

Implementation of a Deep Learning-Based Approach in Islamic Religious Education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin in Medan

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A B S T R A C T

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to examine the implementation of the Deep Learning approach in Islamic Religious Education at Muallimin Islamic Junior High School (MTs) Medan under the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. The research subjects were selected through purposive sampling, involving the school principal, the vice-principal of curriculum affairs, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and students who demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the learning process. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. The results indicate that: first, lesson planning for Deep Learning-based Islamic Religious Education involves the preparation of teaching modules that include triggering questions, clear learning objectives, and structured time allocations; second, the classroom implementation effectively integrates the three pillars of Deep Learning, namely Mindful Learning (connecting), Joyful Learning (experiencing), and Meaningful Learning (creating meaning); third, the post-implementation evaluation reveals that the Deep Learning approach contributes positively to the overall effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education at MTs Muallimin Medan.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education is regarded as a vehicle for spiritual development that functions to guide students toward a comprehensive understanding and the ability to implement Islamic law values in daily life as a foundation for behavior (Herly, 2022). In line with this view, Islamic Religious Education also plays a strategic role in the process of forming students' character and personality. This character strengthening is directed at broadening students' insights and their understanding of Islamic teachings (Anwar & Syaiful, 2014). Nevertheless, within an increasingly plural social reality, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning strategies in vocational schools faces growingly complex challenges. The Indonesian education system is currently in a major wave of change that demands the strengthening of 21st-century competencies, such as critical reasoning, innovation, and collaboration, as preparation to respond to global challenges (Ahmad Suriansyah, 2015). These dynamics drive the need for curriculum reconstruction and the renewal of learning models that do not merely emphasize content mastery, but also develop deep understanding and active student engagement (Abdul Kahar, 2022).

Furthermore, the shift from traditional learning patterns toward more contemporary approaches has become an urgent necessity alongside the accelerated development of technology, especially in addressing the characteristics of digital-generation students who are accustomed to rapid and interactive information access (Hermawan & Faza, 2020). In this context, the application of deep learning has begun to be widely adopted as a significant innovation in education, both through technological utilization and as a pedagogical

approach. Islamic Religious Education in senior high schools holds a strategic role in shaping students' character, noble morals, and spirituality (Rina, 2019).

However, reality in the field indicates that the learning process of Islamic Religious Education still tends to be oriented toward cognitive aspects and rote memorization alone, dominated by lecture methods that lack active student empowerment (Farhana & Ika, 2022). At Muallimin Islamic Junior High School Medan, this condition is evident in the low level of student participation in religious discussions, a weak understanding of the meaning of Islamic teachings, and a lack of emotional and spiritual involvement in the teaching and learning process. The concept of deep learning was first introduced by the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Abdul Mu'ti, as part of an educational reform agenda aimed at presenting a more meaningful and in-depth learning process for students. This concept is not merely interpreted as the application of artificial intelligence, but rather emphasizes the development of learning methods that encourage profound critical thinking and a holistic, meaningful interconnectedness between concepts (Nurul, 2022).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this approach rests on three main pillars: mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. Mindful learning means that students are present in the classroom with full awareness and are truly focused on the lesson so they can apply what they have learned to their daily lives. Meaningful learning implies that the education must contain relevance to the students' needs. Joyful learning means that the instruction must create an exciting atmosphere that is far from boring and inherently pleasant (Akmal, 2013).

Thus, the implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education, when structured in a planned and sustainable manner, not only impacts the quality and effectiveness of the learning process but also plays a strategic role in developing students' spiritual awareness and intellectual capacity (Nurul, 2022). This approach is directed at preparing a generation that is not only superior in academic achievement but also possesses a solid Islamic understanding, commendable character, and the ability to adapt to global dynamics without abandoning Islamic values. Deep learning is understood as a learning approach designed to encourage students to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the material while simultaneously honing their capacity for analysis and problem-solving.

This approach is commonly implemented through various strategies, such as case studies, in-depth discussions, and the application of learned concepts to real-life contexts (Fadriati, 2022). The implementation of a deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education has actually begun to be adopted by several educational institutions in Indonesia (Sumarmi, 2023). This issue demands a transformation of learning approaches, one of which is through the application of the deep learning concept. Deep learning in education does not only focus on the depth of material mastery but also encompasses the aspects of full awareness (mindful learning), the significance of the learning process (meaningful learning), and a pleasant learning atmosphere (joyful learning) (Mulyasa, 2022). Through this approach, Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected to be able to create learning experiences that not only sharpen the intellect but also touch the hearts and influence the behavior of students (Akmal, 2013). Furthermore, this study examines the implementation of the three main pillars of deep learning – namely mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning – specifically within the local context of Muallimin Islamic Junior High School Medan, which has not been extensively addressed in previous research. This research contributes to the development of an Islamic Religious Education learning model based on awareness and spiritual experiences that are both contextual and applicable for teachers.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive research design, which examines data to describe social and concrete realities regarding the issues occurring at Muallimin Islamic Junior High School (MTs) Medan (Abdussamad, 2021). The focus is on the implementation of Islamic Religious Education under the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) framework using the Deep Learning approach. The subjects of this research were

Implementation of a Deep Learning-Based Approach in Islamic Religious Education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin in Medan selected through purposive sampling, involving the school principal, the vice-principal of curriculum affairs, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and selected students deemed capable of providing relevant insights for this study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation techniques (Mastang Ambo Baba, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Lesson Planning of Islamic Religious Education Based on Deep Learning

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation conducted by the researcher, it was found that Islamic Religious Education teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin Medan have designed learning activities in a planned and systematic manner by applying the concept of deep learning integrated with the principles of mindful learning, meaningful learning, and joyful learning. In this context, lesson planning does not merely aim at achieving cognitive outcomes, but also emphasizes the strengthening of students' affective and psychomotor domains.

