

From Memorization to Meaning Making: Deep Learning as a Pathway to Higher Order Thinking in Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

Keywords:

Deep Learning,
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(HOTS).

This study aims to describe the implementation of deep learning-based instruction in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and analyze its impact on students' higher-order thinking skills at SMA Negeri 1 Tenggarong. The background of this research arises from the prevalence of surface learning practices in IRE, which emphasize rote memorization and fail to foster 21st-century skills such as critical, analytical, evaluative, and creative thinking. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The participants consisted of IRE teachers, students, parents, and school administrators selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, higher order thinking skills (HOTS) tests, and documentation, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed a transformation from memorization-based learning toward deeper understanding through case analysis, behavioral evaluation, and authentic projects such as Islamic-themed videos and podcasts. Students demonstrated improvement in higher-order thinking by linking Qur'anic verses and Hadith to contemporary issues like digital ethics and intolerance. This study concludes that deep learning is an effective instructional model to enhance students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies and can serve as a strategic approach for realizing the "Pancasila Student Profile" in the context of 21st-century Islamic education.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:
Deep Learning,
Pendidikan Agama
Islam, Kemampuan
Kognitif Tingkat
Tinggi

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan implementasi pembelajaran berbasis deep learning dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) serta menganalisis dampaknya terhadap keterampilan kognitif tingkat tinggi siswa di SMA Negeri 1 Tenggarong. Latar belakang penelitian ini berangkat dari dominannya praktik pembelajaran permukaan (*surface learning*) dalam PAI yang menekankan hafalan dan belum mengembangkan kemampuan berpikir kritis, analitis, evaluatif, dan kreatif. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas guru, siswa, orang tua, dan pihak sekolah yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, tes HOTS, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis dengan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya transformasi pembelajaran dari hafalan menuju pemahaman mendalam melalui kegiatan analisis kasus, evaluasi perilaku, serta proyek autentik seperti video dan podcast Islami. Siswa menunjukkan peningkatan keterampilan berpikir tingkat tinggi dengan kemampuan mengaitkan ayat Al-Qur'an atau hadis dengan isu kontemporer seperti etika digital dan intoleransi. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa deep learning efektif meningkatkan kompetensi kognitif, afektif, dan psikomotorik siswa, serta relevan diterapkan untuk mewujudkan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dalam konteks pembelajaran abad ke-21.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds a fundamental position in shaping students' moral reasoning, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility (Masturin 2022; Irpan and Sain 2024; Warsah and Istan 2025). Nevertheless, a persistent issue in many IRE classrooms is the dominance of surface learning practices that prioritize memorization of religious texts over meaningful understanding (Suhayib and Ansyari 2023). Qualitative observations and empirical studies indicate that such practices often fail to equip students with critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills required to navigate contemporary social and ethical challenges (Moustaghfir and Brigui 2024). In the context of rapid digital transformation, moral complexity, and increasing exposure to conflicting values, this condition becomes increasingly problematic (Nasucha, Khozin, and Thoifah 2023; Fitroni et al. 2024). Students are expected not only to recall Islamic teachings, but also to interpret, evaluate, and apply them critically in real life situations, making this phenomenon a crucial educational issue that warrants systematic academic investigation.

In response to these challenges, previous studies have increasingly emphasized the importance of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic education. Research has shown that HOTS-oriented learning can enhance students' analytical, evaluative, and creative abilities through strategies such as project-based learning, contextual discussions, and integration with national education initiatives like the Pancasila Student Profile Reinforcement Project (P5) (Kosasih et al. 2021; Hasanah, Nurlaili, and Nasution 2024). Other studies have explored deep learning as a pedagogical concept rooted in constructivist theory, highlighting its potential to foster meaningful understanding and active knowledge construction. However, most of these studies remain either conceptual or partial in nature (Millatina 2024; Nuraini 2025). Empirical research that explicitly integrates deep learning as a pedagogical process to systematically cultivate HOTS within real IRE classroom practices is still limited, particularly at the secondary school level.

