

Dynamics, Problems, and Solutions in the Implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum as Reinforcement of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Deep Learning Approach

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Abstract: The transformation of education in the twenty-first century requires learning approaches that not only emphasize cognitive achievement but also foster character development and humanistic values. In Indonesia, educational reform has been implemented through the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes student-centered learning, flexibility in instructional practices, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. In this context, the Love-Based Curriculum emerges as an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates empathy, compassion, and ethical values into the learning process. This study aims to analyze the dynamics, theoretical foundations, challenges, and strategic solutions related to the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and deep learning approaches. The research employs a qualitative method using a literature review design by examining relevant national and international scholarly sources. The findings indicate that the integration of love-based pedagogy and deep learning can support meaningful and holistic learning by fostering students' intellectual, emotional, and social development. The implementation of this approach also aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in promoting student-centered learning and character education. However, several challenges remain, including limited teacher understanding of love pedagogy, assessment systems that focus primarily on cognitive outcomes, and institutional constraints within schools. To address these challenges, the study proposes several strategies, including strengthening teacher professional development, developing holistic assessment models, and fostering collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Overall, the Love-Based Curriculum offers a promising framework for supporting holistic education and character development in Indonesian educational contexts.

Keywords : *dynamics and solutions, curriculum merdeka, love-based curriculum*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of education in the twenty-first century demands a significant shift in the paradigm of learning systems (Rusydi et al. 2025) (Kurniawan 2025). Education is no longer merely understood as a process of transferring knowledge from teachers to students but also as a process of character formation, emotional intelligence development, and the cultivation of social awareness. This paradigm shift is influenced by various global developments, including rapid technological advancement, increasingly complex social challenges, and the growing demand for twenty first-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Therefore, modern educational systems are required to develop learning approaches that are not

only oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the formation of broader human values.

In Indonesia, educational transformation has been realized through the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy, which is implemented through the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to provide flexibility for educational institutions in designing learning processes that are more contextual and student-centered (Nadzirah et al. 2026). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile as the foundation for students' character development (Purnomo et al. 2022). Through this approach, students are expected to develop critical, creative, and collaborative thinking skills to face future challenges.

One pedagogical approach that has gained increasing attention in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is deep learning in education. In the educational context, deep learning refers to a learning process that emphasizes conceptual understanding and encourages students to connect knowledge with real-life experiences. This approach encourages learners not merely to memorize information but to understand the meaning and relevance of knowledge in everyday life (Erlina et al. 2026). According to Fullan and Langworthy (2014), deep learning also plays a crucial role in developing higher-order thinking skills and encouraging students to become independent and reflective learners.

However, several studies suggest that deep learning cannot be optimally implemented without a supportive emotional and social learning environment. The interpersonal relationship between teachers and students plays an essential role in creating a conducive learning atmosphere. In this context, the concept of the pedagogy of love emerges as an approach that emphasizes empathy, care, and humanistic relationships within the educational process.

Education should not merely be interpreted as an emotion but as a pedagogical principle encompassing empathy, compassion, respect for human dignity, and a commitment to helping students develop their full potential. This perspective is supported by research conducted by (Díaz-Megolla and Falcon 2025), which shows that love-based pedagogical practices can enhance student engagement, strengthen social relationships in the classroom, and improve students' emotional well-being.

Within the Indonesian educational context, the concept of love pedagogy has developed into the idea of a Love-Based Curriculum. This curriculum places the value of love as the foundation of the educational process with the aim of creating a more humanistic and character-oriented learning environment. Rosadah and Koswara (2026) explain that a love-based curriculum integrates spiritual values, social empathy, and intellectual development within educational practices.

This concept is also consistent with various theories of humanistic education proposed by prominent educational thinkers such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Rogers argued that effective learning occurs when students feel valued, accepted, and emotionally supported within the learning environment (Rogers, 1983). Consequently, love-based education can serve as an effective approach to fostering meaningful learning experiences.

Despite its potential, the implementation of a love-based curriculum still faces several challenges. Previous studies indicate that many teachers do not fully understand the concept of love pedagogy or how to integrate it into classroom

practices (Heriyudanta & Pradana, 2025). Furthermore, educational evaluation systems that remain heavily focused on cognitive outcomes present another obstacle in measuring the success of value-based education.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of the development of a love-based curriculum within the educational system, identify the challenges in its implementation, and formulate strategic solutions for its application as a reinforcement of the Merdeka Curriculum through a deep learning approach.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. This method was chosen because the study aims to examine concepts, theories, and research findings related to the implementation of a love-based curriculum in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and the deep learning approach.

Research data were collected from various relevant academic sources, including international journals, scholarly books, research reports, and educational policy documents. Literature studies enable researchers to analyze theoretical perspectives and empirical findings published by previous scholars. According to (Creswell 2014), literature-based research is an effective approach for understanding educational phenomena comprehensively through the analysis of credible scientific sources. The data collection process was conducted through several stages. The first stage involved identifying literature related to the research topic, particularly studies concerning love pedagogy, value-based curriculum development, and deep learning in education. The second stage involved selecting literature based on relevance, academic credibility, and theoretical contribution to the research topic. The final stage involved analyzing the selected literature to identify key concepts (Sugiyono 2019), research findings, and implications relevant to the study.

The data analysis technique used in this study was descriptive qualitative analysis, which involves organizing the collected data from various literature sources and interpreting the data to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and implementation of the love-based curriculum in educational systems.

DISCUSSION

Dynamics of the Love-Based Curriculum in Education

The development of the Love-Based Curriculum represents a significant shift in contemporary educational discourse, particularly within the context of character education and humanistic learning approaches. Education in the twenty-first century increasingly recognizes that cognitive development alone is insufficient to prepare students for the complex social, cultural, and ethical challenges of modern society. As a result, many educational systems have begun to emphasize the importance of integrating emotional intelligence, empathy, and moral values into formal learning environments. The Love-Based Curriculum emerges as one of the innovative approaches aimed at addressing this need.

In general, the Love-Based Curriculum is grounded in the belief that education should cultivate not only intellectual competence but also compassion (Mustagfiroh et al. 2025), empathy (Irayanti 2026), and ethical awareness among learners. Within this framework, love is understood as a pedagogical value that shapes the relationships between teachers and students, as well as the broader

learning environment. Love in education does not merely refer to emotional affection but rather to a professional commitment to nurturing students' holistic development, including their intellectual, emotional, and moral growth.

The concept of love as a pedagogical principle has been widely discussed in educational literature. Humanistic education theorists emphasize that meaningful learning occurs when students feel respected, supported, and valued by their teachers. Rogers (1983) argues that an atmosphere of empathy and acceptance plays a crucial role in fostering student motivation and engagement. Similarly, the importance of caring relationships in education (Noddings, 2003.), arguing that ethical care should become a central principle guiding teaching practices.

Within the Indonesian educational context, the emergence of the Love-Based Curriculum is closely related to broader educational reforms that emphasize character education and moral development. Indonesia has long recognized the importance of character formation as a fundamental goal of education, as reflected in national policies such as the Pancasila Student Profile and the strengthening of character education programs. These initiatives emphasize values such as cooperation, empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility.

The Love-Based Curriculum can be seen as an extension of these efforts, providing a more explicit pedagogical framework for integrating values of compassion and empathy into teaching and learning processes. In particular, the concept has gained significant attention within Islamic educational institutions, especially madrasahs, which operate under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In these institutions, the Love-Based Curriculum is often integrated with religious values and spiritual education.

According to Malik (2025), the Love-Based Curriculum in Indonesian madrasahs is designed to promote several dimensions of love, including love for God, love for humanity, love for the nation, and love for the environment. These dimensions reflect the integration of religious teachings with broader humanistic values, creating a comprehensive educational framework that emphasizes both spiritual and social development.

The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Indonesian madrasahs also reflects an effort to respond to contemporary social challenges. In recent years, educators and policymakers have expressed concerns regarding issues such as declining moral values, intolerance, and social fragmentation. As a multicultural society with diverse religious (Maritim and Buchori 2025) and cultural backgrounds, Indonesia faces the challenge of fostering social harmony and mutual respect among its citizens. In this context, education plays a crucial role in cultivating values of tolerance, empathy, and peaceful coexistence.

Research conducted by (Basori et al. 2025) on the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah demonstrates how this approach can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Their study shows that teachers who adopt love-based pedagogical practices tend to emphasize collaboration, mutual respect, and emotional support within classroom interactions. As a result, students develop stronger interpersonal relationships and demonstrate higher levels of engagement in learning activities.

Furthermore, the Love-Based Curriculum also encourages the integration of moral and spiritual values into academic subjects. Rather than treating character education as a separate component of the curriculum, love-based pedagogy integrates ethical reflection and moral awareness into various learning activities.

For example, teachers may encourage students to reflect on ethical dimensions of social issues, participate in community service projects, or engage in collaborative activities that promote empathy and cooperation.

Another important dimension of the Love-Based Curriculum in Indonesia is its connection with religious moderation and interreligious harmony. Indonesia has actively promoted the concept of religious moderation as a strategy to maintain social cohesion and prevent the spread of radical ideologies. Within this framework, love-based education can serve as an effective tool for cultivating attitudes of tolerance and respect for diversity.

Fahrudin, Afandi, and Rahman (2026) argue that love-based pedagogical approaches can strengthen religious moderation by encouraging students to appreciate differences and engage in constructive dialogue with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Their research highlights that students who are exposed to love-based educational practices are more likely to develop inclusive attitudes and demonstrate respect for cultural and religious diversity.

In addition to its role in promoting social harmony, the Love-Based Curriculum also contributes to the development of emotional intelligence and social competence among students. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Educational psychologists emphasize that emotional intelligence plays a critical role in students' academic success, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being.

By fostering empathetic relationships between teachers and students, the Love-Based Curriculum helps create a classroom environment where students feel psychologically safe and supported. Such environments encourage students to express their ideas openly, participate in collaborative discussions, and develop confidence in their abilities.

Despite these positive potentials, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Indonesia still faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the limited understanding among teachers regarding the practical application of love-based pedagogical principles. While many educators agree with the importance of compassion and empathy in education, they may struggle to translate these abstract values into concrete teaching strategies.

Napitupulu and Aziz (2025) note that effective implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum requires systematic teacher training and professional development programs. Teachers need to develop skills in emotional intelligence, reflective teaching, and relationship-based pedagogy in order to effectively implement love-based learning practices.

Another challenge concerns curriculum integration. Some educational institutions may find it difficult to integrate love-based values with existing curricular frameworks and assessment systems. Traditional educational models often prioritize academic achievement and standardized testing, which may leave limited space for emotional and relational aspects of learning.

However, recent educational reforms in Indonesia, particularly the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, provide new opportunities for integrating love-based educational approaches. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, project-based learning, and the

development of the Pancasila Student Profile. These principles align closely with the values promoted by the Love-Based Curriculum.

Syafaruddin, Sarda, and Mawaddah (2025) argue that the integration of the Love-Based Curriculum with deep learning approaches within the Merdeka Curriculum framework can create a holistic educational model that supports intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development simultaneously. Such integration allows educators to design learning experiences that encourage critical thinking, collaboration, empathy, and ethical reflection.

In conclusion, the dynamics of the Love-Based Curriculum in Indonesian education reflect an ongoing effort to create a more humanistic and value-oriented educational system. By emphasizing compassion, empathy, and ethical awareness, the Love-Based Curriculum contributes to the development of students who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and morally grounded. As educational reforms continue to evolve, the integration of love-based pedagogy with contemporary approaches such as deep learning and the Merdeka Curriculum holds significant potential for transforming educational practices in Indonesia.

Theoretical Foundations of Love Pedagogy

The theoretical foundations of love pedagogy are rooted in a combination of educational philosophies that emphasize the importance of human relationships, compassion, and ethical responsibility in the learning process. In contemporary educational discourse, love is increasingly recognized not merely as an emotional expression but as a pedagogical principle that shapes the ways teachers interact with students and design learning environments. The concept of love-based pedagogy draws from several theoretical traditions, including humanistic education, relational pedagogy, compassionate education, and religious educational philosophy. Together, these perspectives highlight that effective education must address not only intellectual development but also emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human growth.

Humanistic education theory provides one of the most influential foundations for understanding the role of love in teaching and learning. Humanistic theorists argue that education should focus on the holistic development of learners by recognizing their emotional needs, personal aspirations, and social relationships. Rogers (1983) emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs in environments where students feel accepted, respected, and psychologically safe. When teachers demonstrate empathy and unconditional positive regard toward students, learners are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and a genuine interest in learning.

Similarly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights the importance of fulfilling students' psychological and emotional needs before higher-order learning can occur. According to Maslow (1970), individuals must first experience feelings of safety, belonging, and esteem before they can achieve self-actualization. In educational settings, these needs can be fulfilled through supportive teacher-student relationships characterized by trust, empathy, and care. The presence of these relational elements creates a learning environment where students feel valued and encouraged to participate actively in academic activities.

Within this humanistic perspective, love becomes a central element in creating positive educational experiences. Loreman (2011) conceptualizes love in education as a professional and ethical commitment that encompasses empathy,

patience, kindness, and genuine concern for students' well-being. According to Loreman, love-based teaching practices involve recognizing the individuality of each student and creating learning opportunities that support both academic achievement and personal growth. Teachers who adopt love-based pedagogical approaches strive to cultivate classroom environments where students feel emotionally supported and intellectually challenged at the same time.

Another important theoretical perspective supporting love pedagogy is relational pedagogy, which focuses on the significance of interpersonal relationships in the educational process. Relational pedagogy views learning as a social activity that occurs through meaningful interactions between teachers and students. Henderson and Smith (2021) argue that strong teacher–student relationships form the foundation for effective learning because they foster trust, motivation, and engagement. When students perceive that their teachers genuinely care about their success and well-being, they become more willing to participate in classroom discussions, collaborate with peers, and explore complex ideas.

Relational pedagogy also emphasizes the importance of dialogue and mutual respect in the classroom. Rather than viewing education as a one-directional transfer of knowledge, relational approaches consider teaching and learning as collaborative processes. Teachers and students engage in meaningful conversations that encourage critical thinking, reflection, and shared understanding. In such environments, students feel empowered to express their opinions and develop confidence in their intellectual abilities.

The relevance of relational pedagogy becomes even more significant in contemporary educational contexts characterized by diversity and inclusivity. Inclusive education seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their social, cultural, or educational backgrounds, have equal opportunities to participate in learning processes. emphasize that inclusive pedagogy requires teachers to recognize the diverse emotional and social needs of learners (Kelemen 2023). By adopting empathetic and compassionate teaching practices, educators can create learning environments that support the participation of all students(Conn and Murphy 2022).

Inclusive education also highlights the importance of understanding students' individual experiences and perspectives. Teachers who practice love-based pedagogy are more likely to acknowledge the unique strengths and challenges of each learner. This recognition encourages the development of personalized learning approaches that support students' academic and personal development.

Empirical research further reinforces the importance of compassion and empathy in educational practices. (Díaz-Megolla and Falcon 2025), in their systematic review of empirical research on love in education, found that love-based pedagogical practices significantly improve classroom climate, student engagement, and academic outcomes. Their study demonstrates that when teachers demonstrate genuine care and empathy toward students, learners develop stronger emotional connections to their school environment. These connections contribute to higher levels of motivation, participation, and overall learning satisfaction.

Beyond psychological and pedagogical theories, the concept of love in education also has strong foundations in religious and spiritual traditions, particularly within Islamic educational philosophy. In Islamic teachings, love

(*mahabbah*) and compassion (*rahmah*) are considered fundamental ethical principles that guide human relationships. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the importance of mercy, kindness, and compassion as essential virtues for believers.

One of the most significant references to compassion in Islamic teachings is the description of the Prophet Muhammad as "a mercy to all creation" (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*), as stated in the Qur'an (Qur'an 21:107). This concept highlights that compassion and kindness should become guiding principles in social interactions, including educational relationships. Within Islamic educational traditions, teachers are expected to demonstrate patience, empathy, and moral guidance when interacting with their students.

Classical Islamic scholars also emphasized the importance of compassionate teaching practices. Al-Ghazali, one of the most influential scholars in Islamic educational thought, argued that educators should treat students with affection and care, similar to the way parents nurture their children. According to Al-Ghazali, effective education requires not only intellectual instruction but also moral and spiritual guidance. Teachers should guide students toward ethical behavior, self-discipline, and spiritual awareness.

In this context, the concept of *tarbiyah bil mahabbah* education through love becomes highly relevant. *Tarbiyah bil mahabbah* emphasizes that educational interactions should be grounded in compassion, kindness, and mutual respect. Rather than relying solely on authority or discipline, teachers should cultivate positive relationships with students that encourage trust and open communication.

The integration of love-based pedagogical principles with Islamic educational philosophy provides a strong theoretical foundation for the development of the Love-Based Curriculum in Indonesia. Many madrasahs and Islamic educational institutions have begun to adopt love-based approaches in order to strengthen character education and moral development among students. These approaches aim to balance intellectual learning with the cultivation of ethical and spiritual values.

Furthermore, the incorporation of love-based pedagogy aligns with broader educational goals in Indonesia, particularly the emphasis on character education and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. The Pancasila Student Profile highlights values such as empathy, cooperation, global awareness, and respect for diversity. These values resonate strongly with the principles of love-based pedagogy, which emphasizes compassion, social responsibility, and ethical awareness.

By integrating humanistic educational theories, relational pedagogy, inclusive education, and Islamic ethical principles, the Love-Based Curriculum offers a comprehensive framework for holistic education. This approach recognizes that effective learning environments must support not only students' intellectual development but also their emotional well-being and moral character (Mukhlison and Susetiyo 2025) (Maslani et al. 2025).

In conclusion, the theoretical foundations of love pedagogy demonstrate that education is fundamentally a relational and ethical practice. Love-based educational approaches encourage teachers to cultivate compassionate learning environments where students feel valued, respected, and motivated to learn. When integrated with religious values and contemporary pedagogical theories,

love-based pedagogy can contribute significantly to the development of holistic educational systems that nurture both knowledge and character.

Integration of Love-Based Curriculum and Deep Learning

The concept of deep learning in education provides an important framework for understanding how a Love-Based Curriculum can support meaningful and transformative learning experiences. Deep learning refers to educational processes that encourage students to develop conceptual understanding, critical thinking skills, creativity (Maslani et al. 2025), and the ability to apply knowledge to real-life contexts. Unlike surface learning, which focuses primarily on memorization and the reproduction of information, deep learning emphasizes understanding, reflection, and the meaningful construction of knowledge (Kurniawan 2025).

Deep learning as a transformative educational approach that moves beyond traditional teaching methods centered on information transmission (Viccko 2016). Instead, deep learning (Cai et al. 2025) encourages students to actively engage with knowledge, question assumptions, collaborate with others, and develop solutions to authentic problems. This approach places students at the center of the learning process, enabling them to take ownership of their learning and develop the competencies needed to navigate complex social and global challenges.

Within the framework of deep learning, students are encouraged to become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Erlina et al. 2026). Learning activities often involve inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, collaborative problem solving, and reflective thinking (Rahmawati et al. 2025). These approaches allow students to explore ideas in greater depth, make connections between theoretical knowledge and real-world experiences, and develop higher-order thinking skills. As a result, deep learning supports the development of competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration, which are widely recognized as essential skills for the twenty-first century.

However, the implementation of deep learning requires more than innovative teaching strategies. It also depends on the creation of supportive and emotionally safe learning environments. Educational psychologists emphasize that students must feel psychologically secure in order to engage fully in challenging intellectual tasks. When learners experience anxiety, fear of failure, or negative judgment, they may avoid participating in discussions, expressing their ideas, or exploring unfamiliar perspectives.

