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Love-Based Islamic Education: Assessing Teacher Readiness for Classroom Happiness and the Mitigation of Symbolic Violence in Madrasas

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (KBC) marks a significant shift in Indonesian Islamic education, aiming to replace rigid pedagogical approaches with a framework centered on Mahabbah (love). Despite its theological appeal, the transition often faces hurdles regarding how educators internalize these values in daily interactions. The purpose of this study is to analyze teacher readiness in manifesting love-based education to create classroom happiness while mitigating subtle forms of symbolic violence in madrasas. This research utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, beginning with a quantitative survey of 100 Islamic Education teachers, followed by a qualitative phenomenological exploration involving in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The results reveal a notable Knowledge-Practice Gap, where teachers demonstrate high cognitive understanding (M=4.12) but remain at a moderate level of affective readiness (M=3.25). Furthermore, qualitative findings indicate that symbolic violence persists through subtle labeling and hidden administrative pressures, which hinder the full manifestation of classroom happiness. This study concludes that teacher readiness is the primary determinant of successful KBC implementation. Effective reduction of symbolic violence requires a shift from technical curriculum compliance to a deeper emotional and spiritual transformation of the educator.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Islamic education in Indonesia is currently undergoing a significant paradigm shift with the introduction of the Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (KBC) or Love-Based Curriculum. This initiative emerges as a response to the growing need for a more humanistic, inclusive, and character-oriented educational framework within madrasas (Syah et al., 2025). For decades, Islamic education has often been associated with rigid instructional patterns, emphasizing memorization, doctrinal correctness, and legalistic interpretations of religious texts. While such approaches have their own strengths, they frequently overlook the emotional and psychological dimensions of learning. The

introduction of KBC marks a transformative effort to reorient education toward a more compassionate and holistic paradigm.

At the heart of KBC lies the concept of Mahabbah (love), which is positioned not merely as an abstract theological value but as a foundational pedagogical principle. By embedding love into the teaching and learning process, KBC seeks to cultivate a classroom environment that is emotionally safe, inclusive, and conducive to both spiritual and intellectual growth (Nugraha, 2025). In this framework, education is no longer limited to knowledge transmission but becomes a relational process where empathy, respect, and care are central. Teachers are encouraged to view students not just as recipients of knowledge but as individuals with unique emotional needs, backgrounds, and potentials.

The importance of this study lies in examining how teachers, as the primary agents of curriculum implementation, prepare themselves to transition from conventional instructional models to this new paradigm (Aini et al., 2023; Muliyah & Budiman, 2025). This transition is far from simple. It requires not only technical adjustments in teaching methods but also a profound shift in mindset, emotional awareness, and professional identity. Teachers must learn to integrate affective competencies such as empathy, patience, and emotional regulation into their daily practices. Consequently, teacher readiness becomes a critical factor in determining the success of KBC implementation.

Recent research highlights that KBC is not merely a localized educational innovation but a strategic response to broader national challenges. Indonesia, as a pluralistic society with diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, faces ongoing challenges related to social cohesion and interfaith relations. In this context, KBC plays a vital role in promoting values that go beyond mere tolerance. According to (Cahyati et al., 2025), KBC reframes the concept of harmony by fostering deep compassion and mutual understanding. Rather than simply accepting differences, students are encouraged to develop genuine respect and care for others, regardless of their backgrounds.

Furthermore, KBC aligns closely with national efforts to promote religious moderation. Faruq (2025) emphasizes that the curriculum serves as a strategic tool to ensure that Islamic education remains inclusive, adaptive, and relevant in addressing contemporary social issues. By prioritizing love and compassion, KBC helps counteract tendencies toward exclusivism or extremism, fostering instead a balanced and moderate religious outlook. This makes KBC particularly significant in shaping future generations who are not only knowledgeable in religious matters but also socially responsible and open-minded.

In the context of primary education, the implementation of KBC in various Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has shown promising results. (Rama et al., 2025) reported that students exposed to love-based learning environments demonstrate higher levels of engagement, motivation, and emotional well-being. Learning becomes more meaningful as students are encouraged to connect religious teachings with real-life experiences. Instead of relying solely on rote memorization, teachers guide students to internalize values such as kindness, honesty, and empathy. This shift not only enhances cognitive understanding but also strengthens character formation, which is a central goal of Islamic education.

However, the successful implementation of KBC requires more than philosophical alignment; it demands sophisticated pedagogical strategies. One such strategy is the integration of "Deep Learning" approaches within the KBC framework. (Putri et al., 2025) argue that deep learning enables students to engage with knowledge at a conceptual level, encouraging critical thinking, reflection, and problem-solving. When combined with the principles of Mahabbah, deep learning creates a balanced educational model that nurtures both intellectual rigor and emotional stability. Students are not only encouraged to think critically but also to do so within a supportive and caring environment.

