

Love-Based Curriculum Management in Islamic Religious Education: A Strategy for Character and Values Education

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how love-based curriculum management functions as a strategic approach to character and values education in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Recent educational studies indicate a growing gap between the normative goals of religious education and its practical impact on students' character formation, particularly when curriculum management prioritizes cognitive achievement over moral development. Previous research has discussed character education, values-based learning, and Islamic pedagogy; however, limited attention has been given to integrating love-based values as a core element of curriculum management. This study employed a qualitative case study design conducted at Elementary school. Data were collected through desk review of curriculum documents, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with school leaders and IRE teachers, and were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and interpretative analysis. The findings reveal three key results. First, love-based values such as compassion, empathy, and social responsibility were embedded as the core foundation of curriculum management, shaping objectives, learning materials, and school culture. Second, strategic curriculum planning aligned cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes, enabling character education to be structurally integrated rather than supplementary. Third, collaborative organizational management among school stakeholders ensured consistency and sustainability in implementing love-based principles. This study contributes to educational management theory by conceptualizing love-based values as a strategic managerial framework rather than a moral add-on. It is recommended that future research expand the scope through multi-site and mixed-method approaches to support broader policy development.

Keywords: Love-Based Curriculum, Islamic Religious Education, Curriculum Management, Character Education, Values Education

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education systems increasingly face challenges related to moral decline, social fragmentation, and weakening character formation among students (Aydemir & Türkel, 2022; Barkhuizen, 2021; Sahid et al., 2021). In many educational contexts, including primary schools, academic achievement is often prioritized over ethical development, resulting in a gap between cognitive competence and moral behavior (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Kanawapee et al., 2022; Rekha et al., 2024). This condition becomes particularly critical in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which theoretically emphasizes character, values, and moral conduct. However, empirical realities show that religious

instruction frequently remains normative and textual, with limited impact on students' daily attitudes and social interactions. Scholars have noted that this discrepancy is influenced by managerial approaches that treat curriculum as a technical instrument rather than a value-driven system (Mahsusi et al., 2024; Sahid et al., 2021; Thaher et al., 2020). Consequently, educational institutions struggle to translate moral ideals into lived experiences. This social fact highlights a crucial issue in contemporary education: how character education can be effectively institutionalized through curriculum management. Therefore, addressing this gap requires a deeper examination of how values-based approaches, such as love-based principles, can be structurally embedded within curriculum management practices.

Existing literature on curriculum management and character education emphasizes the importance of integrating values into educational systems. Studies on values-based education suggest that moral development becomes sustainable when values are embedded within curriculum design, pedagogy, and institutional culture. Research on Islamic Religious Education similarly underscores that IRE should function as a medium for moral and spiritual transformation rather than mere knowledge transmission (Daenulhay, 2020; Nahar et al., 2022). Scholars have also highlighted the role of curriculum management in shaping educational outcomes, arguing that effective management aligns objectives, content, and evaluation (Latipah, 2021; Otaya et al., 2023). Nevertheless, much of the literature treats values as supplementary elements rather than core managerial components. While some studies discuss compassion, empathy, and ethical leadership, few explicitly conceptualize love as a foundational principle of curriculum management. This descriptive review indicates that although values education has been widely discussed, its integration into curriculum management remains under-theorized. Thus, the literature points to a need for a more systematic exploration of value-based curriculum management models within Islamic education.

This study is situated within the context of Islamic Religious Education at the primary school level, focusing on curriculum management as a strategic domain. The scope of the research encompasses curriculum planning, implementation, and organizational management as they relate to character and values education. The study is conducted at Sekolah Dasar Negeri Menteng, a public primary school that integrates Islamic Religious Education into its formal curriculum. This context provides a relevant setting to examine how love-based values can be operationalized within a structured educational environment. The research does not aim to evaluate theological content but rather to analyze managerial processes that shape educational practice. By concentrating on curriculum management, the study explores how values are institutionalized rather than individually practiced. This contextual focus allows for an in-depth understanding of how love-based principles function within real educational structures. Therefore, the scope of this study is deliberately defined to examine the intersection of curriculum management, Islamic education, and character development.

