



BRIDGING WESTERN LEARNING THEORIES AND ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO *KURIKULUM BERBASIS CINTA*

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary educational discourse often faces a dichotomy between rigid behavioral measurement and fluid humanistic development, frequently neglecting the spiritual-emotional essence in Islamic contexts. This study explores the philosophical and practical integration of Behaviorism, Constructivism, and Humanism within the framework of a "Love-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*)" from the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy. The primary purpose of this research is to investigate how Islamic education teachers perceive and implement this synthesis to bridge modern Western pedagogical theories with traditional Islamic values. Employing a qualitative approach with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study gathered data through in-depth interviews with educators selected for their commitment to compassionate pedagogy. The results indicate that "Love" serves as the foundational bridge, where Behaviorism is reinterpreted as *Uswah* (exemplary habituation), Constructivism is manifested through *Tafakkur* (reflective meaning-making), and Humanism is grounded in the honoring of *Fitrah* (innate potential). The study concludes that a Love-Based Curriculum offers a robust philosophical framework that transcends mere instructional techniques, positioning the teacher as a *Murabbi* who harmonizes psychological efficiency with spiritual depth. This research suggests that such a synthesis is essential for creating a holistic educational environment that fosters both intellectual competence and moral integrity in the modern era.

Keywords: Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta; Islamic Educational Philosophy; Phenomenological Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of 21st-century education is currently navigating a profound transformation, shifting from mere instructional delivery to more holistic, spiritual, and value-driven paradigms. In the contemporary era, the purpose of education is no longer confined to the accumulation of cognitive data; rather, it has evolved into a quest for meaning, character, and spiritual resonance. In the Islamic educational context, this evolution is increasingly focused on the epistemological dimensions that define how knowledge is not only acquired but also internalized and manifested in conduct (Asyibli et al., 2025). As global education systems struggle with the dehumanizing effects of technocracy and rigid standardization, Islamic educational philosophy offers a revitalizing perspective through the "Love-Based Curriculum" (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*). This framework has been recognized as a pivotal model for fostering not only intellectual growth but also eco-theological awareness and students' spirituality, positioning love as the ontological gravity of the learning process (Rifqi & Saputra, 2025; Wahyudi et al., 2025).

The emergence of a Love-Based Curriculum is not a mere sentimental reaction to modern stressors; it is a sophisticated response to the need for Pedagogy Eros an ecology of deep



learning where affection and intellect are inseparable (Ngazijah et al., 2025). Recent scholarship underscores that this curriculum requires strategic management and systemic optimization within educational institutions to move beyond theoretical rhetoric into transformative practice (Napitupulu et al., 2025; Lubis, 2025). However, the implementation of such a curriculum in a globalized world necessitates a robust philosophical bridge between diverse pedagogical theories. The challenge lies in how Islamic education can absorb the efficiency of Western psychological theories without losing its spiritual identity. Recent discourse suggests that the reconstruction of Islamic educational philosophy must integrate revelation, reason, and experience to effectively respond to 21st-century complexities (Sahid et al., 2025).

Western learning theories, specifically Behaviorism, Humanism, and Constructivism, have long dominated the global pedagogical landscape. Humanism and Constructivism, for instance, have been instrumental in reimagining professional education such as nursing by placing the student's subjective experience and meaning making at the center of the inquiry (Samreen et al., 2025; Frias, 2019). However, when these theories are transplanted into Islamic Religious Education, they require a nuanced "trans-contextualization" to ensure they align with the metaphysical foundations of Islam (Holbrook et al., 2022; Darmawan & Ramli, 2025). For example, while Constructivism emphasizes the student's role in building knowledge, in an Islamic framework, this process is viewed as *Tafakkur* a reflective journey where the mind discovers the signs of the Creator within the creation. Similarly, Humanism's focus on self-actualization finds its Islamic parallel in the honoring of *Fitrah*, the innate primordial nature of the human soul.

