

RELIGI

JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

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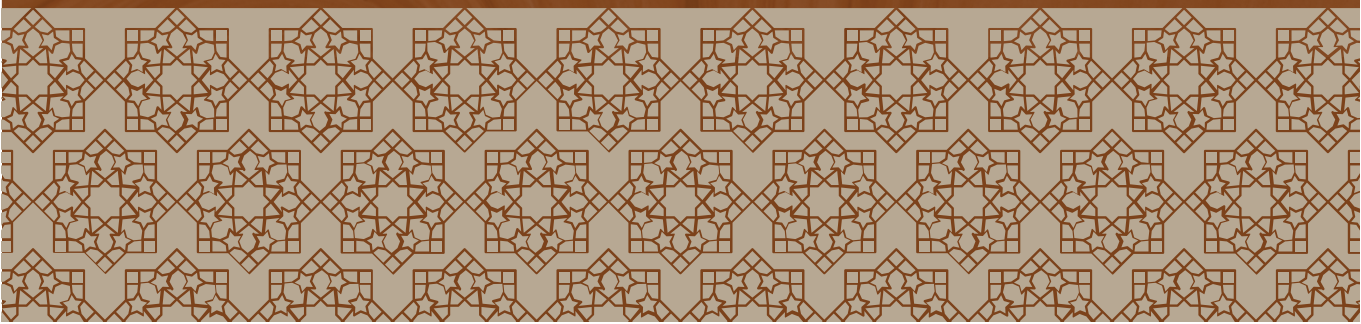
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LOVE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTER IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Roshy Nur Khoiroh (1), Ahmad Barizi (2), Nabilatun Mubasyiroh (3)

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang (1) (2) (3)

Email: roshynurkhoiroh09@gmail.com (1), abarizimdr@uin-malang.ac.id (2),
nabilamubasyiroh@gmail.com (3)

Abstract

Islamic religious education faces a fundamental problem: the dominance of cognitive approaches that neglect the affective dimension results in shallow value internalization, leaving students' religious character fragile against the pervasive negative influences of the digital age. This study employs a qualitative library research approach through thematic analysis, cross-source interpretation, and source triangulation. The theoretical framework rests on the concept of mahabbah as articulated by Al-Ghazali, who positions love as the pinnacle of spiritual development and the engine of intrinsic motivation; Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah, who emphasizes the purity of divine love as a prerequisite for authentic value internalization; and Ibn Miskawayh, who grounds love as the ethical foundation of social relations and moral excellence integrated with the Love-Based Curriculum of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. The findings demonstrate that mahabbah functions as a transformative force unifying the spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions of character formation, producing graduates who are morally resilient, empathic, and oriented toward the common good.

Keywords: *Love (Mahabbah); Love-Based Curriculum; Religious Character; Islamic Education. Digital Era*

Abstrak

Pendidikan agama Islam menghadapi problem mendasar: dominasi pendekatan kognitif yang mengabaikan dimensi afektif menyebabkan nilai-nilai agama tidak terinternalisasi secara mendalam, sehingga karakter religius peserta didik rapuh di tengah derasnya pengaruh negatif era digital. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan analisis tematik, interpretasi lintas sumber, dan triangulasi data. Kerangka teori bertumpu pada konsep *mahabbah* menurut Al-Ghazali yang menempatkan cinta sebagai puncak spiritual dan motor motivasi intrinsik, Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah yang menekankan kemurnian cinta sebagai syarat internalisasi nilai, dan Ibnu Miskawaih yang menjadikan cinta sebagai fondasi relasi sosial dan kesempurnaan akhlak, diintegrasikan dengan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta Kementerian Agama RI. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa *mahabbah* berperan sebagai kekuatan transformatif

yang menyatukan dimensi spiritual, emosional, dan sosial dalam pembentukan karakter religius yang holistik, tangguh secara moral, dan berorientasi pada kemaslahatan bersama.

Kata kunci: Cinta(Mahabbah); Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta; Karakter Religius; Pendidikan Islam. Era Digital

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education occupies an irreplaceable position within the moral architecture of the nation. Beyond its role as a mere curricular subject, it is expected to serve as a formative medium for cultivating holistic individuals — ones who are faithful, God-conscious, and of noble character, in accordance with the values enshrined in the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah.¹ However, these noble aspirations are confronted directly by an increasingly alarming social reality. Amid the unstoppable acceleration of digitalization, deviant behavior among the younger generation has become increasingly prevalent: brawls organized through social media, cyberbullying practices, promiscuous behavior, and juvenile involvement in criminal acts. This condition is not merely a surface-level social problem; it is a reflection of the systemic failure of character education processes that have long remained stagnant.²

The root of the problem lies in the dominance of cognitive approaches in Islamic religious education. Religious values are taught as knowledge to be memorized and examined, rather than as lived beliefs to be internalized and genuinely embraced. The affective dimension, which in fact constitutes the most critical bridge between knowledge and character formation, is frequently overlooked. It is within this context that the concept of mahabbah, or love in the Islamic tradition, offers an alternative paradigm that is urgently needed and warranted for consideration.³

Al-Ghazali, in his seminal work *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, positions mahabbah (divine love) as the culminating stage of the spiritual journey, one that generates intrinsic motivation for learning rather than compliance driven by external compulsion. Love for Allah, in this framework, constitutes the animating force that vitalizes all human activity, encompassing both the pursuit of knowledge and the ongoing process of character formation.⁴ Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah asserted that only pure, selfless love for God wholly untainted by worldly interests is capable of cultivating a genuinely sincere and enduring internalization of values

¹ Hazizah Isnaini, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Peserta didik," *Ikblis: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 4 (2024): 95–96.

² "Krisis Moral Anak Indonesia: Tantangan Pendidikan dalam Era Digital," kumparan, diakses 14 Desember 2025, <https://kumparan.com/annepratiwi-sasingunand/krisis-moral-anak-indonesia-tantangan-pendidikan-dalam-era-digital-23SqeccGAvp>.

³ Muthya Khairunnisa Koto dkk., "Pendidikan Islam dan Kurikulum Cinta," *NUSANTARA: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* 12, no. 8 (2025): 3278–79.

⁴ N. Nurbaya dkk., "Rabiah al-Adawiyah dan Mahabbah Al-Ghazali," *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 3, no. 1 (2025), <https://ojs.daarulhuda.or.id/index.php/Socius/article/view/2095>.

within the individual servant of God.⁵ Ibn Miskawayh contends that the actualization of human moral perfection is contingent upon the cultivation of social relationships founded on authentic affection and benevolence, as opposed to those driven solely by utilitarian considerations or shared self-interest.⁶ These three perspectives collectively and integratively constitute the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

Several prior studies have addressed aspects relevant to this theme, although each varies in focus and scope. Oktari and Kosasih found that the formation of religious character in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) requires an approach that transcends formal classroom instruction, namely the consistent habituation of values within daily life.⁷ Bali and Fadilah demonstrated that the internalization of religious character is most effectively achieved when routine habituation is integrated with teacher modeling and a school environment that holistically reflects Islamic values, substantially surpassing the effectiveness of unidirectional moral instruction.⁸ Wibowo et al. affirm the central role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as agents of change whose influence cannot be substituted by any textbook or curricular program.⁹ Mainuddin et al. map Al-Ghazali's conceptual framework on character education and its contributions to contemporary pedagogical practice.¹⁰ Nevertheless, studies that specifically integrate the concept of mahabbah as articulated by the three aforementioned classical thinkers with the implementation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia's Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta), and its subsequent impact on the religious character formation of learners in the digital era, remain considerably scarce in the existing literature. It is this academic gap that constitutes the primary contribution of the present article.

