

Mahabbah as Curriculum: Actualizing a Love-Based Framework for Cultivating Intellectual-Ulama in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Islamic education confronts a persistent epistemological dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge, producing graduates who are intellectually competent yet morally underdeveloped, or ritually observant yet socially disengaged. This study investigates how a mahabbah-based (love-based) curriculum is actualized at the As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School (pesantren), Indonesia, aiming to reconstruct an intellectual-ulama profile that integrates revelatory and rational knowledge within a holistic educational paradigm. An intrinsic qualitative case study design was employed. Data were generated through twelve months of participatory observation, purposively sampled in-depth interviews with 18 participants (leaders, curriculum specialists, and students), and systematic document analysis. Thematic analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. Trustworthiness was established through source/methodological triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. The findings reveal that five interconnected dimensions of mahabbah—transcendental, humanistic, intellectual, ecological, and civic—function as the ontological and epistemological spine of the curriculum. Each dimension features discernible curricular, pedagogical, and evaluative manifestations that collectively reinforce the intellectual-ulama profile. This mahabbah-based curriculum represents a theoretically grounded and practically viable model for resolving the knowledge dichotomy in Islamic education. It advances a holistic curriculum paradigm wherein love operates as a transformative educational force, offering a replicable framework for pesantren and broader Islamic educational institutions globally.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has historically aspired to produce the insan kamil—the complete human being whose rational acuity, spiritual depth, and moral integrity are inseparably

fused (Anwar, 2022; Muttaqin, 2025). This holistic aspiration is encoded in the Qur'anic injunction that knowledge ('ilm) and wisdom (hikmah) are inseparable from consciousness of the Divine. Yet the institutional landscape of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia and beyond reveals a persistent gap between this normative ideal and empirical reality.

The dichotomy between religious ('ulum naqliyyah) and secular ('ulum 'aqliyyah) knowledge continues to fracture curricula, faculty, and student identities in Indonesian madrasas and pesantren (Ihsan et al., 2024; Kosim et al., 2023). On one side, graduates emerge intellectually proficient in STEM disciplines yet bereft of theological grounding; on the other, students deeply versed in classical Islamic texts find themselves ill-equipped to navigate the epistemic demands of modernity (Wulandari et al., 2025). This bifurcation is not merely curricular; it is ontological—a fracture in students' understanding of what it means to know and why knowing matters.

Scholars have proposed various remedies: integrated curricula, epistemological convergence, and thematic content alignment (Abuzar & Khondoker, 2024; Mahmudhassan & Abuzar, 2024). Yet most interventions operate at the level of cognitive content rather than motivational architecture. They redesign what students learn but not the affective disposition from which learning springs. This gap is consequential: cognitive restructuring without motivational transformation yields students who know integration as a fact but do not feel it as a lived imperative.

Within Islamic intellectual tradition, mahabbah—divine love rooted in the Qur'anic command to love Allah above all else (Q. 2:165)—has long been theorized by scholars such as al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE) and Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240 CE) as the supreme motivational force shaping human conduct (Abitolkha & Muvid, 2021; Prathama & Mahadwistha, 2024). Yet contemporary curriculum scholarship has not systematically operationalized mahabbah as a curricular construct. Where love appears in Islamic pedagogical discourse, it functions as inspirational rhetoric rather than as a structured framework with identifiable dimensions, pedagogical strategies, and evaluative indicators (Sahin, 2022).

This study addresses that lacuna. It examines how the As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School, one of Indonesia's most historically significant pesantren (Tahir & Tahir, 2022; Wahyuni, 2025), has constructed and operationalized a mahabbah-based curriculum across five interconnected love dimensions. The pesantren's century-long tradition of synthesizing classical scholarly learning with engaged social service renders it an unusually apt site for studying how love, as an educational principle, can be actualized to produce what we term the intellectual-*ulama*: scholars whose breadth of knowledge, depth of moral commitment, and social engagement model the classical polymathic tradition exemplified by al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, and KH. Hasyim Asy'ari (Burhanuddin & Hamidah, 2025; Fahrudin et al., 2026).

