

Analysis of the Implementation of the 'Love-Based Curriculum' in Early Childhood Education: The Role of Teachers and Supporting Learning Materials

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ABSTRACT

Education is the primary means of instilling moral values, empathy, and compassion from an early age. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (MoRA) introduced the Love-Based Curriculum as an effort to develop an educational system that emphasizes the values of humanity, tolerance, and respect for diversity. This study aims to describe the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum concerning the role of teachers and supporting learning materials at RA An Najwa. This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. The research participants consisted of the school principal and teachers. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at RA An Najwa is still in its initial stage and has therefore not yet been implemented optimally. Teachers have made efforts to instill the values of compassion, empathy, and tolerance in learning activities;

however, their understanding of the curriculum remains limited due to the lack of socialization and technical guidance provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The learning media and instructional materials currently used are still conventional and have not fully supported the systematic implementation of the values of the Love-Based Curriculum. Therefore, continuous training, technical assistance, and the development of love-based learning media are needed to ensure that the curriculum can be implemented effectively in accordance with the objectives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. This study provides an initial overview of the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in an Early Childhood Education institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, an area that has rarely been reported in previous studies.

Introduction

Education is the most appropriate means of instilling values from an early age. Through education, the younger generation can be shaped into individuals who understand, accept, appreciate, and contribute to diversity. Early Childhood Education (ECE) provides stimulation, guidance, nurturing, and learning activities that foster children's abilities and skills. Early Childhood Education serves as an essential foundation for child development because this period is characterized by rapid growth in cognitive, language, social-emotional, moral, and physical-motor domains. Therefore, learning experiences provided from an early age will influence children's development at subsequent levels of

education (UNESCO, 2021; Black et al., 2017). Early Childhood Education (ECE) is education provided for children from birth to six years of age. According to Ebbeck (as cited in Bakari et al., 2022), "Early childhood education is a service provided to children from birth to eight years of age." The institution responsible for formulating, establishing, and implementing policies on religious education and religious educational institutions is the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (MoRA).

In addition to administering religious affairs and maintaining interfaith harmony, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (MoRA) is also responsible for developing religious education policies, including the development of the Love-Based Curriculum. The Ministry carries out the functions of formulating, establishing, and implementing policies on religious education and religious educational institutions. MoRA introduced the concept of a curriculum based on love, known as the Love-Based Curriculum. According to the Minister of Religious Affairs, Nasaruddin Umar (2024), this curriculum emerged from concerns over educational practices that, in some cases, have indirectly instilled hatred, intolerance, and religious exclusivism from an early age (Syaripudin et al., 2025).

The Love-Based Curriculum is an educational policy developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to strengthen character education through the cultivation of compassion, tolerance, humanity, and respect for diversity within the learning process (Syaripudin et al., 2025; Khairani et al., 2025). Curriculum implementation is determined not only by

curriculum documents but also by the quality of the learning process, teacher–student interactions, and teachers' ability to translate the curriculum into learning practices that are appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood learners (Edwards, 2021).

The implementation of a curriculum oriented toward the values of compassion focuses not only on academic achievement but also on the development of character, empathy, social awareness, and respect for diversity as part of a humanistic educational process (OECD, 2021). This curriculum places the value of love as the foundation for creating a humanistic learning environment while supporting the character development of learners. The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum is highly relevant to Early Childhood Education because learning at this level is oriented toward the holistic development of children through meaningful learning experiences and play-based activities. Learning through play provides children with opportunities to develop thinking skills, creativity, communication, collaboration, and emotional regulation through meaningful and enjoyable experiences (Yogman et al., 2018; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020). Therefore, appropriate learning media are needed to stimulate the development of religious and moral values, social-emotional skills, language, cognition, physical-motor abilities, and artistic development (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022; Syaripudin et al., 2025).

