

Internalizing Islamic leadership values through a deep learning approach in Islamic education

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Abstract

This article examines the internalization of Islamic leadership values through a deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) classes at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk. Based on the assumption that IRE plays a strategic role not only in transmitting religious knowledge but also in shaping students' character and leadership attitudes, this study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis, then analyzed using data reduction, presentation, and conclusion-drawing techniques supported by triangulation. The findings show that the deep learning approach promotes meaningful learning by encouraging critical thinking, reflection, and contextual understanding of Islamic leadership values such as responsibility, honesty, justice, cooperation, and exemplary behavior. Through problem-based learning, reflective discussions, and collaborative activities, students internalize these values cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. The study concludes that deep learning transforms Islamic Education from a knowledge-oriented approach into a value- and character-oriented learning process, making it an effective strategy for strengthening students' Islamic leadership character.

Keywords: character education, deep learning , Islamic education, Islamic leadership

INTRODUCTION

The development of globalization and advances in information technology have had a significant impact on various aspects of life, including social, cultural, and educational spheres. Easy access to information, the digitization of education, and cross-cultural interactions enable students to acquire knowledge more quickly and from a wider variety of sources. On the one hand, this opens up great opportunities for improving students' competencies. On the other hand, globalization also poses serious challenges, particularly regarding moral crises, weak leadership qualities, and declining ethical values among the younger generation. The phenomena of low responsibility, lack of honesty, minimal social concern, and weak role modeling indicate that education has not yet fully succeeded in shaping students' character in a holistic manner (Hasanah et al., 2025).

Effective education aims not only to develop cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor aspects. In the context of 21st-century education, character development has become a primary focus because the quality of a nation is determined not only by intellectual intelligence but also by the moral character and leadership of its youth. One aspect of character that needs to be developed from an early age is leadership. Leadership is not limited to formal positions but encompasses an individual's ability to take responsibility, make decisions, collaborate, and set an example for those around them. From an Islamic perspective, every individual is, by nature, a leader and will be held accountable for what they lead. Islamic leadership values such as trustworthiness, justice, honesty, responsibility, consultation, and setting a good example are fundamental principles derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, which must be internalized early on in the lives of students (Ichwanudin et al., 2025).

Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' overall character. Through Islamic Religious Education, students are expected not only to understand Islamic teachings in theory, but also to internalize and apply them in their daily lives. Ideally, Islamic Religious Education should focus on the internalization of moral values and character, rather than merely the transfer of knowledge (Nata, 2021). However, the reality on the ground shows that Islamic Education (PAI) instruction still frequently relies on conventional methods, such as lectures and rote memorization. This approach, which places greater emphasis on cognitive aspects, does not provide sufficient opportunity for the development of attitudes, reflection, and real-world experiences. As a result, the values of

Islamic leadership that are taught have not been fully internalized in the attitudes and behaviors of students (Raito & Sukmawati, 2023).

In line with the transformation of education in the 21st century, various innovative learning approaches have begun to be developed to improve the quality of education. One such approach is deep learning. This approach emphasizes deep understanding, critical reflection, active student engagement, and meaningful learning. Learners not only grasp concepts superficially but are also able to connect them to their experiences, real-life contexts, and their core values. The deep learning approach encourages learners to think critically, solve problems, engage in discussions, and reflectively evaluate their learning experiences (Taqiyya et al., 2025).

The deep learning approach in Islamic Education (PAI) instruction holds significant potential for facilitating the internalization of Islamic leadership values in students. Through deep reflection, case studies, discussions, and contextual learning, students are not merely expected to understand Islamic leadership concepts theoretically, but to genuinely internalize values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *adl* (justice), *shura* (deliberation), and exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*) until these values are authentically manifested in their attitudes and behavior. Consequently, PAI learning does not merely produce cognitive understanding, but drives an authentic and sustainable process of value internalization within students (Irfanuddin et al., 2025).

Several previous studies suggest that learning based on active engagement and reflection can enhance conceptual understanding while fostering character development (Amin & Marengke, 2025). However, research specifically integrating the deep learning approach with the process of internalizing Islamic leadership values within the PAI curriculum remains considerably limited. Prior studies have generally examined the deep learning approach only within the domain of general cognitive learning, without explicitly linking it to the internalization of Islamic leadership values rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith. Conversely, existing studies on Islamic leadership in PAI have predominantly employed normative and lecture-based approaches, leaving the internalization of leadership values largely unexplored in a structured, measurable, and pedagogically innovative manner. This gap constitutes the primary rationale and urgency of the present study (Aliyah et al., 2025).

