

Implementing the Curriculum of Love to Foster Humanistic Character among Female Boarding Students

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Abstract: This study responds to the challenge faced by boarding madrasahs in maintaining discipline and religious habituation without relying on rigid or punitive educational relationships. It examines the implementation of Indonesia's Curriculum of Love and its perceived implications for the humanistic character formation of female students at MTs Al Ukhuwah 6 Sukoharjo. A qualitative case-study design was employed. Data were drawn from in-depth interviews with 11 informants—one madrasah principal, four teachers or boarding mentors, and six female students—together with participant observation conducted during August 2026 and curriculum documentation. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while source and method triangulation were used to strengthen credibility. The findings indicate three recurring forms of practice: joyful learning, educator role modelling (*uswah hasanah*), and the cultivation of a student-friendly boarding environment. Informants associated these practices with greater self-awareness, responsibility, openness toward mentors, learning comfort, and discipline grounded more in personal awareness than fear of sanctions. Mediation and persuasive communication were also used to address interpersonal conflict. Because this is a single-site qualitative case study without pre-post measurement, the findings are interpreted as contextual implications rather than causal effects. The study highlights the value of integrating compassion, role modelling, and pastoral care in character education within boarding madrasahs.

Keywords: *Boarding Madrasah Environment; Joyful Learning; Positive Discipline; Student Well-Being; Uswah Hasanah.*

INTRODUCTION

Character education in Indonesian pesantren and boarding madrasahs operates within a demanding educational environment. These institutions are expected to preserve religious scholarship, disciplined routines, Qur'anic learning, and communal moral formation while also providing adolescents with educational relationships that are psychologically safe and respectful. A highly punitive approach can create tension when discipline is experienced primarily as fear of sanctions rather than as the internalization of responsibility. Research on pesantren has documented bullying and seniority as relational and institutional issues rather than merely individual misconduct. This makes the quality of educator-student interaction central to discussions of character formation in residential Islamic education. (Arfah & Wantini, 2023; Yuhbaba, 2019; Adlani et al., 2026)

Against this background, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs introduced the Curriculum of Love (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta/KBC) through the 2025 Directorate General of Islamic Education guideline. The framework places mahabbah (love) and rahmah (compassion) at the centre of educational relationships and identifies orientations toward God, knowledge, fellow human beings, the environment, and the nation. Recent studies have positioned KBC as a humanistic orientation in Islamic education and as a framework that can be translated into madrasah and pesantren practice. In the Islamic educational vocabulary used in this study, this orientation is associated with a Jamaliyah approach that emphasizes gentleness and beauty as a counterweight to disciplinary practices that may become excessively Jalaliyah or punitive. (Qamariah & Anwar, 2025; Hidayati et al., 2025) (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Kementerian Agama RI, 2025)

Existing literature has discussed the Curriculum of Love conceptually and in several formal educational settings, including Islamic schooling and language education. Yet empirical accounts of how the framework is enacted in a lower-secondary boarding madrasah remain limited. This setting matters because education extends beyond scheduled lessons: students interact with teachers, mentors, peers, religious routines, and institutional rules throughout the day. MTs Al Ukhuwah 6 Sukoharjo provides a useful case because its educational environment combines formal madrasah instruction, Islamic studies, Qur'an memorization, and residential mentoring. This gap is also important in light of international evidence showing that the quality of teacher-student relationships during adolescence is associated with academic, social-emotional, and behavioural outcomes, while the culturally salient dimensions of caring, conflict resolution, and students' sense of being respected vary across contexts. (Artola Bonanno et al., 2024; Salter et al., 2025)

The study therefore addresses two questions: how is the Curriculum of Love implemented in teaching and boarding-school mentoring at MTs Al Ukhuwah 6 Sukoharjo, and what implications do informants perceive for the humanistic character of female students? The analysis reads the field data through several related concepts already established in the manuscript: joyful learning, *uswah hasanah*, positive discipline, student resilience and adaptation, and the mitigation of bullying. Its contribution lies in examining the Curriculum of Love as a pedagogical and pastoral practice that extends beyond the classroom into the everyday ecology of a boarding madrasah.

