A Deep Learning-Based ISMUBA Instructional Model to Foster Integrity Character in Elementary Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of a deep learning-based ISMUBA instructional model as a strategy to foster students' integrity character at SD Muhammadiyah 12 Pamulang, Indonesia. The ISMUBA curriculum (Islamic Studies, Muhammadiyah Ideology, and Arabic Language) is integrated with the principles of deep learning, emphasizing reflective, meaningful, and joyful learning. A qualitative field research design was employed, utilizing interviews, observations, and documentation to gather data. Findings indicate that character formation was achieved through contextual and reflective learning activities such as "Didikan Subuh," "Dhuha Ceria," and thematic projects. Key supporting factors include competent teachers, a religious school environment, and aligned school policies. Conversely, the primary challenges identified were limited instructional materials, time constraints, and inconsistent parental involvement. Despite these barriers, the model successfully enhanced students' honesty, responsibility, discipline, and empathy. The study recommends the development of structured ISMUBA modules and teacher training programs focused on deep learning principles to optimize character education outcomes in faith-based elementary schools.

Keywords: ISMUBA, deep learning, character education, integrity, Islamic learning

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of 21st-century education, character formation has become as vital as academic excellence. Global trends show an increasing concern over moral decline among young learners, particularly in urban contexts where exposure to digital media, weakened family structures, and peer influence often overpower formal moral instruction [1]. This phenomenon is not unique to Western education systems— it is increasingly evident in Indonesia, especially among elementary students in metropolitan regions such as Jakarta and South Tangerang. Several reports from school counseling units and education forums highlight growing behavioral issues including dishonesty, disrespect, bullying, and even incidents of violence in Islamic schools that are expected to uphold higher moral standards [2], [3]. These developments raise critical questions about the effectiveness of conventional educational approaches in nurturing integrity, responsibility, and empathy among students.

In particular, SD Muhammadiyah 12 Pamulang—a model school within the Muhammadiyah educational network—has faced rising behavioral challenges despite its religious curriculum. Between 2020 and 2024, internal data documented over 120 character-related incidents, including 35 cases of bullying in 2022 and a spike in disciplinary and emotional violations in 2023 and 2024, some of which involved serious offenses such as verbal aggression and harassment [4]. These incidents occurred in a school with daily religious rituals, Qur'anic recitation, and structured Islamic studies, indicating a disconnect between religious instruction and character internalization.

This discrepancy calls for a reevaluation of pedagogical practices, particularly in the delivery of ISMUBA (Al-Islam, Kemuhammadiyahan, and Arabic Language)—the core religious curriculum of Muhammadiyah schools. ISMUBA aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to shape moral identity grounded in Islamic

and Muhammadiyah values. However, traditional modes of ISMUBA instruction often emphasize rote memorization, passive reception of information, and rigid assessments, lacking the depth of engagement required for meaningful character development [5]. As emphasized by Lickona [6], character education must be explicit, emotionally engaging, and behaviorally reinforced across all dimensions of a student's life. In its current implementation, ISMUBA frequently falls short of this standard.

A promising alternative lies in adopting deep learning as a transformative pedagogical model. Introduced by Marton and Säljö [7] and further developed by Fullan through his "New Pedagogies for Deep Learning" (NPDL) framework [8], deep learning promotes active, reflective, and meaningful engagement with knowledge. It encourages students to connect classroom material with personal experiences, think critically about moral dilemmas, and internalize values through real-world application. Fullan's six global competencies—character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking—align well with Islamic principles and can be integrated effectively within ISMUBA to nurture holistic student development.

In the context of Islamic education, deep learning fosters not only intellectual comprehension but also spiritual insight and emotional growth. Students are guided to reflect on Qur'anic values, discuss ethical scenarios, and participate in rituals and projects that allow them to live out their learning. Practices such as *Didikan Subuh* (morning moral formation), *Dhuha Ceria* (joyful mid-morning worship), and project-based religious themes provide emotionally resonant and socially collaborative opportunities for character formation. These practices align closely with the Islamic educational philosophy of nurturing the whole person—*qalb* (heart), *aql* (mind), and *nafs* (soul) [9]. Additionally, Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy of *olah pikir, olah rasa, olah hati, dan olah raga* mirrors the core tenets of deep learning by emphasizing balanced development in cognitive, emotional, moral, and physical domains [10].

Despite its potential, the implementation of deep learning in ISMUBA education faces multiple barriers. First, there is a lack of structured ISMUBA modules that integrate deep learning principles. Most teaching materials provided by the Muhammadiyah Central Board remain content-heavy and outcome-oriented, offering little room for student autonomy, reflection, or creativity [11]. Second, many teachers lack the necessary training and pedagogical understanding to apply deep learning methodologies. As a result, classrooms often revert to traditional lecture styles that hinder student engagement and emotional connection to values [12]. Third, parental support is often minimal, weakening the continuity of character education outside the classroom. Finally, there is an absence of authentic and holistic assessment tools to measure moral development effectively, leaving character education success largely anecdotal [13].

