

FROM SENYUM, SALAM, SAPA TO RAḤMATAN LIL-‘ĀLAMĪN: NURTURING LOVE AND TOLERANCE THROUGH A LOCAL WISDOM-BASED SCHOOL CULTURE ECOSYSTEM IN ISLAMIC PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: Growing concern about intolerance and polarization has renewed interest in how Islamic education can cultivate love and tolerance from the earliest years of schooling. In Indonesia, this concern is reflected in the national agenda of religious moderation and, more recently, in the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta). Yet love and tolerance are frequently taught as abstract values or slogans, detached from the cultural grammar through which children actually learn how to treat others. Drawing on the first phase of an ongoing doctoral study on school culture in Islamic primary education, this paper examines how local wisdom can serve as a bridge between Islamic scholarly ideals of love (maḥabbah, raḥmah) and tolerance (tasāmuḥ) and children’s everyday practices. Using a qualitative instrumental case study of an Islamic elementary school in Malang, East Java, combined with a hermeneutic reading of Qur’anic, prophetic, and classical sources, the study identifies five pathways through which Javanese-Islamic local wisdom, namely senyum-salam-sapa, gotong royong, andhap asor within uswah ḥasanah, tepa slira, and rukun, translates love and tolerance into routines, relationships, reflection, and responsible action. These pathways are integrated into a “concentric circles of love” framework that extends children’s love from the



self and the classroom to the family, the nation, and humanity. The paper argues that local wisdom is not an obstacle to global harmony but its most accessible starting point, provided that it is reflectively interpreted rather than merely preserved.

Keywords: love and tolerance, local wisdom, school culture ecosystem, Islamic primary education, rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world presents a striking paradox. People of different faiths, ethnicities, and cultures have never been so closely connected, yet prejudice, hate speech, and religiously framed hostility continue to circulate with unprecedented speed. International education policy has responded by calling on schools to cultivate a sense of belonging to a common humanity, respect for diversity, and the capacity to live together peacefully.¹ Muslim scholarly leadership has made parallel appeals. The open letter *A Common Word between Us and You* identified love of God and love of the neighbour as the shared foundation of Muslim–Christian relations,² and the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, co-signed by the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, called on educators to make fraternity, tolerance, and mutual respect central to the formation of the young.³ These appeals raise a practical question that is easily overlooked: where, and how, do love and tolerance begin? For most people, the answer lies not in global declarations but in childhood, in the small and repeated ways in which children learn to greet, share, forgive, and live alongside others.

Indonesia offers a particularly instructive setting for this question. As the country with the world’s largest Muslim population and a long history of religious and cultural plurality, it has made religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) a national priority, understood as a way of practising religion that keeps to the middle path, upholds justice and balance, and avoids extremes.⁴ Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 places education among the main channels for strengthening this agenda.⁵ In July 2025, the Ministry of Religious Affairs went a step further by launching the Love-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta*, KBC), formalized through Ministerial Decree No. 1503 of 2025 and the Director General of Islamic Education’s Decree No. 6077 of 2025 on the KBC guidelines.⁶ The KBC organizes its aims around five dimensions of love (*Panca Cinta*): love of God and His Messenger, love of knowledge, love of oneself and others, love of the environment, and love of the homeland. Officials have presented it not as a replacement for existing curricula but as an enrichment intended to give them a “soul”, in response to

¹ UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015).

² *A Common Word between Us and You* (Amman: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2007).

³ Ahmad al-Tayyeb and Pope Francis, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (Abu Dhabi, February 4, 2019).

⁴ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

⁵ Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 58 Tahun 2023 tentang Penguatan Moderasi Beragama.

