



## Integrating the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) and the CASEL Framework: Instructional Strategies in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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### Abstract

*A Love-based learning approach constitutes an educational mode that integrates the values of compassion, empathy, appreciation, and care into the entirety of the learning process. Its implementation is reinforced by the CASEL framework, which focuses on strengthening the social and emotional competencies of learners. This study aims to elaborate on the strategies employed by teachers, and to identify the supporting factors of CASEL implementation at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary school). This research adopted a qualitative approach in the form of a case study. Data were collected through observation, interview, and documentation, and subsequently analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with validity verified through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that teachers' strategies are manifested through warm communication, persuasive emotional approaches, and the consistent habituation of positive attitudes, which collectively succeeded in developing students' social-emotional competencies.*

**Keywords:** Love-Based Curriculum (KBC); CASEL; instructional strategies; curriculum

### Abstrak

*Pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis cinta merupakan suatu model pendidikan yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai kasih sayang, empati, penghargaan dan kepedulian ke dalam seluruh proses pembelajaran. Penerapan diperkuat oleh kerangka CASEL yang berfokus pada penguatan kompetensi sosial dan emosional peserta didik. Penelitian mengambil pendekatan kualitatif berupa studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis dengan tahap reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan melalui uji keabsahan triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa strategi guru terwujud melalui komunikasi hangat, pendekatan emosional persuasif dan pembiasaan sikap positif secara konsisten, sehingga berhasil mengembangkan kompetensi sosial-emosional siswa.*

**Kata kunci:** Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta; CASEL; Strategi pembelajaran; kurikulum

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### Introduction

The current educational reality within Madrasah Ibtidaiyah illustrates the complex challenges encountered by educators. Preliminary field observations indicate that teachers are not solely expected to enhance students' academic performance; rather, they are also required to foster meaningful social interactions and facilitate the development of students' social-emotional competencies. Consequently, educational

success is no longer exclusively measured by cognitive proficiency, but also by well-developed social capabilities.

This phenomenon is clearly evident in daily classroom practices, wherein certain students who possess adequate cognitive and academic capabilities still encounter impediments in their social-emotional development. These impediments manifest as difficulties in emotional regulation, poor social interaction skills, and the emergence of aggressive behaviors or social withdrawal (Astuti et al., 2024; Tsary & Widarti, 2024). Several observable indicators include a lack of self-confidence in expressing opinions, limitations in constructively managing emotions, and difficulties in establishing collaborative interactions with peers. In the context of science education, for instance, many students perceive science merely as a formal academic subject in the madrasah, rather than a paradigm for understanding life and the universe (Zaer & Misra, 2025). This condition underscores a prevalent gap between cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence. If left unaddressed, such circumstances may significantly impede the holistic development of the students (Laili, 2024).

These issues indicate that a learning paradigm solely oriented toward knowledge transfer—without due regard for character formation and social-emotional competencies—is no longer adequate to address contemporary demands (Hafizah, 2025). In a broader context, Indonesia faces the critical challenge of moral degradation among the youth, including an increasing trend toward social intolerance (Aisyah & Fitriatin, 2025). This phenomenon is not confined to broader society but has also infiltrated the educational ecosystem, including Islamic-based educational institutions (Rofiq et al., 2024). This condition is compounded by rapid advancements in digital technology, which yield a dual impact: while broadening access to information on one hand, exposure to negative content and a lack of moral filtering on the other can gradually erode students' positive character (Suriyati et al., 2023). Consequently, these circumstances necessitate an urgent transformation toward a learning paradigm that seamlessly integrates the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in a balanced manner.

Empirical studies demonstrate that love-based education exerts a significant impact on students' character development and academic achievement. This finding is corroborated by other research indicating that the implementation of the KBC in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah plays a vital role in shaping children's personalities through humanistic learning, specifically by instilling values of affection, care, and love for fellow

human beings, religion, and the environment (Shulhan, 2025). Students who feel valued and accepted exhibit higher learning motivation and more positive social behaviors (Qamariah & Anwar, 2025). Furthermore, CASEL-based education has been proven to enhance academic engagement and learning motivation, while fostering positive adaptive behaviors among students (Widiastuti, 2022). Recent research reinforces that the implementation of the CASEL framework in instruction does not solely focus on developing students' social and emotional competencies, but also emphasizes the pivotal role of teachers as facilitators who support diversity and utilize inclusive and empathetic instructional strategies (Ekahidayatullah et al., 2025). CASEL encompasses five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020).

