

From Love Ethics to Implementation Readiness: A Mixed Methods Model of Islamic Religious Education Teacher Agency in the Love Curriculum

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Abstract

The Love Curriculum places relationships, mercy, empathy, moderation, and psychosocial safety as the operational pedagogical foundation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, but its transformation into classroom practice still requires an implementation readiness framework that can be tested and explained empirically. This study examines the influence of pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy on PAI teachers' implementation readiness, and explains how teachers interpret, negotiate, and translate this policy in teaching and learning. The design used was a sequential explanatory mixed methods design with a survey of 286 PAI teachers and qualitative follow-up through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving 24 teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), while qualitative data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. The results showed that pedagogical understanding was the strongest predictor of implementation readiness ($\beta = .42$; $p < .001$), followed by institutional support ($\beta = .31$; $p < .001$) and pedagogical efficacy ($\beta = .24$; $p = .002$), with R^2 implementation readiness of .61, Q^2 of .43, and SRMR of .052. Qualitative findings showed that teachers interpreted the Love Curriculum as a relational ethic that requires disciplinary boundaries, operational policy language, and school community support. The contribution of this study lies in an integrative model that links the love-oriented policy, teacher agency, and the implementation readiness in PAI. The implication is that teacher training needs to move from normative socialization to evidence-based pedagogical assistance, reflection, and observable classroom practice.

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INTRODUCTION

A curriculum that elevates love as an educational principle cannot be understood simply as permissive moral rhetoric, because it touches on how schools manage relationships, authority, discipline, and recognition of the dignity of students (Aldrup et al., 2022; Mahoney et al., 2021). In

PAI, this urgency becomes sharper because teachers not only convey normative knowledge but also demonstrate how religion functions as a source of wisdom, gentleness, responsibility, and social civility (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023). If this issue is not examined, the Love Curriculum risks remaining persuasive administrative rhetoric in documents but weak in classroom action and difficult to link to observable learning indicators. Further risks also arise at the policy level, namely that schools can declare themselves to have mainstreamed love values without knowing whether teachers really have the pedagogical understanding, institutional support, and efficacy to implement it. Research on teacher empathy shows that the quality of teacher-student interaction does not automatically arise from goodwill, but rather requires professional understanding, skills in identifying students' needs, and the ability to manage classroom responses (Aldrup et al., 2022). Thus, this research is important because it examines whether the Love Curriculum has become a pedagogical tool that can be implemented or is still limited to value rhetoric. In the context of PAI, failure to understand this distinction can narrow religious education into doctrinal transmission without a safe space for dialogue (Rissanen, 2021; Bowie et al., 2022). Therefore, this study places the perspective of PAI teachers as the main analytical basis to understand the acceptance, readiness, and negotiation of the implementation of affective-religious policies in schools.

Theoretically, love-based education is intertwined with relational pedagogy, social-emotional learning, moral education, and teacher agency, while contextually it encounters administrative burdens, diversity of student characters, pressure on curriculum achievement, and variations in school support (Cipriano et al., 2023; Kneen et al., 2023). When theory demands dialogical and empathetic learning, teachers often work in a space governed by schedules, assessments, parental expectations, and school cultures that do not always provide room for reflection (Kneen et al., 2023; Hizli Alkan, 2023). This tension is important because the Love Curriculum can only survive when teachers have the pedagogical autonomy to translate values into concrete classroom actions. Ryan and Deci (2020) show that autonomy, competence, and connectedness affect the quality of motivation, so policies that seek to foster pedagogical love need to support the professional needs of teachers, not just add normative instruction. At the same time, research on PAI design emphasizes that goals, materials, methods, and contexts must be aligned with each other so that religious education does not lose its transformational direction (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023). If the relationship between theory and context is not examined, questions about teacher readiness remain vague and policy recommendations can easily be reduced to ceremonial training. This is where theoretical and contextual issues flow into the need to test the relationships among readiness variables while interpreting teachers' experiences in depth. By combining measurement and interpretation, this study seeks to capture the structure of readiness and the meanings behind the numbers.

Previous studies have enriched the understanding of religious education, but most of them have not placed the Love Curriculum as an empirical object studied from the perspective of PAI teachers as direct implementers (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023; Sultmann et al., 2021; Tuna, 2022).

Sultmann et al. (2021) examined teachers' reflections in the development of the religious education curriculum and showed that teacher involvement strengthens curriculum meaning-making, but the context did not focus on PAI and did not test the relationship among implementation readiness variables. Sultmann et al. (2022) complemented these findings through a quantitative analysis of teachers' assessments of the religious education curriculum, but the study emphasized program acceptance more than the configuration of understanding, support, efficacy, and readiness. Tuna (2022) highlighted the professionalization of PAI teachers in the Austrian context and showed that professional recognition is related to education, employment status, and accreditation, but did not fully explain how affective-religious policies are translated into learning strategies. Rissanen (2021) developed a critical understanding of PAI, but the focus is mainly on conceptual orientation and theoretical implications, not on the readiness of teachers' implementation readiness in specific policies. Studies on teacher empathy show a relationship between teachers' social-emotional characteristics and the quality of classroom interactions, but have not tested the distinctive religious-pedagogical configurations in the Love Curriculum (Aldrup et al., 2022). Studies of social and emotional learning (SEL) show the benefits of universal intervention, but these studies have not sufficiently explained how PAI teachers integrate the values of love, mercy, and moderation into the design of religious learning (Cipriano et al., 2023). Based on this body of studies, this research is directed to answer the need for a model that combines quantitative structure and qualitative depth.

The literature on teacher agency shows that curriculum implementation never takes place as a mechanical transfer of policy documents to the classroom, but as an interpretive process influenced by experience, identity, support, and institutional conditions (Hizli Alkan, 2023; Pantić et al., 2021). Kneen et al. (2023) showed that teachers who play the role of curriculum developers can create spaces for agency, but these spaces are uneven and depend on the school ecosystem. Wang et al. (2021) found that professional development experiences can expand teachers' agency, but the process of localizing new pedagogy still presents ambivalence. Guo et al. (2021) showed that language teacher agency is formed ecologically through the interaction among policies, work contexts, and professional identities, so that teacher readiness cannot be reduced to administrative compliance. Hizli Alkan (2023) emphasized teachers' internal conversations in curriculum making, which is relevant to understanding how PAI teachers weigh love language, religious norms, and class demands. The main limitation of these studies is the lack of an empirical model that integrates love policies, implementation agency, and PAI practices in Indonesian schools (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). If this analytical gap is not filled, the discussion of the Love Curriculum will be easily divided between normative narratives and technical evaluations that remain disconnected. Therefore, this study designed quantitative testing and qualitative exploration so that teacher readiness can be understood as a relationship among understanding, support, efficacy, and the meanings of practice.

