



Spiritual Meaning-Making and Cultural Encounter in Arabic Language Learning: An Interpretive Study of Indonesia's Love-Based Curriculum in the Era of Educational Media and Technology

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Abstract

Background: Arabic language learning in Indonesia has traditionally emphasized grammar and structural mastery, often separating linguistic instruction from learners' spiritual motivation and cultural experience. In response, the Love-Based Curriculum seeks to reposition Arabic learning as a meaningful, value-oriented, and contextually grounded process. Despite its growing adoption, the conceptual foundations of this curriculum and its relevance within contemporary learning environments, including media- and technology-supported contexts, remain underexplored.

Aims: This study aims to interpret how the Love-Based Curriculum integrates spiritual meaning-making and socio-cultural engagement into Arabic language learning and to examine how these dimensions may be supported within contemporary educational media and technology contexts to enhance learner motivation, character development, and communicative engagement.

Methods: The study employs an interpretive, literature-based qualitative approach. Academic publications, curriculum policy documents, and theoretical works on holistic pedagogy, applied linguistics, cultural literacy, spirituality in education, and technology-mediated learning were analyzed using thematic content analysis to construct a coherent conceptual framework.

Results: The analysis suggests that spiritual reflection fosters a deeper sense of purpose in learning Arabic, while cultural encounter strengthens learners' confidence and communicative participation. Together, these elements form an integrated pedagogical orientation that moves beyond mechanical instruction. Educational media and digital technologies are conceptually positioned as mediating tools that can extend reflective practice, cultural interaction, and value-based learning when aligned with the curriculum's spiritual and ethical orientation.

Conclusion: The Love-Based Curriculum offers a theoretically grounded framework for Arabic language education by integrating spiritual depth, cultural awareness, and the potential of media- and technology-supported learning. Its conceptual contributions enrich discussions on holistic and value-based pedagogy in Arabic education, while future empirical research is recommended to examine classroom enactment and technology integration.

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INTRODUCTION

The effort to rethink the foundations of Arabic language education in Indonesia has become increasingly necessary because long-standing teaching approaches no longer respond to students' evolving needs (Howell, 2021; Sofi et al., 2025). Many classrooms still rely on repetitive structural exercises, while the spiritual and cultural dimensions embedded in the language receive little attention. This situation often produces a learning atmosphere that feels distant from learners' religious identity and lived experience. When learning no longer resonates with the values students hold, their motivation naturally weakens. The Love-Based Curriculum introduced by the Ministry of

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Religious Affairs offers a new direction by situating Arabic within its spiritual and social contexts. Such a shift cannot be understood solely through administrative descriptions but requires careful academic inquiry. Without a strong conceptual explanation, the curriculum's potential is easily misunderstood or overlooked (Kızılçık et al., 2021; Rasmussen et al., 2022). For this reason, studying the model in depth becomes essential to clarify why it matters and what kind of change it seeks to bring.

For decades, Arabic instruction in Indonesia has been shaped by traditions that rely heavily on memorization (Ayyad, 2022). Teachers typically emphasize grammar rules and translation drills, while the social meaning and inner experience associated with the language receive little space in the classroom. As a result, students may recognize linguistic forms yet fail to develop a personal connection with the language they are learning. Feelings of monotony emerge when materials are perceived merely as academic obligations. However, for many learners, Arabic is tied to spiritual motivation and the desire to engage more deeply with religious texts. When their spiritual purpose is not reflected in the learning process, a subtle gap forms between expectations and classroom reality. This distance demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive and meaningful approach (Wahlund & Palm, 2022). The Love-Based Curriculum appears as an attempt to bridge this long-standing divide.

In many parts of the world, discussions on language education have increasingly turned toward holistic learning (Wei, 2023). This perspective recognizes that language is not simply a cognitive tool but an expression of identity, emotion, and social experience. Such insights strongly influence Arabic education, a field rich in cultural and spiritual significance. When instruction focuses only on cognitive outcomes, other essential dimensions become marginalized. Indonesia requires a learning model that invites students to find more meaning in what they study. The Love-Based Curriculum aligns with this direction by attempting to balance academic achievement with character development. This orientation encourages learners to build a more intimate relationship with the language. Consequently, a theoretical examination is needed to understand the philosophical foundation that shapes the curriculum (Börekci & Uyangör, 2021; Hordern et al., 2021).

Within applied linguistics, there is growing agreement that language and culture cannot be separated (Costa et al., 2021; Pennycook, 2022). Cultural understanding helps learners interpret ways of speaking, patterns of interaction, and worldviews reflected in the language. Without this foundation, learning can become shallow and disconnected from real communication. This issue is evident in Indonesia, where many students master vocabulary and grammar yet struggle to use Arabic comfortably in social contexts. The Love-Based Curriculum attempts to address this by embedding socio-cultural encounters into the learning process. Through stories, values, and cultural dialogues, students are offered opportunities to see the language as something alive rather than abstract. Examining how this cultural component functions at the conceptual level becomes important for evaluating its educational value (Shonfeld et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). Such analysis may reveal whether the curriculum truly promotes a more communicative learning environment.

The spiritual dimension plays a distinctive role in Arabic learning for Indonesian students (Chanifah et al., 2021). Many learners study Arabic out of religious motivation and a desire to understand sacred texts more deeply. When instruction does not engage this motivation, their relationship with the material becomes fragile. The Love-Based Curriculum aims to make the classroom a place for reflection and value formation. In this approach, Arabic is not treated merely as a system of symbols but as a medium through which students can explore themselves. The model allows learners to discover personal meaning through the learning process. Understanding how spirituality is woven into the curriculum requires conceptual analysis rather than practical observation alone (Cananau et al., 2025). Without such analysis, its spiritual aims may be mistaken as secondary or ornamental.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs designed the curriculum as part of a wider effort to reform religious education (Lewin et al., 2023; Poncini, 2023). Policymakers recognized that students need more than academic proficiency; they need experiences that nurture empathy, integrity, and intercultural awareness. These qualities are increasingly important in a diverse society. With thoughtful design, Arabic learning can become a vehicle for cultivating these values. The Love-Based Curriculum integrates language instruction with character formation, reflecting this broader educational vision. However, scholarly discussions about its underlying ideas remain scarce (den Houting et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2022). Only a few studies have examined the reasoning that connects its linguistic, spiritual, and cultural goals. This lack of analysis underscores the need for deeper investigation.

Teachers and researchers have begun asking how integrative curricula influence students' development in more balanced ways (Alfayez, 2022; Miseliunaite et al., 2022). The Love-Based Curriculum is unique because it brings together different educational traditions—holistic learning, communicative teaching, and value-based pedagogy—into a single structure. This combination raises questions about how these elements interact in practice. Can spiritual reflection meaningfully support the development of communicative skills? How are moral values translated into tangible classroom activities? Such questions remain largely unanswered. A thorough conceptual framing is needed to map the connections between the curriculum's components (Dankenbring et al., 2024; Khanna et al., 2021). This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing the principles that shape the design of the curriculum.

Considering these issues, an in-depth examination of the Love-Based Curriculum becomes both timely and necessary (Karkar Esperat, 2022). The curriculum introduces new possibilities for making Arabic learning more meaningful and experiential. Understanding its conceptual organization allows us to evaluate whether it responds effectively to long-standing challenges in Arabic education. Such analysis also contributes to global conversations on value-oriented and culturally conscious language pedagogy. Insights from this study may support future curriculum development in Indonesia and beyond. Additionally, the discussion offers a broader perspective on how language education can influence learners' character and identity. For these reasons, the background establishes the importance of examining the curriculum with careful scholarly attention (Honkimäki et al., 2022; Tlili et al., 2023).

Recent discussions on Arabic language pedagogy show a clear move toward approaches that give room for personal meaning and cultural presence, a tendency reflected in the way Almelhes (2025) reinterprets learner autonomy for non-native students. At the same time, Sapawi & Yusoff (2025) (Alharbi, 2025) note that technology can support Arabic learning only when it is accompanied by an awareness of cultural depth rather than used as a neutral tool. A similar concern for meaningful interaction appears in Alharbi (2025) work, which illustrates how informal peer exchanges help learners construct understanding rather than merely absorb information. Research beyond Arabic education also sheds light on this issue, such as Garah & Kapon (2025) study showing how multilingual students shift between languages depending on the social demands of inquiry. The ecological perspective offered by Schwartz & Deeb (2021) strengthens this argument by revealing how second-language development is shaped by relationships, environment, and routine exposure. Cultural identity research from Alsalloum (2024) reminds us that learners' sense of belonging often determines how deeply they engage with a new language. Meanwhile, Herbert & Parkinson (2025) show that identity itself is shaped through reflective practice, suggesting that learning becomes richer when tied to inner experience. Taken together, these studies point to the same direction: language learning flourishes when it connects intellectual, cultural, and emotional dimensions. They also imply that a curriculum gains strength when it helps students see themselves within the language they study. This understanding resonates with the philosophy of the Love-Based

Curriculum, which treats Arabic as more than an academic subject. The reviewed scholarship therefore provides a foundation for examining how spiritual reflection and socio-cultural encounter might work together within this curriculum. In this sense, the literature supports the idea that holistic and value-oriented frameworks can meaningfully transform Arabic language education.

