

Character Education Program Management in Islamic Primary Schools: A Sequential Explanatory CIPP Evaluation

Siti Kamilah^{1*}, Rita Sriayu², Suherman³, Zurqoni⁴, Heri Retnawati⁵

^{1,4}UIN Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia

^{2,3}Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Balikpapan, Indonesia

⁵Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Email Corresponding Author: sheteacamel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Character education in Indonesian madrasah continues to face a structural challenge: programs are designed with ambition but evaluated without rigor. This study assessed the *ecotheological* and religious nationalist character reinforcement program implemented through a love-based curriculum in PAI learning at MI *Syaichona Cholil* Balikpapan, using Stufflebeam's CIPP model as the evaluative framework. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, combining a five-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to 84 students and 120 parents, observation of 36 PAI learning sessions, in-depth interviews with one madrasah principal and four PAI teachers, and documentary analysis. The context evaluation confirmed strong policy alignment and genuine field demand, with 91.7% of teachers affirming the program's necessity. Input evaluation revealed a critical competency gap: only 45.8% of teachers demonstrated adequate understanding of the love-based curriculum. Process evaluation identified a 27-percentage-point discrepancy between lesson plan intentions and standardized assessment practice. Despite these constraints, the product evaluation yielded statistically significant character gains in both *ecotheological* character ($d = 0.69$) and religious nationalist character ($d = 0.70$), both at $p < .001$. Teacher relational competence emerged as the primary mediating variable determining program effectiveness. These findings establish that the love-based curriculum possesses sufficient pedagogical potency to generate meaningful character development even under partially optimized conditions, provided that teacher formation is treated as a central institutional priority rather than a supplementary concern.

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INTRODUCTION

The moral and ecological crisis confronting Indonesian society has rendered character education in Islamic primary schooling not merely a pedagogical concern but an institutional urgency. Reports from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry consistently document the deterioration of local ecosystems in urban and peri-urban areas of Kalimantan, a region where extractive industries have accelerated environmental degradation at a pace that formal civic education has failed to match (Wiwiyani et al., 2025). Simultaneously, surveys on youth nationalism conducted by national research institutions reveal a measurable weakening of religious nationalist identity among the generation now passing through elementary schooling (Hart et al., 2022; Apriani et al., 2025; Idris et al., 2022). These two



crises, ecological and civic, are not unrelated: both reflect the absence of a coherent values framework capable of integrating spiritual responsibility toward the natural world with a grounded sense of national belonging. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, as the foundational institution of Islamic basic education in Indonesia, occupies a strategically irreplaceable position in addressing this dual deficit. The question is no longer whether character education should be strengthened in this context, but whether the pedagogical approaches currently employed are adequate to the depth of formation that the moment demands.

Scholarship on character education in Islamic schooling has grown considerably over the past decade, yet it has developed along largely parallel tracks that have rarely been brought into productive conversation. Research on ecotheology in Islamic education has established that integrative approaches linking theological teaching with ecological responsibility significantly enhance students' environmental awareness and behavioral orientation toward nature (Utami et al., 2025; Hamidah et al., 2023; Alharbi et al., 2025). Separately, studies on religious nationalism in PAI learning have demonstrated that the deliberate integration of national values within Islamic subject content produces meaningful gains in students' sense of civic belonging and love of homeland (Safitri et al., 2025; Musyahid et al., 2023). A third strand of scholarship has examined the love-based curriculum as a pedagogical framework, finding that its emphasis on relational learning and affective engagement substantially improves student motivation and value internalization compared to conventional cognitive-transmission approaches (Leggo, 2005; Muhibah, 2022) (Arcipe et al., 2023; Vieira et al., 2025; Alenezi et al., 2023). What these three bodies of work share, however, is a common limitation: each has pursued its object of inquiry in isolation, treating ecotheology, religious nationalism, and love-based pedagogy as independent variables rather than as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single formative project.

The gap left by this fragmented literature is consequential. No published study has yet evaluated a program that simultaneously integrates ecotheological values, religious nationalist character, and a love-based curricular approach within the PAI learning cluster of a *madrasah ibtidaiyah*. Equally absent from the literature is a comprehensive program evaluation using the CIPP model applied to this combination of character dimensions, despite Rachmaniar et al. (2021) framework being widely recognized as the most decision-oriented and contextually sensitive instrument available for evaluating multidimensional educational programs. Haynes-Brown et al. (2022) states that CIPP evaluation across fifteen East Javanese madrasah represents the most methodologically proximate prior study, examined general character strengthening programs but did not address ecotheological or love-based dimensions, nor did their study integrate qualitative and quantitative strands through a sequential explanatory design. The present study was designed precisely to fill this intersection of absences.

