



Integrating Deep Learning to Foster Meaningful and Joyful Learning in Quranic Studies: A Merdeka Curriculum Framework

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Abstract

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic education demands a pedagogical shift from rote memorization to profound conceptual understanding. However, many Quranic studies classrooms still struggle with disengagement and superficial learning. This study aims to analyze the integration of the Deep Learning approach—characterized by mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning—within the Al-Qur'an Hadith subject at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. Using a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw. The findings reveal that instructional planning aligns with KMA No. 1503 of 2025, emphasizing a "curriculum of love" through teaching modules that prioritize student-centeredness. The execution of this framework utilizes discovery and problem-based learning models, successfully shifting the paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered engagement. Evaluation results, encompassing diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, demonstrate a significant improvement in student learning outcomes, with average scores rising from 70.09 to 76.34. This study concludes that the Deep Learning framework effectively fosters a more holistic and enjoyable educational environment, enabling students to internalize Quranic values more deeply while meeting the competency standards of the Merdeka Curriculum. These results imply that the synergy between mindful engagement and structured curriculum flexibility is essential for modernizing religious education in the digital era.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Deep Learning, Quranic Studies, Meaningful Learning, Joyful Learning.

Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam pendidikan Islam menuntut pergeseran pedagogis dari hafalan ke pemahaman konseptual yang mendalam, namun banyak kelas studi Al-Qur'an masih berjuang dengan kurangnya keterlibatan dan pembelajaran yang dangkal. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis integrasi pendekatan Pembelajaran Mendalam—yang dicirikan oleh pembelajaran yang penuh perhatian, bermakna, dan menyenangkan—dalam mata pelajaran Al-Qur'an dan Hadis di Madrasah Tsanawiyah. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dan dokumentasi di MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa perencanaan pembelajaran selaras dengan KMA No. 1503 tahun 2025, yang menekankan "kurikulum cinta" melalui modul pengajaran yang berpusat pada siswa. Penerapan kerangka kerja ini menggunakan model pembelajaran penemuan dan berbasis masalah yang berhasil menggeser paradigma dari keterlibatan yang berpusat pada guru menjadi keterlibatan yang berpusat pada siswa. Hasil evaluasi, yang mencakup penilaian diagnostik, formatif, dan sumatif, menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam hasil belajar siswa, dengan skor rata-rata meningkat dari 70,09 menjadi 76,34. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kerangka kerja Pembelajaran Mendalam secara efektif mendorong lingkungan pendidikan yang lebih holistik dan menyenangkan, memungkinkan siswa untuk menghayati nilai-nilai Al-Qur'an secara lebih mendalam sambil memenuhi standar kompetensi Kurikulum Merdeka. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa sinergi antara keterlibatan yang penuh perhatian dan fleksibilitas kurikulum yang terstruktur sangat penting untuk memodernisasi pendidikan agama di era digital.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of global education in the 21st century has undergone a transformative shift toward holistic competency development, emphasizing that learning must transcend traditional rote memorization to prepare students for a complex, interconnected world. This global movement necessitates that educational frameworks prioritize not only cognitive mastery but also learners' emotional and spiritual well-being, ensuring that knowledge is internalized and applicable to real-world challenges (Darmayanti et al., 2023; Inganah et al., 2023; Wajdi et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic education, particularly within Quranic studies, this significance is amplified as the curriculum must balance sacred traditional values with modern pedagogical demands. The integration of high-level thinking skills and character building has become a cornerstone of international educational standards, pushing religious institutions to modernize their instructional strategies to remain relevant and effective (Mispani et al., 2026; Umam, 2025). Consequently, the shift toward a more dynamic and integrated approach is no longer optional but a mechanical necessity to foster a generation that is both intellectually capable and ethically grounded in the digital era.

Despite these global aspirations, Islamic education at the secondary level faces critical problems characterized by student disengagement and a superficial understanding of religious texts. The primary challenge lies in the persistence of conventional, teacher-centered methodologies that treat Quranic studies as a static subject of memorization rather than a living guide for ethical conduct (Hariyanti & Lestari, 2023; Hanifah et al., 2019). Many students perceive the learning process as burdensome or monotonous, leading to a "joyless" classroom environment where the profound meanings of the Al-Qur'an are lost in the pursuit of administrative grades. Furthermore, the transition to the Merdeka Curriculum has introduced structural tensions, as educators struggle to balance the required flexibility with the rigor of religious instruction (Sukamto, 2022; Sukmadinata, 2021). These pedagogical bottlenecks are exacerbated by a lack of innovative media and interactive tools, which often results in a significant gap between the curriculum's ideal goals and the actual classroom experience, ultimately hindering the development of students' critical and reflective capacities.

Extensive research has been conducted to address these pedagogical gaps in various contexts. Research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been conducted by Sukamto (2022), Sukmadinata (2021), and Umam (2025), focusing on administrative readiness and general structural changes. Studies concerning interactive learning media and student engagement have been explored by Darmayanti (2022), Hanifah et al. (2018), and Rachmatika (2023). Additionally, research on character-based education and religious pedagogy has been discussed by Hariyanti and Wutsqa (2020) and Mispani et al. (2026). However, these studies often exhibit significant limitations; for instance, Sukamto (2022) focuses heavily on planning without providing empirical data on classroom joy, while Darmayanti (2022) emphasizes digital tools but lacks a focus on the specific spiritual depth required in Quranic studies. Most previous works treat "Deep Learning" as a technical machine-learning concept or a general cognitive strategy, failing to integrate it with the "mindful, meaningful, and joyful" triad specifically within the framework of KMA No. 1503 of 2025. This fragmentation leaves a void in understanding how a comprehensive "curriculum of love" can be practically executed in a madrasah setting.

The novelty of this research lies in its unique synthesis of the "Deep Learning" pedagogical triad—mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning—specifically tailored for Quranic studies within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Unlike previous studies that treat these elements in isolation, this research introduces the "Curriculum of Love" concept as a functional bridge between KMA No. 1503 guidelines and classroom practice (Syafi'i & Darnanengsih, 2025; Umam, 2025). By repositioning Deep Learning as a humanistic pedagogical tool rather than a purely cognitive or technical one, this study offers a fresh perspective on religious education. It moves beyond the standard adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum by providing a documented case of how spiritual internalization can be achieved through joyful and mindful engagement. The integration of these three pillars creates a new instructional architecture that prioritizes the student's emotional and spiritual connection to the text, marking a significant departure from existing models that focus primarily on literacy or digital transition.

