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Love-Based Curriculum from the Perspective of Spritual and Character Education in Mandrasah 'Aliyah

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Abstract

This study is grounded in concerns regarding the prevailing educational orientation that predominantly emphasizes academic and cognitive achievement, while frequently neglecting affective, spiritual, and moral dimensions. Such an imbalance has contributed to diminished levels of empathy and social awareness among students. Accordingly, a more holistic educational model is required—one that harmoniously integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence—conceptualized in this study as a love-based curriculum. The purpose of this research is to examine the concept and implementation of a love-based curriculum from the perspective of spiritual and character education at Darussalam Simpang Limun Banggai Private Islamic Senior High School. The study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The validity of the findings was ensured through triangulation of both data sources and research methods. The findings indicate that the love-based curriculum is implemented through the integration of spiritual and character values into teaching and learning activities at the madrasah. Teachers play a pivotal role as moral exemplars, and their empathetic personal engagement significantly facilitates the internalization of love-based values among students. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including limited professional training for teachers and insufficient collaboration between the madrasah and parents. The study recommends systematic educator training and the comprehensive integration of love-based values across curricular components to strengthen the implementation of this educational model.

Keywords: Love-Based Curriculum, Spiritual Education, Character, Madrasah Aliyah.

1. Introduction

Education is a process of developing the whole person, oriented not only toward mastering knowledge but also toward character and spirituality. However, the current modern education system tends to prioritize cognitive orientation and academic achievement alone. This often results in stu-

dents' affective and spiritual dimensions being marginalized in learning practices. Maslani et al. emphasized that the Islamic education system needs to develop a curriculum centered on the values of love and compassion to avoid becoming trapped in teaching that merely transfers knowledge without transforming personality [1]. In the context of national education, the decline in moral values and empathy among students poses a serious challenge. Results of the *Indonesian Child and Adolescent Character Index* (2024) survey research shows that students' social awareness levels have decreased by 28% compared to the previous five years, while bullying behavior has increased significantly in the school environment. This phenomenon illustrates a degradation in the values of compassion and empathy, which is in stark contrast to the essence of Islamic education, which emphasizes the development of noble morals [2],[1].

This phenomenon has also been observed in various Islamic educational institutions, including Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High Schools). Although madrasahs are ideally founded upon moral and spiritual education as their core principles, educational practices frequently continue to prioritize academic performance and examination outcomes. Irpan and Sain argue that Islamic religious education often concentrates predominantly on cognitive dimensions and rote memorization, rather than fostering the development of a holistic spiritual personality and character formation [3]. This situation has become increasingly complex in the digital era, where the rapid flow of information, rising individualism, and consumerist lifestyles contribute to the erosion of students' social sensitivity. Abidin et al. emphasized the need for a humanistic approach in Islamic education to build emotional and spiritual intelligence amidst the challenges of the digital era. Without such an approach, the educational process will lose its human dimension [4].

Based on these considerations, there is an urgent need to develop a curriculum that nurtures the heart and spiritual dimensions of learners, rather than merely facilitating the transfer of knowledge. Meehan argues that the spiritual dimension of the curriculum constitutes a crucial element in shaping students' sense of meaning and purpose in life. He further asserts that meaningful education is that which touches the heart, cultivates compassion, and fosters positive and authentic relationships between teachers and students [5]. In the Islamic educational tradition, the spiritual dimension is at the core of the entire learning process. This is emphasized by Nur, who states that Sufism-based moral education can be an effective approach to shaping personality and fostering spiritual awareness amidst the moral decline of the younger generation. Therefore, the Islamic education curriculum needs to revitalize the values of Sufism and compassion as the spirit of education [6][7].

One concept considered capable of addressing this challenge is the *Love-Based Curriculum*. This concept emphasizes the importance of love, both love for God, fellow human beings, and knowledge, as the foundation for designing learning. Miller Drake in their classic work, *Toward a Spiritual Curriculum*, asserted that education rooted in love and spirituality can address the crisis of meaning facing the modern education system [8]. This perspective is further supported by Kessler, who, through the Passages program, demonstrated that love-based education can cultivate empathy, compassion, and emotional balance among students. He critiques the secular education system for neglecting the dimension of the heart and emphasizes that integrating spirituality into the learning process can significantly strengthen students' character development [9].

From an Islamic educational perspective, Henderson emphasized the importance of building a culture of compassion in schools through learning that fosters empathy. He argued that a love-based curriculum can create a peaceful, inclusive, and character-oriented learning environment. This principle aligns with the values of mercy and brotherhood in Islam [10]. The idea of a love-based curriculum also finds support in the context of contemporary Islamic education [11]. Maslani et al. found in their research that integrating the value of love into the teaching materials of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' Creed and Morals can enhance students' spiritual understanding

and strengthen interpersonal relationships in madrasas [1, 12]. The results of this study demonstrate that implementing a love-based curriculum is not only conceptually ideal but also practical. Spirituality in the curriculum is a path to "transcending the commonplace" and connecting learning with the meaning of life [13].

