



Deep learning as a learning strategy in islamic religious education (PAI) in schools: A literature review

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing adoption of deep learning in contemporary education, limited studies have examined its conceptual integration into Islamic Religious Education (PAI), creating a need for a comprehensive theoretical analysis. This study investigates and explains the application of deep learning as a learning strategy within Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and its relevance to students' learning experiences. Employing a library research approach, the study draws upon a range of scholarly publications, books, educational policy documents, and previous research findings related to the concepts of deep learning and Islamic Religious Education. The collected data were examined through a systematic process involving identification, classification, interpretation, and synthesis of information obtained from multiple sources. The analysis demonstrates a strong alignment between the principles of deep learning and the objectives of Islamic Religious Education. Both emphasize the development of comprehensive understanding, reflective thinking, and the internalization of Islamic values. Deep learning encourages the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions through reflective, problem-centered, contextual, collaborative, and experiential learning practices. In addition, its implementation contributes to the strengthening of critical thinking abilities, religious awareness, and practical life skills that enable learners to respond more effectively to contemporary challenges, including technological developments, changing learning systems, educational assessment practices, and policy transformations. The study further reveals that deep learning has become a central concern in educational reform efforts, particularly in relation to the implementation of educational policies promoted by the 21st-century learning paradigm and the Deep Learning Policy introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The findings provide a conceptual framework for understanding the development of Islamic Religious Education learning strategies that are more adaptive, relevant, and responsive to contemporary educational needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) constitutes a fundamental component of the educational curriculum, serving a significant role in fostering students' character formation, moral development, and spiritual growth (Yusri et al., 2024). Beyond the transmission of religious knowledge, PAI is intended to cultivate Islamic values that are reflected in learners' attitudes and everyday behavior (Biantoro et al., 2025). Within the contemporary educational landscape, PAI is expected not only to equip students with a conceptual understanding of Islamic teachings but also to develop their capacity for critical, reflective, creative, and adaptive thinking in responding to ongoing social transformations (Yusuf et al., 2024). Consequently, the adoption of appropriate instructional approaches has become increasingly important to create meaningful learning experiences that enable learners to connect religious concepts with real-life contexts.

The rapid development of science, information technology, and globalization has brought significant changes to the educational landscape. Today's learners live in an information-rich environment; however, not all information they encounter can be properly understood and interpreted (Frisnoiry & Chairad, 2024). This condition demands a transformation in the learning paradigm—from merely delivering information to fostering learning experiences that encourage students to understand, analyze, reflect upon, and apply acquired knowledge. One approach considered capable of addressing these demands is deep learning.

Over the years, deep learning has developed beyond a purely academic concept and has increasingly attracted attention in national educational policy discussions. As part of the 2024–2025 educational agenda, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemendikdasmen) introduced the Deep Learning approach as a learning paradigm emphasizing meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning. The approach seeks to strengthen the quality of learning by fostering critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, collaboration, and reflective engagement with authentic learning experiences. Such a policy reflects a shift in educational priorities—from content mastery toward deeper understanding, character formation, and the development of competencies required in the twenty-first century. Consequently, deep learning has become highly relevant across disciplines, including Islamic Religious Education, where it can support not only the acquisition of religious knowledge but also the internalization and practical application of Islamic values in everyday life (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025).

From an educational perspective, deep learning is understood as an approach that promotes comprehensive conceptual understanding, active learner engagement, critical reflection, and the application of knowledge to diverse real-world situations. The approach emphasizes meaningful and sustainable learning experiences, enabling students not merely to know a concept but also to recognize its significance and relevance to their daily lives (Jannah et al., 2025). A growing body of educational research has demonstrated that learning practices centered primarily on memorization often produce only superficial understanding. Although students may retain information for short periods, they frequently encounter difficulties when attempting to relate that knowledge to real-life situations. In contrast, learning approaches that prioritize deep understanding, reflection, and problem-solving have been shown to enhance learning outcomes and support the development of higher-order thinking skills (Zahra et al., 2026).

Despite ongoing educational reforms, contemporary realities indicate that Islamic Religious Education continues to face several challenges (Mulyadin, 2025; Nasor et al., 2025). In many educational settings, instructional practices remain dominated by teacher-centered delivery and memorization-oriented learning. Assessment systems likewise tend to emphasize students' ability to recall and explain content rather than their capacity to internalize and apply Islamic values in everyday contexts (Mandessy et al., 2025). Therefore, a noticeable discrepancy often exists between students' understanding of religious teachings and their actual behavior (Muhammad et al., 2025). This condition is reflected in various social phenomena, including low levels of worship awareness, increasing incidents of bullying, limited social concern, the misuse of digital media, and

the emergence of intolerant attitudes among adolescents—suggesting that religious education has not yet fully achieved its intended objectives (Rahayu & Siregar, 2025). These circumstances underscore the importance of adopting learning strategies capable of integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in a balanced and holistic manner.

A considerable number of studies have examined the implementation of deep learning in educational settings. Agustina et al., (2024) reported that teachers generally regard deep learning as an effective approach for improving learning quality because it promotes students' active involvement in the process of knowledge construction. Nevertheless, their findings also revealed persistent obstacles in the design and implementation of deep learning-oriented instruction, particularly those associated with pedagogical competence and the availability of adequate learning resources. The study emphasized that the successful adoption of deep learning depends not only on teacher readiness but also on supportive educational systems and institutional conditions.

Supporting this perspective, Prihatin et al., (2025) investigated the application of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education, specifically in the teaching of Islamic history. Their study demonstrated that deep learning enables students to establish meaningful connections among historical events, Islamic values, and contemporary social realities. Through such learning experiences, students are encouraged not merely to remember historical facts but also to extract lessons and values that can be applied in everyday life. These findings highlight the substantial contribution of deep learning to strengthening conceptual understanding within PAI.

Comparable conclusions were presented by Astuti, (2025) in a literature review addressing the transformation of Islamic Religious Education through the deep learning approach. The review indicated that the implementation of deep learning has the potential to shift PAI from a memorization-centered model toward learning experiences that are more reflective, contextual, and experiential. Approaches such as project-based learning, personalized learning, and reflective learning were identified as effective strategies for enhancing conceptual comprehension, religious awareness, and critical thinking skills. At the same time, the review pointed to several implementation barriers, including limited teacher competence and the continued dominance of cognitively oriented assessment practices.

In a similar vein, Muhajjalina, (2025) argued that PAI instruction remains largely characterized by surface-level learning practices, thereby restricting students' ability to internalize and apply Islamic values in daily life. According to the study, a deep learning-based instructional design is therefore necessary to position learners as active participants in the learning process. The findings suggest that deeper internalization of Islamic values occurs when students are directly engaged in reflection, inquiry, and meaningful learning activities related to the subject matter. Further evidence was provided by Santoso, (2025) who explored the integration of deep learning into Islamic Religious Education within digital learning environments. The study found that combining deep learning with educational technology can generate more interactive and meaningful learning experiences. The integration of digital tools not only enhances students' understanding of Islamic teachings but also helps them relate religious concepts to contemporary social realities. These findings reinforce the relevance of deep learning as a strategic response to current challenges in religious education.

Likewise, Wafa et al., (2025) emphasized the important role of deep learning in transforming Islamic Religious Education from a memorization-oriented approach into one that prioritizes value internalization. Learning experiences centered on reflection, authentic engagement, and meaning making enable students not only to comprehend Islamic teachings cognitively but also to appreciate and practice them in everyday life. Consequently, deep learning is viewed as an approach capable of strengthening the affective and spiritual dimensions of learners, areas that have often received insufficient attention in educational practice.

The significance of these findings is further supported by the study of Wibowo & Ali, (2026) which investigated the implementation of deep learning in secondary-level Islamic Religious Education. The study demonstrated that deep learning contributes to the development of students' critical thinking abilities, enhances communication skills, and facilitates the connection between Islamic Religious Education content and real-world contexts. Moreover, the integration of deep learning was found to strengthen the incorporation of faith and piety (IMTAQ) alongside science and technology (IPTEK), thereby creating a more effective and meaningful learning experience.

