

Exploring the Need for a Deep Learning-Based Islamic Religious Education Model to Foster Students' Spiritual and Moral Intelligence in East Java, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT. This study analyzes the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels. It examines the relevance of a deep-learning approach in strengthening students' spiritual and moral development. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with PAI teachers and students, document analysis, and a survey involving 35 secondary school students. The study analyzed qualitative data using the Miles and Huberman framework (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing), while quantitative data were analyzed descriptively. The findings indicate that PAI learning remains predominantly characterized by lectures, memorization, and teacher-centered instruction, with limited integration of digital media and contextual learning. The survey showed that students' spiritual intelligence and moral intelligence were categorized as high, moderate, and low. Qualitative findings further revealed a gap between students' cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings and their consistent application in everyday life. Students also perceived PAI learning as insufficiently connected to contemporary issues, particularly social media, digital interactions, and everyday moral challenges. Meanwhile, teachers called for more interactive, contextual, reflective, and problem-based learning. The study concludes that deep learning offers a relevant pedagogical orientation for connecting conceptual understanding, reflective engagement, and practical application of Islamic values. Its implementation requires developmentally appropriate strategies, teacher professional development, contextual digital pedagogy, and assessment that addresses cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education; deep learning; spiritual intelligence; moral intelligence; digital learning*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of society driven by globalization, digitalization, and the increasing influence of social media has changed the context in which religious education is delivered and experienced (Ahmadi et al., 2026; Rosodor & Putra, 2025). Contemporary education is no longer expected to focus exclusively on the transmission of disciplinary knowledge but is increasingly required to develop learners who are able to interpret knowledge critically, make ethical decisions, and apply what they learn to complex real-life situations (Ahadiyah et al., 2024; Azizah et al., 2026; Ib et al., 2026; Jemani, 2023). This challenge is particularly relevant to religious education because learning outcomes extend beyond cognitive achievement to include the formation of values, attitudes, character, and responsible behavior (Aedi & Gorni, 2025; Ahwan & Karfida, 2025; Lestari

et al., 2025). UNESCO emphasizes the need for educational systems that cultivate adaptive, critical, ethical, and lifelong learning capacities in response to rapidly changing social conditions (UNESCO, 2021).

The challenges surrounding Islamic Religious Education (PAI) therefore need to be grounded in empirical evidence rather than described only as general pedagogical concerns. The empirical data reported in this study indicate a measurable gap between students' cognitive understanding of religious content and the internalization of spiritual and moral values (Ardianto et al., 2026; Budiyo et al., 2024; Dilo, 2024; Febrianti et al., 2025; Raikhan, 2024). The gaps in spiritual and daily moral implementation, at cognitive benchmarks, is chronicled in the Ministry of Education reports in the Republic of Indonesia in 2024. These reports also highlight the effects of the digital age across the world (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2024). Within this broader context, the challenge for PAI is not simply the acquisition of religious knowledge but the transformation of religious knowledge into value-based understanding and observable practice. PAI is expected to support students' spiritual development, moral character, religious practice, and ability to relate Islamic teachings to everyday situations (Agustina & others, 2020; A'lawi & Budianto, 2025; Ikhwan et al., 2025; Jaedun et al., 2024). However, empirical studies of PAI implementation in Indonesian schools indicate that instructional practices in some contexts remain oriented toward knowledge transmission and conventional classroom approaches, while the internalization of religious values requires more contextual, reflective, and experiential learning (Aisah et al., 2025; Fatah et al., 2025; Syihabuddin, 2022). Teachers also face practical constraints in integrating sustained character development into classroom learning (Mubarak et al., 2024). In addition, empirical research has documented continuing challenges in students' Qur'anic reading abilities and the need for systematic instructional support (Amin et al., 2025; Chairawati et al., 2026; Musradinur et al., 2026; Winataa et al., 2020). These findings suggest that cognitive familiarity with religious concepts does not necessarily result in their consistent enactment in everyday life (Biantoro & Rahmatullah, 2025). The problem, therefore, is better understood as a gap between knowing religious teachings and embodying the values represented by those teachings, requiring PAI learning approaches that explicitly connect cognitive understanding, reflection, value internalization, and practice.

