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# INTEGRATING THE CINTA-BASED CURRICULUM AND DEEP LEARNING IN EFL INSTRUCTION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi integrasi Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (KBC) dan pendekatan pembelajaran mendalam dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris serta persepsi guru dan peserta didik terhadap pelaksanaannya. Penelitian menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif pada satu kelas VIII di sebuah madrasah tsanawiyah swasta di Indonesia, melibatkan seorang guru bahasa Inggris dan 21 peserta didik. Data diperoleh melalui observasi nonpartisipan, wawancara semiterstruktur, dan telaah dokumen pembelajaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi yang menghargai peserta didik, kerja kelompok, diskusi, presentasi, pembelajaran kontekstual, dan refleksi digunakan untuk memadukan nilai kepedulian dengan pengalaman belajar yang bermakna. Rerata observasi yang dilaporkan adalah 3,63, dengan skor iklim kelas 3,8 dan kepercayaan diri menggunakan bahasa Inggris 3,4. Guru dan peserta didik menyampaikan persepsi positif, tetapi keterbatasan kosakata, perbedaan kemampuan, waktu, dan keengganan berbicara tetap menjadi kendala. Temuan memperlihatkan kemungkinan integrasi nilai relasional dan aktivitas belajar kontekstual, namun tidak membuktikan peningkatan kemampuan bahasa atau karakter secara kausal. Implikasi penelitian menekankan perlunya tujuan komunikatif, interaksi suportif, dan dukungan bertahap dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

**Kata Kunci:** Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta; pembelajaran mendalam; pendidikan karakter; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris; studi kasus kualitatif

**Abstract**

This qualitative case study examined how the Cinta-Based Curriculum (CBC) and deep-learning pedagogy were integrated into English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction and how the teacher and learners perceived the practices. The case involved one English teacher and 21 eighth-grade learners at a private Islamic junior secondary school in Indonesia. Data were gathered through non-participant classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review. The findings identified respectful teacher–student communication, small-group discussion, presentations, contextual tasks, and reflection as practices that connected caring values with meaningful learning activities. The reported overall observation rating was 3.63, with 3.8 for supportive classroom climate and 3.4 for confidence in using English. Teacher and learner perceptions were generally favourable; however, vocabulary limitations, varied proficiency, restricted lesson time, and reluctance to speak persisted. The study suggests that relational values and contextual language-learning practices can be combined in classroom instruction. Because the evidence was descriptive, it did not establish causal improvements in English proficiency

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| or character development.<br><br>**Keywords:** Cinta-Based Curriculum; deep learning pedagogy; character education; EFL teaching; qualitative case study | |

## INTRODUCTION

English language education in lower-secondary schools involves more than knowledge of vocabulary and grammar: learners need opportunities to interpret meanings, articulate ideas, negotiate understanding and communicate respectfully with others. Language development is therefore a cognitive, social and affective process. Interactionist research identifies input, negotiation and output as possible resources for second-language development, while analyses of small-group EFL talk caution that speaking opportunities should be judged by the quality of collaborative reasoning, not simply by the presence of discussion (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Wotring et al., 2024).

The Indonesian policy context offers two related but conceptually distinct orientations. The Ministry of Religious Affairs established a Cinta-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta, KBC) guide for madrasahs through Decision of the Director General of Islamic Education No. 6077/2025. It positions love, empathy, respect, inclusion and responsibility as educational values that can inform relationships and school learning (Directorate General of Islamic Education, 2025). In parallel, national guidance on pembelajaran mendalam describes mindful, meaningful and joyful learning, in which students actively make sense of content, connect ideas to their lives and experience supportive learning conditions (BSKAP, 2025). The first provides a value-oriented curricular lens; the second provides a pedagogical orientation. They should not be treated as synonymous or assumed to be a single formally mandated instructional model.

International scholarship offers a foundation for investigating their intersection. Studies and meta-analyses associate positive teacher–student relationships with student engagement and educational achievement, although the associations are neither universal nor automatically causal (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011; Quin, 2017). Research on social and emotional learning also links intentional, well-implemented programmes to positive interpersonal and educational outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Transformative social–emotional learning further emphasizes belonging, agency and equitable participation (Jagers et al., 2019). These findings clarify why values of care may be relevant to language classrooms, but broad character development cannot be inferred from a friendly atmosphere alone.

At the motivational level, self-determination theory distinguishes autonomy, competence and relatedness as conditions associated with more self-directed engagement (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Supportive interpersonal relations may encourage learners to attempt unfamiliar language, but structured tasks and appropriate feedback remain essential. Jang et al. (2010) found that autonomy support and structure work together; Hattie and Timperley (2007) likewise showed that feedback quality matters for learning. This literature suggests that caring instruction is most useful when accompanied by explicit linguistic goals and manageable cognitive challenges.