This study proposes that the readiness of PAI teachers in implementing the Love Curriculum is formed through the convergence among pedagogical understanding of the values of love, institutional support that enables relational practice, and pedagogical efficacy to translate values into learning strategies. The quantitative research question is: To what extent do pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy affect the PAI teachers' implementation readiness? The qualitative research question is: How do PAI teachers interpret, negotiate, and translate the Love Curriculum in learning practice? The first contribution of this research is to offer an implementation readiness model of the Love Curriculum that connects motivation theory, teacher agency, empathic pedagogy, and PAI design. A second contribution is to provide mixed-methods evidence that not only shows the most influential variables, but also explains the pedagogical and institutional reasons behind those patterns. The third contribution is to present operational indicators that can be used for instrument development, teacher training, and policy implementation evaluation. Practically, this research helps policymakers avoid an overly general socialization approach and directs attention to mentoring based on teachers' needs. Theoretically, this research expands the global conversation about religious education by including love as a pedagogical category that can be tested, interpreted, and developed methodologically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Love Curriculum as a relational pedagogy in Islamic Religious Education

An important shift in contemporary religious education moves from the mastery of material as the sole focus to learning that connects knowledge, relationships, moral emotions, and social responsibility (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023; Rissanen, 2021). The Love Curriculum in this study is defined as a curricular-pedagogical orientation of PAI that regulates teacher-student relations, learning experiences, classroom management, and value evaluation so that religious learning takes place safely, meaningfully, and socially responsibly (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023; Cipriano et al., 2023; Mahoney et al., 2021). This definition distinguishes pedagogical love from the personal affection of teachers because what is emphasized is systematic design, the quality of interaction, and the evaluative decisions that can be observed. Its indicators include rahmah (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023), empathy (Aldrup et al., 2022), safe dialogue (Bowie et al., 2022; Aldrup et al., 2022), religious moderation (Nasir & Rijal, 2021), respect for the dignity of learners (Warren, 2021; Berkowitz, 2021), and social responsibility (Mahoney et al., 2021). Self-determination theory suggests that learning that supports autonomy, competence, and connectedness underpins the idea that pedagogical love should be present as a climate that makes students feel recognized, capable, and meaningfully connected (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Within that framework, the Love Curriculum can be understood as an umbrella for teacher-student relations, learning motivation, character building, and non-coercive appreciation of religious values. Suhayib and Ansyari (2023) emphasized the importance of alignment of goals, curriculum components, and PAI context, so that the values of love need to be present in design and not just in advice. Therefore, this study positions

the Love Curriculum as a pedagogical construct that has conceptual, relational, and implementation aspects.

Studies of religious education show that teachers are the primary actors who transform curriculum design into meaningful learning experiences (Tuna, 2022; Sultmann et al., 2021). Rissanen (2021) shows that critical PAI requires a dialogue space that helps students understand religion reflectively, not just repeating normative knowledge. Bowie et al. (2022) added that teachers' engagement with sacred texts and academic knowledge requires a meta-approach that makes religious learning more dialogical. In the context of the Love Curriculum, these two findings clarify that PAI teachers must be able to maintain loyalty to religious sources while opening a learning space that respects students' questions. Sultmann et al. (2021) show that teachers' reflection in the development of religious curricula strengthens ownership of change, but that reflection requires the support of comprehensible policy structures and language. Tuna (2022) shows that the professionalization of PAI teachers is related to social legitimacy and academic capacity, so that the implementation of the Love Curriculum cannot be separated from professional development. This study interprets these findings as the basis that teachers' pedagogical understanding is an initial prerequisite for implementation readiness. Thus, pedagogical love needs to move from moral terminology to practical indicators that can be seen in the design, interaction, and evaluation of learning.

2. Teacher agency and curriculum implementation readiness

Contemporary debates about curriculum implementation are increasingly abandoning the linear compliance model and moving toward an understanding that teachers are policy interpreters who work through histories of experience, institutional relations, and professional considerations (Kneen et al., 2023; Hizli Alkan, 2023). Teacher agency is defined as the professional capacity to direct pedagogical choices, assess action opportunities, and adapt learning responses reflexively in a school ecosystem that always has limits and possibilities (Pantić et al., 2021; Kneen et al., 2023). This definition is important because the Love Curriculum will not survive if teachers are only asked to carry out instructions without space to assess student needs and classroom conditions. Relevant agency indicators include policy interpretation (Hizli Alkan, 2023), pedagogical autonomy (Kneen et al., 2023), professional reflection (Pantić et al., 2021), context adaptation (Wang et al., 2021), and school collaboration (Zhang et al., 2023). The theory of human agency underpins the idea that teachers are not passive implementers, but subjects who direct actions through intention, anticipation, reflection, and self-evaluation (Bandura, 2018). In the issue of the Love Curriculum, this framework frames the relationship among teacher beliefs, institutional opportunities, and pedagogical courage to translate the values of love into classroom decisions. Pantić et al. (2021) show that teachers' agency for change can be read through social and epistemic networks, so implementation readiness needs to be understood as both individual and relational qualities.

Therefore, this study examines the readiness of implementation as a result of pedagogical understanding, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy of teachers.

Suhayib and Ansyari (2023) showed that an effective PAI design requires harmony among goals, materials, methods, and contexts, so that teachers' understanding of the principle of love becomes the basis for organizing learning decisions. Aldrup et al. (2022) showed that teacher empathy is related to the quality of interaction and student outcomes, so that a pedagogical understanding of love can be placed as a source of implementation readiness. Sultmann et al. (2022) showed that teachers' acceptance of religious curriculum increases when the development and implementation components are clearly understood, so that conceptual understanding warrants testing as a predictor of readiness. This line of evidence introduces Hypothesis 1 as a test of the position of pedagogical understanding in implementation readiness.

H1: The pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum has a positive effect on the PAI teachers' implementation readiness.