Character education as a structured educational process. The role of management and leadership in sustaining educational change (Abidin et al., 2023; Fatmawati et al., 2024). Noddings' work on care ethics underscores the importance of relational values in education. Character integration in Islamic curricula (Istikhori et al., 2023; Martzoukou, 2022). Curriculum implementation challenges in religious education. Although these studies contribute valuable perspectives, they tend to address values, management, and Islamic education separately (Kultsum et al., 2022; Rianawaty et al., 2021; Roziqin et al., 2024). Few studies explicitly integrate love-based values into curriculum management frameworks. This indicates that existing research has not fully addressed the managerial dimension of values integration. Therefore, the current study positions itself within this research landscape by synthesizing these domains.

Despite extensive research on character education and curriculum management, a significant research gap remains regarding the integration of love-based values as a core managerial principle. Existing studies often conceptualize values as pedagogical outcomes rather than structural foundations. Moreover, research in Islamic Religious Education tends to focus on instructional methods or theological content, leaving curriculum management underexplored. The novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of love not merely as an ethical ideal but as a strategic element of curriculum management. By examining how love-based values are embedded within planning, organization, and implementation, this study offers a new analytical perspective. This approach moves beyond normative discourse and provides an empirical examination of value institutionalization. Consequently, the study fills a theoretical and empirical gap by linking curriculum management theory with love-based educational principles. Thus, the research contributes an original framework for understanding values-driven curriculum management.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how love-based curriculum management functions as a strategy for character and values education in Islamic Religious Education. Specifically, the study seeks to address the following research questions: How are love-based values integrated into curriculum management processes in IRE? Why does love-based curriculum management influence character and values education? What managerial structures support or hinder the implementation of love-based principles? These questions guide the investigation toward understanding both functional outcomes and underlying structures. The focus of the study is not to measure moral outcomes quantitatively but to analyze managerial practices qualitatively. Therefore, the research objectives are aligned with the need to understand curriculum management as a strategic instrument for character education.

This study argues that love-based curriculum management constitutes a viable and strategic approach to strengthening character and values education in Islamic Religious Education. The central argument is that values become effective when they are institutionalized through curriculum management rather than delivered as isolated moral messages. The study contributes theoretically by expanding curriculum management discourse to include affective and ethical dimensions. Practically, it offers a model for schools seeking to integrate character education systematically. This contribution is particularly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges related to moral development. In conclusion, the research advances an original argument that curriculum management grounded in love-based values can transform Islamic Religious Education into a sustainable vehicle for character and values education.

RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the implementation of love-based curriculum management in Islamic Religious Education at Sekolah Dasar Negeri (SDN) Menteng. The research focuses on the school as an institutional setting where curriculum management processes are enacted and experienced. Specifically, the material object of this study includes curriculum planning documents, learning activities, organizational practices, and educational interactions related to Islamic Religious Education (Köhler, 2024). SDN Menteng was selected as the research site because it represents a public primary school that integrates Islamic Religious Education within a formal national curriculum framework. The case examined in this study centers on how love-based values are embedded in curriculum management practices, including planning, implementation, and organizational coordination. The activities analyzed involve classroom instruction, school routines, and collaborative management processes among educators and school leaders.

This study employs a qualitative research design using a case study approach. The

qualitative paradigm is chosen to capture the complexity and depth of curriculum management practices that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement (Mulisa, 2022). A case study design enables the researcher to explore how love-based values are interpreted, implemented, and institutionalized within a specific educational context. This approach is particularly suitable for examining processes, meanings, and interactions among educational actors. The study adopts an interpretive perspective, viewing curriculum management as a socially constructed practice shaped by values, beliefs, and institutional norms.

