DEEP LEARNING LEARNING STRATEGY TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN PAI-BP LEARNING IN GRADE 6 OF STATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 081 PANYABUNGAN

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of deep learning strategies and their role in developing critical thinking skills in sixth-grade Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) in sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan. The background of this research is based on the continued dominance of lecture- and memorization-oriented PAI-BP learning, which has not optimally developed higher-order thinking skills, particularly critical thinking. However, the Independent Curriculum demands meaningful, student-centered learning and encourages the development of higher-order thinking skills. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative approach. Subjects included PAI-BP teachers and sixth-grade students. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results indicate that the deep learning strategy was implemented through the use of contextual problems, focus group discussions, open-ended questions, and reflection activities at the end of the lesson. The implementation of this strategy was able to create a more active, dialogic, and meaningful learning environment. Furthermore, students' critical thinking skills are beginning to develop, demonstrated by their ability to ask questions, analyze religious issues, justify opinions, and draw conclusions based on Islamic values. However, the implementation of this strategy still faces challenges such as limited learning time and differences in student abilities. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the deep learning strategy has the potential to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning, particularly in developing critical thinking skills in elementary school students.

Keywords: Deep Learning, Critical Thinking, Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, Elementary School, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills are an essential competency that needs to be developed from elementary school, including in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP). Critical thinking enables students to not only understand religious teachings textually but also to analyze, evaluate, and relate Islamic values to the realities of everyday life. In the context of PAI-BP, critical thinking skills are a crucial foundation to prevent students from being dogmatic, but rather to understand Islamic teachings rationally, reflectively, and contextually, according to their stage of cognitive development (Rabi'ah, 2024).

However, the reality of PAI-BP learning in elementary schools still demonstrates the dominance of conventional approaches oriented toward lectures and memorization. This learning model tends to position students as passive recipients of information, thus limiting opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills, such as critical, reflective, and analytical thinking. As a result, PAI-BP learning outcomes often stop at lower-level cognitive aspects and fail to fully address the dimensions of value internalization and character formation (Maharani et al., 2025).

In fact, the Independent Curriculum explicitly emphasizes the importance of meaningful, student-centered learning and encourages active engagement in the learning process. This curriculum directs teachers to design lessons that foster higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), including critical, creative, and reflective thinking, as part of efforts to realize the Pancasila Student Profile. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) teachers are required to adapt learning strategies that not only deliver teaching materials but also foster deep thinking processes in students (Prastyo et al., 2025).

One approach deemed relevant to addressing this challenge is the deep learning strategy. Deep learning emphasizes a learning process that focuses on understanding the full meaning of concepts, linking new knowledge to prior learning experiences, and actively engaging students in reflection and problem-solving. Through deep learning, students are encouraged to understand the "why" and "how" of a concept, rather than simply memorizing "what" (Fitriani & Santiani, 2025).

Empirical studies show that the implementation of deep learning in elementary schools can improve students' conceptual understanding, strengthen learning engagement, and develop higher-order thinking skills. In-depth learning allows students to discuss, ask questions, express opinions, and reflect on the material being studied. This situation has great potential for integration into Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning, which is rich in values, morals, and the formation of religious attitudes (Maharani et al., 2025).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning in sixth grade elementary schools, a deep learning approach becomes increasingly important because students are in the cognitive development stage, moving from concrete operational to formal operational. In this phase, students begin to think logically, link cause and effect, and perform simple reasoning regarding social and religious phenomena. Therefore, a deep learning strategy can be an effective tool for training students in analyzing Islamic values, understanding the wisdom of worship, and consciously and reflectively internalizing noble morals (Maulana et al., 2025).

SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan is a school located in Panyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency. As an elementary education unit, it has unique student characteristics, socio-cultural backgrounds, and learning conditions. PAI-BP learning at this school requires an

approach that is not only aligned with the curriculum requirements but also relevant to the students' local context. Therefore, the application of a deep learning strategy in PAI-BP learning needs to be studied empirically to determine its effectiveness in improving critical thinking skills in sixth grade students.

Based on the above description, this study is important to examine how deep learning strategies can be applied in Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning and how they affect the critical thinking skills of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions in the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning models and practical contributions for teachers in designing Islamic religious learning that is more meaningful, reflective, and oriented towards developing students' critical thinking skills.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aimed to deeply understand the process of implementing deep learning strategies and how these strategies contribute to the development of students' critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP). Qualitative research allows researchers to explore learning phenomena in a naturalistic and contextual manner, reflecting real-world conditions (Moleong, 2019).