This is where the principles of the Love-Based Curriculum become particularly relevant. A Love-Based Curriculum emphasizes empathy, compassion, and respect as core values guiding the learning process. By fostering caring relationships between teachers and students, this approach creates a supportive classroom atmosphere in which learners feel valued and respected. Such environments encourage students to take intellectual risks, express their opinions, and engage in meaningful dialogue with their peers.

The integration of love-based pedagogy with deep learning therefore creates a powerful synergy. Emotional support and compassionate relationships provide the psychological foundation necessary for deep intellectual engagement. When students perceive that their teachers genuinely care about their well-being and

academic success, they are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and curiosity. These factors play a crucial role in sustaining deep learning processes.

Furthermore, love-based educational practices promote the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies, which are closely connected to deep learning outcomes. Social and emotional learning involves the development of skills such as empathy, emotional regulation, responsible decision-making, and interpersonal communication. These competencies enable students to work collaboratively, manage challenges effectively, and build positive relationships within learning communities.

Collaborative learning environments supported by love-based pedagogy also enhance the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Students who experience empathy and mutual respect within their learning communities are more likely to engage in constructive dialogue and cooperative learning activities. Through collaborative discussions, learners are exposed to diverse perspectives that encourage deeper reflection and analysis of complex issues.

In addition, the integration of the Love-Based Curriculum and deep learning aligns closely with contemporary educational theories that emphasize constructivist learning principles. Constructivist theories suggest that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through interactions with their environment and social contexts. Within constructivist classrooms, teachers function as facilitators who guide students in exploring ideas and building their own understanding.

Love-based pedagogy strengthens constructivist learning environments by creating relationships characterized by trust and openness. When students feel emotionally supported, they are more willing to share their ideas, ask questions, and participate in collaborative inquiry. This dynamic fosters the kind of active engagement that is essential for deep learning to occur.

The integration of love-based pedagogy and deep learning is also closely connected to the development of reflective learning practices (Muhsyanur 2024). Reflection plays a crucial role in helping students internalize knowledge and connect new information with prior experiences (Syafaruddin et al. 2025). Through reflective activities such as journaling, group discussions, and self-assessment, students can examine their learning processes and develop greater self-awareness.

In educational contexts that emphasize love-based values, reflective learning becomes an opportunity for students to explore not only intellectual concepts but also ethical and emotional dimensions of their experiences. For example, students may reflect on how their learning activities contribute to social responsibility, empathy, or community engagement. Such reflections encourage learners to develop a deeper understanding of their roles as members of society.

The integration of the Love-Based Curriculum and deep learning is particularly relevant within the context of Indonesian educational reform, especially with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum promotes flexible learning pathways, student-centered teaching practices, and project-based learning activities. These principles align closely with the goals of deep learning, which emphasize authentic learning experiences and the development of higher-order thinking skills.

Within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, project-based learning is widely used as a strategy to encourage students to explore real-world problems and

develop practical solutions. When combined with love-based pedagogical principles, project-based learning can become an effective tool for promoting both intellectual growth and character development. Students working on collaborative projects learn not only academic concepts but also the values of cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect.

Moreover, the integration of love-based pedagogy and deep learning contributes to the development of the Pancasila Student Profile, which serves as a key educational objective within Indonesia's national curriculum. The Pancasila Student Profile emphasizes the cultivation of students who are faithful, ethical, independent, collaborative, and globally aware. These values resonate strongly with the principles of love-based education, which emphasize compassion, social responsibility, and respect for diversity.

In the context of Islamic education and madrasahs, the integration of deep learning and love-based pedagogy also reflects the ethical principles embedded within Islamic teachings. Concepts such as *rahmah* (compassion), *mahabbah* (love), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) emphasize the importance of caring relationships and social responsibility. When these values are incorporated into educational practices, they contribute to the creation of learning environments that support both intellectual exploration and moral development.

Nevertheless, despite the potential benefits of integrating the Love-Based Curriculum and deep learning, several challenges remain in practice. Teachers may require additional training to effectively implement deep learning strategies while simultaneously fostering compassionate classroom environments. Educational institutions must also develop assessment systems that recognize not only cognitive achievement but also social and emotional development.