The research gap identified here is the lack of empirical evidence regarding the synergy between the Deep Learning approach and the specific religious competency standards of the Merdeka Curriculum in Madrasah Tsanawiyah. While there is a wealth of literature on 21st-century skills (World Economic Forum, 2016; Wajdi et al., 2024), there is a noticeable absence of studies that detail the transition from teacher-centered to student-centered models in the Al-Qur'an Hadith subject through the lens of mindful and joyful pedagogy. Previous research has often ignored the emotional atmosphere of the classroom, focusing instead on test scores and digital infrastructure (Hanifah et al., 2025; Hariyanti & Wutsqa, 2020). This study addresses the discrepancy between the theoretical flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum and the rigid, rote-based reality of traditional Quranic instruction. By focusing on the "joyful" aspect, this research fills the void left by purely academic or administrative evaluations, offering a more nuanced understanding of how modern students actually internalize religious values.

The theoretical framework utilized in this study is anchored in the Constructivist Learning Theory and the Deep Learning pedagogical model proposed by Syafi'i and Darnanengsih (2025). Constructivism posits that learners actively build their own understanding by integrating new experiences with prior knowledge, which aligns perfectly with the "Meaningful Learning" pillar (Inganah et al., 2023; Wiggins, 1998). Furthermore, the study draws on Wiggins's (1998) "Educative Assessment" theory to examine how diagnostic and formative assessments can foster deep understanding rather than mere recall. This is supported by the "Mindful Learning" concept, which emphasizes presence and awareness in the learning process, and by the "Joyful Learning" framework, which focuses on reducing anxiety to enhance cognitive receptivity (Darmayanti et al., 2023; Stake, 1995). By combining these theories, the research establishes a robust foundation for analyzing how a shift in instructional philosophy can lead to better learning outcomes and a more profound connection to Quranic teachings.

The core concepts employed in this research revolve around the triad of Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful learning within the specific context of the Merdeka Curriculum. "Mindful learning" refers to students' conscious engagement and spiritual presence during the study of Al-Qur'an and Hadith, ensuring they are not merely physically present but also mentally and spiritually attentive (Syafi'i & Darnanengsih, 2025; Umam, 2025). "Meaningful learning" involves connecting Quranic verses to contemporary social and personal realities, making the text relevant to students' lives (Hanifah et al., 2025; Sukmadinata, 2021). Finally, "Joyful learning" emphasizes a classroom atmosphere free of pressure, where curiosity and a love of the subject matter drive the educational process. These concepts are operationalized through teaching modules and student-centered models like discovery and problem-based learning, which are designed to fulfill the mandates of the latest religious education regulations in Indonesia (KMA No. 1503, 2025; Sukamto, 2022).

What makes this research particularly compelling is its focus on the "Curriculum of Love"—an approach that humanizes religious education by prioritizing the bond between teacher, student, and the sacred text. In an era where education is often reduced to data and metrics, the attempt to quantify and qualify "joy" and "meaning" in a religious setting provides a fascinating and necessary counter-narrative (Gooch, 2026; Mispani et al., 2026). This study is important because it demonstrates that high academic standards and spiritual depth are not mutually exclusive but are, in fact, enhanced by a joyful pedagogical environment. By documenting the shift in student outcomes and the transformation of classroom dynamics at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw, this research provides a scalable model for other Islamic institutions. It challenges the traditional "strict" image of Quranic studies and offers a hopeful, modern alternative that aligns with the psychological needs of the Alpha and Z generations.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze and describe the comprehensive implementation of the Deep Learning approach within the Merdeka Curriculum framework for Quranic studies. Specifically, this study aims to evaluate how the planning, execution, and assessment phases are integrated to foster a mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning environment (Paimin et al., 2026; Umam, 2025). By examining the transition from teacher-centered to student-centered models and documenting the subsequent impact on learning outcomes, the research seeks to provide a definitive framework for educators looking to modernize religious instruction. Ultimately, the goal is to establish a viable pedagogical pathway that ensures students not only master the technical aspects of Quranic literacy but also internalize the ethical and spiritual values of the Al-Qur'an in a way that is relevant and enjoyable for their development in the 21st century.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research methodology is designed as a rigorous framework for systematically investigating the integration of Deep Learning into the Merdeka Curriculum. This section outlines the procedural steps taken to ensure the study's findings are both valid and reliable, beginning with the foundational research design.

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how "meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning" is operationalized in Quranic studies. The case study method is particularly effective for examining contemporary phenomena in their real-life context, enabling a detailed exploration of complex pedagogical shifts (Paimin et al., 2026; Stake, 1995). By utilizing this design, the researcher can capture the nuances of classroom interactions and the administrative adaptations required by KMA No. 1503 of 2025. The research flow is visualized in the following diagram to provide a clear roadmap of the investigative process.

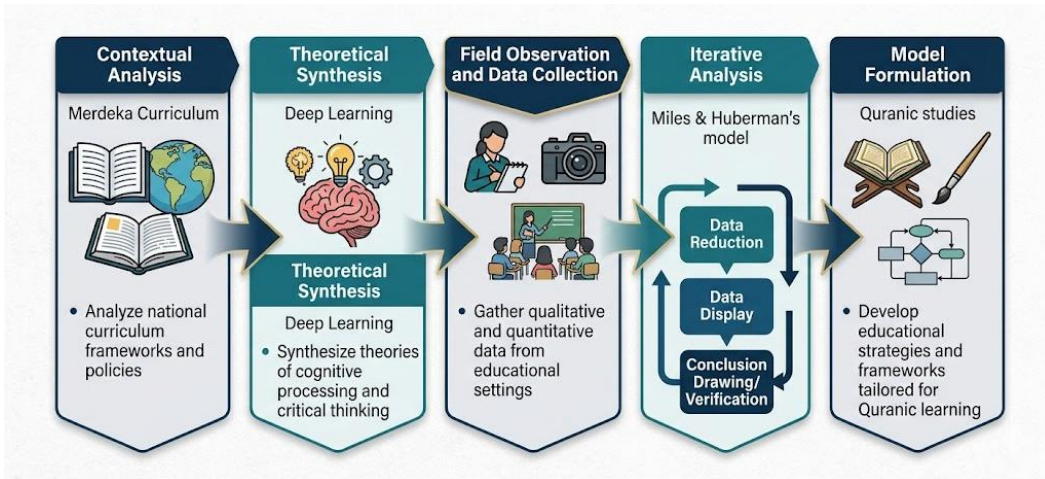


Figure 1: Methodological Research Workflow

Figure 1 illustrates the systematic progression from theoretical inquiry to practical field analysis. This workflow ensures that the transition from a teacher-centered paradigm to a student-centered one is documented through continuous triangulation between theory and empirical findings (Darmayanti et al., 2023; Sugiyono, 2019). Each stage is interconnected, ensuring that the development of the "Curriculum of Love" teaching modules is grounded in both regulatory compliance and pedagogical innovation. After establishing the overall design and workflow, the study proceeds to define the specific methods of data collection.