The central problem animating this study is threefold. First, Islamic education globally confronts a motivational crisis: students learn about religion and about science but experience no felt unity between them (Erika et al., 2026). Second, existing curricular frameworks—whether classical turath-based or modern integrated models—

lack an affective architecture that situates love as an epistemological foundation rather than a supplementary virtue (Ali et al., 2026). Third, the intellectual-ulama ideal remains under-theorized in contemporary curriculum scholarship, leaving practitioners without a coherent model for its cultivation (Syafii et al., 2025).

The significance of this study is threefold. Theoretically, it extends Noddings' ethic of care and Nel Noddings' relational pedagogy into an Islamic educational key, establishing mahabbah as an indigenous Islamic counterpart with distinctive transcendental dimensions (Hart, 2022; Noddings, 2013). Methodologically, it generates rich empirical data on pesantren curriculum actualization, a domain underrepresented in English-language educational research (Lukens-Bull, 2025). Practically, it provides a replicable curricular model for Islamic educational institutions seeking to overcome the knowledge dichotomy. This study is guided by the following questions:

1. How is the mahabbah-based curriculum theoretically constructed and operationalized at As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School?
2. How do the five dimensions of mahabbah manifest in curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and student outcomes?
3. In what ways does the mahabbah-based curriculum contribute to the realization of the intellectual-ulama profile?

Theoretical Framework

In Western educational philosophy, love and care as pedagogical principles gained systematic articulation through Noddings' foundational work on the ethic of care (Chen & Shih, 2025). Noddings argued that genuine education demands a caring relational posture of attentive receptivity and motivational displacement between educator and student (O'Brien, 2023). Palmer extended this insight, contending that teaching courage emerges from the teacher's identity and integrity—from who they love and why (Rendón et al., 2023). Hooks likewise argued that love, properly understood as a redemptive, communal force rather than a sentimental emotion, constitutes the ethical foundation of transformative pedagogy (Zembylas, 2017).

Within Islamic intellectual tradition, love occupies an even more architecturally central position (Sahin, 2022). Al-Ghazali's *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) positions mahabbah as the pinnacle of the spiritual stations (maqamat) through which the human soul progresses toward God. For al-Ghazali, love for Allah is not an incidental emotional byproduct of religious practice but the very engine that transmutes learning from mere information acquisition into tazkiyah al-nafs—purification of the self (Syaffutra & Zarkasi, 2025). Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328 CE) similarly insisted that 'ilm without mahabbah produces scholars who know about God without knowing God.

Contemporary Islamic educational scholars have begun reconnecting this classical insight to curriculum theory. Sahin (2022) proposes an “opening the mind” model in which religious education fosters critical spiritual agency rather than rote transmission; Hashim (2024) develops a philosophy of compassionate citizenship in Islamic

educational contexts; and [Ubaidillah and Gürel \(2025\)](#) examines how Islamic schools in the West negotiate identity formation through communal bonds that are, at their foundation, affective and relational. None of these scholars, however, have operationalized mahabbah as a multi-dimensional curricular structure. This study makes that contribution.

Curriculum Theory and the Integrative Paradigm

Curriculum theory since Tyler has been dominated by rationalist, technical frameworks in which learning objectives, content, methods, and evaluation are arranged in a linear, means-ends logic ([D'Souza et al., 2024](#)). Eisner criticized this paradigm for reducing education to behavioral outputs, neglecting aesthetic, imaginative, and moral dimensions ([Pant et al., 2023](#)). Pinar advanced reconceptualism, reframing curriculum as "currere" a lived, autobiographical journey of meaning-making ([Craveiro & Ribeiro, 2024](#)). Doll proposed a post-formal curriculum characterized by richness, recursion, relations, and rigor, displacing the goal-driven linear model ([Zhang, 2018](#)).

