Volume 6 Number 2 2026

ISSN 2797-3840 (Print)
2797-992X (Online)

Indonesian Journal of Islamic Elementary Education

http://e-journal.uingusdur.ac.id/ijiee
DOI: https://doi.org/10.28918/xwyaaz73

Implementation and Challenges of the Love Based Curriculum (KBC) in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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Submission:	*Revision:*	*Accepted:*	*Published:*
May 5, 2026	*October 30, 2026*	*November 16, 2026*	*November 23, 2026*

Abstract: Transforming the affective curriculum is vital for elementary madrasahs preparing for *Indonesia Emas 2045* by aligning intellectual capabilities with emotional and spiritual maturity. This study examines the implementation and operational challenges of the Love Based Curriculum at MI Asas Islam Kalibening. Employing an interpretive qualitative phenomenological design, the study captured the lived experiences of five purposively selected educators. Data were gathered through semi structured in person interviews and field notes, then analyzed using NVivo 12 Pro. Findings reveal a tiered, compassion centered curriculum tailored to students' psychological development across learning phases. Key operational challenges included nomos oriented cultural barriers, methodological rigidity in exact science modules, and physical fatigue from managing 19 learning groups. These pressures were mitigated by the principal's servant leadership model, notably an open door policy providing psychological decompression, as well as the curriculum division's provision of adaptive instructional materials and video tutorials. Theoretically, these findings extend the Job Demands Resources model within emotionally protective school ecosystems. Practically, the study underscores the urgent necessity to reduce daily administrative burdens and institutionalize mental health support for educators in Islamic primary education.

Keywords: *affective curriculum, love-based curriculum, servant leadership, teacher well being, islamic elementary school*

How to Cite:
Anwar, C., & Umami, M. (2026). Implementation and challenges of the love-based curriculum (KBC) in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Elementary Education, 6*(2), 112–125. https://doi.org/10.28918/xwyaaz73

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education bears a significant responsibility as the primary instrument for improving the quality of human resources holistically and sustainably (Akmaluddin et al., 2025; Pratikno et al., 2022). Formal institutions no longer rely solely on academic achievements but are obligated to foster a generation with a strong personality and noble character. The instillation of character values is a crucial pillar for Islamic educational institutions in ensuring the success of Indonesia Emas 2045's grand vision (Hidayat, 2024). Success in achieving Indonesia Emas 2045 is designed through curricular transformation that aligns intellectual competencies with the emotional and spiritual maturity of all students.

Emotional and spiritual maturity must be instilled from an early age at the elementary school level, such as in madrasah ibtidaiyah. Madrasah ibtidaiyah occupy a strategic position as the foundational setting for instilling values of empathy, independence, and moral responsibility in young children (Awalita, 2023). A well-planned instructional environment is essential during this developmental phase to help students internalize positive habits (Sajja et al., 2025). Efforts to foster these positive habits have recently been undertaken through various curricular policy adoptions at the Islamic elementary school level, one of which is reflected in an analysis of the dynamics of implementing a new operational curriculum for specific subject clusters in fourth-grade madrasah ibtidaiyah (Umami, 2025).

National policy positions universal compassion as the central driving force behind all instructional activities in madrasahs (Laili, 2024). Instructional activities in the classroom aim to reform the conventional education system to create an inclusive learning environment that supports students' emotional well-being (Taryati & Tarsidi, 2025). Ensuring students' emotional safety is believed to be effective in mitigating the spread of psychological violence, bullying, and intolerance in educational settings (H. A. Putri, 2024). Addressing these social issues will shift the rigid teacher-student relationship toward a warmer, more dialogic model of academic guidance.

A warm, dialogic tutoring model has, in fact, triggered a complex paradigm shift for educators in the field (Ratmawati et al., 2024). Educators are often hindered by the rigidity of traditional mindsets among some teachers who remain focused on formal legal aspects (nomos-oriented) or mere administrative obligations (Rothstein & Johnson, 2025). This obsession with administrative compliance creates serious methodological challenges when they are required to develop instructional modules that organically integrate the Five Principles of Love. The organic formulation of the five values of love is ultimately difficult to practice consistently due to the packed daily teaching schedule and the heavy burden of curriculum achievement targets.