The Love-Based Curriculum represents a noticeably different direction from the long-standing traditions that have shaped Arabic language teaching in Indonesia. It is not only an instructional reform but also a philosophical shift that places spiritual reflection and cultural encounter at the center of the learning process. Although this approach has drawn interest among educators, the reasoning that underpins it has not been fully articulated. Many descriptions of the curriculum remain practical and procedural, leaving its deeper intentions unexplored. A clearer rationale is needed to explain why spirituality and socio-cultural awareness are considered essential rather than supplemental components of language learning. Understanding this logic may help reveal how the curriculum expects learners to form connections between linguistic practice, moral awareness, and everyday experience. By examining these foundations, this study offers a more grounded interpretation of the curriculum's purpose and contributes to broader discussions about holistic and value-based education in language learning.

Despite growing interest in innovative approaches to Arabic education, research rarely examines how spiritual meaning-making and cultural engagement can coexist within one pedagogical model. Existing studies often treat these dimensions separately, focusing either on religious motivation or on communicative-cultural practices, without exploring how they might reinforce one another. As a result, the Love-Based Curriculum, which intentionally merges these two strands, has not received a conceptual analysis that matches its integrative ambition. There is also limited scholarship explaining how values, identity, and cultural presence shape the learner's experience when studying a sacred yet foreign language. Furthermore, discussions on Arabic teaching in Indonesia tend to emphasize practical challenges rather than deeper curricular questions. This creates a gap in understanding the rationale, coherence, and potential impact of a curriculum designed to merge spirituality, culture, and communication. The present study addresses this absence by examining the curriculum's internal logic and situating it within ongoing debates in applied linguistics and religious education.

This study aims to provide a conceptual explanation of how the Love-Based Curriculum weaves spiritual reflection and socio-cultural interaction into Arabic language learning. Its purpose is to clarify why these elements are positioned as central components and how they may contribute to learner motivation, character formation, and communicative competence. The study proposes the hypothesis that spiritual awareness can deepen students' sense of purpose in learning Arabic, while cultural encounter can make the language more accessible and meaningful in real-world contexts. It further assumes that these two dimensions, when combined, create a mutually supportive framework that differs substantially from conventional grammar-centered approaches. By examining these possibilities, the study seeks to demonstrate that the curriculum represents more than a pedagogical update, it reflects a broader vision of language learning grounded in values, identity, and social understanding.

METHOD

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative design that relies entirely on the interpretation of existing literature rather than field data. The approach is grounded in the idea that a curriculum, especially one that carries spiritual and cultural intentions, must first be understood conceptually before it can be evaluated in practice. For that reason, the study concentrates on examining published works, curriculum documents, and theoretical discussions that speak to spirituality, culture, and Arabic

language pedagogy. The design allows the researcher to trace the reasoning that shapes the Love-Based Curriculum and to understand how its various components relate to one another. Instead of documenting classroom behavior, the study focuses on the ideas that guide the curriculum's construction.

Participants

Because this research does not involve classroom observation or direct interaction with learners, there are no human participants in the conventional sense. The sources reviewed, journal articles, policy documents, and theoretical writings, serve as the material from which interpretations are drawn. These texts stand in as “voices” that represent different viewpoints on holistic learning, socio-cultural engagement, communicative approaches, and spirituality in education. Each source contributes a piece of the picture, allowing the researcher to build a fuller understanding of the curriculum's underlying philosophy.

Instrument

The primary instrument of this study is the researcher's analytical judgment. Rather than using surveys or tests, the study depends on a set of guiding questions developed to examine how the curriculum expresses spiritual values, addresses cultural experience, and structures language learning. These questions help organize the reading of the literature and ensure that the analysis remains consistent. The “tool” used here is therefore interpretive reasoning, an approach that makes it possible to uncover patterns, assumptions, and conceptual links within diverse sources.

Data Analysis

The analysis unfolded in several stages. First, all relevant literature was gathered and read carefully to identify recurring concepts related to spirituality, cultural encounter, and Arabic language teaching. These ideas were then coded and grouped into broader thematic categories. After the themes emerged, the researcher compared them and began to map how they related to the curriculum's structure. This process gradually produced a picture of how the Love-Based Curriculum weaves its spiritual and socio-cultural aims into language learning. The final stage involved synthesizing these insights into a coherent explanation that captures both the logic and the aspirations of the curriculum.