3. Institutional support, pedagogical efficacy, and PAI classroom practice

Shifting curriculum policies require schools not only to provide documents, but also to manage a professional environment that allows teachers to learn, experiment, fail safely, and improve their practices (Oskarsdottir et al., 2021; Cleary et al., 2022). Institutional support is defined as the capacity of the school system to provide professional conditions that enable teachers to understand policies, test strategies, improve practices, and maintain consistency in the implementation of the Love Curriculum (Oskarsdottir et al., 2021; Cleary et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). This definition places schools as ecosystems that can accelerate or slow down teacher readiness. Indicators of institutional support include targeted training (Oskarsdottir et al., 2021), supportive leadership (Pantić et al., 2021), teacher learning community (Zhang et al., 2023), availability of teaching tools (Sultmann et al., 2022; MacPhail et al., 2021), reflection time (Hizli Alkan, 2023), and classroom innovation space (Kneen et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Social systems theory of learning provides the basis that pedagogical change requires interaction among individuals, structures, artifacts, and professional relationships that mutually shape one another (Tronsmo & Nerland, 2022). In the Love Curriculum, institutional support affirms collaborative practices that make the values of love not depend on the charisma of a particular teacher, but on a replicable school culture. West et al. (2022) point out the importance of systems for monitoring social-emotional learning, while Mahoney et al. (2021) emphasize that SEL integration requires a systemic approach. Therefore, institutional support is predicted to contribute to the readiness of PAI teachers to implement the Love Curriculum.

Mahoney et al. (2021) showed that social-emotional learning is effective when schools build a consistent support system, so love-oriented policies require institutional infrastructure. Kneen et al. (2023) showed that the space for teacher agency develops when schools give legitimacy to

curriculum initiatives, so that institutional support can strengthen implementation readiness. Zhang et al. (2023) emphasized that professional collaboration expands teachers' capacity to develop curriculum innovations, so that collective support deserves to be positioned as a predictor of readiness. The convergence of these findings leads to Hypothesis 2 as a test of the role of institutional support in implementation readiness.

H2: Institutional support has a positive effect on the PAI teachers' implementation readiness.

Pedagogical efficacy is defined as the teachers' professional confidence to design and enact learning actions, maintain perseverance, and evaluate the success of love-based PAI strategies in diverse classroom situations (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023). The definition emphasizes professional beliefs related to action, rather than general optimism. Indicators of pedagogical efficacy include confidence in designing learning (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023), empathetic classroom management (Wink et al., 2021), reflective communication (Warren, 2021; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023), value assessment (Berkowitz, 2021; Dignath & Veenman, 2021), and adaptation to students' needs (Roorda et al., 2021).

4. Conceptual model and hypothesis development

The development of the conceptual model in this study moves from motivational theory, teacher agency, and empathic pedagogy to an implementation readiness framework that can be quantitatively tested and qualitatively explored in depth (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Bandura, 2018). Self-efficacy theory provides the basis that teachers' confidence in their capacity to act affects the choice of strategy, perseverance in facing obstacles, and the quality of self-evaluation in policy implementation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023). In the context of the Love Curriculum, this framework links teachers' pedagogical beliefs with the courage to manage classrooms in an empathetic, dialogical, and dignified manner. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2023) explained that self-efficacy is related to motivation and action management, so that teachers who feel capable are better prepared to translate the values of love into learning strategies. Warren (2021) showed that empathic involvement in the classroom requires sensitivity and pedagogical responses, so efficacy becomes important when teachers face diverse student behaviors. Cleary et al. (2022) showed that professional development can shift teacher outcomes and implementation approaches, so that pedagogical efficacy warrants testing as a driver of readiness. This rationale leads to Hypothesis 3 as a test of the contribution of pedagogical efficacy to implementation readiness.

H3: Pedagogical efficacy has a positive effect on the PAI teachers' implementation readiness.

The resulting model places implementation readiness as an endogenous variable predicted by the pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum, institutional support, and pedagogical

efficacy. The three predictors are not understood as a list of stand-alone factors, but as configurations that support each other in policy implementation. Pedagogical understanding provides conceptual language, institutional support provides space and resources, while pedagogical efficacy energizes action. In the mixed methods tradition, this quantitative model needs to be extended through qualitative data so that the numbers do not lose teachers' experiences that explain why a particular relationship is strong or weak (Fetters & Molina-Azorín, 2021). Guetterman et al. (2021) emphasized that data integration can be shown through integrative displays (joint displays), so that the survey findings and qualitative themes in this study are integrated in the discussion section. Figure 1 presents a conceptual model that places three hypotheses on a direct path to implementation readiness. This model also marks the qualitative component as an explanation of the statistical patterns, rather than a separate narrative addition. Thus, the theoretical design and methodological design were arranged to reinforce each other from the beginning of the research.

Figure 1 visualizes the hypothesis structure that connects pedagogical understanding, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy with the readiness to implement the Love Curriculum.