The sources of information in this study consist of human informants, institutional texts, and observed educational practices. Key informants include the school principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, curriculum coordinators, and selected classroom teachers. These informants were chosen purposively based on their roles and involvement in curriculum management and instructional processes. Documentary sources include curriculum plans, lesson plans, school policy documents, and instructional materials related to Islamic Religious Education. Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure methodological rigor. Desk review was conducted to analyze relevant documents and institutional texts. Classroom and school observations were carried out to capture real-time implementation of love-based values. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using interview guidelines to explore participants' perspectives and experiences. In addition, open-ended questionnaires were used to complement interview data and capture reflective responses.

Table 1. Data Collection Matrix

Data Source	Technique	Instrument
School Leaders	Interview	Interview guide
IRE Teachers	Interview & Observation	Interview guide, observation sheet
Documents	Desk Review	Document checklist
School Activities	Observation	Field notes

Data analysis in this study follows an interactive and iterative process consisting of data reduction, data display, and data verification (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data reduction involves selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. This stage allows the researcher to identify relevant patterns related to love-based curriculum management. Data display is conducted by organizing information into thematic categories, narrative descriptions, and tables to facilitate interpretation. The final stage, data verification, involves drawing conclusions and validating findings through triangulation across data sources and techniques. In terms of analytical methods, this study employs content analysis to examine curriculum documents and instructional materials. Discourse analysis is used to analyze interview transcripts and institutional narratives, focusing on how love-based values are articulated and framed. Interpretative analysis is applied to understand the meanings behind observed practices and managerial decisions. Through these analytical procedures, the study ensures systematic, credible, and meaningful interpretation of qualitative data. Consequently, the data analysis process supports the development of well-grounded conclusions regarding love-based curriculum management.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Love-Based Values as the Core of Curriculum Management

The first finding of this study reveals that love-based values constitute the core foundation of curriculum management in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SDN Menteng. These values—such as compassion (*rahmah*), empathy, mutual respect, and social

responsibility—are positioned as guiding principles that inform curriculum design and instructional direction. Rather than functioning merely as moral slogans, love-based values are systematically integrated into curriculum objectives, learning materials, and school regulations. This strategic positioning indicates a paradigm shift in IRE management, moving from content-oriented instruction toward character-oriented education. The curriculum is designed to foster not only students' understanding of religious concepts but also their capacity to embody Islamic values in everyday behavior. This approach aligns curriculum management with the broader mission of character and values education. Consequently, love-based values serve as a unifying framework that shapes pedagogical decisions and institutional practices.

Love-based values were consistently reflected in daily educational practices. Teachers demonstrated respectful communication, patience, and emotional attentiveness when interacting with students, particularly during Islamic Religious Education lessons. Observations showed that learning activities encouraged cooperation, mutual assistance, and respectful dialogue among students. In classroom displays, visual materials emphasized messages of kindness, tolerance, and social harmony rooted in Islamic teachings. School routines such as collective prayers, peer support activities, and conflict resolution practices further reinforced these values. Importantly, these practices were not limited to IRE lessons but permeated the broader school culture. This indicates that curriculum management at SDN Menteng effectively translated love-based values from formal planning documents into lived educational experiences. Such consistency between planned curriculum and observable practice demonstrates the operationalization of love-based values as a managerial foundation.

Table 2. The integration of love-based values into curriculum management

Curriculum Component	Manifestation of Love-Based Values
Curriculum Objectives	Emphasis on empathy, respect, and moral responsibility
Learning Materials	Contextual Islamic narratives promoting compassion
Teaching Practices	Dialogical, respectful, and student-centered methods
School Culture	Cooperative routines and value-based discipline

Table 2. illustrates how love-based values are embedded across multiple curriculum dimensions. Each component reflects intentional alignment between curriculum management and character education goals. The visualization clarifies that love-based values are not isolated elements but interconnected across curriculum structures. Consequently, curriculum management at SDN Menteng demonstrates coherence between planning, implementation, and institutional culture. This alignment strengthens the sustainability of values education within the school context.