Preparation of Deep Learning-Based Teaching Modules

Islamic Religious Education teachers develop teaching modules that reflect a deep learning approach. These modules incorporate active learning models such as inquiry learning, project-based learning, mind mapping, and reflective thinking. The modules also include triggering questions designed to foster awareness, curiosity, and students' reflective abilities toward faith-based values, particularly *syu'ābul imān* (branches of faith).

The learning objectives outlined in the modules are formulated holistically, covering three main domains:

Cognitive, to develop students' theoretical understanding of faith;

Affective, to cultivate spiritual attitudes and values such as gratitude (syukur), trust in God (tawakkal), and responsibility;

Psychomotor, to encourage students to apply faith-based values through concrete actions.

As conveyed by the informant during the interview, reflective and contextual questions are intentionally designed to help students connect faith values with their real-life experiences. One example of such a question is: "In your opinion, how can a person demonstrate their faith in today's social media era?" This question stimulates discussion and broadens the meaning of learning, encouraging students to think critically and deeply. The informant further explained that memorization-based questions are deliberately avoided and replaced with exploratory questions such as: "If faith is invisible, how can we know that someone truly has faith?" This approach illustrates how teachers promote mindful reflection within the learning process.

This finding aligns with Gardner's (1999) theory, which emphasizes that stimulating questions play a crucial role in meaningful learning, as they can spark students' curiosity, stimulate critical thinking, and connect knowledge with real-life contexts and personal values.

Holistic and Contextual Learning Objectives

Interview findings reveal that teachers formulate learning objectives by integrating the three domains of the learning taxonomy (Anderson & D.R. Krathwohl., 2001). For example, in the topic of faith in Allah, Islamic Religious Education teachers explain that:

Cognitive domain: students understand both rational ('aqli) and textual (naqli) evidences;

Affective domain: students develop feelings of gratitude and reliance on God;

Psychomotor domain: students create reflective projects, such as sharing activities or social action initiatives.

Teachers also emphasize that in moral education (akhlaq), students are not only required to explain concepts theoretically but are also assigned to practice virtuous behavior through role-play or simulations. This demonstrates that lesson planning is not merely textual but guides students toward transformative learning experiences. This approach is consistent with Bloom's Taxonomy, which adapts the cognitive domain into modern thinking processes such as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. It also

Implementation of a Deep Learning-Based Approach in Islamic Religious Education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin in Medan aligns with constructivist learning theory – particularly Vygotsky’s social constructivism – which highlights meaningful learning through direct experience, collaboration, and authentic simulations (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Time Allocation and Reflective Assessment Strategies

Lesson planning also includes proportional time allocation that supports deep learning. Time is divided into three essential stages: concept introduction, meaning exploration, and reinforcement of attitudes and practices. Teachers recognize the importance of allocating specific time for reflection through activities such as writing faith journals, group discussions, and sharing circles. These strategies strengthen students’ affective and spiritual dimensions by fostering greater awareness and internalization of the values being learned.

As explained by Islamic Religious Education teachers, approximately 10–15 minutes at the end of each lesson are devoted to personal reflection. In practice, students write about their experiences in applying *syu’ābul imān*, such as being honest or maintaining trustworthiness. This practice was also confirmed by other teachers, who stated that reflective activities are an essential component in helping students internalize faith values more deeply and personally.

Assessment Supporting Value Internalization

Teachers do not rely solely on written formative assessments but also employ alternative assessments that evaluate attitudes and skills through mini projects, daily journals, and behavioral observations. These forms of assessment align with the deep learning approach, as they provide more authentic feedback on students’ personal and spiritual development. Thus, assessment is not merely a tool for measuring academic achievement but also serves as a means of character development and self-reflection in applying faith-based values. This aligns with Muhaimin’s perspective, which states that reflection is an active and continuous process of deep thinking about experience aimed at achieving deeper understanding.

Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Learning Using the Three Main Pillars of Deep Learning

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin Medan integrates a classroom action model based on the three main pillars of deep learning: relating, experiencing, and meaning making. These pillars are mutually reinforcing and supported by mindful learning, meaningful learning, and joyful learning approaches, resulting in a holistic learning process encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Opening Activities (Relating / Mindful Learning)

The lesson begins with opening activities such as greeting, prayer, reciting shalawat, and checking student attendance. The teacher then explains the learning objectives and connects the material with students’ life experiences, social phenomena, and spiritual values. At this stage, mindful learning is particularly prominent, as students are guided to be fully present and aware during the learning process. This is reinforced through muhasabah practices, mindful breathing, and triggering questions that raise students’ awareness of the importance of faith in daily life.

