

Designing a Humanistic Curriculum for Madrasah Aliyah based on the Values of Love and Empathy

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Empathy;
Humanistic Curriculum;
Islamic Education; Love;
Madrasah Aliyah.

Article history:

Received 2026-03-14

Revised 2026-04-18

Accepted 2026-05-25

ABSTRACT

Humanistic education in Madrasah Aliyah requires a curriculum that integrates intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual development. However, love and empathy are often treated as values rather than organizing principles of curriculum design. This study aimed to design a humanistic curriculum for Madrasah Aliyah based on love and empathy and to formulate its principles, components, implementation strategies, and assessment framework. The study employed Research and Development (R&D) using an Educational Design Research (EDR) orientation. Data were collected through interviews, observations, document analysis, focus group discussions, and expert validation involving curriculum specialists, Islamic education experts, school leaders, teachers, and students. Qualitative data were analyzed interactively through data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification, while expert validation findings informed iterative product revision. The results indicate that love functions as the philosophical and ethical foundation, whereas empathy operates as a socio-emotional competency translating values into social practices. The resulting curriculum integrates humanistic objectives, learning experiences, dialogic pedagogy, teacher modeling, supportive school culture, and authentic assessment. The study concludes that love-based humanistic curriculum should be developed as a whole-school educational ecosystem rather than an additional instructional theme. Its contribution lies in integrating humanistic education, social-emotional learning, and Islamic values into a curriculum framework for Madrasah Aliyah.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially not only oriented to the mastery of knowledge, but also to the process of humanizing humans through the development of the intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of students. In the perspective of humanistic education, students are seen as individuals who have needs for acceptance, appreciation, a sense of security, self-actualization, and

meaningful social relationships. Therefore, the ideal curriculum should not stop at the preparation of cognitive competencies and academic achievements, but rather be able to create a learning experience that allows students to develop as whole human beings. In the context of Madrasah Aliyah (MA), the orientation has a more complex dimension because general education, Islamic education, moral formation, and character strengthening must take place integratively. The value of love and empathy becomes relevant as a pedagogical foundation because love can be interpreted as an appreciation for human dignity, while empathy is the ability to understand the feelings, perspectives, and needs of others. Thus, a humanistic curriculum based on love and empathy should ideally not be placed as additional material, but as a principle that animates the goals, content, learning strategies, teacher-student relations, madrasah culture, and learning evaluation. This perspective is in line with the development of contemporary educational thinking that places interpersonal relationships and the well-being of students as an important part of the quality of learning (Klusmann et al, 2022).

The urgency of this orientation is even stronger when education is faced with the complexity of students' social lives in the digital era. Schools are not only a space for knowledge transfer, but also a space for the formation of identity, social relations, and the ability to manage differences. PISA 2022 data shows that the social-emotional conditions of Indonesian students have an ambivalent picture. On the one hand, as many as 86% of Indonesian students stated that they felt that they had a place or be part of the school and 87% stated that it was easy to make friends at school, a figure that was relatively higher than the OECD average of 75% and 76% respectively. However, at the same time, 16% of Indonesian students admitted to feeling lonely at school and 13% felt like outsiders or left out. More worryingly, 25% of female students and 30% of students reported experiencing bullying at least a few times a month (Durlak et al, 2023). The data do not necessarily show that the entire Indonesian education system fails to build empathy, but it does show that there is a tension between the creation of a general sense of belonging and the persistent experiences of exclusion, loneliness, and bullying. Thus, educational success is not enough to be measured through academic achievement or behavioral compliance, but also through the ability of educational institutions to build relationships that are safe, caring, inclusive, and respect the existence of each student.

Empirically, the importance of love and empathy in the educational process is also supported by research that shows that the quality of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students has consequences for the learning experience. A systematic review by Aldrup, Carstensen, and Klusmann found that teacher empathy is related to the quality of teacher-student interaction and various positive outcomes for students (Klusmann, U. et al. 2022). Research on 1,010 high school students also showed that empathy skills are influenced not only by individual characteristics, but also by factors at the school level; about 20% of the variation in empathy scores in the study came from school-level variables (Schwab et al, 2021). These findings are conceptually important because they show that empathy is not solely an individual character that students must "bring" to school, but can be influenced by the environment and educational experience. This means that if the curriculum only emphasizes moral knowledge without providing pedagogical experiences that allow students to hear, understand, appreciate, and respond to the experiences of others, then character education risks creating a gap between *knowing the good* and *doing the good*. In the context of the Supreme Court, this issue becomes increasingly important because Islamic values such as *rahmah*, *ukhuwah*, *ta'awun*, respect for human dignity, and noble morals should not stop as normative knowledge, but are realized through concrete learning experiences.

