

CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ELT MATERIALS: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF LOVE-BASED DEEP LEARNING IN AN ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXTBOOK

Hastuti

UIN Alauddin Makassar
E-mail: hastutibone45@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the integration of character education within English Language Teaching (ELT) materials through a content analysis of love-based deep learning in an Islamic junior high school English textbook. Grounded in the framework of character education and deep learning, particularly the concept of love-based learning, this research explores how moral values, emotional engagement, and spiritual dimensions are embedded in the instructional content. This study employs a qualitative research design using content analysis as the primary method. The data were collected from selected units, texts, exercises, and visual elements in the textbook, which were then analyzed using a coding scheme based on indicators of character education and love-based deep learning principles. The findings reveal that the textbook incorporates various character values such as respect, responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and religiosity. These values are reflected through themes, dialogues, reading passages, and learning activities that encourage students to connect cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually with the learning content. Furthermore, the elements of love-based deep learning are identified in activities promoting meaningful understanding, reflective thinking, and value internalization. However, the integration of these elements is not always systematic or explicitly structured. This study concludes that while the ELT textbook demonstrates potential in promoting character education through love-based deep learning, there is still a need for more intentional and consistent integration. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more holistic and value-oriented ELT materials, especially in Islamic educational contexts.

Keywords: Character Education, ELT Materials, Content Analysis, Love-Based Deep Learning, Islamic Junior High School.

1) INTRODUCTION

In the global educational landscape, there has been a significant shift from a purely cognitive-oriented approach to a more holistic paradigm that integrates knowledge, skills, and character development. This shift is reflected in international educational frameworks such as those promoted by Partnership for 21st Century Learning and OECD,

Paper presented at The 5th ICONELE on April 16th-17th, 2026 English
Education Department, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
South Sulawesi-Indonesia

which emphasize not only critical thinking and communication but also values such as empathy, responsibility, and respect (OECD, 2019; P21, 2019). In this regard, character education has gained increasing attention as an essential component of education systems worldwide (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

At the same time, the growing complexity of global challenges—such as cultural diversity, social inequality, and digital transformation—has further reinforced the urgency of integrating character education into classroom practices. Scholars argue that education should not only prepare students academically but also equip them with moral and social competencies for navigating multicultural and interconnected societies (Noddings, 2013; UNESCO, 2021). In language education specifically, this integration becomes even more crucial, as English Language Teaching (ELT) provides a meaningful space for embedding values such as intercultural understanding, tolerance, and ethical communication through authentic and context-sensitive materials (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2014). However, despite this growing recognition, many educational contexts still struggle to systematically incorporate character values into instructional materials, indicating a significant gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

At the same time, the concept of deep learning has emerged as a response to surface-level learning practices. Deep learning promotes meaningful understanding, critical reflection, and the ability to connect knowledge with real-life contexts (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, at all 2018). More recently, the idea of love-based deep learning has been introduced, emphasizing emotional engagement, compassion, and human connection as integral parts of meaningful learning (Zohar & Marshall, 2000; Noddings, 2013). This perspective highlights that effective learning involves not only cognitive processes but also emotional and spiritual dimensions.

Within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), teaching materials—especially textbooks—play a central role in shaping both linguistic competence and value formation. Scholars such as Jack C. Richards argue that textbooks function as the primary source of input and classroom activities, thereby influencing what and how students learn (Richards, 2001).

However, many ELT materials globally still prioritize language skills over the integration of moral and character values (Widodo, 2018; Gray, 2010). This creates a gap between the goals of holistic education and the actual content delivered in classrooms.

In Indonesia, the importance of character education has been strongly emphasized in national education policies. The government promotes *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK) as a strategic initiative to develop students' moral and ethical values alongside academic achievement (Kemendikbud, 2017). This initiative aligns with the National Education System Law (Law No. 20 of 2003), which underscores the development of students' character and civilization. Schools are therefore expected to integrate character education into all subjects, including English.

Furthermore, recent curriculum developments, including the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, encourage meaningful, student-centered learning that fosters critical thinking and value internalization (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). However, in practice, the implementation of these policies often faces challenges. Many teaching materials, including ELT textbooks, still focus predominantly on grammar, vocabulary, and language skills, with limited explicit integration of character values and deep learning principles (Suharjati, 2019; Widodo, 2018).

In Islamic junior high schools, the integration of religious and moral values is a fundamental aspect of education. Students are expected to develop not only academic competence but also strong spiritual and ethical character. Islamic education emphasizes values such as *akhlaq*, empathy, cooperation, and respect, which are derived from the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith (Halstead, 2007). Therefore, learning materials, including English textbooks, should ideally reflect Islamic values alongside language learning objectives.