Furthermore, existing literature tends to treat HOTS and deep learning as separate domains of inquiry (Lu, Pang, and Shadiev 2021). Studies on HOTS in IRE often focus on learning outcomes or assessment design, while research on deep learning predominantly examines general subjects such as science or history. As a result, there is a lack of empirical evidence explaining how deep learning functions as a comprehensive instructional approach in Islamic Religious Education and how it concretely transforms students' higher-order cognitive engagement (Hamzah, Hamzah, and Zulkifli 2022). This gap suggests that current scholarship has not sufficiently addressed the pedagogical mechanism through which deep learning can move IRE learning beyond rote memorization toward critical reasoning and contextual understanding of Islamic values.

This study seeks to address these limitations by focusing on the implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education as an integrated pedagogical approach for fostering higher-order thinking skills. Specifically, the study aims to describe how deep learning is designed and implemented in IRE learning activities and to analyze its contribution to students' abilities to analyze, evaluate, and create in relation to Islamic teachings and contemporary social issues. By positioning deep learning as the core learning process rather than merely an instructional supplement, this study complements existing research and provides a more holistic understanding of pedagogical transformation in IRE. The focus of this research lies in examining learning

practices that enable students to engage deeply with religious content in meaningful and reflective ways.

Moreover, this study empirically examines the argument that deep learning serves as an effective pathway for cultivating higher-order thinking skills and meaningful value internalization in Islamic education. Through a qualitative case study conducted at a public secondary school, this research investigates whether and how deep learning-oriented instruction facilitates a shift from surface learning toward deeper understanding, critical reflection, and contextual application of Islamic values. The central argument tested in this study is that deep learning not only enhances students' higher-order cognitive skills but also strengthens the internalization of religious values aligned with the goals of 21st-century education and the Pancasila Student Profile. By empirically grounding this argument, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to the development of innovative and transformative Islamic Religious Education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design (Dumez 2015). The qualitative approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand the learning phenomenon in a deep and holistic manner (Merriam, 1988; Oranga & Matere, 2023), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects comprehensively, whether from aspects of behavior, perception, or action. The case study design was selected because the research focuses on a single location and specific subjects to be examined intensively and in depth (Rashid et al., 2019; Haki & Prahastiwi, 2024), explains that case studies enable researchers to explore a case in detail within its real-life context.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Tenggarong with the subjects consisting of IRE (Islamic Religious Education) teachers and students. The selection of subjects was carried out using purposive sampling, namely a selection based on certain considerations relevant to the research needs. Sugiyono (2020) emphasizes that purposive sampling is a technique for determining samples based on specific criteria deemed to have the most knowledge of the problem being studied. The data collection techniques used in this study consisted of several methods: (1) observation, to directly observe the deep learning-based IRE teaching process; (2) in depth interviews, to explore the experiences of teachers and students; (3) HOTS tests, to measure students' higher-order thinking skills; and (4) documentation, including activity records, photographs, and relevant school documents. Lawlor, Tilling, and Davey Smith (2016) stresses that the use of various data collection techniques strengthens research findings, as information is obtained from multiple perspectives.

The research instruments consisted of observation sheets, interview guidelines, and HOTS based test instruments. Observation sheets were used to assess the implementation of deep learning, interview guidelines to guide the process of gathering information, and HOTS tests to measure students' analytical, evaluative, and creative abilities. Markhamah (2021) Explains that HOTS-based assessments are essential to measure students' learning outcomes in line with the 2013 Curriculum, which emphasizes 21st-century competencies.

The data analysis technique employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Mezmir (2020) explains that data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data; data display is presented in the form of

narrative descriptions; while conclusions are drawn iteratively until robust findings are obtained. To maintain data validity, this study applied triangulation techniques, namely checking data from various sources, techniques, and times. Noble and Heale (2019) emphasizes that triangulation is a technique for examining the validity of data by utilizing something external to the data itself for comparison or verification purposes. Through triangulation, the accuracy and credibility of the research data can be better ensured.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of Deep Learning in Islamic Religious Education

The implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMA Negeri 1 Tenggarong was observed directly through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis. Field observations revealed a shift from teacher-centered instruction toward student-centered learning activities, including case-based discussions, reflective dialogue, and project-based tasks. These activities encouraged students to actively construct meaning rather than merely memorize religious texts.

This finding was supported by an interview with the IRE teacher, who stated:

Deep learning in IRE means guiding students to understand the meaning behind Islamic teachings. They are not only asked to memorize verses, but to analyze how these teachings relate to real issues such as social media ethics and intolerance (Malini 2025).