In the Islamic context, [Yunita et al. \(2025\)](#) outlined a curriculum framework anchored in the concept of adab—the proper ordering of knowledge and action—which integrates transcendental, humanistic, and natural dimensions within a unified epistemic vision. Al-Attas famously called for the “Islamization of knowledge,” repositioning the Qur’an and Sunnah as epistemological anchors that illuminate rather than contradict empirical and rational inquiry ([Elsawahly & Ali, 2025](#)). More recently, [Arif et al. \(2020\)](#) documented how leading Indonesian pesantren have enacted forms of integrative curriculum that exceed government reform efforts in depth and durability, drawing on centuries of scholarly tradition.

The mahabbah-based curriculum examined in this study extends this integrative paradigm by adding an affective-motivational dimension: it is not merely what is taught (content integration) or how it is taught (pedagogical integration) but why students are motivated to learn at all that distinguishes this model. Love, as the foundational motivational architecture, transforms integration from an institutional policy into an existential commitment.

The Intellectual-Ulama Profile: Historical and Contemporary Constructions

The ideal of the scholar who synthesizes religious and rational knowledge is not a modern invention; it is a recurrent theme in Islamic intellectual history. Al-Ghazali exemplified the integration of Sufi spirituality, Shafi’i jurisprudence, and Greek-derived philosophy in his pedagogical writings. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) pioneered the philosophical-theological synthesis that profoundly influenced medieval European scholasticism. Ibn Sina’s medical and philosophical polymathism demonstrated that deep expertise in natural sciences was entirely consistent with Islamic faith ([Mohamed, 2023](#)).

In the Indonesian archipelago, this polymathic ideal found institutional expression in the pesantren tradition. KH. Hasyim Asy’ari, founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, exemplified the intellectual-ulama type: simultaneously a master of classical Islamic jurisprudence,

a political strategist, and a national independence activist (Huda et al., 2024). His educational vision, encoded in the Qanun Asasi of Nahdlatul Ulama, explicitly linked the cultivation of religious knowledge to civic responsibility and nation-building.

Contemporary scholarship on the intellectual ulama (often termed ‘ulama intelektual’ in Indonesian discourse) emphasizes four core competencies: mastery of Islamic classical texts (turath); engagement with contemporary disciplines; ethical exemplarity; and active social contribution (Habibi et al., 2024; Yahya et al., 2025). This study adds a fifth dimension: the motivational architecture of mahabbah that sustains and integrates the other four.

Pesantren as a Site of Curriculum Innovation

Indonesia’s approximately 27,000 pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) collectively enroll over four million students, making them one of the world’s largest non-state educational systems (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). Pesantren have historically functioned as sites of curriculum innovation precisely because they operate outside rigid state-prescribed frameworks, enabling them to experiment with integrative models unavailable to formal madrasas (Mustafidin et al., 2024).

The As’adiyah Sengkang pesantren, founded in 1928 in South Sulawesi, occupies a distinctive position in this landscape (Haris, 2024). It combines the classical Shafi’i-oriented curriculum of the Hadrami scholarly tradition with contemporary subject offerings, producing graduates who serve as ulama, academics, bureaucrats, and social entrepreneurs—a profile that embodies the intellectual-ulama ideal. The pesantren’s documented commitment to ‘comprehensive love education’ (pendidikan cinta holistik) as an organizing curricular principle makes it a theoretically and empirically significant case study site.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative intrinsic case study design. The intrinsic designation signals that the case—the mahabbah-based curriculum of As’adiyah Sengkang—is of interest, not as a vehicle for theory generalization. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to understand a particular educational phenomenon in its full contextual complexity, including its historical, institutional, pedagogical, and social dimensions.

