IMPLEMENTATION OF LOVE-BASED ISLAMIC EDUCATION AT MTSN 2 PALANGKA RAYA CITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PAULO FREIRE'S CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze the implementation of love-Based Islamic education at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya from the perspective of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. The background of this study is rooted in the emergence of the Love-Based Curriculum as a learning approach that emphasizes the values of compassion, empathy, and respect for the dignity of students in the educational process. This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to understand teachers' experiences and pedagogical practices in applying these values in the classroom. Data collection techniques included interviews with teachers and questionnaires administered to students. The results of the study indicate that teachers interpret the love-based curriculum as a learning process grounded in attitudes of compassion, empathy, and attention to students' needs. The implementation of these values is reflected in dialogic interactions between teachers and students, providing space for students to express their opinions, as well as friendly and respectful attitudes in the learning process. Although some teachers have spontaneously incorporated these values into their daily teaching practices, their implementation is not yet fully integrated into the madrasah curriculum system. From the perspective of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, this approach has the potential to create a more humanistic, dialogic, and transformative educational process because it positions students as active agents in learning. Therefore, institutional policy reinforcement and the development of teacher competencies are necessary to ensure that the implementation of love-based Islamic education can proceed in a more systematic and sustainable manner.*

Keywords: *Islamic Education, Love-Based Curriculum, Critical Pedagogy, Paulo Freire, Humanistic Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is currently experiencing significant dynamics of curriculum change, particularly in response to the demands of the times, which call for character formation and the comprehensive involvement of students (Latif et al., 2025). In Indonesia, particularly in madrasas such as MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City, curriculum development no longer focuses only on the transfer of normative knowledge but has begun to adopt a curriculum that integrates the values of love, empathy, and humanism as part of the learning process. This approach is known as the Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta, KBC), introduced by the

Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in 2025 as an enrichment of the national curriculum, not a replacement, with the aim of creating a learning environment that reflects compassion, spiritual character, and social awareness in every subject. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, cited in Nugraha, states that the love-based curriculum has emerged as an important alternative for strengthening the affective climate through respect for students' dignity (Nugraha, 2025). In classroom practice in crowded classes, this is greatly needed because academic achievement often becomes the main focus, while affective aspects receive less attention. This approach is in line with the values of character education that put compassion first, and therefore requires a strong conceptual understanding on the part of teachers. The conceptual literature affirms that the love curriculum originates from humanistic pedagogical theory, which positions students as holistic individuals (Qamariah & Anwar, 2025).

Previous research shows that the application of humanitarian values in Islamic education has a positive impact on students' social attitudes, tolerance, and active participation in the learning process. A study by Basori et al, (2025) for example, reveals that Islamic education that emphasizes compassion and dialogue can increase moral awareness and harmonious educational relationships between teachers and students. That study emphasized the aspect of values but has not specifically linked it to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy framework. Another study conducted by Fazrin et al. (2025) discussed the implementation of critical pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education learning and found that a dialogical approach can improve students' critical thinking skills and social awareness. However, that study has not highlighted the attitudinal aspect in the form of love-based education as an ethical foundation in the practice of critical pedagogy. Meanwhile, Daaboul (2024) in his research on humanistic Islamic education concluded that the values of love, empathy, and respect for students contribute fully to the creation of a comprehensive learning climate marked by mutual engagement. However, that study has not been examined contextually in a public Islamic secondary educational institution and has not been analyzed using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy perspective.