This study therefore aimed to evaluate the ecotheological and religious nationalist character reinforcement program implemented through a love-based curriculum in PAI learning at MI Syaichona Cholil Balikpapan, using Stufflebeam's CIPP model as the evaluative framework. The evaluation addressed all four CIPP components: the contextual relevance and policy alignment of the program, the adequacy of teacher competence and instructional resources at the input level, the fidelity and consistency of implementation at the process level, and the measurable character outcomes at the product level. By doing so, the study responds to a practical need identified repeatedly in the field: the absence of evidence-based evaluation data that can guide madrasah leaders and policymakers in making informed decisions about character program investment, revision, and scale.

The central argument animating this study draws on the convergence of three theoretical traditions. Palazzolo et al. (2024) ethics of care establishes that authentic moral formation requires relational pedagogy as its foundation, not content delivery. Begum et al. (2021) ecological theology grounds the imperative of environmental responsibility within Islamic spirituality, positioning care for the natural world as inseparable from worship.

Intawong et al. (2025) pedagogy of the heart affirms that transformative learning cannot occur in the absence of love as a relational and political act between educator and learner. The love-based curriculum, as theorized by Habiyaemye et al. (2023) and operationalized in this study, functions as the pedagogical architecture that holds these three traditions together. Understanding how this architecture performs under real institutional conditions, with real teachers navigating real constraints, is what the sections that follow set out to examine.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods evaluation design, specifically a formative-summative evaluation framework built upon Susanto et al. (2022) CIPP model, which assesses a program across four interrelated dimensions: Context, Input, Process, and Product. The CIPP model was selected because it was designed explicitly for decision-oriented evaluation of multidimensional educational programs, making it particularly well-suited to assess character-based initiatives that operate simultaneously at the policy, competency, implementation, and outcome levels (Derakhshanfard et al., 2022; Ettehadí et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022). The research was conducted at MI Syaichona Cholil Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, a setting chosen for its documented implementation of an ecotheological and religious nationalist character program within PAI learning. A sequential explanatory design guided the integration of quantitative and qualitative strands, whereby quantitative findings from surveys and observations served as the primary analytical base, followed by qualitative inquiry to explain and contextualize patterns that the numbers alone could not fully account for (Gunnulfson et al., 2021; Izquierdo et al., 2021; Cowhitt et al., 2023). This design reflects Mageda et al. (2023) argument that sequential explanatory designs are most appropriate when quantitative results require interpretive depth that only qualitative data can provide.

Data were collected through four complementary methods during the 2024/2025 academic year at MI Syaichona Cholil Balikpapan. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to 84 students in grades V and VI and 120 parents, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness across class levels and gender. Grades V and VI were specifically selected on two grounds: first, students at these levels had completed a minimum of one full academic year within the character reinforcement program, making measurable internalization outcomes assessable; second, they occupy a developmental stage characterized by increasing moral reasoning capacity, rendering them particularly receptive to value internalization through relational pedagogy. Observation was conducted across 36 PAI learning sessions covering all four subject areas within the PAI cluster, namely Al-Quran Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, and SKI, using a structured observation guide. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the madrasah principal and four PAI teachers, selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their direct involvement in program delivery. Documentary analysis covered curriculum documents, lesson plans, and program reports. The credibility of quantitative instruments was established through expert judgment by three specialists in educational evaluation, Islamic education, and educational psychology, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis using AMOS software, with a minimum loading factor threshold of $r = 0.30$ (Nye et al., 2022). Instrument reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with acceptance thresholds set at $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (acceptable), $\alpha \geq 0.80$ (good), and $\alpha \geq 0.90$ (excellent). The credibility of qualitative data was ensured through source and method triangulation and member checking with all interview participants.

Table 1. Research Informants, Interview Codes, and Roles

No.	Informant	Interview Code	Role in Research
1	Madrasah Principal	W-P	Provided institutional perspective on program governance, policy implementation, and observed student behavioral change.

