriculum, Islamic character education, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning strategies. Data analysis was conducted descriptively to outline the main content and ideas from each source, followed by an analytical study to compare concepts, examine the interrelationships between ideas, and develop a conceptual synthesis on implementing the Love Curriculum in character development that respects diversity in Islamic elementary schools. This approach enables researchers to build a complete and applicable theoretical understanding of the study's objectives.

Data Selection and Classification

Data collection in this study was conducted through a search of literature relevant to the study's focus, namely implementing the Love Curriculum in character formation that respects diversity in Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah). Data sources included Islamic education theory books discussing character values, tolerance, and values-based learning approaches; national and international scientific journals addressing the Love Curriculum, character education, religious tolerance, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the elementary level; and official policies from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, such as the Love Curriculum implementation guide and madrasah education documents. Relevant scientific articles, theses, and dissertations were also used as supporting materials to enrich the analysis. The literature search was conducted through various academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and SpringerLink for English-language/international sources and the Garuda Portal and SINTA for national literature and policy sources. Literature selection criteria were based on relevance to the research topic, the credibility of the authors and publishers, and the recency of the sources, with priority given to publications within the last ten years (2014–2024). Ensuring that the literature used is appropriate to the current educational context and ongoing curriculum developments (Machi & McEvoy, 2009) is important.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach, which involved two operational steps. In the descriptive stage, the researcher summarized the literature and systematically explained the main ideas from each source. Next, in the analytical stage, the researcher examined the interrelationships between concepts, compared the perspectives of various authors, and drew conceptual conclusions regarding applying the Love Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning to shape student character that values diversity. This analysis process was structured thematically to facilitate the development of a conceptual synthesis that illustrates the relationship between the theory and practice of Islamic character education in madrasahs. With this approach, the research is expected to produce a

comprehensive, applicable, and relevant understanding in addressing the challenges of Islamic education in an increasingly diverse society.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. The Value of Respecting Differences from the Perspective of Islamic Education

In Islam, differences are not a threat, but rather part of the *sunnatullah* (the law of God). This is emphasized in *Surah Al-Hujurat*, verse 13 of the Quran, which states that humans were created into tribes and nations so that they might know one another (*lita'arafu*), not hate one another. Values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'aruf* (getting to know one another), and *ta'awun* (helping one another) are the main foundations of Islamic education, fostering an open character and respect for differences. Research findings by (Aderibigbe et al., 2023) reinforce this. In their study in the United Arab Emirates, they demonstrated that Islamic principles, when taught through an authentic and reflective approach, can foster tolerant, empathetic, and collaborative attitudes in students. Islamic education serves not only as a transfer of knowledge but also as a means of socializing humanitarian values that uphold diversity.

Another study by (Susanto et al., 2023) revealed that Islamic educational institutions have long practiced multicultural values such as equal service to students regardless of social, cultural, and economic background. The value of *hablum minannas* is developed through the example of the Prophet Muhammad, habituation methods, and integrative and holistic learning that reflects the inclusivity of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, (Nur & Usman, 2025) emphasized that Islamic education strategically creates social harmony through strengthening multicultural curricula, teacher competencies, and cross-cultural dialogue. They concluded that when Islamic education is implemented in an open, dialogical manner and respects plurality, it can shape students who are personally religious and socially humanistic.

These results demonstrate that respecting differences is not a foreign concept in Islamic education but rather an integral part of its mission. However, implementing these values must be systematic, from curriculum development and learning methods to daily practices within the school environment. Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly in madrasas, is key in instilling these teachings into students' lived character.

Respecting differences is an integral part of Islamic teachings, derived from Qur'anic principles and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. Islam teaches that diversity is a natural law (*sunnatullah*) that must be addressed with mutual understanding, respect, and assistance. Recent research confirms that Islamic education implemented in a reflective, multicultural, and dialogical manner has proven effective in fostering students' tolerant, empathetic, and humanistic attitudes. Therefore, these values need to be systematically implemented through the curriculum, learning strategies, and school culture that instill tolerance as part of students' core character, particularly in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Madrasahs.

b. Implementation of the Love Curriculum in Character Building that Respects Differences

The literature review results indicate that the Love Curriculum's values, particularly *hablum minannas* (love for others), play a strategic role in shaping students' character and respect for differences from an early age. This value aligns with the goals of Islamic education, which emphasize compassion, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society. Research (Susari et al., 2024) confirms that an Islamic Religious Education curriculum designed with a tolerance approach, especially at the elementary school level, can foster an attitude of mutual respect between religions. They found that the implementation of tolerance values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is carried out through: (1) integration of values

into the syllabus, (2) exemplary teacher role models as tolerant figures, and (3) student involvement in interfaith and intercultural activities, such as social activities and inclusive celebrations of religious holidays.

Findings reinforce this (Muharridha et al., 2025), which show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curricula that support universal values such as empathy, respect for differences, and cooperation are highly effective in enhancing students' understanding of diversity. They emphasize that using a dialogic approach and direct experience (experiential learning) is key to successfully instilling values of tolerance in multicultural schools. On the other hand, (Alhashmi et al., 2020) through a study of the Islamic education curriculum in the United Arab Emirates, emphasize the importance of explicitly redesigning teaching materials to incorporate values of tolerance. They also highlight the need for ongoing teacher training to convey inclusive classroom messages effectively.