This integration is particularly evident in specific subject areas such as Arabic language learning. (Amelia & Thohir, 2025) find that the application of KBC significantly reduces psychological barriers, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes. In traditional settings, students often experience "slip of the tongue" due to pressure and lack of confidence. However, in a love-based classroom, where mistakes are treated as part of the learning process, students feel more relaxed and willing to participate. This demonstrates that emotional security plays a crucial role in enhancing cognitive

performance. When students feel valued and supported, their capacity for learning increases substantially.

The theoretical foundation supporting this phenomenon is further reinforced by (kirana putri et al., 2025) who suggest that emotional well-being is closely linked to cognitive engagement. According to their findings, students who experience positive emotional environments are more likely to achieve optimal learning outcomes. This reinforces the central premise of KBC: that love and compassion are not merely ethical ideals but practical tools for improving educational effectiveness.

Despite these promising developments, the implementation of KBC is not without challenges. One of the most critical factors influencing its success is the readiness of school leadership and teaching staff. (Dzulfiqar, 2025) highlight the importance of Compassionate Leadership in creating an institutional culture that supports the values of KBC. School leaders play a pivotal role in providing both structural and emotional support to teachers. This includes offering professional development programs, fostering collaborative environments, and modeling compassionate behavior in their own leadership practices.

However, a significant gap remains between the theoretical ideals of KBC and the practical realities in classrooms. While many teachers express enthusiasm for the philosophy of love-based education, their readiness to implement it effectively varies. One of the key challenges is the persistence of symbolic violence in subtle forms, such as labeling, favoritism, or marginalization. These practices, often unconscious, contradict the principles of Mahabbah and can undermine the goals of KBC. Addressing this issue requires not only awareness but also continuous training and reflective practices among educators.

The main aim of this study, therefore, is to analyze teacher readiness in manifesting Mahabbah-based education to create classroom happiness while actively reducing symbolic violence in madrasas. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study examines both the cognitive and affective dimensions of teacher preparedness. Cognitive readiness includes understanding the principles of KBC, designing appropriate lesson plans, and applying innovative teaching strategies. Affective readiness, on the other hand, involves emotional intelligence, empathy, and the ability to build positive relationships with students.

The findings indicate that while there is a high level of enthusiasm among teachers toward the KBC philosophy, several areas require further development. Technical readiness, such as the ability to design love-based learning activities and assessments, remains inconsistent. Additionally, emotional regulation emerges as a critical challenge, particularly in managing classroom dynamics and responding to student behavior. These findings suggest that successful implementation of KBC requires a comprehensive approach that integrates both technical training and emotional development.

By identifying these gaps, this study contributes to the development of more effective teacher training programs centered on the pedagogy of love. Such programs should not only focus on instructional techniques but also emphasize self-awareness, reflective practice, and emotional resilience. Ultimately, the success of KBC depends on the ability of teachers to embody the values of Mahabbah in their daily interactions, transforming classrooms into spaces of joy, respect, and meaningful learning.

2. METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach using an explanatory sequential design, a framework widely recognized for its ability to generate comprehensive and well-rounded insights by integrating quantitative and qualitative data. This design is particularly relevant in educational research, where complex human behaviors, such as teaching practices and emotional readiness, cannot be fully understood through numerical data alone. By combining large-scale measurement with in-depth exploration, the explanatory sequential approach enables researchers to first identify general patterns and then uncover the underlying reasons behind those patterns. As highlighted by (Ertesvåg et al., 2021; Palinkas, 2011; Salim & Aditya, 2025), this design is effective in bridging the gap between

statistical trends and lived experiences, making it highly suitable for studies focusing on teacher readiness and pedagogical transformation.

In line with this framework, the research was conducted in two distinct but interconnected phases. The first phase involved a quantitative survey aimed at establishing a baseline understanding of teachers' cognitive and affective readiness. This stage focused on measuring how well teachers understand the principles of love-based pedagogy and how prepared they are emotionally to implement such an approach in their classrooms. The quantitative data provided a broad overview of readiness levels across a relatively large sample, allowing for the identification of general trends and potential gaps. However, while this phase was useful for mapping patterns, it did not fully capture the contextual and experiential dimensions of teaching practices.

