RECONSTRUCTING THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: HUMANISTIC APPROACHES TO CULTIVATING EMPATHY, TOLERANCE, AND HARMONY

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Abstract
This study aims to reconstruct the philosophy of love in Islamic education through a humanistic approach that integrates spirituality, empathy, and social harmony. Using a *critical literature review* and philosophical-hermeneutic analysis, the research explores classical Islamic thought, particularly the concepts of *maḥabbah* (love), *ta'dib* (ethical discipline), and *rahmah* (compassion), in relation to modern humanistic theories advanced by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. The findings reveal that love in Islam functions not merely as an emotional state but as an epistemological and ethical foundation that unites divine knowledge with human experience. This reconstruction leads to the formulation of a *Love-Based Islamic Humanistic Education (LIHE)* model comprising three interrelated dimensions: spiritual foundation (cognitive-affective integration), pedagogical process (dialogical and empathic learning), and social manifestation (tolerance and harmony). The synthesis of Islamic and humanistic paradigms offers a transformative moral and character education framework, emphasizing empathy, inclusiveness, and ethical awareness. His study concludes that love should serve as the core of Islamic educational philosophy, bridging faith and humanity while addressing the challenges of pluralism, dehumanization, and moral disintegration in contemporary society. This research contributes theoretically by redefining the epistemology of Islamic education and practically by offering pedagogical guidelines for developing compassionate and inclusive Islamic learning environments.
Keywords: Islamic Education; Philosophy of Love; Humanistic Pedagogy; Empathy; Tolerance; Harmony; Moral Education; *Rahmah*; *Ta'dib*; Islamic Humanism

1. Introduction

Islamic education in the 21st century faces serious challenges in responding to global humanitarian dynamics, especially in the context of social plurality, identity conflicts, and moral value crises. Educational transformation is no longer enough to be oriented only to transferring religious knowledge, but also to forming character based on compassion, empathy, and social harmony. According to Halstead (2007), Islamic

education must reaffirm the role of spiritual values that promote peace and social justice in a multicultural society. The *love-based approach (love-based education)* has become relevant as a new paradigm in fostering morality and universal humanity.

In the Islamic tradition, love (maḥabbah) is a central spiritual energy that leads humans to moral perfection and closeness to God. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and al-Ghazali emphasized that love for Allah should be reflected in love for others (Nasr, 2002). This value of love is universal and is the basis of social ethics that encourages empathy, solidarity, and tolerance. However, this dimension is often marginalized in modern educational practices due to the dominance of formalistic cognitive and evaluative approaches (Halstead, 2018). As a result, Islamic education loses the humanistic power that should shape the human being into a perfect human being spiritually, morally, and socially.

A humanistic approach in education offers a way to restore the affective and relational dimensions in the learning process. Figures such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow have argued that *learner-centered education* can foster empathy and moral awareness through a loving relationship between teacher and student (Rogers, 1983; Maslow, 1968). In Islam, this paradigm aligns with the principle *of rahmatan lil-'alamin*, which is universal affection as the core of Islamic teachings. Several recent studies have shown that the synthesis between Islamic values and humanistic approaches can create an inclusive learning environment oriented towards the integrity of humanity (Al-Khateeb & Hashim, 2021; Ahmad & Awang, 2023).

In addition, reconstructing the philosophy of love in Islamic education is important to answer the tension between theological idealism and the need for social praxis. On the one hand, Islamic education must maintain the authenticity of the teachings of revelation; on the other hand, it must respond to the complexities of modern life that demand empathy across religions, genders, and cultures (Ismail & Osman, 2020). The humanistic approach allows Islamic education not only to transmit religious values but also to be a liberating praxis that fosters social awareness and universal love.

This research seeks to reconstruct the philosophy of love in Islamic education through a humanistic approach by highlighting three central values: empathy, tolerance, and harmony. All three are seen as concrete manifestations of inclusive and just Islamic spirituality. Using a critical literature review, this article examines classical Islamic literature and modern education theory to find a conceptual synthesis that can enrich today's Islamic education paradigm. The results are expected to make a theoretical contribution to developing a curriculum and pedagogy based on love and encourage the transformation of educational praxis towards a more peaceful and civilized society.