In the Indonesian context, (Mawadda et al., 2023) studied Islamic Religious Education textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education and Culture for junior high school level. The results showed that these textbooks explicitly included tolerance learning materials. However, differences in the portion and depth of presentation were still found across levels and curricula. This is crucial in Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) so that the Love Curriculum approach can be implemented systematically and sustainably

Theoretically, the formation of a tolerant character in Islam is rooted in the principles of ta'aruf (getting to know one another), tasāmuh (tolerance), and rahmah (compassion) as enshrined in the Qur'an (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13). This principle aligns with the values of the Love Curriculum, which are not only religious-spiritual but also social-humanistic. The integrated implementation of the Love Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) allows students to interpret religious teachings contextually, not merely normatively.

Referring to the results of the study and findings above, it can be concluded that the Love Curriculum has strong potential in forming a character that respects differences in madrasa students, with the following notes: it must be supported by a responsive curriculum design, teachers who understand the dialogic and inclusive approach, and a school culture that is open to diversity.

c. The Role of Islamic Education as a Means of Implementing the Love Curriculum

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a strategic position in implementing the Love Curriculum because it directly touches the spiritual and social aspects of students. In Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah), values such as tolerance, compassion for others, and concern for the environment are highly relevant to be developed through PAI learning. This implementation can be done through narrative approaches (stories of the Prophet and his companions), reflective (discussions and case studies), and contextual (simple social projects that promote humanitarian values).

Research by (Susari et al., 2024) shows that in the elementary school context, Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in fostering interfaith tolerance. Through curriculum design that integrates values of tolerance, teachers can utilize Islamic Religious Education as a medium to instill mutual respect, empathy, and openness to differences. Teachers serve not only as transmitters of material but also as role models who reflect a tolerant lifestyle through daily behavior inside and outside the classroom. Another study by (Mawadda et al., 2023) also shows that Islamic Religious Education textbooks in the national curriculum have begun to include learning content on tolerance. However, implementation in the field is highly dependent on teacher creativity and the learning approach used. Teachers who focus solely on cognitive aspects tend to fail to internalize the values of the Love Curriculum, such as *hablum minannas* (love for others).

Findings from (Muharridha et al., 2025) emphasize the importance of experiential learning and dialogue in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) to foster tolerance in multicultural schools. They stated that interactive learning strategies, such as group discussions and social reflection, have proven effective in developing students' understanding of the importance of coexisting in diversity. On the other hand, the main challenges in implementing the Love Curriculum through PAI are limited teacher training and the curriculum's tendency to be ritualistic. Supadi noted that PAI still focuses too much on ritualistic and normative aspects, often neglecting social and humanitarian values. Therefore, there needs to be greater emphasis on strengthening teacher capacity through training that targets the development of values-based learning and interfaith dialogue (Supadi, 2024).

In general, the findings above support the potential of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a primary tool for implementing the Love Curriculum, particularly in shaping students' character and respect for differences. However, its success is largely determined by how teachers can adapt reflective, contextual, and integrative learning strategies. This aligns with the spirit of the Love Curriculum, which places values at the core of education, not merely religious knowledge.

d. Character Building Strategy of Respecting Differences in Elementary Madrasah

Implementing the Love Curriculum in Islamic Elementary Schools (MI) emphasizes character development that respects differences through the value of *hablum minannas*, namely love for fellow human beings. Implementation strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, oriented towards tolerance, compassion, and togetherness, are key. The literature review indicates that this character development can be achieved through the following strategies:

1) Positive Habits

Simple habits such as greeting friends from different backgrounds, sharing tasks fairly, or maintaining courtesy towards those of different religions are basic yet highly effective strategies. This strategy aligns with research findings (Sa'diyah, 2018), which emphasize the importance of habituation methods to instill Islamic character values from an early age, including empathy and tolerance, through school routines.

2) Inspirational Stories

Using stories of Islamic figures who exemplify compassion across groups, such as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Medina Charter or the story of Abu Bakr and Bilal, is a proven effective approach in fostering a tolerant character. This method falls into the storytelling category, which has been shown to stimulate students' affective dimensions and strengthen empathy for differences (Ghazali, 2014). In this context, character education is informative and transformative through moral imagination.

3) Simple Social Projects

Activities such as cross-grade group work, food sharing programs, or visits to other places of worship under teacher supervision are concrete examples of the experiential learning approach (Susari et al., 2024) showed that learning involving real interactions between religious or cultural groups can foster mutual respect in Islamic elementary schools. Teachers who actively participate in these projects also serve as concrete models of tolerance

4) Observation-Based Attitude Assessment

Assessment in the Love Curriculum focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on affective aspects. Teachers can use reflective journals, daily observation sheets, and individual discussions to assess the development of students' attitudes toward differences. This aligns with research (Arif et al., 2024), emphasizing the importance of a participatory character assessment

model based on teacher and student participation in building a positive and inclusive school culture.

The four strategies above complement each other and align with the student-centered and values-centered Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning approach. Implementing the Love Curriculum is not simply an addition of teaching materials, but rather a shift in the educational approach to become more empathetic, collaborative, and humanity-oriented. These values are crucial to instill in MI as a foundational step in forming children's moral identity. Integrating content reinforcement, teacher role models, and student engagement in real-life experiences is the primary foundation for instilling a sense of respect for diversity within the madrasah environment.

4. CONCLUSION

The Love Curriculum offers a new paradigm in character education based on Islamic values of peace, friendliness, and inclusiveness. In the context of Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah), implementing this curriculum is highly relevant for shaping students' character and respecting differences, both religiously, socially, and culturally. To achieve this goal, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning must be directed at the knowledge aspect and the concrete application and experience of these values in everyday life. Support from teachers, a curriculum, and a conducive school culture will be key to cultivating a tolerant and peace-loving young generation from an early age.

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