To address this limitation, the study proceeded to a second phase involving qualitative phenomenological exploration. This phase was designed to explain and enrich the findings obtained from the quantitative data. Through in-depth interviews and classroom observations, the researcher sought to understand how teachers interpret, internalize, and implement the concept of love-based education in real-life settings. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kamila & RM, 2023) such a sequential approach allows qualitative findings to serve as an explanatory layer, providing meaning and context to numerical results. In this study, qualitative insights were essential in revealing the emotional dynamics, interpersonal interactions, and subtle challenges that teachers face when transitioning from conventional methods to more compassionate pedagogical practices.

The subjects of this study consisted of both teachers and students from several Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic primary schools), ensuring that the research captures perspectives from key participants within the educational process. In the quantitative phase, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select 100 Islamic Education teachers. This sampling method was chosen to ensure that participants had relevant experience and were directly involved in implementing or responding to the Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (KBC). By focusing on teachers who are actively engaged in Islamic education, the study was able to generate data that is both relevant and representative of the targeted educational context.

In the qualitative phase, the study narrowed its focus to six key informants. These participants were selected based on their roles, experiences, and potential to provide rich, detailed insights into the implementation of love-based pedagogy. The qualitative investigation paid particular attention to the collaborative roles between teachers and guidance counselors, as this partnership is crucial in fostering students' moral character and emotional well-being. As noted by (Tornee & Sanrattana, 2023), such collaboration plays a significant role in shaping a supportive learning environment where values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility can flourish.

Through this carefully structured subject selection, the study aims to capture how personality interactions and moral values are expressed in diverse classroom settings. The inclusion of both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth allows the research to explore not only what teachers do but also why they do it and how they experience these practices. (Apriana et al., 2025) emphasize that understanding these interpersonal dynamics is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of character-based education, particularly in contexts where emotional and spiritual dimensions are central to the learning process.

The research procedure was implemented in a systematic and rigorous manner to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The quantitative phase was conducted first, with data collected through structured surveys distributed digitally. The results of this phase were then analyzed and used to inform the design of the qualitative phase. Specifically, patterns and anomalies identified in the quantitative data guided the selection of interview participants and the development of interview questions. This sequential integration ensured that the qualitative findings were directly relevant to the issues identified in the initial phase, thereby enhancing the overall coherence of the study.

In terms of research instruments, the quantitative phase utilized the Teacher Readiness Scale (TRS), which was adapted from existing continuous professional development assessment tools. This instrument was designed to measure two key dimensions: pedagogical understanding and emotional

stability. Pedagogical understanding refers to teachers' knowledge of instructional strategies, curriculum principles, and classroom management techniques aligned with love-based education. Emotional stability, on the other hand, reflects teachers' ability to regulate their emotions, respond empathetically to students, and maintain a positive classroom atmosphere. As suggested by (Hidayati & Maula, 2025; Shabrina et al., 2025), combining these two dimensions provides a more holistic assessment of teacher readiness.

For the qualitative phase, the study employed semi-structured interview guides and observation checklists. These instruments were carefully designed to be sensitive to the moral and spiritual context of Islamic education. The interview guides allowed participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in their own words, while still ensuring that key themes were consistently explored across all interviews. Meanwhile, the observation checklists were used to document classroom interactions, focusing on indicators such as compassionate communication, student engagement, and the presence of a supportive learning environment.

Data collection was carried out through multiple methods to enhance the richness and credibility of the findings. Digital surveys were used to gather quantitative data efficiently, while in-depth interviews provided detailed narratives of teachers' lived experiences. Participatory observations were also conducted to capture real-time classroom dynamics, allowing the researcher to compare reported practices with actual behaviors. This triangulation of data sources helped to ensure that the findings were both comprehensive and trustworthy.

Finally, data analysis was conducted using appropriate techniques for each phase. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize trends and patterns in teacher readiness levels. Meanwhile, qualitative data were processed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves three key steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Through this iterative process, the researcher was able to identify recurring themes, establish relationships between variables, and draw meaningful conclusions. Triangulation techniques were also employed to validate the findings by cross-checking data from different sources and methods, thereby strengthening the overall reliability of the study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

The first phase of this research established a clear baseline of teacher readiness in implementing the Mahabbah-based curriculum.