Early childhood children require a supportive learning environment and instructional materials that are appropriate to their developmental characteristics. Learning materials are designed to provide comprehensive

stimulation across all aspects of children's development, including religious and moral values, physical-motor development, cognitive development, language, social-emotional development, and the arts (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022; Yogman et al., 2018). According to Gerlach and Ely, media, in a broad sense, encompass materials, people, and events that create conditions enabling students to acquire knowledge, skills, or attitudes. The National Education Association defines instructional media as all forms of communication, whether printed or audiovisual, including the equipment used to deliver them (Ferdian Utama et al., 2023). The use of instructional media that is appropriate to the developmental characteristics of young children can increase children's engagement during the learning process, facilitate conceptual understanding, and create more meaningful learning experiences (Zosh et al., 2018).

Numerous studies have examined the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum within the context of education in Indonesia. Khairani et al. (2025) found that the Love-Based Curriculum has the potential to serve as a strategy for strengthening character education and religious moderation through the cultivation of compassion, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Furthermore, Syaripudin et al. (2025) explained that the Love-Based Curriculum represents the development of an educational policy by the Ministry of Religious Affairs that is oriented toward fostering spiritual and humanitarian character. Syah et al. (2025) also found that the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum is capable of creating a more humanistic learning environment while

strengthening the habituation of positive character among students. Nevertheless, most of these studies have focused on conceptual discussions or the general implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum, whereas research specifically examining the role of teachers and supporting instructional materials in implementing the Love-Based Curriculum within Early Childhood Education institutions remains very limited. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum through the role of teachers and the supporting learning materials used during the instructional process at RA An Najwa, thereby providing empirical evidence regarding the challenges, needs, and efforts to optimize the implementation of this curriculum. Teachers play roles as designers of learning experiences, facilitators, and role models in children's character development. Consequently, teacher competence is a determining factor in the successful implementation of a curriculum within educational institutions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Teachers are the primary actors in curriculum implementation because they function as planners, implementers, and evaluators of the learning process. Their ability to adapt curriculum policies into classroom practices greatly determines the success of curriculum implementation in early childhood education settings (Ghunu & Utari, 2025).

Based on the results of observations conducted at RA An Najwa, the school only began implementing the Love-Based Curriculum in the 2025–2026 academic year. The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs at RA An Najwa has not yet been optimal

because the school is still transitioning from the previous curriculum. In addition, teachers' understanding of the concept of the Love-Based Curriculum remains limited because only the school principal received socialization and mentoring from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Therefore, it is still too early to determine whether the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at RA An Najwa can be considered successful.

The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at RA An Najwa is still in its initial stage, as it has only been introduced in the current academic year. Its implementation can be observed through various aspects, including the integration of the values of love into learning activities, such as fostering the habit of greeting one another, resolving conflicts through dialogue, and encouraging mutual assistance. Teachers strive to adopt a child-centered approach by providing children with opportunities to express their emotions and encouraging them to understand and appreciate differences among their peers. In addition, supporting learning media such as picture cards, storybooks, and educational play materials are utilized to instill the values of love.

Teachers occupy a central position in the successful implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum because the values of compassion, empathy, tolerance, and humanism can be understood by young children through role modeling and direct interaction. This finding is consistent with Fauziah et al. (2025), who stated that early childhood character development becomes more effective when teachers consistently cultivate positive habits and provide exemplary behavior in every learning activity. This finding is also supported by Jennings

and Greenberg (2009), who explained that teachers' social and emotional competence influences the creation of a positive classroom climate, the quality of teacher–child interactions, and children's social-emotional development. Therefore, teachers who demonstrate empathy, care, and compassion are more effective in implementing learning that is oriented toward character development. The role of teachers is the primary factor in the successful implementation of the curriculum because they are responsible for translating curriculum policies into instructional practices that are appropriate to the developmental characteristics of young children (McLachlan et al., 2018). In line with the World Health Organization (WHO) theory cited in Syah et al. (2025), emotional support and a caring learning environment are essential for preventing psychological disorders in children. At RA An Najwa, teachers' roles in implementing this curriculum are reflected in several aspects, including serving as role models, facilitating learning experiences, guiding children's social-emotional development, providing a safe learning environment, developing love-based instructional media, and partnering with parents in instilling the values of love. The implementation of these roles at RA An Najwa has begun to emerge through exemplary behavior, humanistic learning practices, emotional support, and the provision of a warm and nurturing learning environment.