In light of these challenges and opportunities, this study aims to investigate the implementation of a deep learning-based ISMUBA instructional model at SD Muhammadiyah 12 Pamulang. Specifically, the research addresses two core questions: How is the deep learning-based ISMUBA instructional model implemented to develop students' integrity character? What are the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation?

By exploring these questions through a qualitative case study approach, the research seeks to provide practical insights into the design and practice of deep learning pedagogy within Islamic primary education. The study contributes to ongoing discourse in character education, curriculum innovation, and Islamic pedagogy, while offering a contextual solution to moral and behavioral concerns in faith-based elementary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ISMUBA curriculum—an acronym for *Al-Islam*, *Kemuhammadiyahan*, and *Bahasa Arab*—forms the philosophical and pedagogical backbone of Muhammadiyah education in Indonesia. Rooted in Islamic values and Muhammadiyah's vision of modern religious education, ISMUBA is designed not only to teach religious doctrine but also to build students' character, morality, and cultural identity through an integrated approach to learning [1]. It emphasizes a triadic focus on cognitive (knowledge of Islamic teachings), affective (internalization of values), and behavioral (ethical action) domains. According to Iswanto, ISMUBA aims to create morally resilient and socially responsible learners by infusing faith-based education with contextual, reflective practices [2].

Despite these goals, ISMUBA in practice often relies on conventional instructional methods such as lectures, memorization, and teacher-centered delivery, which fail to activate students' deeper engagement or reflection [3]. Studies by Handayani and Nafila show that many ISMUBA classes are disconnected from real-life experiences, making it difficult for students to apply Islamic values meaningfully in their everyday behavior [4], [5]. This pedagogical gap necessitates an instructional shift from surface-level learning to more transformative and reflective models.

Deep learning provides a compelling pedagogical alternative. First introduced by Marton and Säljö, deep learning refers to a learning approach that promotes conceptual understanding, critical reflection, and the integration of knowledge into students' lived experiences [6]. Deep learning contrasts with surface learning, which prioritizes memorization and superficial understanding. Students who engage in deep learning seek to internalize meaning, connect new ideas with prior knowledge, and apply what they learn to real-world challenges.

Fullan advanced this framework through the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL), which emphasizes six global competencies—character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking—commonly referred to as the 6Cs [7]. These competencies form the foundation for preparing learners to succeed in a fast-changing, interconnected world. From Fullan's perspective, character is not only a competency but also a moral imperative, one that reflects traits such as integrity, empathy, and resilience—attributes central to Islamic character education [8].

In the context of Islamic pedagogy, deep learning aligns with the prophetic tradition and the holistic educational vision of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Islamic teachings emphasize the inseparability of knowledge ('ilm), understanding (fahm), and righteous action ('amal saleh). The model of moral development proposed by Lickona—comprising moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—resonates deeply with Islamic perspectives on character formation [9]. Therefore, applying deep learning in Islamic instruction involves not only delivering content but also nurturing students' emotional and ethical engagement with that content.

Empirical evidence supports the integration of deep learning principles in religious education. Research by Aliyah et al. found that reflective activities such as group discussions, storytelling, and real-life simulations enhanced students' moral sensitivity and empathy in Islamic Studies classes [10]. Likewise, Martiadi's study demonstrated that contextualized learning experiences—such as service projects and ritual practices—contributed significantly to students' sense of responsibility and honesty [11]. These findings suggest that Islamic learning is most impactful when students are emotionally and cognitively involved in the learning process.

In the specific context of ISMUBA, studies show emerging but insufficient integration of deep learning. Nafila noted that ISMUBA lessons that include thematic, project-based elements tend to foster discipline and student collaboration, yet they often lack reflective depth or critical dialogue [5]. Handayani's systematic literature review emphasized that most ISMUBA pedagogy remains traditional and lacks student-centered features necessary for transformative learning [4]. These gaps highlight the need for a systematic instructional model that merges deep learning principles with ISMUBA's moral and ideological objectives.

Additionally, the ISMUBA curriculum—when delivered through deep learning strategies—can reinforce Islamic rituals and values through engaging experiences. Programs such as *Didikan Subuh*, *Dhuha Ceria*, Qur'anic memorization challenges, and inter-class moral competitions have shown promise in encouraging students to live out values such as honesty (ṣidq), trustworthiness (amānah), and humility (tawāḍuʿ) [12]. These activities are not merely ritualistic but can become powerful learning tools when facilitated with reflective dialogue, emotional engagement, and community involvement.

Theologically, education in Islam is a transformative act. It is not merely about knowledge transmission but about *tazkiyah al-nafs*—the purification of the soul—and the cultivation of *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character). Prophet Muhammad ﷺ declared, *"I was sent to perfect noble character"* (HR. Ahmad), which indicates the centrality of character education in Islamic pedagogy [13]. Thus, any learning model that seeks to

actualize Islamic educational goals must go beyond the cognitive domain and into the realm of emotional and spiritual transformation.

Deep learning pedagogy enables this transformation through several strategies: project-based learning, inquiry learning, collaborative learning, and reflective learning—all of which are conducive to moral growth. