



Negotiating Love, Rahmah, and Adab: Humanizing Islamic Religious Education In Indonesian Higher Education

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Abstract:

This research aims to understand the integration of the concepts of love (maḥabbah), raḥmah, and adab in the humanization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesian universities. The research is motivated by the tendency of PAI learning to be more oriented towards cognitive aspects, academic achievement, and knowledge transfer so that the spiritual, emotional, and moral dimensions in education are often overlooked. This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library *research* through the study of Islamic classical literature, the Qur'an, Hadith, books, and relevant scientific journals. The data analysis technique uses content analysis with an interpretive approach to understand the deep meaning of the concepts of love, raḥmah, and adab in Islamic education. The results of the study show that love (maḥabbah) functions as a spiritual foundation that builds emotional attachment and sincerity in the relationship between lecturers and students, raḥmah is a pedagogical approach based on compassion, empathy, and tenderness that creates a humanistic and inclusive learning atmosphere, while adab becomes an ethical foundation that directs knowledge to the formation of morals and moral responsibility. The integration of these three values forms the paradigm of Islamic Religious Education which is not only oriented towards intellectual intelligence, but also on strengthening spirituality, moral maturity, and the formation of human beings. Thus, the humanization of Islamic education through love, raḥmah, and adab is a relevant approach in responding to moral crises, spiritual droughts, and formalistic educational relations in modern universities.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education in higher education currently faces challenges in maintaining a balance between cognitive and humanistic aspects (Brien et al., 2023) (Arar & Saiti, 2022). The learning process tends to emphasize academic achievement, number-based evaluation, and mastery of teaching materials (Hanifah et al., 2025). In practice, Islamic Religious Education learning is still dominated by concept memorization, assignment completion, and written exams

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that do not provide space for strengthening students' affective and spiritual dimensions. This condition causes religious education to potentially lose its essence as a process of forming a complete character and humanity (Putra & Hayeesama-ae, 2025).

This situation has an impact on educational relationships that tend to be formal, rigid, and emotionally meaningful (Julita et al., 2025). Interaction between lecturers and students often takes place in a hierarchical and administrative pattern, so that the pedagogical closeness that should be an important part of education is not optimally formed. In many cases, the learning process simply stops at delivering material in the classroom without being followed by deep dialogue, empathy, and emotional engagement. As a result, the internalization of religious values in students becomes less than optimal (Ulfah et al., 2024).

The root of the main problem in Islamic Religious Education learning in higher education lies in the tendency to reduce religious education to mere knowledge transfer (Alimin, 2023). The dominance of rationalistic and technocratic paradigms in the modern education system has shifted the spiritual and ethical dimensions in the learning process. Values such as love (maḥabbah), rahmah (affection), and adab (ethics) that should be the foundation of Islamic education are often marginalized in learning practices (Birhane, 2021). This condition shows that there is a humanization crisis in Islamic religious education in the university environment (Hafizah et al., 2025).

In many studies and literature, Islamic Religious Education has long placed love, mercy, and manners as the main foundation in the educational process. Classical Islamic educational thinkers such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh emphasized the importance of moral formation and purification of the soul as the primary goal of education (Rahmawati, 2026) (Bampasidou et al., 2024). In addition, contemporary studies also show that education based on compassion and ethics is able to strengthen pedagogical relationships and increase the internalization of values in students. Thus, conceptually, these values have a very strong position in building an ideal Islamic education (Romadona, 2021).

There is a gap between the theoretical concept of Islamic education and the reality of its implementation in higher education. Most previous studies have focused more on aspects of curriculum, learning strategies, and evaluation, without in-depth examining the reconstruction of humanistic values in educational relations (Miharja, 2023). The integration of love, grace, and manners as a unified paradigm of humanization of education has not been systematically explored. Therefore, there is a need to re-examine how these three values can be reconstructed in the context of modern higher education (Syihabudin, 2026) (Iksal et al., 2026).