This type of education requires teachers to act not only as instructors but also as compassionate figures who guide the students by setting a moral and spiritual example. Theologically, love-based education is firmly grounded in Islamic teachings. Allah SWT commands His people to spread love, as He states in Surah Al-Anbiya: 107 that the Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy to all the worlds. Therefore, education at Madrasah Aliyah should be a means of instilling the values of mercy, compassion, and goodness in students.

However, the implementation of the value of love in the madrasa curriculum system remains limited. Kurniawan, Rohmaniah, Saputra revealed that Islamic Religious Education learning is still dominated by a normative theological approach and does not address the pedagogical and affective aspects of students. This indicates a gap between the idealism of the curriculum and practice in the field [14]. Similarly, Amrah Sulaiman, in their research on rabbani character also emphasized that the formation of spiritual intelligence must be facilitated through learning that fosters love for God and others. However, the results of their research show that the implementation of spiritual values is often hampered by the limitations of the curriculum model and teaching methods that are still conventional [15].

Several other studies, such as those conducted by Mahler et al., have developed spiritual character-based curricula aimed at enhancing the quality of learning in the digital age. However, these studies primarily focus on conceptual design and have not yet provided a comprehensive account of how a love-based curriculum is practically implemented within the context of a madrasah environment [16]. Research by De Souza also shows that the spiritual dimension is often overlooked because it is considered unmeasurable in national curriculum standards. Yet, this aspect is central to the process of constructing meaning in learning [17]. This challenge often causes teachers in madrasahs to struggle to translate the value of love into teaching and learning activities.

Based on these findings, a clear research gap can be identified. Although previous studies have extensively examined the conceptual dimensions of love- and spirituality-based curricula, empirical research within Madrasah Aliyah settings remains limited. In particular, there is insufficient exploration of how the values of love and spirituality are implemented in practice, as well as how they are understood and experienced by teachers and students in everyday learning activities. Therefore, this study addresses an urgent need in the field. It seeks not only to examine the theoretical foundations of a love-based curriculum but also to investigate its practical implementation within the authentic context of Islamic education in Madrasah Aliyah. A qualitative approach was employed, as it enables an in-depth exploration of the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of educational practitioners regarding the integration of love and spirituality in the learning process [18, 19, 20].

In South Labuhan Batu Regency, specifically in Bangai Village, Torgamba District, Darussalam Simpang Limun Private Islamic Senior High School has an enrollment of approximately 250 students (107 boys, 143 girls) in the 2024/2025 semester based on data from *sekolah.data.kemdikbud.go.id*. This school has received B accreditation, but in the practice of religious learning and character/spiritual formation, it still faces indicators that indicate the need for further strengthening, for example in learning to read and write the Qur'an at the previous level in the same location. The geographical conditions and institutional resources in this village area add complexity to efforts to form students' character and spirituality which include love, empathy, and caring. Therefore, research on a love-based curriculum has a high urgency in this school.

Based on this context, a love-based curriculum emerged as a response to the challenges of modern

education. By implementing the values of love, compassion, and empathy in the learning process, teachers not only become transmitters of knowledge but also spiritual role models who foster respect, care, and discipline in students. This approach is very much in line with the vision of Islamic education, namely to produce people who are faithful, have noble character, are knowledgeable, and are able to apply the values of love in social life. Therefore, this study focuses on the implementation of a love-based curriculum in Madrasah Aliyah, especially in the context of spiritual and character education. This study aims to explore in more depth how the values of love, empathy, and spirituality are implemented in the curriculum and how this impacts student character formation. The main research question in this study is: How is the concept of a love-based curriculum implemented in education in Madrasah Aliyah and what impact does it have on student character and spirituality?

2. Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, as it seeks to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the meanings, values, and implementation of a love-based curriculum from the perspective of spiritual and character education at Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai Private Islamic Senior High School, Torgamba District, South Labuhanbatu Regency. This approach enables the researcher to examine holistically the experiences and perspectives of teachers, the madrasah principal, and students in integrating the values of compassion, empathy, and spirituality into the teaching and learning process [18, 19]. This research was conducted in the field by involving purposively selected informants, including madrasah principals, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Character Building teachers, general subject teachers, and students, until reaching the point of data saturation. This study involved a number of purposively selected participants, consisting of 10 teachers (6 Islamic Religious Education teachers and 4 general subject teachers), 30 students consisting of 15 male students and 15 female students, and 2 administrators, namely the Principal and the Deputy Principal of Curriculum. The duration of data collection lasted for 3 months, from January to March 2025, which included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Data collection was carried out through direct observation of learning activities and teacher-student interactions in the classroom, as well as a review of curriculum documents used in the madrasah.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The collected data were then analyzed using open, axial, and thematic coding processes, adapting the interactive data analysis model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [18]. In the open coding stage, researchers read and examined the data obtained to identify initial categories covering the values of love, spirituality, and character in the curriculum. Then, in axial coding, these categories were connected and grouped to understand the relationships between existing themes, such as the role of teachers, love-based teaching methods, and challenges in implementing a love-based curriculum. The final stage was thematic coding, where the main themes that emerged, such as "the influence of teachers as role models," "implementation of spiritual values in the curriculum," and "challenges in integrating character in learning" were further processed to produce findings that answered the research questions.

