

Strengthening Religious Character through the Integration of Deep Learning in Islamic Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening religious character is a fundamental goal of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), but its implementation still faces challenges because the learning process tends to be oriented towards mastery of the material and has not fully facilitated the deep internalization of Islamic values. Although deep *learning* is beginning to be widely applied in various educational contexts, studies that explain the conceptual mechanism of the relationship between deep learning and the formation of religious character in Islamic religious education are still relatively limited. This study aims to analyze the mechanism of strengthening religious character through the integration of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education and to develop a conceptual framework that explains the process of religious character transformation. The research uses a qualitative approach with *library research* design through a systematic synthesis of scientific articles, academic books, and relevant policy documents. Data was obtained from various academic databases, then analyzed using *qualitative content analysis* through the stages of data reduction, theme categorization, conceptual synthesis, and theoretical interpretation. The results of the study show that deep learning forms religious character through five interrelated stages, namely meaningful learning, critical and spiritual reflection, internalization of values, habituation of religious behavior, and the formation of religious character as the identity of students. The process is strengthened by the pedagogic competence of teachers, the school's religious culture, authentic learning experiences, the ethical use of technology, and collaboration between schools, families, and communities. The main contribution of this research is the development of a conceptual model that integrates *deep learning theory*, character education, and the philosophy of Islamic Religious Education in explaining the mechanism of religious character transformation. These findings broaden the deep learning discourse by placing the spiritual dimension as the main mechanism that bridges the relationship between meaningful learning and the formation of religious character. The resulting conceptual model is expected to be a theoretical foundation as well as a practical reference in the development of Islamic Religious Education learning that is more reflective, contextual, and oriented towards character transformation.

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Zulfikar

Pascasarjana Institut Ahmad Dahlan Probolinggo; zlfikaryusuf@gmail.com**1. INTRODUCTION**

21st century education has undergone a very significant paradigm transformation as a consequence of social changes, advances in digital technology, globalization, and the increasing complexity of life's problems. The success of education is no longer seen solely from the ability of students to master academic competence, but also from their capacity to build character, think critically, collaborate, adapt to change, and make ethical and responsible decisions. This shift places education as a whole human development process that integrates intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). In line with this direction, the national education policy through the Independent Curriculum and the Academic Manuscript of Deep Learning emphasizes that the learning process must be designed to produce meaningful learning experiences so that students are able to construct knowledge while internalizing character values in real life (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024).

In the context of Indonesia, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a very strategic position in realizing this goal. PAI not only functions as a vehicle for the delivery of Islamic knowledge, but also as an instrument for the formation of religious character that becomes the moral foundation of students in facing various dynamics of modern life. Muhaimin (2019) explained that the essence of Islamic Religious Education lies in the process of integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions so that students not only understand Islamic teachings conceptually, but are also able to live and implement these values in daily life. This view is strengthened by Nata (2020) who emphasizes that Islamic education must be able to produce people who have a balance between intellectual intelligence, spiritual maturity, and social responsibility. Therefore, the success of PAI cannot be measured only through the achievement of cognitive learning outcomes, but also through the formation of religious character that is reflected in students' attitudes, behaviors, and moral commitments (Wardhana & Raditya, 2025).

Religious character is a multidimensional construct that includes faith, piety, noble morals, responsibility, honesty, discipline, social concern, tolerance, and the ability to make Islamic teachings the basis for thinking and acting. The formation of character is not an automatic consequence of mastery of religious material, but the result of the process of internalizing values that takes place gradually through meaningful learning experiences. From the perspective of character education, Lickona (2013) explained that character develops through the integration of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*. These three dimensions show that moral knowledge is only the first step in character formation, while behavior change requires the involvement of affective aspects and real experiences that are carried out repeatedly. This perspective is in accordance with the thinking of Al-Ghazali (2013) who places *riyadhah*, *muhasabah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs* as the main mechanism of moral formation. Thus, the religious character in Islamic Religious Education develops through a process of transformation that connects knowledge, reflection, habituation, and spiritual experience in a sustainable manner.