2.2 Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using a multi-method approach, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, to ensure data richness and depth. Interviews were conducted with school leaders, teachers of Al-Qur'an Hadith, and students to capture diverse perspectives on the implementation of Deep Learning (Hanifah et al., 2019; Spradley, 2016). The observation focused on the "joyful" and "mindful" indicators during the teaching process, while documentation analysis reviewed teaching modules (Modul Ajar) and student assessment records. This triangulation of sources is essential for verifying the alignment between instructional planning and classroom execution in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum (Inganah et al., 2023; Sukamto, 2022). To provide a structured view of the investigative focus, the following table summarizes the research questions and their corresponding analysis types.

Table 1: Research Questions and Types of Analysis

Research Dimension	Research Question (Inquiry)	Analytical Technique / Method	Key Evidence Source
Mindful Learning	How does the Merdeka Curriculum foster cognitive engagement and self-awareness in students?	Thematic Analysis: Identifying patterns of metacognition and critical thinking.	Student reflections and lesson plan audits.
Meaningful Learning	In what ways do students connect Quranic studies to real-world contexts and personal values?	Content Analysis: Evaluating the depth of "Understanding by Design" (Wiggins, 1998).	Semi-structured interviews and project portfolios.
Joyful Learning	What emotional and environmental factors contribute to a positive learning atmosphere?	Descriptive Observation: Tracking engagement levels and emotional responses.	Field notes and "Iterative Analysis" (Miles & Huberman).

Table 1 clearly links the study's inquiries to the analytical techniques employed. This structure ensures that each dimension of the Deep Learning triad—mindful, meaningful, and joyful—is systematically addressed through specific evidence-based evaluations (Paimin et al., 2026; Wiggins, 1998). Once the data is gathered, it is processed through a rigorous analytical model.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis follows the qualitative interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the condensation phase, the researcher filters vast field notes and interview transcripts to focus on themes related to "mindful" and "meaningful" engagement (Miles et al., 2014; Paimin et al., 2026). Data display involves organizing these themes into matrices or narrative scripts to reveal patterns in how students internalize Quranic values. Finally, conclusions are verified through persistent observation and peer debriefing to ensure that the findings accurately represent the educational transformation at the research site (Stake, 1995; Sukmadinata, 2021). The iterative nature of this analysis enables continuous refinement of the "Deep Learning" framework as it applies to religious education.

2.4 Research Instrument

The primary instrument in this qualitative study is the researcher themselves, supported by interview protocols, observation checklists, and document analysis guides. These instruments were developed based on indicators of Deep Learning and the requirements of the Merdeka Curriculum, ensuring they capture both the cognitive and affective domains of learning (Hariyanti & Lestari, 2023; Syafi'i & Darnanengsih, 2025). The interview protocol, for instance, includes specific prompts to explore how teachers implement the "Curriculum of Love" and manage classroom anxiety to foster joy. The observation checklist is designed to record instances of student-centered engagement and the use of discovery learning models. To clarify the structure of these tools, the following table details the instrument indicators.

Table 2: Research Instrument and Indicators

Instrument	Indicator / Variable Measured	Operational Definition	References
Observation Protocol	<i>Joyful & Mindful Engagement</i>	Observing student body language, participation rates, and focus during Quranic recitation/memorization.	Sugiyono (2019)
Semi-Structured Interview Guide	<i>Meaningful Connection</i>	Assessing how students internalize Quranic values and apply them to their personal ethics (<i>Akhlaq</i>).	Darmayanti (2022)
Document Analysis Rubric	<i>Merdeka Curriculum Alignment</i>	Evaluating Module Ajar (Lesson Plans) for differentiated learning and "Learning Achievement" (<i>Capaian Pembelajaran</i>).	Paimin et al. (2026)
Reflective Journals	<i>Metacognitive Processing</i>	Evidence of students' "Mindful" self-correction and goal setting in their learning journey.	Wiggins (1998)

Table 2 outlines the operational framework of the instruments used to ensure that the data collected is directly relevant to the research goals. This transparency in instrumentation supports the methodological rigor necessary for a scholarly case study (Darmayanti, 2022; Sugiyono, 2019). These instruments are further tested for their validity and reliability to maintain study integrity.

2.5 Validity and Reliability (Trustworthiness)

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employs triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking. Source triangulation involves comparing information from teachers, students, and administrators, while technique triangulation compares results from interviews with those from classroom observations (Carter et al., 2014; Paimin et al., 2026). Member checking was conducted by sharing the preliminary findings with the participants to confirm their accuracy and resonance with their experiences. These steps are crucial in qualitative research to minimize researcher bias and ensure that the narrative accurately reflects the madrasah's pedagogical climate (Stake, 1995; Wajdi et al., 2024). This rigorous process guarantees that the resulting framework for Quranic studies is both credible and dependable.

2.6 Subjects and Research Location

The research was conducted at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw, Tanggamus, specifically focusing on the Al-Qur'an Hadith subject for the 2025/2026 academic year. The subjects include the school principal as the curriculum supervisor, Al-Qur'an Hadith teachers as the primary implementers of Deep Learning, and secondary-level students as the beneficiaries of the "meaningful and joyful" approach (Paimin et al., 2026; Umam, 2025). This location was chosen because of its proactive transition to the Merdeka Curriculum and its commitment to innovating religious pedagogy under KMA No. 1503 of 2025. The following figure provides a visual representation of the subject distribution and the research site environment.