⁶ Keputusan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 1503 Tahun 2025; Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Nomor 6077 Tahun 2025 tentang Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2025).



concerns that religious education had tended to emphasize doctrine and routine while paying less attention to meaning, spirituality, and values.⁷

This policy turn resonates deeply with the Islamic scholarly tradition. The Qur'an describes the mission of the Prophet as *raḥmatan lil-‘ālamīn*, a mercy to all the worlds,⁸ and presents human diversity as a divine design whose purpose is mutual knowing (*li-ta'ārafū*).⁹ Al-Ghazālī devoted entire books of his *Iḥyā'* to love of God and to the etiquette of friendship and brotherhood, treating love as both the summit of spiritual life and the substance of good social relations.¹⁰ In the Indonesian archipelago, moreover, Islam spread largely through cultural accommodation rather than conquest, as preachers and scholars expressed Islamic teachings through existing idioms, arts, and social customs.¹¹ Abdurrahman Wahid later conceptualized this process as the "indigenization of Islam" (*pribumisasi Islam*), in which local culture becomes a vehicle for, rather than a rival to, Islamic values.¹² Local wisdom, in other words, has historically been one of the main channels through which Islamic love and tolerance took root in Nusantara.

In contemporary schools, however, this relationship is far from automatic. Love and tolerance can easily become slogans displayed on walls or items on a checklist, and religious programmes may produce what the first author's doctoral research describes as *symbolic compliance*: children perform the expected behaviour without understanding or owning the values behind it. Local wisdom, for its part, is often treated as folklore content or as an ornament for special occasions, such as traditional dress days, rather than as a living pedagogy that shapes how children relate to one another. At the same time, an uncritical celebration of local wisdom risks romanticizing practices that may also carry hierarchy, conformity, or exclusion. Three gaps follow. First, research on the KBC is still at an early stage and has so far focused largely on concepts and policy rather than on how love is cultivated in the everyday life of schools. Second, studies of local wisdom in education have tended to examine its integration into subject content rather than its role in school culture. Third, few studies connect the micro-level practices of children's school life with the macro-level aspiration of global harmony.

This paper addresses these gaps by asking three questions: (1) how are Islamic values of love and tolerance expressed through local wisdom in the culture of an Islamic primary school; (2) through what pathways do these local practices nurture love and tolerance in children; and (3) how can such locally rooted formation be extended toward a global horizon of harmony? The paper draws on the first phase of the first author's

⁷ "Kemenag: Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta Bukan Kurikulum Pengganti tapi Pengayaan," *Antara*, 2025, <https://kupang.antaranews.com/berita/154561/kemenag-kurikulum-berbasis-cinta-bukan-kurikulum-pengganti-tapi-pengayaan>.

⁸ Al-Qur'an, al-Anbiyā' [21]: 107.

⁹ Al-Qur'an, al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13.

¹⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 2, Kitāb Ādāb al-Ulfah wa al-Ukhuwwah, and vol. 4, Kitāb al-Maḥabbah wa al-Shawq (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.); William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹¹ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002); M. C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2006).

¹² Abdurrahman Wahid, "Pribumisasi Islam," in *Islam Indonesia Menatap Masa Depan*, ed. Muntaha Azhari and Abdul Mun'im Saleh (Jakarta: P3M, 1989).



doctoral research at the Doctoral Study Program of Basic Education, Universitas Negeri Malang, which develops a school culture ecosystem model for nurturing moderate Muslim identity in Islamic primary education. Its contribution is twofold: conceptually, it connects Islamic scholarship on love and tolerance, Javanese-Islamic local wisdom, and ecological theories of school culture within a single framework; practically, it offers Islamic primary schools a way of implementing the spirit of the KBC through the culture they already possess.

Love and Tolerance in Islamic Scholarship

In Islamic thought, love is not a sentimental addition to faith but part of its very definition. The Prophet declared that none of his followers truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself,¹³ and he linked entry into Paradise to faith, faith to mutual love, and mutual love to the simple act of spreading greetings of peace (*afshū al-salām baynakum*).¹⁴ Love here is concrete: it is learned and expressed through everyday gestures. Al-Ghazālī similarly treats love among people as something cultivated through *adab*, the disciplined practice of courtesy, generosity, forgiveness, and loyalty.¹⁵ This perspective is consistent with the understanding of Islamic education as *ta’dīb*, the cultivation of right conduct and right relationships.¹⁶

Tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), in turn, is grounded in the Qur’anic principles that there is no compulsion in religion,¹⁷ that Muslims may show kindness (*birr*) and justice (*qisṭ*) to those who do not fight them,¹⁸ and that diversity exists so that people may come to know one another. Abou El Fadl argues that the Islamic tradition contains rich resources for tolerance, but that these resources must be actively retrieved and interpreted by each generation.¹⁹ Kamali situates tolerance within *wasatiyyah*, a principle of balance, justice, and excellence rather than compromise or weak commitment.²⁰ An important distinction emerges here. In much modern political theory, toleration is a minimal arrangement for coexisting with what one dislikes or disagrees with.²¹ The Islamic ideal reaches further: tolerance is the lower threshold of social life, while love, mercy, and kindness are its horizon. In this paper, therefore, love and tolerance are treated as two movements of a single disposition: love moves outward toward others, while tolerance makes room for others who are different.