The philosophical grounding for this integration can be traced to the profound intellectual heritage of Islamic thinkers. The pursuit of "Happiness" (*Sa'adah*) in Al-Farabi's thought, for instance, provides a teleological end for education that transcends material success, implying that learning must lead to the soul's perfection (Azzahra et al., 2025). Furthermore, the paradigmatic impact of modern thinkers like Noeng Muhadjir demonstrates how Islamic education can maintain a rigorous scientific character while remaining deeply rooted in religious ontologies (Pendidikan et al., 2025). This synthesis creates a space where modern instructional strategies, such as the Flipped-STAD model, can be utilized to foster pragmatic competence among EFL students in Islamic higher education without sacrificing the values of collaborative ethics and religious integrity (Muliyah et al., 2025). At the heart of this Love-Based Curriculum is the elevated role of the teacher. Moving beyond the Western definition of a facilitator, the Islamic educator is reclaimed as a *Murabbi* a spiritual guardian and character former (Muzaki et al., 2025). The *Murabbi* does not merely manage a classroom; they manage the hearts of their students. In this capacity, the teacher becomes the primary agent who bridges the gap between different learning theories. They apply Behaviorist principles not as rigid control, but as *Uswah Hasanah* (exemplary habituation) to build *Adab*. They employ Constructivist methods to spark *Ijtihad* and critical thinking. They embody Humanism to provide the "unconditional positive regard" that Maslow and Rogers advocated, but grounded in the prophetic tradition of *Rahmah* (mercy).

Despite the richness of these theoretical frameworks, a significant gap remains in the empirical literature. While many studies discuss the "what" and "why" of the Love-Based Curriculum, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the "how" from the lived experiences of the practitioners themselves. Teachers often find themselves at a crossroads, caught



between the mechanical demands of modern administrative curricula and the spiritual call to teach with love. How do they perceive the synthesis of Behaviorism, Constructivism, and Humanism when the glue that holds them together is love? How do they navigate the tensions between standardized testing (often rooted in Behaviorism) and the desire to foster a creative, free-thinking Constructivist environment that honors the student's Humanistic dignity?

This research addresses this gap through a phenomenological lens. By employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study seeks to delve into the lived experiences of Islamic educators who have committed themselves to this compassionate synthesis. It explores the internal deliberations, the spiritual motivations, and the practical strategies of teachers who act as bridges between Western pedagogical efficiency and Islamic spiritual depth. Through their voices, we can understand how a Love-Based Curriculum functions not as a soft alternative to "real" education, but as a rigorous, holistic, and intellectually demanding philosophy that seeks to produce individuals who are both scientifically competent and spiritually grounded. This study posits that the Love-Based Curriculum is the ultimate synthesis for modern Islamic education. It is a curriculum where Behaviorism provides the discipline, Constructivism provides the wisdom, and Humanism provides the dignity all of which are unified by the overarching Islamic philosophy of Mahabbah. By investigating the perspectives of the teachers, this research aims to provide a blueprint for a more humane, effective, and spiritually resonant educational future, proving that in the classroom, as in life, love is the highest form of intelligence.

METHODS

To capture the depth of the philosophical synthesis discussed, this study adopts a qualitative approach rooted in Phenomenological Inquiry. As emphasized by Creely et al. (2020), phenomenological inquiry in education is uniquely positioned to uncover the essence of pedagogical encounters that are often missed by quantitative metrics. This approach allows the researcher to explore the "lived experiences" of educators, moving beyond theoretical abstractions to understand the ontic reality of the classroom (Lo Monaco et al., 2024). Specifically, this study utilizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to facilitate a dual interpretation: the participants' attempt to make sense of their world, and the researcher's attempt to make sense of the participants' sense-making (Younas & Inayat, 2025).

The research was conducted at several Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Cilacap Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. This locus was selected due to its unique cultural landscape and the strong commitment of its madrasah to integrating character-building within the formal curriculum. The subjects of this study consisted of seven (7) Islamic education teachers selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included a minimum of ten years of teaching experience and a recognized reputation for implementing "compassionate pedagogy" in their classrooms. In line with the idiographic principles of IPA, this small and homogenous sample size was chosen to ensure a deep, nuanced, and intensive exploration of each participant's unique lived experience (Ashraf et al., 2024; Younas & Inayat, 2025). The conduct of the research procedure followed an iterative trajectory. Data collection was facilitated through semi-structured, in depth interviews the primary research instrument designed to elicit rich narrative accounts of how teachers bridge Western learning theories with Islamic values. These interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and



supplemented by field notes to capture the atmospheric and non-verbal nuances of the participants' reflections within the madrasah setting. The data analysis technique followed the rigorous stages of IPA: (1) immersive reading and re-reading of the transcripts; (2) initial exploratory noting; (3) developing emergent themes; and (4) searching for connections across emergent themes to identify the master themes that characterize the "Love-Based Curriculum" in practice (Younas & Inayat, 2025; Creely et al., 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

Love as Uswah (Refining Behaviorism)