Despite these challenges, the integration of love-based pedagogy and deep learning represents a promising direction for educational innovation. By combining intellectual rigor with emotional support and ethical values, this approach creates learning environments that nurture the whole person. Students are not only encouraged to acquire knowledge but also to develop empathy, responsibility, and a commitment to contributing positively to society.

In conclusion, the integration of the Love-Based Curriculum and deep learning provides a holistic educational framework that supports meaningful learning experiences. Emotional support and compassionate relationships create the conditions necessary for deep intellectual engagement, while deep learning strategies enable students to develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Together, these approaches contribute to the development of learners who are intellectually capable, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible.

Implementation within the Merdeka Curriculum

The integration of a Love-Based Curriculum within the Merdeka Curriculum represents a promising innovation in Indonesian education. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. These principles aim to cultivate students who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and morally grounded. A Love-Based Curriculum complements these objectives by providing an ethical and emotional framework for educational practices. Through the integration of empathy,

compassion, and mutual respect, teachers can create learning environments that support the holistic development of students. The Merdeka Curriculum itself emerged as part of Indonesia's broader educational reform efforts aimed at addressing the limitations of previous curriculum models that were often perceived as overly rigid and focused primarily on academic content. By promoting flexibility in learning pathways and encouraging teachers to design contextually relevant learning experiences, the Merdeka Curriculum provides an opportunity for educators to integrate humanistic values more deeply into classroom practices. Within this framework, the Love-Based Curriculum can serve as an important pedagogical approach that strengthens the moral and emotional dimensions of education.

One of the central elements of the Merdeka Curriculum is the emphasis on student-centered learning, which shifts the focus of education from teacher-dominated instruction to active student participation. In student-centered learning environments, teachers act as facilitators who guide students in exploring knowledge rather than merely delivering information. This approach aligns closely with the principles of love-based pedagogy, which emphasize respect for students' individuality, learning autonomy, and emotional well-being.

In practice, teachers who adopt love-based approaches within the Merdeka Curriculum often focus on building positive relationships with students. These relationships create an atmosphere of trust and openness in the classroom, allowing students to express their ideas without fear of judgment. When students feel respected and valued by their teachers, they are more likely to develop confidence in their abilities and become actively engaged in learning activities.

Project-based learning, which is a key component of the Merdeka Curriculum, provides an effective platform for implementing love-based pedagogy. Through collaborative projects addressing real-world problems, students can develop both intellectual skills and social awareness. Such activities encourage learners to work together, respect diverse perspectives, and develop empathy toward others. Project-based learning also allows students to connect academic knowledge with real-life experiences. For example, students may engage in projects related to environmental conservation, community development, or social welfare. Through these activities, learners not only develop problem-solving skills but also cultivate a sense of responsibility toward society. Love-based values such as compassion, cooperation, and social responsibility become embedded within the learning process.

Another important aspect of implementing the Love-Based Curriculum within the Merdeka Curriculum is the development of reflective learning practices. Reflection plays a crucial role in helping students internalize the values they encounter during learning activities. Reflective learning encourages students to examine their experiences, values, and emotions, thereby promoting self-awareness and ethical reasoning.

Through reflective practices such as journals, group discussions, and personal reflections, students are encouraged to think critically about their actions and the impact of their decisions on others. These reflective processes help learners develop moral sensitivity and empathy, which are essential components of character education.

Furthermore, the integration of love-based pedagogical principles supports the realization of the Pancasila Student Profile, which serves as a guiding framework within the Merdeka Curriculum. The Pancasila Student Profile includes several key competencies, such as faith and piety, global diversity awareness, collaboration, independence, critical thinking, and creativity. Love-based educational approaches reinforce these competencies by promoting empathy, cooperation, and ethical responsibility.

Within Indonesian educational discourse, character education has long been considered a fundamental goal of schooling. By integrating love-based values with the Merdeka Curriculum framework, educators can create learning environments that nurture both intellectual growth and moral development. Such integration ensures that education does not merely produce academically capable students but also individuals who possess strong ethical principles and social awareness.