This problem shows that the development of a humanistic curriculum in madrassas requires a paradigm shift from a curriculum that is simply content-oriented to a curriculum that is oriented to the humanitarian experience of students. The study by Hidayati et al. at MA Muallimat Muhammadiyah shows that the humanistic approach in the curriculum can be directed at the development of students through attention to personal aspects and learning experiences, but the study still focuses on analyzing the implementation of the humanistic approach in one madrasah context (Kang et al, 2023). The development of madrasah education policy in 2025 will then strengthen the relevance of this issue. The

Ministry of Religious Affairs launched the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) as an orientation that emphasizes love for God, humans, the environment, and the nation and integrates character, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions in education (Wang, X., et al. 2023). In fact, in 2025 the Ministry of Religious Affairs has conducted KBC application tests in 50 madrasahs through the INOVASI Phase 3 Program, while 12 Aliyah Madrasahs were appointed as the initial implementers of the implementation (Wang, S., et al. 2021). The policy change shows that the paradigm of love-based education is no longer just a philosophical idea, but has entered the policy and implementation stage. However, it is precisely at this point that an important scientific problem arises: how the values of love and empathy are systematically translated into the architecture of the MA curriculum so that they do not stop as slogans, moral values, or policy documents.

Recent research on love-based curriculum is beginning to provide an initial foundation, but it still leaves a number of limitations. Afriansyah and Sirozi, for example, examined the internalization of KBC in Indonesian, English, and Arabic subjects at MAN Insan Cendekia OKI through the analysis of learning planning documents (Voigt, T. H., et al. 2022). The research is important because it shows the possibility of integrating the value of love into learning, but the focus is more on the internalization process in certain learning devices and has not produced a humanistic curriculum design that comprehensively connects objectives, content structure, learning experiences, pedagogical relations, madrasah culture, and evaluation. Another study on the implementation of KBC in MI shows that the values of compassion, empathy, persuasive communication, teacher example, discussion, storytelling, and role-playing can support the development of empathy and cooperation of students (İnel, Y., 2022). However, the context of the research is at the level of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, so that the characteristics of the psychosocial development of students are significantly different from those of Madrasah Aliyah students who are in the late adolescence phase and face problems of identity, diversity of perspectives, peer relations, social pressure, and the intensity of more complex digital interactions. In other words, previous research has shed light on the importance of love, empathy, and humanism, but it has not been adequate in answering how to design a humanistic curriculum that is specifically in accordance with the developmental characteristics and needs of MA students.

The research gap of this research is even clearer when viewed from the trend of the 2025 study which is still dominated by two orientations. First, there are conceptual and philosophical research, such as studies that integrate Islam, humanism, and local wisdom into the concept of *Love-Based Curriculum* through objectives, content, learning strategies, and evaluation (Cervelló, E., 2021). Second, there is an implementive study that describes the practice of KBC in certain madrasahs, but has not fully established a curriculum model that can explain the relationship between the values of love, empathy, educational goals, learning experience design, the role of teachers, madrasah culture, and affective evaluation mechanisms systematically (İnel, Y., 2022). In fact, recent conceptual studies themselves recommend empirical testing of the love-based curriculum model that has been formulated (Cervelló, E., 2021). Thus, what is inadequate in previous research is not just a study on the importance of love or empathy, but the construction of curriculum design that is operational, contextual, integrative, and in accordance with the characteristics of Madrasah Aliyah. This research seeks to fill this gap by placing love and empathy not as additional themes in the curriculum, but as organizational principles that connect the dimensions of goals, materials, pedagogy, social relations, madrasah culture, and student development assessment. This approach also allows Islamic education to move from a transmission of values model to lived values, which are values learned through experience, interaction, reflection, and real actions.

