

Different Paths, One Character: How the Love-Based Curriculum Forms Nationalist-Religious Character

Siti Kamilah^{1*}, Rita Sriayu², Noor Malihah³, Ferli Septi Irwansyah⁴, Artika Eka Prihatini⁵, Fitra Elnurianda⁶

^{1,2,5}Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Balikpapan, Indonesia

³Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

⁶Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia

Email Corresponding : sheteacamel@gmail.com

Abstract

Madrasah in Indonesia carry a growing responsibility to form pupils whose religious devotion and national commitment develop as one, a task made harder by rising intolerance and thinning empathy among the young. This study examines how the Love-Based Curriculum shapes nationalist-religious character across two contrasting *madrasah ibtidiyah* in Balikpapan, one a state *madrasah* and the other a *pesantren*-based private school. A qualitative multiple-case design guided the inquiry, drawing on in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and pupils, participatory classroom observation, and document analysis, with source, technique, and time triangulation securing the validity of the findings. The two schools entered the curriculum through different dimensions of love and different subjects, the first through love of the homeland in Islamic history and the second through love of fellow humans in creed and character. Both nonetheless produced pupils in whom faith and nationhood were fused rather than separated. The analysis shows that a shared affective mechanism, built on teacher exemplarity and a value-laden classroom environment, converted these divergent inputs into a convergent character. From this pattern the study proposes an Affective Convergence Model as its central contribution. The findings imply that *madrasah* of differing orientation need not adopt an identical program to reach the same formative goal, provided the dimension of love they foreground is carried by an affective pedagogy grounded in the teacher's example.

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INTRODUCTION

Few tasks in Indonesian religious education are as delicate as forming a pupil who is devout and patriotic at once, since devotion to faith and love of nation are often treated as competing loyalties rather than a single formation (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Sutomo & Budihardjo, 2021). *Madrasah* are now expected to hold the two together, and that expectation has grown more pressing amid public concern over intolerance and the shallow internalization of values among the young (Helmiati, 2021). Part of the difficulty lies in a familiar imbalance, where classroom practice rewards cognitive achievement while the affective and civic sides of learning are left to chance (Gegenfurtner et al., 2026; Laronze & Nkaoua, 2025; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2024). The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) cluster carries much of this burden, since it is where belief, character, and belonging are meant to be cultivated together. Responding to the problem, the Ministry of Religious Affairs issued the Love-Based Curriculum through Directorate General Decree Number 6077 of 2025, which sets the dimensions of love as the affective ground of *madrasah* learning (Dzulfian Syafrian, 2025; Jamilah, 2021; Muhaemin et al., 2023). Whether that policy actually forms a character that is both devout and national, and how, remains an open empirical question.

Prior scholarship clusters around three themes that together frame this question. A first body of work establishes that moderate Islamic education can strengthen national feeling, with Jamilah (2021) showing that moderate instruction raised nationalism among Muslim student organizations, and Muhaemin et al. (2023) arguing that PAI can counter intolerant attitudes in schools. A second theme concerns pedagogy, where Saepudin et al. (2023) used action research to build religious moderation through character education, foregrounding the affective work of value formation. A third and newer theme addresses the Love-Based Curriculum directly, with studies describing its integration of compassion across PAI subjects and its promise for humanistic character, though most remain conceptual or literature-based rather than empirical (Sari, 2025). Read across these themes, the literature affirms that Islamic education can cultivate moderation, nationalism, and affective character, and that love offers a plausible organizing principle for that task.

A critical reading of these themes exposes two gaps. The existing work rarely descends to the classroom level to show how specific dimensions of love are embedded in particular Islamic religious education subjects and enacted through pedagogy, so the mechanism of formation remains underspecified (Saepudin et al., 2023). It also rarely compares across institutions, which leaves open whether *madrasah* of differing character reach the same formative outcome through the same route or through different ones. The novelty of this study lies in closing both gaps at once through an empirical, multiple-case comparison of two contrasting *madrasah*, one state and one *pesantren*-based. Rather than asking whether the Love-Based Curriculum forms character, it asks how divergent value inputs across sites yield a convergent character, a question neither the moderation nor the curriculum literature has posed.