This research was conducted at SMPN 1 Pace, Nganjuk, as a case study site based on several considerations directly relevant to the research focus. The school actively organizes

Islamic character development programs; however, the internalization of Islamic leadership values within PAI learning has not yet been implemented through a structured deep learning approach. This condition makes SMPN 1 Pace a representative empirical context for developing and testing a deep learning-based model for internalizing Islamic leadership values. Furthermore, the strong Islamic socio-cultural tradition of the Pace community provides a conducive setting for implementing PAI learning oriented toward the genuine appreciation and practice of Islamic leadership values.

Based on the above discussion, this study is important to conduct. This study aims to analyze the process of internalizing Islamic leadership values through a deep learning approach in Islamic Education instruction, as well as to identify the factors that support and hinder its implementation. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a theoretical contribution to the development of an Islamic Education learning model oriented toward the formation of Islamic leadership character, while also providing a practical contribution to teachers in designing more meaningful, reflective, and contextual learning in line with the challenges of today's education.

The scope of this study focuses on the application of the deep learning approach in Islamic Education and its relationship to the internalization of Islamic leadership values, which include trustworthiness, honesty, fairness, responsibility, consultation, and exemplary behavior. This study does not address all aspects of PAI education but focuses on learning strategies and the process of internalizing values in learning activities, with the aim of providing a deep understanding and practical recommendations for the development of character education based on Islamic values in schools.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the internalization of Islamic leadership values through the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). The research was conducted at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk, which applies active and reflective learning strategies aligned with deep learning principles. The subjects consisted of 1 Islamic Education teacher and 30 eighth-grade students selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in deep learning-based instruction. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with all participants and classroom

observations during the learning process to explore students' experiences and the implementation of Islamic leadership values in IRE instruction (Kimbal et al., 2025).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' and students' understanding of Islamic leadership values and their learning experiences. Participatory observation was conducted over 8 weeks (January–February 2026) across 16 PAI learning sessions, focusing on learning activities, teacher-student interactions, and the internalization of Islamic leadership values reflected in students' attitudes and behaviors. Document analysis included lesson plans (RPP), teaching modules, student reflection journals, worksheets (LKPD), and affective assessment records related to leadership values. These documents were used to complement and strengthen the findings from interviews and observations through source triangulation (Putri & Murhayati, 2025).

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved simplifying and categorizing information from interviews, observations, and documentation to identify emerging patterns and themes. The data were then presented descriptively to illustrate the process of internalizing Islamic leadership values in Islamic Education learning. Conclusions were drawn gradually and reflectively based on field findings and documentary evidence to ensure consistency with the research objectives (Qomaruddin & Sadiyah, 2024).

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation involving teachers, students, and documents, as well as methodological triangulation combining interviews, observations, and documentation. This triangulation strengthened the credibility and reliability of the findings and provided a valid description of the internalization of Islamic leadership values through the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (Nurfajriani et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Internalizing Islamic Leadership Values in Islamic Education

The findings of this study show that the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk significantly contributed to the internalization of Islamic leadership values among students. Values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), responsibility, honesty, justice, *shura* (deliberation), and exemplary conduct were not only understood cognitively but also reflected in students' attitudes and

Behaviors during the learning process. Interviews with teachers revealed that reflective discussions and real-life case studies encouraged students to practice these values in daily interactions. One teacher explained that students who previously only memorized the concepts of *amanah* and responsibility began to apply them by reminding peers to keep promises during group activities. Similarly, students acknowledged changes in their understanding of leadership, emphasizing honesty, responsibility, and willingness to listen to others rather than merely intellectual superiority.

Classroom observations further strengthened these findings. During a leadership case-study activity, several student groups independently used deliberation and voting mechanisms to resolve disagreements without teacher instruction, indicating that the value of *shura* had been internalized affectively and behaviorally. These findings suggest that deep learning creates meaningful and reflective learning experiences that connect Islamic values with students' real social lives. The success of this internalization process was also influenced by the socio-cultural environment of the Pace community, where traditions of deliberation and Islamic values were already strongly embedded. As a result, students experienced Islamic leadership values not as abstract theories but as values consistent with their everyday experiences.