As’adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren As’adiyah Sengkang) is in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Founded in 1928 by the revered scholar Anregurutta KH. Muhammad As’ad Al-Bugisi, the pesantren has over a century of documented curriculum development. It currently enrolls approximately 3,500 students across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, with a faculty of over 200 teachers spanning Islamic classical sciences and contemporary disciplines. The pesantren was purposively purported based on: (a) its historical reputation for integrating classical and modern knowledge; (b) its explicitly documented love-based curriculum philosophy; and (c) its accessibility and willingness to permit extended ethnographic engagement.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure informational richness and diversity of perspective (Patton, 2015). Eighteen participants were recruited across three stakeholder groups:

Table 1. Participant Profile and Selection Criteria (N = 18)

Participant Group	n	Inclusion Criteria
Institutional Leaders (Anregurutta & deputies)	5	Active leadership role; minimum 10 years at the institution; direct involvement in curriculum policy
Curriculum Teachers & Specialists	8	Teaching across at least two knowledge domains (Islamic sciences & general subjects); minimum 5 years at the institution
Students (Senior cohorts)	5	Enrolled for minimum 3 years; nominated by teachers as exemplary intellectual-ulama profile; diversity of disciplinary focus

Data was generated through three complementary methods constituting technical triangulation:

- Participatory observation was conducted over twelve months (two academic semesters). The first author maintained a reflective field journal documenting classroom interactions, communal rituals, informal conversations, and institutional ceremonies. Observation focused on the enactment of love dimensions in daily educational interactions, including the opening of lessons, pedagogical discourse, student-teacher relationships, and extracurricular activities.
- In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all 18 participants, lasting 60–90 minutes each. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Interview guides were developed around three thematic clusters: (a) conceptual understanding of mahabbah as an educational principle; (b) pedagogical strategies for enacting love dimensions in curriculum; and (c) perceived outcomes in terms of student character, knowledge integration, and social engagement.
- Document analysis encompassed institutional curriculum frameworks, lesson plans, student portfolios, internal evaluative reports, and historical records of the pesantren’s founding vision. Document coding followed the same thematic scheme as interview analysis, enabling triangulated confirmation of emergent categories.

Data were analyzed following Miles, Huberman, and Saldāna’s (2014) interactive model, operationalized through three iterative phases:

- Data condensation involved systematic open coding of transcripts and field notes, with codes organized into first-order descriptive categories aligned with participants’ own terminology (love for knowledge is the engine of learning’), followed by second-order conceptual categories abstracted by the research team (intellectual ethos).

- Data display involved constructing thematic matrices that mapped each love dimension across curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation axes, enabling visual pattern recognition across data sources and participant groups.
- Conclusion drawing and verification involved iterative team discussions to confirm emergent themes, followed by member checking: a summary of findings was shared with five key informants who verified interpretive accuracy or requested amendments.