The study pursues three specific objectives that extend the existing literature. It seeks to describe how each *madrasah* integrates the dimensions of love into its Islamic religious education (PAI) cluster, to identify the pedagogy that carries that integration, and to explain how the resulting nationalist-religious character is formed and validated across the two sites. In doing so, it moves the field beyond the conceptual and single-site accounts that dominate current work toward a grounded, comparative account of practice. Its relevance is both academic and practical. Academically, it supplies the classroom-level and cross-institutional evidence that the moderation and Love-Based Curriculum literatures currently lack. Practically, it offers principals and PAI teachers a transferable understanding of how contrasting emphases can still produce a coherent, moderate, and nationally committed pupil.

The central focus of the study is the relationship between the dimension of love a *madrasah* foregrounds and the character it forms, explored through the lived practice of two schools. It concentrates on how love of the homeland, love of fellow humans, and devotion to God are taught through different PAI subjects, and on whether an affective pedagogy anchored in teacher exemplarity converts these differing inputs into a shared outcome. Because the aim is understanding rather than measurement, the study adopts a qualitative multiple-case design that reads interview, observation, and documentary evidence against one another at each site. This design allows the study to trace formation as it happens in ordinary classroom life rather than to infer it from attitudes alone. The following section sets out the method through which these two cases were selected, documented, and analyzed.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a multiple-case study design, chosen because the research problem concerns how meaning, value, and character are formed within specific institutional settings rather than how variables relate across a population (Al Qur'an, 2025; Petrová Kafková et al., 2026). A multiple-case design is appropriate when the aim is to understand a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, and to compare how that phenomenon unfolds across more than one bounded case (Lim et al., 2023; Lin & Tao, 2024; Wang, 2024). The two cases were selected purposively for their instructive contrast: MIN 1 Balikpapan Timur, a state *madrasah* with a historical-patriotic emphasis, and MISC Balikpapan

Selatan, a *pesantren*-based private *madrasah* with an affective-social emphasis. Choosing two *madrasah* that differ in status and orientation, rather than two of the same type, allowed the study to test whether the love-based curriculum operates as a single fixed formula or as a flexible framework realized differently according to each school's character, and it is this contrast that gives the later cross-site analysis its analytical value.

Data were gathered through three complementary techniques so that each finding could be examined from more than one direction: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Koro et al., 2024). Interviews were conducted with the principals and PAI teachers at both sites to elicit their understanding, policy intent, and classroom strategies for integrating the dimensions of love, namely love of God, of the Prophet, of fellow humans, and of the homeland, and were supplemented by pupils' accounts of what they experienced. Participatory observation focused on the opening of lessons, the use of story-telling, drama, and reflective discussion in History of Islamic Culture and *Aqidah Akhlak*, pupils' affective responses, and the religious and national symbols displayed in the classroom and school environment, while documentation study examined lesson plans, syllabi, and character-program guides. Informants were assigned codes to preserve anonymity and to make the triangulation of sources traceable, so that interview material is cited as KM (*madrasah* head) or G with a subject marker (teacher) followed by the site, pupils as S with the site, and observation notes as OBS with a sequence number. The informants who provided the study's primary evidence are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Research informants across the two sites

Code	Role	Site		Area of responsibility	Data-collection technique
KM-MIN1	<i>Madrasah</i> head	MIN Balikpapan Timur	1	Institutional policy of the love-based curriculum	In-depth interview
G-SKI/MIN1	PAI teacher	MIN Balikpapan Timur	1	History of Islamic Culture (<i>SKI</i>)	In-depth interview and observation (OBS-01)
S-MIN1	Pupils	MIN Balikpapan Timur	1	Recipients of the <i>SKI</i> learning process	Interview and observation (OBS-01)
KM-MISC	<i>Madrasah</i> head	MISC Balikpapan Selatan		Institutional policy of the love-based curriculum	In-depth interview
G-AA/MISC	PAI teacher	MISC Balikpapan Selatan		<i>Aqidah Akhlak</i>	In-depth interview and observation (OBS-02)
S-MISC	Pupils	MISC Balikpapan Selatan		Recipients of the <i>Aqidah Akhlak</i> learning process	Interview and observation (OBS-02)

Source: Field data of the two research sites, 2025.