¹³ Muḥammad ibn Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb min al-Īmān an Yuḥibba li-Akhīhi mā Yuḥibbu li-Nafsih (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002); Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Īmān (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2000).

¹⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Bayān annahu lā Yadkhulu al-Jannah illā al-Mu’minūn.

¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, vol. 2, Kitāb Ādāb al-Ulfah wa al-Ukhuwwah.

¹⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia [ABIM], 1980); J. Mark Halstead, “An Islamic Concept of Education,” *Comparative Education* 40, no. 4 (2004): 517–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006042000284510>.

¹⁷ Al-Qur’an, al-Baqarah [2]: 256.

¹⁸ Al-Qur’an, al-Mumtaḥanah [60]: 8.

¹⁹ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, ed. Joshua Cohen and Ian Lague (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

²⁰ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur’anic Principle of Wasatiyyah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²¹ Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).



Local Wisdom as the Cultural Grammar of Islamic Values

Local wisdom refers to values, knowledge, and practices developed and transmitted within a community that guide how its members live together and with their environment. In Javanese society, which forms the cultural setting of this study, two principles have long been identified as central to social life: *rukun*, the maintenance of harmonious relations and the avoidance of open conflict, and *hormat*, the respect owed to others according to their position.²² Around these principles cluster related virtues such as *tepa slira* (the capacity to put oneself in another's place), *andhap asor* (humility and modesty), *unggah-ungguh* (courteous conduct and speech), and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). In Javanese Muslim communities, these virtues have long been interwoven with Islamic teachings, so that the boundary between “local” and “Islamic” values is often porous.²³

This paper approaches local wisdom as a *cultural grammar*: a set of familiar forms through which children learn what it means to treat others well. Just as children acquire the grammar of their mother tongue before they can explain its rules, they acquire the grammar of courtesy, empathy, and cooperation from their families and communities before they can reflect on it. When Islamic primary schools express love and tolerance through this familiar grammar, children can recognize these values as their own rather than as foreign impositions. However, grammar can also constrain. Practices of *hormat* and *rukun*, for instance, can discourage children from voicing disagreement or questioning adults.²⁴ For local wisdom to support genuine love and tolerance, it must therefore be interpreted in the light of Islamic principles and reflected upon, not merely reproduced.

School Culture Ecosystem: From Local Practice to Global Horizon

The first author's doctoral research conceptualizes school culture as an ecosystem: an interdependent set of value foundations, culturally organized routines, teacher modelling and relational reinforcement, reflective meaning-making, and moral agency through responsible action, connected by continuous feedback. This model draws on Schein's distinction between visible artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions,²⁵ on sociocultural accounts of learning as participation in communities of practice,²⁶ on social learning and care ethics,²⁷ and on the experiential and self-determination traditions that emphasize reflection and autonomy in the internalization of

²² Hildred Geertz, *The Javanese Family: A Study of Kinship and Socialization* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961); Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa: Sebuah Analisa Falsafi tentang Kebijakanaksanaan Hidup Jawa* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1984).

²³ Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java*; Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²⁴ Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa*.

²⁵ Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017).