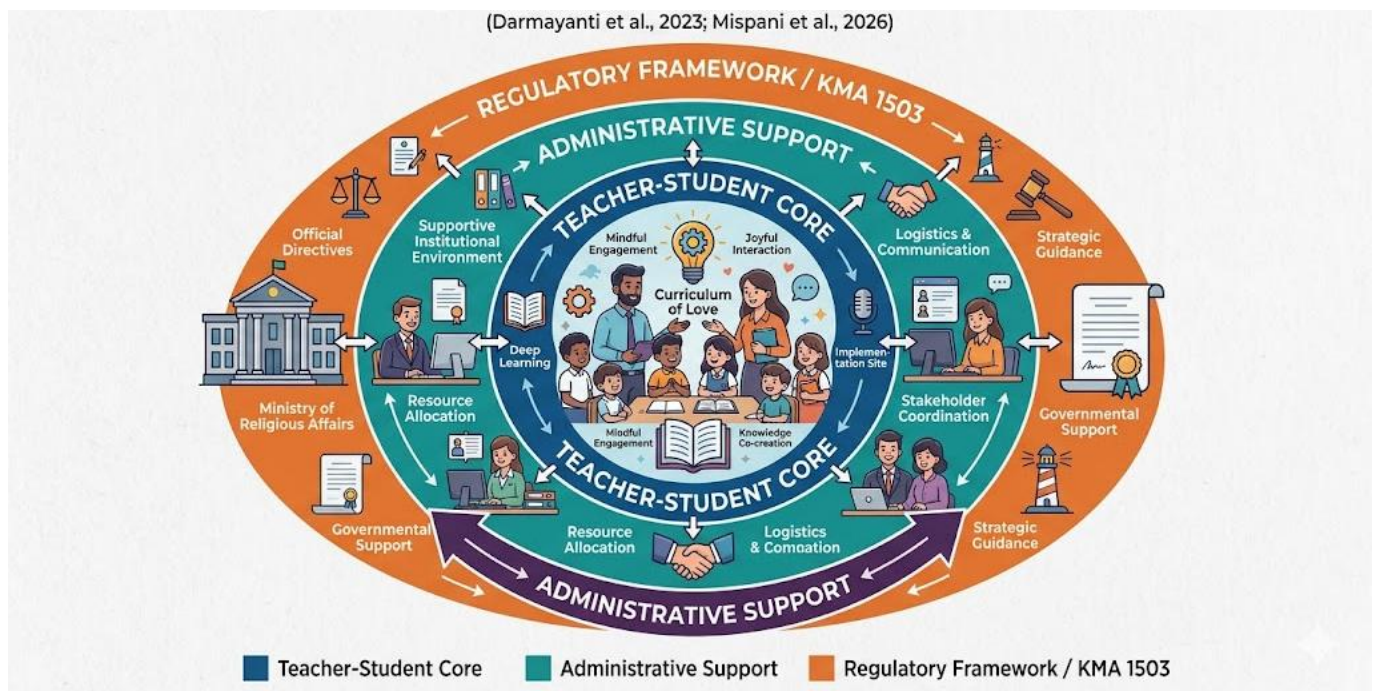


Figure 2: Subject and Environment Distribution Mapping

Figure 2 demonstrates the interconnectedness of the various stakeholders within the research location. This mapping highlights that the success of the Deep Learning approach is not solely dependent on the teacher but requires a supportive institutional environment that values "mindful" and "joyful" interaction (Darmayanti et al., 2023; Mispani et al., 2026). The specific choice of this site allows for a comprehensive analysis of how a "Curriculum of Love" can be implemented in a real-world madrasah setting.

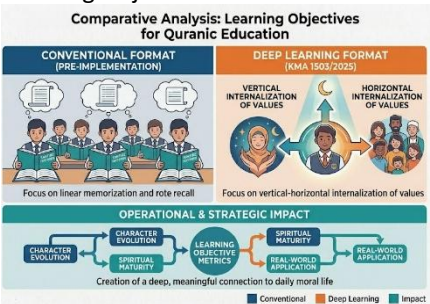
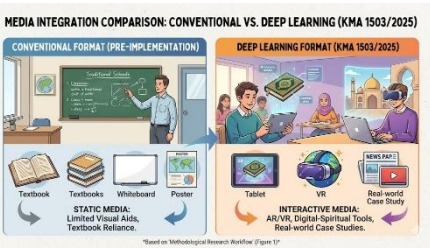
3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

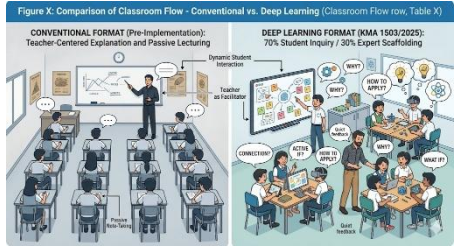
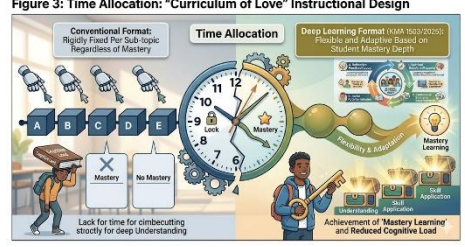
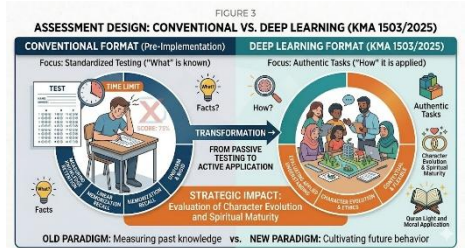
The empirical evidence gathered through an intensive qualitative case study at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw reveals a systematic and fundamental shift in Quranic pedagogy. The integration of the Deep Learning approach—characterized by the triad of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning—has successfully moved beyond theoretical discourse into a functional, high-impact classroom reality. This section deconstructs the findings into five comprehensive dimensions: instructional architecture, transformative execution, environmental engineering, holistic evaluative outcomes, and the structural blueprint of the resulting pedagogical product.