The PAI which should serve as a pillar in the development of positive morals, tends to focus on memorization and text understanding devoid of the aspect of internalization of values (Leheza et al., 2026; Nurhidaya & others, 2020). The results of observation and empirical documentation indicate that from primary to secondary education, students encounter difficulties in reading the Qur'an, fulfilling the requirements of the Ibadah, as well as, exhibiting disciplined behaviors commensurate to the teachings of Islam (Karman et al., 2025; Kurniawan et al., 2023; Makhmudah, 2020). This situation is exacerbated by the dominance of a lecture approach to teaching which is low on the use of a variety of media and students' interest in learning drops sharply. The same findings have also been reported by (Fiallos et al., 2023) who stress on the point that conventional methods of teaching and learning stifle the development of analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills of the learners (Wilsa et al., 2017). There is, thus, an urgent need to design learning models that go beyond the mere transmission of religious knowledge to also instill the students' spiritual and moral intelligence in a manner that is relevant to the context of their lives.

The aforementioned issues can be approached from a deep learning angle as learning concepts offer frameworks for such challenges (Aguilar-Castillo et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2025). Moreover, deep learning emphasizes the integration of knowledge with critical understanding as well with the application of such knowledge with real-life situations (Erma & others, 2019; Huda et al., 2025; Razali & Natalia, 2025). In the context of PAI, such an approach helps the learners reflectively analyze Islamic value system correlating them with real-life issues and internalizing the moral as well as the spiritual teachings of Islam in their day-to-day activities. However, previous research studies focused more on general pedagogical issues as opposed to the specific needs of PAI modeled on deep learning.

This study aims to examine the development of a model of Islamic Religious Education learning activities in the form of deep learning to enhance students' spiritual and moral intelligence. This thesis seeks to map the availability of teacher and student activities, learning infrastructure, and the relevance of teaching systems across various educational sectors. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide practical and theoretical contributions. In this regard, this research can enrich the study of the integration of religious education with deep learning in the practice of lifelong learning. From a practical perspective, this research can provide empirical contributions to educators, curriculum administrators, and policymakers to improve the learning models used, in an effort to meet the requirements relevant to the main objectives of spiritual and moral education for the younger generation. Meanwhile, this research can address existing challenges in the academic field and add to existing efforts to address the challenges of character education, both in Indonesia and worldwide.

Deep learning in education encompasses a learning process that encompasses more than memorization, but also understanding, analyzing, synthesizing, and critically reflecting on actions taken. This approach encourages students to connect their knowledge with field experiences, develop high-quality thinking, and construct deeper meaning (Jamil & Hameed, 2023). In Islamic Religious Education, the deep learning process aims to equip students with a more reflective understanding of Islamic values, where students not only comprehend texts linguistically but also connect them to social and moral aspects. This aligns with 21st-century education, which emphasizes critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity.

On the other hand, moral education focuses on the development of the character and the ethical fundamentals which dictate an individual's conduct in the social sphere. Studies indicate that an effective moral education should engage in experience, habituation, and critical reflection rather than purely prescriptive methodology (Khouili et al., 2025). At a global scale, moral education is growing in importance due to the phenomenon of the devaluation of values stemming from the influence of digital media and popular culture. The incorporation of deep learning technology in moral education enables students to cultivate the ability to reason ethically, make appropriate moral decisions, and develop sensitivity to social issues. Next spiritual intelligence is understood as an individual's ability to internalize spiritual values, find meaning in life, and integrate religious values into daily life. Based on (Fiallos et al., 2023), spiritually based education has the capacity to increase the moral resilience of students as well as strengthen their emotional engagement in learning. Spiritual intelligence also serves to unite the cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions, thus providing an essential foundation in the integration of character. If combined with deep learning, spiritual intelligence serves as the motivator for the internalization of values in the teaching of religion.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach (Miles et al., 2020) to examine PAI learning practices and the development of deep learning-based instruction at the elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels in selected schools in East Java, Indonesia, from March to August 2023. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and comprised 5 PAI teachers, 35 students, and 5 school principals. Teachers were required to have at least three years of PAI teaching experience to ensure sustained familiarity with classroom practice and curriculum implementation; students were selected based on their active participation in PAI learning and school religious activities so that they could provide direct experiential accounts; and principals were included because of their knowledge of school-level curriculum implementation and learning policies. The sampling was intended to obtain information-rich participants relevant to the research questions rather than statistical representation.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory classroom observations, and document analysis of curriculum documents, syllabi, and lesson notes. The interviews explored participants' experiences and perceptions of PAI learning, while observations