This research has novelty in the form of conceptual integration of three main values, namely love (maḥabbah), rahmah, and adab, which are reconstructed as a single paradigm of humanization of Islamic Religious Education in higher education, different from previous studies that tend to examine the three separately or only as normative values, so that this study emphasizes its integration as a relational-pedagogical foundation in the interaction of lecturers and students that form Islamic education more humanistic, spiritual, and ethical in the context of contemporary Indonesian higher education (Kheisat et al., 2024). Based on this, this study aims to understand the meaning of the integration of the

concepts of love, mercy, and adab in the process of humanization of Islamic Religious Education, especially in the spiritual and ethical relationship between lecturers and students in higher education, by emphasizing how these three values are lived, interpreted, and implemented in learning practice as a living pedagogical experience, not just a normative concept. so that it is expected to enrich the understanding of the humanist Islamic education paradigm in modern universities (Alnajjar, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is to understand the meaning of the integration of the concepts of love, mercy, and manners in the humanization of Islamic Religious Education, so that the data studied is conceptual and textual, not field data in the form of numbers (Rofik et al., 2026) (Ha & Oh, 2025). The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained from classical Islamic literature such as the works of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh, as well as Qur'anic and Hadith texts that are relevant to the concepts of education, love, rahmah, and adab (Hikmah et al., 2025) (Ko et al., 2024). The secondary data was obtained from books, journal articles, and previous research that discussed Islamic Religious Education, the humanization of education, and contemporary Islamic pedagogy (Candra et al., 2021).

The data analysis technique used is content analysis with an interpretive approach. The analysis process is carried out through data reduction, thematic grouping, interpretation of meaning, and drawing conceptual conclusions (Uddin et al., 2024). In this context, the researcher focuses on understanding meaning, which is understanding the deep meaning of the concepts of love, mercy, and manners in the humanization construction of Islamic education in higher education (Syah et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study show that the humanization of Islamic Religious Education in higher education cannot be separated from the integration of the values of love (maḥabbah), rahmah, and adab as the main foundation of the educational process (Nurbaya et al., 2025) (Marsakha, 2021). These three values form an Islamic education paradigm that not only emphasizes the intellectual aspect, but also the spiritual, emotional, and moral aspects. These findings show that the crisis of religious education in modern universities arises when the learning process is too oriented towards the transfer of knowledge and academic achievements, thus ignoring the humanitarian dimension in educational relations (Nurhikmah, 2024).

The concept of love (maḥabbah) in this study shows that Islamic education is actually built on the basis of inner attachment between educators, students, science, and God. Al-Ghazali's thinking places love as the spirit of education that animates the learning process so that it is not mechanistic and formalistic (Hafizah et al., 2025). These findings are in line with the view that education is not just a cognitive process, but a process of tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the soul)

that connects the mind and the heart. In the context of higher education, *maḥabbah* is the basis for the formation of a more humane pedagogical relationship because lecturers not only function as transmitters of knowledge, but also spiritual guides who present sincerity, attention, and appreciation to students (Sari, 2026).

Rahmah in this study shows that Islamic pedagogy places compassion as the main approach in the learning process (Machovenko, 2024). Jalalain's interpretation of QS. Ali Imran verse 159 shows that gentleness, deliberation, empathy, and forgiveness are important principles in building effective educational relationships (Salaeh et al., 2023). These findings confirm that authoritarian and rigid approaches have the potential to distance students from the process of internalizing values. On the other hand, a learning atmosphere full of grace can create a stronger sense of security, openness, and motivation to learn. Thus, compassion-based pedagogy serves not only as a learning method, but also as a humanization strategy that strengthens the emotional and spiritual connection between lecturers and students (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Adab is found to be the foundation of ethics that directs the learning process to remain within the framework of morality and wisdom. Ibn Miskawaih's thought emphasized that education should be oriented towards the formation of morals through the habit of virtue and self-control (Andersson et al., 2022). In this context, adab is not only understood as manners, but as a moral structure that connects knowledge with ethical responsibility. These findings show that the success of education is not enough to be measured from the intellectual aspect alone, but also from the ability of education to shape the character and balance of the soul of students (Abdurakhmonova, 2021).

The integration of love, rahmah, and manners in this study shows that the three are complementary in building the humanization of Islamic Religious Education. Love is the basis for spiritual and emotional connection, rahmah presents a gentle and empathetic pedagogical approach, while adab ensures that the educational process remains moral and ethical (Gabriel & Puyó, 2022). This integration results in an inclusive, dialogical, and meaningful learning process so that Islamic education does not lose its human spirit in the midst of the dominance of the modern educational paradigm that tends to be technocratic (Dung et al., 2023) (Santos & Terem, 2023).

