



Construction Learning Environment of a Child-Friendly Madrasah Program at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Salatiga

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the construction of a learning environment through the Madrasah Ramah Anah (MRA, Child-Friendly Madrasah) program at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN, State Islamic Senior Highschool) Salatiga, identify the elements of the learning environment that have been formed, and explain their significance for deep learning and the Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (KBC, Passionate Based-Curriculum). This study uses a qualitative field approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed thematically through coding, category grouping, and theme identification, with data validity ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques. The research results indicate that the learning environment in the MRA program at MAN Salatiga is constructed through an operational institutional foundation, service and mentoring mechanisms, a humanistic culture of interaction, and an active, contextual, and reflective learning design. This construction forms a safe, relational, participatory, and meaningful learning environment, although the experience of safety and the courage to participate are not yet fully equitable among all students. This study found that the MRA program functions not only as an instrument for child protection but also as a socio-pedagogical foundation that enables deep learning and the values of the KBC to be realized in madrasah learning practices.

Keywords: Child-Friendly Madrasah; Learning Environment; Deep Learning; Passionate Based-Curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational quality is increasingly understood as the ability of educational institutions to create learning experiences that enable students to grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally in an integrated manner (Nahdiyah et al., 2023). Within this framework, the learning environment becomes a central issue, as the quality of learning is determined not only by the curriculum content but also by the extent to which schools or madrasahs can provide a safe, inclusive, participatory, and meaningful atmosphere for students (Raudah et al., 2021). UNICEF has long positioned child-friendly schools as part of quality education that “works for every child” (Aminpour, 2023; Fitriani et al., 2021), while contemporary research on *school climate* indicates that students’ perceptions of a positive school climate correlate with greater academic engagement and better emotional competence (Harahap, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, the need to build a more meaningful learning environment has gained new momentum through curriculum policy transformation. The regulatory basis regarding the learning environment in the Merdeka Curriculum refers to Article 12, paragraph (4) of Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 1 of 2026, which states that the learning environment encompasses all physical, virtual, and social conditions that support a safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning atmosphere to foster a culture of learning. This provision is

reinforced by Article 9(2), which emphasizes that a learning atmosphere is created through a safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, Article 9(1) of the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation underscores that a good learning atmosphere is interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, challenging, motivates active participation, and provides space for initiative, creativity, and independence.

In the madrasah education system, this direction is articulated more specifically through Ministerial Decree (KMA) No. 1503 of 2025. This regulation amends Ministerial Decree No. 450 of 2024 and serves as the latest guideline for the implementation of the madrasah curriculum. In various official outreach sessions by the Ministry of Religion, KMA 1503/2025 is described as a foundation for strengthening the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs, particularly regarding deep learning and the Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta (KBC, Passionate Based-Curriculum) (Dzulfiqar, 2025; Suryadi et al., 2026). This policy is explicitly linked to the hope of creating a safe, inclusive, and humanistic learning environment that discourages bullying practices. This means that within the madrasah context, deep learning does not stand alone but is encouraged to align with ethical and affective orientations through the KBC (Hapsari, 2025).