Drawing upon the findings of previous studies, it can be inferred that deep learning offers considerable potential for improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education. Its contributions are evident in the enhancement of conceptual understanding, critical thinking, religious awareness, and the internalization of Islamic values. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature has concentrated on practical implementation issues or the integration of deep learning within the Merdeka Curriculum and educational technology initiatives. Comparatively limited attention has been given to a comprehensive conceptual examination of the relevance, characteristics, and educational potential of deep learning as a learning strategy within Islamic Religious Education. To address this gap, the present study seeks to provide a systematic theoretical framework concerning the application of deep learning in PAI instruction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a library research design within a descriptive qualitative framework. The selection of this method was based on the objective of systematically reviewing and analyzing a wide range of scholarly literature related to deep learning as a strategic approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning contexts. Through qualitative inquiry, relevant concepts, theories, and previous research findings were identified, interpreted, and synthesized to generate a comprehensive understanding of deep learning implementation in educational practice. Accordingly, the study did not involve field-based data collection; instead, it focused on an in-depth examination of existing scholarly sources relevant to the research topic.

The data utilized in this study consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained from scholarly journal articles, academic books, research reports, educational policy documents, and other publications discussing deep learning concepts, learning strategies, and Islamic Religious Education. Secondary data were drawn from conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, research reports, and other scientific publications that provided additional support for the analysis. To ensure a robust theoretical foundation, all selected literature was evaluated based on its relevance, credibility, and recency.

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques involving the exploration of diverse academic sources from databases and repositories such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Garuda, and other scholarly platforms. Literature searches employed keywords including deep learning, meaningful learning, learning strategies, Islamic Religious Education, and PAI learning. The retrieved literature was subsequently screened according to its relevance to the research objectives, classified into thematic categories, and systematically documented to facilitate analysis. Emphasis was placed on highly relevant and relatively recent publications to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings.

The retrieved literature was subsequently classified into thematic categories and analyzed using thematic content analysis. Each selected study was coded according to its research objectives, methodology, educational context, deep learning concepts, implementation strategies, outcomes, and identified challenges. Similar findings were grouped into thematic categories, compared across studies, and synthesized to identify recurring patterns, research trends, research gaps, and implications for Islamic Religious Education. This systematic analytical process enhanced the credibility, consistency, and comprehensiveness of the review findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Relevance of Deep Learning to the Objectives of Islamic Religious Education

An examination of the existing literature demonstrates that the deep learning approach is strongly aligned with the fundamental objectives of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Normatively, PAI is intended to nurture individuals who possess faith and devotion to Allah SWT, demonstrate noble character, and implement Islamic values in both personal and social life. Achieving these aims requires educational experiences that extend beyond the mere transmission of religious knowledge toward fostering value internalization, self-reflection, and behavioral transformation. Within this framework, deep learning provides a pedagogical foundation that enables students to develop a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings and translate that understanding into meaningful actions. Ubadi et al., (2025) reported that the implementation of deep learning in PAI enhances the quality of learning interactions, enriches students' learning experiences, and strengthens their religious understanding.

The findings of previous studies further indicate that the core principles of deep learning correspond closely with the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains that characterize Islamic Religious Education. One of the persistent concerns in educational practice is the disproportionate emphasis placed on cognitive achievement, particularly through content mastery and memorization. Such an orientation often results in a disconnect between students' religious knowledge and the manifestation of that knowledge in daily behavior. Deep learning seeks to overcome this challenge by positioning learners as active participants in the construction of meaning through reflection, inquiry, discussion, and problem-solving activities. Consequently, educational outcomes are not limited to knowledge acquisition but also encompass moral development and spiritual awareness. These observations are consistent with the findings of Astuti, (2025), who argued that deep learning can transform PAI from a memorization-based model into a learning experience that promotes meaningful understanding and value-oriented engagement.

From the perspective of Islamic education, the concept of deep learning is also consistent with the Islamic intellectual tradition, which emphasizes tafakkur (critical thinking), tadabbur (contemplation), and ta'ammul (deep reflection). Islamic education aims not merely to produce individuals who know religious teachings but also those who understand their wisdom, purpose, and relevance to life. Therefore, deep learning can be viewed as an actualization of Islamic pedagogy that integrates understanding, appreciation, and practice into a unified whole. A study by Rizki et al., (2026) demonstrated that deep-learning-based instruction encourages students to understand Islamic teachings in contextual, critical, and reflective ways, thereby contributing to character development and religious moderation.