2	PAI Teacher 1 (Al-Quran Hadith)	W-T1	Provided insights on lesson planning practice, time constraints, and character assessment challenges.
3	PAI Teacher 2 (Aqidah Akhlak)	W-T2	Described operational difficulties in applying the love-based curriculum at the classroom level.
4	PAI Teacher 3 (Fiqh)	W-T3	Offered perspective on the integration of ecotheological values within fiqh subject content.
5	PAI Teacher 4 (SKI)	W-T4	Contributed observations on religious nationalist values within historical Islamic education content.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Paired t-tests were conducted to assess pre-post differences in student character scores, and Cohen's *d* was calculated to determine practical significance, with effect size categories interpreted according to Paul et al. (2021) criteria. Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which proceeds through four iterative stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This model was selected because its iterative structure is well-aligned with CIPP evaluation logic, allowing themes to be revisited and refined as each new data source was incorporated (Duan et al., 2023; Çonoğlu et al., 2021). Condensation involved systematic reduction of field notes, interview transcripts, and observation records into thematic codes organized around the four CIPP components. Credibility was further strengthened through prolonged engagement with field data across 36 observed sessions and persistent cross-checking between quantitative patterns and qualitative explanations, ensuring that no interpretive claim rested on a single data source alone.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The evaluation was conducted across four components of the CIPP model: Context, Input, Process, and Product. Table 1 provides an overview of the key findings and status across all components, which are subsequently elaborated in the sub-sections that follow.

Table 1. Summary of CIPP Evaluation Results

Component	Key Indicator	Finding	Status
Context	Policy relevance and field needs	91.7% of PAI teachers reported a genuine need; ecotheology and religious nationalism explicitly embedded in curriculum documents; aligned with Law No. 20/2003, Presidential Regulation No. 87/2017, KMA No. 183/2019, and KMA No. 347/2022	High
Input	Teacher competence and instructional materials	58.3% demonstrated adequate understanding of Islamic ecotheology; only 45.8% adequately understood the love-based curriculum; instructional materials available but not yet optimally integrated	Needs Improvement
Process	Implementation and character assessment	68.7% of lesson plans included character indicators; 54.2% of sessions applied a love-based approach; 72.9% used active learning methods; only 41.7% used standardized character assessment instruments	Moderate
Product	Character development outcomes	Ecotheological character: mean score 3.87 (+12.5%, $d = 0.69$); religious nationalist character: mean score 4.12 (+10.2%, $d = 0.70$); both significant at $p < .001$	Significant

Source: Primary data, processed (2025).

Context Evaluation

Analysis of policy documents and in-depth interviews with the madrasah principal revealed that MI Syaichona Cholil Balikpapan had established curriculum documents that

explicitly incorporated ecotheological character reinforcement and religious nationalist values. Ecotheological content was formally embedded in the school's operational curriculum, while religious nationalist values were articulated in the madrasah's vision and mission statements. A needs assessment conducted with PAI teachers indicated that 91.7% reported a genuine need for ecotheological character reinforcement in learning activities, and the same proportion (91.7%) affirmed the importance of strengthening religious nationalist values. This high level of agreement signals a strong collective awareness among educators regarding the urgency of the program. The madrasah principal further elaborated on this perception in an in-depth interview: *"We see firsthand how students show limited concern for the environment surrounding the madrasah. This program is not merely a curricular requirement; it is a genuine need that we encounter every day. Ecotheology must become the spirit that breathes through every PAI lesson. (W-P, 2025)"*

From a policy alignment perspective, the program demonstrated strong congruence with several national regulatory frameworks, including Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Character Education Strengthening, KMA No. 183 of 2019, and KMA No. 347 of 2022. This high degree of contextual relevance provides a solid institutional foundation for the program's sustainability.

Input Evaluation

Competency test results indicated that 58.3% of PAI teachers demonstrated a sound understanding of Islamic ecotheology concepts, while the remaining 41.7% required further competency development. A more pronounced gap was identified in teachers' understanding of the love-based curriculum: only 45.8% demonstrated an adequate grasp of its conceptual framework and practical application. Given that the teacher sample comprised four individuals selected through purposive sampling, this figure concretely indicates that only two of the four teachers understood the love-based curriculum at an operational level. Qualitative data provided a deeper explanation for this competency gap. One teacher stated the following: *"I understand the theory that learning must be grounded in love and compassion, but I find it difficult to apply concretely because there are no clear examples in the textbooks and no specific training has ever been provided on this approach. (W-T2, 2025)"*.