examined actual instructional practices and student engagement. Source and method triangulation were used to compare evidence across teachers, students, principals, interviews, observations, and documents, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings. Data analysis followed the interactive process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, combined with thematic analysis. The researchers first reviewed the interview, observation, and document data to identify meaningful segments and assign initial codes. Related codes were then grouped into categories and refined into broader themes. For example, evidence concerning lectures, memorization, limited media, and teacher constraints was categorized as instructional constraints, while Qur'anic reading, religious practice, discipline, storytelling, case analysis, and problem solving were examined as patterns related to value internalization and contextual learning needs (Vasconcelos, 2010). Emerging themes were compared across data sources and interpreted in relation to deep learning, moral education, spiritual intelligence, and lifelong learning.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed source and method triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Member checking was used to confirm the researchers' interpretations with participants, while the audit trail documented the research and analytical process. These procedures supported the credibility and traceability of the findings (Creswell, 2018). Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of teacher, student, and school needs for deep learning-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning models. Thus, this methodology provides not only empirical descriptions but also in-depth understanding that can serve as a basis for designing innovative learning models.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Internalization of Religious Values and Culture

The first theme concerns the gap between students' cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings and their ability to internalize these values in everyday behavior. The analysis of interview and observation data generated several recurring codes, including difficulties in reading the Qur'an, inconsistent religious practices, weak discipline, and limited application of religious values in daily interactions. These codes were subsequently grouped into the broader category of limited internalization of religious values. This pattern appeared across the three educational levels, although its manifestation differed according to students' developmental characteristics. At the elementary level, teachers reported that some students still required substantial assistance in developing basic Qur'anic literacy and practicing religious routines. At the secondary level, the issue was more visible in the gap between students' knowledge of religious concepts and their behavioral implementation.

Teachers' accounts were consistent with classroom observations. Students were generally able to recall religious concepts and provide correct answers to questions concerning Islamic teachings, but the application of these concepts in everyday situations was less consistent. One junior high school PAI teacher explained: *"The children can answer questions about the pillars of faith, but they still struggle to apply them in their daily lives."*

Rather than treating this statement as evidence by itself, the finding was interpreted together with recurring observations and other interview accounts. The convergence of these sources suggests that the central challenge is not simply students' lack of religious knowledge, but the limited transformation of religious knowledge into habitual attitudes and behavior. Teachers also identified structural constraints contributing to this condition. Limited instructional time, curriculum demands, and available learning resources encouraged teachers to prioritize the delivery of subject matter and assessment preparation. Consequently, opportunities for sustained reflection, practice, mentoring, and behavioral reinforcement were relatively limited. The findings therefore indicate that the internalization of religious values requires learning experiences that extend beyond cognitive transmission and provide students with opportunities to practice, reflect on, and apply Islamic values in authentic contexts.

Descriptive Profile of Students' Spiritual and Moral Intelligence

To complement the qualitative findings, descriptive survey data were collected from 35 secondary school students. The survey was used as supporting evidence to provide an overview of the distribution of students' spiritual and moral intelligence. The survey findings were not treated as an independent causal test, but were integrated with the qualitative evidence to provide a broader description of the phenomenon observed in the case study. The descriptive results indicate variation in students' spiritual intelligence. Approximately 38% of the students were classified in the high category, 44% in the medium category, and 18% in the low category. The largest proportion therefore fell within the medium category, while a smaller but important proportion demonstrated relatively low spiritual intelligence.