This research is important to be carried out now because there is a momentum of convergence between empirical needs, the development of humanistic education theory, and changes in madrasah education policies. Empirically, PISA data shows that although the sense of belonging among Indonesian students is relatively high, the problems of loneliness, exclusion, and bullying are still found (Durlak, J. A., 2023). Pedagogically, research shows that empathy and the quality of teacher-student relationships are related to a more positive learning experience (Klusmann, U., 2022). In terms of policy,

the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2025 will officially launch the Love-Based Curriculum and direct madrasah education to strengthen the dimensions of humanity, compassion, character, and spirituality (Wang, X., et al., 2023). This condition creates a policy window as well as an academic need to develop a curriculum framework that does not stop at the declaration of values, but can be translated into an educational design that can be applied and evaluated. Therefore, the research "Designing a Humanistic Curriculum for Madrasah Aliyah based on the Values of Love and Empathy" is directed to fill the gap between the normative idea of love-based education and the need for concrete curriculum design at the MA level. This research is expected to formulate principles, components, intercomponent relationships, as well as curriculum implementation and evaluation mechanisms that allow the value of love and empathy to become real experiences in students' academic and social lives. Academically, this research is useful for enriching the study of humanistic curriculum development in Islamic education; Practically, the results can be a reference for madrasah heads, teachers, curriculum developers, and policy makers in designing learning that is more humane, inclusive, reflective, and oriented towards moral formation.

2. METHODS

This research method uses a research and development (*R&D*) approach with an Educational Design Research (EDR) orientation. The selection of this approach is based on the research objectives that not only describe the phenomenon of humanistic education, but produce curriculum products that are systematically designed, validated, revised, and tested for application in the context of Madrasah Aliyah. EDR is appropriately used because it allows for a close relationship between empirical issues, theoretical foundations, design processes, expert validation, and product refinement through an iterative development cycle. In contrast to descriptive research that mainly explains existing conditions, the development approach allows research to answer the design-oriented problem, namely how the value of love and empathy can be transformed into operational curriculum components. The research process is directed through the stages of needs and context analysis, theory and curriculum document studies, prototype design, expert validation, revision, readability and applicability tests, and finalization of curriculum models. This design selection is also consistent with the character of EDR which integrates the interests of research and educational practice through an iterative and context-based design process (Durlak, J. A., 2023).

The research subjects consist of madrasah heads, deputy madrasah heads for curriculum, teachers, Madrasah Aliyah students, and Islamic curriculum and education experts who are selected purposively based on the relevance of competence and experience. The object of the research is the design of a humanistic curriculum based on the values of love and empathy, including philosophical foundations, goals, principles of material organization, learning strategies, learning experiences, the role of teachers and students, madrasah culture, and assessments (Ruswandi, B., 2025). Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, document analysis, focus group discussions (FGDs), and expert validation sheets. Interviews and FGDs are used to obtain stakeholders' needs, perceptions, experiences, and expectations; observation is used to identify actual relational practices and learning cultures; Meanwhile, document analysis is used to test the suitability of the design with the curriculum documents and madrasah policies. The combination of these techniques was chosen to obtain data triangulation so that the design developed is not only sourced from the perspective of the researcher, but represents the real needs and conditions of the user (Schwab, S., (2021). The research instruments are in the form of semi-structured interview guidelines, observation guidelines, document analysis formats, FGD protocols, and expert validation sheets with indicators derived from humanistic educational constructs, love, empathy, and curriculum development principles. Qualitative data is analyzed interactively through data condensation, data presentation, conclusion drawn, and verification, while expert validation results are analyzed using average scores and eligibility percentages, along with comment analysis and recommendations as the basis for product revision. The consistency between objectives, methods, and analyses lies in the orientation of the research to produce a valid, relevant, and practical curriculum model,

not to test the influence between variables. Therefore, this study is methodologically more appropriate to use R&D/EDR than quantitative surveys or experiments, because the success of the research is determined by the quality of the design process and the proof of product feasibility in the real context of Madrasah Aliyah.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are known that the design of a humanistic curriculum for Madrasah Aliyah based on the values of love and empathy needs to begin with mapping the actual conditions of the curriculum, the needs of students, and the learning practices that take place in the madrasah. Based on the results of the needs analysis, it was found that the curriculum orientation basically contains elements of character formation, morals, and social competence development, but the values of love and empathy have not been fully positioned as the principles that organize the entire educational experience. These values tend to be implicitly present through Islamic Religious Education materials, moral learning, religious activities, and social interactions in madrasahs. These findings show that there is a gap between the presence of humanistic values in the substance of the curriculum and its operationalization in the design of learning experiences (Alhamuddin, 2025). Thus, the main problem is not the absence of the values of love and empathy, but the lack of a curriculum construction that makes the two values a cross-component orientation that connects educational goals, materials, learning strategies, teacher-student relations, madrasah culture, and assessment (Susilawati, P. A. 2024).