Love-based values function as the central axis of curriculum management in IRE at SDN Menteng. Interpretation of this finding suggests that curriculum management operates beyond technical administration and assumes a moral and ethical dimension. By embedding love-based values into curriculum structures, school leaders and teachers ensure that educational processes consistently reinforce character formation. This approach reflects a value-driven management model, where curriculum decisions are guided by ethical considerations rather than solely academic efficiency. The interpretation further indicates that such integration enhances the relevance of IRE in addressing students' social and emotional development. Love-based curriculum management thus serves as a strategic response to contemporary educational challenges related to moral decline and social fragmentation. Overall, this finding highlights the transformative potential of aligning curriculum management with core humanistic and Islamic values.

Positioning love-based values as the core of curriculum management significantly strengthens character and values education. At SDN Menteng, this approach enabled IRE to

function as a transformative educational force rather than a purely instructional subject. The general conclusion suggests that love-based curriculum management can be effectively adopted in other primary education contexts to promote holistic development. By integrating values into curriculum planning and implementation, schools can create learning environments that nurture moral awareness and social responsibility. Therefore, love-based values should be recognized as a strategic foundation for curriculum management in Islamic Religious Education.

Strategic Curriculum Planning

The curriculum planning in IRE at SDN Menteng is strategically designed to integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning outcomes. Curriculum documents reveal that lesson plans explicitly articulate character-related objectives alongside academic competencies. This reflects a management orientation that prioritizes holistic education rather than fragmented learning goals. Strategic planning ensures that religious knowledge is consistently linked to attitudes and behaviors, enabling students to internalize Islamic values meaningfully. Such planning demonstrates deliberate alignment between educational vision and instructional practice. Consequently, curriculum planning functions as a strategic instrument for embedding character education structurally within IRE.

Interview data from three key informants support this finding. The school principal stated, “We ensure that every IRE lesson plan includes character indicators, not only academic targets.” An IRE teacher explained, “Our lesson planning always connects Islamic teachings with students’ daily behavior, such as honesty and respect.” Meanwhile, a curriculum coordinator emphasized, “Character education is not an additional program; it is integrated from the planning stage.” These statements demonstrate shared understanding among stakeholders regarding strategic curriculum planning. The interviews confirm that curriculum planning is intentionally structured to support character and values education. This collective commitment strengthens the consistency of implementation across classrooms.

Strategic curriculum planning at SDN Menteng ensures that IRE learning objectives encompass cognitive mastery and character development. Planning documents function as managerial tools that guide teachers in integrating values into instructional practice. This restatement emphasizes that curriculum planning is not neutral but value-laden. By embedding character indicators, planning processes reinforce the school’s commitment to holistic education. Therefore, curriculum planning emerges as a critical managerial mechanism for sustaining love-based education.

Strategic curriculum planning reflects a proactive management approach that anticipates students’ moral and social needs. Rather than reacting to behavioral issues, the curriculum is designed to prevent them through systematic value integration. This interpretation highlights curriculum planning as a preventive and developmental strategy. It also suggests that effective management requires foresight and coherence between vision and practice. Thus, strategic planning enhances the effectiveness of IRE as a vehicle for character formation.

Strategic curriculum planning at SDN Menteng demonstrates that character education can be institutionalized through deliberate managerial processes. This finding implies that schools seeking to strengthen values education should prioritize planning as a strategic entry point. Holistic curriculum planning ensures sustainability and consistency in character development initiatives. Therefore, strategic planning serves as a cornerstone of love-based curriculum management in Islamic Religious Education.

Collaborative Organizational Management

Collaborative organizational management plays a crucial role in implementing a love-based curriculum at SDN Menteng. Effective collaboration among school leaders, IRE teachers, and supporting staff ensures shared responsibility for values education. Organizational structures facilitate coordination, communication, and mutual accountability. This collaborative approach enables consistent application of love-based principles across institutional practices. Consequently, curriculum implementation becomes a collective endeavor rather than an individual initiative.