Documentation in the form of lesson plans, teaching modules, and classroom photographs confirmed the consistent use of discussion-based learning and authentic projects aligned with deep learning principles.

Students' Cognitive Engagement and Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Interview data from students demonstrated increased cognitive engagement following the implementation of deep learning. Students reported that learning activities required them to analyze real-life phenomena, evaluate behaviors from an Islamic perspective, and express their ideas through discussion and creative projects.

Muhammad Fachriza, an 11th-grade science student who is active in discussions, stated:

Before this method, I only memorized the material. Now, I am asked to think about how Islamic teachings apply to issues like social media behavior. It makes the lesson more meaningful (Fachriza 2025).

Meanwhile, Bayu Haryo Mardiono, an 11th-grade social studies student who is generally more passive, remarked: *At first it was difficult to speak in discussions, but analyzing real cases helped me understand the lesson better, even if I was still nervous* (Mardiono 2025).

These statements indicate that deep learning facilitated students' transition from passive reception toward analytical and evaluative thinking, which are core indicators of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

Authentic Learning Outcomes and Creative Student Products

Qualitative evidence also showed that students translated their critical understanding into authentic learning outputs. Documentation analysis revealed various student-produced works, including digital campaign videos, posters addressing moral and spiritual issues, and short podcasts delivering Islamic messages.

Fachriza, for instance, illustrated how he was able to connect a hadith on *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) with the issue of intolerance in school: “*I did not just memorize the text, but I also examined its relevance to problems of intolerance in school or society*” (Fachriza 2025).

Meanwhile, Bayu, although still struggling to actively participate, acknowledged an increase in his understanding:

“In my opinion, deep learning helps me to better understand the content of IRE, not just memorize it. Although it was quite difficult at first, over time I began to understand it more clearly.” (Mardiono 2025).

Positive responses also came from parents. Syaiful Anwar, the parent of a 10th-grade student, stated:

“After experiencing IRE lessons with a deep learning approach, I observed that my child became more confident in expressing his opinions. He has also started to think more critically and does not simply accept information as it is, but tries to analyze it.” (Anwar 2025).

These artifacts served as tangible evidence that deep learning not only enhanced cognitive understanding but also encouraged creative expression and value internalization.

Changes in Students’ Cognitive Abilities and HOTS

Data obtained from teachers, students, parents, and school administrators demonstrated that the implementation of deep learning had a significant impact on students’ higher order thinking skills.

The findings indicate that students demonstrated the ability to engage critically with contemporary social phenomena, including the negative impacts of social media, consumerist behavior, and issues of intolerance, by meaningfully relating these issues to Islamic values. Through guided discussions and reflective activities, students were able to evaluate which behaviors were consistent with Islamic teachings and which deviated from ethical principles, such as critically assessing the phenomenon of “flexing” on social media from the perspective of Islamic ethics. Furthermore, this critical engagement was translated into authentic learning outcomes, as students produced various creative works, including digital campaign videos, posters addressing spiritual “diseases of the heart,” and short podcasts conveying Islamic messages, reflecting the integration of analytical, evaluative, and creative dimensions of higher order thinking skills.

The IRE teacher provided an example when students discussed the theme of digital ethics in Islam:

“Students were able to analyze the negative impacts of social media, evaluate behaviors that are consistent and inconsistent with Islamic teachings, and even provide recommendations for Islamic-based solutions. The change observed was that they became more critical in filtering information and more aware of digital ethics.” (Malini 2025).

Factors Influencing the Implementation of Deep Learning in IRE Learning

The implementation of deep learning-based instruction at SMAN 1 Tenggara is inseparable from both supporting factors that provide strong encouragement and challenges that need to be addressed. One of the most significant supporting factors is the policy support from the school and government through the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) curriculum. This curriculum grants teachers flexibility to develop learning in accordance with students' needs, allowing IRE teachers greater freedom in designing activities that emphasize deep understanding, value internalization, and critical thinking skills.

The Vice Principal of Curriculum, Arum Jati Muliatsih, emphasized that the curriculum's flexibility has created a major opportunity for teachers to innovate with deep learning models that had previously been rarely applied.