Based on the problems mentioned above, further research is needed to discuss in more depth how love-based Islamic education is applied through the lens of Paulo Freire at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya, with the hope that this research can provide a broader view of the application of love-based Islamic education so that it is useful for curriculum developers in schools.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach to explore the implementation of love-based Islamic education at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya from the perspective of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. The phenomenological approach was selected because it enables researchers to understand participants' experiences, interpretations, and perceptions of educational practices within their specific contexts (Nasir et al., 2023). In this study, the approach focused on understanding how teachers interpret and implement the values of love, compassion, empathy, dialogue, and respect for students in the learning process, as well as how students perceive these practices. The research was conducted at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya, with teachers and students serving as the sources of data relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected through teacher interviews and student questionnaires. The interviews were used to explore teachers' understanding of love-based Islamic education, their experiences in implementing its values, the forms of interaction established with students, and the challenges encountered in classroom practice. Meanwhile, the questionnaires were administered to students to obtain information about their perceptions of teachers' attitudes, opportunities for expressing opinions, classroom dialogue, mutual respect, and participation in learning activities. The use of these two data collection techniques enabled the researchers to examine the implementation of love-based Islamic education from both teachers' and students' perspectives. The interview data provided insights into teachers' interpretations and pedagogical experiences, while the questionnaire data offered complementary information about students' perceptions of the learning environment.

The data were analyzed descriptively and thematically by identifying recurring patterns related to the implementation of love-based Islamic education. The analysis focused on several dimensions, including compassion and empathy in teacher–student relationships, dialogical interaction, respect for students' dignity, student participation, and the balance between caring attitudes and classroom discipline. The findings from the interviews and questionnaires were compared to identify convergent and complementary perspectives concerning the implementation of these values. Subsequently, the findings were interpreted using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, particularly the concepts of humanization, dialogue, critical consciousness (*conscientização*), and the rejection of *banking education*, in which students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. This theoretical interpretation was intended to examine the extent to which love-based Islamic education at the research site reflects humanistic, dialogical, and participatory educational practices. Thus, the analysis connected participants' accounts and perceptions with the theoretical framework to develop an understanding of the

implementation of love-based Islamic education in the context of madrasah learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews

The results of an interview with a teacher at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City show that the love-based curriculum is understood as a learning process that emphasizes a loving approach in the relationship between teachers and students. The teacher explained that the concept can basically be interpreted as teaching activity grounded in an attitude of compassion in the learning process. This understanding shows that learning activities do not focus only on delivering lesson material but also emphasize the importance of building a positive emotional relationship between teachers and students. This approach is in line with Paulo Freire's idea that education should be based on human values and love for fellow human beings. According to Freire, love is an important foundation in creating authentic dialogue in educational practice (Edi, 2025)

The findings of the interview also indicate that some teachers have in fact applied values that are in harmony with the love-based curriculum, although the application often occurs spontaneously in everyday learning activities. The teacher stated that this approach had often already been carried out unconsciously. This shows that the values of empathy, care, and attention to students' needs have become part of pedagogical practice in the madrasa environment, although they have not been fully designed systematically within the formal curriculum structure. This finding supports the view that humanistic educational practice often arises from teachers' moral awareness when interacting with students.

In addition, the teachers assessed that the love-based curriculum has a positive influence in dealing with the diversity of students' characters. In the interview it was mentioned that this approach is very relevant to apply considering that there are students who have various limitations or difficulties in learning. The teacher also acknowledged that in certain situations students' behavior can cause annoyance or even anger. Nevertheless, an approach grounded in love encourages teachers to remain patient and to give extra attention to those students. This view is in line with the concept of humanizing pedagogy put forward by Siswadi & Putri (2024), which asserts that the educational process needs to respect the diversity of students' experiences and conditions as part of the effort to humanize human beings through education.

On the other hand, the teachers also emphasized that applying a love-based approach must still be balanced with firmness in the learning process. Firmness is regarded as an important element for maintaining discipline and ensuring that learning activities take place effectively. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, compassion and firmness are not seen as two opposing things but as mutually complementary elements. Freire asserts that humanistic education still requires moral responsibility and a strong commitment to meaningful learning values (Cahyani & Wibowo, 2025).

Furthermore, the teacher also conveyed that implementing the love-based curriculum can encourage students' thinking skills, although in practice there are still limitations in the creativity of learning methods. This shows that the love-based approach has the potential to foster reflective awareness in students. Nevertheless, developing innovation in learning strategies is still needed so that students' creativity can develop more optimally. Within the framework of Freire's pedagogy, the educational process ideally encourages students to think critically and actively through dialogue and reflection on the social reality they experience (Siswadi & Putri, 2024).