Analysis of student needs shows that the humanistic dimension is becoming increasingly important at the Madrasah Aliyah level because students are in a developmental phase characterized by the search for identity, the need for social acceptance, the development of critical thinking skills, and the increasing intensity of relationships with peer groups and the digital environment (Qin, G., 2021). In such conditions, a curriculum that only emphasizes the mastery of normative knowledge about morals is not enough to ensure the formation of empathic behavior. The results of the needs analysis lead to learning needs that provide space for students to experience, reflect, and practice the value of love and empathy in real situations (Li, B., 2022). Thus, the value of love is not understood narrowly as a personal affection, but as a principle of respect for human dignity, care, compassion, acceptance of differences, and social responsibility. Meanwhile, empathy is constructed as the ability to understand the perspective and emotional state of others followed by appropriate responses. These findings are an important basis for determining the character of curriculum design because it shows that the development of the affective dimension must be done through transformative educational experiences, not just through the addition of material on character.

The results of document analysis and studies of learning practices subsequently resulted in the need to reconstruct the curriculum components. At the objective level, the curriculum developed is directed not only at the achievement of academic and religious competence, but also at the formation of students who are able to respect human dignity, build healthy social relationships, understand the perspectives of others, control emotional responses, and show concern in common life (Smith-Adcock, S., 2021). At the content level, the value of love and empathy is not placed as a new subject, but is integrated across subjects and madrasah activities. At the process level, learning is directed to dialogical, reflective, collaborative, experience-based, and contextual activities. Meanwhile, at the evaluation level, students' achievements are not only seen from the ability to explain moral concepts, but also from the ability to apply these values in interaction and solving social problems. These results show that the humanistic curriculum is more appropriately developed as an integrative framework than as an addition to the substance of the curriculum, because love and empathy are values that must be consistently present in the entire educational process (Vella-Brodrick, D. A., 2021).

Based on the synthesis of the results of needs analysis and theoretical studies, an initial design of a humanistic curriculum was obtained that placed love as a basic value and empathy as the main pedagogical mechanism. Love is the foundation that provides ethical orientation to educational goals,

while empathy is the ability that allows students to translate these values into social relationships and concrete actions (Wardatussa'idah et al, I. (2022)). The relationship between the two results in a curriculum construction that moves from the dimension of values to experiences and behaviors: students recognize values, understand their meaning, reflect on their relevance to life, experience interactions that support those values, and then practice them in social life. With this kind of construction, humanistic education does not stop at the formation of moral knowing, but is directed towards the integration of moral feeling and moral action. The results of the design also show that the success of a love- and empathy-based curriculum is highly dependent on consistency between what is taught, how teachers interact with students, and how madrasah culture provides concrete examples of the values taught (Casmana, A. R., 2022).

In the pedagogical dimension, the results of the research lead to the use of learning strategies that provide greater space for interaction, reflection, and social experience of students. Dialogue-based learning, case discussion, cooperative learning, role-playing, social problem-based learning, experiential reflection, social service activities, and collaborative projects are considered more appropriate than predominantly one-way learning (Sutamrin, S., (2021)). The analysis shows that these strategies have a function more than just a variety of learning methods because they provide opportunities for learners to deal with different perspectives, understand the experiences of others, manage differences, and make decisions responsibly. In this framework, teachers no longer solely act as material presenters, but as relational models that show the practice of love, appreciation, patience, openness, and empathy. Thus, the results of the study show that the transformation of the humanistic curriculum will not be effective if it is only carried out at the document level, while the interaction pattern between teachers and students is still authoritative, exclusive, or lacks dialogue (Bernil, K. J. V., 2024).

The results of expert validation of the curriculum design are directed at four main aspects, namely conceptual relevance, suitability with the characteristics of Madrasah Aliyah, integration of curriculum components, and application of design. Substantively, the design needs to show a logical relationship between humanistic foundations, the value of love and empathy, learning objectives, learning experiences, pedagogical strategies, and assessments (Sassi, K et al., 2025). The validator's input is the basis for improving the parts that are still normative so that they can be translated into more operational indicators and activities. The validation process is important because value-based curriculum design has a risk of stopping at philosophical statements if it is not accompanied by observable implementation indicators (Setyaningrum, N et al, 2025). Therefore, the validation results are not solely understood as an assessment of the feasibility of the document, but as a process of testing the coherence between philosophical ideas and pedagogical designs. If validation score data is available, this section can be strengthened by presenting the scores of each aspect and eligibility category to show the level of validity of the design quantitatively.