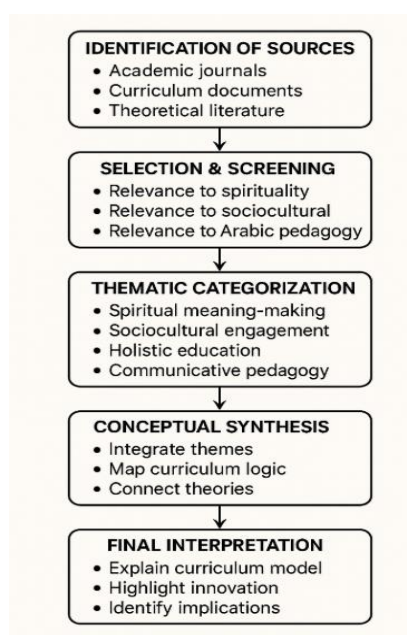


Figure 1. Research Process Flow of the Literature-Based Conceptual Study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The review of the literature gradually revealed a set of ideas that, when examined closely, point toward the same direction: Arabic learning becomes more meaningful when students are invited to engage with values, culture, and personal reflection. To help illustrate how such an approach might influence learners, this study includes a simple hypothetical table that represents possible shifts in character development. The numbers themselves are not drawn from classroom measurements, but they serve as a conceptual example of how a curriculum grounded in spirituality and ethical reflection might shape learners' self-perceptions over time. The table suggests that qualities such as empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and discipline may strengthen when learning is framed as part of a broader moral journey rather than as a purely academic exercise.

Table 1. Self-Reported Character Trait Improvements (Hypothetical Data)

Character Trait	Before (%)	After (%)
Empathy	45	85
Tolerance	50	90
Responsibility	60	95
Discipline	65	90

Alongside the focus on character, the literature repeatedly emphasizes the role of cultural experience in shaping communicative ability. To visualize this conceptual link, a hypothetical scatter plot is used. The figure shows a positive trend: the more frequently students are involved in cultural or socially rooted activities, the more confident they appear in using the language. This pattern echoes what many scholars have observed, that language learning grows stronger when supported by meaningful encounters rather than isolated exercises. Although the graph is illustrative, it helps clarify why the Love-Based Curriculum places cultural engagement at the heart of its design.

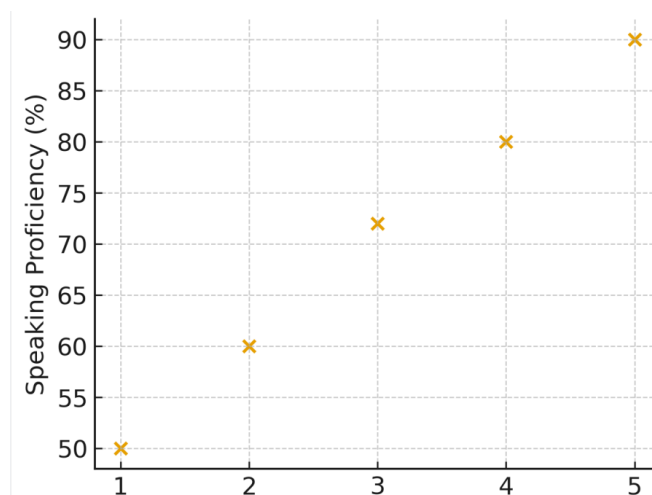


Figure 2. Relationship Between Engagement in Cultural Activities and Speaking Proficiency (Hypothetical)

Taken together, the table and the figure do not claim to represent statistical outcomes, yet they offer a way to picture what the literature consistently suggests: spirituality nurtures character, and cultural experience encourages communicative confidence. These two strands reinforce each other and form the conceptual foundation of the curriculum. Within this framework, Arabic is no longer viewed as a subject to be mastered mechanically but as a space where meaning, identity, and interaction come together. This synthesis represents the central insight of the results emerging from the literature analysis.