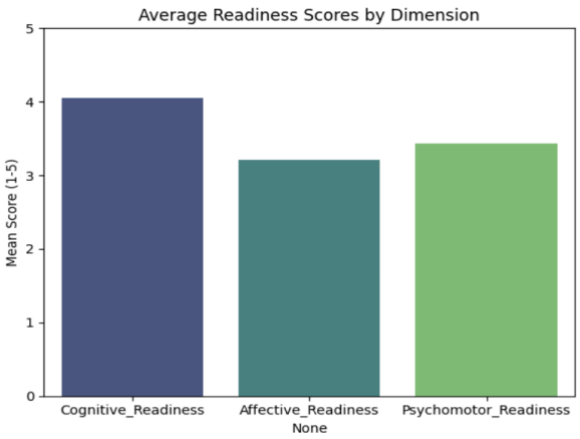


Figure 1. Average Readiness Scores by Dimension

As illustrated in Figure 1, there is a significant gap between Cognitive Readiness (M=4.12) and Affective Readiness (M=3.25). This data suggests that while teachers are conceptually prepared for the

transformation from the 2013 or Merdeka curriculum to a love-based framework (Fathurohim, 2023), they face substantial challenges in emotional internalisation.

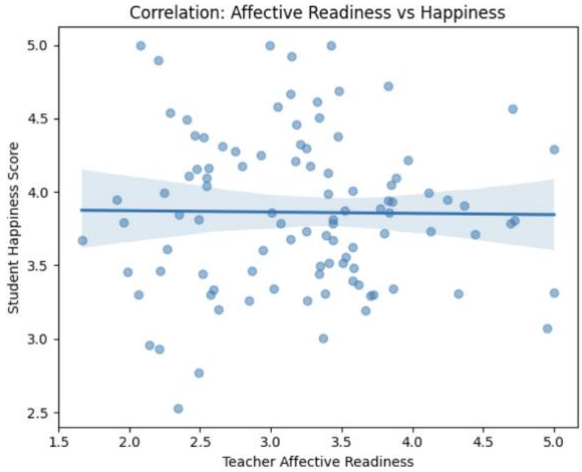


Figure 2. The Correlation between Affective Readiness and Happiness

The quantitative mapping in Figure 2 further reveals a weak correlation between teacher affective readiness and student happiness. Qualitative follow-ups explain this paradox: students perceive Classroom Happiness not through the teacher's self-claim of being loving, but through the absence of subtle symbolic violence and the presence of prophetic pedagogical traits. The integration of "Deep Learning and the Love Curriculum (Fathurohim et al., 2025) is found to be effective only when teachers move beyond administrative compliance toward a Pedagogi Eros that nurtures a holistic learning ecology.

3.2. Discussion

The high cognitive scores identified in this study indicate that teachers and students possess a solid conceptual understanding of Prophetic teachings, particularly in the context of character development. These findings suggest that the theoretical dimension of Islamic education—grounded in the values, ethics, and pedagogical approaches exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad—has been relatively well internalized. Prophetic teaching methods, such as the use of analogies, storytelling, and illustrative drawings, as well as more structured strategies like Hill Climbing to enhance academic achievement, provide not only pedagogical tools but also a rich historical and theological foundation for implementing a love-based curriculum. Such approaches emphasize compassion, gradual learning, and meaningful engagement, which align closely (Akbar et al., 2025; Farihin et al., 2025)with contemporary educational goals of fostering holistic development.

However, as highlighted by several recent studies, including those by (Baitullah et al., 2025; Nst & Al-Husna, 2025), the presence of strong cognitive understanding alone is insufficient for achieving transformative educational outcomes. While teachers may intellectually grasp the importance of love, empathy, and character in Islamic teachings, the real challenge lies in translating this understanding into classroom practices that engage students emotionally (affective domain) and behaviorally (psychomotor domain). This gap between knowing and doing represents a critical issue in the implementation of innovative curricula, particularly those that aim to integrate spiritual and moral values into everyday learning experiences.

3.2.1 Teacher Readiness and the Challenges of Deep Learning

The findings of this study resonate with the Rasch Model analysis conducted by (Pahrudin et al., 2025), which reveals that teacher readiness for implementing Deep Learning in Islamic Education remains uneven and often constrained by systemic barriers. These barriers include limited professional development opportunities, insufficient institutional support, and a lack of practical frameworks for

integrating higher-order thinking into religious subjects. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of Deep Learning defined as learning that is reflective, meaningful, and connected to real-life contexts many teachers continue to rely on traditional methods that prioritize memorization over understanding.

To address this issue, it is essential for educators to embed Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) within the Islamic curriculum(Maslani et al., 2025; Septiana et al., 2025) . This involves designing learning activities that encourage analysis, evaluation, and creative thinking, rather than simply recalling information. In the context of Islamic education, this could mean engaging students in discussions about ethical dilemmas, encouraging critical reflection on religious texts, and connecting Prophetic teachings to contemporary social issues. By doing so, teachers can help students move beyond superficial learning and develop a deeper, heart-centered understanding of their faith.