These findings support Nugraha (2021), who argues that the deep learning approach can shape leadership character through reflective and meaningful learning. In the context of SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk, the success of value internalization was influenced not only by the pedagogical approach but also by the students' socio-cultural environment, which strongly upholds Islamic values and deliberation traditions. As a result, students experienced Islamic leadership values as relevant to their daily lives, making the internalization process more authentic and effective. This finding also reinforces Khotimah and Abdan's (2025) argument that deep learning in PAI strengthens affective engagement beyond cognitive understanding. Through participatory, reflective, and contextual learning, students were able to connect religious concepts with real-life experiences and apply values such as responsibility, tolerance, compassion, and cooperation in their social interactions (Musyarrofah, 2025). Therefore, deep learning-based PAI not only improves conceptual understanding but also transforms students' attitudes and behaviors in both school and social environments (Qolbiah et al., 2025a; Rahmawati et al., 2026).

Implementation of Deep Learning Approaches in Islamic Education

The deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk was implemented through problem-based learning, group discussions, value reflection, case studies, and contextual assignments that connected learning materials with students' real-life experiences. In this process, teachers acted as facilitators who guided students' critical thinking, encouraged dialogue, and supported self-reflection on Islamic leadership values. Observations during 16 learning sessions showed significant changes in classroom dynamics, with students becoming more active, responsible, and collaborative. For example, during a discussion on "a just leader," students independently divided roles and ensured that every group member had the opportunity to speak, reflecting the practice of deliberation and cooperation. Interview data also revealed that students found PAI learning more meaningful because they were actively involved in discussions, reflection, and real-life problem solving. In addition, teachers observed the growth of students' metacognitive abilities, as students began evaluating not only what they learned but also how they learned. These findings indicate that the deep learning approach promotes active participation, reflective thinking, collaboration, and the internalization of Islamic leadership values in both cognitive and behavioral dimensions.

The findings show that the implementation of deep learning in PAI at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk successfully developed students' metacognitive competencies, particularly their ability to evaluate, plan, and manage their own learning processes. This supports Qolbiah et al. (2025), who argue that deep learning encourages not only understanding but also sustainable internalization of Islamic leadership values. In the context of this school, metacognitive development emerged gradually through the teachers' consistent use of reflective activities at the end of each lesson, creating a culture of reflective thinking rather than merely applying deep learning procedurally. As a result, deep learning in PAI not only improved students' academic abilities but also strengthened their Islamic leadership character through active, reflective, and contextual learning, making the internalization of values more effective and sustainable.

The Impact of the Deep Learning Approach on the Development of Islamic Leadership Character

The deep learning approach in PAI at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk significantly strengthened students' Islamic leadership character, reflected in increased confidence,

responsibility, critical awareness, and accountability. Students became more active in discussions and developed a deeper understanding that Islamic leadership begins with self-discipline and self-improvement. Reflection activities also encouraged positive behavioral change, particularly in the value of *amanah* (trustworthiness). Although some students initially struggled with reflective and critical thinking due to their lecture-based learning background, teachers addressed this through scaffolding and guiding questions. Overall, deep learning-based PAI effectively internalized Islamic leadership values through reflective, contextual, and student-centered learning.

The findings reveal that the impact of deep learning on the formation of Islamic leadership character at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk was gradual and varied according to students' readiness and backgrounds, differing from previous studies that tend to generalize its effects (Rahmawati et al., 2026; Panuntun et al., 2025). The successful internalization of values such as deliberation, honesty, and *amanah* was supported by two main factors: the Islamic socio-cultural environment of the Pace community, where these values were already embedded in daily life, and teachers' pedagogical scaffolding through gradual guiding questions. The observed behavioral changes, including increased responsibility and active participation, indicate that learning reached the affective and psychomotor domains, not merely the cognitive level. These findings support Qolbiah et al. (2025) regarding metacognitive competence, while also showing that students became more capable of aligning their behavior with Islamic leadership values. Overall, deep learning-based PAI promotes holistic Islamic education by shaping students who are not only knowledgeable but also able to practice Islamic leadership values in everyday life.

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in the Process of Internalizing Islamic Leadership Values

The findings revealed that Islamic Religious Education teachers played a central role in internalizing Islamic leadership values through the deep learning approach by acting not only as knowledge transmitters but also as facilitators, motivators, mentors, and role models. Teachers emphasized the practical application of leadership values through activities such as group deliberation, fair task distribution, responsibility, case studies, social reflection, and storytelling about exemplary Islamic figures. Classroom observations showed that teachers consistently encouraged respectful discussion, honesty, responsibility, and collective decision-making. Teachers also believed that values were more effectively internalized

Through practice and habituation rather than theoretical instruction alone. Students acknowledged the influence of teachers' exemplary behavior, particularly in demonstrating fairness, discipline, and honesty, which motivated them to apply these values in their own behavior. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers played a crucial role in creating reflective and contextual learning experiences that strengthened students' Islamic leadership character.