The findings of this study also strengthen the view that the ultimate goal of Islamic Religious Education is not only to produce academically intelligent human beings, but to form *kamil* people who have a balance between intellectual intelligence, spirituality, and morals. Therefore, the humanization of Islamic education through the integration of love, mercy, and manners is a relevant approach in answering the challenges of moral crisis, spiritual drought, and formalistic educational relations in Indonesian universities (Harefa & Hulu, 2024).

Love (Maḥabbah) as the Foundation of Educational Involvement

The concept of love (*maḥabbah*) in the perspective of Islamic education, especially in the tradition of Al-Ghazali thought, is found as a fundamental element that animates the educational process so that it does not stop at the intellectual dimension alone. Within the framework of *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, education is understood not only as an activity of knowledge transfer, but as a process of

purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) that rests on the spiritual relationship between man and Allah, as well as between teachers and students. Maḥabbah in this case is not only interpreted as an emotional feeling, but as a spiritual energy that directs knowledge towards meaning, sincerity, and closeness to Allah. Thus, education becomes a space for the formation of a whole human being, not just academically intelligent.

Al-Ghazali places love as the main driver in the learning process that has the value of Sufism. The ideal educational relationship is not mechanistic or administrative, but is built on the basis of affection, respect, and sincerity of intention. In this context, maḥabbah becomes a bridge that connects the dimension of reason with the dimension of the heart, so that the knowledge gained is not spiritually dry. Education based on love will give birth to a more humane learning atmosphere, where lecturers and students not only interact formally, but also inwardly and meaningfully.

The concept of love (maḥabbah) in the perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali is found as an epistemological basis in understanding the nature of education and the relationship between humans and science. In *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, Al-Ghazali affirms that love will not arise without the existence of knowledge and the process of recognition of the object of the beloved. This means that education has an important role in shaping the consciousness of love, because it is impossible for humans to love something without first knowing it deeply. In this context, maḥabbah is not just an emotion, but the result of an integrated intellectual and spiritual process.

This finding shows that education in Al-Ghazali's perspective does not stop at cognitive mastery, but continues on the formation of a love for truth, knowledge, and divine values. Thus, the learning process becomes a way to foster an inner connection between humans and the knowledge learned, so that education is not spiritually dry, but alive and meaningful in Sufism.

Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* stated:

الْحُبُّ عِبَارَةٌ عَنْ مَيْلِ الطَّبَعِ إِلَى الشَّيْءِ الَّذِي يُدْرِكُ لَذَّتَهُ

"Love is the inclination of the heart towards something that is perceived as pleasure".
(Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, Juz IV, p. 296)

These findings show that love in Islamic education according to Al-Ghazali is born from a process of deep recognition and understanding, not just a spontaneous feeling. In the context of the humanization of Islamic Religious Education in higher education, this emphasizes that the learning process must be able to lead students to meaningful understanding so as to give birth to a love for science and truth values. Thus, education not only produces intellectual intelligence, but also forms a depth of feeling, spirituality, and inner connectedness that makes the learning process more human and has the value of Sufism.

Rahmah as a Compassion-Based Pedagogy

The findings of the journal "Rahmah as a Compassion-Based Pedagogy" show that the educational process built on the basis of rahmah (compassion) is able to create a harmonious relationship between educators and students. This approach places teachers not only as transmitters of knowledge, but also as mentors who understand the emotional, psychological, and needs of students. With a gentle attitude, empathy, and appreciation for students, the learning process becomes more comfortable, humane, and effective.

The way these findings are applied can be seen through interaction patterns that prioritize softness in communication, non-violent advice, deliberation in learning, and an attitude of forgiveness for students' mistakes. Rahmah-based pedagogy also encourages the creation of a safe and supportive learning environment so that students are more open, confident, and motivated to develop academically and morally.