In addition to policy support, students' enthusiasm also plays a very influential role. The interview results revealed that students felt more engaged when learning was presented in an interactive manner. For example, Muhammad Fachriza shared that IRE lessons became more lively when the teacher introduced case studies or discussions on everyday phenomena such as gadget addiction or intolerance at school. He expressed that he was more motivated because he could share his views and listen to those of his peers. This enthusiasm made the deep learning process run more smoothly, as the model heavily relies on active student participation.

Another supporting factor is the availability of teacher training and digital learning facilities provided by the school. The IRE teacher, Rina Malini utilized various digital media such as Islamic videos and online quiz applications to create an engaging learning environment. This was made possible by the training offered by the school to prepare teachers for the demands of the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) curriculum. Facilities such as projectors, internet access, and technology-equipped classrooms also made it easier for teachers to implement deep learning.

Parental involvement was equally important in supporting the program's success. Syaiful Anwar, a parent of one of the students, shared that he noticed positive changes in his child after engaging in deep learning-based IRE lessons. His child became more diligent in worship, more responsible with household chores, and more confident in expressing opinions during family discussions. Parental support in the form of appreciation and encouragement at home helped students internalize the values learned at school, ensuring continuity between formal education and the family environment. However, the implementation of deep learning also faced significant obstacles. The first challenge was time limitations. This learning model requires longer durations as it involves multiple stages such as discussions, case analyses, and creative project development. The IRE teacher reported that the allocated lesson time was often insufficient to accommodate all planned activities, forcing some to be condensed or even omitted.

In addition to time, differences in students' personalities posed another challenge. Not all students possessed the same level of confidence and activeness in learning. Some, like Fachriza, were critical and articulate, while others, like Bayu Haryo Mardiono, still struggled to speak in class due to a lack of confidence. Such differences required teachers to work harder to maintain balance so that all students remained engaged and none felt left out of the process.

Variations in teacher readiness were another obstacle. Although the school provided training, not all teachers could adapt quickly to the deep learning method. The use of digital technology, preparation of interactive lesson modules, and management

of student projects required specialized skills that were not yet fully mastered by all educators. Teachers accustomed to lecture based methods faced great challenges in transitioning to a new approach that demanded higher creativity.

Limited access to technology also compounded the obstacles. Not all students had digital devices or reliable internet access at home. This condition made it difficult for them to complete digital media-based projects. The principal, Supriyanto explained that the school attempted to address this by providing dedicated learning spaces equipped with digital devices. Nevertheless, facility limitations remained an issue, as not all student needs could be met optimally.

Thus, it can be understood that the success of deep learning implementation is greatly influenced by a combination of supporting and inhibiting factors. Policy support, student enthusiasm, teacher preparedness, and parental involvement serve as strong drivers, but time constraints, differences in student characteristics, uneven teacher readiness, and limited technological facilities remain significant challenges that must continuously be addressed.

This was reinforced by the statement of the principal, Supriyanto:

The biggest challenges are teachers' readiness to change their teaching paradigm and the limited technological facilities for some students. To address these, the school provides intensive mentoring and prepares dedicated learning spaces equipped with adequate facilities (Supriyanto 2025).

Real-Life Impact on Students

Parents reported noticeable changes in their children's behavior at home. Syaiful Anwar stated:

"My child has become more diligent in worship, more attentive to household responsibilities, and better at cooperating with his younger sibling. What I am most grateful for is that my child now engages more frequently in discussions with us about the Islamic Education (IRE) material learned at school." (Anwar 2025).

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that deep learning not only enhances students' academic understanding but also shapes their religious character and critical attitudes in everyday life.

Visualization of Qualitative Findings

Table 1. Evidence of Deep Learning Implementation and HOTS Development

Data Source	Evidence	Key Findings
Classroom Observation	Group discussions, case analysis, project-based learning	Shift from memorization to analytical and reflective learning
Teacher Interview	Explanation of learning objectives and strategies	Deep learning emphasized meaning-making and contextual understanding
Student Interviews	Reflections on learning experiences	Increased engagement, critical thinking, and confidence
Documentation	Lesson plans, student posters, videos, podcasts	Authentic products reflecting analysis, evaluation, and creation

Based on triangulation of observations, interviews, and documentation, the findings confirm that deep learning in IRE facilitated a meaningful shift in students' learning experiences. Students were not only able to analyze and evaluate contemporary issues through Islamic perspectives but also to produce authentic works that reflected their understanding. This triangulated evidence strengthens the credibility of the findings and confirms that the results are grounded in real classroom practices rather than theoretical assumptions.