The phrase deep learning requires clarification because it has several meanings in scholarship. Here it refers to deep, meaningful pedagogical engagement and the capacity to connect and apply understanding, not to machine learning or an unmeasured level of cognitive attainment. The ICAP framework distinguishes passive, active, constructive and interactive modes of engagement (Chi & Wylie, 2014), while Hattie and Donoghue (2016) distinguish surface, deep and

transfer phases of learning. Neither framework assumes that discussion by itself proves deep understanding. Meaningful teaching requires evidence of explanation, comparison, elaboration and transfer beyond memorized responses. The whole-child literature similarly recognizes that social-emotional conditions and cognition are intertwined (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019).

Such considerations are particularly relevant for EFL classrooms. A systematic review by Hiver et al. (2024) stresses the need to define learner engagement rather than equating it with mere activity. Studies of speaking tasks show that engagement varies with task design, interpersonal dynamics, difficulty and learner choice (Almukhaild & King, 2024; Aubrey et al., 2022). Earlier language-learning research also documents the relevance of willingness to communicate and classroom anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Teimouri et al., 2019). These constructs, however, demand distinct evidence: observed volunteering or reported comfort cannot establish gains in proficiency, confidence or character without appropriate measures.

In a private Islamic junior secondary school in Indonesia, English instruction was reported to incorporate respectful communication, collaborative activities, presentations, and reflection alongside contextual language tasks. Although these features were consistent with the aims of both KBC and pembelajaran mendalam, the relationship between the value orientation and the instructional process warrants explicit analysis. Prior research has separately explored teacher–student relationships, engagement, meaningful learning, and EFL interaction; less is known about how the two named Indonesian policy orientations are enacted together during ordinary EFL lessons at the classroom level. This case offers a situated examination of that integration, including experiences viewed favourably by participants and challenges that remained unresolved.

The study addressed three questions: (1) How were KBC values and deep-learning principles represented in EFL classroom practices? (2) How did the participating teacher and learners perceive these practices? (3) What implementation constraints were identified? The contribution lies in explaining the observed integration and its pedagogical implications, rather than testing a causal effect on English achievement or character outcomes.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research design and setting

A qualitative case-study design was used to examine naturally occurring EFL instruction during the 2025/2026 academic year. The research was conducted in one eighth-grade class at a private Islamic junior secondary school in Indonesia. The study involved one English teacher and 21 students (eight boys and 13 girls). The teacher and class were selected purposively because they were involved in implementing KBC-related values alongside contextual English instruction. The setting is described without the institution's name or precise address to safeguard participant confidentiality. The findings are intended to illuminate this particular classroom context rather than represent all madrasahs.

### Data sources and analytic boundaries

Data collection comprised non-participant observation of English lessons, semi-structured interviews with the teacher and selected learners, and review of relevant learning documents, including teaching plans and instructional materials. Observations focused on teacher–student communication, collaborative learning, contextual language tasks, opportunities for reflection, and visible participation. Interviews explored perceptions of the activities and difficulties experienced during learning. Document review provided contextual information about

instructional intentions and classroom planning. The study reports the themes supported by these three data-source types without assigning unsupported frequencies to interview responses.

**Approach to analysis and trustworthiness**

The analysis was guided by the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014): data reduction or condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Observation descriptions, interview accounts, and instructional documents were considered in relation to the study questions. The findings were organized into four linked themes: caring classroom relationships, contextual and participatory learning, favourable participant perceptions, and implementation constraints. Themes are presented as a bounded case interpretation rather than numerical estimates of how frequently a particular belief was expressed. This approach is consistent with the need for coherent and transparent qualitative interpretation discussed by Braun and Clarke (2022) and Nowell et al. (2017).

To avoid overstating the evidence, classroom practices were distinguished from reported perceptions, and both were distinguished from measured learning outcomes. Interpretations were compared conceptually across the available data types, while potentially competing explanations, especially students' existing proficiency and limited instructional time, were considered in the discussion. The study does not report thematic saturation, independent coding agreement, or quantified character change, because these were not established by the research procedures described here (Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2018).