Table 1 lists the informants who provided the study's primary evidence and shows how the three data-collection techniques were distributed across the two sites. At each *madrasah* the head supplied the policy account, a PAI teacher supplied the classroom account, and the pupils supplied evidence of uptake, so that a single finding could be traced through three levels of the same institution. The pairing of interview with observation for the teachers and pupils, indicated in the final column, is what allowed each interview claim to be checked against enacted practice at the same site. This distribution of informants across roles and sites forms the basis for the source triangulation reported in the findings.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, moving through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification as a recursive rather than a strictly linear sequence, and was extended by a cross-site analysis appropriate to the multiple-case design (Bingham, 2023; Laari, 2025; McGill et al., 2023). In the condensation stage the interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were reduced and coded around the study's guiding concepts, so that the dense record of fieldwork was sharpened into analytically relevant units organized under the dimensions of love and the emerging themes. The interview quotations were lightly edited for readability, removing conversational fillers and normalizing spelling without altering their meaning. These condensed data were then displayed, first as within-case thematic

matrices for each *madrasah* and then as a triangulation matrix and a cross-site matrix that set the two cases side by side, allowing patterns of convergence and divergence to be seen at a glance. Conclusions were drawn from these displays and verified through the triangulation of source, technique, and time, comparing each head's stated policy with the teachers' practice and the pupils' experience, matching interview accounts against observation and lesson-plan evidence, and checking behavioral consistency between the intra-curricular morning and the habituation of midday. The credibility of the findings therefore rests not on any single account or any single site, but on the convergence of three data streams cross-checked across two contrasting cases.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study compares two *madrasah ibtidaiyah* in Balikpapan: MIN 1 Balikpapan Timur, a state *madrasah* with a historical-patriotic emphasis, and MISC Balikpapan Selatan, a *pesantren*-based private *madrasah* with an affective-social emphasis. Five themes structure the findings. Each rests on three techniques used together: interviews with heads, PAI teachers, and pupils; participatory observation of classrooms and school environments; and the study of lesson documents. Every theme is then read across the two sites, so that a pattern claimed at one *madrasah* is checked against the other. What emerges is that the love-based curriculum works less as a fixed formula than as a flexible framework, one that each school realizes according to its own character. The themes proceed from how each site frames its program, through the dimension of love and the subject that carries it, to the pedagogy and the character it forms, and close with the triangulation that validates the whole.

How Each Site Frames the Love-Based Curriculum

Each *madrasah* had turned the idea of a love-based curriculum into a named flagship program, and the name it chose reveals the value it placed first. Both institutionalized the same concept, yet each entered it through a different dimension of love. At MIN 1 the head framed the program as a response to a real threat, insisting that religious teaching could not stop at the transfer of knowledge:

We see radicalism as a real challenge, so our policy is firm: the PAI cluster must not be mere cognitive transfer. Through the "Noble Character, Love of the Homeland" program I require all PAI teachers, especially in SKI and Fiqh, to embed love-of-homeland indicators. SKI is the very spirit of Islamic nationalism. If a child loves the Prophet, they must also love their homeland, following the Prophet's example in Medina. (KM-MIN1)

At MISC the head reasoned from a different starting point, placing love of fellow humans rather than historical patriotism at the base of national feeling:

We focus on the dimension of Mahabbatul Insan, love of fellow humans, as the gateway to nationalism. Here, the "Islamic religious education (PAI) with a Soul that Loves the Nation" program is embedded strongly in Aqidah Akhlak. The environment here is heterogeneous, so the children must cultivate their tolerance first. If they love people of a different ethnicity, that is the most concrete foundation of the Republic seen through Islam. (KM-MISC)

The two principals reached the same institutional commitment by different routes, one anchoring nationhood in the example of the Prophet and the history of Islamic struggle, the other in an ethic of care for a diverse society. The coherence of the curriculum therefore does not rest on one uniform doctrine. It rests on a shared move each school makes, turning the language of faith into the language of the nation. This pattern, set here at the level of policy, is the one the following themes follow down into subject choice, classroom practice, and pupil conduct, and the one the final theme puts to the test.