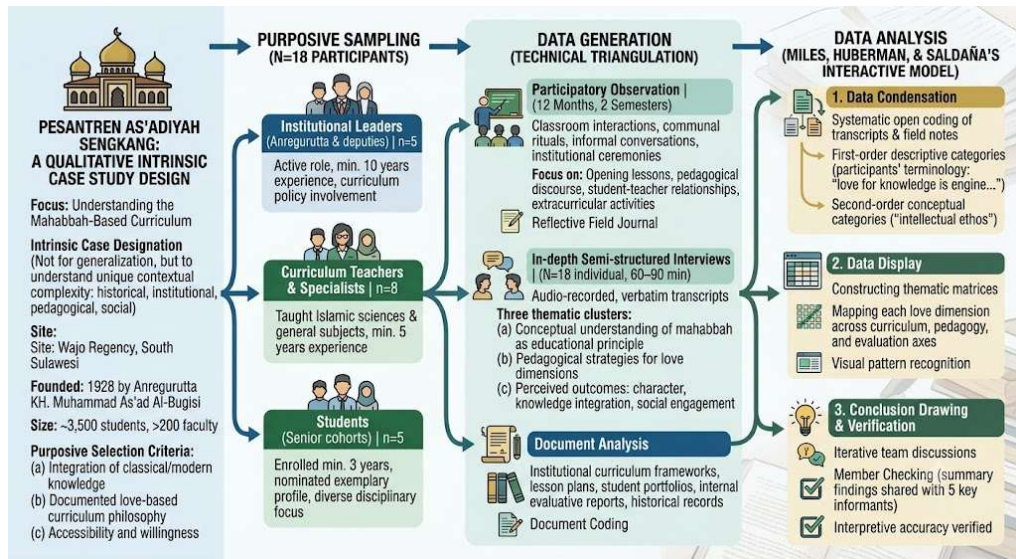


Figure 1. Research Flow

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis identified five mahabbah dimensions operating as an integrated curricular system. Each dimension functions simultaneously as an ontological foundation (shaping students' understanding of why education matters), a pedagogical principle (guiding instructional design), and an evaluative criterion (measuring educational outcomes). Table 2 presents an overview of the five-dimensional framework.

Table 2. The Five-Dimensional Mahabbah Curriculum Framework at As'adiyah Sengkang

Dimension	Domain	Curricular Manifestation	Pedagogical Strategy	Evaluative Indicator
Love for Allah & Prophet	Transcendental	Integration of tafakkur (reflection) across all subjects; Prophetic biography as methodology	Thematic tafsir; contemplative inquiry	Spiritual humility; purposeful learning
Love for Self & Others	Humanistic	Character development portfolio; collaborative social projects	Cooperative learning; mentoring dyads	Empathy index; community contribution record

Dimension	Domain	Curricular Manifestation	Pedagogical Strategy	Evaluative Indicator
Love for Knowledge	Intellectual	Integrated epistemology; cross-domain research projects	Inquiry-based learning; Socratic dialogue	Intrinsic motivation scale; research output
Love for Environment	Ecological	Eco-theology curriculum; green campus practice	Experiential ecology; service-learning	Environmental stewardship behaviors
Love for Nation & State	Civic	Critical citizenship education; ulama-nation historical case studies	Project-based civic engagement	Civic participation; community leadership

Transcendental Dimension: Love for Allah and the Prophet as Epistemological Foundation

The first and architecturally primary dimension is mahabbah lillah wa rasulih—love for Allah and His Prophet. Documentary analysis of the pesantren’s curriculum framework reveals this dimension as the stated epistemological foundation: all disciplinary knowledge is explicitly framed as a form of tafakkur (reflective contemplation of divine signs). The headmaster articulated this foundational logic:

“When a student opens a biology textbook and studies cell division, we want that moment of scientific wonder to simultaneously deepen their certainty about the Creator. The microscope becomes a lens not just for cells but for iman [faith]. That is what we mean by mahabbah as curriculum—every subject is a different doorway into the same house of divine love.” (Institutional leader, Interview 1)

Pedagogically, this dimension is operationalized through thematic integration: each subject opens with a moment of tafakkur in which the teacher poses a reflective question connecting the day’s content to signs of divine wisdom (*ayat kawniyyah*). Observation data confirmed this practice across 34 observed lessons spanning biology, mathematics, Arabic literature, and social sciences. The practice is not liturgical performance but a genuine epistemic reorientation: students are trained to ask not only “what is this?” but “what does this reveal about the wisdom of the Creator?”

The Prophet’s biography (*sirah nabawiyah*) functions as a methodological exemplar rather than historical text. Teachers draw explicitly on the Prophet’s intellectual curiosity, diplomatic acuity, and commitment to justice as models for scholarly engagement. A curriculum teacher noted: *“The Prophet was the first ‘ulama-intelektual. He did not separate knowledge from ethics, or ethics from action. We use his life as the living methodology of our curriculum.” (Teacher 3, Interview 7).*

Humanistic Dimension: Love for Self and Others as Social Ethics of Knowledge

The second dimension—love for self and others—grounds the curriculum in relational anthropology: the Islamic understanding that humans are trustees (*khalifah*) of divine capacities that can only be fulfilled in community. Analysis of curriculum documents reveals a structured character development program that runs parallel to

academic instruction, comprising three interlocking components: self-knowledge workshops, mentoring relationships (halaqah), and community service projects.