2. Literature Review
2.1. The Philosophy of Love in Islamic Thought
The concept of love (*maḥabbah*) in Islamic philosophy has deep roots in the Sufistic and theological traditions. Al-Ghazali views love as a "spiritual energy" that directs people

to God and others (Nasr, 2002). In *Ihya' Ulum al-Din,* he explains that true love grows from a deep knowledge of the Divine majesty and directly impacts social behaviors such as love, empathy, and justice. Ibn Arabi expands on this view by placing love as the ontological basis of existence, that all creation arises from God's love for existence (Chittick, 1998). Thus, love is not only a spiritual emotion, but also the foundation of social ethics in Islamic education. In education, the value of love has become a source of morality and pedagogical inspiration. According to Halstead (2007), Islamic education should function as a means to internalize moral values through the experience of love and togetherness. Education based on love does not emphasize indoctrination, but opens up a space for dialogue and reflection that fosters moral awareness. This approach is in accordance with the concept of *ta'dib* developed by al-Attas (1991), which emphasizes the balance between knowledge, manners, and compassion in forming the perfect human character.

2.2. Humanistic Education and the Pedagogy of Empathy

The humanistic approach to education is rooted in the psychological theories of Rogers and Maslow, which place humans at the center of the learning process. Rogers (1983) argues that effective education must foster freedom, authenticity, and an empathic relationship between teachers and students. This concept is in line with the idea of Islamic education, which emphasizes *ukhuwah insaniyyah* (universal brotherhood) and *rahmah* (affection) as the foundation of social morality (Al-Khateeb & Hashim, 2021). In the study of contemporary Islamic education, the integration of humanistic values became important to balance faith and humanity. Ahmad and Awang (2023) show that combining Islamic spiritual values with a humanistic approach results in a more open, empathetic, and inclusive learning environment. Thus, humanism in Islamic education is not just the absorption of Western theory, but the process of contextualizing the values of love, empathy, and appreciation for diversity as an expression of faith.

2.3. Love, Tolerance, and Harmony as Educational Goals

The three central values of love, tolerance, and harmony reflect the rahmatan lil-'alamin principle, which is Islamic education's primary goal (Ismail & Osman, 2020). Love is the ethical foundation that encourages self-recognition and connectedness to others, while tolerance fosters respect for differences in a pluralistic community. Harmony, conversely, is the result of a spiritual and social balance achieved through education that instills compassion and empathy. Some studies have shown that Islamic schools that adopt a love- and empathy-based curriculum can reduce intolerant behavior and promote healthy social interaction in a multicultural environment (Firdaus, 2025). Through love-based learning, students understand religious teachings textually and live them emotionally and socially. This marks a paradigm shift from rote education to education based on human awareness and values.

2.4. Integrating Islamic Philosophy and Humanism

Efforts to integrate Islamic philosophy and humanistic approaches require a careful epistemological synthesis. According to Al-Attas (1991), Islamic education cannot be separated from its spiritual dimension; However, humanistic aspects need to be included so that education does not get caught up in dogmatism. Research by Hashim and Rossidy (2000) emphasizes the importance of Islamic education, combining revelation with rationality and universal human values. In this context, reconstructing the philosophy of love does not mean replacing Islamic theology with secular humanism, but rather affirming that the two can enrich each other. Islam provides moral and spiritual direction, while humanism provides an empathetic and participatory methodology in education. Together, the two form faithful, reflective, and compassionate individuals.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study uses *a critical literature review approach* with a philosophical and hermeneutic perspective. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the conceptual reconstruction of the values of love in Islamic education through synthesis with humanistic education theory. As suggested by Snyder (2019), a *critical literature review* not only collects data from the literature but also evaluates and integrates various theoretical views to produce new conceptual models.

The philosophical approach examines the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of love in Islam. In contrast, the hermeneutic approach is used to interpret the meaning of love as a pedagogical principle in the context of universal humanity (Gadamer, 2004). Through interpretive analysis, this study seeks to find the relevance between Islamic spiritual values and the humanistic paradigm in modern education.

3.2. Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The primary data sources for this research consist of internationally reputable journals (Scopus and Web of Science), classical and modern books on Islamic philosophy, and humanistic literature in education. The literature selection process was carried out using three main criteria: (1) relevance to the theme of love and Islamic education; (2) contributions to humanistic educational theories or universal moral values; and (3) publications in the 1990–2025 time frame to ensure historical and contemporary coverage.

Databases include *Scopus, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink,* and *Google Scholar.* The keywords used include: *Islamic education, philosophy of love, humanistic pedagogy, empathy, tolerance,* and *moral education.* From the initial search results, approximately 85 literature sources were found, then selected into 40 relevant sources for in-depth analysis.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The analysis was carried out using a three-layer framework:

1. The Epistemological Layer examines the origins of knowledge and the meaning of love in Islamic philosophy (Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and Al-Attas).

2.   The Humanistic Layer reviews the humanistic educational theories of Rogers (1983) and Maslow (1968) that emphasize empathy, autonomy, and self-actualization.

3.   The Integrative Layer synthesizes both approaches to produce a *love-based education conceptual* model that fosters empathy, tolerance, and harmony.