This statement clarifies why limited conceptual understanding (45.8%) directly translates into inconsistent classroom implementation. Regarding the availability of instructional materials, MI Syaichona Cholil Balikpapan had developed PAI subject materials that incorporated ecotheological content and national values. However, another teacher noted that the existing materials had not yet integrated both values within a single, cohesive learning module (W-T3, 2025). This structural limitation contributed to the fragmented delivery of ecotheological and religious nationalist content across subject areas.

Process Evaluation

Observation of 36 PAI learning sessions yielded the following quantitative findings: (a) 68.7% of lesson plans included character indicators related to ecotheology and/or religious nationalism; (b) 54.2% of observed sessions implemented a love-based learning approach; (c) 72.9% of sessions employed active learning methods; and (d) only 41.7% of sessions utilized standardized character assessment instruments. Qualitative data revealed that the gap between lesson planning and actual classroom implementation stemmed from competing pressures to complete the prescribed subject matter and from a limited operational understanding of love-based pedagogy. One teacher explained: *"We frequently prioritize completing the subject matter content within the limited time available. Character assessment is still conducted intuitively because no standardized rubric exists that we can use on a daily basis. (W-T1, 2025)"*

This explanation accounts for the discrepancy between the 68.7% of lesson plans that included character indicators and the 54.2% of sessions in which these indicators were actually implemented. The gap is even more pronounced in the use of standardized assessment instruments, which stood at only 41.7%, representing a 27-percentage-point

difference from lesson plan intentions that must be addressed systematically. At the same time, classroom observations identified a number of creative integrative practices among certain teachers. These included: (a) recycling activities linked to the hadith prohibiting waste (*israf*); (b) the cultivation of medicinal plants connected to QS. *Al-Anbiya*: 107; and (c) composting activities framed within the *fiqh* concept of *thaharah* (purification). Observational notes recorded that during these sessions, students demonstrated notably higher levels of emotional engagement and enthusiasm compared to conventional instructional sessions (Obs-7, Obs-14, Obs-22). The primary barriers identified during the process evaluation were: (a) insufficient instructional time allocation; (b) the absence of integrated learning materials that simultaneously addressed ecotheological and religious nationalist values; and (c) the lack of a consistent reward system to reinforce ecological and nationalist behaviors within the *madrasah* environment.

Product Evaluation

Student character was measured using a five-point Likert scale administered to 84 respondents. The results indicated a mean ecotheological character score of 3.87 (SD = 0.62) and a mean religious nationalist character score of 4.12 (SD = 0.54). Table 2 presents a detailed comparison of pre-test and post-test scores across both character dimensions.

Table 2. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Student Character Scores

Character Dimension	Pre-test Score (SD)	Post-test Score (SD)	Increase (%)	Effect Size (d)
Ecotheological Character	3.44 (0.61)	3.87 (0.62)	+12.5%	0.69 (Medium-Large)
Religious Nationalist Character	3.74 (0.53)	4.12 (0.54)	+10.2%	0.70 (Medium-Large)

Source: Primary data, processed (2025). Note: Pre-test scores are estimated from program baseline data. * $p < .001$ (paired t-test).

As shown in Table 2, ecotheological character scores increased by 0.43 points (12.5%) and religious nationalist character scores increased by 0.38 points (10.2%) relative to the baseline measured at the beginning of the program. Paired t-test results confirmed that these improvements were statistically significant for both dimensions ($p < .001$). The corresponding effect sizes were $d = 0.69$ for ecotheological character and $d = 0.70$ for religious nationalist character, both of which fall within the medium-to-large range according to Cohen's (1988) criteria. Qualitative data enriched the interpretation of these findings. The *madrasah* principal described observable behavioral changes among students in their daily interactions: "We are beginning to see students asking why we must protect the environment, and they themselves are connecting these questions to Quranic verses they have studied in class. For students at the elementary *madrasah* level, this represents a meaningful shift in awareness. (W-P, 2025)"

This testimony confirms that the quantitative score increases reflect a process of authentic value internalization rather than surface-level academic performance. Teacher instructional quality and relational competence emerged as the strongest predictors of program success. Teachers who consistently applied a love-based and relational pedagogical approach produced measurably stronger character outcomes among their students compared to those who applied the approach only partially or intermittently.