To address this gap, the present study employs a qualitative approach through a library research method. This methodological choice is grounded in its alignment with the nature of the inquiry, which centers on conceptual analysis and the synthesis of perspectives drawn from diverse disciplinary traditions. Data were collected through systematic searches conducted across Google Scholar, national journal repositories, and official

⁵ Kamaruddin Mustamin, "Konsep Mahabbah Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah," *Farabi* 17, no. 1 (2020): 66–76.

⁶ Dina Khairiah dan Ali Wardhana Manalu, "Fisafat PAUD: Kajian Akhlak Menurut Ibnu Miskawaih," *BUHUTS AL ATHEAL: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Anak Usia Dini* 1, no. 1 (2021): 32–46.

⁷ Dian Popi Oktari dan Aceng Kosasih, "Pendidikan karakter religius dan mandiri di pesantren," *Jurnal pendidikan ilmu sosial* 28, no. 1 (2019): 42.

⁸ Muhammad Mushfi El Iq Bali dan Nurul Fadilah, "Internalisasi Karakter Religius di Sekolah Menengah Pertama Nurul Jadid," *Jurnal MUDARRISUNA: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–25.

⁹ Yusuf Rendi Wibowo dkk., "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa Sekolah Dasar," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 9, no. 01 (2024): 536–53.

¹⁰ Mainuddin Mainuddin dkk., "Pemikiran Pendidikan Karakter Al-Ghazali, Lawrence Kolberg dan Thomas Lickona," *Attadrib: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 6, no. 2 (2023): 283–90.

websites of relevant institutions. Data analysis was carried out in three interrelated stages: thematic categorization, cross-source interpretation to identify consistent conceptual patterns, and descriptive synthesis to integrate the findings into a coherent scholarly narrative. Source triangulation was applied as an instrument to ensure objectivity, whereby each claim was verified against a minimum of three distinct references.¹¹

This article focuses its inquiry on three research questions: 1) to analyze how the concept of mahabbah in the thought of Al-Ghazali, Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah, and Ibn Miskawayh serves as the philosophical foundation for the formation of religious character in Islamic education; 2) to examine how religious character is understood within the perspective of Islamic education, encompassing its definition, constituent elements, dimensions, and the challenges it confronts in the digital era; and 3) to investigate how the values of mahabbah are concretely implemented through the Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta) of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, and to assess its implications for the holistic and resilient formation of religious character among madrasah students in the face of the moral crisis of the digital age.

THE CONCEPT OF MAHABBAH (LOVE) IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION

The Concept of Mahabbah: Etymological and Terminological Definitions

The term *mahabbah* in Arabic is etymologically derived from the verbal root *ahabba - yuhibbu - mahabbatan*, which literally denotes a profound sense of love, sincere affection, and an unwavering attachment of the soul. From an etymological standpoint, a number of linguists trace this root to the word *habbah*, meaning a seed or grain, which serves as a symbolic representation of something deeply embedded within the soil of the human heart that which is planted profoundly, grows gradually, and yields enduring fruit.¹²

Terminologically, Islamic scholars and thinkers have defined mahabbah through various complementary formulations. Harun Nasution conceptualizes it as a spiritual state in which a servant surrenders himself entirely to Allah, purifies the heart from all attachments other than to Him, and establishes divine pleasure (*ridha Allah*) as the sole orientation of life. This total self-surrender, referred to as *tawakkal*, constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for the realization of genuine mahabbah.¹³ In a broader context, mahabbah cannot be reduced to a mere sentimental emotion or a transient affective state. Sufi scholars conceptualize it as both a *maqam* (spiritual station) and a

¹¹ Miza Nina Adlini dkk., "Metode penelitian kualitatif studi pustaka," *Edumaspu: Jurnal Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2022): 974–80.

¹² Wahyu Budiantoro, "Konsep Cinta (*Mahabbah*) dalam Logika Komunikasi Transendental," *Amerta Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (2021), <https://ejournal.amertamedia.co.id/index.php/amerta/article/view/3>.

¹³ Nurbaya dkk., "Rabiah al-Adawiyah dan Mahabbah Al-Ghazali."

hal (inner condition) that simultaneously encompasses cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. An individual who genuinely attains mahabbah does not solely experience love for Allah within the heart, but also manifests such love through the entirety of their thought patterns, verbal expressions, and daily conduct.¹⁴

The Qur'an provides a strong affirmation regarding the nature of this love through Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 165, which explicitly distinguishes between the illusory attachment to beings other than God and the authentic love manifested by true believers:^{15]}

“And [yet], among the people are those who take other than Allah as equals [to Him]. They love them as they [should] love Allāh. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allāh. And if only they who have wronged would consider [that] when they see the punishment, [they will be certain] that all power belongs to Allah and that Allāh is severe in punishment.” (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 165)

The verse affirms that the intensity of love toward Allah constitutes the foremost indicator of authentic faith. The highest form of love is that which remains untainted by attachment to transient and ephemeral matters. Within the framework of Islamic education, this verse serves as a robust normative foundation, underscoring that the entire process of character formation must originate from and converge upon the reinforcement of love toward Allah as the central orientation of learners' lives.¹⁶

Within the framework of Islamic philosophy, Muthahhari affirms that a complete understanding of the human being can only be attained when the spiritual dimension is recognized as the irreducible core of personality one that cannot be reduced merely to biological or psychological processes. This perspective reinforces the argument that mahabbah toward God is not merely an emotional phenomenon, but rather the highest expression of human fitrah the innate disposition that yearns for perfection and proximity to the Creator. Consonant with this view, Idham et al., in their philosophical exploratory study, underscore that philosophical inquiry into the nature of the human being and love cannot be dissociated from the spiritual context that encompasses it. Consequently, any form of education that disregards this dimension has, in essence, neglected the very core of humanity itself.¹⁷

¹⁴ Budiantoro, “Konsep Cinta (*Mahabbah*) dalam Logika Komunikasi Transendental.”

¹⁵ “Qur'an Kemenag,” diakses 29 Oktober 2025, <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/>; Roni Ismail, *Menuju Muslim Rahmatan Lil'Alamin*, (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2016), 22-24; Roni Ismail, *Menuju Hidup Islami*, (Yogyakarta: Insan Madani, 2009), 45-46.

¹⁶ Ayub Kumalla, “Konsep *Mahabbah* (Cinta) dalam ‘Rubaiyat’ Karya Rumi dan Relevansinya dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam” (PhD Thesis, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2019), <https://www.academia.edu/download/111416291/295428355.pdf>.

¹⁷ Murtadha Muthahhari, *Munusia Seutuhnya : studi kritis berbagai pandangan filosofis* (Sadra Press, 2012).