This research was conducted at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan, Panyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency, during the even semester of the current academic year. Subjects included sixth-grade PAI-BP teachers and sixth-grade students. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting informants based on specific considerations, such as direct involvement in PAI-BP learning and experience implementing learning strategies in the classroom. This technique was chosen to ensure that the data obtained were truly relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2020).

The focus of the research was directed at the implementation of deep learning strategies in PAI-BP learning and the critical thinking skills students developed during the learning process. Critical thinking skills in this study were identified through indicators of students' abilities to ask questions, analyze religious issues, provide reasons for their opinions, and draw conclusions based on Islamic values. These indicators were adapted to the characteristics of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and the cognitive development of elementary school students (Rhomadan & Khairuddin, 2025).

Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly observe the PAI-BP learning process using deep learning strategies, including teacher-student interactions, discussion activities, and student engagement in learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with PAI-BP teachers and several students to obtain in-depth information regarding their experiences, perceptions, and responses to the implementation of deep learning strategies. Documentation was used to supplement the research data in the form of learning tools, teaching modules, student work results, and photographs of learning activities (Sugiyono, 2020).

Data analysis in this study was conducted interactively and continuously through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried

out by selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation is done in the form of narrative descriptions to facilitate understanding of the research patterns and findings. Conclusions are drawn by interpreting the data's meaning in depth and linking it to deep learning theory and the concept of critical thinking in PAI-BP learning (Miles et al., 2014).

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through triangulation techniques, both source triangulation and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from teachers and students, while technical triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checks to ensure that the data and interpretations obtained were consistent with the experiences of the informants. These steps were taken to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the research results (Moleong, 2019).

RESULTS
1. Overview of the Implementation of the Deep Learning Strategy in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) for Grade VI

The implementation of the deep learning strategy in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) in Grade VI of SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan demonstrates a significant change in learning patterns. The learning process is no longer centered on the teacher as the sole source of information, but rather directed toward active student involvement in understanding the material in a deep and meaningful way. PAI-BP teachers strive to connect the subject matter to students' real-life experiences so that Islamic values can be understood contextually.

During learning activities, students are encouraged to discuss, express their opinions, and justify their views. Teachers emphasize that the goal of PAI-BP learning requires not only mastery of the material but also an understanding of the meaning and application of Islamic values in everyday life. One PAI-BP teacher stated:

"*In PAI learning, I don't want students to simply memorize the material. I try to engage them in discussions and relate the lessons to their daily experiences so that they truly understand the meaning of the material being studied.*"

This learning approach has resulted in increased student engagement throughout the learning process. Students have begun to confidently ask questions, express their opinions, and respond to the views of their classmates. Teachers have also observed changes in learning attitudes, especially among students who previously tended to be passive. This is reinforced by another teacher who said:

"*After using this type of learning, I see students becoming more confident in speaking up and expressing their opinions. Although not all of them are active yet, there is already a visible change compared to previous learning.*"

In addition to discussions, reflection activities at the end of the lesson are an important part of implementing deep learning strategies. Students are asked to summarize the material

and convey the values or messages they learned from the PAI-BP learning. Through this activity, students are encouraged to connect the learning material with attitudes and behaviors that can be applied in everyday life, such as honesty, responsibility, and mutual assistance.

Learning that involves discussion and reflection is also directly felt by students. They expressed that the learning process becomes more engaging and easier to understand because of the opportunity to express opinions and exchange ideas. One student said:

"*Learning like this is more fun because we can discuss with our friends. So we don't just listen to the teacher's explanation, but we can express our own opinions.*"

Other students stated that the open and non-judgmental learning environment makes them more confident in expressing their opinions. Although initially hesitant and afraid of being wrong, students began to express their views because the teacher provided space for differing opinions as long as they provided clear reasons. This is reflected in the following student statement:

"*At first, I was afraid of making mistakes when speaking up, but over time I gained courage. Because the teacher said it's okay to have different opinions, as long as there's a reason.*"

Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of deep learning strategies in PAI-BP teaching in sixth grade at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan is able to create a more active, reflective, and meaningful learning environment. Learning is not only oriented toward mastering the material but also encourages students to think, discuss, and internalize Islamic values in the context of everyday life. This finding provides an important basis for further analysis in the discussion section related to the development of students' critical thinking skills.

2. Application of Deep Learning Strategies in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP)

Research results show that the implementation of deep learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) in sixth grade at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan is realized through several interrelated learning activities oriented toward in-depth understanding of the material. These implementations are evident in lesson planning, implementation of core activities, and consistent reflection activities.