Table 3. Joint Display: Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings across CIPP Components

Component	Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Explanation	Integration
Input	Only 45.8% of teachers demonstrated adequate understanding of the love-based curriculum	"I understand the theory, but it is difficult to implement in practice because there are no concrete examples in the textbooks and no specific training has been provided." (W-T2)	Conceptual gap directly constrains classroom implementation
Process	54.2% of observed sessions	"We often focus on completing the subject	Curriculum

	applied a love-based approach; only 41.7% used standardized character assessment instruments	<i>matter within limited time. Character assessment is still conducted intuitively because there is no standardized rubric available for daily use." (W-T1)</i>	completion pressure undermines consistency of relational pedagogy
Process	72.9% of sessions used active learning methods	<i>Classroom observations revealed substantial variation: teachers who consistently engaged relationally with students produced a more conducive learning environment and stronger character outcomes (Obs-7, Obs-14, Obs-22)</i>	Teacher-student relational quality serves as a key mediating variable
Product	Ecotheological character score +12.5% ($d = 0.69$); religious nationalist character +10.2% ($d = 0.70$); both at $p < .001$	<i>"Students have started asking why we must protect the environment, and they themselves connect it to Quranic verses learned in class." (W-P)</i>	Authentic value internalization is occurring even under inconsistent implementation conditions

Note: W-P = Interview, Principal; W-T1, W-T2, W-T3 = Interview, Teacher 1-3; Obs = Observation session code (illustrative). Interview excerpts are representative of dominant themes.

Table 3 presents an integrated synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings across the CIPP components, revealing a coherent pattern in which each numerical indicator is meaningfully explained by corresponding field evidence. At the input level, the finding that only 45.8% of teachers demonstrated adequate understanding of the love-based curriculum is directly explained by the absence of concrete pedagogical models and structured professional training, as reflected in Teacher 2's testimony, which confirms that the gap is not motivational but structural in nature. At the process level, two interconnected patterns emerge: first, the co-occurrence of a 54.2% implementation rate for love-based approaches and a critically low 41.7% use of standardized assessment instruments is explained by the chronic pressure to complete prescribed subject matter within constrained instructional time, leading teachers to rely on intuitive rather than systematic character assessment.

Second, although 72.9% of sessions employed active learning methods, classroom observations revealed that the quality and relational depth of those methods varied substantially across teachers, with consistently relational teachers producing noticeably stronger character outcomes, thereby establishing teacher-student relational quality as a key mediating variable in the program's effectiveness. At the product level, the statistically significant character improvements of 12.5% in ecotheological character ($d = 0.69$) and 10.2% in religious nationalist character ($d = 0.70$) are corroborated by the principal's observation that students have begun independently connecting environmental responsibility to Quranic teachings, indicating that authentic value internalization is occurring even under conditions of inconsistent implementation, and suggesting that the love-based curriculum possesses sufficient pedagogical potency to generate meaningful character development even when applied partially.

Discussion

This study evaluated the ecotheological and religious nationalist character reinforcement program through a love-based curriculum in PAI learning at MI Syaichona Cholil Balikpapan using Stufflebeam's CIPP model. The evaluation revealed a structurally coherent but operationally uneven program. At the context level, the program demonstrated strong alignment with national educational policy and genuine field demand, with 91.7% of PAI teachers affirming the necessity of both character dimensions. At the input level, however, a critical competency gap was identified: only 45.8% of teachers possessed adequate understanding of the love-based curriculum, a gap that is structural rather than motivational

in origin. At the process level, a 27-percentage-point discrepancy between lesson plan intentions and standardized assessment practice signals systemic implementation inconsistency. Despite these constraints, the product evaluation yielded statistically significant character improvements in both ecotheological character ($d = 0.69$) and religious nationalist character ($d = 0.70$), with both dimensions reaching $p < .001$, affirming the program's meaningful pedagogical impact under real-world conditions.