However, preliminary observations indicate that the integration of these values in ELT materials is often implicit and not systematically designed. While some textbooks include moral messages, they may not fully align with the principles of love-based deep learning, which emphasize the integration of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual engagement in learning (Noddings, 2013).

Although previous studies have examined character education and ELT materials, several gaps remain. First, most studies focus on the presence of character values without analyzing how these values are integrated through a deep learning framework (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Widodo, 2018). Second, the concept of love-based deep learning is still relatively underexplored, particularly in the context of ELT materials. Third, there is limited research that specifically investigates this issue within Islamic educational settings, where the integration of spiritual values is highly essential (Halstead, 2007).

Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by conducting a content analysis of an ELT textbook to examine how character education is integrated through the lens of love-based deep learning in an Islamic junior high school context. This research is expected to provide new insights into the development of more holistic, value-oriented ELT materials.

2) METHODS

This study employed a qualitative content analysis design to investigate the representation of character education in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials, specifically focusing on love-based deep learning values in an Islamic junior high school English textbook. Qualitative content analysis was considered appropriate because the study aimed to identify, classify, and interpret moral and character values embedded in the textbook content rather than to measure them statistically.

The object of this study was an English textbook used for Grade VIII students at an Islamic Junior High School (Madrasah Tsanawiyah/MTs) in Indonesia. The textbook was selected purposively because it is officially used in classroom instruction and reflects the implementation of the current curriculum that emphasizes character education and deep learning approaches. The textbook consisted of several chapters containing reading texts, dialogues, exercises, visual illustrations, and communicative tasks that potentially reflect character values.

The primary data source of this research was the textbook itself, while supporting data were obtained from curriculum documents, character education frameworks, and previous related studies. The unit of analysis included words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, pictures,

and learning activities that represented values related to love-based deep learning. These values included empathy, respect, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, honesty, care, and spiritual awareness, which are closely connected to character education principles in Islamic education.

The data were collected using document analysis and observation sheets. First, the researcher carefully read and reviewed the entire textbook chapter by chapter. Second, the researcher identified and highlighted textual and visual elements containing character education values. Third, the identified data were classified based on a coding framework adapted from character education theory and love-based deep learning principles. A checklist table was used as the main research instrument to record the frequency and forms of value representation.

The data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative content analysis involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, relevant materials related to character education values were selected and coded. In the data display stage, the findings were organized into tables and descriptive categories to show patterns of representation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting how love-based deep learning values were integrated into the ELT materials and how they supported character formation among students.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation of theory was applied by comparing the findings with established theories of character education and previous studies in ELT materials analysis. In addition, peer checking was conducted by discussing the coding results with academic supervisors and fellow researchers to minimize subjectivity and improve the validity of interpretation.

Thus, this method enabled the researcher to comprehensively examine how character education was embedded in ELT materials and to evaluate the extent to which the textbook supported the development of students' moral and social values through love-based deep learning.

3) RESULTS

The analysis of the English textbook for Grade VIII students at the Islamic Junior High School revealed that character education values were consistently embedded in the ELT materials through reading texts, dialogues, exercises, visual illustrations, and classroom tasks. The findings showed that love-based deep learning values were represented in both explicit and implicit forms across all chapters of the textbook.

A total of eight major character education values were identified: empathy, respect, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, honesty, care, and spiritual awareness. Among these values, respect and responsibility appeared most frequently, while spiritual awareness and tolerance appeared less frequently.

Table 1. Distribution of Character Education Values in the Textbook

No Character Value		Frequency	Percentage
1	Respect	28	23.1%
2	Responsibility	24	19.8%
3	Cooperation	18	14.9%
4	Empathy	15	12.4%
5	Honesty	13	10.7%
6	Care	11	9.1%
7	Tolerance	7	5.8%
8	Spiritual Awareness	5	4.2%
Total		121	100%

The data in Table 1 showed that respect was the most dominant value identified in the textbook, accounting for 23.1% of the total occurrences. This value was commonly found in expressions of politeness, appreciation of others' opinions, and respectful communication in dialogues. Responsibility was the second most frequent value, particularly represented in task instructions, group assignments, and daily life situations requiring accountability.

Cooperation was frequently reflected in collaborative learning tasks, pair work, and group discussions. Empathy and care appeared in reading passages and dialogues involving helping others, understanding feelings, and showing concern for family, friends, and society. Honesty was mainly found in moral stories and situational dialogues involving truthfulness and trust.

Tolerance and spiritual awareness were identified less frequently. Tolerance was mostly represented in multicultural and social interaction contexts, while spiritual awareness appeared in materials related to gratitude, moral reflection, and Islamic values integrated into daily life communication.