Data validity testing was carried out by triangulating sources, techniques, and time to ensure the validity of the findings [18]. This research adheres to ethical scientific principles such as maintaining informant confidentiality, academic honesty, and informed consent. This method is relevant because it can uncover dimensions of meaning and spiritual values in educational practices that cannot be measured quantitatively [21] [19] [20].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The concept of a love-based curriculum from the perspective of spiritual and character education at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai

Madrasah Aliyah Swasta (MAS) Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai is a private Islamic senior high school located in Torgamba District, South Labuhanbatu Regency, North Sumatra Province. The madrasah operates under the auspices of the Darussalam Foundation and has distinguished itself as an educational institution that emphasizes a balanced integration of general academic knowledge and religious values. With vision *"The realization of students who are faithful, skilled, and achieve to prepare a generation of successors to the nation with noble morals and insightful spacious,"* this madrasah is committed to producing students who are not only academically intelligent, but also possess spiritual depth and character maturity.

In daily life, learning activities at the madrasah begin with the implementation of congregational dhuha prayer, reading the Qur'an, as well as prayer together. Every teacher is expected not only to play a role as a teacher in the cognitive aspect, but also to become an example in attitudes, behavior, and spirituality. Based on this principle, the idea emerged to implement a love-based curriculum, namely an educational approach that fosters love, empathy, and spiritual closeness in the entire learning process.

The concept of a love-based curriculum is interpreted as an educational approach that places the value of love as the core of all teaching and learning activities. The Head of Madrasah, Salman, explained that education is not solely a process of transferring knowledge, but also a means of forming the heart, morals, and behavior of students [22]. Therefore, the curriculum at MAS Darussalam is directed so that every subject, both general and religious, instills love for Allah SWT, fellow human beings, and the surrounding environment.

A love-based curriculum does not imply a modification of the national curriculum structure; rather, it involves the integration of love-based values into every aspect of its implementation. In this framework, teachers function not merely as transmitters of knowledge but also as "second parents" who guide students with care and compassion. Within the learning process, the concept of love is enacted through the habituation of noble moral values, such as mutual assistance, respect for teachers, and compassion toward peers. This approach is manifested in concrete activities, including the *Monday Share a Smile Program*, in which students are encouraged to spread greetings, smiles, and greet friends kindly. Besides that, there are *Social Service for Love for Others* and *Prayer Together for the Homeland* activities that become a means for students to practice the value of love concretely in daily life.

There are four main values integrated into the curriculum at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai, namely: (1) love for Allah SWT, (2) love for fellow humans, (3) love for knowledge, and (4) love for the environment. First, love for God is manifested through the habituation of sincere and conscious worship, such as the implementation of dhuha prayer, communal dhikr, and reading the Qur'an before lessons begin. Students are directed to understand worship not solely as a formal obligation, but as a form of love and devotion to the Creator.

Second, love for fellow humans is implemented through attitudes of empathy, helping, and appreciation of differences. Students are accustomed to not discriminating against friends based on social background. In learning activities, they are trained to work in groups to foster a sense of mutual value and support. Third, love for knowledge is realized through instilling a high spirit of learning and curiosity. The teacher encourages students to learn not because of grade pressure, but because of love for knowledge that brings benefit and blessings. Fourth, love for the environment is implemented through *Friday Clean* and *Green Madrasah Movement* activities. Students are trained to maintain cleanliness, plant trees, and value nature as a form of gratitude and worship to Allah SWT.

The curriculum at MAS Darussalam is designed to integrate spiritual values and character holistically. Every subject contains moral and spiritual values inserted in the learning context. Lesson material is always connected with Islamic values. For example, in Islamic history lessons, students are invited to emulate the struggle of the Prophet Muhammad SAW who was full of love and honesty. In addition, character discipline and responsibility are also emphasized through school rules. Late students are not directly punished, but rather asked to read prayers and do self-reflection to grow awareness and moral responsibility [23, 24].