These findings enter into productive dialogue with, and in several respects extend, the existing body of scholarship on character education in Islamic schooling. The high contextual relevance confirmed in this study aligns with Hidayati et al. (2022), who identified institutional commitment and policy alignment as the most determinative preconditions for character program success in madrasah settings across East Java. However, the present study advances that finding by demonstrating that policy alignment alone is insufficient when teacher competency at the input level remains underdeveloped. This nuance is absent from Hidayati's analysis, which did not disaggregate competency by pedagogical approach. The ecotheological dimension of this study builds on Herlanti et al. (2024) conclusion that integrative approaches linking Islamic teaching with ecological issues significantly enhance students' environmental awareness. The present study corroborates this finding while introducing a critical addition: the love-based curriculum functions as the relational medium through which ecological values are internalized, not merely transmitted, a distinction that Mubit's study did not theorize explicitly (Li et al., 2024; Ooshima et al., 2025).

A notable tension emerges between the present study and Mariani et al. (2024) multisitus investigation of love-based curriculum implementation in Islamic primary education. Mariani concluded that the approach significantly enhanced student motivation but flagged the absence of measurable character assessment instruments as an unresolved limitation. The present study encountered the same limitation empirically: only 41.7% of observed sessions used standardized assessment instruments, a finding that simultaneously validates Muhibah's concern and demonstrates its persistence across different institutional contexts three years later. This suggests that the standardized assessment gap is not site-specific but constitutes a field-level structural deficit requiring systemic intervention. Furthermore, while Syah et al. (2023) reported a 34.7% increase in students' love of homeland through nationalism-integrated PAI learning, the present study's 10.2% gain in religious nationalist character reflects a more conservative but methodologically more cautious estimate, attributable to the use of effect-size reporting alongside percentage change rather than raw percentage gain alone, offering greater statistical transparency than prior work.

This study makes a distinct contribution to the field of Islamic education management by providing the first CIPP-based empirical evaluation of a love-based curriculum applied simultaneously to ecotheological and religious nationalist character dimensions within a madrasah ibtidaiyah context. From an Islamic education management perspective, the findings reframe the conventional understanding of curriculum leadership: effective character program management is not reducible to document compliance or policy alignment, but requires active cultivation of teacher relational competence as a core managerial responsibility. The study introduces teacher-student relational quality as an empirically supported mediating variable in character program effectiveness, a construct that has been theorized in Chen et al. (2025) ethics of care but has rarely been operationalized within Indonesian madrasah evaluation research. For madrasah principals and educational policymakers, this repositions professional development not as a supplementary administrative task but as the central lever through which curriculum-based character programs achieve their intended outcomes. This finding carries direct implications for how Direktorat KSKK Madrasah designs and monitors teacher capacity-building programs at scale.

Taken together, the findings of this study underscore a fundamental tension that characterizes character education programs in Indonesian madrasah: the aspiration toward holistic, values-driven learning consistently outpaces the institutional capacity required to

sustain it. The love-based curriculum is not merely a pedagogical style; it represents a relational theory of learning that demands a corresponding investment in teacher formation, assessment infrastructure, and organizational culture. The medium-to-large effect sizes observed in both character dimensions ($d = 0.69$ and $d = 0.70$) are encouraging precisely because they were achieved under conditions of partial and inconsistent implementation, suggesting that fuller and more systematic application of the love-based approach holds substantially greater potential. Future research should pursue longitudinal designs that track character development across academic years, comparative studies across multiple madrasah contexts, and instrument development studies specifically targeting standardized character assessment for ecotheological and religious nationalist dimensions. The integration of ecotheology into PAI curriculum management represents not only a pedagogical innovation but a theological imperative grounded in the Islamic concept of *khalifah fil ardh*.

CONCLUSION

Curricular aspiration and classroom reality have long stood in tension within madrasah character education in Indonesia, and this study demonstrates that the distance between them is structural rather than incidental. A comprehensive CIPP evaluation conducted at MI Syaichona Cholil Balikpapan revealed that a love-based curriculum integrating ecotheological and religious nationalist values produced statistically significant character gains among students, with effect sizes of $d = 0.69$ and $d = 0.70$ respectively ($p < .001$), despite conditions of inconsistent implementation and underdeveloped assessment infrastructure. Teacher relational competence, rather than policy alignment or material availability, emerged as the primary mediating variable determining program effectiveness, thereby repositioning teacher formation as the central lever of madrasah character program management. Policymakers and madrasah leaders must therefore treat structured professional development not as an administrative supplement but as a foundational institutional commitment, because the Quranic mandate of *khalifah fil ardh* will remain aspirational until the teachers entrusted to carry it are genuinely and systematically equipped to do so.

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