The findings indicate that the successful internalization of Islamic leadership values at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk was strongly influenced by the relational and contextual role of Islamic Religious Education teachers, who created meaningful learning through practice, habituation, and moral exemplarity rather than merely transferring knowledge cognitively. Students responded more positively to teachers' concrete behavioral examples, making daily teacher-student interactions an important medium for strengthening emotional engagement and moral awareness. To overcome limited instructional time, teachers integrated leadership values into regular classroom activities through reflective discussions, collaborative tasks, and responsibility-based assignments. The implementation of deep learning also developed gradually through contextual adaptation, as teachers simplified reflective and participatory activities into practical classroom habits. These findings support previous studies on the importance of teacher exemplarity in Islamic character education Nasrullah et al., 2023) (Rendi & Nurlaili, 2025; , while specifically showing that, at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk, the effectiveness of value internalization depended not only on instructional methods but also on the consistency of teachers' daily interactions and moral example.

Students' Responses and Perceptions of Deep Learning Instruction

Based on interviews, classroom observations, and students' reflections, most students showed positive perceptions toward the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk. Students found the learning process more interactive, engaging, and meaningful because they were actively involved in discussions, reflections, and problem-solving activities rather than simply memorizing material. They stated that connecting Islamic leadership concepts to daily experiences, such as classroom responsibilities and group work, made the lessons easier to understand and more relevant. Classroom observations also showed increased student participation, confidence, and willingness to express opinions, particularly during collaborative discussions and case studies. Even previously passive students became more involved when learning activities related to

real-life situations. In reflective sessions, students appreciated opportunities for open dialogue and personal reflection, indicating that deep learning created a more student-centered and contextual learning environment.

The findings indicate that students at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk responded positively to the deep learning approach because it encouraged active participation, personal reflection, and contextual understanding, shifting students from passive recipients into active participants in learning. Students understood Islamic values more effectively when lessons were connected to real-life experiences, social interactions, and moral responsibilities relevant to their daily lives. Teachers also created an open and dialogical classroom atmosphere by encouraging discussion, respectful disagreement, and self-reflection, which increased students' confidence, participation, and emotional engagement. Reflective discussions and case-based learning further helped previously passive students become more active and collaborative. These findings support previous studies on the role of deep learning in improving participation, understanding, and character formation in Islamic Religious Education (Sofyan et al., 2026; (Musyarrofah, 2025), while specifically showing that, in the context of SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk, the effectiveness of deep learning lies in its contextual and reflective nature, enabling students to internalize Islamic leadership values into their attitudes, decision-making, and social behavior.

Challenges in Applying Deep Learning Approaches to Islamic Religious Education

The findings revealed that the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk faced several challenges related to limited instructional time, student readiness, teacher competence, and institutional support. Teachers explained that deep learning required more time because students needed opportunities for discussion, reflection, and critical thinking, while curriculum targets still had to be completed. Classroom observations showed that some reflective and collaborative activities had to be shortened due to time constraints. In addition, not all students were initially ready for active and discussion-based learning, as many were accustomed to lecture-centered instruction and felt hesitant to express opinions. Teachers also faced difficulties in consistently applying deep learning strategies, particularly in managing discussions and ensuring all students participated actively. Furthermore, limited educational facilities,

interactive media, and contextual learning resources became additional barriers to implementing project-based and reflective learning activities effectively.

The findings indicate that the challenges in implementing deep learning at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk were closely related to the transition from conventional teacher-centered learning toward reflective and student-centered practices. Limited instructional time became a major challenge because teachers had to balance curriculum completion with meaningful discussions and reflective activities. To address this, teachers adapted pragmatically by integrating reflection into regular lessons, reducing lecture time, and using collaborative discussions and contextual questioning. Students' initial passivity was also influenced by their previous memorization-oriented learning experiences, requiring gradual adaptation through small-group discussions, peer collaboration, and reflective questioning to build confidence and participation. Teacher readiness emerged as another challenge, as teachers were still developing competence in applying deep learning consistently; however, they responded through collaborative learning, lesson modification, and contextual teaching adjustments. Despite limited facilities and learning resources, teachers utilized accessible strategies such as real-life case discussions and students' daily experiences as contextual learning materials. These findings support previous studies on challenges in deep learning implementation (Munawir et al., 2025; Feri et al., 2025), while specifically showing that, in the context of SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk, the sustainability of deep learning depended on teachers' adaptive strategies, gradual student adjustment, and contextual classroom management.