The normative basis for this reading is consistent with Islamic teachings on compassionate education. Qur'anic passages emphasize gentleness, wisdom, good counsel, and exemplary conduct (Q.S. Ali 'Imran [3]: 159; Q.S. al-Nahl [16]: 125; Q.S. al-Ahzab [33]: 21). In this study, these sources function as a normative frame rather than as substitutes for empirical evidence. Empirically, joyful learning is understood as an approach that reduces unnecessary psychological pressure and encourages active, appreciative interaction; prior studies have associated such

approaches with learning interest and motivation. Uswah hasanah refers to the educator's exemplary conduct as a mechanism through which values are modelled and internalized. A student-friendly boarding environment, meanwhile, concerns the relational conditions through which students can adapt, seek assistance, and address interpersonal problems without immediately encountering punitive responses. (Sanusi et al., 2024; Wahid & Prasetya, 2024). (Tugiah & Asmendri, 2022; Putri et al., 2025)

METHOD

Methodologically, the research used a qualitative descriptive case-study design. Observation was conducted at MTs Al Ukhuwah 6 Sukoharjo, Central Java, from 1 to 28 August 2026, while follow-up interviews recorded in the research notes continued through 29 August 2026. The study involved 11 informants: one madrasah principal, four teachers or boarding mentors, and six female students involved in the learning and boarding environment. Participants were selected purposively on the basis of their direct involvement in the implementation of the Curriculum of Love. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and curriculum documentation. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive procedures of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation across the principal, educators, and students and through method triangulation across interviews, observation, and documents. The available research record does not report standardized psychological measures or a pre-post comparison; accordingly, reported changes are treated as contextual perceptions and implications rather than causal effects. (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The Curriculum of Love as a Pedagogical and Pastoral Practice

The field data point to three recurring forms through which the Curriculum of Love was enacted at MTs Al Ukhuwah 6: joyful learning, educator role modelling, and the development of a student-friendly boarding environment. These forms do not reproduce the five orientations of the national framework as separate program components. Rather, they show how the broad orientation of love was translated into everyday educational relationships. The significance of this finding is that the Curriculum of Love appears in the case not simply as a written curriculum but as a relational practice linking classroom instruction, boarding mentorship, discipline, and conflict management.

Joyful Learning and the Experience of Being Respected

In subjects such as nahwu-sharaf and Qur'an memorization, students described teaching as more dialogic, interactive, and appreciative. The available accounts emphasize comfort, ease of understanding, and reduced boredom rather than measurable achievement gains. Female students generally understood joyful learning as a way of making lessons less burdensome and more memorable. Some reported that material presented in an enjoyable manner was easier to remember and practise. They also associated the boarding environment with support for study and memorization, while the everyday use of Arabic was perceived as helping them become more familiar with the language. These perceptions are consistent with earlier work linking joyful learning to interest and engagement in religious education. (Tugiah & Asmendri, 2022; Wiyanti et al., 2025)

These accounts suggest that the importance of joyful learning in this case lies not simply in entertainment but in the relational experience of being respected during learning. Prior research

similarly associates low-pressure and participatory learning with interest and motivation. However, the present study did not compare learning outcomes before and after the implementation of the Curriculum of Love. It therefore cannot establish that joyful learning caused improved achievement or motivation. A more defensible interpretation is that students perceived dialogic and appreciative teaching as creating a more comfortable learning climate that may support engagement with demanding religious and academic routines. This relational interpretation is consistent with cross-cultural research identifying caring, supportive communication, classroom climate, and conflict resolution as central dimensions of adolescent teacher–student relationships. (Artola Bonanno et al., 2024)

Uswah Hasanah and Persuasive Mentoring

Educators described their boarding role in parental terms and reported prioritizing persuasive communication when students experienced problems or violated rules. Boarding mentors used personal conversations outside formal class and Qur'an-memorization sessions so that students could express difficulties and receive guidance. This practice reflects the manuscript's use of *uswah hasanah*: educators are expected not only to instruct but also to embody the conduct they seek to cultivate. In this sense, modelling and interpersonal treatment become part of the curriculum itself. Recent international reviews further indicate that supportive teacher–student relationships are closely intertwined with adolescent emotional well-being, including anxiety-related experiences, reinforcing the importance of relational quality in secondary educational settings. (Salter et al., 2025)