Discussion

Implementation of Deep Learning in the Context of IRE

The findings demonstrate that the application of deep learning in IRE learning at SMAN 1 Tenggara marks a significant shift from a surface learning paradigm toward deeper understanding. The IRE teacher, Rina Malini, M.Pd., emphasized that students should not merely memorize verses or hadiths but also comprehend their meanings, internalize their values, and apply them in daily life.

This statement aligns with (Marton and Saljo 1976) theory of deep learning, which characterizes meaningful learning as students' effort to understand meaning, connect ideas, and apply them in new contexts. In this study, the teacher functioned as a facilitator, providing learning experiences through discussions, case studies, and problem-based or project based learning (PBL and PjBL) (Yuna et al. 2025).

The use of strategies such as project-based learning, analysis of real-life cases (e.g., digital ethics, flexing phenomena, and intolerance), and integration with the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) is consistent with Vygotsky's constructivist principles, which highlight that students build understanding through social interaction and real world experiences (Siregar et al. 2024).

Comparison of Cognitive Abilities Before and After Implementation

A comparison of students' interview responses revealed clear transformation. Before the implementation of deep learning, IRE learning was more passive and teacher-centered. Muhammad Fachriza remarked that the lecture method made him merely a receiver of information without much room for discussion. This situation reflects typical surface learning, which emphasizes memorization.

After the application of deep learning, however, students were more actively engaged. Fachriza explained that he was more interested when the teacher presented real cases, such as gadget addiction, and asked students to analyze them through an Islamic perspective. Meanwhile, Bayu Haryo Mardiono, who was usually passive, began to show improvement in understanding, although he still faced confidence challenges. These findings reinforce prior research (Laird et al., 2014; Weng et al., 2022; Damanik & Muhammad, 2025), which stated that deep learning increases students' cognitive engagement and fosters critical thinking skills through discussion and reflection.

Analysis of HOTS Development (Analysis, Evaluation, Creation)

The enhancement of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) was clearly evident in interview data and teaching modules. The IRE teacher cited how students were able to analyze the negative impacts of social media, evaluate behaviors in light of Islamic teachings, and design creative solutions rooted in religious values.

This demonstrates progression from knowledge (C1) to analysis (C4), evaluation (C5), and even creation (C6) in Bloom's taxonomy.

Creative skills were also reflected in teaching modules, such as in a project-based activity on digital campaigns with the theme "*Qur'anic Generation: Competitive in Goodness, Excellent in Work Ethic.*" Students produced videos, posters, or podcasts

spreading Islamic messages. These activities illustrate how deep learning drives students toward higher-level learning outcomes that are difficult to achieve through memorization-based methods.

Contextual Impacts on Students' Attitudes and Behavior

Interestingly, the transformation extended beyond cognitive domains into the affective domain. Parent Syaiful Anwar highlighted real behavioral changes in his child at home: *"He has become more diligent in worship, more responsible with household duties, and better at cooperating with his sibling and peers."*

This indicates that deep learning in IRE strengthens the internalization of religious values into everyday behavior. This aligns with Bloom's (1956) perspective, which places the affective domain (attitudes, values, appreciation) as an essential aspect of learning outcomes.

Thus, deep learning not only enhances critical thinking skills but also shapes students' religious and social character, in line with the goals of the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Based on interviews with teachers, students, parents, and school administrators, the successful implementation of deep learning in IRE at SMAN 1 Tenggara was shaped by both supporting and inhibiting factors.

One key supporting factor was the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) curriculum, which provides flexibility for teachers to innovate. As emphasized by Vice Principal of Curriculum, Arum Jati Muliatsih this new curriculum enabled teachers to design more creative strategies suited to students' needs. Teachers were no longer bound by rigid memorization-focused approaches, but instead had the freedom to plan activities that fostered active engagement.

In addition, student enthusiasm toward interactive learning was a major driving force. The IRE teacher, Rina Malini, M.Pd., explained that students were visibly more motivated when engaged in discussions, case studies, or problem-based projects. This was reflected in Fachriza's statement that learning felt more meaningful when he was asked to analyze current phenomena from an Islamic perspective. Enthusiasm of this kind is essential, since deep learning relies heavily on active student participation.