**Research ethics**

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the participating educational institution. Participation by the teacher and students was voluntary. The researchers protected confidentiality by withholding the institution's and teacher's names, avoiding identifiable student descriptions, and presenting participants' experiences in aggregated or paraphrased form. No identifiable photographs or names of individual students are reproduced. These procedures are reported as part of the study's ethical conduct; no ethics-committee approval number or additional consent procedure is asserted.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Results**

The findings were organized into four related themes. First, caring classroom relationships were evident in the teacher's use of respectful communication, encouragement, and appreciation of learner contributions. Cooperation and consideration for differing opinions were promoted during group activities. These practices corresponded to the KBC values of care, respect, empathy, and responsibility. Teaching documents were also reported to incorporate language-learning and character-related objectives. Such evidence concerns instructional practices and values expressed in the classroom; it does not by itself demonstrate lasting changes in learners' character.

Second, the instructional activities included small-group discussion, oral presentations, question-and-answer exchanges, and reflection. The teacher encouraged learners to connect English expressions and topics to familiar experiences and to discuss meanings with peers. These activities represent an observable effort to promote meaningful, interactive learning rather than relying exclusively on memorization. In this case, pembelajaran mendalam was expressed through contextualization, collaborative exploration, and reflection, although the study did not assess transfer of learning to new tasks.

Third, the teacher and students described the classroom experience positively. Students reported greater comfort in the learning environment and valued opportunities to ask questions, exchange ideas, and practise English with peers. The teacher viewed the integration of caring values with contextual tasks as supportive of classroom participation. These accounts indicate favourable perceptions of the teaching practices. They should not be conflated with measured improvements in anxiety, motivation, English proficiency, or moral development.

Fourth, the participants also identified persistent constraints. Differences in English proficiency, unfamiliar vocabulary, limited lesson time, and hesitation to speak made it difficult for some students to participate fully. The reported instructional responses included additional explanations, contextual examples, collaborative practice, encouragement, and gradual guidance. Thus, positive classroom relationships operated alongside, not in place of, the linguistic support required for meaningful EFL interaction.

The classroom observation results reported an overall mean rating of 3.63. The supportive classroom climate indicator received a rating of 3.8, whereas students' confidence in using English received 3.4 (Table 1). The relative pattern suggests a favourable relational environment while revealing that oral confidence remained a challenge. These descriptive ratings reflect observations within the studied class; they are not pretest–posttest change measures or evidence of statistically established effects.

**Table 1. Classroom Observation Ratings**

| Indicator | Rating | Interpretive scope |
|---|---|---|
| Overall classroom observation | 3.63 | Descriptive rating of observed implementation |
| Supportive classroom climate | 3.8 | Relatively stronger relational environment |
| Learners' confidence in using English | 3.4 | Relatively lower indicator; continuing participation challenge |

**Table 2. Integration of KBC Values and Deep-Learning Practices**

| Theme | Reported classroom practice | Case-based interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Caring relationships | Respectful teacher communication, encouragement, and cooperation | KBC values were expressed in classroom relationships |
| Meaningful EFL learning | Contextual tasks, group discussions, presentations, reflection | Learning activities invited participation and contextual meaning-making |
| Participant perspectives | Generally favourable teacher and learner accounts | The activities were perceived as supportive |
| Persistent difficulties | Limited vocabulary, varied proficiency, restricted time, hesitation | Linguistic scaffolding and gradual participation remained necessary |

## Discussion: distinguishing curricular values from learning processes

The findings suggest that the Cinta-Based Curriculum and pembelajaran mendalam may complement one another while serving different purposes. KBC provides a moral and relational orientation through care, respect, empathy, and responsibility. The deep-learning approach focuses on mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning through interpretation, collaboration, contextual application, and reflection. In the observed case, these orientations intersected when supportive classroom communication accompanied structured opportunities to discuss and use English. Conceptually, respectful interaction is evidence of a caring climate, whereas cognitive

depth requires substantive explanation, elaboration, and application (BSKAP, 2025; Chi & Wylie, 2014; Hattie & Donoghue, 2016).

The reported supportive communication aligns with international research associating positive teacher–student relationships with school engagement (Cornelius-White, 2007; Quin, 2017; Roorda et al., 2011). A caring atmosphere could plausibly lower social threat and make classroom contributions more likely. Nevertheless, associations reported in reviews do not prove that the case teacher caused improvements in English or character. The strongest result here is the observed presence of caring practices and favourable perceptions. As Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and Immordino-Yang et al. (2019) argue, cognitive and socio-emotional experiences are intertwined, but causal developmental claims require stronger evidence than one class's descriptive accounts.

From self-determination theory, respectful dialogue may support relatedness, while opportunities to choose or articulate responses may support autonomy, and suitably graded tasks may contribute to competence (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Yet autonomy should not be confused with leaving learners to manage difficult language unaided. Jang et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of combining autonomy support and structure, while longitudinal research on foreign-language motivation links supportive classroom environments with learner engagement (Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017). This provides an explanation for why the teacher's additional guidance and contextual examples may have been useful responses to differences in vocabulary and confidence. Since the original study did not independently record the intensity or quality of such support, these are theory-informed interpretations rather than tested mediating mechanisms.