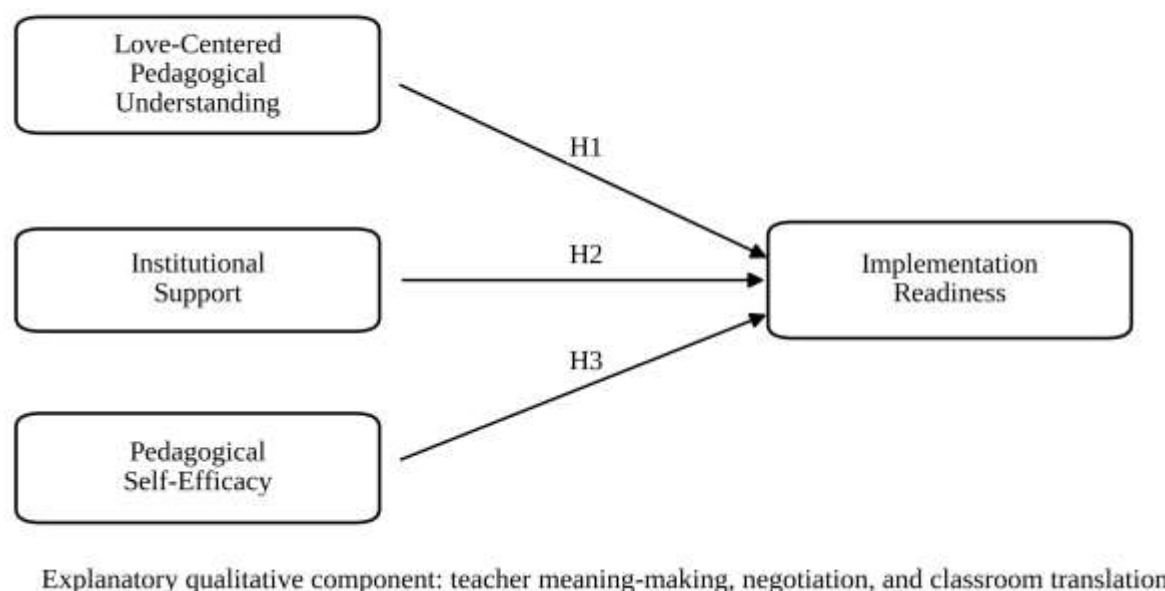


Fig 1. Conceptual model of research

Figure 1 shows that the PAI teachers' implementation readiness is positioned as the output of three sources of readiness, namely pedagogical understanding, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy. The H1, H2, and H3 pathways mark that the model not only examines policy acceptance, but also assesses the predictive power of conceptual, structural, and psychological

factors. The qualitative component at the bottom of the image shows that this study examines teachers' experiences to explain the patterns of relationships that emerge in the quantitative analysis. With this position, the conceptual model serves as a bridge among theory, hypothesis testing, and qualitative interpretation.

METHODS

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed methods design because the first goal of the study was to test the relationships among variables, while the second goal was to explain the meaning and negotiation of teachers behind quantitative patterns (Fetters & Molina-Azorín, 2021). Fetters and Molina-Azorín (2021) assert that the strength of mixed methods design lies in the integration of results, not in the placement of quantitative and qualitative data side by side without analytical dialogue. In this study, a survey was conducted first to map the influence of pedagogical understanding, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy on implementation readiness. Subsequently, interviews, observations, and document analysis were conducted to interpret how teachers enacted, limited, or negotiated the Love Curriculum in the classroom. This approach was chosen because the Love Curriculum has a dimension that can be measured through teachers' perceptions as well as an experiential dimension that requires in-depth interpretation. Quantitative data provided an overview of general patterns, while qualitative data provided explanations of contexts, language, and practices that cannot be reduced to scores. Integration was carried out through an integrative display (joint display) in the discussion so that the relationship between numbers and themes could be seen systematically (Guetterman et al., 2021). Thus, the research design produced outcomes that were more policy-relevant and more sensitive to the experience of PAI teachers.

The quantitative participants were 286 PAI teachers at the junior high school and high school levels in three districts in West Java, while the qualitative participants were 24 teachers selected from a variety of high, medium, and low readiness scores. Quantitative sampling techniques used stratified random sampling based on school level and educational unit status to better represent contextual variations; structuring of these variations is important in mixed methods design because survey results need to be prepared to be explained through informative qualitative case selection (Fetters & Molina-Azorín, 2021). Qualitative participant recruitment used maximum variation sampling because the research required a variety of experiences, not just a large number of informants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The survey was conducted through a five-point Likert questionnaire that measured four latent constructs. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' meanings of love, mercy, discipline, moderation, and the limits of implementation. Classroom observations were conducted to check the suitability between the teacher's narrative and learning practices, while document analysis was conducted on teaching modules, assessment rubrics, reflection notes, and learning materials. All participants received information on the

purpose of the research, the right to withdraw, and the guarantee of confidentiality. The identity of the teacher, school, and specific location was anonymized throughout the data excerpt.

Details of the design, participants, and data collection techniques are presented in Table 1 to show the operational relationship between the quantitative and qualitative components.

Table 1. Research design, participants, and data collection techniques

Components	Quantitative	Qualitative
Design	Explanatory survey to test the influence among variables.	Thematic deepening to explain statistical patterns and classroom practices.
Participants	286 PAI teachers from junior high and high school.	24 PAI teachers based on variations in readiness scores.
Sampling/recruitment	Stratified random sampling based on school level and status.	Sampling of maximum variation based on school readiness scores, experience, and context.
Data collection	A five-point Likert questionnaire with 17 items.	Interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of learning documents.
Analysis	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).	Reflective thematic analysis and source triangulation.

Table 1 shows that the study began with a survey of 286 PAI teachers and continued with an in-depth qualitative exploration of 24 teachers selected based on variations in readiness scores. A total of 17 items on the questionnaire were used to test four latent constructs through PLS-SEM, whereas interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to explain statistical patterns contextually. This composition makes qualitative data not an administrative complement, but serve as an explanatory device for quantitative results.

The quantitative instrument grid is presented in Table 2 so that each construct, indicator, item code, and number of items can be traced to the relevant references.

Table 2. Quantitative instrument grid

Construct	Indicator	Item code	Number of items
Pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum	Rahmah (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023); empathy (Aldrup et al., 2022); Safe dialogue (Bowie et al., 2022; Aldrup et al., 2022); religious moderation (Nasir & Rijal, 2021)	LPU1-LPU4	4

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Institutional support	Training (Oskarsdottir et al., 2021); leadership (Pantić et al., 2021); learning communities (Zhang et al., 2023); teaching tools (Sultmann et al., 2022; MacPhail et al., 2021)	INS1-INS4	4
Pedagogical efficacy	Learning design (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023); empathic classes (Wink et al., 2021); reflective communication (Warren, 2021; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023); adaptation to students' needs (Roorda et al., 2021)	PSE1-PSE4	4
Implementation readiness	Clarity of action (Kneen et al., 2023); commitment to practice (Wang et al., 2021); evaluation ability (Cleary et al., 2022); classroom integration (Mahoney et al., 2021; Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023); sustainability (Cleary et al., 2022)	IR1-IR5	5

Table 2 shows that the instrument contains 17 items that are proportionally divided: four items for pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum, four items for institutional support, four items for pedagogical efficacy, and five items for implementation readiness. The placement of five items on the readiness construct was chosen because endogenous variables require a broader scope of indicators, especially clarity of action, commitment to practice, evaluation ability, classroom integration, and sustainability. Each indicator phrase is placed side by side with a citation so that the conceptual basis of the instrument can be traced directly.