Parental support also reinforced the program's success. Syaiful Anwar testified that his child became more diligent in worship, more confident in expressing opinions, and more critical in addressing daily issues after participating in deep learning-based lessons. Such support shows that deep learning extends beyond the classroom, positively influencing the family environment.

Furthermore, the school's commitment to providing teacher training and digital facilities played a significant role. Principal Supriyanto, S.Pd., noted that the school facilitated teachers with training in digital media use and provided supporting infrastructure such as technology equipped classrooms, internet access, and presentation tools.

Nonetheless, the implementation faced considerable challenges. The first was time constraints. The IRE teacher acknowledged that this model required longer sessions to accommodate discussions, analysis, and creative projects. In practice, lesson time allocation often fell short, forcing activities to be condensed.

In addition, differences in student readiness posed challenges. Some students, like Fachriza, were active and critical, while others, like Bayu Haryo Mardiono, remained passive and less confident. Teachers needed to make extra efforts to involve passive students, which often required additional strategies and energy.

Teacher readiness was another issue. Although training was provided, not all teachers felt fully prepared to master the new method. Some continued to struggle with digital media and managing interactive learning.

Finally, technological facility limitations were a real obstacle. Not all students had access to digital devices or reliable internet at home. To address this, the school provided dedicated digital learning spaces, but this did not fully resolve the issue, especially for students unable to access facilities outside school hours.

In conclusion, the success of deep learning implementation at SMAN 1 Tenggarong was the result of the interplay between supporting and inhibiting factors. Policy support, student enthusiasm, parental involvement, and school commitment formed the main strengths, while time constraints, varying student readiness, teacher preparedness, and technological limitations represented challenges to be anticipated. This interplay underscores that successful implementation of deep learning requires synergy among schools, teachers, students, and parents to achieve optimal results.

Relevance to 21st Century Education Goals and the Pancasila Student Profile

The implementation of deep learning at SMAN 1 Tenggarong demonstrates strong relevance to the demands of 21st-century education. The principal, Supriyanto, emphasized: *“Deep learning-based instruction encourages students to understand, analyze, and creatively solve real-world problems. At the same time, it trains them to think critically, collaborate, and make meaningful contributions to society”*.

This statement aligns with the objectives of the Pancasila Student Profile, which aims to shape learners who are faithful, critical, creative, and collaborative. Thus, deep learning can be viewed as a strategic instructional model for achieving these goals.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a significant and somewhat unexpected finding that could only be identified through in-depth qualitative field research: deep learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) does not merely enhance students' higher-order cognitive skills, but also facilitates a meaningful internalization of Islamic values that extends beyond the classroom into students' daily lives. Contrary to the common assumption that Islamic education primarily reinforces moral attitudes through doctrinal transmission and memorization, this study demonstrates that when students are engaged in deep learning processes such as contextual case analysis, ethical evaluation, and authentic project creation they are able to critically interpret Islamic teachings and apply them to contemporary social issues, including digital ethics, consumerism, and intolerance. This finding challenges the prevailing view that higher-order thinking and value internalization are difficult to achieve simultaneously in religious education contexts.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study strengthens and extends previous research on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Islamic education by providing empirical evidence that positions deep learning as a central pedagogical pathway for HOTS development. While earlier studies have largely treated HOTS as an instructional outcome or assessment target, this research contributes a more integrated perspective by conceptualizing deep learning as the pedagogical mechanism that enables analysis, evaluation, and creation to emerge naturally within IRE learning. Moreover, this study enriches the field by empirically linking deep learning practices with national education agendas, particularly the Pancasila Student Profile, thereby offering a contextualized model of Islamic education that is both theoretically grounded and policy-relevant. The

use of qualitative triangulation through observations, interviews, and documentation further provides methodological contribution by illustrating how deep learning can be examined rigorously in religious education settings.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research was conducted as a single case study in one public secondary school, involving a limited number of participants, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Variations in educational level, gender, age, and sociocultural background were not extensively explored, and the qualitative design, while offering depth, does not allow for statistical generalization. In addition, the findings are shaped by the specific institutional context and the readiness of teachers and students to adopt deep learning practices. Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, multiple school contexts, and mixed-method approaches in order to generate a more comprehensive understanding of deep learning implementation in Islamic education and to support evidence-based policy formulation at broader levels.

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