Character formation in this madrasah is primarily emphasized through habituation and exemplary conduct. Teachers serve as tangible role models by demonstrating gentleness, patience, and respect toward students [25]. Findings from interviews with students indicate that teachers at MAS Darussalam do not reprimand students harshly; instead, they consistently provide guidance in a calm, gentle, and persuasive manner. This approach fosters a learning environment that is peaceful, harmonious, and conducive to students' holistic development.

In the implementation of the love-based curriculum, three principal components function synergistically: learning materials, instructional methods, and assessment practices. With regard to learning materials, teachers endeavor to integrate moral and spiritual values into each subject area. For instance, in Indonesian language classes, students are encouraged to compose poetry centered on themes of love and compassion, while in Biology classes they are invited to reflect upon the greatness of God as manifested in His creation.

In terms of instructional methods, teachers apply humanistic and reflective approaches by providing opportunities for students to engage in dialogue, share personal experiences, and express their thoughts and feelings. Concerning assessment, the madrasah evaluates not only academic achievement but also students' attitudes and behaviors. A character observation sheet is utilized to assess indicators such as discipline, responsibility, and empathy. These character-based evaluations constitute an integral component of students' semester academic reports.

The implementation of a love-based curriculum in MAS Darussalam appears as a response to the phenomenon of moral decline among teenagers. The head of the madrasa explained that many students in the modern era have lost respect for teachers, are easily offended, and do not care about others. Therefore, the madrasah feels the need to re-implant the values of love and empathy in the educational process [26, 27, 28]. Love-based education is believed to be more meaningful because it touches the hearts of students emotionally and spiritually. Love is viewed as a spiritual energy that connects the teacher and students in a meaningful relationship [29, 30]. Thus, the love-based curriculum is a manifestation of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* Islamic education, namely education that brings love for all of God's creatures.

The main objective of implementing a love-based curriculum is to form students who have a balance between intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence. The head of the madrasa emphasized that this curriculum is expected to produce students who are not only academically achieving, but also have a soft heart, are empathetic, and have a soul full of love. The purpose of education with love is to create a learning atmosphere driven by awareness, sincerity, and love for kindness, not pressure and fear [13].

Observations and interviews show that the implementation of a love-based curriculum has a positive impact on the behavior of students at MAS Darussalam. Discipline has increased, students come on time, speak politely, and are more concerned with the cleanliness of the madrasah environment. The relationship between teachers and students becomes more familiar and mutually appreciative. Students feel that the teacher is not just a teacher, but also a friend and sincere mentor. In addition, the level of social empathy of students has increased, visible from their concern for friends who are experiencing difficulties.

Overall, the implementation of a love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai has had a significant influence on shaping students' personalities with noble morals, spirituality, and full of love. This madrasah is not only a place to gain knowledge, but also a space for character formation and the cultivation of love values as a moral foundation for a civilized life [16].

The love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai is rooted in the view that education must begin from the heart and be directed toward fostering compassion, empathy, and sincerity in students. Based on research, the madrasah defines a "love-based curriculum" as a learning system that instills love for God, teachers, fellow human beings, and the environment. This concept is rooted in the thinking of al-Ghazali, who emphasized that the core of moral education is the purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and the instilling of love for divine truth [31]. Love, according to al-Ghazali, is not merely an emotion, but a source of spiritual motivation to do good and avoid injustice. Thus, the implementation of a love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam represents the actualization of Sufism and moral values within the Islamic education system.

In line with that, Nur emphasized that Sufism-based moral education is relevant to the needs of modern education because it integrates spiritual and moral aspects into a unified learning process [6]. Madrasahs that place love as the foundation of their curriculum have truly fostered the spirit of *tarbiyah al-qalb*, an education of the heart that fosters students' spiritual awareness [24]. Values of love, such as compassion, empathy, responsibility, and sincerity, are integrated into all aspects of the curriculum, from lesson planning and teaching methods to student behavior evaluation. Interviews revealed that teachers at MAS Darussalam strive to provide "humanizing" learning by understanding students' emotional states, using a dialogical approach, and instilling spiritual values in every subject.

This approach aligns with the ideas of Abidin et al., who emphasize the importance of a humanistic approach in Islamic education. According to them, education that fosters emotional and spiritual intelligence is essential in the digital era so that students are not only intellectually intelligent, but also gentle, empathetic, and have high morals [4]. Furthermore, Kurniawan et al. and Laili explain that the integration of theological and pedagogical perspectives in Islamic Religious Education learning is key to optimizing character formation [14, 23]. In the context of MAS Darussalam, this is evident in the teachers' efforts to connect each subject matter with divine values and noble morals, a form of theology of love in educational practice.