Interestingly, the teachers also said that implementing the love-based curriculum faces almost no significant obstacles. On the contrary, this approach actually has a positive impact on students' emotional development because they feel more cared for and valued by their teachers. A learning environment grounded in an attitude of compassion can create a more conducive learning atmosphere, so that students become more open in interacting and more active in taking part in learning activities.

Nevertheless, the interview results show that the implementation of the love-based curriculum at the madrasa is still limited and has so far been practiced by only a small number of teachers. This condition shows that the concept still requires strengthening through institutional policy, more systematic curriculum development, and training for teachers so that the love-based approach can be applied more consistently in all learning processes.

Thus, the integration of the love-based curriculum and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy shows that education that is humanistic, dialogical, and full of empathy has great potential to create a more meaningful learning process. This approach focuses not only on academic achievement but also on character formation, the development of social awareness, and the creation of harmonious relationships between teachers and students.

Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire given to students at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City show that the implementation of love-based Islamic education at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City has begun to materialize through teachers' friendly attitudes, giving students space to ask questions, and instilling the value of mutual respect in the learning process. However, its application is still not fully optimal and needs strengthening, particularly in terms of more open dialogue, increased active student participation, and the development of more reflective learning methods. From the perspective of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, this condition indicates a shift from traditional learning patterns toward a more humanistic and dialogical approach. Therefore, the integration of love-based Islamic education with a critical pedagogy approach has great potential to realize a learning process that focuses not only on mastery of the material but also on the formation of character, social awareness, and students' spiritual maturity.

Discussion

The implementation of Islamic education at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City is systematically directed at realizing the madrasa's vision as a trusted educational institution in shaping students who are intelligent and of noble character. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning does not focus only on the cognitive aspect in the form of mastering Islamic material but also emphasizes strengthening the affective and psychomotor dimensions through the internalization of the values of faith, piety, and noble character in students' lives (Ajir et al., 2024). In this way, PAI is positioned as a strategic instrument in shaping religious character and Islamic personality in students holistically.

In line with the madrasa's mission, the implementation of PAI is realized through structured worship habituation, for example the performance of the obligatory prayers and the habit of reading the Qur'an in the madrasa environment (Huda et al., 2023). These religious practices function not merely as ritual activities but also as a medium of character education that instills discipline, responsibility, and spiritual awareness in students. This habituation is reinforced by creating a madrasa environment that is Islamic, comfortable, clean, and healthy, so that Islamic values can be instilled in a relevant and sustainable way in students' daily activities.

In the learning process, PAI teachers act as educators, facilitators, and at the same time moral and spiritual guides for students. Teachers not only deliver teaching material but also build communicative and dialogical educational interaction in order to encourage the development of students' religious awareness and social sensitivity (Syahriyah, 2023). Through creating a supportive learning

environment focused on developing students' abilities and potential, PAI is expected to be able to promote academic achievement while shaping students' attitudes and behavior in accordance with the values of Islamic teachings (Ibrahim & Andriyadi, 2022).

Institutionally, the implementation of Islamic education at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City is also directed at strengthening public trust in the quality of madrasa education. The integration of PAI learning, worship habituation, and teachers' role modeling reflects the madrasa's commitment to shaping graduates who excel not only intellectually but are also spiritually mature and moral. Thus, Islamic education at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City plays a strategic role in realizing the madrasa's educational goals, which are oriented toward developing people who are faithful, knowledgeable, and of noble character.

The application of Islamic education grounded in the value of love in the learning process is realized through a pedagogical approach that positions students as primary subjects whose dignity, potential, and life experiences are respected (Sidik & Sari, 2025). The concept of love-based education is understood not merely as an emotional expression but as an ethical and practical foundation in the provision of education (Daaboul, 2024). Through this foundation, the Islamic education learning process is directed at fostering empathy, care, and moral responsibility in students.

In practice, the value of love is reflected in the building of dialogical relationships between teachers and students. Teachers are no longer positioned as the only source of knowledge but act as facilitators who provide space for dialogue, open opportunities for students to express their opinions, and respect the diversity of their understanding and backgrounds (Daaboul, 2024). This approach is in line with the concept of humanistic-critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue, reflective awareness, and liberating educational relationships.