Nevertheless, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education in various educational units still faces various challenges that are quite complex. Various studies show that PAI learning is still dominated by a teacher-centered, material-oriented approach, and places learning success on the aspect of mastering religious concepts. This condition causes the learning process to emphasize memorization activities more than building understanding, reflection, and learning experiences that allow students to internalize Islamic values in depth (Abdussyukur & Zulfah, 2025; Baskara et al., 2025; Firnanda et al., 2025). As a result, students are often able to explain religious concepts theoretically, but are not fully able to apply them consistently in daily life. This phenomenon shows

that there is a gap between the mastery of religious knowledge and the formation of religious character, so PAI learning requires a pedagogical approach that not only transfers information, but is also able to transform values into behavior.

The constructivist perspective provides an explanation for why learning that is only oriented to the delivery of material is less effective in building character. Piaget (1972) explained that knowledge is built through the process of assimilation and accommodation based on the learning experiences experienced by students. Meanwhile, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that the learning process develops through social interaction, dialogue, and collaboration that allows students to build meaning together. Thus, passive learning will limit students' opportunities to build meaningful understanding so that religious values only stop at the level of declarative knowledge. On the other hand, learning that provides space for exploration, reflection, problem-solving, and authentic experiences allows learners to connect religious concepts with the realities of life so that a deeper moral awareness is formed.

In this context, the deep learning approach emerges as a learning paradigm that has the potential to answer these challenges. Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2018) define deep learning as a learning process that allows learners to build meaningful understanding through active involvement, collaboration, reflection, creativity, and the application of knowledge in real-world situations. Hattie (2012) added that effective learning occurs when students not only know what they are learning, but also understand why the knowledge is important and how to use it to solve life's problems. Therefore, deep learning not only improves academic learning outcomes, but also strengthens critical thinking skills, self-reflection, and character building through authentic learning experiences.

The development of research in recent years shows that deep learning is beginning to be adapted in Islamic Religious Education. Various studies report that this approach is able to increase student engagement, strengthen contextual understanding of Islamic teachings, develop critical thinking skills, and encourage more reflective and meaningful learning (Aliyah et al., 2025; Aribah et al., 2025; Meirina et al., 2025; Prihantoro, 2025). Other research shows that deep learning supports the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through student-centered learning experiences while contributing to strengthening character education (Ariyati et al., 2025; Suryantoro et al., 2025). In fact, this approach has begun to be developed at various levels of education as a strategy to connect academic learning with the formation of religious character and the Pancasila Student Profile (Do et al., 2025).

However, the review of these various studies shows that most studies are still oriented towards the implementation of learning models, improving learning outcomes, evaluating learning, or developing students' critical thinking skills (Abdussyukur & Zulfah, 2025; Baskara et al., 2025; Firnanda et al., 2025). Other research discusses the application of deep learning in the context of the Independent Curriculum without comprehensively explaining the mechanism of religious character formation (Aribah et al., 2025; Ariyati et al., 2025). On the other hand, conceptual studies that integrate deep learning theory, character education theory, and Islamic religious education philosophy are still relatively limited. As a result, the relationship between meaningful learning, reflection, internalization of values, habituation of behavior, and the formation of religious character has not received a complete theoretical explanation.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to conceptually analyze the mechanism of strengthening religious character through the integration of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education using a literature study approach. In contrast to previous research that was more oriented towards the implementation of learning models, this study offers a conceptual synthesis of the relationship between meaningful learning, critical reflection, internalization of Islamic values, habituation of behavior, and the formation of religious character as a process that takes place continuously. **The novelty** of this research lies in the development of a conceptual framework that integrates *deep learning theory*, character education, and Islamic education philosophy in one analytical model that explains the mechanism of transformation of students' religious character. The conceptual framework is expected not only to enrich the scientific treasures of Islamic Religious Education, but also provide a theoretical foundation for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing learning that is more reflective, contextual, and oriented towards the formation of

religious character in a sustainable manner.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a **library research** design that aims to build a conceptual synthesis regarding the strengthening of religious character through the integration of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education. This approach was chosen because the focus of research is not to test the causal relationships between variables or measure the effectiveness of a learning model through experiments, but to develop a theoretical understanding based on critical synthesis of various relevant scientific literature. Literature research allows researchers to identify concept developments, find research *gaps*, and build new conceptual frameworks through the integration of various theoretical perspectives and empirical research results (Hamilton et al., 2025).