These findings provide quantitative support for the qualitative observation that students' spiritual development is not uniform. The relatively large proportion of students in the medium category suggests that many students possess a basic awareness of religious and spiritual values but do not necessarily demonstrate consistent internalization of these values in everyday conduct. The low-category group further indicates the need for differentiated guidance and learning experiences that can strengthen students' capacity to understand, reflect upon, and apply spiritual values. When interpreted alongside the qualitative findings, these descriptive results indicate a recurring distinction between knowing religious and moral principles and consistently applying them in daily life. Students' relatively adequate cognitive understanding does not automatically result in stable moral behavior. The qualitative data provide an explanation for this pattern by showing that classroom instruction continues to emphasize conceptual understanding, memorization, and assessment-oriented learning, while opportunities for contextual practice and reflection remain limited.

The survey findings should therefore be understood as complementary evidence rather than as a replacement for the qualitative analysis. The convergence between the descriptive survey patterns and the qualitative findings strengthens the interpretation that the principal challenge in PAI is not merely the acquisition of religious knowledge, but the process of translating that knowledge into spiritual awareness, moral reasoning, and observable behavior.

The Gap between Conventional PAI Instruction and Students' Contemporary Experiences

The second major theme concerns the growing gap between conventional PAI learning and the social and digital environments experienced by students. Data condensation from interviews and classroom observations identified recurring codes related to lecture-dominated instruction, memorization, limited use of digital media, passive classroom participation, and weak connections between religious learning and contemporary social issues. These codes were grouped into the category of limited contextualization of PAI learning. The pattern was particularly evident at the junior and senior high school levels, where students interact intensively with social media and digital environments. Students reported that some PAI lessons were difficult to connect with the situations they encounter outside the classroom. One senior high school student stated: *"Learning Islamic Religious Education in the classroom feels far removed from the real-world issues we face, such as social media interactions."*

This statement was not interpreted as an isolated indication of student dissatisfaction. Rather, it was considered together with other student interviews, teacher accounts, and classroom observations. Across these sources, students expressed a need for learning activities that address concrete issues such as social media interaction, interpersonal relationships, ethical decision-making, digital behavior, and contemporary social problems.

The findings consequently suggest that the challenge is not that students reject religious learning, but that the pedagogical connection between religious principles and students' lived experiences remains insufficiently developed. Conventional approaches centered primarily on lectures and memorization may provide students with conceptual knowledge, but they offer fewer

opportunities for students to examine how Islamic principles can guide decisions in complex contemporary situations. The issue is therefore pedagogical rather than attributable solely to students. When PAI learning is presented predominantly as the transmission of established knowledge, students may experience a disconnection between classroom content and the ethical dilemmas they encounter in their everyday digital and social environments.

Teachers' Instructional Challenges and the Need for Contextual Learning

The third theme emerged from the analysis of teacher interviews, student interviews, classroom observations, and school documents. Several recurring codes were identified, including limited instructional time, resource constraints, and reliance on conventional teaching methods, difficulty integrating digital media, and the need to connect religious concepts with contemporary problems. The analysis indicates that teachers recognize the limitations of conventional PAI instruction and demonstrate an interest in developing more interactive and contextual learning practices. At the elementary level, teachers emphasized the potential of interactive storytelling and experiential activities, particularly in teaching *Akblaq*. Such approaches were viewed as appropriate for helping younger learners understand moral values through concrete situations and relatable narratives.

At the junior and senior high school levels, teachers emphasized the importance of discussion, case analysis, problem solving, and contextual interpretation of Qur'anic verses. These findings suggest that teachers do not necessarily lack awareness of the need for pedagogical innovation. Instead, they face practical constraints in translating this awareness into sustained classroom practice. The convergence of teacher and student perspectives is particularly important. Students expressed the need to discuss real-world problems, while teachers identified case-based and thematic learning as potentially effective ways to connect Islamic teachings with contemporary issues. This convergence indicates a degree of readiness for a more contextual PAI learning model.