For example, the teacher guides students to perform short dhikr and brief reflection before the lesson begins. Based on interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers, one teacher stated:

“Before starting the lesson, I greet the students, check attendance, then guide them through slow breathing for one to two minutes. I lead them in a short dhikr and begin the lesson with a calm and focused heart, connecting the material with guiding questions related to their daily lives.”

This illustrates how teachers cultivate students’ spiritual and emotional awareness as a foundation for reflective and meaningful learning. This practice aligns with mindfulness-based education theory, which suggests that mindfulness helps reduce stress, improve focus, and deepen learning experiences.

Core Activities (Experiencing / Joyful and Meaningful Learning)

During the core activities, learning is designed to allow students to directly experience faith concepts through enjoyable and collaborative activities. Methods used include simulations, educational games, group discussions, and case studies. This approach supports joyful learning by actively engaging students, while also fostering meaningful learning by connecting experiences with real-life values.

For instance, students participate in simulations demonstrating honesty and trustworthiness or analyze social cases related to *syu'ābul imān*. As expressed by an Islamic Religious Education teacher:

"I use simulations and educational games so that students not only understand the concept of syu'ābul imān theoretically, but also feel and practice its values. I want them to learn with their hearts, not merely through memorization."

Through such activities, learning becomes a process of character and value formation through direct and enjoyable experiences. This finding supports Hosnan's theory, which emphasizes meaningful, student-centered learning through real experiences, active engagement, and character development.

Closing Activities (Meaning Making / Meaningful and Mindful Learning)

The closing session focuses on deep reflection regarding the material learned. Teachers pose thought-provoking questions such as: "What does monotheism mean to you?" or "Which branch of faith is most important in your life?" Students are then asked to write personal journals containing reflections and concrete plans to practice faith values in daily life, such as maintaining honesty or keeping promises.

One teacher stated:

"I ask students to write a short journal about their plan to apply one faith value. I close the lesson with spiritual reinforcement and a collective prayer so that the knowledge they gain is not only for exams, but for life."

Reflection serves as a bridge between understanding and real-life action. Overall, the implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin Medan demonstrates that integrating the three pillars of deep learning with mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning creates a holistic educational experience. Teachers address not only cognitive development but also students' spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions, transforming learning into a process of value internalization and personal growth. This is consistent with Mezirow's theory, which emphasizes critical reflection as a catalyst for transformative learning.

Evaluation After the Implementation of Deep Learning-Based Instruction

Evaluation of the implementation of deep learning-based instruction at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin Medan provides a comprehensive overview of its impact on improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education. Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, several findings indicate the effectiveness of this approach across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Improvement in Conceptual Understanding (Cognitive Domain)

After implementing the deep learning approach, students demonstrated a significant improvement in understanding concepts of monotheism and *syu'ābul imān*. They were not only able to memorize definitions but also relate the material to real-life contexts. This was evident in more dynamic classroom discussions, students' ability to provide concrete examples during reflection, and the relevance and applicability of their journal writings. These findings indicate that deep learning fosters meaningful understanding rather than surface-level knowledge.

Strengthening of Attitudes and Values (Affective Domain)

Evaluation results also revealed positive developments in students' affective domain. Teachers observed increased spiritual awareness, including honesty, trustworthiness, discipline, and mutual respect among students. This demonstrates that value-based Islamic Religious Education effectively supports holistic character development. Although some students initially struggled with reflection and expressing personal values, teachers addressed

these challenges through gradual strategies, personal approaches, and intensive guidance. This highlights the importance of teacher flexibility and perseverance in implementing deep learning-based instruction.

Teachers further emphasized that after adopting the deep learning approach, students showed improved conceptual understanding, positive attitude changes, and more active engagement in the learning process. Classroom environments became calmer and more religiously oriented, despite ongoing challenges. According to Mukhopadhyay and Hossain, integrative deep learning approaches enhance meaningful conceptual understanding while simultaneously shaping character, spiritual values, and active student engagement. A supportive, reflective, and humanistic learning environment effectively fosters self-transformation and positive behavioral change.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings and discussion presented in this study, several conclusions can be drawn as follows. First, lesson planning at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muallimin Medan has successfully integrated the three core pillars of deep learning, namely mindful learning, meaningful learning, and joyful learning. Teachers design instructional modules that emphasize reflective activities, emotional engagement, and the relevance of learning materials to students' real-life experiences. Second, the implementation of learning is carried out through various instructional strategies, including thematic discussions, the use of inspiring visual media, case studies, and project-based approaches that actively involve students in the learning process. Learning is directed not only toward cognitive understanding but also toward strengthening students' character and spiritual development. Third, learning evaluation indicates that the deep learning approach has a positive impact on students' engagement in the learning process. Students demonstrate improvement in critical thinking skills, a deeper understanding of Islamic values, and the application of religious teachings in their daily lives.

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