The heavy burden of curriculum achievement targets has sparked extensive scholarly debate among academics about the effectiveness of instilling the value of compassion. Research by Kahfi et al. (2025) indicates that incorporating the principle of compassion into language learning can foster an inclusive learning environment while simultaneously boosting students' intrinsic motivation. This intrinsic motivation of students, fostered by the humanistic curriculum, is further supported by Hatima (2025), who found success in instilling the value of love through literary content, such as poetry, and in drafting lesson plans. These draft language lesson plans emphasize that the success of instilling noble character depends heavily on the consistency of educators, as well as the full support of madrasah policies.

Full support for madrasah policies has also begun to guide the expansion of the implementation of compassion values into technology and basic science curricula. In the digital realm, research by Nasrul et al. (2026) integrates a blended learning model to foster a warm, emotionally and spiritually supportive climate for students. The emotional-spiritual climate of students in science literacy is reinforced by the findings of Ulzana et al. (2025), who incorporated the values of empathy and environmental responsibility into basic biology materials. Unfortunately, basic biology materials and prior publications are still dominated by conceptual literature reviews. Hence, empirical evaluations of the dynamics of institutional barriers at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level remain very limited.

The limitations of empirical evaluations at the elementary school level provide the primary rationale for this study. This study examines the implementation and operational challenges of the Love-Based Curriculum at MI Asas Islam Kalibening, with particular attention to the implementation profile, internal supporting factors, and structural barriers encountered in its implementation. This analysis offers scientific novelty by providing an objective mapping of the dynamics of educators' transition from conventional instructional patterns toward loving communication. The investigation focuses on private Islamic elementary schools, using a case study at MI Asas Islam Kalibening in Salatiga. Specifically, it examines daily instructional dynamics and internal school policies, involving key informants such as the madrasah principal, the vice principal for curriculum, and classroom teachers.

METHOD

This study employed an interpretive, qualitative phenomenological approach to explore in depth the meaning of educators' lived experiences during the transition to the Love-Based Curriculum (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This transition to the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) aims to map the subjective perceptions and inner struggles of individuals

at MI Asas Islam Kalibening, a private institution with 19 learning groups serving more than 550 active students. The hundreds of active students in these classes necessitated the selection of informants through purposive sampling, based on the criteria that participants had direct experience with the research topic and possessed contrasting professional characteristics (Patton, 2014). Contrasting professional characteristics were the primary consideration for the researcher in selecting five key informants, including the school principal (KM-01), the vice principal for curriculum (VP-02), a senior civil servant teacher in Grade 1 Phase A (G-03), a professional teacher in Grade 4 Phase B (G-04), and a professional teacher in Grade 5 Phase C (G-05).

Field data were collected intensively through face-to-face semi-structured interviews without the use of digital voice recorders to ensure the informants' psychological comfort. This psychological comfort encouraged the open expression of their thoughts, which the researcher documented in real time as a draft textual transcript throughout the daily dialogues. The daily dialogues, which lasted 20-45 minutes per participant, were then refined through field notes immediately after the interviews ended. After the interviews concluded, the completed independent draft transcripts were read repeatedly to capture an overview of the data and identify potential segments of the phenomenon of pedagogy of love.

The transcripts of these phenomena were then analyzed qualitatively using NVivo 12 Pro, involving the stages of conceptualization, classification, and digital coding (Edwards-Jones, 2014). The digital code categories were then integrated into the identification of essential themes, which were dialectically linked to the draft theoretical construct and graphical modeling. The interpretation of textual meaning followed this graphical modeling by re-examining participants' original understanding to ensure data validity, using triangulation strategies and member checking. The member-checking strategy, combined with the digital audit trail in NVivo, ensures full transparency of all philosophical conclusions drawn from the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on field observations, intensive interviews, and field notes gathered at MI Asas Islam Kalibening, the empirical findings demonstrate a substantial transformation within the school learning climate following the adoption of the Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta or KBC). The institutionalization of KBC established multifaceted instructional dynamics across 19 learning groups accommodating more than 550 active students. In managing this large student body, educators confronted differentiated psychological challenges across distinct developmental phases while simultaneously

managing heavy daily teaching schedules. This demanding operational environment produced significant initial friction, primarily characterized by dissonance between long-standing conventional disciplinarian habits and newly introduced humanistic communication protocols.