It can be concluded that love (*mahabbah*) is not merely a term referring to affection or emotional inclination, but rather a profound and firmly grounded spiritual concept oriented toward Allah SWT as the central axis of human existence. The etymological and terminological meanings of *mahabbah* indicate that love in Islam originates from the depths of the heart and subsequently influences the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral dimensions of an individual servant. In the context of Islamic education, this understanding affirms that the character formation of learners cannot be achieved through cognitive knowledge alone, but must be directed toward the cultivation of love for Allah as the moral and spiritual foundation that animates all aspects of the learning process.¹⁸

The Concept of Mahabbah According to Al-Ghazali, Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah, and Ibn Miskawayh

Imam Al-Ghazali, widely recognized as one of the greatest Islamic thinkers in history, positioned *mahabbah* as the apex of the entire human spiritual journey. In his seminal work *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, Al-Ghazali described *mahabbah* as the seventh stage within a series of spiritual *maqamat*: *tawbah* (repentance), *sabr* (patience), *zuhd* (asceticism), *tawakkul* (reliance upon God), *mahabbah* (divine love), *ridha* (contentment), and *ma'rifat* (gnosis). According to his framework, an individual who has genuinely attained true *mahabbah* will find his heart entirely consumed by the presence of God, rendering all worldly temptations devoid of their appeal. This condition does not imply a withdrawal from worldly life; rather, it signifies the engagement with the world through a perspective that has been wholly illuminated by divine love.¹⁹

What makes Al-Ghazali's thought particularly relevant to the field of education is his argument that love constitutes the fundamental energy that drives all human activity. When a learner engages in the pursuit of knowledge motivated by a genuine love of learning and a profound love of God whereby the acquisition of knowledge is conceived as an act of worship (*ibadah*) the resulting motivation is inherently intrinsic and enduring in nature. In contrast to extrinsic motivation, which is contingent upon systems of reward and punishment, motivation rooted in love (*mahabbah*) emerges organically from within the individual and sustains itself without the necessity of external compulsion.²⁰

¹⁸ Roni Ismail, "Religiosity to Minimize Violence: A Study of Solo Indonesian Society", *Revista de Gestao Social e Ambiental*, 18 (6), e05426-e05426, 2024; Roni Ismail, "Beragama Bahagia Untuk Bina Damai: Kajian atas Keberagaman Matang Menurut William James", *Living Islam*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2024. 145-162. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v7i1.5277>; "Konsep Toleransi dalam Psikologi Agama (Tinjauan Kematangan Beragama)", *Religi: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012.

¹⁹ Nurbaya dkk., "Rabiah al-Adawiyah dan *Mahabbah* Al-Ghazali."

²⁰ Nurbaya dkk., "Rabiah al-Adawiyah dan *Mahabbah* Al-Ghazali."

Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah, a prominent female Sufi figure whose thought on divine love continues to be studied to this day, offered a deeper and simultaneously more demanding dimension to the concept of mahabbah. For Rabi'ah, authentic love toward God must be total and exclusive free from any mixture of motives, including the hope for paradise and the fear of hellfire. Such love, referred to in Sufi terminology as mahabbah khalisah or pure love, emerges only when a servant loves God solely for the sake of God, independent of any expectation of reward or threat of punishment.²¹

In the context of education, Rabi'ah's conception carries a profound pedagogical implication: the internalization of deep religious values can only occur when learners genuinely love and embrace those values out of sincere conviction, rather than through coercion or imposed compliance. Education grounded in fear and threat may produce short-term obedience, yet it will never cultivate the firm and authentic religious character that Rabi'ah envisioned.²² Meanwhile, Ibn Miskawaih, widely recognized as the architect of classical Islamic ethics and a pioneer of moral philosophy within the Islamic intellectual tradition, developed the concept of love from a distinct yet complementary perspective. He systematically classified love into four categories based on its motivational foundations and orientations: first, love grounded in sensory pleasure and gratification; second, love motivated by utility and pragmatic interests; third, love derived from goodness and moral virtue; and fourth, love that constitutes a harmonious synthesis of the aforementioned three elements.²³ According to Ibn Miskawayh, the human being, as an inherently social creature, cannot attain moral perfection in isolation. Such perfection is achievable solely through the quality of one's interpersonal relationships grounded in sincere affection rather than mere mutual interest. In Ibn Miskawayh's view, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provided the most exemplary model of how Islam encourages its adherents to cultivate strong bonds of brotherhood through a variety of social practices and acts of communal worship.²⁴

Based on the foregoing examination of the thought of Al-Ghazali, Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah, and Ibn Miskawaih, it can be understood that *mahabbah* in Islamic education constitutes a concept of love that transcends mere emotion, functioning instead as a spiritual, moral, and social force that holistically shapes the character of learners. Al-Ghazali positions mahabbah as the apex of the spiritual journey, giving rise to intrinsic motivation in the pursuit of knowledge; Rabi'ah affirms the purity of love toward God that is entirely free from self-interest; while Ibn Miskawaih presents mahabbah as the foundational basis of social relations that fosters virtuous character and moral perfection.

²¹ Mustamin, "Konsep Mahabbah Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah."

²² Kamaruddin Mustamin, "Konsep *Mahabbah* Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah,"

²³ Khairiah dan Manalu, "Fisafat PAUD."

²⁴ Dina Khairiah dan Ali Wardhana Manalu, "Fisafat PAUD: Kajian Akhlak Menurut Ibnu Miskawaih,"

Accordingly, these three perspectives are mutually complementary and collectively demonstrate that Islamic education grounded in *mahabbah* must orient learners toward loving God, internalizing religious values with sincerity, and cultivating morally virtuous and compassionate social relationships.

The Relevance of Love (Mahabbah) in Islamic Education

The relevance of love (*mahabbah*), as drawn from the three perspectives elaborated above Al-Ghazali with his spiritual dimension, Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah with her emphasis on purity, and Ibn Miskawaih with his social orientation collectively constructs a comprehensive argument as to why love must constitute the foundational basis of Islamic education.²⁵ First, *mahabbah* provides an affective dimension that is frequently absent in educational approaches that are excessively oriented toward cognitive outcomes. When religious values are transmitted solely through memorization and formal assessment, without engaging the emotional and volitional dimensions of learners, such values are unlikely to become genuinely internalized as part of their character. Conversely, when the learning process takes place within an atmosphere of love and compassion, learners are naturally inclined to internalize the values being taught.²⁶ Second, *mahabbah* functions as the most powerful and most sustainable intrinsic motivator. Research in educational psychology has repeatedly demonstrated that motivation originating from within the individual which, in the Islamic context, may be understood as love for Allah and the desire to draw closer to Him is substantially more effective in producing permanent character transformation than extrinsic motivation dependent upon reward and punishment.²⁷ Third, *mahabbah* encompasses a profoundly significant social dimension within the context of Islamic education, which aims to cultivate individuals who are not only personally virtuous but also genuinely contributive to society. Authentic love for Allah, as expounded by Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh, is inseparable from love for fellow creations of Allah. Accordingly, *mahabbah*-based education is inherently also an education that is socially oriented in its objectives and pedagogical outcomes.²⁸

It can be concluded that love (*mahabbah*) holds a fundamentally significant relevance in Islamic education, as it is capable of simultaneously integrating affective, spiritual, and social dimensions within the learning process. Love ensures that religious values do not remain confined to the cognitive domain alone, but are genuinely internalized into the attitudes and conduct of learners. Furthermore, *mahabbah* serves as a source

²⁵ Muthya Khairunnisa Koto dkk., "Pendidikan Islam dan Kurikulum Cinta," *NUSANTARA: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* 12, no. 8 (2025): 3278–87.

²⁶ Nurbaya dkk., "Rabiah al-Adawiyah dan *Mahabbah* Al-Ghazali."

²⁷ Budiantoro, "Konsep Cinta (*Mahabbah*) dalam Logika Komunikasi Transendental."