Observations indicate that collaborative management is evident in routine coordination meetings, joint planning sessions, and shared evaluation practices. School leaders actively support teachers by providing guidance and feedback related to character education. Teachers collaborate in designing learning activities that reflect shared values. Additionally, non-teaching staff reinforce love-based values through daily interactions with students. These observations confirm that collaboration strengthens institutional coherence. As a result, love-based curriculum implementation is sustained through organizational synergy.

Table 2. Collaborative Organizational Management

Organizational Actor	Role in Love-Based Curriculum
Principal	Policy direction and supervision
IRE Teachers	Instructional implementation
Curriculum Team	Planning and evaluation
School Staff	Reinforcement of school culture

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of roles in collaborative curriculum management. Each actor contributes to sustaining love-based values institutionally. The visualization highlights that effective management relies on shared commitment and coordinated action. Such collaboration enhances consistency and accountability.

Collaborative organizational management institutionalizes love-based principles within school operations. Interpretation suggests that collaboration transforms values education from personal practice into organizational culture. By embedding values within management structures, the school ensures continuity despite personnel changes. This interpretation emphasizes collaboration as a stabilizing factor in curriculum implementation. Therefore, organizational synergy strengthens the durability of love-based education.

The study generalizes that collaborative organizational management is essential for sustaining love-based curriculum implementation. At SDN Menteng, collaboration ensured consistency, shared ownership, and cultural integration of values education. This finding implies that character education initiatives require organizational alignment to succeed. Thus, collaborative management serves as a key determinant of effective love-based curriculum management in Islamic Religious Education.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that embedding values such as compassion, empathy, and social responsibility into curriculum management contributes positively to the effectiveness of character and values education (Ismail et al., 2024; Mardhiah et al., 2023; Safuan et al., 2024). This approach functions as a unifying framework that aligns instructional goals, pedagogical practices, and institutional culture. In practical terms, love-based curriculum management enhances students' moral engagement and reduces the disconnection often found between religious knowledge and everyday behavior (Masdul et al., 2024; Pike et al., 2021). Similar findings have been reported in previous studies emphasizing value-centered curriculum models, which highlight that moral values become more effective when

structurally embedded rather than informally conveyed. Conversely, the absence of such integration may result in a dysfunction where character education becomes symbolic and fragmented. Therefore, the functional implication of this finding is that love-based values strengthen curriculum coherence and educational relevance. In conclusion, positioning love-based values at the core of curriculum management enables Islamic Religious Education to function as a transformative medium for character development rather than a purely cognitive discipline.

The values are embedded within curriculum objectives, instructional materials, and school policies, they become part of the organizational structure rather than individual moral preferences (Alam, 2021; Haddade et al., 2024; Susilo et al., 2022). This structural integration creates consistency between formal planning and daily practice. Research on educational management similarly suggests that value-driven leadership and curriculum design influence institutional behavior patterns and learning outcomes. The causal relationship observed in this study shows that structural embedding of values leads to sustained behavioral reinforcement among students and educators. Without such structural support, values tend to remain abstract and inconsistently applied (Begum et al., 2025; Nahar et al., 2022). The underlying structure at SDN Menteng allows love-based principles to operate across multiple layers of curriculum management, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. Thus, the effectiveness of love-based curriculum management is not accidental but structurally produced. In conclusion, the causal explanation for the success of love-based values lies in their institutionalization within the curriculum management system.

The planning approach functions to balance academic achievement with moral development, thereby addressing critiques that religious education often prioritizes memorization over internalization. Studies on holistic curriculum design support this view, emphasizing that learning becomes more meaningful when knowledge, attitudes, and behavior are intentionally aligned. From a functional perspective, strategic planning increases instructional clarity and teacher consistency, reducing variability in value transmission. In contrast, poorly planned curricula risk producing disjointed learning experiences that weaken character education goals (Sahid et al., 2021; Setiawati et al., 2023; Toshmali et al., 2020). Therefore, the implication of this finding is that strategic curriculum planning serves as a functional mechanism to institutionalize character education. In conclusion, integrating character indicators within curriculum planning strengthens the capacity of Islamic Religious Education to produce ethically grounded learners.