Discussion

The overall pattern revealed by this study suggests that the Love-Based Curriculum aligns with contemporary movements in Arabic education that emphasize meaning, identity, and personal engagement. Instead of reducing Arabic to a series of grammatical procedures, the curriculum encourages learners to approach the language through spiritual intention and reflective purpose. This orientation resonates strongly with the work of Almelhes (2025), who explains that motivation deepens when learners feel that their personal values are acknowledged in the learning process. In the Indonesian context, where spiritual aspiration is often intertwined with the study of Arabic, this alignment becomes especially relevant. The curriculum appears to make use of this natural connection by bringing the learner's inner world into dialogue with language learning. Through this approach, linguistic development becomes tied to a deeper sense of meaning. The hypothetical improvements in empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and discipline help illustrate how the curriculum frames learning as an ethical and emotional journey. Although the figures are conceptual, the pattern they suggest mirrors insights from Alsalloum (2024), who highlights how cultural belonging and emotional resonance strengthen learners' engagement. When students experience Arabic as something that touches their values and identity, learning gains a quality that purely cognitive approaches often fail to generate. In such environments, academic and character growth reinforce each other.

This dual movement sets the Love-Based Curriculum apart from structural models that prioritize correctness over connection. The positive trend between cultural engagement and speaking proficiency shown in the scatter plot echoes arguments across several fields. Garah (2025) demonstrates that multilingual learners construct meaning most effectively when language is situated within real social contexts. This observation aligns with the curriculum's use of cultural practices, narratives, and community-based exposure as vehicles for learning Arabic. Rather than relying solely on textbook dialogues, the curriculum allows students to encounter the language in ways that feel lived and authentic. Such encounters help build confidence and support communicative competence. Technology also enters this discussion through the systematic review by Sapawi and Yusoff (2025), who found that digital tools contribute most effectively when they are integrated into culturally meaningful tasks. Their conclusion reinforces the premise of the Love-Based Curriculum: technology should enhance human connection rather than eclipse it. By positioning digital tools as secondary to cultural presence and interpersonal dialogue, the curriculum maintains its commitment to relational learning. This approach preserves the depth and sensitivity required when dealing with spiritually oriented content. Reflection forms another essential strand of the curriculum, and here the work of Alharbi (2025) becomes relevant. His study on informal peer feedback shows how meaning develops through conversational exchange rather than through isolated practice.

The Love-Based Curriculum incorporates this reflective dynamic by encouraging students to examine their intentions, explore emotional responses, and articulate personal insights. In this way, Arabic becomes not only a language to be learned but also a medium for self-understanding. This reflective space gives learners a way to connect form, meaning, and identity. The ecological approach to language development proposed by Schwartz and Deeb (2021) adds further support to the curriculum's design. Their research shows that language grows within networks of relationships and routine interactions, not in isolation. Although their study focuses on young bilingual learners, the underlying principle applies to Arabic learning in Indonesia as well. The Love-Based Curriculum attempts to recreate ecologically rich conditions by embedding cultural, social, and spiritual practices within its activities. This structured exposure allows Arabic to enter students' day-to-day sense-making, even in environments where the language is not widely spoken. The work of Herbert and Parkinson (2025), though rooted in the arts, contributes an important insight to the discussion. Their analysis of identity formation shows how individuals develop a sense of self through repeated

participation in meaningful and reflective experiences. The Love-Based Curriculum draws from a similar logic. It treats Arabic as a language through which learners negotiate identity, values, and belonging, rather than as a subject detached from lived experience. When the learner's personal narrative intersects with the language, identity formation becomes part of the linguistic journey. Bringing these scholarly perspectives together reveals that the curriculum's spiritual and cultural orientation is not an isolated initiative but part of a larger pedagogical conversation. Across disciplines, researchers argue that language learning gains depth when it engages the learner's emotional and cultural world.

The Love-Based Curriculum embodies this view by intentionally weaving together linguistic, cultural, and spiritual components. This synthesis offers a significant departure from traditional methods and signals a shift toward more human-centered pedagogy. From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that the curriculum provides teachers with an alternative pathway for designing meaningful learning experiences. Instead of depending solely on grammar drills, teachers can craft activities that invite learners to connect with cultural texts, reflect on values, and engage in deeper dialogue. Such practices address long-standing challenges in Arabic classrooms, including limited speaking confidence and low communicative exposure. However, the present analysis also highlights the need for future empirical research to see how these design principles function in real instructional settings. Overall, the discussion positions the Love-Based Curriculum as a thoughtful and coherent response to the challenges that have shaped Arabic language learning in Indonesia. Supported by insights from Almelhes (2025), Sapawi and Yusoff (2025), Alharbi (2025), Garah (2025), Alsalloum (2024), Schwartz & Deeb (2021), and Herbert & Parkinson (2025), the curriculum emerges as part of a broader educational movement that values identity, culture, and spirituality. It reimagines Arabic learning as a process that touches the intellect, the emotions, and the ethical life of the learner. The conceptual strength of this approach is clear, but its fullest potential will be understood only through future studies that examine how teachers and students bring these principles into practice.