The source of research data consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data is in the form of scientific articles published in accredited national journals and reputable international journals during the 2020–2026 period that discuss deep *learning*, Islamic Religious Education, character education, and religious character. These articles were chosen because they represent the latest developments in the study of deep learning in the context of education, especially Islamic Religious Education (Abdussyukur & Zulfah, 2025; Aliyah et al., 2025; Aribah et al., 2025; Baskara et al., 2025; Firnanda et al., 2025; Meirina et al., 2025; Prihantoro, 2025). Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from academic books, government policy documents, international organization reports, and classical works that became the conceptual basis of research, such as character education theory (Lickona, 2013), Islamic philosophy of education (Al-Ghazali, 2013; Muhaimin, 2019; Nata, 2020), constructivist theory (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), deep learning theory (Fullan et al., 2018; Hattie, 2012), as well as national and international education policy documents (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024).

The literature search strategy is carried out systematically through several academic databases, namely Google Scholar, Crossref, Dimensions, DOAJ, Garuda, and accredited national journal portals. The search uses a combination of *keywords* *deep learning*, *Islamic Religious Education*, *Islamic Religious Education*, *religious character*, *character education*, *deep learning in education*, and *deep learning*. All literature found was then selected based on several inclusion criteria, namely: (1) having direct relevance to the research focus; (2) published in a credible academic journal or publisher; (3) presenting theoretical foundations and empirical evidence regarding deep learning or character education; and (4) contribute to the development of the concept of deep learning integration in Islamic Religious Education. On the other hand, literature that is popular, does not go through a *peer review* process, or does not have a direct connection to the research focus is eliminated from the analysis process.

The next stage is the process of extracting and organizing the data. Each article is read in depth to identify the main concepts, theoretical foundations, research methodologies, key findings, as well as conceptual implications related to the formation of religious character. All information is then poured into a literature synthesis matrix to facilitate the process of comparison between studies. The preparation of the matrix allows researchers to identify recurring patterns, find similarities and differences in research results, and group various concepts into themes that have logical connections.

Data analysis uses a *qualitative content analysis approach* that is carried out iteratively through four main stages, namely data reduction, theme categorization, conceptual synthesis, and theoretical interpretation (Hamilton et al., 2025). In the reduction stage, various pieces of information that have similar meanings are grouped into simpler units of analysis. The categorization stage is carried out by identifying the main themes, such as religious character, principles of deep learning, meaningful learning experiences, reflection, internalization of values, habituation of behavior, and factors that support the strengthening of religious character. Furthermore, the relationship between themes is critically analyzed to build a conceptual synthesis of the mechanism of formation of religious character through in-depth learning in Islamic Religious Education.

The synthesis process is not only carried out by summarizing the results of previous research, but also through critical dialogue between various theoretical perspectives. The concept of deep learning was analyzed using the framework of Fullan et al. (2018) and Hattie (2012), then interpreted

in the perspective of constructivism Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978). Furthermore, the results of the interpretation are integrated with the character education theory of Lickona (2013) and the philosophy of Islamic education developed by Al-Ghazali (2013), Muhaimin (2019), and Nata (2020). Such an integrative approach allows research to produce conceptual synthesis that not only explains the relationships between concepts, but also offers a new analytical framework regarding the mechanisms of strengthening religious character through deep learning.

To ensure the credibility of research results, validity is carried out through **triangulation of sources**, which is comparing various theories, empirical research results, and policy documents derived from different academic sources. In addition, the research applied a **trail audit** by systematically documenting the entire literature search process, reference selection, theme categorization, and conceptual synthesis. The application of both strategies aims to increase the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transparency of research so that each resulting conclusion has a scientifically accountable basis for argumentation (Hamilton et al., 2025).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Religious Character as a Transformational Outcome of Islamic Religious Education

A synthesis of various literature shows that religious character is a transformational outcome that is the main orientation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). In contrast to the learning paradigm that places material mastery as the main indicator of success, various studies show that the success of PAI is determined by the ability of students to transform religious knowledge into moral awareness and religious behavior that is consistent in daily life (Muhaimin, 2019; Nata, 2020; Wardhana & Raditya, 2025). Thus, religious character is not understood as an *instructional effect*, but as a substantive goal of the entire process of Islamic education.

The results of the synthesis show that all the literature analyzed has a common point in the view that religious character is built through the integration of four main dimensions, namely cognitive, affective, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions. The cognitive dimension functions to build a conceptual understanding of Islamic teachings through mastery of the Qur'an, hadith, creed, fiqh, and morals. However, this understanding is not enough to form character if it does not develop into an internal consciousness that influences the way we think, make decisions, and act. Therefore, the affective and spiritual dimensions become the bridge that transforms knowledge into personal beliefs, while the behavioral dimension becomes a tangible manifestation of the process of internalizing values.