²⁸ Koto dkk., "Pendidikan Islam dan Kurikulum Cinta."

of intrinsic motivation that fosters the emergence of sincere and enduring religious consciousness, rather than mere compliance driven by external pressure. At the same time, love within the Islamic perspective guides learners in cultivating socially engaged relationships grounded in compassion, so that education not only produces individuals who are personally pious, but also morally virtuous and of genuine benefit to others.

RELIGIOUS CHARACTER IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

The Concept of Religious Character

The term religious character refers to the totality of an individual's attitudes, values, and behaviors that reflect a profound internalization of religious teachings. Within the Islamic perspective, religious character encompasses two complementary dimensions: the vertical dimension, which pertains to the intimate relationship between a servant and Allah SWT, and the horizontal dimension, which concerns the quality of interpersonal relationships within society.²⁹

An individual is considered to possess a religious character when religious values do not merely reside as cognitive knowledge, but are genuinely manifested across every dimension of life both explicitly and through subtle habitual behaviors. This character reflects a firmly established belief and sincere devotion to Almighty God, positioning religious values as an irreplaceable life compass that transcends any other value system..³⁰

Religious character encompasses a number of interrelated components. The first component is a strong *aqidah*, defined as a conviction rooted in knowledge and inner certainty that remains resistant to doubt or external influence. The second component is consistent *ibadah*, referring to the performance of religious ritual obligations not as a burden, but as an expression of love and gratitude toward Allah. The third component is noble *akhlak*, encompassing virtuous behavioral dispositions in interpersonal interactions that serve as a reflection of the depth of one's faith. The fourth component is sound *muamalah*, denoting the manner in which an individual manages his or her social, economic, and political relationships in accordance with Islamic principles.³¹

From a relational perspective, religious character encompasses two inseparable dimensions. The vertical dimension pertains to the quality of an individual's relationship with Allah SWT, encompassing depth of faith, quality of worship, sincerity in supplication,

²⁹ Oktari dan Kosasih, "Pendidikan karakter religius dan mandiri di pesantren."

³⁰ Bali dan Fadilah, "Internalisasi Karakter Religius di Sekolah Menengah Pertama Nurul Jadid."

³¹ Santy Andrianie dkk., *Karakter religius: Sebuah tantangan dalam menciptakan media pendidikan karakter* (Penerbit Qiara Media, 2022), https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=IcBmEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA50&dq=karakter+religius&ots=fqTGGZs4Ei&sig=XPT1g0gsZD61_0aZf_lvITA8Y7I.

and submission in the face of divine decree. The horizontal dimension pertains to the quality of one's relationship with fellow human beings and other creatures, encompassing honesty, justice, social concern, tolerance, and respect for diversity. These two dimensions are mutually reinforcing: a weakening of the vertical dimension will inevitably undermine the horizontal dimension, and vice versa.³²

The Qur'an provides remarkably concrete guidance regarding the elements of religious character through Surah An-Nahl, verse 90:³³

“Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving [help] to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.” (Qs. An-Nahl:90)

This verse maps religious character in two simultaneous directions: a positive direction encompassing justice, ihsan (excellence in conduct), and social concern; and a negative direction characterized by firm resolve in avoiding all forms of wrongdoing and enmity. Religious character, therefore, is not merely a matter of performing virtuous deeds, but also entails the moral courage and resoluteness to reject and resist actions that are contrary to religious values.³⁴

Al-Ghazali further elaborates the indicators of virtuous character into four ethical pillars, which he identifies as the foundations of perfect moral conduct. First, al-hikmah (wisdom): the capacity of the soul to distinguish truth from falsehood and benefit from harm in every circumstance encountered. Second, asy-syaja'ah (moral courage): a form of bravery that does not stem from arrogance, but rather from rational self-governance and firm conviction in the truth one upholds. Third, al-iffah (self-restraint): the ability to regulate carnal impulses and desires so that they remain in accordance with religious values. Fourth, al-'adl (justice): the capacity to harmonize all dimensions of one's personality and to treat every individual in accordance with their rightful due.³⁵

Prasetiya and Cholily further enrich the conceptual understanding of religious character indicators by proposing a more operationally measurable framework. According to their formulation, religious character indicators in the school context encompass five empirically observable dimensions: first, devotional observance, reflected in the consistency of performing prayer and other ritual worship; second,

³² Andrianie dkk., *Karakter religius*.

³³ “Qur'an Kemenag.”

³⁴ Andrianie dkk., *Karakter religius*.

³⁵ Mainuddin dkk., “Pemikiran Pendidikan Karakter Al-Ghazali, Lawrence Kolberg dan Thomas Lickona.”

honesty and integrity across all aspects of academic and social life; third, respect and compassion toward others as manifested in daily behavioral conduct; fourth, a tolerant and open-minded disposition toward diversity; and fifth, an awareness of social responsibility that motivates students to make tangible contributions to their surrounding community. This indicator framework complements Al-Ghazali's four foundational pillars by incorporating a practical dimension that facilitates educators and madrasah institutions in systematically evaluating the extent to which religious character is genuinely embodied in students' behavior, rather than remaining confined to the level of normative knowledge alone.³⁶

Asdiqoh, in her empirical study on the implementation of character education at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Boyolali, demonstrates that character formation within madrasah institutions extends beyond formal programmatic frameworks, encompassing a comprehensive transformation of school culture and climate conducive to the cultivation of Islamic values. This finding is consistent with the arguments advanced by Saleh et al. in *Arus Baru Pemikiran Islam*, which emphasize that the renewal of Islamic education must be grounded in a critical reflection upon the Islamic intellectual tradition, so that values such as akhlaq and mahabbah are not merely transmitted through formal inheritance, but are substantively revitalized within contexts that remain relevant to contemporary generations.³⁷

It can be concluded that religious character constitutes a tangible manifestation of the internalization of Islamic teachings — one that transcends the level of mere cognitive knowledge and is instead reflected in daily attitudes, habits, and conduct. This character encompasses a vertical dimension, expressed through a profound relationship with Allah SWT, as well as a horizontal dimension, demonstrated through constructive relationships with fellow human beings and the surrounding environment. Core elements such as a sound theological creed (aqidah), consistent religious observance (ibadah), noble moral conduct (akhlak), and virtuous social interactions (muamalah) collectively affirm that religious character represents an integrated unity of belief, self-regulation, and social responsibility. Accordingly, Islamic education must direct learners not merely toward an understanding of religious values, but toward the internalization of such values as the foundational basis for moral conduct, social interaction, and ethical decision-making in everyday life.

³⁶ Benny Prasetya dan Yus Mochamad Cholily, *Metode Pendidikan karakter Religius paling efektif di sekolah* (Academia Publication, 2021), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=Lsg3EAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=karakter+religius&ots=DlhD9OrhYw&sig=rjZjT2tLbDUyx8DvKsvrYouQSE>.

³⁷ Suherman Saleh [et al, *Arus Baru Pemikiran Islam: Catatan Kritis dari Gang Buni Ciputat* (Penerbit A-Empat, 2021).