Figure 1. Words that frequently appear in the data (Source: NVivo 12 Pro Analysis)

As visualized in Figure 1, lexical frequency analysis conducted through NVivo 12 Pro identified core lexical nodes dominated by terms such as *kelas*, *madrasah*, *kurikulum*, *cinta*, *KBC*, and *kasih*. The prominent presence of *kasih* and *cinta* empirically confirms the institution's conscious effort to transform conventional authoritarian interactions into warm, dialogic educational engagements. Concurrently, the frequent co-occurrence of operational keywords such as *hambatan*, *waktu*, and *mengajar* highlights acute professional pressure experienced by educators in the field. These recurring nodes reflect shared teacher concerns regarding packed instructional timetables, tight curriculum achievement targets, and an intensive administrative documentation burden.

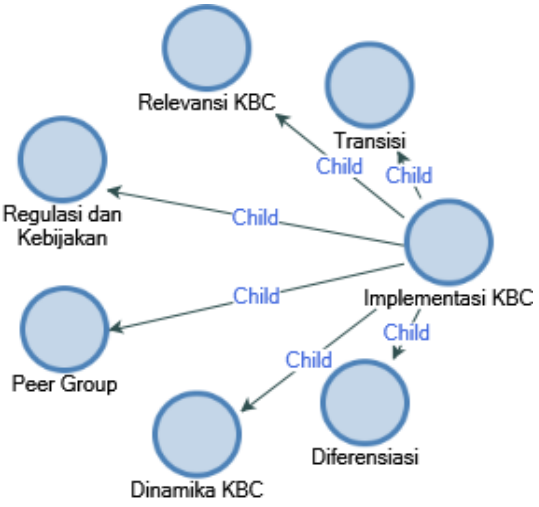

Figure 2. KBC Implementation Project Map (Source: NVivo 12 Pro Analysis)

The qualitative project map in Figure 2 illustrates that the classroom execution of KBC does not occur uniformly, but is organically tiered in response to the specific psychological characteristics of elementary students across different educational phases. In Phase A, which comprises first-grade classes, educators encountered heightened emotional volatility, separation anxiety stemming from the transition from early childhood schooling, and substantial physical dependency. Senior educator G-03 explained that teaching first-grade learners under KBC requires extraordinary emotional resilience, noting that whereas raising one's voice or issuing reprimands was previously commonplace to establish order, teachers are now expected to sit at the children's eye level, listen patiently, and provide gentle dialogic reassurance even when the classroom becomes unruly.

This pedagogical reality shifts as students enter Phase B in the fourth grade, where the primary instructional challenge transitions toward addressing emergent individual egos and growing cognitive autonomy. Teacher G-04 noted that fourth-grade learners increasingly resist direct top-down reprimands, compelling educators to establish participatory, respectful classroom agreements rather than punitive prohibitions. The complexity of educational interaction reaches its apex in Phase C among fifth-grade students, where maturing pre-adolescent identities within peer group relations frequently produce subtle relational friction. Teacher G-05 observed that interpersonal disputes, verbal sarcasm, and covert social exclusion frequently disrupt classroom harmony. To address these challenges under KBC, educators in Phase C actively abandoned unilateral sanctions, instead adopting restorative dialogic mediation to resolve peer friction without compromising student dignity.