Deep learning requires active engagement, contextual understanding, and meaningful learning experiences; therefore, the quality of the learning environment cannot be treated as a passive backdrop (Saleh, 2025). The learning environment is, in fact, a pedagogical prerequisite that enables these principles to function (Kovač et al., 2025). Students find it difficult to ask questions, reflect, collaborate, or construct meaning if they are in a learning climate that is stressful, hierarchical, or psychologically unsafe (Yurt & Kara, 2025). Therefore, in the context of madrasahs, the relevant question is not only how the curriculum is implemented, but also how the culture, relationships, mentoring practices, and daily management of the madrasah are structured to support conscious, meaningful, and joyful learning. The framework of a child-friendly school or madrasah is important precisely because it has the potential to provide a social and cultural foundation for deep learning (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Research by (Aziz et al., 2025) indicates that the implementation of *child-friendly school* policies in Indonesia requires a comprehensive approach, continuous evaluation, and strong collaboration, as the challenges of implementation are significant. Nofitasari et al. (2023), in their critical evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum in child-friendly schools with an Islamic and bilingual focus, note that while the process of successfully implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in planning, implementation, and evaluation is still underway, school principals and all *stakeholders* remain committed to striving toward the primary goal of the curriculum: fostering high-quality, highly competitive human resources and strengthening character education through the Pancasila Student Profile. On the other hand, Nasarudin et al. (2024), however, demonstrate that the use of a collegial management model contributes to strengthening character education by emphasizing the importance of active involvement from all parties in building a school culture that is safe, comfortable, and respects students' rights in accordance with the principles of MRA and the Merdeka Curriculum.

In the context of madrasahs, research is also beginning to develop, but the focus tends to remain descriptive or evaluative. A study on the implementation of the MRA program at the Madrasah Aliyah level, for example, examines how the program is implemented and its impact on a specific case at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN, State Islamic Senior Highschool) in Malang (Malindo et al., 2024). Another study in Pandeglang Regency analyzes the level of MRA program implementation quantitatively across 215 Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs, Islamic Junior Highschool) (Suhada et al., 2025). Meanwhile, findings from the child-friendly school context at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN, State Islamic Elementary School) 2 Rembang indicate that values such as empathy, tolerance, and cooperation are beginning to be integrated into the learning process (Harni et al., 2025). Although useful, this body of research generally still focuses on the fulfillment of children's rights, program management, or implementation levels. What has not been widely discussed is how child-friendly madrasah programs are constructed as learning environments that pedagogically support deep learning, especially following the

emergence of a new policy framework that integrates the Merdeka Curriculum, deep learning, and the KBC framework within madrasahs.

MAN Salatiga was selected because the madrasah implements the Madrasah Ramah Anah (MRA, Child-Friendly Madrasah) program, while at the policy level, the madrasah is also operating within the framework of KMA (Madrasah Education Policy) 1503 for 2025, which emphasizes deep learning and the KBC. This position makes MAN Salatiga not merely a site for program implementation but a crucial space for understanding how policies are translated into a tangible learning ecosystem. The key question is not whether MRA is “good” in a normative sense, but rather how MRA is constructed, what elements of the learning environment are formed, and to what extent that construction aligns with the demands of deep learning in the Merdeka Curriculum as well as the ethical-affective orientation of the KBC. In other words, this study seeks to shift the focus from merely a “child-friendly program” to the “construction of the learning environment” as a bridge between policy and pedagogical practice.

Conceptually, this study offers a more integrative perspective. Previous studies have tended to treat curriculum, *school climate*, *child-friendly schools*, and character education as separate issues; this study, however, examines the common ground among them. Theoretically, this study is based on the assumption that deep learning requires a safe, relational, participatory, and meaningful learning environment; that the KBC adds affective, ethical, and spiritual dimensions to that environment; and that MRA can serve as an institutional medium to concretize those values in practice. These assumptions are not accepted at face value but are critically tested through field data, given the strong possibility that MRA may be strong only at the administrative level without fully transforming learning practices. On this basis, this study aims to analyze how the learning environment is constructed within the MRA program at MAN Salatiga, identify the elements of the learning environment emerging from this construction, and explain their significance in relation to the deep learning approach in the Merdeka Curriculum and the orientation of the KBC in the implementation of contemporary madrasah curricula.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative field approach with a case study design at MAN Salatiga. The location was selected purposively because this madrasah implements the MRA program. The research focus is directed at the construction of the learning environment formed through the implementation of MRA, including teacher-student interactions, student participation, mentoring mechanisms, communication patterns, behavior management, and the values embodied in the daily life of the madrasah. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, including the madrasah principal, the vice principal for curriculum, subject teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, the MRA team or coordinator, educational staff, and students.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The primary research instrument was the researcher themselves, assisted by a semi-structured interview guide, an observation guide, and a documentation format. Data were analyzed thematically through repeated reading, coding, category grouping, and the identification of main themes aligned with the research focus. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. This study was not intended to evaluate the MRA program normatively, but rather to analyze how MRA is constructed as a learning environment and its relationship to deep learning and the KBC.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The construction of the learning environment through the MRA program at MAN Salatiga is shaped by the interconnection between institutional foundations, a sense of safety, supportive pedagogical relationships, student participation, and the meaningfulness of learning. These findings confirm that the MRA at MAN Salatiga does not stop at the administrative level but has functioned as an institutional framework that concretely influences students' learning experiences. Thus, the learning environment in this study is not understood