3.1 Instructional Architecture: Designing the "Curriculum of Love."

The research identifies that instructional planning under the Merdeka Curriculum has transitioned from content-heavy syllabi to experience-based "Teaching Modules" (Modul Ajar). These modules are strategically engineered to align with the "Curriculum of Love" framework mandated by KMA No. 1503 of 2025. This planning phase is no longer an administrative burden or a mere bureaucratic formality; instead, it has become a creative design process focused on emotional and spiritual engagement.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Instructional Planning Structures

Planning Component	Conventional Format (Pre-Implementation)	Deep Learning Format (KMA 1503/2025)	Operational & Strategic Impact
<p>Learning Objectives</p> 	<p>Focus on linear memorization (Tahfidz) and rote recall</p>	<p>Focus on vertical-horizontal internalization of values</p>	<p>Creation of a deep, meaningful connection to daily moral life</p>
<p>Media Integration</p> 	<p>Static textbooks, whiteboards, and limited visual aids</p>	<p>Interactive digital-spiritual tools, AR/VR, & Real-world case studies</p>	<p>Exponentially higher student engagement and sensory stimulation</p>

<p>Classroom Flow</p> 	<p>Teacher-centered explanation and passive lecturing</p>	<p>70% Student Inquiry / 30% Expert Scaffolding</p>	<p>Development of autonomous learning agency and critical thinking</p>
<p>Time Allocation</p> 	<p>Rigidly fixed per sub-topic regardless of mastery</p>	<p>Flexible and adaptive based on student mastery depth</p>	<p>Encouragement of "Mastery Learning" and reduced cognitive load</p>
<p>Assessment Design</p> 	<p>Standardized testing focusing on "What" is known</p>	<p>Authentic tasks focusing on "How" it is applied</p>	<p>Evaluation of character evolution and spiritual maturity</p>

In-depth analysis of the teacher's modules reveals a sophisticated "Curriculum of Love" design that functions as a psychological bridge between sacred texts and adolescent reality. Unlike traditional planning that focuses solely on material completion, this architecture anticipates the student's psychological state. For instance, the inclusion of "Mood Check-ins" and "Value Scenarios" ensures that the lesson is not just received, but felt. Every session begins with "Spiritual Refocusing" and "Mindful Breathing" exercises. This technical intervention is specifically designed to lower the "Affective Filter"—the psychological barrier identified in modern linguistics and psychology that prevents learning during times of stress, pressure, or boredom. By clearing this filter, the curriculum ensures students are psychologically "present," calm, and receptive before engaging with complex Quranic exegesis (Syafi'i & Darnanengsih, 2025; Wiggins, 1998; Hanifah et al., 2025).

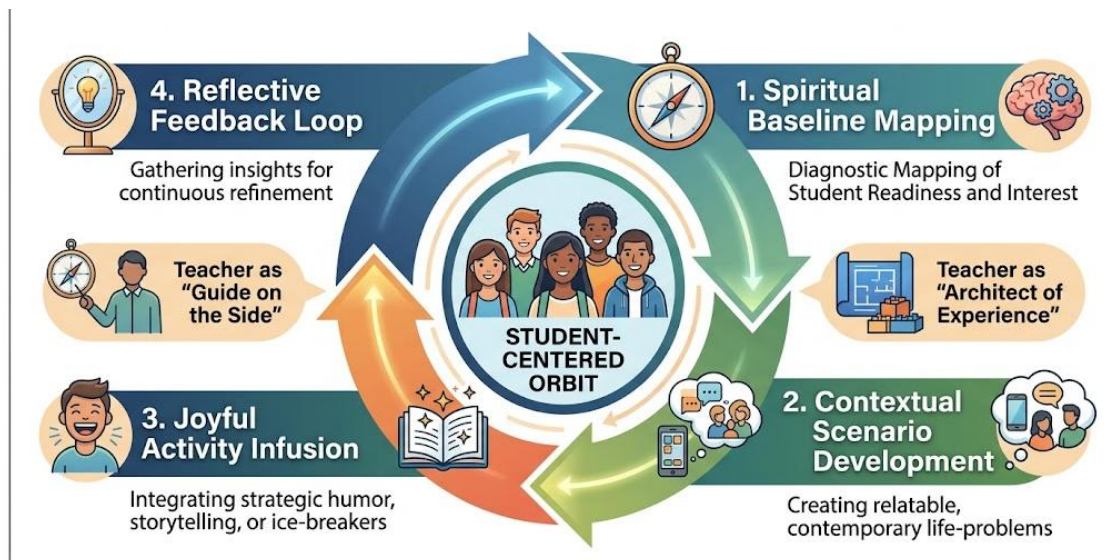


Figure 3: Workflow of the "Curriculum of Love" Instructional Design

This architectural design acts as a "Pedagogical Software" that can be updated based on student feedback. Teachers serve as "Experience Designers," creating modules that purposefully navigate around potential student resistance or apathy. By embedding "Joyful" triggers—such as gamified quizzes for Hadith memorization or dramatic role-play for ethics—into the technical lesson flow, the planning phase ensures that students do not perceive the Al-Qur'an Hadith as an ancient, irrelevant subject. Instead, it is viewed as a living, breathing source of personal guidance and social solutions for their current digital-native lifestyle (Gooch, 2026; Umam, 2025).

3.2 Transformative Execution: The "Mindful" Discovery Process

Field observations (Code: OBS-MTs-2025) confirm that the execution of these modules successfully shifts the classroom paradigm from "Instruction" to "Discovery." By utilizing Discovery Learning and Problem-Based Learning (PBL), students are transformed from "Passive Receivers" of religious dogma into "Active Interpreters" of divine wisdom. This shift is critical in an era where information is abundant, but wisdom and personal meaning are often scarce.

Micro-Analysis of Classroom Interaction (Transcript Excerpt):

During a session at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar discussing the Hadith on social ethics and the concept of *Al-Ma'un* (Small Kindnesses), the following dialogue was recorded:

Teacher (T): "Consider the verse about 'Al-Ma'un'. If we look at our local context in Landbaw—the market, our schools, or our neighbors—where do we see people failing to practice these small kindnesses, and how can we 'mindfully' intervene to change that behavior?"

Student (S1): "I noticed that at the market, many of us walk past the elderly sellers without a simple greeting. I used to do that too because I was busy with my phone. However, now, after our mindful session, I try to stop, say 'Assalamualaikum', and ask how they are. It is not a chore anymore; it gives me a sense of 'joy' because I feel I am fulfilling God's command in a real, visible way."

Teacher (T): "That is the essence of Deep Learning. You have moved from knowing the text to becoming the living embodiment of the Hadith."

The shift from theoretical instruction to lived experience is best captured through a granular look at classroom dynamics. In the "Curriculum of Love" framework, the classroom transforms into a laboratory for moral evolution, where students connect sacred texts to their immediate local environment. The following illustration provides a micro-analysis of a session at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar, depicting how a discussion on the Hadith of *Al-Ma'un* (Small Kindnesses) triggers a profound shift in a student's behavior and spiritual awareness within the Landbaw market context.