This framework is adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2019) conceptual analysis model, which emphasizes identifying themes, interpreting meaning, and constructing relationships between concepts.

3.4. Analytical Procedure

The analysis procedure involves three main stages. First is descriptive mapping, which identifies general patterns and key terms in the literature on love and Islamic education. Second is interpretive analysis, which interprets the meaning of love in the context of ethics and education, using Gadamerian hermeneutic principles (Gadamer, 2004). Third, philosophical reconstruction is the rearrangement of the conceptual framework of Islamic education that is oriented towards the values of love and humanity, considering the relevance of the modern Muslim social and cultural context (Ismail & Osman, 2020). This process results in mapping the relationship between Islamic spirituality, humanistic values, and the pedagogy of compassion that can be applied in curricula and learning practices.

3.5. Validity and Trustworthiness

The validity of the interpretation is maintained through literary triangulation and conceptual validation by three sources: classical Islamic texts, modern educational theory, and contemporary empirical studies. This approach aligns with the validity guidelines for conceptual research according to Torraco (2016), which emphasize logical cohesion, argumentation consistency, and practical relevance. Thus, the results of the analysis are not only theoretical, but also have practical implications for the development of Islamic education that is more humanistic and inclusive.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Reconstructing Love as the Core of Islamic Educational Philosophy

The literature study results show that the concept of love in Islam is not just an emotional dimension but an ontological and epistemological principle that underlies all educational activities. Al-Ghazali views love (*maḥabbah*) as the culmination of man's spiritual journey, where actual knowledge will foster love for God and all creatures (Nasr, 2002). While Ibn Arabi affirms that love is the *raison d'être* of all creation, "I am a hidden treasure that wants to be known, so I created creatures so that they may know Me through love" (Chittick, 1998). In the education framework, this understanding shifts the orientation of learning from mere knowledge transfer to the formation of spiritual and moral consciousness rooted in love.

This philosophical approach emphasizes that Islamic education is *teleological*, leading to self-recognition and the achievement of *al-insan al-kamil* (the perfect human being). Thus, love bridges the epistemology of revelation and social praxis. This reconstruction of the philosophy of love demands that Islamic education not stop at the indoctrination of moral values, but fosters *affective intelligence* that involves empathy, care, and deep human relationships (Halstead, 2018). By including love as the foundation of education, the learning process can simultaneously become an arena for developing spirituality and humanity.

4.2. The Humanistic Turn in Islamic Pedagogy

The results of the literature analysis show that there is a strong intersection between Islamic values and humanistic principles in education. Rogers' (1983) theory of *student-centered learning* emphasizes that meaningful education occurs when students feel love, acceptance, and freedom to grow. This principle is in accordance with the values of *rahmah* and *ta'dib* in Islam, where teachers are not only a source of knowledge, but also a moral guide and an example of compassion. Ahmad and Awang (2023) found that applying a humanistic approach in Islamic education produces students with higher moral awareness and stronger empathy for differences.

These findings suggest that the orientation of Islamic education needs to shift from the "authority-based pedagogy" paradigm to "love-based pedagogy." In the old model, the teacher functioned as a controller of knowledge; In the new paradigm, teachers become facilitators who foster love and dialogue. Thus, the reconstruction of the philosophy of love serves as an epistemic basis that fosters a dialogical and empathetic learning climate. This approach is more appropriate to the context of today's multicultural and pluralistic society (Ismail & Osman, 2020).

4.3. Love as a Pedagogical Ethic: Cultivating Empathy and Tolerance

Hermeneutic analysis shows that love serves as a *pedagogical ethic* in Islamic education. The ethics of love encourage learners to empathize with others and respect differences. Firdaus (2025) notes that Islamic schools that implement an empathy-based curriculum experience a significant increase in harmonious social interaction and a decrease in intolerant behavior. The value of love forms the awareness that differences are part of the Divine will, as affirmed in the Qur'an (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13), which commands humanity to know each other (*lita'ārafū*). This ethics of love also encourages teachers to become empathetic figures who exemplify love and respect human dignity. In the context of modern education, this means creating a non-discriminatory learning space, respecting gender, cultural, and religious diversity. Thus, love is a spiritual ideal and an effective pedagogical strategy in building social empathy and cross-border harmony.