According to Maslani et al. and Harahap, a love-based curriculum is also a form of liberating moral and faith education, where students are encouraged to recognize God's love and emulate the Prophet's mercy in their daily lives [1, 25]. This is clearly evident in the habituation activities at the madrasah, such as greeting each other, sharing, and listening with empathy. The love-based curriculum serves as a medium for developing students' spiritual intelligence. Based on field observations, MAS Darussalam students exhibit calmer behavior, respect their teachers, and have high learning motivation.

This finding aligns with research showing that developing spiritual intelligence can strengthen students' character and morals, as they learn to understand the meaning of life and the purpose of human creation [26, 27, 28]. Furthermore, Amrah Sulaiman emphasized the importance of developing Rabbani character as a means of fostering spiritual intelligence in the learning process [15]. Meanwhile, Ramadhani et al. and Burhanudin explained that heart-based education must be at the core of all educational activities, as the heart is the center of human moral and spiritual awareness [29, 30]. Therefore, a love-based curriculum can be viewed as a heart curriculum, a curriculum oriented toward fostering spiritual awareness and noble morals.

This is also in line with the thinking of Brummelen et al., who emphasize the need for spirituality in the curriculum so that students do not lose meaning in the learning process [13]. Education

without spirituality only produces students who are oriented towards results, not on life values. When viewed from a global perspective, the idea of a love-based curriculum has similarities with the concept of compassionate education [5, 10]. They believe that education must foster compassion, forgiveness, and empathy in students. However, in Islamic education, love has a transcendental dimension, namely love for God, which is the basis of all forms of love for creatures.

This concept is reinforced by De Souza, who explains that the spiritual dimension of learning cannot be separated from students' daily lives. Learning that fosters love will help students understand the values of life, strengthen their personalities, and deepen their sense of gratitude [17]. Thus, the implementation of a love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam is a concrete form of the spiritual curriculum advocated by Miller Drake, namely a spiritual curriculum that connects reason, heart, and moral action [8].

Although the implementation of the love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam has demonstrated generally positive outcomes, this study also identified several significant challenges. First, not all teachers possess a comprehensive theoretical and methodological understanding of the love-based curriculum approach, which may limit the consistency and depth of its application. Second, instructional practices remain, at times, predominantly oriented toward cognitive assessment and academic achievement, rather than fully integrating affective and spiritual dimensions of learning. Third, supporting facilities and programs—such as dedicated reflection spaces, structured spiritual mentoring initiatives, and systematic moral guidance—have not yet been implemented optimally.

According to Miswanto and Ilham, spiritual and character-oriented learning requires sustainable and collaborative curriculum design between teachers, principals, and religious institutions [32]. Without an integrated system, the value of love will only stop at moral slogans, not become the madrasah culture. Furthermore, Kessler reminds us that in modern education, students often lack the space to reflect and search for the meaning of life. Therefore, madrasahs must create space for spiritual reflection such as *dhikr*, *muhasabah*, or inner dialogue so that the value of love does not stop at rhetoric, but grows in the consciousness of students [9].

From a policy perspective, the Ministry of Religious Affairs needs to follow up on this type of research by developing a National Love-Based Curriculum Guide based on the values of compassion, empathy, and spirituality. This aligns with the vision of Religious Moderation, which emphasizes compassion and balance. From a school perspective, Islamic schools can strengthen their curriculum structure by adding modules on spiritual heart and character education, adopting a reflective approach, and establishing a spiritual guidance team to continuously mentor students. Teachers also need to be trained in the methodology of love pedagogy (pedagogy of love) as stated by Henderson and Abidin, namely learning that is rooted in empathy, not authority; in mentoring, not commands [10, 4].

Islamic education is essentially an education in love. As al-Ghazali stated, love for God will give rise to righteous deeds, while love for others will foster justice and social awareness [31]. In the context of MAS Darussalam, a love-based curriculum is an effort to return education to its natural state, enlivening the heart, purifying the soul, and fostering noble character. As Miller Drake put it, spirituality in the curriculum is a path to transcending learning routines into meaningful experiences [8]. Education without love will only produce intelligent individuals with dry consciences, but education built on love will produce a generation of knowledge, morals, and compassion.

3.2 The role of educators in instilling the values of love, compassion, spirituality and character at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai

Teachers play a crucial role in instilling the values of love in students. Based on interviews and field observations, the implementation of the values of love at MAS Darussalam is carried out through

exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) and a compassionate personal approach. Teachers strive to understand the emotional state of each student, provide motivation using gentle language, and create a friendly, comfortable, and welcoming classroom atmosphere. Prior to the commencement of formal learning activities, teachers encourage students to greet one another, exchange smiles, and offer prayers for classmates who are absent. This practice reflects a deliberate and systematic effort to cultivate a classroom culture grounded in empathy, care, and a sense of togetherness [33, 34].