The Dimension of Love

Each site foregrounds a different dimension of love and delivers it through a different PAI subject, which is how one framework spreads across the cluster. MIN 1 built love of the homeland into History of Islamic Culture, reasoning from historical consciousness, while MISC built love of fellow humans into *Aqidah Akhlak*, reasoning from empathy in a diverse community. The teachers' accounts show what this looked like in practice. The *SKI* teacher at MIN 1 taught the history of Islamic struggle by dramatizing it rather than by asking for memorization:

I use a lot of historical storytelling and small drama performances. When we discuss the Wali Songo or the independence-era scholars, I do not ask them to memorize dates. I say, "Imagine you are Prince Diponegoro, wearing a turban yet brave enough to take up arms against the Dutch." The children get goosebumps. That is where I stress that defending the country is jihad, a religious command. (G-SKI/MIN1)

The *Aqidah Akhlak* teacher at MISC reasoned from religious obligation toward social solidarity, using visual material and reflective discussion:

I often use a visual approach, playing documentary videos about Indonesia's diversity or about children their own age in remote areas. After watching, we hold a reflective discussion. I ask whether we are allowed to hate those who are different, and the children answer together that we may not, that God forbids it. This national awareness, born from obedience to God, is what takes root firmly. (G-AA/MISC)

Across the two sites, the four voices show that the choice of dimension and subject is not arbitrary but expresses each school's identity, the state *madrasah* reasoning from history and the *pesantren*-based school from theology. The difference enriches the framework rather than fracturing it, since whichever dimension is stressed, the trajectory bends toward the same moderate, nationalist-religious character. That a head and a teacher at each site describe the same emphasis in convergent terms is itself an early instance of source triangulation, developed systematically in the final theme: the policy stated at the top is echoed in the practice at the classroom level, independently at both sites.

Pedagogy and the Classroom Environment

What is taught matters less here than how it is enacted, and observation carries this theme, because at both sites the teaching works through experience and environment rather than through lecture. At MIN 1 the researcher recorded a deliberately designed hidden curriculum from the school gate inward, where a banner reading "Love of Religion, Defense of the Nation" gave way to corridors in which posters of the *Wali Songo* stood beside portraits of national heroes; inside a Grade 6 *SKI* (Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam, History of Islamic Culture) lesson the teacher opened with *Asmaul Husna* and a solemn singing of "*Indonesia Raya*" before setting a collaborative project on the traces of scholars in the homeland, and the field note recorded that pupils came to feel proud as Indonesian Muslims rather than only to know the history (OBS-01). At MISC the environment was inclusive rather than historical, its Grade 5B classroom displaying a "tree of hope" whose every leaf carried a pupil's prayer for Indonesia's peace, foregrounding the symbolism of *Mahabbatul Insan* (OBS-02). A representative view of the classroom setting at one of the research sites appears in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1 shows the quality both observations captured: a room where religious and national symbols hang together, so the setting begins the lesson before the teacher speaks. The MISC observation also caught the moment at which a taught value became enacted conduct, which is the analytical heart of this theme. During an *Aqidah Akhlak* lesson on the etiquette of neighbourliness the teacher replaced lecture with a news-based case study of citizens helping one another across religious lines during a disaster, and at the break two pupils shared their meals with a classmate who had forgotten food, an unprompted act the field note read as the teacher's *uswah hasanah* translated into behaviour (OBS-02). The methods differ, historical drama at MIN 1 and reflective, service-oriented discussion at MISC, but a single logic runs beneath them.



Figure 1. Classroom learning environment at one of the research sites, showing religious and national symbols within ordinary PAI instruction

Source: Field documentation, 2025.