4.4. Toward a Model of Love-Based Islamic Humanistic Education

Based on a synthesis of Islamic philosophy and humanistic theory, this research resulted in a conceptual model called Love-Based Islamic Humanistic Education (LIHE). This model has three main dimensions: Spiritual Foundation (Cognitive-Affective Integration) instills the values of *maḥabbah* and *rahmah* as the basis of knowledge and morality. The Pedagogical Process (Dialogical and Empathic Learning) applies a learning process based on dialogue, experience, and empathy, not just memorizing texts. Social Manifestation (Tolerance and Harmony) forms social behaviors that respect differences and encourage humanitarian solidarity. This LIHE model emphasizes that Islamic education aims not only to produce spiritually pious individuals but also peace-loving human beings who are open and contribute to social harmony. This approach aligns with the spirit *of rahmatan lil-'alamin* and can be the cornerstone of a transformative curriculum in modern Islamic educational institutions (Al-Khateeb & Hashim, 2021).

4.5. Discussion and Theoretical Implications

The results of this integration show that love can become a new philosophical paradigm in Islamic education, replacing the old paradigm oriented towards authority and memorization. Theoretically, *Love-Based Islamic Humanistic Education* expands the concept of Islamic education from three aspects: Ontological, by placing love as the basis of creation and the purpose of human life; Epistemological, by making love the path of knowledge and the source of ethics; and Pedagogical, by applying love as a method of learning and social relationships. Practical implications include curriculum transformation, empathy-based teaching methods, and teacher training to foster emotional and spiritual competence. Thus, Islamic education can be a means of social peace and the formation of human beings with the character of love, who can answer the challenges of globalization, intolerance, and modern dehumanization (Halstead, 2018; Ahmad & Awang, 2023).

5. Conclusion and Implications
5.1. Conclusion

This research confirms that love is an essential philosophical and ethical foundation in Islamic education. Love is understood not only as a spiritual expression, but also as an epistemological principle that guides the process of seeking knowledge and forming human morality. Through philosophical reconstruction, love in Islam has proven to be a pedagogical basis encouraging empathy, tolerance, and social harmony. These findings indicate that love-oriented Islamic education can go beyond the traditional paradigm that emphasizes the purely cognitive aspect, towards a learning model that touches on the affective and humanistic dimensions. The integration between Islamic values and humanistic approaches creates a harmonious conceptual synthesis. Islam provides a spiritual and normative dimension through the concepts *of rahmah, ta'dib,* and *maḥabbah,* while humanism provides a methodological approach that emphasizes dialogue, freedom of thought, and self-awareness. These two frameworks produce an educational paradigm

that fosters faith and universal humanity. Therefore, reconstructing the philosophy of love can be a new foothold for Islamic education relevant to the challenges of modernity and plurality.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

From the theoretical side, the results of this research expand the horizon of Islamic education philosophy in three main aspects: The Epistemology of Islamic Education Love acts as a bridge between rational knowledge and spiritual knowledge, thus producing a holistic and humane epistemology (Al-Attas, 1991; Nasr, 2002). Integrating Islamic values with a humanistic approach results in a love-based pedagogy paradigm combining morality, spirituality, and social empathy (Ahmad & Awang, 2023). The values of love and empathy extracted from Islam have the potential to enrich global ethical discourse and cross-cultural education, making Islam a universal source of moral inspiration (Halstead, 2007). These theoretical implications can be the basis for developing a new Islamic education theory that focuses on *human flourishing*, namely human perfection in spiritual, intellectual, and emotional dimensions.

5.3. Practical Implications

The reconstruction of the philosophy of love in Islamic education offers a transformational direction for educational policies and practices: Love-Based Curriculum. Love and empathy can be used as core principles in the Islamic education curriculum by integrating the themes of compassion, social solidarity, and moral responsibility in all subjects. Humanistic Teacher Training: Teachers must become *moral exemplars* who teach through example and empathy, not just cognitive delivery (Ismail & Osman, 2020). Inclusive School Environment Islamic schools must develop a learning culture that respects differences, prioritizes cross-cultural dialogue, and fosters social harmony to actualize love (*rahmah*). The application of these principles will make Islamic educational institutions not only the center of knowledge transmission but also a space for the formation of human beings who are loving, ethical, and humane.

5.4. Future Research Directions

Future research can develop an empirical model of *Love-Based Islamic Humanistic Education (LIHE)* through field studies in Islamic schools. The focus can be on measuring the impact of a love-based approach on students' social and spiritual behavior, empathizing with curriculum analysis in the context of multicultural Islamic education, and comparing Islamic models and *care ethics* theory in Western education. Such advanced studies will strengthen the love-based Islamic education paradigm's scientific foundation and global relevance.

5.5. Final Reflection

As taught in Islam, love is not just a personal emotion but a cosmological foundation that unites man and God. In education, love functions as an epistemic ethics and social praxis that gives birth to people of faith and humanity. By integrating Islamic spiritual values and modern humanistic approaches, Islamic education can move towards a more whole, dialogical, and compassionate paradigm—a step towards a civilization rooted in love and mercy for the whole of nature (*rahmatan lil-'alamin*).

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