Toward a Deep-Learning Approach in Islamic Religious Education

The integrated analysis indicates that the development of a deep-learning-oriented PAI model should respond to the gap between religious knowledge and its practical application. The findings point toward an instructional model that moves beyond the transmission and memorization of religious concepts and emphasizes meaningful understanding, contextualization, reflection, practice, problem solving, and moral decision-making. The proposed direction is supported by three findings. First, students demonstrate varying levels of spiritual and moral intelligence, with the largest proportions located in the medium category. Second, qualitative data reveal a persistent gap between students' understanding of religious concepts and their application in daily behavior. Third, both teachers and students expressed a need for learning activities that connect Islamic teachings with authentic social and contemporary issues.

At the elementary level, this approach can emphasize storytelling, modeling, habituation, and experiential activities. At the junior high school level, learning can incorporate guided discussion, contextual problems, collaborative activities, and reflection. At the senior high school level, greater emphasis can be placed on case analysis, ethical reasoning, critical discussion, and problem solving related to contemporary social and digital issues. The proposed conceptual relationship among these elements is presented in Figure 2.

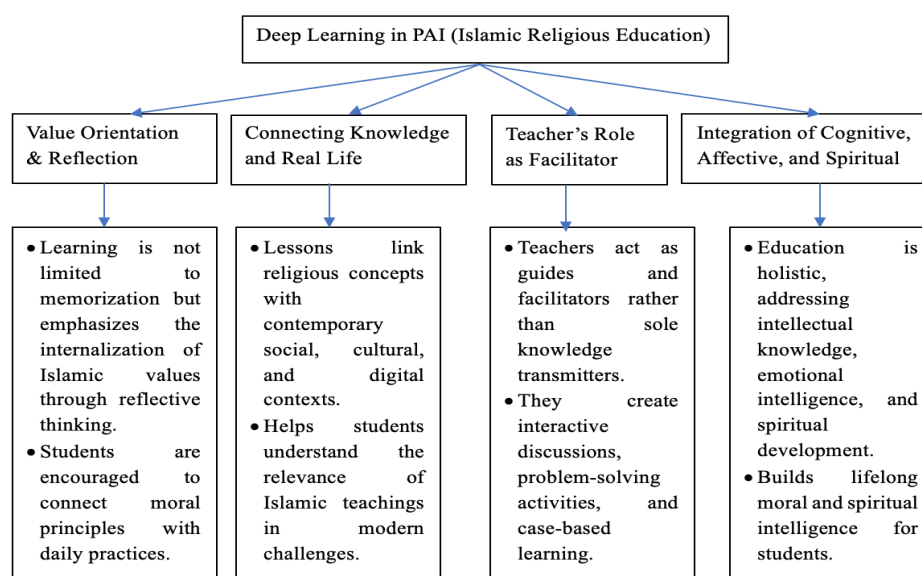


Figure 2. Concept Map of Deep Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Overall, the findings indicate that a deep-learning approach in PAI should not be understood merely as the use of a new teaching technique. Rather, it represents a pedagogical shift from knowledge transmission toward meaningful internalization and application of Islamic values. Such an approach integrates religious knowledge with students' experiences, encourages reflection and critical engagement, and provides opportunities for students to practice moral and spiritual values in authentic situations.

The integration of qualitative and descriptive survey findings consequently suggests that strengthening PAI requires attention to both students' developmental needs and the pedagogical conditions in which religious learning takes place. The variation in spiritual and moral intelligence provides an important descriptive profile, while the qualitative evidence explains how instructional practices, contextual relevance, and opportunities for value internalization shape students' experiences of PAI learning.

Discussion

From Religious Knowledge to the Internalization of Islamic Values

The findings of this study reveal a persistent gap between students' cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings and their ability to internalize and apply these values in everyday life. The descriptive survey of 35 secondary school students showed that 38% of students were categorized as having high spiritual intelligence, 44% as moderate, and 18% as low. A similar pattern was identified in moral intelligence, with 36% of students categorized as high, 42% as moderate, and 22% as low. The predominance of the moderate category indicates that many students possess an awareness of spiritual and moral values, but this awareness has not consistently developed into stable behavioral patterns. This finding is important because contemporary educational research increasingly conceptualizes student development as multidimensional, involving cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical dimensions rather than academic achievement alone (Durlak et al., 2011).