Based on previous studies, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum has the potential to establish a humanistic learning environment, foster empathy, and strengthen students' character. However, studies specifically examining the

implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Early Childhood Education institutions, particularly those focusing on the role of teachers and supporting instructional materials, remain very limited. Therefore, this study is important because it provides empirical evidence regarding the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at RA An Najwa, which can serve as an evaluation and as input for the development of policies and instructional practices based on the values of love in Early Childhood Education. Learning materials designed according to children's developmental stages enable teachers to provide appropriate stimulation, thereby supporting the optimal development of all aspects of children's growth and development (NAEYC, 2020).

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum based on natural settings through the perspectives of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study focused on the role of teachers and the supporting learning materials used by teachers during the initial stage of implementing the Love-Based Curriculum. A descriptive qualitative design was selected to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the conditions occurring in the field. This approach enabled the researchers to explore teachers' perspectives, classroom practices, and the challenges they encountered in implementing the Love-Based Curriculum without manipulating the natural learning environment.

RA An Najwa, an early childhood education institution, was selected as the research site. RA An Najwa began implementing the Love-Based Curriculum in the 2025–2026 academic year. The research participants consisted of the school principal and teachers, who were purposively selected by the researchers as data sources based on specific considerations and criteria. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Results and Discussion

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a vital role in the development of children's character. Based on the interview with the principal of RA An Najwa, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum is still in its initial stage. One of the challenges encountered is the uneven understanding among teachers regarding the curriculum concept due to the limited dissemination of information and socialization activities. An excerpt from the interview with the principal is presented below:

"We began implementing the Love-Based Curriculum in the 2025/2026 academic year following the socialization program conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, only the principal participated in the program. Therefore, it is still necessary to disseminate the information to all teachers so that they have a shared understanding of the Love-Based Curriculum and can implement it consistently throughout the learning process."

In addition to the role of teachers, the interview findings also revealed that the supporting instructional materials currently used remain general in nature and have not yet been fully adapted to the characteristics of the Love-Based Curriculum. *"The instructional media we currently use consist of illustrated storybooks, picture cards, and educational games already available at the school. To date, we do not yet have instructional media specifically designed based on the Love-Based Curriculum. Therefore, teachers still adapt the learning materials according to the needs of classroom instruction."*



Figure 1



Figure 2

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at RA An Najwa is still in the transition phase from the previous curriculum. Based on observations and interviews, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum remains at an early stage. The findings demonstrate that the successful implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum requires the active involvement of teachers as role models, facilitators, and mentors so that the values of compassion can be internalized throughout the learning process.

These findings are consistent with Muailah (2025), who stated that the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum is carried out through contextual planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning activities.

The findings also reveal that teachers' understanding of the Love-Based Curriculum still needs to be strengthened through continuous training and professional assistance. This is consistent with the findings of Afifah et al. (2026), who reported that teacher training programs contribute to improving teachers' pedagogical competence and the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum. Teachers have begun integrating the values of compassion, empathy, and tolerance into classroom activities. However, teachers' understanding of the Love-Based Curriculum remains uneven. Susilawati et al. (2020) argued that the implementation of character education in early childhood requires teachers to consistently integrate character values into both instructional activities and daily habituation. Roziman (2025) further stated that integrating the values of compassion into classroom instruction can enhance students' empathy and sense of social responsibility. These conditions indicate that curriculum implementation still requires greater reinforcement through socialization, mentoring, and support from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Furthermore, these findings can be interpreted in light of Fullan's theory of curriculum implementation (as cited in Umami et al., 2025), which emphasizes that successful implementation depends on three aspects: understanding, capacity, and system support. In the context of RA An Najwa, both teachers' understanding and institutional system support still need to be

strengthened.

According to Ebbeck (as cited in Bakari et al., 2022), "Early childhood education is a service provided to children from birth to eight years of age." The institution responsible for formulating, establishing, and implementing policies on religious education and religious educational institutions is the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (MoRA). Early childhood education institutions operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs are known as Raudatul Athfal (RA).