The findings expand on the theory of character education developed by Lickona (2013). Lickona explained that character develops through the integration of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*. However, the synthesis of literature shows that in the context of Islamic Religious Education there is another dimension that has a central position, namely the spiritual dimension. Islamic values are not only understood as social norms, but as transcendental beliefs that shape the life orientation of students. This perspective is in line with the thinking of Al-Ghazali (2013) who explains that the formation of morals takes place through the process of *riyadhah*, *muhasabah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs* until religious values become part of a person's personality.

The results of the synthesis also show that the formation of religious character takes place through a dynamic and repetitive process. Religious knowledge is the initial foundation, but a change in character only occurs when students have the opportunity to reflect, experience meaningful learning experiences, habituate religious behavior, and gain examples from the educational environment. Thus, religious character is not the result of momentary learning, but the accumulation of learning experiences that take place continuously.

These findings indicate that the orientation of Islamic Religious Education needs to shift from an approach centered on material mastery to learning that is able to facilitate value transformation. This shift is a prerequisite for religious learning not to stop at the cognitive aspect, but to be able to produce sustainable changes in religious behavior.

3.2 Characteristics of Deep Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Analysis of various studies shows that deep learning is not just an active learning strategy, but a pedagogical paradigm that is oriented towards meaning *making* through authentic learning experiences. In contrast to *surface learning* which emphasizes memorization and reproduction of information, deep learning encourages students to build knowledge through the process of exploration, reflection, collaboration, problem-solving, and application of concepts in a real context (Fullan et al., 2018; Hattie, 2012).

The literature synthesis identifies five main characteristics of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education. The first characteristic is a meaningful conceptual understanding. Various studies show that religious learning becomes more effective when students not only memorize the postulates, but understand the meaning, purpose, and relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary life (Abdussyukur & Zulfah, 2025; Aliyah et al., 2025). This kind of understanding allows learners to build a relationship between religious concepts and the social realities they face.

The second characteristic is reflective experience. Reflection is a mechanism that connects learning experience with the formation of moral awareness. Students are encouraged to evaluate their beliefs, behaviors, and decisions based on Islamic values so that learning does not stop at the process of obtaining information, but develops into the process of forming religious identity (Firnanda et al., 2025).

The third characteristic is the contextualization of Islamic teachings. The synthesis shows that religious values are easier to internalize when they are associated with real problems faced by students. The contextual approach allows students to understand that Islamic teachings have relevance to social, environmental, economic, and technological issues so that religion is understood as an applicable guideline for life (Aribah et al., 2025; Meirina et al., 2025).

The fourth characteristic is the collaborative construction of knowledge. The constructivist perspective of Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978) explains that understanding develops through social interaction. Therefore, deep learning encourages dialogue, discussion, collaboration, and exchanging experiences as a means of building common meaning.

The fifth characteristic is continuous self-evaluation and spiritual reflection. The literature shows that deep learning provides space for students to conduct reflection on their spiritual development and behavior so that the learning process becomes a means of continuous self-development (Prihantoro, 2025).

These five characteristics do not stand alone, but form an interrelated learning system. Conceptual understanding is the basis for reflection, reflection strengthens the internalization of values, internalization encourages behavior change, while self-evaluation ensures that these changes take place in a sustainable manner. Thus, deep learning in Islamic Religious Education can be understood as a transformation process that connects knowledge, experience, and character in a pedagogical unity.

3.3 Mechanisms of Deep Learning Integration in the Formation of Religious Character

A synthesis of various literature shows that the main contribution of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education does not lie in the improvement of academic abilities alone, but in its ability to build value transformation mechanisms that link religious knowledge with changes in students' behavior. Analysis of various studies shows that the process takes place gradually through interrelated interactions between learning experiences, reflection, internalization of values, habituation of behavior, and strengthening of religious identity (Fullan et al., 2018; Hattie, 2012; Aliyah et al., 2025; Firnanda et al., 2025).

In contrast to conventional learning which places mastery of material as the final goal, deep learning views knowledge as the starting point for the formation of moral awareness. The religious knowledge gained by students through the process of exploration and investigation does not stop as declarative information, but becomes a material for reflection to understand the relationship between Islamic teachings and daily life experiences. In the perspective of constructivism, the process occurs because learners actively build meaning through the interaction between previous experiences and new learning experiences (Piaget, 1972;

Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, deep learning allows for a more personal and contextual reconstruction of understanding.