The Character Pupils Actually Showed

A curriculum that claims to form character must be judged by what pupils do and become, not by what it intends. The two sites produced two complementary profiles, each mirroring its emphasis. At MIN 1 the outcome was a firm patriotic pride, with pupils positioning themselves as a Muslim generation continuing the nation's struggle, a disposition visible in their absorbed enthusiasm during the historical project work and in the observation that the customarily "dry" material of *SKI* had become charged with civic meaning (OBS-01). At MISC the outcome was a high level of sociocultural tolerance, with pupils valuing difference across ethnic and religious lines, a disposition that surfaced not in words but in the spontaneous sharing observed during the break (OBS-02). Neither profile rested on informant claims alone; each interview assertion was matched against observed behavior, which is what allows the study to treat these outcomes as findings rather than aspirations. Taken together, the two profiles suggest that the love-based curriculum does not produce one standardized character but cultivates whichever facet of the moderate *Muslim citizen* its host institution most values, while keeping both facets, patriotic pride and inclusive tolerance, inside a single profile of a religiously grounded, nationally committed pupil. This last theme sets out how the central finding was checked before the two cases are drawn together. The claim to be tested was that the love-based curriculum strengthens nationalist-religious character. Rather than take any account at face value, the analysis ran it through three kinds of triangulation, gathered in Table 1 and then worked through one at a time. The cross-checking of the central finding along the three triangulation axes appears in **Table 2**.

Table 2 reports an analysis carried out along each axis, not simply laid out. The source check followed one claim down through each school, testing the policy the heads described against what teachers said they did, against how pupils described their experience, and against the indicators written into the *RPP*; at both sites these lined up, so the leadership's commitment could not be read as talk confined to the top. The technique check then tested the same claim sideways across methods, asking whether what teachers claimed in interview actually appeared in the observed lessons and in the documents; the story-telling, drama, and reflective discussion showed up in all three places, which closed the distance between the stated and the enacted curriculum. The time check tested how far the character lasted across the day, and found that what pupils understood in the morning returned as cooperative conduct by midday, marking the difference between a habit that has taken hold and mere compliance in class. Because the finding held up

under all three checks at both sites, the study treats it as valid and well saturated, and this is the base on which the cross-site comparison in **Table 3** rests.

Table 2. Data-triangulation matrix across the two sites (source, technique, time)

Axis of triangulation	Evidence drawn on	How the data confirm one another
Source (head, teacher, pupil, document)	Principals set the integration policy; Islamic religious education (PAI) teachers apply the methods (storytelling, drama, reflective discussion); pupils report greater tolerance and national feeling	The accounts line up across both sites. Policy set by the leadership reappears in the teachers' methods and is borne out by pupils' reported growth in tolerance and pride, consistently at MIN 1 and MISC.
Technique (interview, observation, documentation)	Interview: what teachers say they do. Observation: what happens in class (drama, reflective discussion, projects). Documentation: lesson plans (<i>RPP</i>), syllabi, and program guides at both sites	What teachers claim in interviews is reflected in the observed lessons and is incorporated into the <i>RPP</i> , syllabi, and program handbooks, closing the gap between the stated and the enacted curriculum.
Time (morning intra-curricular / midday habituation)	Morning: understanding the concept and discussing it in class. Midday: social interaction and habituated conduct during breaks	This character holds across the day. What pupils grasp in the morning lesson returns as inclusive, cooperative behavior at midday, which separates a settled disposition from momentary compliance.

Source: Processed from interview transcripts, field notes, and lesson documents of the two sites, 2025.

Table 3. Cross-site analysis across the two *madrasah*

Focus	MIN 1 Balikpapan Timur	MISC Balikpapan Selatan	Reading across the sites
Programme name	"Noble Character, Love of the Homeland"	"Islamic Religious Education (PAI) with a Soul that Loves the Nation"	Both institutions incorporate the love-based curriculum under a distinctive name that point toward a shared goal
Dimension of love and main subject	Love of the homeland (<i>Hubbul Wathan</i>) is integrated into History of Islamic Culture (<i>SKI</i>).	Love of fellow humans (<i>Mahabbatul Insan</i>) is integrated into <i>Aqidah Akhlak</i> .	The sites activate distinct dimensions of love and distinct Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects.
Pedagogy	Historical story-telling, heroic drama, scholar-history projects	Documentary video, reflective discussion, service-oriented habituation	Both reach the pupils' feelings, and the teacher serves as an example rather than a lecturer
Character formed	A firm national identity and pride as an Indonesian Muslim	Sociocultural tolerance, valuing difference and prioritising harmony	Islam and nationalism prove compatible and mutually reinforcing

Source: Cross-site analysis of the two research sites, 2025.