solely as the physical atmosphere of the school, but rather as the result of the interaction between policies, services, relational culture, and pedagogical design that work simultaneously.

Table 1. Synthesis of the main research findings

Dimension of Findings	Key Findings	Implications
MRA Institutional Framework	There is an MRA team, service mechanisms, complaint mechanisms, monitoring, and student and parent engagement	MRA has an operational institutional framework
Safe environment	Students generally feel safe and know where to seek help, although certain negative experiences are still reported	A sense of safety has been established, but it is not yet fully widespread
Relational environment	The guidance counselor applies a humanistic approach and networked mentoring; teachers are relatively responsive to students' learning difficulties	Supportive relationships are a key element of the quality of the learning environment
Participatory environment	Students are involved in discussions, presentations, group work, organizations, and madrasah activities	Students begin to take on the role of learners
Meaningful environment	Content is linked to daily life and supported by reflective-contextual learning design	Learning leads to meaningful understanding and real-world application
Connection to deep learning and KBC	Learning includes the stages of understanding, applying, and reflecting, and embodies the values of safety, friendliness, comfort, and respect	MRA serves as the socio-pedagogical foundation for deep learning and the KBC

The construction of the learning environment at MAN Salatiga is built upon the relatively strong institutional foundation of MRA. An interview with Shofiyana, the MRA coordinator, explained that MRA is a well-structured institution. This is evidenced by documentation of the official decree establishing the implementation team, the program's organizational structure, service mechanisms, complaint channels, monitoring processes, as well as student and parent involvement. Institutional aspects are formulated through written policy indicators, an implementation team, child protection SOPs, mentoring programs, program evaluations, and external stakeholder involvement. Field data indicates that these elements are present and form part of the madrasah's governance. The MRA at MAN Salatiga is not merely a policy slogan but an operational framework supporting the creation of a learning environment (Shofiyana, *interview*, 2026).

The presence of an institutional structure indicates that the learning environment at MAN Salatiga is built through a deliberately organized system. This means that a safe and welcoming learning atmosphere is not merely the result of coincidentally positive interactions, but is supported by clear role distribution, protection mechanisms, and service arrangements. In this context, the institutional framework of the MRA serves as the foundational basis that enables other dimensions of the learning environment to develop more stably.

Regarding the safe environment dimension, the results of a study conducted through interviews with 20 tenth- and eleventh-grade students showed that the majority of students perceive the madrasah as a safe, comfortable, and sufficiently conducive space for learning. This sense of safety is not only supported by students' perceptions but, as field observations also indicate, by the presence of formal services such as guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, case management mechanisms, and accessible support channels when students face issues. A safe environment is characterized by the courage to ask questions, a lack of fear of making mistakes, freedom from humiliation, the absence of intimidation, the availability of support

mechanisms, and a sense of safety, physical, and psychological. Field findings indicate that most of these elements are already present in madrasah life.

Nevertheless, this study also found that psychological safety has not yet been uniformly experienced by all students. Some students still reported experiences of being laughed at when giving the wrong answer, receiving excessive teasing from peers, or facing unwelcoming responses from teachers. These findings suggest that the existence of formal mechanisms does not automatically guarantee an equally safe experience for all students. Therefore, while a safe environment at MAN Salatiga can be said to have generally been established, it still requires reinforcement at the level of daily interactions to ensure that psychological safety is truly distributed evenly.