The results of the synthesis show that the mechanism of character transformation takes place through four interconnected processes.

Cognitive Internalization

The first stage is the process of cognitive internalization. At this stage, students build a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings through exploration, discussion, case analysis, and problem-solving activities. This understanding is no longer textual, but develops into a frame of thought used to interpret various social phenomena. Various studies show that contextual learning allows students to understand the relevance of Islamic values to the problems of modern life so that religious teachings are seen as a guideline for life, not just a subject matter (Abdussyukur & Zulfah, 2025; Aribah et al., 2025).

Reflective Internalization

The next stage is reflective internalization. The synthesis of literature shows that reflection is a mechanism that connects knowledge with moral awareness. Through the reflection process, students evaluate beliefs, behaviors, and life experiences based on Islamic values so that awareness is formed about the meaning of religious teachings in personal life. Hattie (2012) explained that meaningful learning only occurs when students actively reflect on their learning experiences. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this reflection develops into a *process of muhasabah* that allows students to build spiritual awareness in a more profound way.

Behavioral Transformation

The process of reflection then develops into behavioral transformation. Various studies show that authentic learning experiences encourage students to apply Islamic values in real actions, such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, social care, and ethical decision-making (Prihantoro, 2025; Wardhana & Raditya, 2025). At this stage, behavioral change is no longer driven by external pressures, but develops as a logical consequence of the values that have been internalized. This perspective is in line with Lickona's (2013) character education theory which places moral actions as a manifestation of moral knowledge and feelings that have developed before.

Strengthening Religious Identity

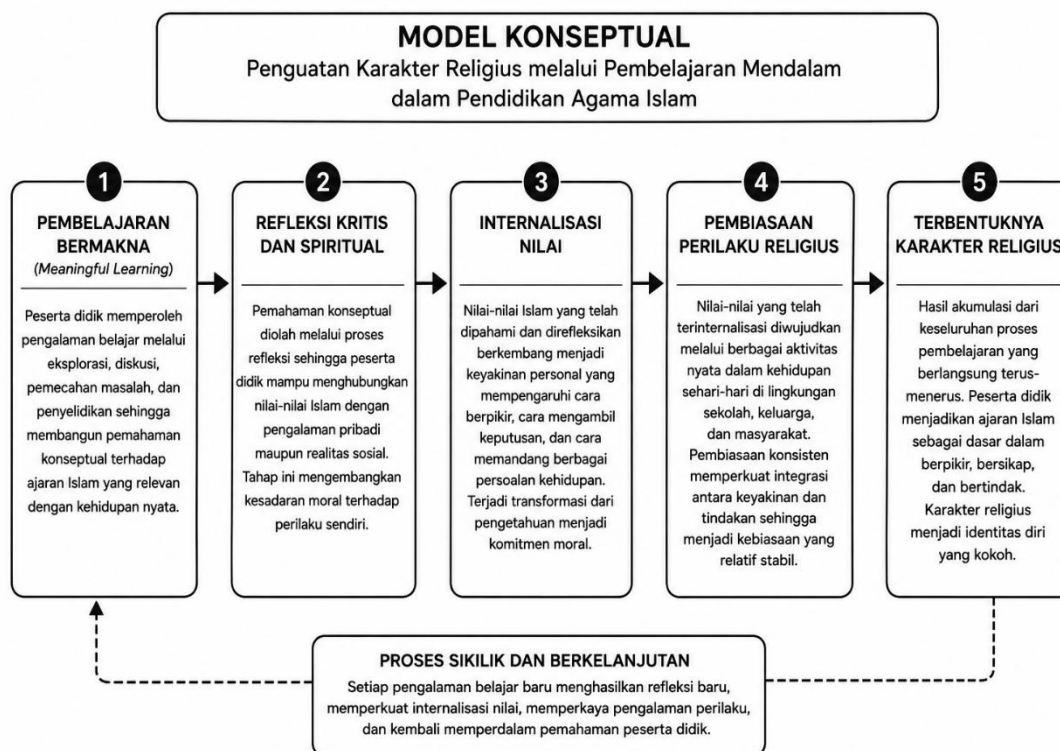
The last stage is the strengthening of religious identity. The results of the synthesis show that deep learning produces relatively continuous change because learners experience a continuous learning cycle between understanding, reflection, practice, and self-evaluation. This process gradually forms a stable religious identity so that Islamic values are no longer seen as external rules, but become part of the belief system and life orientation of the learner. This perspective strengthens the view of Al-Ghazali (2013) that the formation of morals is a process of habituation that lasts continuously until good behavior becomes character.