Table 3 puts the argument in a single frame. The two *madrasah* agree on the essentials of the love-based curriculum and differ in emphasis, and it is that combination, shared ends reached by local means, that makes up the finding. Where they agree, in giving the curriculum a named programme, in trading lecture for a pedagogy that reaches the feelings, and in casting the teacher as an example, they show the framework's stable core. Where they differ, in the dimension of love they lead with, the subject they build it into, and the character they form, they show how far it bends to fit a school's identity and setting. That range is not a sign of inconsistency. It is what lets one framework form patriotic pride in one place and inclusive tolerance in another, while both stay inside a single picture of the moderate *Muslim citizen*. Taken with the triangulated evidence, the comparison supports the study's conclusion: across two contrasting *madrasah*, the love-based curriculum forms a nationalist-religious character that pupils take in as feeling and act out in conduct, showing that Islam and nationalism reinforce one another in shaping a *Rahmatan lil-'Alamin* pupil.

Discussion

This study confirms that the love-based curriculum works as an effective vehicle for forming nationalist-religious character. Its more important contribution, however, is the account of *how* two *madrasahs* reached the same result along different routes. MIN 1 entered the curriculum through love of the homeland and the History of Islamic Culture, while MISC entered it through love of fellow humans and *Aqidah Akhlak*. Both produced students in whom religious devotion and national commitment were fused rather than held apart. Earlier scholarship on character education has generally treated value integration as a question of choosing the right content (Aziz & Aziz, 2022; Berkowitz, 2022; Long et al., 2021). These two cases point in a different direction. They indicate that the decisive factor is the affective pathway rather than the specific value selected, and that the coherence of a love-based curriculum depends on a shared process of internalization rather than a common syllabus.

That process becomes clearer when the findings are read through Lickona's framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which the field notes themselves invoked (Nagashima & Gibbs, 2022; Van Fossen et al., 2022). In both *madrasahs* the teaching moved past moral knowing on purpose. Students did not simply learn that love of the homeland or love of one's neighbor is virtuous. They were led to feel it through storytelling, drama, reflective discussion, and the teacher's own example, and then to act on it in cooperative and service-oriented behavior (Paterson, 2026). The spontaneous meal-sharing observed at MISC and the patriotic pride observed at MIN 1 show, in Lickona's terms, that moral feeling had matured into moral action. This places the love-based curriculum within affective pedagogy, where emotion becomes the bridge between cognition and behavior rather than a by-product of instruction (Díaz, 2023; Niemi & Katila, 2022).

The teacher and the classroom environment played a more significant role than the lesson content itself, as the data indicate that much of the pedagogical work occurred before any explicit instruction began (Gunio, 2021). The banner at the MIN 1 gate, the pairing of scholarly portraits with national heroes, and the tree of hope at MISC all functioned as a hidden curriculum whose symbolism shaped learning through the environment (Eder, 2023). The teacher, acted as *uswah hasanah*, an exemplar whose disposition passed to pupils through modeling rather than instruction. The classroom ecology and the teacher's example together formed the affective mechanism that converts different value inputs into a shared character outcome. This explains why contrasting methods at the two sites did not produce contrasting characters. Synthesizing these observations, the study proposes an Affective Convergence Model of the love-based curriculum, as shown in **Figure 2**. **Figure 2** The model synthesizes the findings into one explanatory framework and constitutes the study's primary contribution to the field.

Figure 2 shows what separates this study from earlier accounts of value-based Islamic education. On the left, the model displays divergence, because each *madrasah* begins from a different dimension of love, carried by a different PAI subject and a different method. The center holds the affective mechanism, the teacher as exemplar and the classroom as a value-laden ecology, which processes these different inputs in the same manner. On the right, the two pathways converge on a single outcome, a nationalist-religious character expressed as the *Rahmatan lil-'Alamin* profile, resting on Lickona's progression from moral knowing to feeling and action. What the model contributes is a way of reading pedagogical diversity as a strength instead of a source of inconsistency. Because the conversion happens affectively, the specific value entry point matters less than the mechanism that follows it, so one framework can honor the local identity of each institution and still form a coherent character. This gives researchers and curriculum designers a transferable explanation for why love-based approaches succeed across different *madrasah* settings.