Challenges in Implementing a Love-Based Curriculum

Despite its potential benefits, the implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum faces several challenges. One of the primary challenges is the limited understanding among teachers regarding the concept of love pedagogy. Many educators have been trained within traditional instructional models that prioritize content delivery and standardized testing.

As a result, teachers may find it difficult to integrate emotional and relational aspects into their teaching practices. (Heriyudanta and Pradana 2025). note that educators often struggle to translate abstract concepts such as compassion and empathy into concrete classroom strategies. While teachers may recognize the importance of caring relationships in education, they may lack the pedagogical tools needed to implement such values effectively.

Another challenge relates to the professional development of teachers. Implementing a Love-Based Curriculum requires educators to develop not only pedagogical competencies but also emotional intelligence and reflective teaching skills. Teachers must be able to recognize students' emotional needs, manage classroom relationships effectively, and create inclusive learning environments. Without appropriate training and professional development opportunities, many educators may find it difficult to adopt these practices.

Another significant challenge relates to assessment systems. Educational evaluation frameworks in many countries continue to focus primarily on cognitive outcomes measured through standardized

examinations. Such assessment models often neglect social and emotional competencies that are central to love-based educational approaches.

Traditional assessment methods typically emphasize measurable academic outcomes, such as test scores and grades. However, the values promoted by the Love-Based Curriculum such as empathy, compassion, cooperation, and ethical responsibility are often difficult to measure using conventional testing methods. As a result, educators may struggle to evaluate the effectiveness of love-based pedagogical practices within existing assessment systems.

Institutional culture also plays a crucial role in determining the success of educational innovation. Schools that maintain rigid hierarchical structures and authoritarian disciplinary practices may resist the adoption of relational and compassionate pedagogical approaches. In such environments, teachers may feel pressured to prioritize academic performance and classroom control rather than nurturing supportive relationships with students.

Moreover, the increasing demands placed on teachers, including administrative responsibilities and curriculum requirements, may limit their capacity to implement innovative teaching strategies. Teachers are often required to complete extensive documentation, administrative reporting, and standardized assessments. These responsibilities can reduce the time and energy available for developing creative and relational teaching practices.

Another challenge relates to the broader educational ecosystem, including parental expectations and societal attitudes toward education. In some communities, academic success is still primarily defined by examination results and university admission rates. Consequently, parents and stakeholders may place significant pressure on schools to prioritize academic performance over character development.



Figure caption

This figure illustrates the conceptual relationship between the Love-Based Curriculum, the deep learning approach, and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian education. The Love-Based Curriculum serves as a value-based foundation that emphasizes empathy, compassion, and humane relationships between teachers and students. These values support the implementation of deep learning, which promotes critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and meaningful learning experiences. The integration of these three approaches is expected to foster the holistic development of students, encompassing intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the dynamics, challenges, and strategic solutions related to the implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum within the context of contemporary educational reform in Indonesia. The findings indicate that the Love-Based Curriculum represents an innovative approach that integrates intellectual development with emotional intelligence and moral values. By emphasizing empathy, compassion, and respectful relationships between teachers and students, this curriculum seeks to create a more humanistic and meaningful learning environment.

The study also highlights that the theoretical foundations of love pedagogy are rooted in humanistic education, relational pedagogy, inclusive education, and religious educational philosophy. These perspectives collectively emphasize the importance of caring relationships, emotional support, and ethical responsibility in the learning process. In the context of Islamic education, the concept of love in pedagogy is closely related to values such as *rahmah* and *mahabbah*, which emphasize compassion and moral guidance in educational interactions.

Furthermore, the integration of the Love-Based Curriculum with deep learning approaches supports the development of students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. When combined with the Merdeka Curriculum, this approach aligns with the principles of student-centered learning and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile.

However, several challenges remain, including limited teacher understanding of love pedagogy, cognitive-oriented assessment systems, and institutional constraints. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening teacher professional development, developing holistic assessment models, and fostering collaborative educational ecosystems. Overall, the Love-Based Curriculum offers a promising framework for fostering holistic education that balances academic competence with character development and social responsibility.

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