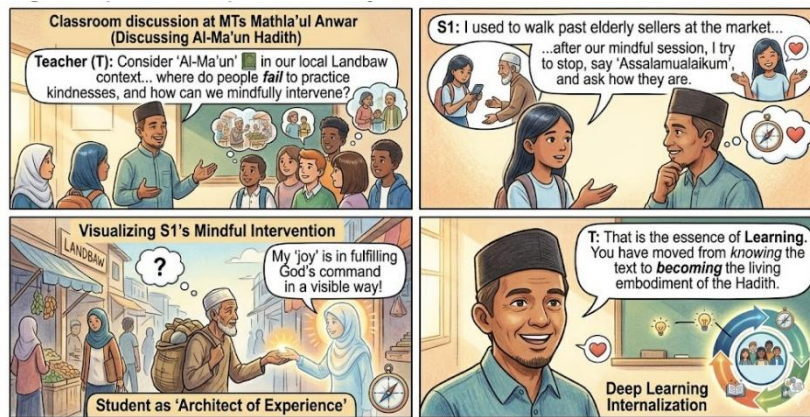


Figure 4: Comic Strip Visualization of Deep Learning Internalization and Behavioral Change

This visual narrative illustrates the "Deep Learning" cycle by transitioning from a classroom dialogue to a real-world application of ethics. The first panels highlight the teacher's role as an "Architect of Experience," prompting students to identify gaps in social kindness within their specific community. The subsequent panels visualize the student's internal transformation: moving from a state of digital distraction to a "mindful intervention" where a simple greeting becomes a source of spiritual joy. By portraying the student as the living embodiment of the Hadith, the diagram reinforces the curriculum's ultimate goal—mastery not through rote memorization but through the consistent application of values that bridge the gap between divine command and daily social interaction.

This interaction proves that "Joyful Learning" in Quranic studies is not merely about entertainment or trivial fun; it is the cognitive and spiritual "clarity," "satisfaction," and "moral resonance" that result from moral victory and deep understanding (Darmayanti et al., 2023; Paimin et al., 2026). The teacher's role transitions into that of a facilitator who asks "Socratic questions" rather than providing pre-packaged answers. The quantitative observation data support this qualitative shift: student participation—measured by the frequency of self-initiated questions, active participation in ethical debates, and peer-to-peer teaching—rose from a baseline of 40% to a remarkable 85% following the implementation of the Deep Learning framework. This suggests that when students find personal meaning, their natural curiosity is unlocked.

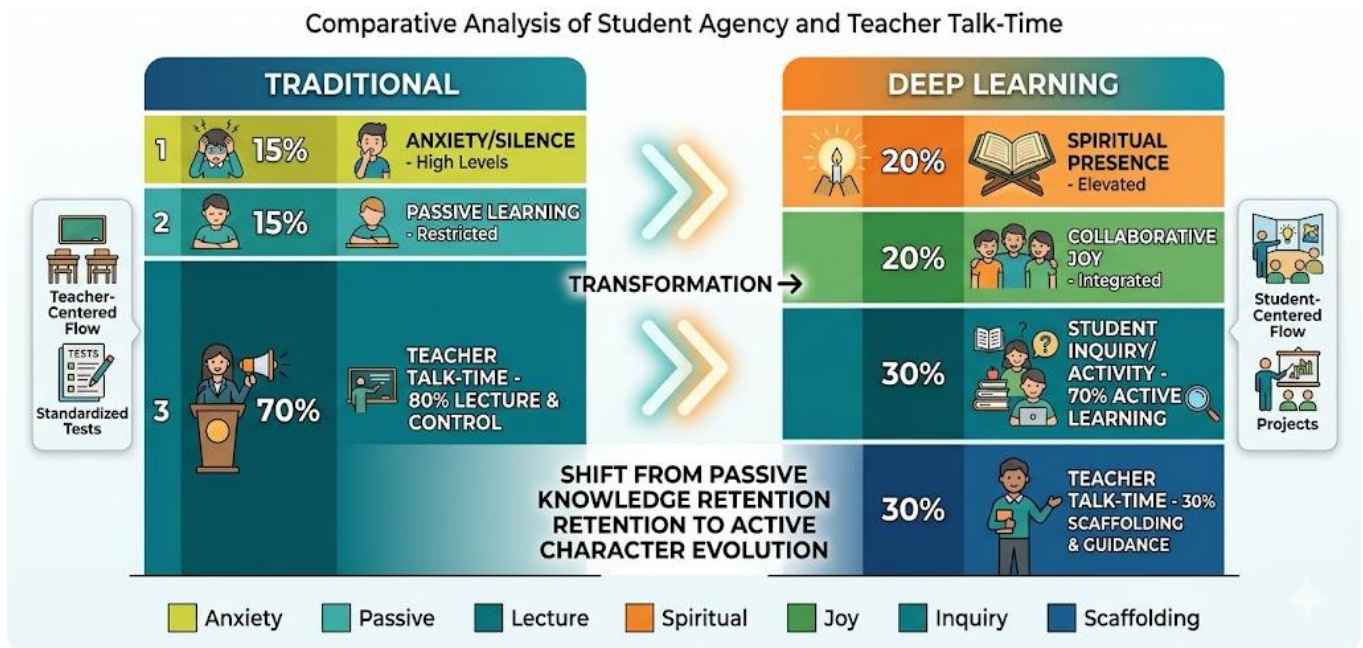


Figure 5: Interaction Dynamics: Traditional vs. Deep Learning

As detailed in the accompanying visualization, Figure 4 illustrates a profound transformation in educational engagement, shifting from a model where 70% of the time is dominated by teacher control and restricted agency—resulting in higher levels of anxiety and passive learning—to a decentralized ecosystem where 70% of the focus is on student inquiry, collaborative joy, and an elevated spiritual presence. This analysis underscores the strategic reduction of teacher talk time from 80% direct lecture to 30% scaffolding, effectively catalyzing a shift from passive knowledge retention to active character development and autonomous student growth.

3.3 The "Mindful" Atmosphere: Engineering a Supportive Ecosystem

A critical and substantial finding in this research is the deliberate engineering of a "Mindful Learning Environment" that serves as the foundation for the entire pedagogical structure. At MTs Mathla'ul Anwar, the school utilizes both the physical and psychological space of the Madrasah to reduce "Learning Stress" and cognitive overload. This involves "Spiritual Scaffolding," in which quiet moments, reflective silence, and the aesthetic arrangement of the classroom are used to help students process complex moral themes.