Based on this synthesis, it can be understood that deep learning is not merely a new pedagogical approach but a strategy that possesses both philosophical and practical relevance to the objectives of Islamic Religious Education. Through learning experiences that emphasize meaning-making, reflection, and active student engagement, PAI has the potential to become a more effective vehicle for character formation and spiritual development than approaches focused solely on memorization.

Deep Learning as a Learning Strategy in Islamic Religious Education

Contemporary literature indicates that the effective implementation of deep learning is closely associated with a fundamental transformation in the role of teachers within the instructional process. In conventional learning paradigms, teachers are generally viewed as the primary source of knowledge, responsible for transmitting information directly to students. In contrast, the deep learning approach redefines teachers' roles as facilitators, mentors, and designers of meaningful learning experiences. Rather than merely delivering content, teachers are

expected to create learning environments that encourage inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and problem-solving through authentic learning activities.

Within this framework, students are provided with opportunities to actively engage in the construction of knowledge and the exploration of real-world issues. Such learning experiences foster deeper understanding and support the development of higher-order thinking skills. Consequently, the role of the teacher shifts from information provider to learning guide, helping students connect concepts with meaningful contexts and personal experiences. This orientation is consistent with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes learner-centered education and encourages students to become active participants in the learning process. By placing learners at the center of educational activities, deep learning contributes to the development of twenty-first-century competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and lifelong learning skills.

In the context of PAI, reflective learning represents one of the most relevant strategies for implementing deep learning. Reflection enables students to connect religious content with their personal experiences, making learning more meaningful. For example, when studying moral values (*akhlak*), students are not limited to learning definitions of honesty or responsibility; they are also encouraged to reflect on personal experiences related to these values. Through reflection, students can evaluate their own behavior and develop deeper moral awareness. Astuti, (2025) noted that reflective learning grounded in deep learning principles significantly enhances students' emotional engagement and active participation in PAI learning.

In addition to reflection, problem-based learning and experiential learning are also effective strategies for implementing deep learning. In the study of *aqidah* (Islamic creed), students may be encouraged to analyze social phenomena related to faith and morality. In *fiqh* and worship-related subjects, students can be presented with case studies involving contemporary issues that require contextual interpretations of Islamic law. Similarly, in *Qur'an* and *Hadith* studies, students can conduct thematic analyses of specific verses or traditions to explore their relevance to current social issues. Such approaches enable students not only to understand the content but also to relate it to the realities of everyday life.

Research findings further indicate that the use of digital technology can strengthen the implementation of deep learning in PAI. The utilization of online learning platforms, interactive media, digital simulations, and technology-based projects provides students with richer and more personalized learning experiences. Santoso, (2025) emphasized that integrating technology into PAI supports deeper learning while maintaining a focus on the development of Islamic character. The authors' analysis suggests that the implementation of deep learning in PAI will be most effective when teachers shift the focus of instruction from content delivery to the creation of meaningful learning experiences. In this way, students will not only understand Islamic teachings conceptually but also internalize and apply them in their daily lives.

Although the reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that deep learning improves meaningful learning experiences and supports the achievement of Islamic Religious Education objectives, they differ substantially in their focus and implementation. Ubadi et al. (2025) emphasized the enhancement of learning interactions and students' religious understanding, whereas Astuti (2025) highlighted reflective learning as an effective strategy for promoting moral awareness and student engagement. Santoso (2025) focused on the integration of digital technology to strengthen learning experiences, while Rizki et al. (2026) emphasized contextual learning that promotes critical thinking and religious moderation. These similarities confirm the effectiveness of deep learning across different educational contexts, whereas the differences indicate that previous studies have mainly investigated isolated components of deep learning rather than examining their interrelationships comprehensively.