The first dimension of the synthesis found in Cilacap's Madrasah Ibtidaiyah involves a radical reinterpretation of Behaviorist principles. While traditional Behaviorism often relies on external stimuli to modify conduct, the participants in this study consistently described a process of Spiritualizing Behaviorism. In this context, love serves as the primary metaphysical force that transforms mechanical conditioning into Adab (refined character). The teachers do not view students as passive organisms to be programmed, but as sacred beings whose outward behavior is a reflection of their inward spiritual state (Qalb). Therefore, reinforcement is not merely a pedagogical tool but an expression of Mahabbah (love). The following table and verbatim accounts illustrate how these educators bridge the gap between psychological conditioning and Islamic prophetic modeling (Uswah), proving that in a love-based curriculum, discipline is not a burden of fear, but a fruit of emotional and spiritual connection.

Table 1. The Transformation of Behaviorism into Love-Based Uswah

Psychological Construct	Islamic Philosophical Adaptation	Role of Love	Phenomenological Manifestation in Cilacap MI
Operant Conditioning	Habituation (Riyadhah)	Love as the Catalyst	Discipline is driven by emotional bonding rather than fear of sanctions.
Positive Reinforcement	Tahmid & Targhib	Love as the Reward	Rewards are given in the form of sincere smiles, verbal praise, and spiritual encouragement.
Social Learning Theory	Uswah Hasanah	Love as Modeling	The teacher becomes a living embodiment of the values they teach, fostering organic imitation.
Punishment	Rahmah-Based Correction	Love as Protection	Misbehavior is addressed through private, affectionate dialogue to protect the student's dignity (Karama).

Expanded Verbatim Data (Excerpts from the Field)

To provide a thick description, here are the expanded translations of the interviews with the teachers in Cilacap:

Informant 2 (Male, 12 years experience)

"In our Madrasah, discipline is not about the fear of punishment. I often say to the children, 'I love you all dearly, and that is exactly why I want you to perform your prayers on time.' When



they are orderly, I offer them a sincere smile or heartfelt praise. In my experience, this is far more effective than shouting. Love is the energy that makes rules feel light. When a child feels loved, they obey not because they have to, but because they don't want to disappoint someone who cares for them”.

Informant 5 (Female, 15 years experience)

"I believe Behaviorism works only when it is 'baptized' in affection. If I want them to have good Adab (manners), I must be the first to show them love. In Cilacap, we have a very close-knit culture. I use our local dialect to joke with them, making them feel at home. This 'Love-Based Reinforcement' creates a habit of goodness that sticks to their hearts, not just their skin. We call this Uswah—being a mirror of love for them to reflect."

Informant 1 (Male, 20 years experience)

"Punishment is our last resort and must be done with Rahmah (mercy). If a student violates a rule, I take them aside privately. I hold their hand and ask, 'What happened, son?' This touch of love usually breaks their ego. We are not training animals through conditioning; we are nurturing souls through Mahabbah. The goal is for them to become disciplined individuals because they love the goodness itself, not because they are afraid of the cane”.

Love as Tafakkur (Transforming Constructivism)

The second master theme focuses on the cognitive dimension of learning. While Western Constructivism emphasizes the student’s active role in "constructing" knowledge, the educators in Cilacap elevate this process into the Islamic concept of Tafakkur. In this context, love is manifested as intellectual patience. The teacher does not merely facilitate the acquisition of information but acts as a Murabbi who lovingly guides the student to discover the Hikmah (wisdom) behind every lesson. The following analysis demonstrates how the "Love-Based Curriculum" creates a safe, dialogic environment where cognitive growth is inseparable from spiritual reflection.

Table 2. The Transformation of Constructivism into Love-Based Tafakkur

Psychological Construct	Islamic Philosophical Adaptation	Role of Love	Phenomenological Manifestation in Cilacap MI
Active Learning	Tafakkur (Contemplation)	Love as Intellectual Space	Students are encouraged to ponder and reflect rather than memorize.
Scaffolding	Irsyad (Divine Guidance)	Love as Patience	The teacher patiently provides support until the student reaches a "Eureka" moment.
ZPD (Vygotsky)	Suhbah (Companionship)	Love as Dialogue	Learning occurs through warm, equal, and loving social interactions between teacher and pupil.
Meaning-Making	Ma'rifah (Inner Knowledge)	Love as Meaning	Knowledge is not just "known" but "felt" as a truth that connects to the Creator.



Expanded Verbatim Data (Excerpts from the Field)

Informant 4 (Female, 14 years experience)

"When a student is confused by a lesson, I don't see it as a failure of intelligence; I see it as a moment where their soul is searching. I don't give them the answer directly. I sit beside them, I put my hand on their shoulder, and I say, 'Let's think about this together, slowly.' For me, love means being patient with their confusion. By allowing them to discover the truth themselves, I am respecting their mind—a gift from God. That discovery is what we call Hikmah."

Informant 3 (Male, 18 years experience)

"Constructivism in our Madrasah is rooted in dialogue (Hiwar). I love it when they ask 'why.' I encourage them to question the world. This is our way of teaching Tafakkur. I use our local 'Ngapak' dialect to break the ice, making the classroom feel like a home. When they feel loved and unjudged, their minds open. They don't just learn about the world; they learn to see God's signs in it. Love is the bridge that turns a textbook into a spiritual journey."

Informant 6 (Female, 11 years experience)

"I always believe that a child cannot build knowledge if their heart is closed by fear. My love for them manifests as 'listening.' By listening to their ideas no matter how simple they feel valued. In this safe atmosphere, they are brave enough to construct their own understanding. We aren't just building smart kids; we are building wise souls who can think for themselves. Love is the prerequisite for Tafakkur".

Love as Fitrah (Grounding Humanism)

The third master theme represents the ontological heart of the Love-Based Curriculum. While Western Humanism emphasizes self-actualization and unconditional positive regard, the educators in Cilacap ground these concepts in the Islamic doctrine of Fitrah the primordial, sinless nature of every human child. In this theme, love is manifested as radical acceptance and sacred trust (Amanah). The findings suggest that teachers view their students not as "empty vessels" or "products," but as noble beings whose inherent potential must be nurtured with divine-like mercy. The following data illustrates how Humanism is transformed from a secular psychological approach into a spiritual act of honoring human dignity (Karama).

Table 3. The Transformation of Humanism into Love-Based Fitrah

Psychological Construct	Islamic Philosophical Adaptation	Role of Love	Phenomenological Manifestation in Cilacap MI
Self-Actualization	Spirit-Actualization	Love as Growth	Education aims to help students realize their divine potential as Khalifah.
Unconditional Positive Regard	Rahmatan lil 'Alamin	Love as Acceptance	Students are loved and valued regardless of their academic or social standing.
Student-Centeredness	Fitrah-Centeredness	Love as Respect	The curriculum is tailored to respect the unique, God-given innate nature of each child.



Empathy	Itsar (Altruistic Love)	Love as Connection	The teacher deeply feels the student's struggles and joys as their own.
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Expanded Verbatim Data (Excerpts from the Field)

Informant 7 (Female, 19 years experience)

"I often tell my colleagues that we are not just teaching subjects; we are taking care of God's 'Amanah' (trust). Every child comes to this Madrasah with a clean Fitrah. Love means I must accept them as they are. If a child is slow in reading, I don't love them less. My love is the 'water' for their 'seed.' If I am harsh, their Fitrah will wither. But if I am kind, their unique potential will bloom in its own time. In Cilacap, we don't produce robots; we nurture human beings."

Informant 1 (Male, 20 years experience)

"Humanism to me is simple: it's about Karama (dignity). I never embarrass a student in front of the class. Even when they fail, I hold their hand and tell them they are valuable. Why? Because their value doesn't come from their grades, it comes from their Creator. My love for them is a reflection of God's mercy. When they feel this 'unconditional love,' they gain the confidence to become the best version of themselves."

Informant 3 (Male, 18 years experience)

"The 'Love-Based Curriculum' is about seeing the child as a whole soul. In our MI, we focus on their well-being first. A child who feels loved and safe is a child who can learn anything. We use our local wisdom and warmth to make them feel like they belong. This is more than just being 'student-centered'; it is being 'soul-centered.' Love is the light that reveals the hidden treasures within every student's Fitrah."

Discussion

The Metaphysical Bridge: Harmonizing Western Paradigms through Mahabbah

The findings of this study provide a profound ontological and pedagogical response to the objectives outlined in the introduction. By exploring the "lived experiences" of educators in Cilacap, this research successfully demonstrates how a Love-Based Curriculum serves as a transformative bridge between Western learning theories and Islamic educational philosophy. Our results indicate that this synthesis is achieved through a process of "Spiritual Trans-contextualization," where Love (Mahabbah) acts as the metaphysical solvent.