The Role of Islamic Education in the Formation of Religious Character

Islamic education bears a responsibility that extends far beyond the mere transmission of religious knowledge. Its most fundamental mission is the holistic formation of the human person an individual who is not only intellectually accomplished, but also spiritually resilient, emotionally mature, and socially responsible. To fulfill this mission, Islamic education must consciously and systematically integrate character formation across all dimensions of its activities, rather than confining such efforts exclusively to religious instruction within the classroom.³⁸

The process of religious character formation through Islamic education unfolds through three mutually reinforcing pathways. The first pathway is ta'lim, or instruction, which refers to the transmission of religious knowledge that provides the cognitive foundation for understanding Islamic values. The second pathway is tarbiyah, or holistic education, which encompasses the comprehensive development of personality through exemplary conduct (uswah), habituation, and guided mentorship. The third pathway is ta'dib, or the inculcation of adab, which pertains to the cultivation of behavioral dispositions that reflect the noble character of a Muslim individual.³⁹

In its implementation, the formation of religious character through Islamic education necessitates consistency and continuity across the various environments in which learners grow and develop. The family, as the primary educational institution (madrasah awal), the school as the formal educational setting, and the community as the arena for the actualization of values all three must operate in alignment and mutually reinforce one another so that the values instilled are genuinely internalized and deeply rooted in the character of the learners.⁴⁰

The study conducted by Bali and Fadilah on the internalization of religious character at SMP Nurul Jadid reveals that the most effective strategy in cultivating religious character is a multifaceted approach combining routine habituation, teacher exemplification, and the creation of a school environment that holistically reflects Islamic values. Practices such as congregational prayer, morning Qur'anic recitation, and the habituation of Islamic greetings were found to be considerably more effective in shaping character than unidirectional moral instruction, such as conventional lecturing.⁴¹

Consistent with these findings, the study by Rahmadayani et al. affirms that the cultivation of Islamic educational values in enhancing students' religious character requires an integrative approach that encompasses all components of education, ranging

³⁸ Khairiah dan Manalu, "Fisafat PAUD."

³⁹ Bali dan Fadilah, "Internalisasi Karakter Religius di Sekolah Menengah Pertama Nurul Jadid."

⁴⁰ Andrianie dkk., *Karakter religius*.

⁴¹ Bali dan Fadilah, "Internalisasi Karakter Religius di Sekolah Menengah Pertama Nurul Jadid."

from curriculum design and instructional methodology to school culture. When Islamic values are instilled consistently and comprehensively across all dimensions of school life, learners do not merely memorize religious prescriptions; rather, they internalize and embody these values as an integral part of their identity and personal character. This process demands the active engagement of all educational personnel as living exemplars who authentically embody the values they impart.⁴²

The contribution of integrated Islamic educational institutions to the formation of religious character has also received considerable scholarly attention. Raharja and Nurachadija found that Integrated Islamic Schools (Sekolah Islam Terpadu) are capable of cultivating students' religious character more comprehensively than conventional schools, owing to the seamless integration of academic programs, religious activities, and character habituation that operates continuously throughout the school day. A school environment thoroughly permeated by Islamic values creates an educational ecosystem that consistently reinforces the religious identity of learners, far surpassing what can be achieved through partial religious instruction confined to designated class periods.⁴³

Islamic education therefore occupies a critically important and strategic role in the holistic formation of learners' religious character not solely with respect to religious knowledge, but equally in the development of personality, attitudes, and conduct. This process cannot be adequately accomplished through formal instruction alone; rather, it must be realized through the complementary integration of ta'līm (knowledge transmission), tarbiyah (moral nurturing), and ta'dīb (ethical cultivation), each reinforcing the other in instilling values, fostering virtuous habits, and shaping noble character. The successful formation of religious character is, furthermore, substantially contingent upon the harmonious alignment among the family, school, and community as mutually reinforcing educational environments. Accordingly, effective Islamic education is that which provides authentic exemplification, systematic habituation, and a conducive environment, thereby ensuring that religious values are genuinely and durably internalized within the learner.

The Challenges of Religious Character in the Digital Era

The digital era presents unprecedented challenges in the history of Islamic education. The ease of access to information and entertainment through digital devices has opened pathways to a wide array of influences that potentially erode the foundations of religious

⁴² Putri Rahmadayani dkk., "Penanaman nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam dalam peningkatan karakter religius siswa," *Al-Miskawiah: Journal of Science Education* 1, no. 2 (2022): 213–38.

⁴³ Anisa Dewi Raharja dan Kun Nurachadija, "Peran Sekolah Islam Terpadu dalam Pembentukan Karakter Religius Siswa," *Jurnal Inovasi, Evaluasi Dan Pengembangan Pembelajaran (JIEPP)* 3, no. 1 (2023): 10–15.

character being cultivated by educational institutions. Among these challenges are student brawls organized through social media platforms, increasingly sophisticated forms of cyberbullying, exposure to pornographic and violent content, and the relentless promotion of consumerist culture perpetuated by social media algorithms. Collectively, these phenomena constitute tangible and pressing challenges that contemporary Islamic education must urgently confront. These challenges cannot be adequately addressed through prohibition and restriction of access alone, as such approaches have demonstrated limited long-term effectiveness. What is fundamentally required is the cultivation of moral immunity from within a character foundation sufficiently robust to enable learners to critically discern, evaluate, and resist negative influences on the basis of well-internalized value consciousness.

Pridayanti et al., in their study on the reinforcement of religious values among elementary school children, emphasize that character formation in the digital era demands a more proactive and anticipatory approach. Education must not merely adopt a reactive stance toward the adverse impacts of technology; rather, it must actively equip learners with values that enable them to become responsible and discerning users of technology. It is in this context that mahabbah (love of Allah) plays a profoundly crucial role. Learners who possess a strong foundation of love for Allah those who understand that every action they undertake, including their digital activities, remains under divine observation and entails accountability before Allah will demonstrate a considerably more robust moral orientation in confronting the various temptations inherent in the digital world. Love of Allah is not merely a sentiment of comfort; it functions as an active moral compass operating at every moment of decision-making.

In the context of the threats posed by the digital era to the younger generation, Dahlan underscores the paramount importance of internalizing religious values as the primary strategy for cultivating students' religious character. The internalization referred to here is not merely the cognitive absorption of knowledge, but rather a process of profound personal appropriation through which religious values become an inseparable constituent of the learner's personality. When such values are genuinely internalized, learners develop a resilient inner defense, enabling them to engage critically and responsibly with digital content rather than passively conforming to prevailing trends without moral deliberation.⁴⁴

Mashuda, in his empirical study on the relevance of Al-Ghazālī's thought concerning moral education (*tarbiyah al-akhlāq*) for Generation Z at MTs Ma'arif Kaliwiro Wonosobo, found that an approach to moral education grounded in Al-Ghazālī's framework remains

⁴⁴ Mukhtar Zaini Dahlan, "Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Agama Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam dan Multikulturalisme* 4, no. 3 (2022): 335–48.

highly relevant in addressing the moral challenges of the digital era. Generation Z, having grown up in an intensely digital environment, is found to require an even stronger moral foundation, and Al-Ghazālī's conception of the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) through love of Allah offers a solution that transcends mere technological restriction. The internalization of moral values rooted in *mahabbah* to Allah has been demonstrated to be more effective in fostering moral resilience than approaches that rely exclusively on external regulation and surveillance of technology use.⁴⁵

The digital era presents serious challenges to the formation of religious character, as learners are directly exposed to a wide range of negative influences capable of undermining their moral and spiritual values. The phenomena of cyberbullying, destructive content, consumerist culture, and the misuse of social media collectively demonstrate that Islamic education can no longer afford to adopt a merely defensive posture through prohibition; rather, it must be capable of cultivating moral resilience from within the learner. In this context, *mahabbah* serves as a foundational pillar, insofar as love of Allah fosters an inner consciousness that every behavior including digital activity remains perpetually subject to divine observation and accountability. Consequently, a well-established religious character may function as a moral compass that guides learners to conduct themselves wisely, responsibly, and with unwavering steadfastness (*istiqāmah*) amidst the overwhelming currents of the digital age.