Prior research concerning the KBC in madrasahs has focused on distinct areas compared to the present study. Earlier scholars primarily emphasized teachers' methods and strategies in instruction—such as Arabic language teaching—through a love-based approach, thereby concentrating on the practical dimensions of language pedagogy (Laili, 2024). In contrast, this study offers novelty by examining teachers' strategies in implementing the KBC integrated with the CASEL framework, distinguishing itself from other studies that have explored the implementation of the KBC solely through literature reviews (Afifah et al., 2026).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) approach is highly relevant and essential for cultivating a generation that is not only intellectually proficient, but also emotionally and socially mature in navigating future challenges (Nurhidayatullah & Bahrodin, 2024). Although previous studies have separately examined the KBC, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and instructional strategies, research integrating the KBC with the CASEL framework within instructional strategies at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level remains scarce. Therefore, this study offers novelty by analyzing the implementation of the KBC through CASEL's five core competencies, as well as identifying teachers' strategies alongside the supporting and hindering factors within the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

### Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to conduct an in-depth analysis of teachers' strategies in implementing the KBC integrated with the

CASEL framework in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This approach was selected because it aims to comprehend the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of research subjects within a naturalistic context. Furthermore, a case study design was chosen due to its core focus on acquiring a profound and comprehensive understanding of a specific phenomenon (Fadli, 2021).

Data collection was conducted through observations of natural learning processes, face-to-face interviews, and supporting documentation (Sugiyono, 2023). Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, encompassing data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and content analysis. To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, source triangulation and technique triangulation were applied (Miles et al., 2014).

This study was conducted at MI Bustanul Ulum Brudu, an Islamic elementary school (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) located in Jombang Regency. The research participants comprised two teachers actively implementing the KBC: a subject-matter teacher and a homeroom teacher.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Teacher Strategies in Implementing the KBC Integrated with CASEL at MI Bustanul Ulum***

The strategies employed by teachers in implementing the KBC through the CASEL framework at MI Bustanul Ulum Brudu are operationalized through instructional strategies that integrate students' academic, social, and emotional dimensions. These strategies are manifested in the variety of instructional strategies utilized, the effective integration of learning media, and the establishment of a safe, child-friendly classroom climate.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the instructional process does not focus solely on cognitive attainment; rather, it actively fosters empathy, collaboration, and emotional regulation among students (Ekahidayatullah et al., 2025).

#### **a. Strategies Through Humanistic and Cooperative Learning Approaches**

Teachers at MI Bustanul Ulum Brudu utilize various instructional strategies, including concise lectures, group discussions, cognitive learning activities, storytelling, and educational games. This methodological variation aims to create an active, engaging, and enjoyable learning environment while offering abundant opportunities for social interaction among students. Through group discussions and collaborative

tasks, students are trained to actively cooperate in completing their assigned responsibilities. Teachers implement this approach to embody the core principles of the KBC, specifically unconditional acceptance—wherein educators refrain from judgment and instead cultivate a safe space for expression, ensuring students feel valued as unique individuals.

Similarly, storytelling in this context functions not merely as a medium for knowledge transfer, but as a vehicle for instilling values of love and compassion in students (Dirgayunita & Fajriatun, 2025). Teachers embed messages of empathy, care, and unconditional acceptance into their stories, allowing students to comprehend academic material while simultaneously experiencing emotional connection.

These empirical findings were further supported by classroom observations and interview data, which indicated that the implementation of varied instructional strategies contributed to both students' conceptual understanding and the development of their social skills. The teacher typically began the lesson with a brief lecture to introduce fundamental concepts, followed by group discussions that encouraged collaboration, the exchange of ideas, and effective communication among students. To conclude the lesson, interactive activities such as educational guessing games were incorporated to create an engaging learning atmosphere while reinforcing students' understanding of the concepts that had been introduced.

The analysis indicates that such instructional variations serve as a strategy that seamlessly integrates academic learning with social-emotional competency development; furthermore, collaborative methods enhance students' social and emotional engagement in the learning process (Ekahidayatullah et al., 2025). This practice aligns closely with the CASEL framework, particularly within the competencies of *relationship skills* and *responsible decision-making*, which empower students to collaborate, communicate effectively, and make informed choices.

This finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating that student-centered instructional strategies—such as group discussions, collaborative activities, and reflection—contribute significantly to the development of students' social-emotional competencies, particularly their ability to communicate, empathize, and engage in responsible decision-making (Parman & Susetyo, 2025). These results corroborate the finding that instructional variation effectively bridges academic and social-emotional dimensions. Moreover, this resonates with findings from other scholars emphasizing

that the successful implementation of a KBC relies heavily on teacher readiness, fostered through mentoring and the enhancement of pedagogical competence.

#### **b. Utilization of Culture- and Technology-Based Instructional Media**

In this regard, teachers at MI Bustanul Ulum Brudu utilize a diverse range of instructional media, encompassing both conventional and digital tools, such as notebooks, student worksheets, whiteboards, concrete learning aids, and digital presentation software like PowerPoint. These media are tailored to the learning content and the diverse characteristics of the students to create engaging and easily comprehensible learning experiences.

Classroom observations indicated that the use of instructional media played a significant role in enhancing students' learning enthusiasm. The teacher employed conventional instructional media, such as whiteboards and textbooks, to introduce fundamental concepts and provide essential learning materials. In addition, digital media, particularly PowerPoint presentations, were used on certain occasions to support the delivery of instructional content. Although digital media were not integrated into every lesson, their use was found to facilitate clearer explanations of the material and to attract students' attention more effectively, thereby fostering greater engagement in the learning process.

Research analysis indicates that the utilization of instructional media aims not only to support content delivery but also plays a vital role in creating a comfortable learning environment, thereby ensuring that students do not experience emotional stress during academic acquisition. This finding is consistent with prior studies demonstrating that the implementation of diverse instructional media has the potential to enhance primary school students' learning motivation while simultaneously reducing fatigue and boredom during classroom instruction (Rimahdani, 2023).

#### **c. Strategies for Cultivating a Psychologically Safe Classroom Climate**

Teachers at MI Bustanul Ulum Brudu actively strive to cultivate an emotionally supportive classroom environment through warm communication, gentle feedback, and by providing students with opportunities to participate without fear.

These efforts are evident in the teachers' routine of warmly greeting students at the beginning of lessons, inquiring about their well-being, and offering guidance using constructive, gentle language when students make mistakes. As articulated by Kanti Wilujeng Sardi, S.Pd.:

"A child-friendly classroom is one where children feel safe and accepted. Therefore, I usually begin the lesson with a brief check-in or informal conversation to ask how the students are doing."

Rather than focusing exclusively on cognitive instruction, teachers intentionally foster students' *self-awareness* (awareness of emotions, personal strengths, and limitations) and *self-management* (the ability to effectively regulate emotions and behaviors).

This finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating that an emotionally supportive classroom environment significantly enhances primary school students' motivation and learning comfort (Banu, 2025). Teachers' empathetic communication fosters a sense of security and active engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, other studies have shown that teachers' emotional performance – such as empathy and stress management – positively impacts students' social-emotional development, including their ability to identify and regulate emotions (Subroto et al., 2024).

Research analysis demonstrates that this empathetic communication approach creates a safe and supportive classroom climate, empowering students to participate more confidently in learning activities while effectively managing their emotions. This aligns with Daniel Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence, which posits that empathy and emotional regulation serve as fundamental pillars for establishing healthy social relationships (Goleman, 1995).

Tabel 1 *Distribution of Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) Implementation Levels*

| Implementation Category | Percentage Criteria | Number of Teachers (f) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Full Implementation     | 100%                | 2                      | 20%            |
| Partial Implementation  | <100%               | 8                      | 80%            |
| Total                   |                     | 10                     | 100%           |

Tabel 2. *Comparative Analysis of Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) Implementation: Teacher A and Teacher B*

| KBC Domain                                              | Teacher A (Full Implementation)                                                                         | Teacher B (Partial Implementation)                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| instructional strategies Applied                        | Student-centered learning (constructivist approach)                                                     | Varied lecturing, individual assignments, and question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions |
| Instructional Media Employed                            | Interactive multimedia (digital educational platforms, animated videos, concrete objects/manipulatives) | Conventional media (printed textbooks, whiteboards, basic modules)               |
| Teacher Efforts in Fostering a Child-Friendly Classroom | Project-Based Learning (PBL), group discussions, inquiry-based learning                                 | Varied lecturing, individual assignments, question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions     |