The qualitative instrument grid is shown in Table 3 to maintain traceability among the focus of the interview, observations, documents, and theoretical sources.

Table 3. Qualitative instrument grid

Focus	Operational indicators	Data source	References
The meaning of pedagogical love	The way the teacher explains mercy, discipline, dialogue, and respect for the dignity of students.	Interviews and teaching module documents	(Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023; Warren, 2021)
Implementation negotiation	Teachers' considerations of policies, workload, school culture, and student needs.	Interviews and observations	(Hizli Alkan, 2023; Kneen et al., 2023)
Classroom practice translation	Aperception strategies, discussion of values, reflective assessment, and responses to student behavior.	Observations and documents	(Aldrup et al., 2022; Berkowitz, 2021)

Support and barriers	Training, leadership, time, and context resistance.	teacher community, reflection tools,	Interviews and school documents	(Mahoney et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023)
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Table 3 shows that the qualitative data are directed to four main foci, namely the meaning of pedagogical love, implementation negotiation, translation of classroom practices, and support and barriers. Each focus is paired with a different data source so that the interview does not stand alone, but is cross-checked through classroom observation and learning documents. This structure reinforces the credibility of the findings because the patterns that emerge can be examined from the teacher's language, learning behavior, and teaching tools.

Content validity of the quantitative instrument was examined by three PAI experts, one curriculum expert, and one methodologist with an Aiken index ranging from .82 to .94 (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2023). The trial was conducted on 48 teachers outside the main sample and resulted in a corrected item-total correlation between .51 and .78. Initial reliability showed Cronbach's alpha of .86 for pedagogical understanding, .84 for institutional support, .88 for pedagogical efficacy, and .90 for implementation readiness. Analysis of the measurement model was conducted using outer loading, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and heterotrait-monotrait ratio according to PLS-SEM reporting practices (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022). The structural model was examined through the path coefficient, t-value, p value, R^2 , Q^2 , and f^2 . Qualitative analysis followed reflexive thematic analysis with stages of data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and interpretive writing (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Credibility was maintained through method triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and discussions among researchers. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through analytical memos, coding decision records, and systematic storage of document proofs.

RESULTS

1. Predictors of Love Curriculum Implementation Readiness

Quantitative results are presented to answer the first research question on the influence of pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy on the PAI teachers' implementation readiness. Preliminary data showed no indicators with loadings below .70, so all items were retained in the measurement model. The composite reliability for all constructs ranged from .88 to .92, while the average variance extracted ranged from .65 to .72. The highest heterotrait-monotrait ratio value was .74, so the discriminant validity was within acceptable limits (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Descriptive statistics showed that pedagogical understanding had the highest average, but implementation readiness was not yet at the maximum level. This indicated that there was a distance between understanding the values of love and enacting them systematically in teaching and learning. Table 4 presents descriptive statistics, reliability, and convergent validity

of the constructs. These results served as the basis for interpreting the structural model without neglecting the quality of the measurements. A summary of measurement quality and construct descriptions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics, reliability, and convergent validity

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	Loading range
Pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum	4.12	.48	.86	.90	.69	.77-.84
Institutional support	3.74	.62	.84	.89	.67	.75-.81
Pedagogical efficacy	3.91	.55	.88	.91	.72	.79-.86
Implementation readiness	3.83	.58	.90	.92	.70	.78-.85

Table 4 shows that all constructs had adequate reliability because Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .84 to .90, while the composite reliability ranged from .89 to .92. AVE values ranging from .67 to .72 indicated that the indicators captured construct variance quite strongly. The highest average was found in the pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum at 4.12, while institutional support had the lowest average of 3.74. This difference showed that the teacher's individual understanding was more established than the school's structural support. The results of hypothesis testing on the structural model are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of PLS-SEM structural model

Pathway	β	t	p	f ²	Verdict
Pedagogical understanding → Readiness for implementation	.42	7.84	<.001	.26	Supported
Institutional support → Implementation readiness	.31	5.69	<.001	.17	Supported
Pedagogical efficacy → Readiness for implementation	.24	3.91	.002	.09	Supported
R ² implementation readiness	.61				Substantively strong
Q ² implementation readiness	.43				Good predictive relevance

Table 5 shows that pedagogical understanding had the largest path coefficient of $\beta = .42$, making it the strongest predictor of implementation readiness. Institutional support was also significant with $\beta = .31$, while pedagogical efficacy was significant with $\beta = .24$. An R² value of .61 indicated that three predictors explained 61% of the variation in implementation readiness, while a Q² of .43 indicated good predictive relevance. Substantively, these results showed that teachers' readiness was not only determined by personal beliefs, but also by clarity of understanding and support of the school environment.

To show the consistency between the conceptual model and the test results, Figure 2 presents the measurement model, path coefficient, R^2 , Q^2 , and SRMR.