During the instructional process, teachers further reinforce the importance of mutual respect and the avoidance of language that may harm others' feelings. In this way, learning activities function not merely as mechanisms for the transmission of knowledge, but also as intentional spaces for character formation and the development of compassion among students. The principal of the madrasah acts as a director, mentor, and primary supervisor in the implementation of a love-based curriculum. According to Salman, as the principal, weekly teacher coordination and coaching meetings are held to ensure that the values of love and compassion truly become the spirit of every educational activity [22]. The principal emphasizes that teachers not only act as transmitters of material, but also as *murobbi* or spiritual guides who guide the hearts of students towards goodness and closeness to Allah SWT. On several occasions, the principal also goes directly to the classroom to ensure that the learning atmosphere runs lovingly, without verbal or emotional violence. This step demonstrates a leadership commitment that emphasizes the affective and spiritual dimensions in the educational process.

Observations show that the application of the values of love at MAS Darussalam is reflected in various aspects of madrasah life. For example, in the classroom, the values of love are realized through gentle interactions between teachers and students, mutual respect, and attention to each student's emotional needs. In the dormitory environment, the values of love are also implemented through Clean Friday activities and the Green Madrasah Movement, which serve as learning media to foster a love of nature and environmental responsibility. Meanwhile, in extracurricular activities, programs such as the Love for Others Social Service and Islamic Mentoring are designed to instill empathy, social solidarity, and concern for others. This comprehensive implementation of the values of love demonstrates that education at MAS Darussalam does not only focus on the cognitive aspect, but also balances the affective and spiritual aspects.

The school culture at MAS Darussalam also serves as a strong support for strengthening the values of love. Based on observational findings, the entire school community—including students, teachers, and administrative staff—consistently practices the "Greetings and Smiles" initiative each morning. This shared routine contributes to the cultivation of a warm and inclusive learning environment that values mutual respect and acknowledges individual differences. Furthermore, the instructional approach adopted by teachers emphasizes *tarbiyah al-qulub* (education of the heart) rather than punitive measures. This orientation prioritizes moral nurturing, emotional sensitivity, and compassionate guidance as central elements of the educational process. When a student makes a mistake, teachers do not immediately impose sanctions but instead engage in dialogue, reflection, and self-reflection to consciously understand their mistakes [35]. This coaching pattern encourages the development of character based on empathy, moral awareness, and compassion.

The values of love are not limited to the classroom, but are reflected in the social and religious activities routinely held at the madrasah. Through congregational prayer, community service, and group prayer, students are trained to express their love for Allah SWT through service and concern for others. The Love for Others Social Service and *Qolbi Mentoring* programs serve as important platforms for instilling the values of social empathy, moral responsibility, and sincerity. In weekly mentoring sessions, students are given the opportunity to share life experiences, discuss moral issues, and engage in self-reflection [3]. These activities serve as spiritual and emotional exercises aimed at strengthening students' understanding of the meaning of true love, rooted in divine and

human values.

The instillation of the values of love at MAS Darussalam is carried out daily, systematically, and continuously. Every morning, teachers lead a group prayer before the start of lessons and remind students to cultivate a sincere intention to learn. At the end of the lesson, students are asked to write a Daily Reflection about their experiences of love at school and at home. In addition, there are regular activities such as the Divine Love Kultum and the Happy Friday Study, designed to strengthen spiritual understanding and build emotional closeness among the madrasa community. Through these activities, the learning process becomes a means of sharpening the heart and instilling the values of love grounded in Islamic spirituality [36, 37].

Each teacher strives to integrate spiritual and character values into the subjects they teach. For example, in Biology, students are encouraged to reflect on God's greatness through the beauty of His creation. In Indonesian, they write literary works on the themes of compassion and sincerity. Meanwhile, in Islamic Cultural History, students are encouraged to emulate the loving, just, and empathetic morals of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The integration of spiritual and character values into each subject demonstrates a holistic approach that combines intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects. This aligns with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize a balance between *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), *ta'lim* (teaching), and *tarbiyah* (moral development) [38, 39].

The evaluation system at MAS Darussalam also demonstrates innovation in assessing comprehensive educational outcomes. Evaluation is not only oriented towards academic achievement but also assesses the development of students' character and spirituality. According to the Deputy Head of Curriculum, assessment is conducted through Character Observation Sheets, personal reflection, and individual mentoring. Students are required to write a Self-Reflection Journal each week, recording their spiritual experiences, social interactions, and emotional development. Teachers then review and discuss the journals to provide personalized moral and spiritual guidance. Furthermore, the school holds monthly coordination meetings to evaluate the implementation of the value of love in each class [14, 40]. The principal emphasized that the implementation of the love-based curriculum must be planned, consistent, and sustainable, not merely ceremonial.