The relational dimension is one of the most prominent findings in this study. This is particularly evident in the role of the guidance and counseling service, which functions not only as a problem-handling unit but also as a space for humanistic support. Findings from an interview with Rosyidah, a guidance and counseling coordinator, reveal that students' issues most frequently relate to career, social, personal, and academic aspects, including several cases of bullying. However, the approach used tends to emphasize empathy, openness, a willingness to listen, and the avoidance of judgmental attitudes. The guidance and counseling service consciously strives to build an image as a safe space so that students feel comfortable sharing their stories (Rosyidah, *interview*, 2026).

Additionally, student support is provided through a collaborative network involving parents, homeroom teachers, and subject teachers. In some cases, the service even extends to home visits or visits to students' residences. These findings indicate that supportive relationships at MAN Salatiga are not built through incidental interactions but through a mechanism of sustained support. At the level of students' experiences, this relational dimension is evident in the perception that teachers are willing to re-explain material, assist when students face difficulties, and maintain an open space for questions and answers. Thus, the relational environment at MAN Salatiga is shaped by a combination of support from adult figures at the madrasah and horizontal support among students (Rosyidah, *interview*, 2026).

Regarding the participatory dimension, Alfiyah Dyah Ernaningsih, an Arabic language teacher, explained that all students have equal opportunities whether they are regular students or students with special needs and all are entitled to participate in classroom activities (Dyah Ernaningsih, *interview*, 2026). Field findings indicate that students have been given the opportunity to engage in various classroom activities as well as madrasah events. These forms of participation include discussions, presentations, group work, student organizations, duty shifts, religious activities, and other student activities that make them feel involved. A participatory environment is defined through indicators such as discussions, presentations, reflection, spaces for expression, involvement in activities, and equal opportunities to participate. Field findings indicate that such spaces are indeed available within the learning process and madrasah life.

The research results also indicate that the existence of participatory spaces is not always accompanied by equal levels of participatory courage among all students. Through interviews with 10th and 11th-grade students, some acknowledged that opportunities to speak are available, yet not all students possess the same level of courage to express their opinions. Thus, a participatory environment at MAN Salatiga is present both structurally and pedagogically, but the actual intensity of participation among students still varies. These findings suggest that participation is not merely a matter of the availability of forums but is also linked to a sense of safety, self-confidence, and the classroom dynamics surrounding it.

The aspect of meaningful learning also emerged strongly in the study. A number of 10th and 11th-grade students stated that lesson materials are often linked to daily life, particularly in subjects closely tied to their social and religious experiences. This indicates that learning is not presented merely as content to be mastered, but is increasingly directed toward interpretation, connection to real-life experiences, and personal reflection. A meaningful learning environment is characterized by the connection of content to students' life experiences, contextual learning, understanding of learning objectives, the interpretation of learning, and the relevance of content

to real life. Field findings indicate that these dimensions are present in students' learning experiences.

These findings are reinforced by an analysis of the Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran (RPP, lesson plans) for the 11th-grade Al-Qur'an and Hadith course, which indicate that learning is designed to be active, collaborative, and contextual. Learning activities are divided into stages of understanding, applying, and reflecting. Teachers at MAN Salatiga connect the material to students' lives by using case studies, providing 3-2-1 reflections, personal journals, project assessments, performance assessments, and rubrics that emphasize understanding, critical reasoning, and real-world application. Thus, the meaningfulness of learning in this study is not merely a perception of the students but is also embedded within the pedagogical design employed by the teachers.