The madrasah principal identified self-awareness and orderliness as the most visible areas of development. He described students as increasingly willing to acknowledge mistakes, accept correction, and make deliberate efforts not to repeat the same behaviour. A boarding mentor similarly connected students' development with completing responsibilities, maintaining entrusted duties, and accepting the consequences of their actions. Another mentor emphasized politeness, mutual respect, self-awareness, and responsibility in daily obligations. These are informant perceptions rather than independently measured behavioural outcomes, yet the convergence of accounts across institutional roles provides qualitative support for interpreting responsibility and self-awareness as salient themes in the case. (Ufa Anastasya, personal interview, August 28, 2026). (Hanifah, personal interview, August 29, 2026). (Muhammad Mucklas, personal interview, August 29, 2026)

A Student-Friendly Boarding Environment

The third pattern concerns the attempt to create a psychologically safer boarding environment for adaptation and interaction. The manuscript describes efforts to support new students during adjustment and to encourage communication between students and mentors. The available conflict data illustrate this orientation in practice. When misunderstandings led to disputes between female students, the response involved calling the students concerned and facilitating direct mediation. The reported outcome was an improvement in relationships and greater mutual understanding. This example is important because it shows that compassion was not framed as the absence of rules or intervention; rather, it informed the manner in which problems were addressed. This emphasis is particularly relevant to a female boarding-school context. Recent international research on Indonesian single-sex pesantren found that peer belonging and bullying were closely connected with students' well-being and learning outcomes, with especially important implications for girls. More broadly, meta-analytic evidence indicates that boarding-school effects are heterogeneous and that supportive institutional conditions matter for student development. (Nawas et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2024)

PROBLEM	REPORTED FACTOR	RESPONSE	PARTIES INVOLVED	REPORTED OUTCOME
INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT	Misunderstanding and limited mutual understanding	Direct mediation and reconciliation	Students and boarding mentor	Improved relationship and mutual understanding

Table 1. Reported interpersonal problem and response in the boarding environment

The source manuscript also records a case of self-harm and a faith-oriented mentoring response. Because the available data do not provide sufficient clinical, safeguarding, or follow-up information, that case is not used here as evidence of the effectiveness of the Curriculum of Love. This limitation is methodologically important: a qualitative educational study should not imply that serious psychological distress can be evaluated or resolved solely through religious advice without appropriate evidence. The case instead indicates the need for future research to document safeguarding procedures and referral mechanisms when student well-being concerns arise.

Perceived Implications for Humanistic Character

Religious Practice as Awareness Rather Than Fear

Informants described congregational prayer, daily Qur'an recitation, and qiyam al-layl as practices that educators sought to cultivate through awareness rather than fear of punishment. The data support an interpretation of this as an educational orientation, but they do not establish a measured transformation from extrinsic to intrinsic religious motivation. Previous research has linked religiosity and well-being with learning motivation among pesantren students, while recent work on musyrif-led worship mentoring emphasizes habituation, modelling, and sustained guidance. No attendance comparison, validated motivation scale, or longitudinal measure is reported in the present case. The finding is therefore best understood as a perceived shift in the meaning of discipline: religious routines were framed by educators as acts to be internalized rather than merely enforced. (Melani, 2016; Nursyahbani & Masripah, 2026)

Conflict Management and Bullying Prevention

Compassionate and persuasive communication was also perceived as contributing to more open peer relationships. The available evidence directly documents interpersonal conflict and mediation, but it does not provide systematic before-and-after data on bullying prevalence. Claims that the Curriculum of Love eliminated bullying or broke the cycle of seniority would therefore exceed the evidence. Research on bullying in pesantren cautions that bullying and seniority are structural and cyclical problems that require systematic monitoring in addition to personal modelling. The contribution of the present case is narrower: it illustrates a non-repressive mechanism - mediation, dialogue, and mentor involvement - that may form one component of a broader anti-bullying environment. (Marthunis & Authar, 2017; Junaidi & Sahrandi, 2025)