In Jalalain's Tafsir Against Surah Ali Imran verse 159 it is explained:

{ فِيمَا } زائدة { رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ } يا محمد { لَهُمْ } أي سهلت أخلاقك إذ خالفوك { وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا } سيء الخلق { غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ } جانبا فاعلظت لهم { لَأَنْقَضُوا } تفرقوا { مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ } تجاوز { عَنْهُمْ } ما أتوه { وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ } ذنوبهم حتى أعفر لهم { وَشَاوِرْهُمْ } استخرج آراءهم { فِي الْأُمْرِ } أي شأنك من الحرب وغيره تطييبًا لقلوبهم وليستن بك فكان صلى الله عليه وسلم كثير المشاورة لهم { فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ } على إمضاء ما تريد بعد المشاورة { فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ } ثق به بعد المشاورة { إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ } عليه

"Ma" is an addition (to Allah your meekness) O Muhammad, so that you face their transgression of your commands with a lenient attitude (and if you are harsh), that is, your morals are bad and uncommendable (and hard-hearted) until you take harsh action against them (of course they will stay away) and scatter (from you). Therefore, forgive (them) for what they have done (and ask forgiveness for them) for their sins until I forgive them (and consult with them), ask for their opinion (in matters of war and other matters) to please them and to be sunnah for you. So the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم consulted with them a lot. (Then when you have made up your mind) to do what you will, believe in Him after the deliberation (indeed, Allah loves those who trust) in Him. (Al-Mahalli & As-Suyuthi, n.d.)

This verse shows that rahmah is an important foundation in education and leadership. The gentle attitude of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH is an example that a compassionate approach is more effective than violence or authoritarian attitudes. In the context of pedagogy, teachers who apply rahmah will find it easier to build emotional closeness with students so that the process of knowledge transfer and character formation runs optimally.

This verse emphasizes that rahmah-based education includes an attitude of forgiveness, respecting students' opinions through deliberation, and guiding with patience. This creates an inclusive learning atmosphere and fosters a sense of security and self-esteem in students. Thus, compassion-based pedagogy is not only a teaching method, but also an approach to moral and humanitarian formation that is in harmony with Islamic values.

Adab as the Foundation of Learning Ethics

The findings of this study show that *manners* play a role as the main foundation in building learning ethics. Adab is not only understood as outwardly polite behavior, but as a moral and intellectual structure that directs the learning process to take place in a meaningful, ethical, and character-oriented manner. In the context of learning, manners are the basis of the relationship between teachers and students, as well as the principle that governs how knowledge is learned, understood, and practiced.

Manners in learning function as an internal direction for students to place their intellect, heart, and actions in balance. The learning process emphasizes not only the transfer of knowledge, but also the formation of an inner attitude that respects knowledge, teachers, and the process of seeking truth. Thus, adab is an ethical prerequisite that determines the quality of educational outcomes, not just an additional aspect in the learning process.

The basis of this finding can be traced in the ethical thought of Ibn Miskawaih through his work *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq*, which emphasizes that the perfection of human morality is achieved through the habituation of virtue based on rationality and self-control. He emphasized that moral virtue is not only theoretical, but must be realized in regular and repetitive real actions so as to form character.

In Ibn Miskawaih's view, the human soul has the potential to achieve perfection if it is directed through the education of correct morals. He also emphasized the importance of balance (*al-wasath*) in every action, including in the process of seeking knowledge. This shows that adab is a concrete form of controlling the rational soul so as not to fall into evil and remain on the path of virtue (Ibn Miskawaih, n.d.).

Column 1. The Concept of Ethics and Manners According to Ibn Miskawaih in *Tahdzib al-Akhlaq*

Aspects of Ibn Miskawaih's Thought (<i>Tahdzib al-Akhlaq</i>)	Explanation
Moral perfection	Perfect human morality is achieved through the habituation of virtue based on rationality and self-control.
Dimensions of moral practice	Moral virtue is not only theoretical, but must be embodied in real actions that are carried out regularly and repeatedly to form character.
The potential of the human soul	The human soul has the potential to achieve perfection when directed through the education of correct morals.
The concept of balance (<i>al-wasath</i>)	Every action must be in a balanced position, not excessive and not lacking, including in the search for knowledge.
The essence of manners	Adab is a concrete form of controlling the rational soul so as not to fall into evil and remain on the path of virtue.