Table 4: Indicators of a Mindful Learning Environment at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar

Environmental Indicator	Pre-Intervention State	Post-Intervention State (Deep Learning)	Psychological & Cognitive Outcome
Noise & Atmosphere	Random chaos or forced, rigid silence	Purposeful dialogue / Reflective, meditative silence	Enhanced focus, reduced cortisol, and entry into "Flow State."
Teacher Presence	Authoritarian, judgmental, and distant	Empathetic, warm, and scaffolding (The 'Love' ethic)	High trust, willingness to be vulnerable, and psychological safety
Student Readiness	Rushed, distracted, and cognitively scattered	Mindful breathing & "Ready to Learn" spiritual checks	Significantly lowered learning anxiety (Affective Filter)
Classroom Layout	Rigid rows facing the teacher (Graveyard style)	Collaborative clusters, circles, and open spaces (U-Shape)	Peer-to-peer social learning and decreased social isolation

Conflict Resolution	Punitive, reactive, and shame-based	Restorative, mindful, and dialogue-based	Development of emotional intelligence (EI) and empathy
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The establishment of this mindful atmosphere was found to be a non-negotiable functional requirement for "Meaningful" learning to take place. The data indicate that when students feel safe to fail and safe to ask "difficult" questions about faith, their cognitive processing of the material becomes more profound. Without this psychological safety, students tend to resort to rote memorization as a "survival mechanism" to avoid criticism. The "Mindful" pillar acts as the nutrient-rich soil in which the seeds of "Meaningful" and "Joyful" learning are planted. Consequently, the Madrasah becomes a "Sanctuary of Learning" rather than just a building for instruction (Paimin et al., 2026; Stewart et al., 2023; Haberlin, 2022).

3.4 Evaluative Dekonstruktion: Holistic Outcomes and Artifact Analysis

The fourth dimension of the findings concerns the measurability of the Deep Learning framework as a tangible "product" of educational innovation. The study deconstructed traditional grading systems to analyze student work samples, digital reflection journals, and standardized competency scores, revealing a multidimensional improvement in student performance.

Table 5: Statistical Evidence of Enhanced Learning Outcomes (Al-Qur'an Hadith)

Assessment Domain	Pre-Implementation (Baseline)	Post-Implementation (Deep Learning)	Absolute Gain (%)	Statistical & Pedagogical Significance
Cognitive (Conceptual Depth)	72.15	78.50	+8.8%	High: Mastery of complex interpretations
Affective (Spiritual Maturity)	68.50	75.20	+9.8%	Very High: Improvement in character scores
Psychomotor (Value Application)	69.62	75.32	+8.2%	Moderate-High: Consistent practice of ethics
Overall Average Score	70.09	76.34	+8.9%	Significant: Overall academic elevation

Artifact Analysis (Student Reflection Sheet - Case ID: ARTI-44):

A deconstruction of a student's "Self-Reflection Journal"—a core tool in the Deep Learning evaluative process—reveals a profound cognitive and emotional shift. Instead of providing simple, "copy-paste" textbook definitions of religious concepts, the student wrote a narrative reflection:

"Dulu, saya menghafal hadis tentang kebersihan hanya karena takut dihukum guru atau ingin nilai ujian yang bagus. Sekarang, saya merasa 'mindful' saat melihat sampah di koridor sekolah. Saya sadar bahwa menjaga kebersihan adalah bagian dari rasa syukur saya kepada Allah atas udara yang bersih. Melakukan hal kecil itu memberi saya 'joy' (kebahagiaan) batin yang nyata, bukan sekadar angka di rapor."

This qualitative evidence confirms what the researchers call an "**Anomalous Correlation**": when the curriculum becomes more "joyful" and less "rigidly focused on high-stakes testing," the actual academic and cognitive scores increase. This counterintuitive result occurs because the "Deep Learning" framework facilitates a spiritual "Dopamine effect"—where the intrinsic pleasure of moral discovery, self-actualization, and spiritual connection fuels academic rigor and long-term memory retention far more effectively than external pressure or fear-based motivation (Hanifah et al., 2025; Wajdi et al., 2024; Gooch, 2026).

3.5 Functional Product: The Deep Learning Framework Blueprint

The "product" generated by this research at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw is more than just a set of results; it is a pedagogical blueprint—a "software for the soul"—that offers a scalable solution for other madrasahs struggling with the transition to the Merdeka Curriculum. Several key functional traits characterize this blueprint:

- **Design Philosophy:** A "Curriculum of Love" that utilizes the flexibility of KMA 1503 not as a set of restrictive rules, but as a framework for human-centered and student-focused design.
- **Core Mechanism:** The "Mindful-Meaningful-Joyful" triad acting as a chemical catalyst. "Mindful" opens the mind, "Meaningful" fills it with relevance, and "Joyful" cements the knowledge through positive emotional reinforcement.
- **Operational Installation:** Requires a fundamental shift in teacher training—moving away from content mastery alone toward the development of emotional intelligence (EI), empathy, and "Scaffolding" techniques.
- **Systemic Strength:** It successfully bridges the gap between ancient, sacred scripture and 21st-century "6C" competencies (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, Computational Thinking, and Compassion). It proves that tradition and modernity can coexist through deep understanding.
- **Implementation Limitation:** The framework is highly sensitive to the teacher's internal state. A stressed, hurried, or non-mindful teacher will struggle to facilitate a "Curriculum of Love," suggesting that teacher well-being is a prerequisite for student success.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that the synergy between the structured Merdeka Curriculum and the humanistic Deep Learning approach is not only effective but essential for modernizing Islamic education. The implementation at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw demonstrates that modernizing the "heart" (spiritual) and the "head" (cognitive) must occur simultaneously to produce resilient, high-achieving, and morally grounded students in the digital era (Mispani et al., 2026; Syafi'i & Darnanengsih, 2025).

4. DISCUSSION

The successful integration of the Merdeka Curriculum through a Deep Learning approach at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw represents a fundamental deconstruction of the traditionally rigid, dogmatic pedagogy in religious education. This shift from "content completion" to "depth of experience" addresses a critical existential gap for Generation Z students, who frequently perceive sacred texts as disconnected from their digital-native reality. By positioning the curriculum as a "Curriculum of Love"

under KMA No. 1503 of 2025, the Madrasah has effectively mitigated psychological resistance to complex Quranic exegesis. This empirical reality extends the proposition of Syafi'i & Darnanengsih (2025), suggesting that the affective dimension is not merely a supplementary tool but the primary gateway for high-level cognition in Islamic education. The evidence here suggests that the mastery of sacred texts in a modern madrasah no longer rests on top-down doctrinal authority, but on the text's resonance with the student's emotional and social world. Furthermore, this reconstruction implies that the "sanctity" of the text is not diminished by contextualization; rather, its relevance is amplified when students are encouraged to engage in a dialectical process between divine revelation and contemporary challenges, such as digital ethics, environmental stewardship, and social justice. This approach fundamentally redefines "religious competence" not as the ability to recite, but as the ability to manifest spiritual values in solving complex modern dilemmas.