LOVE (MAHABBAH) AS THE FOUNDATION OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTER FORMATION

The Relationship Between Love (Mahabbah) and Religious Character

Love is a multifaceted concept encompassing numerous dimensions. It functions as a transcendent and dynamic force that connects an individual to the self, to others, and to the surrounding environment. Love is not merely an emotional feeling or impulse; rather, it entails commitment, sacrifice, and profound understanding. In the social context, love reinforces interpersonal bonds within society, while in the spiritual realm, it serves as a pathway toward the pursuit of goodness and proximity to the Divine. Love encompasses elements of intimacy, self-sacrifice, and mutual giving and receiving. At its highest expression, love constitutes a journey toward inner sanctity and deep comprehension, both in relation to fellow human beings and to the Creator. It is therefore that love

⁴⁵ MASHUDA MASHUDA, "RELEVANSI PEMIKIRAN AL-GHAZALI TENTANG PENDIDIKAN AKHLAK BAGI GENERASI Z: STUDI EMPIRIS DI MTS MA'ARIF KALIWIRO WONOSOBO JAWA TENGAH" (PhD Thesis, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang, 2024), <http://repository.unissula.ac.id/38142/>.

functions as a binding and strengthening force across the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence.⁴⁶

The relationship between love (*mahabbah*) and religious character is fundamentally organic and mutually constitutive, rather than merely a linear cause-and-effect relationship. On one hand, *mahabbah* that is deeply rooted in one's heart will naturally give rise to behaviors that reflect religious character: steadfast devotion in worship, integrity in interpersonal conduct, compassion toward others, and firm adherence to religious values in the face of social pressure. On the other hand, consistency in embodying religious character through consciously cultivated virtuous habits will, in turn, progressively strengthen and deepen *mahabbah* itself.⁴⁷

The psychological mechanism linking *mahabbah* to character formation can be elucidated through the concept of value internalization. When a learner genuinely perceives that they are truly loved and valued by their teacher, by their community, and, in their spiritual experience, by Allah SWT a fundamental transformation occurs within their psychological condition. They become more emotionally receptive, more willing to be influenced by their environment, and more intrinsically motivated to internalize values that they perceive as an expression of the love they have received.⁴⁸

Conversely, an educational environment deficient in affection tends to rely predominantly on threats, criticism, and coercion as disciplinary instruments, thereby generating opposing psychological conditions such as resistance, anxiety, and rejection toward the values being instilled. Learners may exhibit surface-level compliance, yet genuine character formation never truly takes place. This is precisely why Isnaini, in his research on the role of Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI*) teachers, asserts that relational warmth between teacher and learner constitutes an irreplaceable prerequisite that cannot be substituted by any instructional method or educational technology.⁴⁹

The thought of Saleh et al. concerning the new currents of Islamic intellectual discourse provides an enriching context for this understanding: authentic transformation of religious character requires a renewal of perspective that transcends mere ritual compliance and penetrates the inner spiritual experience that animates all dimensions of a Muslim's life. *Mahabbah* to Allah, in this context, functions as a convergence point

⁴⁶ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*, diakses 29 Oktober 2025, <https://cdn.kemenag.go.id/storage/archives/panduan-kurikulum-berbasis-cinta.pdf>

⁴⁷ Wibowo dkk., "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa Sekolah Dasar."

⁴⁸ Isnaini, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa."

⁴⁹ Wibowo dkk., "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa Sekolah Dasar."

between the rich spiritual tradition of Islam and the contemporary challenges confronted by learners, rendering religious character not merely a passively inherited legacy but a consciously chosen and deeply conviction-driven way of life.⁵⁰

Love thus serves as an animating, binding, and reinforcing force in the cultivation of a robust religious character. By virtue of such religious character, learners are not only capable of discerning good from evil on the basis of religious teachings, but are equally equipped to apply these principles in communal life in a manner that is harmonious, tolerant, and imbued with compassion.⁵¹

Love (*mahabbah*) bears a profound and intrinsic relationship with religious character, as it constitutes the inner source of spiritual strength that nurtures, directs, and consolidates an individual's religious behavior. *Mahabbah* not only motivates learners toward devout worship and virtuous conduct, but also fosters the psychological readiness to receive and internalize religious values at a deeper level. When the educational environment is characterized by compassion, mutual respect, and relational warmth, learners are more readily inclined to develop into authentically religious individuals; conversely, approaches rooted in coercion and undue pressure risk engendering superficial compliance devoid of genuine character formation. Accordingly, love functions as a foundational nexus integrating the spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions in the cultivation of a religious character that is robust, harmonious, and enduring.

The Implementation of Love Values in Islamic Education

The implementation of the value of love in Islamic education operates across multiple layers: at the level of classroom instruction, at the level of the teacher-learner relationship, and at the level of overall curriculum design. These three levels must function synergistically in order for the value of love to genuinely permeate the entire educational ecosystem, rather than remaining merely a slogan displayed on school walls.⁵²

First, the implementation of the value of love in instruction. Within the classroom, the value of love is implemented through the manner in which teachers design and deliver learning experiences. Love-based instruction does not standardize learners according to a single uniform benchmark; rather, it honors the diversity of learning styles, varying paces of comprehension, and differing potentials among students. A teacher who instructs with love will invest time in understanding the individual circumstances of each learner

⁵⁰ al, *Arus Baru Pemikiran Islam*.

⁵¹ Wibowo dkk., "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa Sekolah Dasar."

⁵² Isnaini, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa."

their family background, the challenges they face, and the strengths they possess and will responsively adapt their pedagogical approach accordingly.⁵³

In the context of Islamic religious instruction specifically, the value of love is implemented by guiding learners to appreciate the beauty and profundity of Islamic teachings, rather than merely memorizing facts and rules. When a learner comes to understand prayer (*salāh*) not merely as an obligatory duty to be fulfilled, but as a moment of intimate communication with Allah, the Most Loving (*al-Wadūd*), their motivation for performing prayer is fundamentally transformed from reluctant compliance to heartfelt longing.⁵⁴

Second, the role of the teacher in the internalization of mahabbah. Islamic Religious Education teachers occupy a highly strategic position in the process of internalizing mahabbah within learners. The study by Wibowo et al. demonstrates that the influence of teachers in the formation of religious character far exceeds what can be accomplished through even the finest textbooks or curriculum programs. This is because learners do not learn solely from what teachers say, but primarily from what teachers do and from the manner in which teachers treat them.⁵⁵

Several concrete practices employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers that have been demonstrated to be effective in internalizing the value of mahabbah include: habituating the greeting of students with a smile, salam, and salim at every meeting as a consistent expression of appreciation; establishing communal prayer at the beginning and end of each learning session to cultivate collective spiritual awareness; providing personal attention to students who encounter difficulties or problems; celebrating every achievement made by students, however incremental; and demonstrating genuine empathy when students experience failure or emotional distress.⁵⁶

The practice of collectively reciting the *Asmaul Husna* at the outset of each learning session, for instance, does not merely function as a ritualistic opening activity. When the teacher leads the recitation with genuine devotion and systematically explicates the meaning of each of Allah's names to the students, this activity transforms into a recurring and deeply rooted moment of spiritual consciousness cultivation. Students gradually internalize the understanding that Allah is the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and the All-Knowing, and this internalized awareness subsequently influences the manner in which they conduct themselves in their daily lives.⁵⁷

⁵³ Isnaini, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa."