The Implications of Deep Learning-Based Islamic Education on Strengthening Students' Character

The findings revealed that the implementation of deep learning-based Islamic Religious Education at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk significantly strengthened students' character, particularly in responsibility, honesty, cooperation, discipline, and moral awareness. Teachers observed that students became more responsible, active in collaboration, and respectful during discussions, while students themselves acknowledged a greater understanding of honesty, responsibility, and the practical application of Islamic values in daily life. Through contextual and reflective learning activities, such as group discussions, deliberation, and collaborative tasks, students were encouraged not only to understand Islamic teachings

cognitively but also to apply them in social interactions and real-life situations. Classroom observations further showed increased student participation, confidence in expressing opinions, cooperation in completing tasks, and awareness of ethical behavior, especially in communication, responsibility, and respect toward peers and teacher.

The findings indicate that the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk contributed not only to cognitive achievement but also to the holistic strengthening of students' character through reflective, collaborative, and contextual learning experiences. Students internalized Islamic values more effectively because learning activities were directly connected to their daily responsibilities, social interactions, and real-life moral situations. Character development emerged gradually through continuous practice of values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and deliberation in discussions, collaborative tasks, and problem-solving activities rather than through theoretical instruction alone. As a result, students perceived Islamic Religious Education not merely as academic material but as practical guidance for everyday life.

The implementation of deep learning also strengthened students' communication, reflective thinking, collaboration, critical thinking, and moral decision-making skills. Through open discussions and reflective activities, students learned to express opinions respectfully, consider different perspectives, and evaluate moral consequences before making decisions. These findings support previous studies on the role of deep learning in character formation and meaningful engagement in Islamic education (Musyarrofah, 2025; Hasanuddin et al., 2025). However, this study specifically reveals that, in the context of SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk, the success of character strengthening was strongly influenced by the integration of reflective learning, contextual experiences, teacher exemplarity, and continuous value practice in everyday classroom interactions.

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk contributed positively to the internalization of Islamic leadership values such as honesty, responsibility, trustworthiness, cooperation, deliberation, and exemplary conduct. Students not only understood these values cognitively but also applied them in classroom interactions, discussions, collaborative activities, and daily social behavior. Learning became more

meaningful because students were actively involved in reflective and contextual activities that connected Islamic teachings with real-life experiences. Teachers played a central role as facilitators, mentors, motivators, and role models who created open, dialogical, and student-centered learning environments that encouraged participation, reflection, and moral awareness.

The study also found that the effectiveness of deep learning was strongly influenced by the contextualization of Islamic values within students' lived experiences, making value internalization more practical and sustainable. Although challenges such as limited instructional time, differences in student readiness, teacher adaptation, and limited learning resources were identified, teachers addressed these through contextual and reflective classroom strategies. In addition to strengthening Islamic character, the approach also developed communication skills, collaboration, reflective thinking, and moral decision-making. These findings support previous studies on deep learning in Islamic education (Ismail et al., 2026; Rahmawanti & Dinata, 2025), while specifically showing that, in the context of SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk, the success of deep learning depended on the integration of reflective learning, teacher exemplarity, contextual experiences, and continuous habituation of Islamic values in students' daily learning practices.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education functions not only as a cognitive learning strategy but also as an effective pedagogical approach for strengthening the internalization of Islamic leadership values through reflective, contextual, and participatory learning. The novelty of this study lies in its finding that the successful internalization of Islamic leadership values at SMPN 1 Pace Nganjuk was influenced not merely by instructional content, but by the integration of reflective learning, teacher exemplarity, classroom social interaction, and students' real-life experiences. The study further reveals that deep learning transforms Islamic Religious Education from memorization-oriented instruction into a dialogical and character-oriented learning process, where values are internalized gradually through habituation, active participation, and continuous practice. In addition to strengthening Islamic character, the approach also

supports the development of communication, collaboration, reflective thinking, and moral decision-making skills relevant to 21st-century learning. Therefore, schools and curriculum developers are encouraged to integrate deep learning more systematically through reflective activities, contextual discussions, collaborative learning, and value-based projects, while teachers require continuous pedagogical training to develop more participatory and contextually relevant learning experiences. Future studies are recommended to explore the implementation of deep learning in different educational contexts and examine its long-term impact on students' spirituality, moral decision-making, and social skills development.

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