The qualitative findings provide an important explanation for this quantitative pattern. Classroom observations and interviews indicated that students were generally able to recall religious concepts and answer questions concerning Islamic teachings, but teachers observed difficulties in translating this knowledge into daily behavior. One junior high school PAI teacher explained that students could answer questions about the pillars of faith but still struggled to apply these principles in everyday life. This finding indicates that the main challenge is not simply the acquisition of religious knowledge but the transformation of knowledge into reflection, personal meaning, and

moral action. Such a distinction is consistent with the conceptualization of spiritual intelligence as involving meaning-making, critical existential reflection, transcendental awareness, and the production of personal meaning (King & DeCicco, 2009).

The distribution of spiritual intelligence found in this study is also consistent with broader evidence suggesting that spiritual and emotional dimensions are associated with students' educational development. (Zhou et al., 2024) through a systematic review and meta-analysis involving school and university students, found significant associations between spiritual intelligence, emotional intelligence, and academic achievement. Their review included studies retrieved from Scopus and other major databases. The present study extends this perspective by showing that the issue is not only whether students possess spiritual intelligence, but also whether the pedagogical environment provides sufficient opportunities for that capacity to be translated into daily religious and moral behavior.

The qualitative evidence indicates that PAI instruction remains strongly oriented toward lectures, memorization, and the transmission of conceptual knowledge. This condition may explain why students demonstrate relatively adequate cognitive understanding while experiencing difficulties in behavioral application. The finding is consistent with the broader literature on active learning, which shows that students generally benefit when learning requires them to actively process, discuss, apply, and construct knowledge rather than primarily receive information from teachers (Prince, 2004). For example, demonstrated through a large meta-analysis that active learning significantly improves student achievement and reduces failure compared with traditional lecturing. Therefore, the moderate levels of spiritual and moral intelligence observed in this study should not be interpreted simply as individual deficiencies among students. They may also reflect a pedagogical environment in which opportunities for reflection, practice, discussion, and contextual application remain limited. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of meaningful relationships, active engagement, and social-emotional development in learning environments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Deep learning is therefore relevant to PAI not simply because it provides more sophisticated teaching techniques, but because it can create opportunities for students to move from knowing religious concepts to understanding their meaning and applying them in authentic situations. Deep approaches to learning emphasize understanding relationships among concepts and constructing meaning rather than reproducing isolated information (Biggs et al., 2001). Thus, the implication for PAI is that religious knowledge should become a basis for reflection and action rather than the final learning outcome.

Teachers as Facilitators of Reflective and Contextual PAI Learning

The findings further indicate that teachers recognize the limitations of conventional PAI instruction and express a need for more contextual, interactive, and student-centered learning. Teachers at the elementary level emphasized storytelling, modeling, habituation, and experiential activities, particularly in teaching Akhlaq. Such approaches are consistent with the view that effective learning should consider students' developmental, social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics rather than relying on uniform instructional practices (Immordino-Yang, 2011). At the junior and senior high school levels, teachers emphasized thematic discussion, case analysis, problem solving, and contextual interpretation of Qur'anic verses. These approaches are particularly relevant for developing higher-order thinking, collaborative reasoning, problem-solving, and self-directed learning among secondary students (Aba-Oli et al., 2024; Wilder, 2015).

These findings indicate that deep learning should not be implemented as a standardized procedure across educational levels. Instead, its principles should be translated according to students' developmental characteristics and learning needs. Learning and development research emphasizes that pedagogical practices are most effective when they are aligned with learners' cognitive, social, emotional, and contextual development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Elementary students may therefore benefit from concrete experiences, stories, modeling, habituation, and emotionally meaningful activities, while junior high school students can

increasingly engage in guided discussion, collaborative problem solving, inquiry, and reflection. Senior high school students, in turn, can be encouraged to analyze complex cases, evaluate alternative perspectives, interpret religious texts contextually, and engage in ethical reasoning. This developmental progression is also supported by evidence that active, problem-centered, and inquiry-oriented approaches can strengthen students' critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and deeper conceptual understanding (Wilder, 2015). Moreover, the integration of affective and social dimensions into learning is important because emotion, social interaction, and cognition are closely interconnected in students' learning and decision-making processes (Immordino-Yang, 2011).