These findings indicate that manners are not just social norms in learning, but are the philosophical foundation that determines the direction of education itself. In Ibn Miskawaih's ethical framework, adab can be understood as the internalization of virtue values that form harmony between reason, soul, and action. Thus, learning that is not based on manners has the potential to lose its

moral orientation even if it is cognitively successful.

This interpretation also emphasizes that education from the perspective of Islamic ethics is not only oriented to the mastery of knowledge, but also to the formation of human beings with perfect character (*insan kamil*). Adab is the main instrument in ensuring that knowledge is not misused, but directed for the good of self and society. In other words, adab is a bridge between knowledge and wisdom in the educational process.

The Integration of Love, Rahmah, and Adab in the Humanization of Islamic Education

The findings of this study show that the humanization of Islamic Religious Education in higher education can be realized through the integration of the values of love (*maḥabbah*), rahmah, and adab as a unified paradigm of Islamic education. These three values do not stand alone, but complement each other in forming humanistic, spiritual, and ethical educational relationships. Love serves as the basis for emotional and spiritual attachment in the learning process, rahmah presents a pedagogical approach that is full of compassion and empathy, while adab becomes the moral foundation that directs learning behavior and ethics.

As for how these findings are applied, it can be seen through a learning pattern that places lecturers as educators as well as spiritual and moral guides. The learning process is not only oriented towards knowledge transfer, but also character formation through gentle communication, respect for students, deliberation in learning, moral example, and habituation of respect and responsibility. The integration of these three values creates an inclusive, dialogical, and meaningful learning atmosphere so that students not only develop intellectually, but also emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

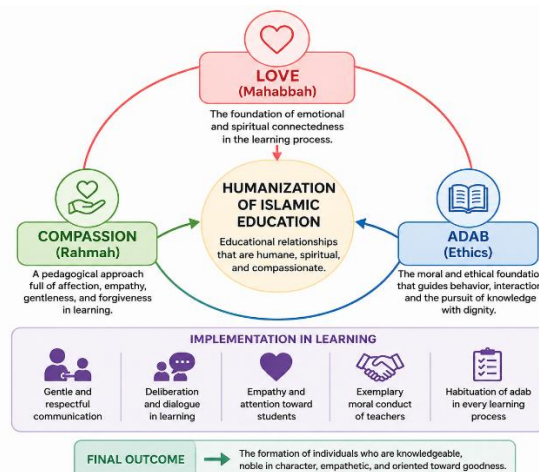


Figure 1. Infographic on the Integration of Love, Rahmah, and Manners in the Humanization of Islamic Education

Discussion

These findings show that the humanization of Islamic Religious Education cannot be achieved if the educational process only emphasizes cognitive and academic aspects. The integration of love, mercy, and adab and manners is an important

foundation in building education that humanizes humans because all three present a balance between intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and moral dimensions. Education based on love will give birth to an inner attachment between educators and students, rahmah creates a learning atmosphere full of empathy and appreciation, while adab ensures that knowledge is directed to the formation of character and wisdom.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education in higher education, the integration of these three values shows that Islamic education is actually not only the process of imparting knowledge, but also the process of forming kamil people who have intellectual intelligence, meekness, and moral maturity. Thus, the humanization of Islamic education through love, mercy, and manners is a relevant approach in responding to moral crises, spiritual droughts, and educational relations that tend to be formalistic in the modern higher education environment.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the humanization of Islamic Religious Education in higher education can be realized through the integration of the values of love (mahabbah), rahmah, and adab in the learning process. These three values are an important foundation in building Islamic education that is not only oriented to cognitive and academic aspects, but also to the formation of character, spirituality, and humanity of students. Love builds emotional and spiritual connection between lecturers and students, rahmah presents a learning approach that is full of compassion and empathy, while adab is the foundation of ethics that directs knowledge to be used wisely and responsibly.

The findings of this study confirm that Islamic Religious Education is actually not just a process of knowledge transfer, but a process of forming kamil people who have a balance between intellectual intelligence, spiritual depth, and moral maturity. Therefore, the integration of love, grace, and manners is a relevant approach in answering moral crises, spiritual droughts, and formalistic educational relations in Indonesian universities. This research is expected to be a conceptual contribution to the development of a more humanistic, inclusive, and rooted Islamic religious education paradigm.

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