²⁶ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Barbara Rogoff, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977); Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).



values.²⁸ In the Indonesian context, Raihani’s work on a whole-school approach to tolerance shows that tolerant attitudes are shaped more by the culture of a school than by formal instruction alone.²⁹

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory provides the bridge between the local and the global. Children develop through regular interactions in their immediate settings, the classroom, school, and family, which are themselves nested within wider systems of community, nation, and culture.³⁰ Read through this lens, the conference theme, *from local wisdom to global harmony*, describes a developmental trajectory rather than a slogan: love and tolerance are first experienced in proximal relationships shaped by local culture and only gradually extended to more distant others. Faith development research points in the same direction, showing that primary school children appropriate faith largely through stories, concrete practices, and trusted adults.³¹ Global harmony, in this view, does not begin as an abstract idea taught to children; it grows from the quality of love they experience and practise in their nearest circles.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, instrumental single-case study design,³² combined with a hermeneutic reading of selected Qur’anic verses, prophetic traditions, and classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship on love and tolerance. The case was used not to generalize statistically but to illuminate how local wisdom mediates Islamic values in school culture, while the textual analysis provided the normative lens for interpreting the empirical data. The study reports the first phase of the first author’s ongoing doctoral research; findings are therefore presented as preliminary and will be further tested in subsequent phases.

The research was conducted at a private Islamic elementary school in Malang, East Java, referred to as the “case school” to protect the anonymity of participants. The school was selected purposively because of its well-developed religious culture, its programmes connecting school and family, and its recognized practices in character education. Participants included the principal and vice-principal for curriculum, Islamic religious education teachers, classroom teachers, students in grades 4–6, and parents, selected through purposive and snowball sampling.

²⁸ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984); Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, “Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being,” *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78.

²⁹ Raihani, “A Whole-School Approach: A Proposal for Education for Tolerance in Indonesia,” *Theory and Research in Education* 9, no. 1 (2011): 23–39; Raihani, “Creating a Culture of Religious Tolerance in an Indonesian School,” *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 4 (2014): 541–60.

³⁰ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

³¹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

³² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018); John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018).



Data for this phase were collected between February and August 2025 through participant observation of daily routines, religious activities, classroom interactions, and school events, recorded in structured field notes; semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, and parents, together with age-appropriate conversations with children using prompts, drawings, and short stories; and analysis of documents such as the school's vision and mission, activity schedules, and codes of conduct. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis³³ and the interactive model of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing.³⁴ Practices identified in the field were coded inductively, then mapped against two sets of sensitizing concepts: Javanese local wisdom values and Islamic scholarly concepts of love and tolerance. A matrix linking practices, local wisdom, Islamic sources, and ecosystem components was used to generate the pathways reported below.

Trustworthiness was pursued through prolonged engagement, triangulation of sources and techniques, member checking with school leaders and teachers, thick description, an audit trail, and peer debriefing within the research team.³⁵ Ethical procedures included research permits, informed consent from adult participants, parental consent and child assent for students, and the use of pseudonyms throughout.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The case school operates under an Islamic educational foundation and envisions students who are knowledgeable, of strong character, and environmentally conscious. Its curriculum integrates the national curriculum with the school's own programme, which emphasizes Qur'anic learning, congregational prayer, Islamic jurisprudence and history, and parental involvement. Most students and teachers come from Javanese Muslim families, so that Javanese idioms of courtesy and cooperation are part of the everyday language of the school. Analysis of the field data showed that the school's cultivation of love and tolerance rarely took the form of explicit lessons on these topics. Instead, it was carried by familiar local forms that teachers and parents recognized as both "good Javanese manners" and "Islamic character". Five pathways were identified, summarized in Table 1.

³³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

³⁴ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2020).

³⁵ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1985).



Table 1. Pathways Linking Local Wisdom, Islamic Scholarship, and Love and Tolerance in the Case School

Local wisdom	Observed school practices	Islamic scholarly roots	Ecosystem component	Love and tolerance nurtured
1. <i>Senyum, salam, sapa</i>	Morning greeting of students at the school gate; greetings of peace among students and staff	Spreading <i>salām</i> as the path to mutual love; a smile as charity	Culturally organized routines	Warmth and recognition of every person
2. <i>Gotong royong</i>	Weekly charitable giving (<i>infāq</i>); social service activities; shared duty roles	Cooperation in righteousness (<i>ta’āwun ‘alā al-birr</i> , Q 5:2)	Moral agency through responsible action	Love expressed as care and solidarity
3. <i>Andhap asor within uswah hasanah</i>	Teachers joining routines; gentle, private correction; praise for sincerity and effort	Mercy to the young and respect for the elder; the Prophet as exemplar (Q 33:21)	Teacher modelling and relational reinforcement	Reciprocal respect and trust
4. <i>Tepa slira</i>	<i>Muḥāsabah</i> (self-reflection); prophetic stories; “why” questions about everyday conduct	Loving for others what one loves for oneself	Reflective meaning-making	Empathy and perspective-taking
5. <i>Rukun</i>	Calm dialogue after quarrels or teasing; peer mediation; discussion of questions about other religions	Reconciliation (<i>iṣlāḥ</i> , Q 49:10); repelling evil with good (Q 41:34)	Moral agency and reflection	Non-violent handling of difference

Source: Authors’ analysis of field data (February–August 2025) and textual sources.