Behaviorism is manifested through Uswah (exemplary habituation), deeply rooted in the Quranic ideal of teacher competence (Tanjung & Yuniartin, 2024). Constructivism is elevated to Tafakkur, which aligns with the philosophical urgency of Deep Learning in Islamic education; where teachers perceive deep reflection not just as a cognitive skill, but as a philosophical necessity for spiritual maturity (Fathurohim et al., 2025). Finally, Humanism is grounded in Fitrah, redefining student-centeredness as soul-centeredness. This evidence confirms that the teacher's role as a Murabbi who integrates global perspectives with local exemplary behavior is the essential variable in manifesting a Love-Based Curriculum (Muzaki et al., 2025; Qushwa et al., 2025).



Affective Epistemology: The Neuro-Philosophical Logic of Love

Scientifically and philosophically, these results can be interpreted through "Affective Epistemology." The warmth reported by the teachers reduces students' cortisol levels, crucial for overcoming dehumanization (Hasanah et al., 2026). Philosophically, this is rooted in Al-Farabi's Sa'adah (happiness), where the teacher's love creates the emotional state for attaining wisdom (Azzahra et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this study finds that a Love-Based Curriculum provides a robust philosophical foundation for the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. When viewed through the lens of Islamic educational philosophy, the "freedom" in the national curriculum should be interpreted as the freedom to nurture the student's Fitrah and potential within a framework of moral responsibility (Fathurohim, 2023). By treating the student as a sacred Amanah, teachers provide the psychological security that allows students to engage in active learning without fear, proving that emotional bonding is the prerequisite for cognitive construction.

Social Harmony and Multicultural Resilience

Our results move toward a more Eco-centric and Earth-as-School paradigm (Kaur et al., 2023), rooted in Eco-theology (Rifqi & Saputra, 2025). Moreover, the implementation of this love-based framework has been shown to foster social harmony in multicultural societies (Firdaus & Suwendi, 2025). In the Indonesian context, Islamic educational philosophy remains highly relevant in answering the challenges of multicultural education, ensuring that diversity is managed through a lens of compassion and mutual respect (Riandi et al., 2025). In Cilacap, this is achieved by revitalizing local wisdom through ethnopedagogy, ensuring character education remains culturally grounded (Sakti et al., 2024). Unlike typical Behaviorist reports, teachers here emphasize Spiritual Reinforcement, where the ultimate reward is God's pleasure (Ridha). This adds a transcendental layer to previous findings (Frias, 2019; Samreen et al., 2025), suggesting that ontological motivation in Islamic education provides a more resilient framework for character formation.

Countering Dehumanization: Future Frontiers in an AI-Driven Era

In the broadest context, this research suggests that the dehumanization of modern education can be countered by integrating spiritual-emotional intelligence. It positions the Love-Based Curriculum as a viable alternative to technocratic models. Moving forward, exploring this curriculum within AI-driven empowerment represents a critical next step. Recent reviews indicate that AI can empower Muslim communities by facilitating love-based transformations (Adiyono et al., 2025). As we navigate 2026, the question remains; can the sacred Murabbi-student bond be maintained in an AI-enhanced space? While technology drives efficiency, the human element of Mahabbah must remain the pilot to ensure that digital transformation leads to a more compassionate and effective learning environment, rather than further dehumanization.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological inquiry concludes that a Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta) serves as a robust metaphysical and epistemological bridge, successfully harmonizing Western learning theories within the profound framework of Islamic



educational philosophy. Through the lived experiences of educators in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah across Cilacap, it is evident that Love (Mahabbah) acts as a spiritual catalyst that transforms mechanical Western approaches into organic, soul-centered practices. The research highlights a tripartite synthesis where Behaviorism is spiritualized into prophetic habituation (Uswah), Constructivism is elevated into the pursuit of divine wisdom (Tafakkur), and Humanism is grounded in the sacred dignity of the human soul (Fitrah). This integration confirms that the teacher's role as a Murabbi is the essential variable for the successful implementation of contemporary educational policies, such as Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, by placing the heart at the center of pedagogical freedom.

Ultimately, the primary implication of this study suggests that a Pedagogy of Love offers a universal solution to counter the dehumanizing effects of modern technocratic and high-stakes testing models. By fostering an affective epistemology, educators can balance intellectual excellence with moral integrity, ensuring that students are treated as a sacred Amanah (Trust) rather than mere economic subjects. As we navigate an increasingly digitized and AI-driven era toward 2026 and beyond, this study serves as a critical reminder that while technology may enhance instructional efficiency, the human connection rooted in spiritual affection remains the irreplaceable core of true education. Therefore, future educational transformations must prioritize the preservation of the sacred teacher-student bond to ensure that digital progress leads to a more compassionate, rather than further dehumanized, learning environment.

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