Self-love in this framework is explicitly distinguished from narcissism: it is amanah-consciousness—awareness of the divine trust embedded in one’s God-given capacities. A student informant described the transformative impact of this reframing:

“Before coming to As’adiyah, I thought loving myself meant getting ahead of others. Here I learned that real self-love means developing every gift Allah gave you—and then using it for others. Those two things are not in tension; they are the same thing.” (Student 2, Interview 14).

Love for others is operationalized through cooperative learning structures, cross-cohort mentoring, and mandatory community engagement projects. Observational data documented students from advanced cohorts providing weekly tutoring to junior students, a practice described by teachers as deliberate modeling of the Islamic scholarly tradition of transmission (isnad) as an act of love rather than mere pedagogy.

Intellectual Dimension: Love for Knowledge as Epistemological Ethos

The third dimension—love for knowledge—is the dimension most directly structuring the curriculum’s academic content. Analysis reveals a distinctive epistemological position: the curriculum explicitly refuses the dichotomy between ‘ilm naqliyyah (transmitted religious sciences) and ‘ilm ‘aqliyyah (rational-empirical sciences), positioning both as complementary expressions of a single divine epistemology.

This position is not merely rhetorical. Lesson plans analyzed across subjects document systematic cross-referencing: biology teachers cite Qur’anic verses on creation; Islamic jurisprudence teachers cite contemporary bioethics cases; history teachers draw connections between Andalusian Islamic science and modern physics. A curriculum specialist described the design principle:

“Our syllabus is built like a spider’s web. Every subject is a thread connected to every other thread, and the center—the point that holds everything together—is love for knowledge as a divine gift.” (Teacher 6, Interview 10).

Inquiry-based methodologies are prioritized over rote memorization. Students are required to complete at least one ‘integrated research project’ annually that brings Islamic textual sources into dialogue with empirical data. Observed examples included studies of water conservation practices in Islamic jurisprudence, mathematical patterns in Qur’anic verse structure, and historical analysis of Islamic contributions to algebra and optics.

Ecological Dimension: Love for the Environment as Caliphate Responsibility

The fourth dimension—love for the environment—grounds ecological consciousness in Islamic theological anthropology. The Qur’anic designation of humans as khalifah (vicegerents) on earth (Q. 2:30) is interpreted in the curriculum not as a license for exploitation but as a fiduciary mandate for stewardship and conservation. Documentary analysis reveals a three-part eco-theological curriculum strand integrated across subjects from Grade 7 through tertiary level.

At the environmental ethics level, students study the Qur'anic prohibition on *fasad fil ardh* (corruption on earth) and Prophetic hadiths on cleanliness, tree-planting, and water conservation. At the applied ecology level, the pesantren maintains a 2-hectare green campus with student-managed organic gardens, rainwater harvesting systems, and waste-sorting facilities, all framed as acts of *ibadah* (worship). At the policy engagement level, senior students participate in local environmental advocacy projects, applying Islamic principles to real governance challenges.

This integration of ecological science and Islamic values produces what teachers describe as 'ecological iman'—a faith-grounded environmental commitment that exceeds secular environmentalism because it is anchored in accountability before God. As one institutional leader noted:

"We don't teach environmental care as a Green Politics issue. We teach it as a matter of answering to Allah for how we treated His creation." (Institutional Leader 3, Interview 5).

Civic Dimension: Love for Nation and State as Social Faith

The fifth dimension—love for nation and state—addresses the contested relationship between Islamic identity and nationalist belonging. Curriculum documents reveal a deliberate and theologically grounded resolution: love for the nation (*hubb al-watan*) is positioned not as a rival to love for Allah but as a specific expression of the Islamic duty of *maslahah al-'ammah* (public welfare). The pedagogical argument draws explicitly on the tradition of Indonesian *ulama* who integrated Islamic scholarship with nationalist leadership.