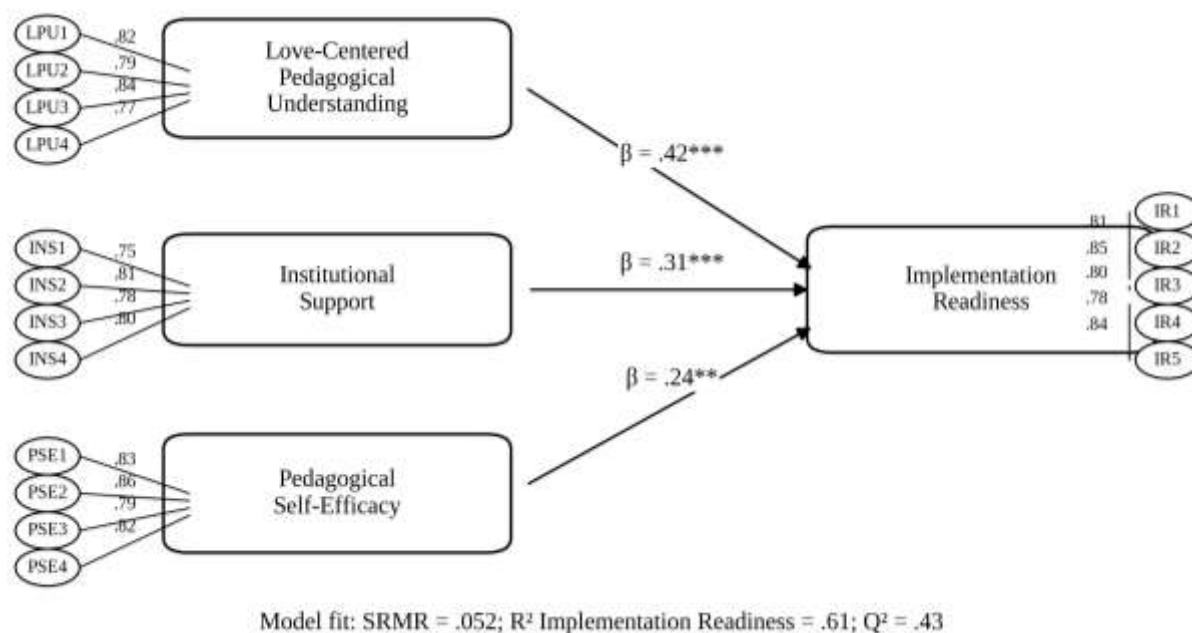


Fig 2. Outer loading model and structural path results

Figure 2 uses the same visual pattern as Figure 1, but adds computed values to the structural paths and measurement indicators. The pedagogical understanding pathway to implementation readiness shows $\beta = .42$, the institutional support pathway shows $\beta = .31$, and the pedagogical efficacy pathway shows $\beta = .24$. Each construct has indicator paths corresponding to the instrument grid, namely four indicators for three predictor constructs and five indicators for implementation readiness. The lowest loading was .75 on the institutional support indicator, while the highest loading was .86 on the pedagogical efficacy indicator; with $SRMR = .052$, $R^2 = .61$, and $Q^2 = .43$, the model had consistent measurement and prediction support.

2. Meaning, Negotiation, and Translation of Love Curriculum Practice

The qualitative results answered the second research question on how PAI teachers interpret, negotiate, and translate the Love Curriculum. Interview data showed that most teachers viewed love not as boundless tenderness, but as a relational ethic that still requires discipline, fairness, and learning limits. Classroom observations showed that teachers with high readiness scores were more likely to use reflective questions, non-judgmental language, and student experience-based value assessments. Document analysis showed a clear difference in quality between modules that only used the word love as a theme and modules that translated it into goals, activities, assessments, and reflections. Table 6 presents the codification of qualitative data. After the table, the narrative of the

results is organized by core themes so that the relationship among empirical evidence, interpretation, and research questions remains clear. The themes are not presented as normative lists, but as patterns that emerge from the convergence of interviews, observations, and documents. Thus, qualitative findings explained why pedagogical understanding was the strongest predictor of quantitative outcomes. The codification of qualitative data is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Qualitative data codification

Theme	Core meaning	Databases	Subcode
Love as a relational ethic	Teachers interpret love as rahmah that still has a pedagogical structure.	Interviews with 18 teachers; observation of 14 classes; Document 19 modules	Operational mercy, non-judgmental language, disciplinary boundaries
Negotiation between values and administration	Teachers feel that the policy language needs to be translated into concrete classroom instruction.	Interviews with 21 teachers; Document 22 modules	Administrative burden, example needs, adaptation space
Empathetic classroom practice	Teachers are ready to use dialogue, reflection, and value assessment if they have examples and support.	Observation of 16 classes; An Interview with 20 Teachers	Reflective questioning, relationship recovery, experiential assessment
Institutions as enablers or constraints	Schools with learning communities make teachers more courageous to try love-based practices.	Interviews with 17 teachers; 12 School Program Documents	Leadership, training, collaboration, reflection time

Table 6 shows that the strongest qualitative theme concerns the relationship between pedagogical interpretation and the translation of classroom practice. The institutional theme is also important because it explains why school support has a significant path coefficient in the quantitative model. The data set showed that the theme of love as a relational ethic appeared in 18 interviews, 14 classroom observations, and 19 teaching modules, while value-administrative negotiation appeared in 21 interviews and 22 modules. These figures indicate that the main problem for teachers is not the acceptance of the term love, but the translation of the term into classroom actions and operational teaching tools.

a. Love as a relational ethic

The theme of love as a relational ethic showed that PAI teachers interpreted the Love Curriculum as a warm and directed pedagogical relationship. They did not separate rahmah from discipline, because discipline was understood as a way of maintaining the moral and psychosocial

safety of students. The interview data confirmed that the language of reprimands, how to correct answers, and attitudes toward students' mistakes were the main spaces for the actualization of love. Classroom observation showed a similar pattern through teacher practices that deferred negative assessments, provided opportunities for improvement, and turned corrections into dialogue. Learning documents supported these findings when the value of mercy began to be placed in the goals, activities, and rubrics of reflection. This pattern explained why pedagogical understanding had the strongest path coefficient in quantitative results. In this theme, love did not function as an affective slogan, but as a logic of action that governed language, boundaries, and learning decisions. The relationship between the data and the findings can be seen through the following snippet.

The following interview excerpt represents the data patterns on this subtheme.

I understand the Love Curriculum as a way for teachers to make students feel safe to ask questions, but being safe doesn't mean being free from rules. When the student makes a mistake, I try to reprimand him with non-embarrassing language, then ask him to improve his attitude. For me, love in PAI is a mercy that has direction, not just understanding all behavior. (W-GPAI-07)

The excerpt shows that teachers interpret love as directed mercy, not neglect of student behavior. The emphasis on non-humiliating language shows that corrective action can still maintain the dignity of students.

The following observation excerpt represents the data patterns in this subtheme.

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher greets the students by mentioning some of their experiences in the previous meeting. When one student answers incorrectly, the teacher does not interrupt the answer, but asks another student to respond with the sentence "let us improve it together." This pattern makes corrections take place without a condescending tone. (O-KLS-12)

The excerpt shows that academic correction can be done without demeaning students. The pattern of "perfecting together" is a concrete example of how love translates into a safe classroom language.

b. Negotiation between values and administration

The theme of negotiation between values and administration showed that PAI teachers accepted the orientation of the Love Curriculum, but still needed an operational language that was economical, clear, and easy to link with the teaching module. Interviews showed that teachers were often hesitant to translate the term love into learning objectives, activities, and assessments because the examples available were not always adequate. The module document showed two different patterns, namely a module that only contains the term love as a value statement and a module that turned it into role-playing activities, reflection rubrics, and behavioral indicators. The tension was not a rejection of policy, but a need for policy language that does not add to the administrative

burden without improving classroom practices. These data also explained why institutional support remained significant in the structural model. Teachers were better prepared when schools provided sample teaching materials, discussion rooms, and opportunities to collaboratively revise modules. Thus, value-administrative negotiation became a link between policy language and learning practice. The relationship between the data and the findings can be seen through the following snippet.