As part of the quality improvement effort, each teacher is required to write reflective notes on the application of the value of love in their respective classes, as well as share experiences with colleagues in teacher discussion forums. This step strengthens the practice of compassion-based learning and builds a collaborative culture between educators. Based on the overall research results, it can be concluded that: (1) teachers play a spearhead role in instilling the values of love and compassion through role models and empathetic learning; (2) the madrasah principal functions as a mentor and director so that the value of love becomes the spirit of all educational activities; (3) a religious and inclusive madrasah culture becomes a strong foundation for the formation of a loving and spiritual atmosphere; and (4) a character evaluation system is developed comprehensively, encompassing cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions.

Overall, MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai has demonstrated a strong commitment to realizing love-centered education. This approach aligns with the goals of Islamic education, namely to develop knowledgeable, moral, and spiritual individuals. By harmoniously combining the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, this madrasah has provided a concrete example of how education can be a means of fostering love for God, for others, and for all of His creation.

Interviews and observations show that teachers play a fundamental role in instilling values of love in students. The approach teachers employ reflects the concept of *uswah hasanah* (exemplary behavior), as emphasized by Al-Ghazali, that the most effective education is based on concrete examples,

not merely verbal instruction [31]. At MAS Darussalam, this practice of exemplary behavior is evident in the teachers' patient, gentle, and understanding attitudes toward students' emotional states.

Teachers not only act as *mu'allim* (teacher of knowledge), but also as *murobbi* (spiritual and emotional guides). They encourage students to greet each other, smile, and pray for their absent classmates. This simple practice psychologically fosters empathy, intimacy, and social solidarity among students. According to Henderson, compassion-based education fosters emotional warmth, which serves as the foundation for positive character development [10]. This approach aligns with Mustofa and Kawakip's thinking, which states that students are inherently searching for the meaning of life and transcendental relationships, so education must provide space for spiritual expression [35]. Thus, teachers at MAS Darussalam not only transfer knowledge but also foster an awareness of divine love as the foundation of morality and humanity.

The madrasah principal plays a strategic role as a leader of love-based education. Based on interviews with the madrasah principal, weekly teacher development meetings are held to ensure that the values of love become the spirit of all educational activities. This approach illustrates transformative leadership oriented towards the formation of a spiritual culture of the school. According to Irfan Sain, religious leadership that emphasizes the spiritual dimension and compassion can improve the psychological well-being of teachers and create a healthy learning environment [3]. The madrasah principal at MAS Darussalam not only monitors academic performance but also emphasizes that teachers must act as guides to the hearts of students. This reinforces the concept of *tarbiyah al-qulub* (education of the heart) which is a characteristic of humanistic Islamic education [34, 33]. The madrasah principal's direct involvement in teacher supervision and development also demonstrates a form of participatory leadership. Thus, the love-based curriculum is not only conceptually designed but is truly internalized through exemplary behavior and the madrasah's spiritual management.

The madrasah culture that has developed at MAS Darussalam is a vital element in bringing a love-based curriculum to life. The practice of "Greetings and Smiles" every morning fosters an inclusive and respectful atmosphere, in line with the Humanistic Approach in Education theory. Abidin et al. emphasized the importance of the affective environment as a platform for developing empathy and compassion [4]. The teacher's approach to handling violations through dialogue and moral reflection also reflects the application of positive discipline. There is no emotional or repressive punishment, but rather a self-reflective learning approach. According to Meehan, spiritual reflection helps students understand the moral dimensions of their actions, thus developing autonomous and responsible characters [5].

Based on these findings, the madrasah culture at MAS Darussalam has evolved into an educational ecosystem aligned with the concept of a love-centered school culture, in which social interaction, communication patterns, and learning processes are grounded in the principles of love, empathy, and respect for human dignity. The results of the study further indicate that the internalization of love-based values extends beyond classroom instruction and is consistently manifested in various social and religious activities within the madrasah environment. Programs such as "Social Service for Love for Others", "Green Madrasah Movement", and "*Qolbi Mentoring*" become real vehicles for students to express love for others, the environment, and Allah SWT.

It demonstrates that education at MAS Darussalam applies the principle of experiential learning, namely learning through spiritual and social experiences. According to Kesi, socio-religious activities can strengthen students' spiritual intelligence and social empathy, both of which are core to Islamic character [26]. Therefore, the dimension of love in education at this madrasah is not theoretical but implemented in a practical and sustainable manner. The value of love for God is manifested in worship, love for others in social solidarity, and love for the environment in ecological responsibility.

Every teacher at MAS Darussalam strives to integrate the values of love and spirituality into the

subjects they teach. This practice aligns with Listiana et al. and Miswanto and Ayu's view of the spiritual curriculum, a curriculum that combines intellectual intelligence with spiritual awareness [38, 39]. In Biology, students are invited to reflect on the greatness of Allah through His creation; in Indonesian, they write works on the theme of love; and in Islamic Cultural History, they emulate the morals of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This integration demonstrates the application of the concept of integrative pedagogy as explained by Kurniawan et al. and Muktamiroh et al. that Islamic Religious Education learning ideally combines cognitive (*ta'lim*), moral (*tarbiyah*), and spiritual (*tazkiyatun nafs*) aspects [14, 40]. Thus, the love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam has realized a holistic approach that touches on the three main domains of Islamic education: reason, heart, and behavior.