Historical case studies of figures such as Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari (1626–1699), who resisted Dutch colonialism through both spiritual and military means, and KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, who declared defending the nation a religious obligation (*fardh 'ain*), are used as the curriculum's civic exemplars. Students engage these figures not as distant heroes but as methodological models: scholars who used their Islamic knowledge in direct service of their communities and nations.

Civically engaged pedagogical methods include critical reading of national history from multiple perspectives; interdisciplinary policy analysis projects; and community service requirements that embed students in local governance and social entrepreneurship initiatives. A student described the transformative effect:

"Previously I thought being a good Muslim meant avoiding haram things and doing ibadah. Here I learned that fixing the road in front of my village, or teaching children in a neglected area, is also ibadah. Love for the nation and love for Allah are the same love, expressed in different directions." (Student 4, Interview 17).

Systemic Integration: The Five Dimensions as an Organic Whole

Critically, the five dimensions do not operate as parallel strands but as an integrated, mutually reinforcing system. Analysis of curriculum design documents and pedagogical observations reveals explicit architectonic connections: love for Allah (dimension one) is the ontological source from which the other four dimensions radiate; love for self and others (dimension two) provides the social-relational substrate within which knowledge, ecology, and civic engagement are practiced; love for knowledge (dimension three)

provides the intellectual tools for realizing ecological and civic responsibilities; love for environment and nation (dimensions four and five) represent the outward expressions of inner spiritual formation.

Evaluative instruments reflect this integration. Beyond written examinations, the pesantren's assessment system includes annual character portfolios documenting students' actualization of each love dimension in concrete behaviors; peer and teacher assessment of collaborative engagement; community project impact reports; and self-reflection journals.

Discussion

Mahabbah as Curricular Architecture: Extending Curriculum Theory

The findings of this study make a distinctive theoretical contribution to curriculum scholarship by operationalizing mahabbah as a multi-dimensional curricular structure rather than a moral aspiration or pedagogical disposition. This extension is significant in two registers. *First*, it advances Noddings' ethic of care by demonstrating an indigenous Islamic counterpart that is simultaneously more cosmologically comprehensive and more structurally elaborated (Chen & Shih., 2025; Tuckwiller et al., 2025). Where Noddings' care focuses on the dyadic relationship between carer and cared-for, mahabbah generates a hierarchical cascade of love: from divine-transcendent (love for Allah) to self-directed (love for self) to social (love for others) to ecological (love for creation) to civic (love for nation) (Tuckwiller et al., 2025). Each level is not merely additive but ontologically foundational to the next. This hierarchical structure positions mahabbah as a more architectonically coherent educational principle than care ethics, precisely because its transcendental anchor provides a stable motivational foundation independent of the contingencies of relational context.

Second, the findings challenge the dominant constructivist curriculum paradigm that positions knowledge construction as primarily cognitive and social. The mahabbah curriculum demonstrates that transformative learning requires a motivational-affective architecture preceding cognitive engagement: students must first be moved to love learning before they can meaningfully construct knowledge (Rosadah et al., 2026). This echoes Palmer's contention that teaching emerges from the inner life of the teacher—and extends it: learning, in this model, emerges from the inner life of the student, specifically from the quality and orientation of their love (Szymańska, 2024).

Resolving the Knowledge Dichotomy: Mahabbah as Epistemological Bridge

A central claim of this study is that the mahabbah curriculum offers a resolution to the knowledge dichotomy that has fragmented Islamic educational institutions globally. The findings support this claim in a specific and important way: love for knowledge (dimension three) does not merely rhetorically assert the unity of religious and scientific knowledge, it enacts that unity by grounding both in a single motivational orientation. When students experience their curiosity about cell division and their wonder before divine creation as two moments of the same love, the dichotomy dissolves not at the level of curriculum content but at the level of epistemological identity.