Furthermore, love-based Islamic education is realized through learning strategies that are contextual and meaningful. For example, by linking moral values to daily life, encouraging reflection on students' religious experiences, and presenting teachers' role modeling in attitude and speech (Munif, 2023). Thus, Islamic learning is not limited to the delivery of merely normative knowledge but encourages the internalization of humanistic Islamic values, such as rahmah (compassion), justice, honesty, and social responsibility.

The implementation of the love-based approach is also evident in the way teachers apply discipline and carry out learning evaluation. Discipline is enforced in a persuasive and educational way, not through repressive means, so that what is

built is awareness, not fear (Daaboul, 2024). Learning evaluation is also designed to increase students' motivation and self-confidence, not focusing only on measuring cognitive aspects.

Love-based Islamic education has a significant conceptual connection with the critical pedagogy perspective developed by Paulo Freire, particularly in viewing education as a process of humanization. Freire positions education as a means of liberation from dehumanizing practices through strengthening critical consciousness (conscientização), reflective dialogue, and educational relationships grounded in love, justice, and respect for human dignity (Cortina & Winter, 2021). In this framework, love is not understood sentimentally but as an ethical and praxis-based commitment to humanizing students throughout the entire learning process.

Within the paradigm of critical pedagogy, education oriented toward love rejects the "banking education" model of learning, namely an approach that positions students as passive entities who receive a transfer of knowledge. Love-based Islamic education instead puts forward dialogical-participatory learning, in which teachers and students interact as subjects who collectively construct religious understanding (Sidik & Sari, 2025). Through equal and reflective dialogue mechanisms, Islamic values do not stop at the level of normative memorization but are understood contextually in accordance with the social dynamics and existential experiences of students.

Furthermore, love-based Islamic education from the perspective of critical pedagogy affirms the urgency of forming social and moral awareness. Islamic Religious Education learning is not directed solely at strengthening ritualistic and normative aspects but also at developing sensitivity to social issues, such as justice, solidarity, and collective responsibility (Danil et al., 2025). In this context, Islamic teachings are positioned as emancipatory values that encourage students to be critical of various forms of injustice and social practices that contradict the principles of humanity and noble character.

Astutik & Destri, cited in Setiawan et al, (2025) call for a participatory, contextual, and student-centered approach. This direction is in line with Freire's Pedagogy of Love, which frames liberation through dialogue, empathy, and egalitarian teacher-student relationships. Teachers act not only as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators and companions who guide students in internalizing and actualizing Islamic values in daily life (Danil et al., 2025). This approach is in harmony with the goal of Islamic education, which emphasizes the proportional integration of the dimensions of faith, knowledge, and noble character.

Thus, love-based Islamic education from the perspective of critical pedagogy can be understood as a learning approach that is integrative, humanistic, and transformative. Its orientation is not limited to cognitive achievement but also includes strengthening critical consciousness, a reflective attitude, and the formation of contextual Islamic character. The synergy between Islamic values and critical pedagogy is expected to produce a generation with a balance of intellectual intelligence, social sensitivity, and spiritual maturity.

CONCLUSION

From the research at MTsN 2 Palangka Raya City, it can be concluded that the application of love-based Islamic education has begun to appear through learning that emphasizes the values of compassion, empathy, and respect for students. Teachers strive to build positive emotional relationships, open space for dialogue, and understand the diversity of students' characters so that the educational process is oriented not only toward academic achievement but also toward character formation, social awareness, and spiritual strengthening. The results of the interviews and questionnaires show that some teachers have applied this approach naturally in learning interactions, resulting in a more positive learning atmosphere because students feel valued and more motivated. From the perspective of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, this approach is in line with the concept of education that is humanistic, dialogical, and liberating, because it encourages students' active involvement through dialogue and critical reflection. Nevertheless, its implementation still needs to be strengthened institutionally through more structured curriculum development, teacher training, and innovation in learning methods so that love-based education can be applied more optimally and sustainably in madrasas.

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