This developmental differentiation is supported by evidence showing that learning approaches involving collaboration, active participation, and problem solving can produce stronger learning outcomes than predominantly teacher-centered approaches. A recent second-order meta-analysis found that cooperative learning has a moderate positive effect on academic achievement, higher-order thinking, and affective outcomes (Güngör et al., 2026). Similarly, a meta-analysis of problem-based learning found positive effects compared with traditional instruction, particularly because students are required to engage with problems rather than merely receive information (Dağyar & Demirel, 2015). The teacher's role is consequently transformed. Teachers become facilitators who help students investigate problems, connect Islamic principles with real-life circumstances, reflect on their experiences, and consider the moral consequences of their decisions. This orientation is consistent with research demonstrating that active and student-centered learning is more effective when teachers deliberately structure opportunities for students to engage with ideas rather than simply transferring information (Miron et al., 2022).

Project-based learning provides another relevant point of comparison. A meta-analysis by (Chen & Yang, 2019) based on 30 studies involving 12,585 students, found a medium-to-large positive effect of project-based learning on academic achievement. Although PAI does not necessarily require project-based learning in every topic, the finding supports the broader argument that students benefit when learning involves authentic problems, collaboration, products, and real-world contexts.

At the same time, the findings reveal that teachers face practical constraints, including limited instructional time, learning resources, and opportunities for professional development. This suggests that pedagogical transformation cannot depend exclusively on individual teachers. Institutional support, teacher training, appropriate digital resources, and curriculum flexibility are necessary conditions for sustainable implementation. This is particularly important because evidence from educational interventions shows that implementation quality can influence the effectiveness of student-centered approaches (Arrosyid et al., 2025; Durlak et al., 2011; Haqqi et al., 2025; Kartiko et al., 2026; Kurniailah & Bakar, 2023).

Deep Learning as a Bridge Between Cognitive, Moral, and Spiritual Development

The integration of the survey and qualitative findings provides a more comprehensive interpretation of students' spiritual and moral development. The survey shows that the largest proportion of students falls within the moderate category for both spiritual and moral intelligence. Meanwhile, the qualitative findings show that students' religious knowledge is not always translated into consistent behavior. Taken together, these findings indicate that PAI needs an approach that intentionally connects cognitive understanding, personal reflection, moral reasoning, and practical action.

Deep learning provides a useful conceptual framework for this purpose. In the present study, it can be understood through three interconnected processes: conceptual depth, reflective depth, and applicative depth. Conceptual depth involves understanding Islamic teachings beyond memorization. Reflective depth requires students to relate these teachings to personal experiences, social situations, and moral questions. Applicative depth involves translating this understanding into decisions and behavior. This interpretation is consistent with the literature on deep approaches to learning. (Howie & Bagnall, 2013) distinguish deep learning from surface approaches by

emphasizing students' attempts to understand meaning and relate ideas to one another. (Prince, 2004) similarly argues that active learning encompasses instructional approaches that require students to engage meaningfully with learning activities rather than passively receive information. (Freeman et al., 2014) further provide meta-analytic evidence that active learning produces better achievement outcomes than traditional lecturing.

The relevance of this framework becomes even stronger when connected with social and emotional learning. (Durlak et al., 2011) in a meta-analysis of 213 school-based interventions involving more than 270,000 students, found that social-emotional learning improved students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance. This evidence supports the present study's argument that meaningful educational outcomes cannot be separated from students' affective and behavioral development. Within Islamic education, these dimensions can be connected to the concepts of *tafaqquh*, *tadabbur*, and *'amal shalih*. *Tafaquh* refers to deep understanding, *tadabbur* to reflective engagement with meaning, and *'amal shalih* to the manifestation of knowledge and faith through righteous action. The conceptual relationship is therefore not that deep learning replaces Islamic pedagogy, but that it can provide a pedagogical structure through which Islamic educational objectives can be more meaningfully realized.

Digital Literacy, Islamic Values, and Moral Adaptability

The lifelong learning perspective is particularly relevant in the digital era because the contexts in which moral decisions are made are constantly changing. Students encounter new forms of communication, artificial intelligence, digital communities, misinformation, and emerging ethical dilemmas that cannot all be anticipated within a fixed curriculum. PAI therefore needs to develop not only students' knowledge of established religious principles but also their capacity to reason ethically when encountering new situations.