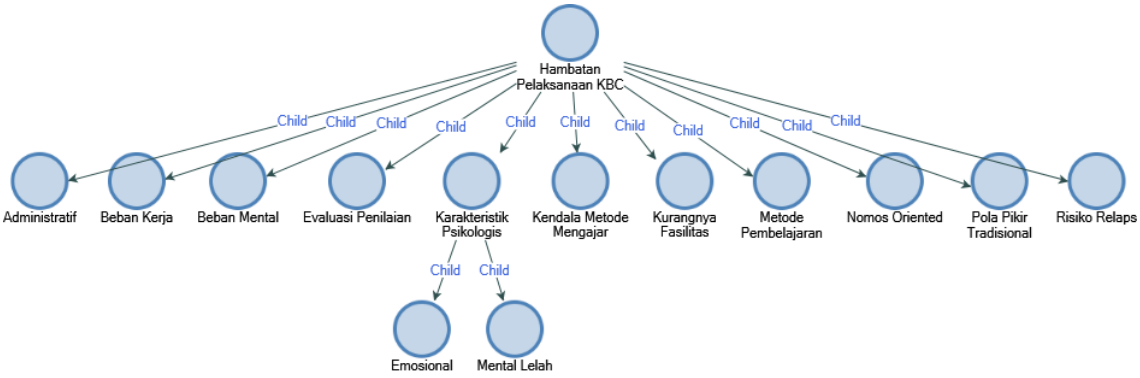

Figure 3. Project Map: Anatomy of KBC Barriers (Source: NVivo 12 Pro Analysis)

Despite widespread institutional commitment, qualitative coding revealed substantial structural and methodological obstacles that hindered smooth curriculum delivery, as mapped in Figure 3. A primary impediment was the persistent legacy of a *nomos-oriented* institutional culture, which prioritized rigid formal regulations, legalistic enforcement, and strict administrative compliance. For senior teachers like G-03, abandoning traditional disciplinary models generated noticeable cognitive dissonance, because the flexible,

compassionate ethos of KBC seemed incompatible with historical standards of strict classroom discipline.

Furthermore, methodological deadlocks emerged during instructional module preparation, particularly for exact science subjects such as mathematics. Teachers G-04 and G-05 experienced considerable difficulty translating the five principles of love into abstract, quantitative topics, which often led to artificial module designs where affective values appeared merely as superficial reflection questions at the close of lessons rather than organic pedagogical components. Compounding these instructional obstacles was acute physical and mental exhaustion resulting from teaching across 19 parallel classes. Educators reported that cumulative fatigue eroded their patience, significantly increasing the risk of behavioral relapse where teachers instinctively reverted to coercive and repressive measures when encountering disruptive classroom behavior.

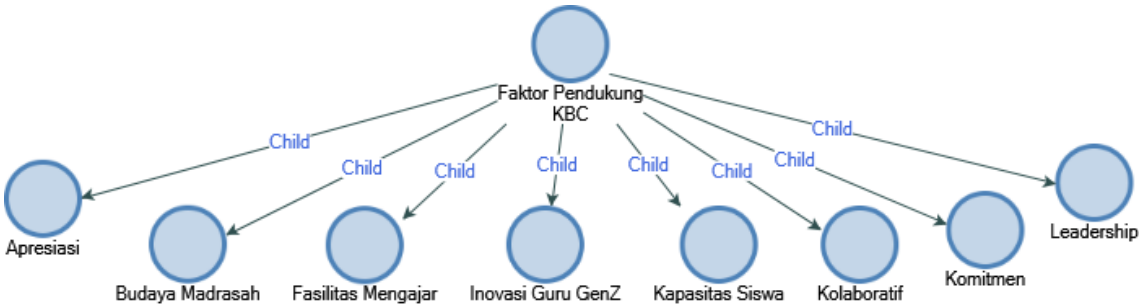

Figure 4. Project Map of KBC Enabling Factors (Source: NVivo 12 Pro Analysis)

To counteract educator burnout and facilitate a successful transition, the madrasah instituted systemic leadership interventions and collaborative support mechanisms, as displayed in Figure 4. A key supporting factor was the servant-leadership approach demonstrated by the madrasah principal (KM-01) through the implementation of an open-door policy. This initiative provided an informal, non-evaluative space where educators could openly share instructional frustrations, decompress emotionally, and receive constructive psychological support without fearing administrative penalties.

This administrative support was reinforced by the vice principal for curriculum (VP-02), who alleviated teacher planning burdens by distributing standardized instructional templates, exemplar lesson plans, and practical video tutorials that illustrated love-based instructional techniques. Relieved of excessive administrative design stress, younger Generation Z educators capitalized on digital tools and artificial intelligence to create engaging, student-centered classroom activities. Moreover, continuous institutional alignment among school foundation leaders, the madrasah committee, and student guardians fostered a supportive environment of trust that sustained educators' collective commitment to realizing holistic educational reform.