The effectiveness of strategic curriculum planning can be explained by its role as a structural control mechanism within curriculum management. The study reveals that lesson plans and instructional objectives operate as formal instruments guiding teacher behavior and pedagogical choices. This aligns with educational management theories suggesting that planning structures shape implementation quality (Boto et al., 2021; Popova et al., 2022). The causal relationship identified indicates that when character values are explicitly included in planning documents, teachers are more likely to consistently integrate them into classroom practice. Previous research supports this correlation, noting that explicit planning reduces ambiguity and enhances instructional alignment. The structure of curriculum planning creates a shared framework that aligns individual teaching practices with institutional goals. Without such structure, character education risks becoming dependent on personal initiative rather than organizational commitment. In conclusion, the underlying cause of effective character integration lies in the formal planning structures that regulate and sustain pedagogical practice.

Collaborative organizational management in implementing a love-based curriculum. The findings show that collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and staff enhances

consistency and shared responsibility in values education. Functionally, this collaboration transforms curriculum implementation into a collective institutional effort rather than an individual endeavor. Research on collaborative school management highlights that shared leadership improves program sustainability and organizational coherence (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Mahsusi et al., 2024). In this study, collaboration functioned to reinforce love-based values across various school interactions, extending character education beyond the classroom. A lack of collaboration, by contrast, may lead to fragmented implementation and weakened institutional culture. Therefore, the implication of this finding is that collaboration strengthens the operational capacity of curriculum management. In conclusion, collaborative organizational management functions as a key enabler of sustainable love-based curriculum implementation.

The underlying cause of effective collaboration lies in organizational structures that promote coordination and shared accountability. Organizational theory suggests that clearly defined roles and communication structures enhance cooperation and reduce role conflict (Khamida et al., 2020; Nasir et al., 2024; Syakroni et al., 2024). The causal relationship observed shows that structured collaboration enables consistent reinforcement of love-based values across institutional practices. Without such structures, collaboration tends to be informal and unstable. Prior studies also confirm that institutionalized collaboration strengthens school culture and program continuity. Thus, the effectiveness of collaborative management is structurally produced rather than incidental.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

This study offers significant practical and theoretical implications for curriculum management and Islamic Religious Education. Practically, it provides a model for schools to integrate character education through love-based values embedded within curriculum planning, implementation, and organizational management. The findings suggest that educational leaders should prioritize value-driven structures rather than isolated programs. Theoretically, this study contributes to curriculum management literature by positioning love-based values as a strategic managerial element rather than a normative ideal. It extends existing theories by demonstrating how affective and moral dimensions can be institutionalized through management processes. Furthermore, the study bridges educational management and Islamic pedagogy by offering an integrative framework for character and values education. In conclusion, the research underscores the importance of aligning values, structure, and management to achieve sustainable educational transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that love-based curriculum management functions as a meaningful and strategic approach to strengthening character and values education in Islamic Religious Education. The most important lesson derived from this research is that moral and spiritual values become effective educational forces when they are institutionalized through curriculum planning, organizational collaboration, and instructional practices rather than delivered as isolated normative messages. The strength of this article lies in its scholarly contribution to curriculum management and Islamic education by renewing existing perspectives that often separate values from managerial processes. By positioning love-based values as a core managerial principle, this study offers an integrative framework that bridges educational management theory with character education and Islamic pedagogy, thereby enriching both conceptual and practical discourse. However, this research is limited to a single case study conducted at SDN Menteng, which restricts the generalizability of the findings across different educational contexts. The study also focuses primarily on primary-level education and employs a qualitative case study approach, without accounting for

variations in gender, age, or broader institutional diversity. Consequently, further research is recommended to involve multiple sites, diverse participant characteristics, and complementary methods such as large-scale surveys or mixed-methods designs to provide a more comprehensive evidence base for policy formulation and educational decision-making.

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