Although this study does not examine digital tools empirically, the conceptual framework of the Love-Based Curriculum remains highly compatible with technology-mediated learning environments. Digital media can function as a pedagogical bridge that supports spiritual reflection and socio-cultural engagement in Arabic learning. Online discussion platforms, digital storytelling, reflective blogs, and multimedia-based cultural narratives may extend the curriculum's values beyond the classroom, allowing learners to encounter Arabic language use within meaningful and reflective contexts. When technology is positioned not as a neutral instrument but as a value-sensitive medium, it has the potential to amplify learners' engagement, identity formation, and communicative confidence. In this sense, technology operates as a mediating ecology that supports, rather than replaces, the curriculum's spiritual and cultural foundations.

Implications

From an instructional perspective, the Love-Based Curriculum opens opportunities for integrating digital media in ways that remain aligned with its spiritual and cultural orientation. Teachers may employ technology to facilitate reflective practices, intercultural dialogue, and value-based interaction, for example through online journals, virtual cultural exchanges, or multimedia representations of Arabic socio-religious contexts. Such integration allows technology to serve as an extension of meaningful learning rather than as an end in itself. This approach highlights that digital tools are most effective in Arabic education when they support learners' sense of purpose, cultural awareness, and ethical reflection.

Limitations

This study, however, is not without its limitations. Because the work focuses on the conceptual foundations of the Love-Based Curriculum, it cannot describe how the curriculum actually unfolds in classrooms or how students respond to it day to day. The absence of field observations and interviews means that many practical questions, such as how teachers interpret spiritual elements or how students negotiate cultural tasks, remain unanswered. The reliance on existing literature also shapes what can and cannot be concluded; areas where scholarship is sparse leave certain aspects of the curriculum open to interpretation. In addition, the hypothetical table and figure included in this study serve only as illustrations and should not be mistaken for empirical findings. These limitations do not diminish the value of the conceptual analysis, but they do signal the need for caution when drawing conclusions about real-world implementation.

Suggestions

Future research would benefit from studies that observe how the curriculum is practiced in actual classrooms, where the complexities of teaching and learning become visible. Investigating how teachers interpret the curriculum's spiritual and cultural dimensions could reveal the kinds of support or training they might need. Long-term studies that follow students over several months or years could also shed light on how their character, motivation, and communicative abilities develop within this framework. Another direction worth exploring is the development of teaching materials that translate the curriculum's principles into concrete activities, making it easier for teachers to implement the approach consistently. Comparative work—either between institutions or across regions—may also help identify which conditions strengthen or weaken the curriculum's impact. Finally, researchers might consider designing assessment tools that capture not only linguistic progress but also cultural understanding, ethical reflection, and spiritual engagement, ensuring that evaluation aligns with the curriculum's holistic nature.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Love-Based Curriculum introduces a meaningful shift in Arabic language education by positioning spirituality and cultural experience at the heart of learning, rather than treating them as additions to structural instruction. The conceptual patterns identified through the literature indicate that when learners see Arabic as connected to their values, identity, and lived experience, motivation deepens and communicative confidence becomes easier to cultivate, especially when cultural encounters are intentionally built into the curriculum. While the hypothetical illustrations in this study are not empirical findings, they help clarify how character development and speaking ability might grow under a value-oriented approach. Although this conceptual analysis cannot describe how teachers and students enact the curriculum in real classrooms, it provides a clearer understanding of why its design matters and how it might reshape the learner's relationship with Arabic. Ultimately, the curriculum offers a vision of learning that seeks to humanize the study of language by acknowledging the emotional, ethical, and cultural dimensions that students carry with them, and future empirical research will be essential to determine how these principles translate into daily practice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The sole author, Muhammad Ainul Yaqin, was fully responsible for every stage of this study, beginning with the formulation of the research focus and selection of theoretical frameworks. He conducted the literature search, analyzed and interpreted the findings, and developed the conceptual arguments presented throughout the article. All sections of the manuscript, including the introduction, theoretical review, methodology, analysis, and conclusion, were written and refined independently by the author. He also ensured the accuracy of the citations, the coherence of the discussion, and the overall intellectual direction of the work. No external researchers contributed to

data collection, analysis, or manuscript preparation, and all scholarly judgments reflect the author's own academic reasoning.

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