The following interview excerpt represents the data patterns on this subtheme.

I agree with the idea of love, but we often ask how love should be written in modules. If it is only written "love others", it is easy for teachers to write it, but they do not necessarily know the activities and assessments. We need an operational example that doesn't make the module thicker. (W-GPAI-15)

The excerpt emphasizes that the main problem for teachers is at the level of operationalization, not in the acceptance of values. Teachers need examples that link goals, activities, and assessments without overburdening administration.

The following document excerpt represents the data patterns on this subtheme.

The teacher's teaching module contains the objective of "students show a merciful attitude in resolving small conflicts", role-playing activities, and reflection rubrics that assess empathic language, moral reasons, and improvement plans. This structure shows the translation of the values of love into an observable teaching tool. (D-MOD-08)

The excerpt shows that a good teaching document is able to turn the values of love into observable activities and rubrics. Thus, the teaching tool serves as a bridge between policy norms and classroom actions.

c. Empathetic classroom practice

The theme of empathic classroom practice showed that the Love Curriculum was most visible when teachers connected moral content with students' life experiences. Observations showed that prepared teachers tended to use reflective questions, small group discussions, and concrete self-improvement assignments. This practice made PAI learning not stop at conceptual explanation but moved toward the recognition of moral experiences that are close to students. Interviews reinforced this pattern because teachers stated that students understood morals more easily when learning started from situations they had experienced. The assessment document also showed the presence of a rubric that assessed empathic language, moral reasons, and action plans. These findings explained that pedagogical efficacy worked through the teacher's courage to choose a more dialogical strategy. Efficacy did not appear as an abstract belief, but as the ability to manage pedagogical risks when students' personal experiences were brought into the classroom. The relationship between the data and the findings can be seen through the following snippet.

The following observation excerpt represents the data patterns in this subtheme.

The teacher asks students to write down experiences when they have felt unappreciated, then relate it to the discussion of morals towards others. The discussion takes place in small groups and teachers go around to keep personal stories from being used as jokes. At the end of the session, students write down one corrective action that will be taken this week. (O-KLS-18)

The excerpt shows that empathic learning requires safe space management when students' personal experiences are discussed in the classroom. The corrective action task at the end of the session showed that moral reflection was directed toward concrete practice.

The following interview excerpt represents the data patterns on this subtheme.

Children understand morals more easily when I start from their experience. After that, I will relate it to textual evidence and the Prophet's example. If I lecture directly, they nod, but they are not necessarily touched. (W-GPAI-03)

The excerpt shows that students' experiences are the entry point for bringing moral content to life. The teacher does not eliminate the scriptural evidence, but places it after experience so that the moral understanding is more meaningful.

d. Institutions as enablers or constraints

The institutional theme as an enabler or constraint showed that the readiness of PAI teachers was strongly shaped by the presence of a learning community, reflective supervision, and cross-role support in schools. Interviews showed that teachers felt more courageous to use a love approach when there was a common language among PAI teachers, Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers, and school leaders. The school's program documents also showed that the learning community's schedule and reflective supervision helped the values of love shift from a moral statement to a mentoring agenda. In schools with weak support, teachers tended to rely on personal interpretations so that practices among teachers became uneven. These data explained why institutional support had a coefficient of $\beta = .31$ and was the second strongest predictor. Schools provided not only facilities but also legitimacy for more empathetic pedagogical experimentation. Thus, the Love Curriculum was more likely to be sustainable when maintained as a collective culture, not merely an individual teacher's initiative. The relationship between the data and the findings can be seen through the following snippet.

The following interview excerpt represents the data patterns on this subtheme.

At our school there is a small meeting of PAI and BK teachers every two weeks. We discuss the students' cases without calling them bad students. From there, I learned that the Love Curriculum requires a common language, not the work of PAI teachers alone. (W-GPAI-21)

The excerpt shows that the Love Curriculum requires a collective language across school roles. The meeting of PAI teachers and Guidance and Counseling expands the practice of love from individual actions to institutional coordination.

The following document excerpt represents the data patterns on this subtheme.

The school's program shows a teacher learning community agenda, reflective supervision schedule, and attitude assessment training plan. The document is not fully developed, but it provides space for teachers to turn the values of love into a mentoring program. (D-PRS-04)

The excerpt shows that the learning community agenda and reflective supervision provide space for teachers to practice the Love Curriculum in a more structured manner. School program documents provide evidence that institutional support can turn values into mentoring programs.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the influence of pedagogical understanding of the Love Curriculum, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy on the PAI teachers' implementation readiness and explain how teachers interpret and translate the policy in the classroom. The first finding showed that pedagogical understanding is the strongest predictor of implementation readiness with a coefficient of $\beta = .42$. These results are in line with Suhayib and Ansyari (2023) who emphasized that PAI design needs to align goals, components, and context so that religious values are not separated from learning actions. This result is also supported by Sultmann et al. (2022) who showed that teachers' acceptance of religious curriculum strengthens when the development and implementation components are clearly understood. Aldrup et al. (2022) strengthened this interpretation by showing that teacher empathy is related to the quality of teacher-student interaction. Warren (2021) provided further support because empathic engagement in the classroom requires a lively and responsive pedagogical experience. Mahoney et al. (2021) showed that social-emotional learning is effective when values are translated systemically, not just used as rhetoric. From a contrasting perspective, Jackson (2021) emphasized that the implementation of religious education policies can be hampered by power configurations and wider strategic fields. Hizli Alkan (2023) also showed that teachers' internal conversations can result in variations in actions even though the policies received are the same. Tuna (2022) showed that the professionalization of PAI teachers is influenced by legitimacy, status, and experience, so pedagogical understanding is not always enough without institutional recognition. Pantić et al. (2021) added that teacher agency is tied to social and epistemic networks, not mere personal capacities. This difference could be explained because this research focused on the love-oriented policy that directly demands a pedagogical interpretation; therefore, understanding is the entry point before structural and psychological factors worked.