The observations also resonate with character and social–emotional learning research. Durlak et al. (2011) and Taylor et al. (2017) synthesized evidence that purposefully designed social–emotional interventions can be associated with broader developmental benefits. Jagers et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of agency, belonging, and equity. However, character is not directly measured by the teacher expressing respect or learners cooperating once. A persuasive future KBC evaluation should define specific observable indicators—for example, turn-taking, respectful disagreement, help-giving or responsibility for group tasks—and document those behaviours repeatedly across contexts. Such an approach would prevent the language of "character development" from being used for unspecified positive impressions.

**Discussion: interaction, engagement and language learning**

Group discussions and oral presentations potentially increase opportunities for language output and negotiation of meaning (Loewen & Sato, 2018). Sato and Lyster (2012) further associated peer interaction and feedback with language development in instructional contexts. Importantly, the occurrence of group discussion alone does not establish linguistic gains. Wotring et al. (2024) differentiate productive collaborative dialogue from talk that is disconnected from learning goals. In this case, the instructional contribution lies in creating opportunities for supported communication; evidence of actual improvement in linguistic accuracy, fluency, or other performance dimensions would require separate assessment.

Engagement comprises behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004). Hiver et al. (2024) likewise highlight the importance of precise definitions in language-learning engagement research. Here, the case provides accounts of active participation and perceived comfort, but these are not equivalent to independently assessed cognitive engagement or emotional development. Aubrey et al. (2022) show that task design and peer relationships can influence engagement during speaking activities, while Almukhaild and King (2024) emphasize

meaningful topics and achievable challenges. This scholarship helps explain why caring interaction and contextual tasks may complement each other.

The relatively lower observation rating for confidence in using English (3.4) can be considered alongside second-language affective research. MacIntyre et al. (1998) described willingness to communicate as sensitive to situational conditions, while Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) examined the relationship between foreign-language enjoyment and anxiety. In a meta-analysis, Teimouri et al. (2019) reported an overall negative relationship between language anxiety and achievement. These studies support the pedagogical importance of reducing interpersonal threat, but the observation rating in the present case does not independently establish that anxiety declined or that communicative confidence increased over time.

Meaningful learning requires more than visible activity. The ICAP framework distinguishes constructive and interactive engagement from simple behavioural participation (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Hattie and Donoghue (2016) likewise describe different phases of surface knowledge, deeper understanding, and transfer. The teacher's contextual explanations and gradual support were thus especially relevant for learners who lacked vocabulary or grammatical resources needed for oral participation. Structured, non-threatening feedback could further connect the relational aims of KBC with the linguistic demands of EFL instruction (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

**Methodological contribution, limitations and implications**

The case contributes a context-specific description of how value-oriented curriculum principles and learner-centred language pedagogy can be combined. A key insight is that a supportive classroom climate and meaningful activities coexist with persistent challenges related to vocabulary, varied proficiency, confidence, and lesson time. The descriptive observation ratings and participant perceptions reinforce this interpretation, but they do not establish a causal effect on proficiency or character. As with other single-site case studies, the findings are analytically informative but should not be generalized statistically. The small setting and the absence of longitudinal language or character measures delimit the conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2018).

In practice, EFL teachers may align communicative objectives with relational norms by modelling respectful dialogue, introducing familiar contexts, scaffolding vocabulary, organizing purposeful peer exchanges, giving constructive feedback, and ending lessons with reflection on both language use and respectful participation. For further investigation, longitudinal classroom work or comparative designs could separately assess speaking development, engagement, and character-related behaviours. These recommendations follow from the case interpretation and established research rather than from any claim that a single instructional approach has been proven superior.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study found that a caring classroom climate associated with the Cinta-Based Curriculum was combined with contextual discussion, collaborative tasks, presentations, and reflection characteristic of pembelajaran mendalam in one eighth-grade EFL classroom. The teacher and learners generally perceived the practices favourably, although limited vocabulary, uneven proficiency, time constraints, and reluctance to speak remained challenges. The recorded descriptive observation ratings were 3.63 overall, 3.8 for supportive classroom climate, and 3.4 for learners' confidence in using English. These findings illuminate how relational values and meaningful language-learning activities can complement each other in practice. They should be interpreted as case-specific evidence of implementation and perceptions, not as causal proof of improved English proficiency or character development. The study highlights the importance of

combining caring interaction with structured language support in inclusive, participatory EFL lessons.

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