⁵⁴ Isnaini, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa."

⁵⁵ Wibowo dkk., "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa Sekolah Dasar."

⁵⁶ Isnaini, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Siswa."

⁵⁷ Isnaini, "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Religius Peserta didik."

Third, the Love-Based Curriculum as an Educational Strategy. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has undertaken a strategic initiative by formulating the Love-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*) as a pedagogical framework for all madrasah educational institutions. This curriculum positions the value of love not as a discrete subject matter, but rather as a philosophical orientation that permeates all aspects of the curriculum encompassing the selection of instructional content, pedagogical methods, and assessment approaches.⁵⁸

The theoretical foundation can be located within Carl Rogers' Humanistic Curriculum Theory, which posits that effective education must recognize the uniqueness of each learner and establish conditions conducive to their authentic development. Within the Islamic context, this conceptual framework resonates profoundly with the classical pedagogical tradition, wherein the teacher's compassion toward the student is regarded as a prerequisite for the genuine transmission of knowledge.⁵⁹

The Love-Based Curriculum is substantively directed toward producing holistic learning outcomes: developing intellectual intelligence while simultaneously strengthening emotional sensitivity, spiritual maturity, and learners' social responsibility. Koto et al., in their study on the Love-Based Curriculum, affirm that this curriculum has successfully transformed the paradigm of religious education from one that is solely oriented toward content mastery to one that is oriented toward the internalization of values. This transformation represents a fundamental shift in Indonesian Islamic education.⁶⁰

The relevance of the Love-Based Curriculum is further substantiated by the perspective of love and compassion-based Islamic education as developed by Barni. According to this framework, effective Islamic education must position compassion not merely as a supplementary element, but as the foundational core of the entire educational process. When educators impart knowledge with genuine affection, learners internalize the presence of divine mercy (*rahmah Allah*) within their learning experience, thereby cultivating intrinsic motivation rooted in profound spiritual consciousness rather than coercion or external pressure. The dimension of compassion in Islamic education, therefore, transcends a merely pleasant pedagogical approach; it constitutes a tangible expression of Islamic values themselves, which regard *rahmah* as one of the foremost divine attributes of Allah that must be reflected in every facet of Muslim life.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*, diakses 29 Oktober 2025, <https://cdn.kemenag.go.id/storage/archives/panduan-kurikulum-berbasis-cinta.pdf>

⁵⁹ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*, diakses 29 Oktober 2025, <https://cdn.kemenag.go.id/storage/archives/panduan-kurikulum-berbasis-cinta.pdf>

⁶⁰ Koto dkk., "Pendidikan Islam dan Kurikulum Cinta."

⁶¹ Mahyudin Barni, "Perspektif pendidikan Islam berbasis cinta dan kasih sayang," *Intelegensia: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran* 8, no. 2 (2023): 62–74.

Aslan and Arifudin, through their comprehensive study, reinforce this argument by demonstrating that the love-based curriculum in Islamic education functions as a form of transformative education that concretely reshapes learners' perspectives and attitudes. The transformation in question extends beyond mere acquisition of knowledge; it encompasses a fundamental reorientation of life outlook, shifting learners from a passive reception of values toward an active internalization and manifestation of those values across all dimensions of life. Accordingly, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum does not merely constitute a pedagogical innovation, but rather represents a deliberate effort to restore the spirit of Islamic education to its authentic essence—namely, the cultivation of individuals who wholeheartedly love Allah and their fellow human beings.⁶²

In the context of Islamic religious education curriculum development in the digital era, Widyastuti and Dartim affirm that Al-Ghazali's intellectual framework provides a philosophically relevant and epistemologically robust foundation. Al-Ghazali's thought concerning the imperative of harmonizing knowledge, practice, and moral character may serve as a conceptual reference framework in designing PAI curricula that transcend mere knowledge content transmission, and instead genuinely cultivate learners' character and personal integrity. In the contemporary digital era characterized by an unbounded proliferation of information Al-Ghazali's principle of the hierarchy of knowledge, which situates spiritual and moral sciences above instrumental knowledge, constitutes a critical compass for determining the priorities and orientational direction of Islamic education curricula.⁶³

To reinforce the practical implementation dimension, Fahmi and Susanto, in their empirical investigation into Islamic educational habituation practices at the primary school level, demonstrate that robust religious character is formed through the consistency of habituated practices established from an early stage of development. Seemingly modest habituated practices such as supplication before and after learning sessions, the exchange of Islamic greetings, and daily voluntary almsgiving conducted routinely and with full conscious intentionality yield a profoundly significant contribution to the formation of learners' religious identity. These findings substantiate the argument that the implementation of love-based values in Islamic education must originate from concrete habituated practices that are proximate and meaningful to

⁶² Aslan Aslan dan Opan Arifudin, "Analisis Dampak Kurikulum Cinta Dalam Pendidikan Islam Sebagai Pendidikan Transformatif Yang Mengubah Perspektif Dan Sikap Peserta Didik: Kajian Pustaka Teoritis Dan Praktis," *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Indonesia* 3, no. 1 (2025): 83–94, <http://sociohum.net/index.php/PROSIDINGNASIOANAL/article/view/299>.

⁶³ Ike Widyastuti dan Dartim Dartim, "Pemikiran al-Ghazali dalam pengembangan kurikulum pendidikan agama Islam di era digital," *Ideguru: Jurnal Karya Ilmiah Guru* 10, no. 2 (2025): 1041–49.

learners, rather than from abstract doctrinal instruction disconnected from their everyday lived experience.⁶⁴

It may be concluded that the implementation of love-based values in Islamic education must be conducted comprehensively, encompassing the instructional process within the classroom, the exemplary conduct and relational quality between educators and learners, and the formulation of curricula oriented toward value internalization. The value of love is insufficient as a mere rhetorical slogan; it must be actualized through educators' disposition of appreciating difference, understanding learners' individual needs, and constructing a learning environment that is warm, empathetic, and spiritually enriching. Within this context, PAI educators occupy a primary role in instilling mahabbah through simple yet meaningful habituated practices, including the greeting of salam, supplicatory prayer, personalized attention, and affirmation of learners' academic progress. Concurrently, the Love-Based Curriculum functions as a strategic framework that orients Islamic education not solely toward the production of intellectual competence, but equally toward the cultivation of emotional, spiritual, and social maturity the defining hallmarks of an individual of genuine religious character (*insan berkarakter religius*).

Implications for Madrasah and Students

The implementation of mahabbah as the foundational principle of Islamic education within madrasah environments carries extensive and profound implications, both for the institution as a whole and for the individual development of each learner.⁶⁵

For the madrasah as an institution, adopting mahabbah as a pedagogical framework necessitates a comprehensive transformation of the school culture. A genuinely love-based madrasah is one in which every interaction between the principal and teachers, between teachers and students, and among students themselves is characterized by mutual respect, genuine care, and sincerity. Such a culture cannot be constructed through top-down regulation; rather, it must emerge organically from a collective commitment among all members of the school community to embody the values they profess to teach.⁶⁶

Suyudi et al. assert that quality Islamic education is inherently situated within a process of continuous transformation, wherein each madrasah institution is required to perpetually renew itself without forfeiting its core identity and foundational values. The practical implication for madrasah institutions is the necessity of cultivating an

⁶⁴ Muhammad Nahdi Fahmi dan Sofyan Susanto, "Implementasi pembiasaan pendidikan islam dalam membentuk karakter religius siswa sekolah dasar," *Pedagogia: Jurnal Pendidikan* 7, no. 2 (2018): 85–89.