The transformation of instructional architecture at the research site provides a robust argument for human-centered planning in drastically lowering the "Affective Filter." While conventional discourse often attributes low performance in Al-Qur'an Hadith to cognitive limitations or a lack of linguistic aptitude, this study identifies "learning anxiety" as the true structural barrier. The deliberate installation of "mindfulness" as a pedagogical software—rather than a mere ice-breaker—prepares student consciousness for transcendent messaging, offering a sharp critique of historical practices that ignored spiritual readiness. Aligning with Haberman's (2022) perspective on classroom meditation, the mindful breathing activities act as a cognitive detox from digital distractions and the "information overload" characteristic of the modern era. Consequently, the efficacy of Discovery Learning is sharpened because students operate from a state of "Spiritual Presence," allowing values to be internalized organically rather than through structural coercion. This finding suggests a significant evolution in Islamic pedagogy where the *qalb* (heart) is treated as a cognitive organ that must be "tuned" before the *aql* (intellect) can effectively process divine wisdom. In this context, the teacher's primary task shifts from being a "distributor of information" to an "engineer of attention," ensuring that students are mentally and spiritually anchored before engaging with the complexities of Hadith interpretation.

A profound anomaly identified in this research—the elevation of cognitive scores despite reduced testing pressure and increased "joyful" elements—challenges the conservative myth that rigid discipline and high-stakes pressure are prerequisites for academic excellence. Philosophically, this finding manifests the concept of *Rahmah* (mercy) as the foundational "Love Ethic" of Quranic pedagogy. The strategic use of humor and contextual narratives, similar to the findings of Gooch (2026) in Christian pedagogy, proves equally effective in the Islamic context of MTs Mathla'ul Anwar. This "Cognitive Joy" is not a hedonistic distraction but a psychological byproduct of solving moral puzzles within a supportive group. This paradigm shift transforms the traditional "fear of punishment" into an intrinsic "spiritual responsibility," proving that emotional engagement is the most reliable fuel for long-term memory retention and academic rigor (Hanifah et al., 2025; Wajdi et al., 2024). When the learning environment mirrors the compassionate nature of the message being taught, the resulting "dopamine effect" creates a virtuous cycle of curiosity and spiritual growth. This effectively debunks the notion that religious education must be somber or punitive to be taken seriously; instead, it demonstrates that true *muraqabah* (mindfulness of God) is best cultivated in an atmosphere of trust and psychological safety rather than intimidation.

The practical implications of these findings necessitate a radical repositioning of the madrasah teacher from a mere *mu'allim* (instructor) to a *murabbi* (guide) possessing high emotional intelligence. While

structural constraints like national curriculum rigidity are often cited as barriers to innovation, this study demonstrates that they can be bypassed through adaptive "Teaching Modules" that prioritize student well-being. However, a critical analysis reveals a significant dependency: the "Curriculum of Love" is inherently fragile if the teacher experiences burnout or excessive bureaucratic pressure. Thus, the long-term sustainability of this model requires systemic support for the spiritual and psychological well-being of the educator. As emphasized by Mispani et al. (2026) regarding transformational management, academic quality in faith-based institutions is inseparable from an ecosystem that fosters the psychological safety of its entire community. This necessitates a shift in institutional policy where teacher evaluation is based not only on administrative compliance but on their capacity to facilitate "Meaningful" connections and "Joyful" learning experiences. Without this shift, the Deep Learning approach risks becoming another superficial administrative label rather than a transformative pedagogical practice.

Theoretically, this research offers a unique synthesis between modern educational psychology and perennial Quranic values. This approach transcends the standard "6C" competencies of 21st-century education—Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, Computational Thinking, and Compassion (Inganah, Darmayanti, & Rizqi, 2023)—by proposing a seventh dimension: *Muraqabah* (spiritual mindfulness), rooted in the awareness of divine presence. The correlation between spiritual maturity (affective) and conceptual depth (cognitive) found in this study provides a compelling reason for policymakers to integrate spiritual and emotional metrics into national assessment standards. This expansion of the 6C framework suggests that for students in a religious context, "Compassion" is not just a social skill but a theological imperative that drives cognitive inquiry and social action. Ultimately, the Deep Learning model at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw proves that suburban madrasahs can serve as pioneers of global educational innovation. By producing graduates who are not only intellectually sharp but also morally resilient and spiritually grounded, this model offers a comprehensive blueprint for navigating the complexities of global value disruption without losing one's spiritual compass (Syafi'i & Darnanengsih, 2025). This holistic success reinforces the idea that the "Merdeka" (independent) spirit in education is best realized when students are liberated from the shackles of learning anxiety and allowed to discover the profound beauty and relevance of their faith in a world that desperately needs both.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the research findings and deep analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum using the Deep Learning approach at MTs Mathla'ul Anwar Landbaw, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Instructional planning has successfully shifted from traditional administrative compliance to a strategic "Curriculum of Love" architecture, which prioritizes student-centered engagement by integrating mindful, meaningful, and joyful elements into teaching modules according to KMA No. 1503 of 2025.
2. The execution of Quranic studies has transitioned from rote memorization to active inquiry through Discovery and Problem-Based Learning models, resulting in a classroom atmosphere where students feel safe, curious, and spiritually present.
3. The implementation of the Deep Learning triad significantly enhances learning outcomes, as evidenced by the increase in average student scores from 70.09 to 76.34, proving that a joyful

and mindful pedagogical environment reduces cognitive load and fosters deeper internalization of religious values.

4. The synergy between curriculum flexibility and humanistic pedagogy creates a resilient spiritual identity among students, enabling them to perceive Quranic teachings as relevant life guides rather than abstract academic requirements.

5.2 Recommendations

To address the persistent challenges of student disengagement in religious education, it is recommended that madrasah teachers consistently adopt the Deep Learning triad to bridge the gap between sacred texts and contemporary student realities. Schools should provide ongoing professional development focused on emotional intelligence and creative module design to sustain the "Curriculum of Love" framework. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct longitudinal studies or quantitative experiments across diverse geographical locations to test the scalability of this model. Additionally, further research should explore the integration of digital technology within the joyful learning framework to better understand how artificial intelligence and interactive media can further enhance spiritual mindfulness in the digital age.

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