The evaluation system at MAS Darussalam focuses on character and spiritual development, not just academic achievement. Through Character Observation Sheets, Self-Reflection Journals, and Individual Mentoring, teachers comprehensively assess students' emotional and moral development. This approach aligns with the concept of assessment for spiritual growth, which assesses the learning process as a growth in values and self-awareness, not just academic outcomes [36, 37].

Weekly reflections and the Divine Love Sermon serve as important tools for assessing students' understanding of the meaning of love as a transcendental value. Thus, this evaluation system reflects the madrasah's efforts to comprehensively measure students' spiritual and moral development.

Based on the overall findings and analysis, it can be concluded that the implementation of a love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai is a concrete form of humanistic and spiritual Islamic education. There are four main components that are interconnected: (1) teachers as role models who instill the value of love through role models, empathy, and heart-to-heart communication; (2) the Principal as a spiritual director who maintains the spirit of compassion in all educational activities; and (3) madrasa culture as an ecosystem that supports the practice of love through positive habits, empathetic discipline, and social solidarity.

This approach aligns with the views of Alamsyah, that modern Sufism-based education can be a solution to the moral crisis of the younger generation, because it fosters love, empathy, and sincerity as core values of Islamic education [41]. By integrating the values of love, compassion, spirituality, and character into all aspects of madrasah life, MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai has succeeded in realizing the concept of love-centered education based on Islamic teachings. This curriculum is not just a teaching system, but a system of heart and moral formation that touches the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual realms. This kind of education becomes an alternative model for other Islamic institutions to build a generation with noble character, empathetic soul, and peace-loving in line with the mission of the Prophet Muhammad as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study on the Love-Based Curriculum from the perspective of spiritual and character education at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai, it can be concluded that the madrasah has effectively implemented an educational model centered on the values of compassion, empathy, and spirituality. The application of the love-based curriculum extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge (cognitive dimensions) to encompass the cultivation of students' moral consciousness and emotional development through a humanistic and faith-oriented approach.

The love-based curriculum concept at MAS Darussalam is based on four main pillars: love for Allah SWT, love for fellow human beings, love for knowledge, and love for the environment. These four values are integrated into all learning activities and madrasah life. The implementation of this curriculum is evident in daily habits such as communal prayer, Quran recitation, self-reflection,

community service activities, and environmental movements. These values make education at MAS Darussalam a process of cultivating the heart (*tarbiyah al-qulub*) and forming morals, not be simply a cognitive-based education. The role of teachers in implementing this curriculum is also significant. Teachers act as spiritual guides, instilling the value of love through role models, emotional care, and a gentle and empathetic learning approach. The principal acts as the primary mentor and director, ensuring that all educational components are aligned with the school's spiritual vision and character. A holistic evaluation system is developed, encompassing academic, affective, and spiritual dimensions, utilizing Character Observation Sheets and student Self-Reflection Journals.

From a policy perspective, it is urgent to implement a love-based curriculum more systematically by strengthening curriculum documents that include indicators of love and compassion. Madrasas need to develop measurable spiritual and character-based curriculum guidelines and ensure that all teachers understand the concept of love-based education as an integral part of learning. Regular training on emotional and spiritual learning is needed to enable teachers to deliver lessons that touch the hearts and morals of students. In general, the research results show that the implementation of a love-based curriculum at MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai has a positive impact on students' behavior, discipline, and social relationships. Teacher-student relationships become more harmonious, empathy levels increase, and the learning atmosphere is peaceful and respectful. Thus, this madrasa has succeeded in presenting an Islamic education model that aligns with the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for the universe), education that spreads love for all of Allah SWT's creatures.

However, this study has limitations. It was conducted in only one location, namely MAS Darussalam Simpang Limun Bangai, so its findings may not be fully generalizable to other schools with different contexts. Furthermore, the qualitative approach used limited the research to an in-depth understanding of individual experiences and perceptions, which cannot describe conditions quantitatively or with a larger sample. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope to several schools or madrasas with different characteristics, and to use quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to obtain more comprehensive data.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in expanding the literature on love-based curriculum in the context of Islamic education, particularly in madrasas. This research not only enriches understanding of the integration of spiritual and character values in education but also offers a curriculum implementation model that can be applied in other madrasas. Thus, the results of this study provide a foundation for the development of a more structured and applicable spirituality- and character-based curriculum in Islamic education.

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