One example of the implementation of deep learning strategies is the use of contextual problems relevant to students' lives. PAI-BP teachers do not directly convey theoretical concepts but instead begin the lesson with situations or cases frequently encountered by students in their daily lives, such as honesty at school, responsibility in worship, and respectful behavior among peers. These problems are used as discussion material to encourage students to think and relate the PAI-BP material to their real-life experiences.

Another form of implementation is the implementation of focused group discussions. In these activities, students are divided into small groups and given the opportunity to discuss the problems presented by the teacher. Each group is asked to express their opinion, provide reasons, and present the results of their discussion to the class. The teacher acts as a facilitator, asking provocative questions and guiding the discussion to maintain focus on the learning objectives. Through these discussions, students are trained to listen to others' opinions, express

their views verbally, and justify their opinions.

In addition to group discussions, deep learning strategies are also implemented through the use of open-ended questions throughout the learning process. Teachers actively ask questions that don't simply require right or wrong answers, but encourage students to explain their reasoning, provide examples, and share their personal perspectives. These questions encourage students to think more deeply and go beyond simply repeating textbook content. Students are given space to answer based on their understanding, thus fostering a more dialogue-based learning process.

Another example of the implementation of deep learning strategies is seen in the reflection activity at the end of the lesson. Students are asked to summarize the material they have learned and convey the values or messages they have learned from the PAI-BP learning. In this activity, students are encouraged to reflect on the relationship between the subject matter and attitudes that can be applied in everyday life. Reflection activities were conducted both verbally and in writing, giving students the opportunity to express their understanding and perspectives personally.

Furthermore, learning documentation demonstrated that teachers had adapted learning materials to the principles of deep learning. Learning objectives were formulated not only to focus on mastery of the material but also on understanding values and developing attitudes. Learning activities were designed to provide space for students to think, discuss, and reflect on the Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) material. This demonstrated that deep learning strategies were implemented in a planned and integrated manner throughout the learning process.

Overall, the implementation of deep learning strategies in PAI-BP in sixth grade at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan included the use of contextual problems, focus group discussions, open-ended questions, and reflection activities. These strategies complemented each other and created a learning process that encouraged students to actively engage, deeply understand the material, and relate Islamic values to everyday life.

3. **Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP)**

Research results show that the implementation of deep learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) in sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan resulted in the emergence of various indicators of students' critical thinking skills throughout the learning process. These critical thinking skills were evident through questioning, problem-analyzing, reasoning, and drawing conclusions related to Islamic values.

Students began to demonstrate courage in asking questions relevant to the learning material. These questions were not only for clarification but also related to the application of PAI-BP values in everyday life. For example, students asked why it is important to be honest in school or the impact of irresponsible behavior on themselves and others. This demonstrates that students are not simply passive recipients of material but are beginning to think critically about the learning content.

The ability to analyze problems was also evident when students participated in group discussions. Students were able to identify problems presented by the teacher, relate them to their personal experiences, and compare various perspectives that emerged during the

discussion. During this process, students begin to demonstrate the ability to distinguish between behavior that is and is not in accordance with Islamic values. Although the depth of analysis varies among students, there is generally a visible effort to understand the problem more comprehensively.

Furthermore, students demonstrate the ability to provide reasons for their opinions. In class discussions, students not only express agreement or disagreement with an opinion but also attempt to explain the reasons underlying their views. The reasons presented are usually linked to concrete examples from everyday life, such as experiences at home, at school, or in their social circles. This reflects the students' growing ability to construct simple arguments based on their understanding of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) material.

Students' critical thinking skills are also evident in their ability to draw conclusions at the end of the lesson. Students are able to summarize the material they have learned and convey messages or values they consider important from the learning. Some students are able to conclude the material by linking it to attitudes that need to be applied in everyday life, such as honesty, responsibility, and mutual respect. These conclusions demonstrate that students not only understand the content but are also able to reflect on the meaning of the learning on a personal level. However, the research results also indicate that students' critical thinking skills have not developed evenly. Some students still require guidance in expressing opinions and presenting reasons more systematically. Overall, however, the implementation of deep learning strategies has provided students with the opportunity to gradually practice critical thinking skills in Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning.

Overall, these findings indicate that the critical thinking skills of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan are beginning to develop through the implementation of deep learning strategies. Students are not only actively engaged in learning but are also beginning to think, analyze, and reflect on the Islamic values they are learning. These findings provide an important basis for further discussion on the relationship between deep learning strategies and the development of students' critical thinking skills, which will be discussed in the discussion section.