1. *Senyum, Salam, Sapa: Love Made Visible in Daily Routines*

The most visible expression of love in the case school was the morning ritual of *senyum, salam, sapa* (smiling, greeting, and welcoming), in which teachers received students at the gate and greetings of peace were exchanged throughout the day. This practice draws on a Javanese ethos of warm recognition while resonating directly with the prophetic teaching that spreading greetings of peace generates mutual love, and that a smile offered to another person counts as charity.³⁶ The routine therefore functioned as a daily enactment of the hadith rather than merely as a disciplinary procedure. Teachers interpreted the greeting as a way of ensuring that every child, regardless of background, ability, or mood, was seen and acknowledged at the start of the day. In ecosystem terms, the greeting is a *culturally organized routine*: it habituates children into a basic grammar of love, namely, that others deserve warmth and recognition. Its limitation, noted by teachers themselves, is that it can become mechanical when performed hurriedly or under supervision alone, which is why its meaning needs to be revisited through reflection.

³⁶ Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī*, Abwāb al-Birr wa al-Ṣilah (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1999).



2. Gotong Royong: Love that Acts through Care and Solidarity

Weekly charitable giving (*infāq*), social service activities, and shared duty roles gave children regular opportunities to act on behalf of others. School actors framed these activities in the vocabulary of *gotong royong*, the Javanese and national ideal of mutual cooperation, while grounding them in the Qur’anic command to cooperate in righteousness and piety.³⁷ The fusion is significant. *Gotong royong* supplies a familiar social form; the Qur’anic principle supplies an orientation toward *birr*, the goodness that seeks the welfare of others. Through these practices, love was experienced not only as a feeling but as responsibility: children shifted from being recipients of care to contributors to the wellbeing of their community. Within the ecosystem, this pathway corresponds to *moral agency through responsible action*, and it is the pathway through which love most naturally extends beyond the school, for example when charitable giving is directed to people outside the school community.

3. Andhap Asor within Uswah Ḥasanah: Reciprocal Respect Modelled by Teachers

Javanese culture places strong emphasis on *andhap asor* and *unggah-ungguh*, which in school translate into children’s courteous speech and respect toward teachers. The data suggest that what made this respect formative of love, rather than of mere deference, was the conduct of teachers as living examples (*uswah ḥasanah*).³⁸ Teachers who joined prayers and routines alongside students instead of supervising from the side, who corrected mistakes gently and privately, and who praised sincerity and effort rather than only correctness, modelled a form of respect that flowed in both directions. This reciprocity mirrors the prophetic statement that whoever does not show mercy to the young and respect to the elder is not of the Prophet’s community.³⁹ The hadith transforms the one-directional hierarchy that *hormat* can imply into a reciprocal relationship: respect moves upward, mercy moves downward. Conversely, participants identified inconsistency among adults, such as one teacher emphasizing compassion while another relied on embarrassment or harshness, as one of the factors that most weakened the school’s culture of love.

4. Tepa Slira: Empathy Cultivated through Reflection

Tepa slira, the Javanese virtue of measuring one’s behaviour by imagining oneself in another’s position, emerged as the local concept closest to the prophetic criterion of faith: loving for others what one loves for oneself. In the case school, this disposition was cultivated less through routines than through moments of reflection, such as *muḥāsabah* sessions, the retelling of prophetic stories, and teachers’ habit of asking children *why* a practice matters and *how* another person might feel. These moments helped children move from doing to understanding. Reflection was also the component that most clearly distinguished genuine love and tolerance from symbolic compliance, because it invited children to articulate reasons in their own words and to consider the perspectives of others. At the same time, teachers reported that reflection required time and skill and

³⁷ Al-Qur’an, al-Mā’idah [5]: 2.