Based on this synthesis, it can be understood that deep learning functions as a transformational mechanism that connects cognitive, affective, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions in one complete learning process. Therefore, the success of learning Islamic Religious Education is no longer determined by the amount of material presented, but by the ability of the learning process to convert knowledge into religious character.

3.4 Conceptual Model of Strengthening Religious Character through Deep Learning

The synthesis of various theories and research results resulted in a conceptual model that explains the mechanism of strengthening religious character through in-depth learning in Islamic Religious Education. In contrast to previous research which generally only described the implementation of deep learning at the classroom level, the model produced by this study places the formation of religious character as a transformation process that takes place gradually and continuously.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Strengthening Religious Character



The conceptual model consists of five interrelated stages.

The first stage is **meaningful learning**. At this stage, students gain learning experience through exploration, discussion, problem-solving, and investigation so that they are able to build a conceptual understanding of Islamic teachings. Learning is no longer oriented to memorization, but to the formation of meanings relevant to real life (Fullan et al., 2018).

The second stage is **critical and spiritual reflection**. Conceptual understanding is then processed through a reflection process so that students are able to relate Islamic values to personal experiences and social realities faced. This stage becomes a bridge between the cognitive dimension and the affective dimension as learners begin to develop moral awareness of their own behavior (Hattie, 2012).

The third stage is **the internalization of values**. Islamic values that have been understood and reflected develop into personal beliefs that influence the way of thinking, the way of making decisions, and the way of looking at various problems in life. At this stage, there is a transformation from knowledge to moral commitment.

The fourth stage is **the habituation of religious behavior**. Internalized values are realized through various real activities in daily life, both in the school, family, and community environment. Habituation that is carried out consistently strengthens the integration between beliefs and actions so that religious behavior develops into a relatively stable habit.

The fifth stage is **the formation of religious character**. Religious character is the result of the accumulation of the entire learning process that takes place continuously. At this stage, students not only understand the teachings of Islam, but have made it the basis for thinking, behaving, and acting. Thus, religious character is understood as the outcome of a pedagogical transformation process that takes place in a sustainable manner, not as a direct consequence of the delivery of learning materials.

This conceptual model shows that the formation of religious character takes place through cyclical relationships. Each new learning experience will generate new reflections, strengthen the internalization of values, enrich behavioral experiences, and again deepen students' understanding. Therefore, the process of character formation never stops, but develops dynamically throughout the educational experience.

3.5 Strategic Factors Supporting Deep Learning Success

The literature synthesis shows that the effectiveness of deep learning in strengthening religious character is not only determined by the quality of the learning process in the classroom, but also by the integration of the educational ecosystem as a whole. The results of the analysis identified four strategic dimensions that consistently emerged in various studies.

The first dimension is the pedagogic competence of teachers. Teachers play the role of learning facilitators who are able to design meaningful learning experiences, build reflective dialogue, and provide examples in implementing Islamic values. Therefore, the success of deep learning is highly dependent on the ability of teachers to transform learning from just information transfer to a value transformation process (Muhaimin, 2019).

The second dimension is institutional culture. Schools function as a social environment that strengthens the internalization of values through habituation of worship, culture of discipline, example, and various activities that support the development of religious character. When the school culture is aligned with the learning objectives, the process of internalizing values takes place more consistently.

The third dimension is the ethical use of technology. Various studies show that digital technology is able to expand the learning experience through interactive learning resources, online discussions, and digital collaboration. However, its use must still be directed by the principles of Islamic ethics so that technology becomes a means of character formation, not just a medium for conveying information (Suryantoro et al., 2025).

The fourth dimension is the synergy of family, school, and community. Religious character develops more optimally when the values learned in school are strengthened by the family and community environment. The collaboration creates a consistency of learning experience so that the internalization of values takes place in a sustainable manner.