RA An Najwa is one of the institutions that began implementing the Love-Based Curriculum in the 2025–2026 academic year. This curriculum focuses on fostering children's character through the values of compassion, empathy, tolerance, and respect. According to Khairani et al. (2025), the Love-Based Curriculum was designed as a long-term strategy to develop learners who excel not only academically but also possess empathy, tolerance, and a strong sense of love for their nation. Based on interviews with the school principal and teachers, the curriculum was introduced through an internal dissemination program during the current academic year. Teachers have begun adjusting the organization of learning by developing topics and themes based on the principles of compassion; however, most instructional practices still refer to the previous curriculum. Therefore, based on the results of observations and interviews, the implementation remains in its initial stage and has not yet reached an optimal level because it was only introduced in the current

academic year.

Teachers play an essential role as facilitators, role models, and mentors in instilling the values of love in young children. According to Nia (as cited in Khairani et al., 2025), teachers serve as facilitators who stimulate dialogue and create opportunities for critical thinking. The teacher's role extends beyond delivering instructional content; teachers are also figures who establish positive emotional relationships with children through exemplary behavior, empathy, and humanistic communication (Muhibah et al., 2026). The interview findings revealed that teachers' understanding of the fundamental principles of the Love-Based Curriculum remains limited. Several teachers stated that they had not yet received training, workshops, or technical guidance from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Continuous professional development for teachers is one of the key factors in improving both curriculum implementation and teachers' pedagogical competence in early childhood education (UNESCO, 2025). Consequently, the implementation of the values of love in classroom activities remains insufficiently structured and has not yet been fully integrated into thematic learning activities.

Within this curriculum, the teacher's role is not merely to deliver instructional content but also to serve as a model of compassion and empathy for children by cultivating character education through habituation. According to Mandayu (as cited in Tamaeka, 2022), character education through habituation includes exemplary behavior, the cultivation of discipline, the

establishment of positive habits, and the creation of a conducive learning environment. Therefore, to ensure that the objectives of the Love-Based Curriculum can be achieved as expected, appropriate instructional media and learning materials are required to support the learning process.

The instructional materials and learning media used at RA An Najwa consist primarily of conventional media, such as worksheets, pictures, word cards, and objects available in the surrounding environment. At RA An Najwa, children are also taught to care for their environment by introducing them to plants through activities such as planting, harvesting, and utilizing the products of those plants. Although no instructional media have yet been specifically designed to support the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum, teachers have begun creating simple love-based learning media, such as a "Tree of Compassion" and "Love Cards" containing positive affirmations for children. Nevertheless, overall, the available instructional media and learning materials remain insufficient to fully support the principles of the Love-Based Curriculum.

Under the previous curriculum, teachers recited the Basmalah only at the beginning of prayers before and after learning activities. However, under the Love-Based Curriculum, every activity begins with the recitation of the Basmalah as a means of cultivating children's devotion to Allah. This practice is based on Surah Al-Muzzammil, verse 8, which states: "According to Suyuthi (as cited in Humaida et al., 2024) in Tafsir al-Jalalayn, the command to remember the name of Allah refers to reciting Bismillāh-Raḥmānir-Raḥīm

before beginning the recitation of the Qur'an. Within the Love-Based Curriculum, children are provided with a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Basmalah, emphasizing that they should always remember and mention Allah SWT in every activity. Allah SWT possesses the attributes Ar-Raḥmān (The Most Compassionate) and Ar-Raḥīm (The Most Merciful), which are closely aligned with the values promoted in the Love-Based Curriculum.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (MoRA) developed the Love-Based Curriculum to cultivate the values of compassion, empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity from an early age. The Love-Based Curriculum is expected to restore the fundamental characteristics of religious education by fostering peace, humanity, and mutual respect. The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum has begun in educational institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, although it has not yet been implemented uniformly across all institutions. One of the early childhood education institutions that has adopted the Love-Based Curriculum is RA An Najwa. The institution began implementing the curriculum in the 2025–2026 academic year. However, its implementation has not yet reached an optimal level because the institution is still undergoing a transition from the previous curriculum. In the future, it is expected that the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum will be fully realized in educational practice rather than remaining merely a conceptual framework. Through its implementation, the Love-Based Curriculum places greater

emphasis on the values of humanity, peace, and compassion as the foundation for fostering a harmonious society and nation.

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