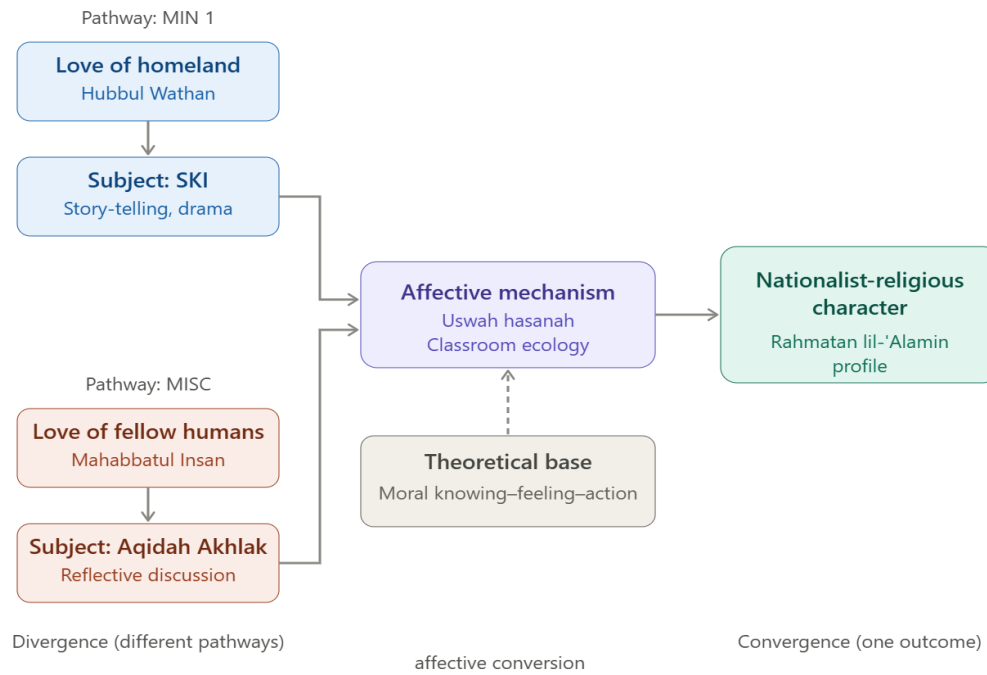


Figure 2. The Affective Convergence Model of the love-based curriculum, synthesizing the cross-site findings

Source: Developed by the authors from the study's findings, 2025.

The specific contribution of this study is clear. On the theoretical side, it advances character-education scholarship by identifying affective conversion, in place of value selection, as the operating principle of the love-based curriculum, and by naming and modeling that principle so other researchers can test and apply it. On the practical side, it shows that *madrasahs* of different orientations, whether state or *pesantren*-based, historical or social in emphasis, do not need an identical program to reach the same formative goal. They need only ensure that whichever dimension of love they choose to foreground is delivered through an affective pedagogy grounded in the teacher's example and a supportive classroom ecology. Within the wider discussion of religious moderation and the compatibility of Islam and nationalism, the model demonstrates that a *Rahmatan lil-'Alamin* character can be cultivated through plural, locally adapted routes rather than one prescribed path (Syamsadea, 2025). Reading divergence as convergence is, to the best of the authors' knowledge, the study's novel contribution to the field.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how the love-based curriculum forms nationalist-religious character across two *madrasahs*, and it found that MIN 1 and MISC reached the same formative outcome along different routes. MIN 1 worked through love of the homeland in the History of Islamic Culture, while MISC worked through love of fellow humans in *Aqidah Akhlak*. Both converged by way of a shared affective mechanism built on the teacher's example and a value-laden classroom ecology, which suggests that the entry point matters less than the process that carries it. Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The study rests on two *madrasah* in a single city, so its findings describe those cases rather than a wider population. It also draws on a small group of informants observed over a short period, which narrows the view of how character forms and settles across time, and its reliance on self-reported interviews leaves the durability of that character untested. Subsequent research could address these gaps in three ways. A larger and more varied sample of *madrasah* would strengthen comparability, a longitudinal design would trace pupils across several years, and the inclusion of parents and the surrounding community would reveal whether the character cultivated in school endures once pupils return home.

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