Discussion

The empirical findings from MI Asas Islam Kalibening substantiate the foundational tenets of humanistic education and affective curriculum theories, which assert that academic excellence cannot be cultivated in the absence of emotional security (Okur-Berberoglu, 2024). The tiered operationalization of KBC across Phase A, Phase B, and Phase C reinforces the ethic of care framework (Goode et al., 2025), confirming that authentic moral education develops through reciprocal, dialogic engagement rather than authoritarian dominance. Transitioning from punitive control to relational reassurance in early elementary grades addresses formative separation vulnerabilities (Septiani et al., 2025), affirming earlier scholarly arguments that foundational learning readiness relies heavily on consistent emotional warmth and dialogic communication (Efrat, 2022; Ishankhankyzy et al., 2026).

Moreover, the developmental challenges documented in upper-grade classes align directly with Erikson's psychosocial theory regarding the developmental crisis of industry versus inferiority (Miller & Lang, 2022). Educational environments that rely predominantly on rigid, unilateral disciplinary regimes risk compounding pre-adolescent identity crises, which can foster covert aggression, diminished social competence, and student anxiety (Lamere, 2025; Maulidia et al., 2025; Somadi et al., 2025). By replacing punitive detentions with restorative mediation circles, educators actively protected student self-worth and fostered inclusive classroom environments (Sunarsih et al., 2025; Wardana, 2025). Nonetheless, as observed by Holili & Fitriyah (2025) and Suparman et al. (2026), institutional cultural transitions inherently create professional friction unless institutional workload allocations and administrative schedules are restructured simultaneously.

A central theoretical contribution of this investigation lies in uncovering the dialectical tension between historical *nomos-oriented* mindsets and the relational demands of an affective curriculum. In private Islamic elementary institutions, deeply ingrained commitments to bureaucratic compliance and legalistic discipline frequently constitute substantial barriers to pedagogical transformation (Rohman et al., 2024; Rothstein & Johnson, 2025). When teaching performance continues to be evaluated predominantly through syllabus completion metrics and administrative audits, mandates for affective integration induce professional dissonance, producing superficial instructional designs where values of empathy are merely appended to technical subject matter (Pratiwi, 2026; R. K. A. Putri et al., 2025).

This observed operational strain provides strong empirical grounding for the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model within primary Islamic schooling contexts (Bakker et al., 2023). The severe physical exhaustion and acute vulnerability to behavioral relapse reported by teachers managing 19 parallel classes demonstrate that unmanaged qualitative job demands rapidly deplete educators' cognitive and emotional reserves (Zang et al., 2022). In

the absence of institutional decompression spaces, educators inevitably encounter an exhaustion threshold where conventional repressive habits re-emerge as an involuntary survival response. This dynamic indicates that an affective educational ethos cannot be sustained by philosophical mandates alone; it necessitates a deliberate deconstruction of routine administrative workloads.