Tabel 3 *Distribution of CASEL Framework Implementation Levels*

| Implementation Category      | Percentage Criteria | Number of Teachers (f) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Comprehensive Implementation | 100%                | 2                      | 20%            |
| Partial Implementation       | <100%               | 8                      | 80%            |
| <b>Total</b>                 |                     | <b>10</b>              | <b>100%</b>    |

Tabel 4 *Comparative Analysis of CASEL Framework Implementation: Teacher A vs. Teacher B*

| CASEL Domain / Competency                                                                | Teacher A (Comprehensive Implementation)                                                 | Teacher B (Partial Implementation)                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Self-Awareness<br>(Ability to recognize one's emotions)                                  | Holistic Integration (seamlessly integrated into academic content and classroom culture) | Incidental (separated from core curriculum, taught only in response to behavioral issues)   |
| Self-Management<br>(Ability to regulate emotions and behavior to achieve positive goals) | Daily reflection journals, mood boards, situation cards, collaborative learning media    | Printed textbooks, whiteboards, conventional student worksheets                             |
| Social Awareness<br>(Demonstrating the ability to understand and appreciate others)      | Role-playing, circle discussions, guided group collaboration                             | Instructional lecturing, individual assignments, one-way question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions |

Based on the overall research findings at MI Bustanul Ulum Brudu, teachers' strategies in implementing KBC using the CASEL approach have been carried out integratively through three main forms: (1) humanistic and cooperative learning approaches, (2) the utilization of culture- and technology-based learning media, and (3) strategies for creating a psychologically safe classroom climate. These three strategies indicate that the implementation of this curriculum does not solely emphasize intellectual achievements, but also systematically develops students' SEL competencies, such as collaboration skills, empathy, emotional management, self-awareness, and responsible decision-making. Nevertheless, the distribution data on the implementation level (Tables 1 and 3) shows that the majority of teachers have not reached the optimal stage. Out of the total 10 teachers studied, 8 teachers (80%) are still in the partial implementation category, and only 2 teachers (20%) have successfully achieved the full or comprehensive implementation level. This difference in implementation levels is clearly visible in the quality of strategies, media, and learning methods applied (Tables 2 and 4). Teachers with full implementation (Teacher A) tend to apply modern, student-centered learning. They teach holistically using interactive multimedia, active learning methods such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL), group discussions, and role-playing.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence aspects are directly integrated into classroom routines and culture through the use of instruments such as daily reflection journals and mood boards.

Conversely, teachers with partial implementation (Teacher B) are still dominated by conventional, teacher-centered (one-way) teaching styles. The learning process in this group mostly utilizes instructional lecture methods, individual assignments, and the use of conventional media such as printed books and whiteboards. The application of CASEL aspects in this group is also not well-planned; it is merely incidental, taught separately from the core materials, and generally only applied when student behavioral issues arise. Overall, these findings confirm that the successful implementation of KBC and the CASEL approach is highly influenced by the teachers' ability to integrate academic, social, and emotional aspects comprehensively within the learning process. The results of this study simultaneously strengthen and support the findings of (Rahmawati et al., 2025), which state that the application of KBC is not only effective in shaping student character but also capable of improving self-regulated learning abilities that support sustainable students' learning success.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study at MI Bustanul Ulum Brudu indicate that the student-centered implementation of the KBC was successfully integrated with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework. In practice, educators combined various interactive instructional strategies such as group discussions, educational storytelling, game simulations, cooperative learning, and reflection sessions—framed within humanistic communication patterns and the habituation of compassionate values. This approach not only enhanced academic performance but also cultivated CASEL's five core social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Although supported by a religious school ethos, teacher synergy, and administrative commitment, program execution still faces challenges, notably non-uniform teacher comprehension and uneven implementation across grade levels.

These results confirm that synthesizing KBC with the CASEL framework holds significant potential as a robust alternative strategy to reinforce character education and students' social-emotional skills in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Furthermore, these findings offer valuable insights for school principals, educators, and policymakers to design

inclusive, humanistic instructional models centered on holistic personality development.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations, including its reliance on a single qualitative case study design, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to educational institutions with differing contexts. Additionally, the scope was primarily limited to teacher perspectives and school regulations, without thoroughly evaluating the long-term impact on students' social-emotional growth.

To address these limitations, future research should expand sample coverage across diverse *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* and employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to obtain a more comprehensive perspective. Concurrently, school administrations are advised to provide continuous professional development for teachers regarding the synthesis of KBC and CASEL to ensure more consistent and effective classroom execution.

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