4. **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Deep Learning Strategies**

The research results indicate that several factors support the implementation of deep learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) in sixth grade at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan. The main supporting factors stem from teachers' readiness to design lessons oriented toward active student involvement, as well as their ability to manage discussions and create an open learning environment. Furthermore, the enthusiasm and motivation of most students to participate in discussions and reflections contribute to the implementation of deep learning.

On the other hand, several inhibiting factors hinder the implementation of deep learning strategies. Limited learning time hinders the optimal implementation of discussions and reflections. Furthermore, differences in student abilities mean that not all students can actively participate in learning activities. Some students still require more intensive guidance to express opinions and present reasons systematically.

In general, despite these implementation challenges, deep learning strategies can still be

implemented effectively and have a positive impact on the PAI-BP learning process if supported by thorough planning and ongoing teacher mentoring.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of deep learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) in sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan created a more meaningful learning process and oriented towards active student involvement. This finding reinforces the view that learning that emphasizes meaning, reflection, and connecting material to students' real-life experiences plays a crucial role in building deep understanding. Meaningful learning enables students not only to cognitively understand the material but also to consciously and contextually internalize Islamic values (Munarun, 2025).

The implementation of deep learning strategies through the use of contextual problems, group discussions, open-ended questions, and end-of-lesson reflections has been shown to encourage students to think more actively and analytically. This aligns with the view that learning that provides space for dialogue and exploration of ideas can develop higher-order thinking skills in elementary school students. (Mumtaz et al., 2025) emphasize that critical thinking skills can develop when students are actively involved in the process of asking questions, analyzing, and concluding information, rather than simply passively receiving knowledge.

The findings of this study also indicate that students' critical thinking skills are beginning to develop through their ability to ask questions, provide reasons for opinions, and draw conclusions related to Islamic values. This supports previous research, which found that active and reflective learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can improve students' understanding and religious attitudes. PAI learning designed in a dialogic and contextual manner is considered more effective in fostering critical thinking and responsible attitudes than memorization-oriented learning (Intan et al., 2025).

In the context of the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka), the results of this study are relevant to the learning principles that emphasize student-centered learning, character building, and the development of 21st-century competencies. The deep learning strategy aligns with the Independent Curriculum policy, which encourages teachers to create in-depth, reflective, and process-oriented learning. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology emphasizes that meaningful learning must provide opportunities for students to experience, reflect on, and apply knowledge in real life (Kemendikbud, 2022).

However, the research also revealed several obstacles to implementing deep learning strategies, such as time constraints and differences in student abilities. These obstacles align with other research findings, which suggest that discussion- and reflection-based learning requires good time management and teacher preparedness to accommodate the varying characteristics of students (Isral, 2024). Therefore, the successful implementation of deep learning strategies depends heavily on teachers' ability to design flexible and adaptive learning.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that deep learning strategies have strong relevance in Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning in elementary schools, particularly in developing students' critical thinking skills. This strategy not only supports the achievement of

cognitive learning objectives but also contributes to the formation of student attitudes and character in accordance with Islamic values. With careful planning and ongoing support, deep learning strategies can be an effective alternative for improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) learning in elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of a deep learning strategy in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (PAI-BP) in sixth grade at SD Negeri 081 Panyabungan is able to create a more meaningful and student-centered learning process. This strategy encourages active student involvement in learning through discussions, contextual problem-solving, open-ended questions, and reflection, so that learning is not only oriented towards mastery of the material, but also towards understanding the meaning and internalization of Islamic values.

The results of the study indicate that students' critical thinking skills are beginning to develop through the ability to ask questions, analyze problems, provide reasons for opinions, and draw conclusions related to the PAI-BP material. The implementation of a deep learning strategy provides space for students to think reflectively and connect the subject matter to everyday life experiences, thus making learning more contextual and relevant.

However, the implementation of a deep learning strategy still faces several challenges, such as limited learning time and differences in student abilities to actively participate. However, these challenges do not diminish the overall effectiveness of the deep learning strategy if supported by thorough lesson planning and ongoing teacher mentoring.

Overall, the deep learning strategy has strong potential to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI-BP) instruction in elementary schools, particularly in developing students' critical thinking skills. Therefore, this strategy is worthy of consideration as an alternative PAI-BP learning strategy capable of supporting the achievement of meaningful, reflective, and character-building Islamic religious learning objectives.

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