Table 2. Forms of Character Education Representation

No Form of Representation Frequency

1	Reading Texts	35
2	Dialogues	29
3	Learning Activities	24
4	Exercises	18
5	Visual Illustrations	15
Total		121

Table 2 indicated that reading texts were the most dominant form of character value representation, followed by dialogues and learning activities. Reading texts often contained narratives and descriptive passages that reflected moral lessons and social values. Dialogues provided practical examples of respectful communication and interpersonal relationships. Learning activities encouraged students to practice cooperation, responsibility, and empathy through interactive classroom engagement.

Visual illustrations also contributed to the representation of values, although with lower frequency. Images showing helping behavior, respectful interaction, and classroom discipline supported the textual content and reinforced moral understanding.

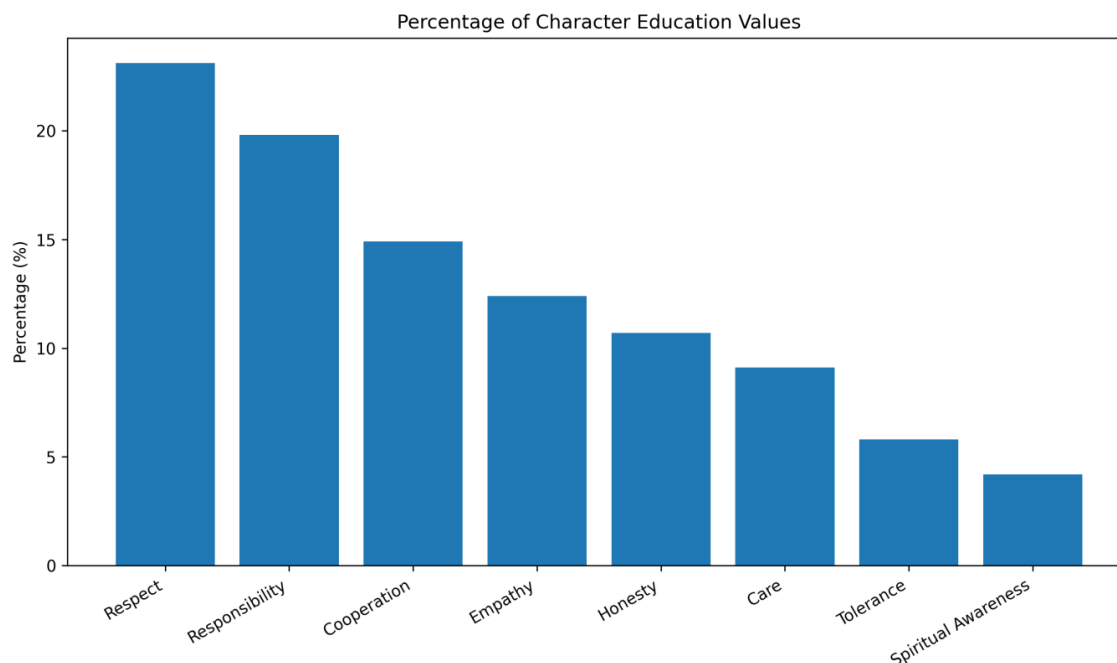


Figure 1. Percentage of Character Education Values

The visual representation of the findings showed that respect and responsibility occupied the largest proportion of character education values, while spiritual awareness and tolerance remained the least represented values in the textbook.

Overall, the textbook demonstrated a strong integration of character education principles aligned with love-based deep learning, particularly in promoting social interaction, moral responsibility, and respectful communication within English language learning.

4) DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that character education values were strongly integrated into the English textbook used in an Islamic Junior High School, particularly through reading texts, dialogues, learning activities, and visual illustrations. The presence of eight major values—respect, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, honesty, care, tolerance, and spiritual awareness—indicated that ELT materials were not only designed to develop students' linguistic competence but also to support moral and social development. This

supports the view that language learning should function as a medium for both academic and character formation.

Among the identified values, respect and responsibility were the most dominant. This finding suggests that the textbook emphasized social discipline, polite communication, and accountability as central components of classroom interaction and student development. In the context of Islamic junior high school education, these values are highly relevant because they align with both national character education goals and Islamic moral principles. Respectful communication and responsible behavior are essential not only for successful language learning but also for shaping students' ethical awareness in daily life.

The dominance of respect is consistent with previous studies on character education in ELT materials. Studies have shown that politeness expressions, social interaction tasks, and dialogue-based learning frequently promote respect as a core value in English textbooks. Similarly, responsibility often appears in task-based instructions and collaborative assignments where students are encouraged to complete duties and participate actively in group learning. This finding is in line with research emphasizing that communicative language teaching naturally provides opportunities for the development of social responsibility and cooperation.

Reading texts were found to be the most dominant form of value representation. This indicates that narrative and descriptive passages play a significant role in transmitting moral messages. Stories involving helping others, honesty, gratitude, and cooperation provide students with contextual examples that are easier to understand and internalize. This finding supports previous research which argues that texts in ELT materials can serve as powerful tools for implicit character education because students learn values while engaging in language comprehension activities.