Based on this synthesis, it can be concluded that deep learning is not only a learning strategy in the classroom, but an educational ecosystem that integrates pedagogical processes, school culture, family environment, and society in shaping the religious character of students holistically.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Strengthening Religious Character as a Transformational Goal of Islamic Religious Education

The results of the synthesis show that religious character is a transformational goal of Islamic Religious Education that cannot be separated from the entire learning process. These findings indicate that the success of Islamic Religious Education is no longer relevant if it is only measured through academic achievement or mastery of religious materials, but must be evaluated based on the extent to which students are able to internalize Islamic values and realize them in daily behavior. Thus, religious character is not just a *learning outcome*, but a manifestation of the educational transformation process that takes place in a sustainable manner.

These findings strengthen the theory of character education developed by Lickona (2013), which explains that character formation takes place through the integration of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*. However, the results of this research synthesis show that in the context of Islamic Religious Education there is an additional dimension that has not been explicitly explained in the Lickona model, namely the spiritual dimension as the main driver of behavior change. Moral knowledge in Islamic Religious Education not only develops into moral action through ethical awareness, but also through transcendental awareness rooted in belief in Allah SWT. Therefore, religious character develops through the integration of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions so that it has more comprehensive characteristics than the general concept of character education.

This interpretation also expands Al-Ghazali's (2013) thinking about the formation of morals. Al-Ghazali places *riyadhah*, *muhasabah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs* as a habituation process that results in a gradual change in character. The results of this study show that the mechanism has a strong compatibility with the principles of deep learning. Meaningful learning experiences function as a medium of intellectual *riyadhah*, reflection becomes a form of *muhasabah*, while habituation of religious behavior is a manifestation of the process of *tazkiyatun nafs*. Thus, deep learning can be

understood not only as a modern pedagogical innovation, but also as an approach that is philosophically in tune with the tradition of Islamic education.

This finding also strengthens the view of Muhaimin (2019) and Nata (2020) that Islamic Religious Education must combine cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in a balanced manner. However, the synthesis of this study shows that the integration of the three dimensions does not take place automatically. Learning experiences are needed that allow learners to connect religious knowledge with life experiences through reflection and real practice. Thus, the process of internalizing values is a mediating factor that explains how learning is able to produce religious character.

4.2 Deep Learning as a Value Transformation Mechanism

The research findings show that the main contribution of deep learning does not lie in improving learning outcomes alone, but in its ability to transform knowledge into moral awareness. This perspective is in contrast to most previous studies that have placed more emphasis on improving critical thinking skills, creativity, or academic learning outcomes (Aliyah et al., 2025; Aribah et al., 2025; Baskara et al., 2025). The results of the synthesis show that deep learning works through pedagogical mechanisms that allow students to build meaning personally so that religious knowledge develops into a life orientation.

The findings are in line with Piaget's (1972) theory of constructivism which explains that knowledge develops through the process of assimilation and accommodation based on learning experience. Vygotsky's (1978) perspective complements this explanation by showing that the process of knowledge construction is influenced by social interaction, dialogue, and collaboration. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the two theories provide a theoretical basis that the internalization of religious values cannot be achieved through lectures or memorization alone, but requires the active involvement of students in building meaning to Islamic teachings through authentic learning experiences.

This interpretation also supports the *concept of deep learning* put forward by Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2018). According to them, deep learning aims to build global competence through the active involvement of students in the learning process. However, the results of this study expand the concept by showing that in Islamic Religious Education, deep learning not only produces 21st century competencies, but also forms religious character through the process of spiritual reflection and internalization of values. Thus, the spiritual dimension is the distinguishing element between the implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education and its implementation in other fields of study.

4.3 Conceptual Contribution to the Development of Islamic Religious Education

One of the main findings of this study is the identification of the mechanism of religious character transformation which takes place through five stages, namely meaningful learning, critical reflection, internalization of values, habituation of behavior, and formation of religious character. The synthesis provides a more comprehensive explanation than previous research which generally only describes the implementation of deep learning or evaluates the effectiveness of learning models in certain contexts (Abdussyukur & Zulfah, 2025; Firnanda et al., 2025; Prihantoro, 2025).

Theoretically, the conceptual model produced by this study shows that the formation of religious character is a dynamic and cyclical process. Each learning experience generates new reflections that reinforce the internalization of values, then develop into religious behaviors, and ultimately shape the religious identity of learners. The relationship shows that character is not formed through a single learning activity, but through an educational experience that takes place continuously. These findings contribute to the development of Islamic Religious Education theory by explaining the mechanism of the relationship between learning, reflection, internalization of values, and character formation that has not been explicitly explained in the literature.