The comparison of previous studies also reveals an important research gap. Existing literature has predominantly discussed instructional strategies, technology integration, or learning

outcomes independently, with limited efforts to integrate these components into a comprehensive conceptual framework. Furthermore, previous studies have rarely explained how deep learning principles are systematically connected to the philosophical objectives of Islamic Religious Education, including the development of faith, noble character, spiritual awareness, and responsible social behavior. This limitation suggests the need for a more integrated perspective that connects educational philosophy, pedagogical principles, instructional implementation, and expected learning outcomes.

Based on this synthesis, the present review proposes an integrated conceptual framework for implementing deep learning in Islamic Religious Education. The framework consists of four interconnected dimensions: (1) the philosophical foundation of Islamic education, emphasizing faith (iman), noble character (akhlaq), and spiritual development; (2) the core principles of deep learning, including meaningful learning, inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and problem solving; (3) instructional implementation through reflective learning, problem-based learning, experiential learning, and technology-supported learning; and (4) expected educational outcomes, including conceptual understanding, higher-order thinking skills, value internalization, religious moderation, and character development. By integrating these dimensions into a single conceptual model, this framework provides a more comprehensive explanation of how deep learning can be systematically implemented in Islamic Religious Education.

Accordingly, the principal scientific contribution of this review lies not only in synthesizing previous empirical findings but also in proposing an integrated conceptual framework that connects Islamic educational philosophy, deep learning principles, instructional strategies, and educational outcomes. This framework extends previous studies by offering a holistic perspective that may serve as a theoretical reference for future research and a practical guideline for educators seeking to design meaningful, student-centered Islamic Religious Education that simultaneously promotes academic achievement and character development.

CONCLUSION

This study addressed the research question concerning the relevance and implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Based on the findings of this literature review, the findings indicate that deep learning aligns closely with the goals of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), as both emphasize the cultivation of deep understanding, reflective thinking, internalization of values, and positive behavioral change among students. The synthesis of previous studies demonstrates that the deep learning approach can reorient PAI from an emphasis on content acquisition and rote memorization toward meaningful and context-based learning that encourages the application of Islamic values in daily practice. These findings suggest that the success of PAI should not be assessed solely through students' cognitive achievement but also through their ability to understand, internalize, and consistently apply Islamic teachings in everyday life.

This study also found that deep learning supports the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains that constitute the essential foundations of PAI. The approach can be implemented through reflective, problem-based, contextual, collaborative, and experiential learning strategies that promote active student participation throughout the learning process. Through these strategies, students can strengthen their conceptual comprehension while simultaneously enhancing their critical thinking abilities, religious awareness, and capacity to relate Islamic values to contemporary life situations. The principal contribution of this review is the proposed integrated conceptual framework that synthesizes previous studies into four interconnected dimensions: the philosophical foundations of Islamic education, deep learning principles, instructional implementation strategies, and expected educational outcomes. This framework provides a comprehensive theoretical perspective for understanding the systematic implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education. Consequently, this study offers an important academic contribution, demonstrating that deep learning may serve as an appropriate

instructional approach for PAI that addresses the requirements of twenty-first-century education while remaining consistent with the Deep Learning Policy introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

From a conceptual standpoint, this study contributes to the discussion of innovative strategies in PAI by examining deep learning as an approach that positions students as active participants in the construction of knowledge and values. Practically, the findings provide implications for teachers, schools, and curriculum developers in designing learning experiences that are more meaningful, character-oriented, and relevant to students' lives. These findings also imply that successful implementation of deep learning requires curriculum support, teacher professional development, and institutional commitment to creating meaningful and student-centered learning environments. Nevertheless, the implementation of deep learning continues to encounter challenges related to teacher competence, student readiness, learning support systems, and educational policy support. Therefore, strengthening educators' capacity and developing sustainable learning ecosystems remain essential. Further studies are encouraged to investigate the implementation of this approach in diverse educational settings and levels to provide broader empirical evidence concerning its effectiveness in enhancing the quality of Islamic Religious Education. Future research is recommended to empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework across different educational levels and contexts, as well as to examine the effectiveness of specific deep learning strategies in improving students' learning outcomes, character development, and religious understanding in Islamic Religious Education.

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