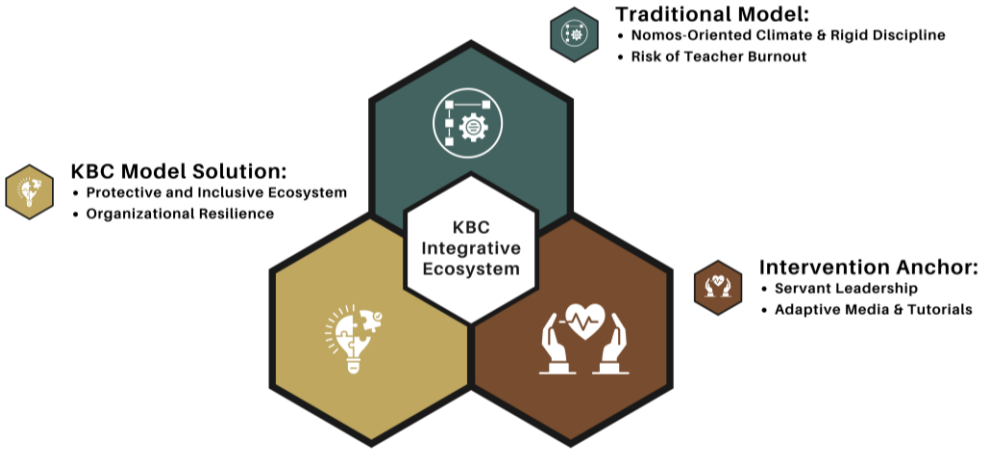

Figure 5. Deconstruction of the KBC Paradigm

Figure 5 conceptualizes the structural deconstruction achieved at MI Asas Islam Kalibening through a dialectical synthesis connecting regulatory compliance (*nomos*) with an institutional ethic of care (Azhari, 2025; Davies, 2024). The element that distinguishes this finding from conventional character education frameworks is the institutionalization of school leadership as an emotional buffer and psychological anchor. The servant-leadership model enacted by the principal, specifically operationalized through a non-evaluative open-door counseling mechanism, effectively transformed hierarchical supervision into an accessible mental health sanctuary (Uman et al., 2024). This structural safe haven provided educators with the psychological security necessary to manage pedagogical reform pressures.

Simultaneously, curriculum scaffolding provided by the vice principal served as an essential external job resource that minimized the cognitive burden associated with daily lesson preparation (Tariq et al., 2025). Relieved of excessive administrative design stress, younger educators actively integrated generative AI and interactive digital media into their daily teaching practices (Chan & Lee, 2023; Chardonnens, 2025). This internal synergy was further strengthened through close collaboration among foundation leaders, school committees, and student guardians, building comprehensive organizational resilience capable of advancing educational reform toward the Indonesia Emas 2045 vision (Lee et al., 2022).

These findings offer clear practical implications for Islamic elementary education. School administrators and educational policymakers must recognize that introducing

affective curricula requires structural workload mitigation, regular mental health support provisions for teachers, and the development of standardized, AI-assisted modular resources to minimize planning fatigue. Regarding limitations, this study was conducted as a single-site qualitative inquiry examining an initial nine-month transitional period within a private madrasah, meaning the observed institutional dynamics may not fully reflect the organizational realities of public elementary schools with different bureaucratic systems. Future research should employ longitudinal mixed-methods designs across diverse geographical settings to assess the quantitative impact of love-based pedagogies on student academic achievement indices alongside continuous socio-emotional maturation metrics.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) at MI Asas Islam Kalibening has empirically demonstrated the dialectic of a humanistic curriculum transition, graded according to students' psychological uniqueness across learning phases. These dynamic learning phases triggered operational obstacles, including clashes with traditional nomos-oriented mindsets, methodological deadlocks in the design of artificial exact science modules, and high levels of physical exhaustion among educators in the field. Educators in the field facing this accumulation of conventional workloads were successfully spared the risk of frustration through inner-focused interventions based on servant leadership by the school principal, as well as the facilitation of adaptive instructional documents by the curriculum division. The curriculum deputy, in collaboration with institutional management, contributed to expanding the theoretical frameworks of job demands-resources and humanistic curriculum models by validating a formula for reconstructing an emotionally protective school ecosystem. The emotionally protective school ecosystem in this cluster of private madrasahs underscores the urgency of conducting longitudinal follow-up research using a mixed-methods, cross-regional approach to test the model's validity in public elementary school settings.

Author's Declaration:

Artificial Intelligence Statement

The authors utilized Artificial Intelligence (AI) assistance to optimize the manuscript draft and refine textual phrasing. All research conceptualizations, methodological frameworks, field data collection, qualitative analyses using NVivo 12 Pro, data interpretations, and conclusions were independently conducted, critically evaluated, and finalized by the authors.

Author Contribution Statement

CA was responsible for the research conceptualization, field data collection, digital coding and analysis using NVivo 12 Pro, data curation, and drafting the manuscript. MU contributed to the methodological validation, academic supervision, theoretical framework development, critical review, and substantive revision of the draft. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication.

Funding Statement

No funding received.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no financial, institutional, or personal conflict of interest regarding the research or publication of this article.

Ethical Clearance

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in this study prior to data collection.

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