However, the relatively low frequency of tolerance and spiritual awareness suggests an imbalance in value representation. Although these values were present, they appeared less frequently compared to social values such as respect and responsibility. In the context of Islamic education, spiritual awareness should ideally receive stronger emphasis because it contributes to students' moral reflection and religious identity. Likewise, tolerance is

increasingly important in multicultural and diverse learning environments. The limited representation of these values may reduce opportunities for students to develop broader intercultural understanding and deeper spiritual reflection through language learning.

The concept of love-based deep learning was reflected through the integration of empathy, care, cooperation, and moral awareness. These values indicate that learning was designed not only for knowledge acquisition but also for emotional engagement and meaningful human relationships. Love-based deep learning encourages students to learn with compassion, respect others, and build positive social connections. Therefore, the textbook demonstrated an effort to move beyond surface-level language instruction toward holistic education that combines cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions.

Despite these positive findings, this study had several limitations. First, the research focused only on one English textbook used in one Islamic junior high school, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Different textbooks from other publishers or educational contexts may present different patterns of character value integration. Second, this study analyzed only the textbook content and did not examine how teachers implemented the materials in classroom practice. The actual effectiveness of character education may depend greatly on teacher interpretation and instructional strategies. Third, the analysis relied on qualitative interpretation, which may involve subjectivity despite the use of coding frameworks and peer checking.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to include a comparative analysis of multiple ELT textbooks from different educational institutions or curriculum systems. Further studies may also investigate teachers' perceptions and classroom implementation of character education through interviews and classroom observation. In addition, research involving students' responses to character-based ELT materials would provide deeper understanding of how these values are received and practiced in real learning contexts. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of ELT materials in promoting character education and love-based deep learning in Islamic schools.

5) CONCLUSION

This study concluded that character education was significantly integrated into the English Language Teaching (ELT) materials of the Grade VIII textbook used in an Islamic Junior High School. The analysis identified eight major character values: respect, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, honesty, care, tolerance, and spiritual awareness. These values were represented through reading texts, dialogues, learning activities, exercises, and visual illustrations, showing that the textbook functioned not only as a tool for language instruction but also as a medium for moral and character development.

Among the identified values, respect and responsibility were the most dominant, indicating that the textbook strongly emphasized polite communication, discipline, and accountability in students' daily interactions. Reading texts were found to be the most frequent form of representation, suggesting that narrative and descriptive materials played an important role in delivering moral messages and contextualizing character values in language learning. The findings also showed that the concept of love-based deep learning was reflected through values such as empathy, care, cooperation, and moral awareness, supporting a more holistic approach to education that integrates cognitive, emotional, and ethical development.

These findings imply that ELT materials in Islamic schools can play an important role in strengthening character education when values are intentionally embedded in instructional content. Textbook writers, curriculum developers, and teachers should ensure that moral values are balanced and consistently represented, especially values such as tolerance and spiritual awareness, which appeared less frequently in this study. Teachers are also encouraged to actively facilitate the implementation of these values in classroom practice so that character education moves beyond written content into students' real behavior and social interaction.

For future practice, schools should support the selection and development of ELT materials that promote both language competence and character formation. Future researchers are recommended to expand the study by comparing different textbooks, involving classroom observation, and exploring students' responses to character-based learning materials. In this

way, the integration of character education and love-based deep learning can be further strengthened to support meaningful and value-oriented English language learning.

REFERENCES

- OECD. (2019). *Future of education and skills 2030: OECD learning compass 2030*. OECD Publishing.
- Partnership for 21st Century Learning. (2019). *Framework for 21st century learning definitions*. Battelle for Kids.
- Krippendorff, Klaus. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, John W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Miles, Matthew B., Huberman, A. Michael., & Saldaña, Johnny. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Lickona, Thomas. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Berkowitz, Marvin W., & Bier, Melinda C.. (2005). *What works in character education: A research-driven guide for educators*. Character Education Partnership.
- Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia. (2017). *Penguatan pendidikan karakter*. Kemendikbud.
- Nucci, Larry P., & Narvaez, Darcia. (2008). *Handbook of moral and character education*. Routledge.
- Tomlinson, Brian. (2011). *Materials development in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, Jack C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, Jeremy. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Widodo, Handoyo Puji. (2018). A critical micro-semiotic analysis of values depicted in the Indonesian Ministry of National Education-endorsed secondary school English textbook. *Springer Texts in Education*, 131–152.
- Setyono, Budi., & Widodo, Handoyo Puji. (2019). The representation of multicultural values in the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture-endorsed EFL textbook: A critical discourse analysis. *Intercultural Education*, 30(4), 383–397.

Kamaruddin, Siti Aisyah. (2012). Character education and students social behavior. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(4), 223–230