The second finding showed that institutional support had a significant effect on implementation readiness with a coefficient of $\beta = .31$. These findings are in line with Kneen et al. (2023) who showed that spaces for teacher agency develop when schools provide opportunities to play a role in curriculum development. Pantić et al. (2021) supported this result because teachers' agency for change is formed in social and epistemic networks, not just in the minds of individuals.

Zhang et al. (2023) emphasized that teacher collaboration strengthens curriculum innovation, so that collective support becomes the energy of implementation. Oskarsdottir et al. (2021) pointed out that professional development needs to be designed as a framework that helps teachers transfer knowledge to practice. West et al. (2022) added that a monitoring system and institutional support are important to maintain the sustainability of social-emotional learning. However, these findings differ from Wang et al. (2021) who showed that professional development experiences can produce ambivalence when new pedagogies are localized. Guo et al. (2021) also showed that teachers' agency does not always become stronger even though technology or the environment provides new opportunities. Cleary et al. (2022) emphasized that professional development can produce variations in outcomes when implementation support and teacher readiness do not move in the same direction. Tronsmo and Nerland (2022) showed that the development of local curricula is influenced by complex social artifacts and practices. This difference could be understood because institutional support in this study is not only interpreted as training, but also as leadership, learning communities, teaching tools, and reflection time that directly address the implementation needs of the Love Curriculum.

The third finding showed that pedagogical efficacy had a positive effect on implementation readiness with a coefficient of $\beta = .24$, although the strength was smaller than the other two predictors. These findings are in line with Schunk and DiBenedetto (2023) who emphasized that efficacy is associated with motivation, choice of action, and perseverance in the face of obstacles. Bandura (2018) provided the basis that human agency works through intentionality, anticipation, and self-reflection. Wink et al. (2021) supported this finding because teacher empathy can influence responses to student behavior and teacher-student relationships. Malin (2026) showed that empathy-compassion training can improve teachers' listening competence, which is relevant to efficacy in relational practice. Cleary et al. (2022) showed that professional development can shift teacher outcomes and implementation methods. On the other hand, Roorda et al. (2021) reminded that teacher-student relationships are not always positive in a linear manner because student dependency and contextual characteristics can change their impact. Opdenakker (2021) showed that teacher behaviors that support or hinder student needs can have different effects on academic engagement. Collie et al. (2023) showed that well-being and teacher-student relationships are interrelated, so efficacy can weaken if teachers are under high work pressure. Burns et al. (2021) emphasized that teacher support has academic and social-emotional dimensions that do not always move together. These differences show that pedagogical efficacy is important, but in the Love Curriculum it works more effectively when supported by conceptual understanding and a school ecosystem that provides space for practice.

Qualitative findings showed that PAI teachers interpreted the Love Curriculum as a relational ethic that still had boundaries, discipline, and pedagogical direction. These findings support Berkowitz (2021) who placed character education as a school design that requires consistent

principles, relationships, and practices. Nucci et al. (2021) reinforced this position because moral education requires consideration of students' development, context, and social experience. Schein and Gray (2021) added an explanation that morality is often framed through harm and relational accountability, so the language of love must be translated into practices that reduce social wounds in the classroom. Cipriano et al. (2023) showed that SEL interventions have a stronger effect when implemented in a structured manner. In the context of PAI, the structure needed to be aligned with the objectives, materials, methods, and context of learning (Suhayib & Ansyari, 2023). Siddiqui et al. (2021) also supported that social-emotional programs require measurable design in order to contribute to educational outcomes. However, Bowie et al. (2022) reminded that religious learning based on sacred texts has hermeneutic complexity that cannot be simplified into affective strategies. Rissanen (2021) showed that PAI critically demands awareness of the possibility of closing dialogue if religious authority is used in an unreflective manner. MacPhail et al. (2021) emphasized that teachers' voices in curriculum reform are often not heard enough. Sultmann et al. (2022) added that teachers' acceptance of religious curriculum can differ according to the clarity of the components and implementation process. This difference explained why the teachers in this study asked for an operational example: they did not reject the Love Curriculum, but needed a pedagogical language that maintained religious depth as well as clarity of action.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a Love Curriculum implementation readiness model that combines relational pedagogy, teacher agency, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy in the context of PAI. This novelty is not merely in the selection of a new topic, but also in the way the research connects quantitative variables with qualitative data on meaning, negotiation, and translation of practice. This model shows that love-based policies are not sufficiently evaluated through normative acceptance, because what determines readiness is the teacher's ability to translate values into learning design, classroom interaction, and assessment. The implication of this research is the need for PAI teacher training that moves from the socialization of terms to teaching-material clinics, practical observation, reflective supervision, and learning communities. Schools also need to provide time for reflection and examples of value assessments so that teachers do not rely on personal interpretations that are too varied. For policymakers, the results of this study suggest that the Love Curriculum should be equipped with pedagogical indicators, not just moral narratives. The limitations of this study lie in the limited coverage of the area, the use of teacher perception data, and the absence of longitudinal observations. Subsequent research needs to test the model across a wider area, incorporate the perspectives of students and principals, and assess changes in teacher practice through longitudinal design or intervention-based mixed methods.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the readiness of PAI teachers in implementing the Love Curriculum is formed by a combination of pedagogical understanding, institutional support, and pedagogical efficacy. Pedagogical understanding is the strongest predictor with $\beta = .42$ because teachers need to understand love as a principle of learning design, not just a moral message. Institutional support also plays a strong role with $\beta = .31$ because the Love Curriculum requires leadership, teaching tools, a learning community, and time for reflection to be applied consistently. Pedagogical efficacy has a positive effect with $\beta = .24$, which suggests that teachers' beliefs remain important even though the impact is smaller than that of understanding and structural support. All three predictors explain 61% of the variation in implementation readiness, while the value of $Q^2 = .43$ indicates good predictive relevance. The qualitative results show that teachers interpret love as mercy that still has boundaries of discipline, justice, and learning direction. Teachers do not reject policies, but need operational examples so that the values of love can be embedded in goals, activities, assessments, and classroom culture. Thus, the Love Curriculum needs to be understood as pedagogical and institutional work, not just as an affective theme. Suggestions for future research are to expand the sample across provinces, include the perspectives of students and principals, test training interventions based on the Love Curriculum, and monitor changes in teacher practice through longitudinal design.

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