Moreover, the role of school leadership is crucial in facilitating this transition. Managerial studies have shown that principals and administrators play a decisive role in shaping the professional culture of schools and in supporting teachers through periods of change. Effective leadership can provide the necessary resources, training, and motivation for teachers to adopt new pedagogical approaches. This includes creating a supportive environment where experimentation is encouraged, collaboration is fostered, and continuous learning is valued. Strategic human resource management, therefore, becomes a key factor in driving educational quality, particularly in Indonesian Islamic schools where the integration of tradition and innovation is an ongoing challenge.

3.2.2 Reducing Symbolic Violence through Love-Based Integration

Another significant contribution of this study lies in its exploration of how a love-based curriculum can help reduce symbolic violence within educational settings. Symbolic violence, in this context, refers to subtle forms of marginalization, labeling, and exclusion that may occur through language, expectations, or institutional practices (Danil et al., 2025; Rosadah et al., 2025). These forms of violence are often invisible yet deeply impactful, shaping students' self-perception and engagement with learning.

The integration of Islamic values, humanistic principles, and local cultural wisdom has been identified as an effective strategy for mitigating such issues. By emphasizing respect, inclusivity, and empathy, a love-based curriculum creates a more equitable and supportive learning environment. This approach aligns with the core teachings of Islam, which promote justice, compassion, and the dignity of all individuals.

The findings of this study indicate that such an approach is particularly effective in Madrasah Aliyah settings, where students are at a critical stage of identity formation(Ali et al., 2026; Syafaruddin et al., 2025). When students feel valued and respected, they are more likely to participate actively in the learning process and to develop positive attitudes toward themselves and others. Furthermore, the implementation of a happiness-centered classroom environment has been shown to enhance students' practical competencies, including language skills such as English communication. This is because a positive emotional climate reduces anxiety and psychological barriers, allowing students to take risks and engage more fully with the material.

Innovative curriculum management also plays a role in this process. By aligning teaching methods, assessment strategies, and learning objectives with the principles of love and compassion, schools can create a coherent and meaningful educational experience. This requires not only pedagogical innovation but also a commitment to ongoing reflection and improvement.

3.2.3 Institutional Resilience and Future Implementation

The transition from the Merdeka Curriculum to a Love-Based Curriculum represents a significant shift in educational philosophy and practice. For teachers, this transition is not merely technical but deeply reflective, requiring them to reconsider their roles, beliefs, and approaches to teaching. As noted by (Siregar et al., 2026; Susilo et al., 2026), this process demands a high level of resilience, as teachers must navigate uncertainty, adapt to new expectations, and continuously develop their skills.

This study highlights the importance of providing sustained support for teachers throughout this journey. One of the key areas for improvement is the optimization of training institutions, which play a critical role in preparing educators for the demands of contemporary education (Anjhani et al., 2025). Training programs must go beyond theoretical instruction and focus on developing teachers' affective and psychomotor competencies. This includes training in classroom management, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and the practical application of love-based principles.

Without such comprehensive and systemic training, there is a risk that the Love-Based Curriculum will remain a theoretical concept rather than a lived reality. The gap between Prophetic ideals and classroom practice will persist, limiting the potential impact of educational reforms. Therefore, it is essential for policymakers, educational leaders, and training institutions to work collaboratively in designing and implementing programs that address these challenges.

4. CONCLUSION

This study successfully addresses the objective of analyzing teacher readiness in implementing the Mahabbah-based curriculum to foster classroom happiness and mitigate symbolic violence in madrasas. The findings reveal a significant Knowledge-Practice Gap, where teachers demonstrate a high level of cognitive understanding regarding the philosophy of love in Islamic education but remain at a moderate level of affective and psychomotor readiness. This disconnect explains why a high conceptual grasp of prophetic teachings does not automatically translate into a palpable increase in student happiness. The research discovers that symbolic violence persists in subtle, verbal forms—often triggered by administrative burnout which functions as a hidden barrier to the manifestation of a truly compassionate learning ecology. Ultimately, the successful reduction of symbolic violence is found to be less about curriculum documentation and more about the teacher's internal emotional regulation and spiritual maturity. It is recommended that educational authorities and training institutions prioritize Affective Training and Compassionate Leadershi programs over purely administrative or technical workshops. Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of love-based pedagogy on students' long-term psychological resilience and academic persistence across different cultural contexts in Indonesia. Currently, a follow-up study is underway to develop a digital-based self-regulation module for madrasah teachers, aimed at providing real-time emotional support to further minimize the occurrence of symbolic violence in high-pressure educational environments.

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