The research findings indicate that the construction of the learning environment through MRA at MAN Salatiga is intertwined with the framework of deep learning and the KBC. In the research instrument, deep learning is characterized by conscious, meaningful, joyful, interactive, inspirational, and reflective learning, while the KBC emphasizes a safe, comfortable, friendly, enjoyable, and prosperous environment, as well as the presence of love, empathy, appreciation, and spiritual values in learning interactions. Field findings indicate that these indicators are not merely conceptual formulations but are also manifested in learning practices and madrasah culture.

An analysis of teachers' lesson plans also reveals the presence of the Five Dimensions of Passionate, character building, active-collaborative-contextual learning, reflective discussions, *problem-based learning*, *project-based learning*, as well as the involvement of guidance counselors and homeroom teachers in learning partnerships. This indicates that the MRA at MAN Salatiga functions not only as a child protection instrument but also as a socio-pedagogical foundation that enables deep learning and the KBC to take on a more concrete practical form.

DISCUSSION

The construction of the learning environment through the MRA program at MAN Salatiga demonstrates that, in the context of this study, MRA is more appropriately understood as an institutional medium that enables child-friendly values to be translated into the pedagogical life of the madrasah (Fitriani et al., 2021). This interpretation aligns with the framework of Child-Friendly Educational Institutions, which identifies policy strengthening, the understanding of educational institution members, child-friendly learning processes, child participation, as well as the involvement of parents and stakeholders as the main components of implementing child-friendly educational institutions (Nasarudin et al., 2024). From this perspective, a child-friendly learning environment does not emerge spontaneously from good relationships alone, but is supported by institutional structures that provide direction, boundaries, and protective mechanisms (Harahap, 2024; Yosada & Kurniati, 2019). Therefore, the findings of this study reinforce the theoretical assumption that MRA is not merely an additional program but an institutional framework that forms the foundation for creating a learning climate in madrasahs (Jailani et al., 2025).

Within the framework of deep learning, the learning environment is understood as the physical, virtual, and social conditions that support a safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning atmosphere (Hapsari, 2025). This theory asserts that conscious, meaningful, and joyful learning cannot occur optimally if students are in a tense, hierarchical, or psychologically unsafe environment (Paramita et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). Thus, the primary significance of this study's findings lies in demonstrating that the quality of the learning environment is not merely a backdrop for the learning process, but a pedagogical prerequisite that enables the principles of deep learning to function (Han & Xu, 2025). This means that when the learning environment is designed to be safe, supportive, and non-coercive, students are in a better psychological state to ask questions, reflect, collaborate, and construct meaning regarding the material being studied (Hu et al., 2026). At this point, this study affirms the theoretical view that deep learning requires a specific learning ecology, not just specific teaching strategies (Solvik & Glenna, 2022).

Furthermore, the relational dimension in this study can be understood through the theory of the social environment in learning and the indicators of a supportive environment in the KBC. The relationship between teachers and students, grounded in love, empathy, respect, and a non-discriminatory attitude, is a crucial element of a supportive learning environment (Amaruddin et al., 2024). This indicates that the quality of learning cannot be adequately explained solely in terms of content or methods but must also be understood as the result of the quality of pedagogical relationships (Hapsari, 2025). Therefore, the findings of this study are significant because they demonstrate that humanistic relationships are not peripheral elements but the core of the learning environment (Petry et al., 2026). When pedagogical interactions are built through empathy, a personalized approach, respectful language, and guidance that respects students' dignity, what is formed is not merely social comfort but also a learning environment that fosters engagement, academic courage, and psychological well-being (Markan et al., 2024). Thus, this study reinforces the theoretical argument that a relational environment serves as a substantive foundation for madrasah learning oriented toward the holistic development of students (Zynuddin et al., 2023).