This finding resonates with Wan Daud's concept of adab as the proper ordering of knowledge but extends it by specifying the affective mechanism through which proper ordering is achieved: not administrative restructuring of disciplines, but transformation of the motivational posture from which disciplines are approached (In'ami & Wekke, 2025). It also affirms Al-Attas' Islamization of knowledge project by demonstrating an empirical case in which that project has been operationalized at the curricular level over decades, with documented outcomes in student profile formation (Sholihah et al., 2026).

The Intellectual-Ulama Profile: Empirical Grounding of a Classical Ideal

This study provides the first empirically grounded account of how the intellectual-*ulama* ideal is systematically cultivated through curriculum design in a living *pesantren* institution. Prior scholarship on the intellectual *ulama* (Rakhmat & Rijal, 2026; Syafaruddin et al., 2026) has been primarily normative-historical: identifying who the intellectual *ulama* were and what they achieved, but not how educational institutions might systematically produce them.

The findings reveal that the intellectual-*ulama* profile is not an outcome of any single curriculum element but an emergent property of the five-dimensional *mahabbah* system operating holistically. Students who demonstrate the intellectual-*ulama* profile across institutional assessments are consistently those who have most deeply internalized all five love dimensions: they exhibit theological depth (dimension one), relational care (dimension two), intellectual curiosity and integrative thinking (dimension three), environmental stewardship (dimension four), and civic engagement (dimension five). This confirms the theoretical claim that the intellectual-*ulama* is a synthesis requiring all five dimensions, not a specialist profile achievable through excellence in one (Haqqi & Yani, 2023).

Implications for Islamic Educational Policy and Practice

The implications of these findings extend well beyond the As'adiyah Sengkang context. At the policy level, the *mahabbah* curriculum model challenges the dominant Indonesian government approach to Islamic education reform, which has focused primarily on curricular content alignment (matching *madrassa* subjects to national education standards) while neglecting motivational architecture. The findings suggest that content alignment without affective transformation is likely to produce graduates who know integration as a policy but do not live it as a commitment.

At the institutional level, the model provides Islamic schools globally—from Southeast Asian *pesantren* to British Islamic schools to North American Muslim academies—with a structured framework for curriculum development that is theoretically coherent, empirically validated, and culturally resonant with Islamic tradition. At the pedagogical level, the multi-modal assessment system documented in this study provides a practical alternative to the dominant examination-oriented evaluation model. By assessing character portfolios, community engagement, and self-reflection alongside cognitive achievement, the *pesantren* operationalizes what

curriculum theorists have long argued but rarely achieved: genuinely holistic educational assessment.

4. CONCLUSION

This study successfully delineates the multi-dimensional architecture of a mahabbah-based curriculum at As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School, demonstrating that love can serve as a foundational curricular framework rather than merely an auxiliary pedagogical trait. By operationalizing five distinct dimensions—transcendental, humanistic, intellectual, ecological, and civic—this organic educational system effectively fosters an "intellectual-ulama" profile characterized by rigorous scholarship, moral integrity, and social responsibility. The research offers significant contributions to international academic discourse: theoretically, it extends contemporary curriculum theory by establishing mahabbah as an indigenous Islamic construct that complements and transcends Western ethics of care; empirically, it delivers a rigorous, triangulated account of affective curriculum enactment; and practically, it provides a scalable blueprint for global Islamic institutions seeking to bridge the traditional-secular knowledge dichotomy.

Despite these insights, the study is inherently bound by its qualitative intrinsic case study design, meaning the context-specific findings from a single site cannot be statistically generalized or automatically transferred to other educational landscapes. To address these boundaries and advance the field, future scholarly inquiries should transition toward multi-site comparative designs across diverse institutional philosophies and employ longitudinal tracking of graduates to evaluate the enduring impact of this curriculum on professional and civic trajectories. Furthermore, future research could focus on developing validated psychometric instruments to quantitatively measure mahabbah as a curricular outcome, alongside pursuing cross-cultural studies that contrast this model with analogous love-based educational philosophies globally, such as Ubuntu or metta-based frameworks.

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