³⁸ Al-Qur’an, al-Aḥzāb [33]: 21.

³⁹ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī*, Abwāb al-Birr wa al-Ṣilah, Bāb mā jā’a fi Raḥmat al-Ṣibyān.



was often the first activity to be sacrificed when the schedule became crowded, which makes it the most fragile pathway in the ecosystem.

5. Rukun: Handling Difference without Violence

Rukun, the ideal of harmonious relations, shaped how the school responded to quarrels, teasing, and questions about difference. When teachers treated such incidents as occasions for calm conversation rather than immediate punishment, and when older students were entrusted with helping peers resolve conflicts, children experienced tolerance as a way of treating people rather than as a topic to be memorized. These practices echo the Qur’anic call to reconcile between brothers and to repel evil with what is better.⁴⁰ Questions that children raised about the religious practices of neighbours or family acquaintances were, in the best cases, handled as opportunities to explain both the integrity of Islamic belief and the duty to treat others with kindness and justice. However, *rukun* also carries a risk: when harmony is understood as the absence of visible conflict, children may learn to suppress disagreement rather than resolve it. Where teachers combined *rukun* with genuine listening, the pathway nurtured non-violent ways of handling difference; where it was reduced to silencing, it produced only outward calm.

6. Concentric Circles of Love: From the Classroom to Humanity

Taken together, the five pathways did not operate as separate programmes but as an interconnected cycle anchored in shared Islamic values: routines created shared experiences of love, teachers modelled and reinforced them, reflection turned them into understanding, and responsible action allowed children to enact and extend them. Read through Bronfenbrenner’s nested systems, these pathways can be arranged as concentric circles (Figure 1). At the centre is the child, born in a state of *fiṭrah*.⁴¹ The first circle is the school culture ecosystem, in which love is practised daily. The second is the family and local community, whose wisdom supplies the cultural grammar of that love. The third is the nation, where love of the homeland and the commitments of Pancasila and religious moderation frame children’s belonging. The outermost circle is humanity and creation, the horizon of *rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn*. Love expands outward through these circles, while encounters with diversity flow back inward as occasions for tolerance and mutual knowing.

⁴⁰ Al-Qur’an, al-Hujurat [49]: 10; Fussilat [41]: 34.

⁴¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Janā’iz, ḥadīth on every child being born in a state of *fiṭrah*.