On the other hand, the participatory dimension in this study also demonstrates a strong correspondence with SRA theory and deep learning. Within the SRA framework, children's participation is positioned as a core component, not a mere supplement, as students are viewed as subjects with the right to engage, voice their opinions, and develop their potential (Nasarudin et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in deep learning, active participation, creativity, initiative, and independence are viewed as indicators that the learning process has moved beyond one-way knowledge transmission (Yosada & Kurniati, 2019). Based on this theoretical foundation, participation in this study should not be interpreted merely as attendance at discussions, presentations, or group activities, but as an indicator of a shift in the pedagogical paradigm from teacher-centered learning toward learning that creates space for students' active involvement as learners (Kärner et al., 2026). Thus, this study supports the theoretical position that participation is a key characteristic of a child-friendly learning environment and a prerequisite for the development of deep learning (Jailani et al., 2025).

The findings of this study can also be strongly explained through the theory of meaningful learning within the framework of deep learning. Meaningful learning is characterized by the connection of content to students' life experiences, relevance to real life, the ability to understand learning objectives, and opportunities to apply and reflect on learning (Paramita et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). Therefore, when learning at MAN Salatiga demonstrates a contextual, reflective, and applied orientation, this indicates that the learning environment built through MRA has supported the realization of the principles of deep learning (Malindo et al., 2024). Theoretically, this is significant because it affirms that the meaningfulness of learning is not solely determined by the quality of the content but also by the environmental conditions that allow students to feel safe to think, engage, and connect their learning to their lived reality (Widagdo, 2024). In other words, this study demonstrates that a safe, relational, and participatory environment are not standalone dimensions but rather mutually supportive in shaping meaningful learning (Han & Xu, 2025).

From the perspective of the Passionate-Based Curriculum, the results of this study can be interpreted as an indication that the MRA at MAN Salatiga has been moving toward the creation of the five learning environments emphasized by the KBC, namely safe, comfortable, friendly, enjoyable, and prosperous (Febiana et al., 2025). KBC places compassion, empathy, spiritual values, and the Five Loves as the foundation that animates learning, madrasah culture, and students' daily activities (Suryadi et al., 2026). Based on this, the discussion in this study indicates that the MRA functions not only at the level of program protection and management but also provides a medium for the actualization of the ethical-affective dimensions of madrasah education (Hapsari, 2025). Thus, the theoretical contribution of this study lies in the assertion that MRA can be interpreted as an institutional medium, deep learning as its pedagogical orientation, and the KBC as the value horizon that breathes life into the learning environment. These three elements do not operate in isolation but intertwine to shape the madrasah's learning ecology.

This discussion also demonstrates that the relationship between theory and practice is not linear. Normatively, the theories of SRA, deep learning, and KBC all presuppose a learning environment that is safe, inclusive, participatory, and meaningful. Field data suggest that the realization of these ideals occurs gradually and is not always evenly distributed across the experiences of all students. In this context, this study offers an important note for theory: the existence of policies, indicators, and good instructional design does not in and of itself guarantee equitable learning experiences for all students. Thus, the learning environment must be understood as a constantly negotiated construction involving institutional structures, madrasah culture, the quality of pedagogical relationships, and students' subjective experiences. The academic contribution of this study lies in the fact that the findings align with theory, but also reveal that the implementation of theory in the field always involves tensions, diverse experiences, and the need for continuous reinforcement.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Child-Friendly Madrasah program at MAN Salatiga is constructed not as an additional program, but as an institutional and pedagogical mechanism that transforms the way the madrasah shapes students' learning experiences. From this construction, the learning environment that emerges does not stand on a single dimension, but rather a learning ecology supported by a sense of security, supportive relationships, student participation, and meaningful learning. The most important finding of this study is that the significance of MRA lies not primarily in the existence of its program structure, but in its ability to shift the madrasah environment from merely a space for delivering material to a learning space that allows students to feel protected, heard, involved, and guided to connect knowledge with the realities of their lives. In this context, MRA has proven to function as a socio-pedagogical basis that bridges the demands of in-depth learning with the ethical-affective orientation of the Love-Based Curriculum, although its effectiveness still requires strengthening so that the quality of security and participation is not only structurally available, but truly distributed equally in the experiences of all students.

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