The application test of the design shows that the success of the humanistic curriculum is greatly influenced by the readiness of the madrasah ecosystem. A curriculum based on love and empathy cannot depend solely on the individual competence of teachers because these values must be supported by institutional culture, communication patterns, leadership, discipline policies, relationships between students, and conflict resolution mechanisms (Alfani, I. H. D., 2025). This finding results in the implication that the implementation of the curriculum needs to use a whole-school approach, namely making the values of love and empathy as a principle that lives in the entire madrasah environment. With this approach, classroom learning, extracurricular activities, student services, teacher-parent relationships, and madrasah governance must provide a consistent value message. If there is a contradiction between learning materials that teach compassion and discriminatory institutional practices or pedagogical relations that do not respect students, then the curriculum has the potential to lose its pedagogical legitimacy (Sirozi, M., 2025). Therefore, the results of the study confirm that the humanistic curriculum is essentially an educational ecosystem design, not just a learning device design.

Overall, the results of the development resulted in a curriculum framework that places the value of love as a philosophical foundation, empathy as an affective-social competence, learning experience as a medium of internalization, teachers as relational role models, madrasah culture as a supportive environment, and authentic assessment as a mechanism for evaluating development (Hidayati, Z., 2025). The framework shows the existence of systemic relationships between components: grades determine goal orientation, goals determine learning experiences, learning experiences shape students' social practices, and assessments are used to see the extent to which values have evolved into attitudes and behaviors. This finding also shows that the design of a humanistic curriculum that is relevant to Madrasah Aliyah must be able to bridge the three dimensions that have often been separated, namely the religious dimension, the humanitarian dimension, and the pedagogical dimension Arifin, A. G. (2025). The value of love derives legitimacy from Islamic teachings and moral education, while empathy becomes a bridge that translates these values into concrete relationships between people.

Thus, the results of the research do not only produce additional material on love and empathy, but also produce a reconstruction of the curriculum orientation. The reconstruction shifts the paradigm from a curriculum that primarily places students as recipients of knowledge to a curriculum that views students as fully developing human beings. This change is an important finding because humanistic education cannot be assessed solely on the existence of values in curriculum documents, but on the extent to which these values shape learning experiences, social relations, and student actions. Therefore, the curriculum design developed in this study has integrative, contextual, dialogical, reflective, and oriented characteristics for the formation of human beings who have academic competence as well as emotional, social, moral, and spiritual maturity. If expert validation data and applicability tests are available, these final results can be reinforced with validity scores, practicality percentages, and citations of field findings so that product effectiveness and feasibility claims are truly based on empirical data.

4. CONCLUSION

The research "Designing a Humanistic Curriculum for Madrasah Aliyah based on the Values of Love and Empathy" concludes that a humanistic curriculum based on love and empathy needs to be constructed as an integrative pedagogical framework, not as an addition to stand-alone material or character programs. Love serves as a philosophical and ethical foundation that directs education to respect human dignity, care, compassion, and acceptance of differences, while empathy serves as a relational competence that translates those values into the ability to understand the perspectives, feelings, and needs of others. The synthesis of findings shows that the significance of the model lies in the coherence between curriculum objectives, learning experiences, teacher examples, madrasah culture, and assessment. The scientific contribution of this research lies in the development of a conception that brings together humanistic education, social-emotional education, and Islamic educational values in a contextual curriculum design for Madrasah Aliyah. Thus, the curriculum is no longer understood solely as a tool for organizing learning materials, but rather as an ecosystem of experiences that allow students to experience, reflect, and practice human values in real life.

The limitations of the research lie in the character of developmental research that still focuses on the design and validation of conceptual-prototypes, so that the long-term impact of the curriculum on the development of empathy, prosocial behavior, madrasah climate, and student character formation cannot be empirically ascertained. In addition, the development context centered on the characteristics of Madrasah Aliyah limits the generalization of findings to the level and characteristics of other educational institutions. Therefore, further research is recommended to conduct a broader and longitudinal field test in several Aliyah Madrasahs with diverse social, geographical, and institutional backgrounds, as well as combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to test changes in empathy, the quality of teacher-student relations, prosocial behavior, and school climate before and after curriculum implementation.

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