In addition, the results of the study show that deep learning can be a conceptual bridge between modern character education and Islamic educational philosophy. The character education developed by Lickona (2013) emphasizes more on the universal moral dimension, while Islamic education adds a spiritual dimension as the basis for character formation. The integration of the two perspectives

results in a more comprehensive pedagogical approach because it combines rationality, experience, reflection, and transcendental awareness in one educational process.

4.4 Practical Implications and Further Research Agenda

Practically, the results of this study imply that Islamic Religious Education teachers need to change the learning orientation from the delivery of material to learning that facilitates a meaningful learning experience. Project-based learning, case studies, spiritual reflection, collaborative discussions, community service-based learning (*service learning*), and worship habituation are strategies that allow students to experience the process of internalizing values more deeply than conventional lecture methods (Fullan et al., 2018; Hattie, 2012).

At the institutional level, schools need to build a religious culture that supports the sustainability of the process of internalizing values through teacher examples, habituation of worship, strengthening academic culture, and close collaboration with families. A consistent learning environment will strengthen the relationship between the classroom learning experience and learners' behavior in daily life. Therefore, the formation of religious character cannot be imposed only on Islamic Religious Education teachers, but must be the responsibility of the entire educational ecosystem.

However, this study has limitations because it uses a literature review approach so that the resulting conceptual model still requires empirical verification. Further research can test this model through case study approaches, phenomenology, ethnography, and *mixed methods* at various levels of education to identify how deep learning mechanisms work in different social and cultural contexts. In addition, further research can also develop instruments to measure the level of internalization of religious values as an indicator of the success of the implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that deep *learning* is a pedagogical approach that has strategic potential in strengthening religious character through transformational learning mechanisms. Based on a synthesis of various literatures, the formation of religious character does not take place as a direct consequence of the mastery of religious material, but develops through a gradual, continuous, and interrelated process. The process begins with meaningful learning, continues with critical and spiritual reflection, then develops into the internalization of values, habituation of religious behavior, and the formation of religious character as part of the identity of students. Thus, the success of Islamic Religious Education is not only determined by the level of mastery of Islamic concepts, but also by the ability to learn to transform knowledge into moral and behavioral awareness that reflects Islamic values in daily life.

The results of the synthesis show that the effectiveness of deep learning is influenced by the integration of various components of education, including teachers' pedagogic competence, school religious culture, authentic learning experiences, ethical use of technology, and collaboration between schools, families, and communities. These four components form an educational ecosystem that allows the process of internalizing values to take place consistently and sustainably. Therefore, deep learning cannot be understood only as a classroom learning strategy, but as a holistic educational approach that integrates cognitive, affective, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions in building students' religious character.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the development **of a conceptual model of the mechanism of religious character formation through deep learning** that integrates *deep learning* theory, character education theory, and Islamic Religious Education philosophy in one analytical framework. The model explains that the relationship between meaningful learning and religious character is mediated by the process of reflection, internalization of values, and habituation of behavior. These findings expand the deep learning discourse that has been more associated with improving academic competence and higher-level thinking skills, by showing that the approach also functions as a mechanism of character transformation through the integration of spiritual dimensions. Thus, this study provides a new perspective on how deep learning can be adapted in Islamic Religious Education to produce more sustainable behavioral change.

Practically, the results of this study provide implications for teachers, school principals, curriculum developers, and policymakers so that Islamic Religious Education learning is no longer oriented to the delivery of material alone, but is directed at creating learning experiences that encourage students to think critically, conduct spiritual reflection, build meaning to Islamic teachings, and implement these values in daily life. Strategies such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, spiritual reflection, collaborative discussions, service *learning*, and religious behavior habituation need to be positioned as an integral part of the learning process, not just a supportive activity.

This study has limitations because it uses a literature study approach so that the resulting conceptual model still requires empirical testing in various educational contexts. Therefore, further research is recommended to test this model through field research using case study approaches, phenomenology, ethnography, and *mixed methods* to obtain empirical evidence on the mechanisms of deep learning in shaping religious character. In addition, future research can also develop instruments for measuring the internalization of religious values, evaluate the effectiveness of models at various levels of education, and examine the influence of school culture, family environment, and digital transformation factors on the successful implementation of deep learning in Islamic Religious Education.

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