The importance of digital literacy is supported by systematic research. (George Reyes & Avello-Martínez, 2021) analyzed scientific production on digital literacy using Scopus and demonstrated the increasing significance of digital literacy as a multidimensional educational competence. (Suárez-Perdomo et al., 2025) further show that media literacy interventions can support adolescents' critical engagement with media and information. These findings strengthen the argument that PAI should address students' digital lives rather than treating them as separate from religious learning. In the context of misinformation, (Rodríguez Castillo et al., 2026) demonstrate the relevance of media literacy education for adolescents exposed to misinformation through social media. This has direct implications for PAI because Islamic ethical education can provide a normative framework for evaluating information, communication, and behavior. Students can be taught to ask not only whether information is accurate, but also whether its dissemination is responsible, beneficial, respectful, and ethically justified. The integration of digital literacy and Islamic values is therefore not equivalent to simply increasing the amount of technology used in PAI. The central question is whether technology facilitates deeper understanding and ethical action. Recent research on Islamic Religious Education likewise emphasizes that digital literacy should be integrated with Islamic character and values rather than treated as a purely technical competence.

Previous studies have established deep learning, active learning, and student-centered pedagogy as effective approaches for strengthening conceptual understanding, higher-order thinking, problem solving, and academic achievement (Hidayanto et al., 2026). However, existing scholarship has predominantly conceptualized deep learning as a cognitive or instructional process, while its capacity to transform religious knowledge into sustained moral and spiritual behavior remains insufficiently theorized within Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Moreover, previous approaches tend to emphasize instructional effectiveness or developmental appropriateness separately, without adequately integrating these dimensions with Islamic moral reasoning and the rapidly changing digital environment. This study addresses these theoretical gaps by introducing an integrated deep-learning framework for IRE comprising three interconnected dimensions: conceptual depth, reflective depth, and applicative depth. Conceptual depth moves students

beyond memorization toward meaningful understanding; reflective depth connects Islamic teachings with personal experiences, social realities, and ethical questions; and applicative depth translates religious understanding into concrete moral decisions and actions. The framework is further differentiated according to students' developmental characteristics and extended into the digital domain through the concept of digital moral adaptability, referring to students' capacity to apply Islamic ethical principles when navigating misinformation, digital communication, artificial intelligence, and emerging ethical dilemmas. Theoretically, this study advances deep learning beyond conventional knowledge construction by positioning it as a process of religious-moral transformation, integrating cognitive depth, reflective engagement, developmental responsiveness, and digital ethical agency through the interconnected principles of *tafaqquh*, *tadabbur*, and *'amal shalih*.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels continues to face a significant gap between students' cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings and the internalization of religious values in everyday behavior. Deep learning should not be understood merely as the adoption of new instructional techniques or digital technologies, but as a shift from knowledge transmission toward meaningful understanding, reflection, contextual interpretation, and ethical practice. The findings indicate that its implementation should be developmentally differentiated: storytelling, modeling, habituation, and experiential learning are appropriate for elementary students, while contextual discussion, collaborative problem solving, case analysis, ethical reasoning, and reflective activities can be progressively emphasized at the junior and senior high school levels.

The study contributes to the development of Islamic Religious Education by conceptualizing deep learning as a bridge between religious knowledge, spiritual and moral reflection, and everyday practice. It also demonstrates that strengthening students' spiritual and moral intelligence requires more than increasing their mastery of religious content. It requires learning environments that enable students to connect Islamic values with authentic social, cultural, and digital experiences and to practice those values through meaningful activities.

Practically, the findings imply the need for teacher professional development, contextual and digital learning resources, developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, and assessment practices that evaluate not only cognitive achievement but also reflection, moral reasoning, and the application of Islamic values. Future research should empirically test the proposed deep-learning-based PAI model through intervention, quasi-experimental, and longitudinal studies to determine its effectiveness in strengthening students' spiritual intelligence, moral intelligence, critical thinking, and sustained character development.

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