Emotional Adaptation and Openness to Mentors

Interview accounts indicate that female students were perceived as more willing to communicate difficulties to mentors and better able to navigate boredom or fatigue associated with study and Qur'an memorization. These observations are compatible with literature linking social support, self-efficacy, spirituality, and resilience among pesantren students. Nevertheless, the study did not employ a standardized resilience instrument. The term resilience should therefore be used cautiously. The evidence more directly supports openness to mentoring and

perceived adaptive capacity than a measured increase in psychological resilience. (Hadaita et al., 2026; Luthfiyah & Hardew, 2024)

Discipline Grounded in Responsibility

The principal and mentors consistently connected discipline with responsibility, respect, and self-awareness. Students were described as increasingly able to follow routines without continuous reminders and as more willing to accept consequences when they made mistakes. Within the logic of the Curriculum of Love, this suggests that compassion and discipline need not be treated as opposites. A warm educational relationship may coexist with clear expectations when rules are communicated through modelling, dialogue, and responsibility. This interpretation resonates with positive-discipline perspectives and with Islamic educational management research that treats discipline as value-based rather than merely punitive. (Febriandari, 2018; Jaya et al., 2025)

Discussion: From Curriculum Document to Boarding-School Ecology

Taken together, the findings suggest that the most analytically useful way to understand the Curriculum of Love in this case is as an educational ecology. Its implementation was not confined to a particular subject, lesson plan, or classroom technique. It appeared across teaching style, mentor behaviour, student adjustment, conflict mediation, religious routines, and everyday discipline. This broad enactment is especially relevant to boarding madrasahs because the boundary between instruction and pastoral care is porous. Educators continue to shape students' experiences outside formal lesson hours, and character formation is embedded in repeated interactions across the day. This interpretation also aligns with curriculum-evaluation work emphasizing that curriculum quality must be examined through enacted practice rather than documents alone, and with Amin and Faizin's account of religious habituation as a mechanism through which Islamic educational values are translated into everyday character formation. (Amin & Faizin, 2024) (Faizin, 2020)

The case also clarifies the relationship between Jamaliyah and discipline. A compassionate orientation did not mean removing rules. Instead, the data suggest an attempt to change the relational pathway through which rules were communicated and internalized. Persuasion, personal conversation, role modelling, and mediation were emphasized over immediate punitive responses. This is consistent with the theological framing of gentleness and *uswah hasanah* in the manuscript. At the same time, the evidence does not justify portraying punitive practice as wholly absent or the observed character changes as caused exclusively by the Curriculum of Love. Students' development may also reflect prior family socialization, peer relationships, religious routines, institutional selection, and other features of *pesantren* life that were not isolated in the study.

The study's contribution is therefore contextual rather than causal. It provides an empirical description of how a recent national curriculum discourse can be translated into the everyday practices of a boarding madrasah. It also shows why implementation research on the Curriculum of Love should examine more than classroom pedagogy. Future studies could compare multiple madrasahs, follow students longitudinally, document institutional safeguarding mechanisms, and combine qualitative accounts with validated measures of school climate, bullying, motivation, or resilience. Such designs would allow stronger claims about change while retaining attention to the cultural and theological meanings through which compassionate education is understood in Islamic educational settings.

CONCLUSION

At MTs Al Ukhuwah 6 Sukoharjo, the Curriculum of Love was enacted through three interconnected practices: joyful learning, *uswah hasanah* in educator–student relationships, and efforts to cultivate a student-friendly boarding environment. Informants associated these practices with self-awareness, responsibility, openness toward mentors, learning comfort, conflict mediation, and discipline grounded in awareness rather than fear of sanctions. The findings indicate that compassionate pedagogy can be integrated with religious habituation and institutional discipline without conceptualizing compassion as the absence of rules.

These conclusions must remain proportionate to the study design. The research concerns one institution, relies on qualitative accounts and observation during a limited fieldwork period, and does not include pre-post measurement or standardized instruments for bullying, motivation, or resilience. It therefore identifies contextual patterns and perceived implications rather than causal effects. Further multi-site and longitudinal research is needed to examine how the Curriculum of Love interacts with school climate, student well-being, religious motivation, and safeguarding practices across different *madrasah* and *pesantren* settings.

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