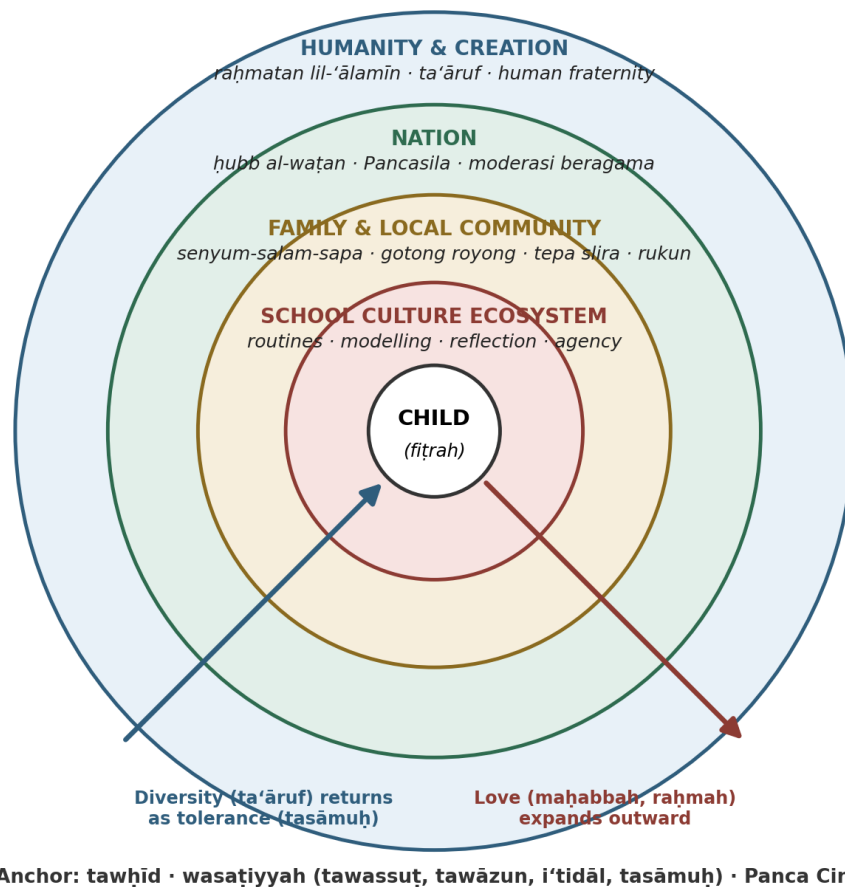


Figure 1. Concentric Circles of Love: From Local Wisdom to Global Harmony in Islamic Primary Education

Source: Developed by the authors.

Discussion

Love as the Affective Core of Religious Moderation

The findings suggest that love is not an additional topic alongside religious moderation but its affective core. The four national indicators of moderation, national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture,⁴² describe what a moderate person does; love explains why a person would want to do it. Without love, tolerance remains a cold arrangement of coexistence; with love, it becomes a warm disposition of kindness toward others. This interpretation supports the rationale of the KBC, which positions love as the spirit that animates the curriculum.⁴³ Yet the case also shows that love cannot be delivered as content. It is cultivated, in Schein’s terms, only when it reaches the level of basic assumptions, the taken-for-granted ways in which adults and children actually treat one another.⁴⁴ The ecosystem model explains how this happens: love becomes an assumption when it is repeatedly experienced in routines,

⁴² Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama*.

⁴³ Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Nomor 6077 Tahun 2025.

⁴⁴ Schein and Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*.



embodied by trusted adults, understood through reflection, and confirmed through one's own responsible action.

Local Wisdom: A Bridge, Not a Boundary

A central contribution of this study is to show how local wisdom functions as a bridge between Islamic scholarly ideals and children's lived experience. Because *senyum-salam-sapa*, *gotong royong*, *andhap asor*, *tepa slira*, and *rukun* are familiar from home and community, children did not experience the school's values as foreign. This continuity echoes the historical pattern of Islam in Nusantara, in which Islamic teachings were expressed through local forms,⁴⁵ and it confirms that values education is most effective when it is embedded in the overall climate of the school.⁴⁶ The study also suggests, however, that the relationship must run in both directions. Local wisdom gives Islamic values a familiar form, while Islamic principles purify and correct local wisdom where necessary. The prophetic emphasis on mercy toward the young turns hierarchical *hormat* into reciprocal respect; the Qur'anic emphasis on justice and reconciliation turns *rukun* from conflict avoidance into honest peacemaking. Local wisdom thus becomes a bridge to global harmony only when it is reflectively interpreted, not merely preserved; uncritically preserved, it risks becoming a boundary that separates “our ways” from those of others.

From Tolerance to Love: Extending the Circles toward Global Harmony

If love begins in proximal relationships, how is it extended to distant and different others? The concentric circles framework suggests that each circle prepares the next, but extension does not happen automatically. Allport's contact hypothesis holds that prejudice is reduced through cooperative contact under conditions of equal status and shared goals.⁴⁷ Many Islamic primary schools, including the case school, serve religiously homogeneous populations, which limits children's direct encounters with people of other faiths. In such settings, the outer circles must be brought closer through carefully designed experiences: stories of the Prophet's respectful conduct toward people of other faiths, such as his standing in respect for the funeral procession of a Jewish man with the words “Was he not a soul?”⁴⁸ joint social service with neighbouring communities, and learning about diverse cultures within Indonesia and beyond. Such experiences translate the Qur'anic ideal of *ta'aruf* into the language of childhood and align with the aims of global citizenship education.⁴⁹ They also embody the movement from minimal toleration toward the Islamic horizon of kindness and justice to all who live in peace,⁵⁰ the very movement envisioned by *A Common Word* and the *Document on Human Fraternity*.

A recurring concern among Muslim educators is that emphasizing love and tolerance might weaken children's religious commitment. The findings suggest the opposite. In the case school, love of others was consistently framed as an expression of

⁴⁵ Azra, *Islam Nusantara*; Wahid, “Pribumisasi Islam.”