⁶⁵ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*, diakses 29 Oktober 2025, <https://cdn.kemenag.go.id/storage/archives/panduan-kurikulum-berbasis-cinta.pdf>

⁶⁶ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*, diakses 29 Oktober 2025, <https://cdn.kemenag.go.id/storage/archives/panduan-kurikulum-berbasis-cinta.pdf>

organizational learning culture that remains receptive to pedagogical innovation, including the systematic integration of mahabbah values across all institutional dimensions from the recruitment of educators with a genuine pedagogical vocation, to the design of value-oriented curricula, and the development of assessment frameworks capable of measuring holistic character development. Sukiyat further contends that the successful implementation of character education strategies is substantially determined by visionary and consistent school leadership, as without genuine executive commitment, even the most well-conceived character programs will fail to become embedded as sustainable institutional culture.⁶⁷

The practical implications for madrasah institutions encompass several dimensions. In the domain of human resource development, educators require professional training that extends beyond subject matter mastery and instructional methodology to encompass the cultivation of relational and emotional capacities. A teacher who is emotionally depleted will be inherently incapable of serving as the source of love that learners fundamentally require. In the domain of evaluation and assessment, a mahabbah-based madrasah must develop assessment instruments capable of capturing the holistic character development of learners, rather than limiting measurement to cognitive achievement on written examinations. The development of attitudes, empathic capacity, the quality of social relationships, and consistency in enacting religious values should constitute integral components of the institutional assessment framework.⁶⁸

For individual learners, growing and developing within a mahabbah-based educational environment exerts a profound influence on character formation. Students who are accustomed to experiencing and expressing love within an educational context will develop the capacity to cultivate healthy and meaningful relationships, regulate their emotions constructively, and confront life's challenges with a resilience grounded in firm religious conviction.⁶⁹

Furthermore, students educated through the paradigm of *mahabbah* tend to develop an altruistic life orientation. They come to understand that their existence carries a significance that transcends personal interest, and that the potential and capacities with which they have been endowed represent a divine trust from Allah, which must be directed toward rendering the greatest possible benefit to others. Such a life orientation known in

⁶⁷ H. Sukiyat, *Strategi implementasi pendidikan karakter* (Jakad Media Publishing, 2020), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=g6XODwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=strategi+pembelajaran+pendidikan+karakter&ots=Ohd30E9Wj1&sig=lmC5XB2W2hPrKOzDWAAn13zWr25c>.

⁶⁸ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*, diakses 29 Oktober 2025, <https://cdn.kemenag.go.id/storage/archives/panduan-kurikulum-berbasis-cinta.pdf>

⁶⁹ Melinda Pridayani dan Ahmad Rivauzi, "Faktor Pendukung dan Penghambat Pelaksanaan Program Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Religius Terhadap Siswa," *An-Nuha* 2, no. 2 (2022): 329–41.

Islam as rahmatan lil ‘alamin constitutes the highest manifestation of religious character that has been cultivated through deep and sustained engagement with *mahabbah*.⁷⁰

Accordingly, *mahabbah* is not merely an abstract theological concept confined to theoretical discourse. It represents a transformative force which, when implemented consistently across all dimensions of Islamic education, is capable of producing a generation that is not only intellectually competent but also spiritually, emotionally, and socially mature a generation prepared to assume roles as leaders and agents of change who bring mercy and benefit to all of humanity.⁷¹

The application of love (*mahabbah*) in Islamic education carries profound and far-reaching implications, both for the madrasah as an institution and for the individual development of learners. For the madrasah, *mahabbah* demands a comprehensive cultural transformation of the school environment into one characterized by mutual respect, genuine care, and sincerity, accompanied by the deliberate strengthening of teachers’ emotional and relational capacities, as well as the development of evaluation systems that assess not only cognitive achievement but also the holistic growth of character and moral conduct. For learners, a *mahabbah*-based pedagogical approach will cultivate individuals who are emotionally healthier, capable of establishing meaningful interpersonal relationships, possessed of spiritual resilience, and intrinsically motivated to direct their potential toward the collective well-being and benefit of others. Accordingly, *mahabbah* functions as a transformative force capable of generating a generation that is intellectually capable, religiously grounded in character, and prepared to serve as a source of universal mercy and benefit for all of creation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the concept of *mahabbah* within classical Islamic thought occupies a fundamental position as the philosophical foundation for the formation of religious character in Islamic education. Al-Ghazali affirms that love of Allah constitutes the apex of the spiritual journey, giving rise to intrinsic learning motivation that is independent of external pressures. Rabi’ah Al-Adawiyah illustrates that only love which is pure and free from self-interested motives is capable of producing sincere and enduring internalization of religious values. Ibn Miskawaih, meanwhile, complements both perspectives by asserting that the perfection of character cannot be attained in isolation, but rather through social relationships grounded in compassion and moral responsibility. These three perspectives collectively construct a cohesive argument: *mahabbah* is not merely a theologically elegant concept in rhetorical terms, but rather

⁷⁰ Koto dkk., “Pendidikan Islam dan Kurikulum Cinta.”

⁷¹ Oktari dan Kosasih, “Pendidikan karakter religius dan mandiri di pesantren.”

an active force that operates simultaneously across three layers of personality spiritual, emotional, and social. In the absence of a foundation of love, the religious character that emerges will remain inherently artificial: a superficial compliance that disintegrates in the absence of external supervision.

The integration of mahabbah values into Islamic educational practice is realized through three mutually reinforcing levels. At the level of teacher-student relations, love implemented through warm and welcoming reception, personalized attention, exemplary moral conduct, and spiritual habituation such as the recitation of *Asmaul Husna* and communal supplication has been demonstrated to significantly strengthen affective bonds that open pathways to value internalization. At the curricular level, the Love-Based Curriculum formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has successfully shifted the paradigm of religious learning from one oriented exclusively toward cognitive mastery toward the internalization of values that engage the affective and psychomotor dimensions of learners. At the level of the madrasah ecosystem, the transformation of school culture to reflect the values of compassion across all institutional interactions constitutes a prerequisite for ensuring that the impact of mahabbah extends beyond the classroom and permeates the entirety of the educational atmosphere. The outcome is a holistic religious character: learners who are not only academically competent, but also possess moral resilience in the digital era, the capacity to cultivate empathic and equitable social relationships, and a life orientation directed toward the collective well-being of others as a tangible manifestation of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations merit serious attention from various Islamic education stakeholders. First, future research should conduct more in-depth field investigations. Through ethnographic studies or pedagogical experiments, researchers can quantitatively measure the effectiveness of the Love-Based Curriculum implementation across diverse madrasah contexts characterized by varying social and cultural conditions, thereby producing findings with greater generalizability. Second, the development of teacher training programs specifically designed to strengthen the emotional and relational capacities of educators beyond conventional subject matter mastery and instructional methodology should be prioritized as a policy matter by Islamic educational institutions and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, given that teachers are the primary agents responsible for enacting mahabbah values in practice. Third, integrative exploration of the concept of mahabbah within the Islamic tradition alongside recent findings in educational psychology particularly concerning emotional intelligence, attachment theory, and relationship-based learning represents a highly promising research agenda for enriching the scientific foundations

of a more humanistic, relevant, and responsive Islamic pedagogy capable of addressing the continuously evolving challenges of the digital era

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RELIGI

JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

Prodi Studi Agama-Agama
Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Pemikiran Islam
UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