⁴⁶ Marvin W. Berkowitz, “What Works in Values Education,” *International Journal of Educational Research* 50, no. 3 (2011): 153–58.

⁴⁷ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954).

⁴⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Janā'iz, Bāb man Qāma li-Janāzat Yahūdī.

⁴⁹ UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education*.

⁵⁰ Walzer, *On Toleration*; Abou El Fadl, *Place of Tolerance in Islam*.



love of God and of the Prophet, the first dimension of the *Panca Cinta*. Strong value foundations and rich religious routines nurtured confident Islamic belonging, while reflection and responsible action ensured that this belonging was expressed through kindness and fairness rather than exclusion. This reflects Kamali's account of *wasatīyyah* as excellence rather than compromise⁵¹ and Sahin's call for a reflective Islamic education in which commitment and openness grow together.⁵²

Implications for Policy and Practice

Several implications follow. At the school level, leaders can use the five pathways as a diagnostic tool, asking not only whether love-related programmes exist but whether each local practice is connected to teacher modelling, reflection, and opportunities for action. At the classroom level, teachers can make the meaning of familiar practices explicit by linking them to Qur'anic verses and prophetic stories, thereby turning habit into understanding. At the curriculum level, the KBC and the Profile of *Raḥmatan lil-‘Ālamīn* Students in madrasah curricula⁵³ can be implemented through projects that follow the full ecosystem cycle, beginning with local practices and ending with children's responsible action in the wider community. At the policy level, the implementation of Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 and the KBC in primary schools would benefit from evaluation that moves beyond counting activities toward assessing the coherence of school culture, the quality of teacher–student relationships, and children's ability to explain and enact love and tolerance. Finally, because children move daily between school, family, and community, partnerships with parents and local religious leaders are essential to keep the circles of love continuous.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has several limitations. It reports the first phase of an ongoing doctoral study conducted in a single Islamic elementary school within a predominantly Javanese Muslim context; its findings are therefore analytically rather than statistically generalizable⁵⁴ and should be regarded as propositions to be tested. Other regions of Indonesia possess different forms of local wisdom, such as *pela gandong* in Maluku or *menyama braya* in Bali, which may relate to Islamic values in different ways. The religious homogeneity of the case school also limited direct observation of interreligious encounters among children. Subsequent phases of the doctoral research will deepen the analysis of children's voices, and future studies could compare Islamic primary schools across cultural regions, examine the implementation of the KBC longitudinally, and develop instruments to assess love and tolerance as dispositions in the primary years.

⁵¹ Kamali, *Middle Path of Moderation*.

⁵² Abdullah Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions* 9, no. 11 (2018): 335, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335>.

⁵³ Keputusan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 347 Tahun 2022 tentang Pedoman Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Madrasah.

⁵⁴ Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*.



CONCLUSION

This study examined how Islamic primary education can nurture love and tolerance in children through the local wisdom already embedded in school culture. Drawing on the first phase of a doctoral case study in an Islamic elementary school in Malang and on Islamic scholarship on love and tolerance, it identified five pathways, *senyum-salam-sapa*, *gotong royong*, *andhap asor* within *uswah hasanah*, *tepa slira*, and *rukun*, through which familiar Javanese-Islamic practices translate the ideals of *maḥabbah*, *raḥmah*, and *tasāmuḥ* into routines, relationships, reflection, and responsible action. These pathways were integrated into a framework of concentric circles of love, in which love expands from the child and the school to the family, the nation, and humanity, while encounters with diversity return as occasions for tolerance and mutual knowing.

The study concludes that the journey *from local wisdom to global harmony* begins in the smallest circles of children’s lives. Local wisdom is not an obstacle to global harmony but its most accessible starting point, provided that it is reflectively interpreted in the light of Islamic principles rather than merely preserved. It is recommended that Islamic primary schools strengthen the links between local practices and the components of the school culture ecosystem, especially reflection and student agency, which are most easily neglected; that teacher development focus on consistent and reciprocal modelling of love; and that the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum be evaluated through the coherence of school culture rather than the number of programmes. In this way, the Qur’anic vision of *raḥmatan lil-‘ālamīn* can take root in children’s everyday lives and grow toward a more harmonious world.

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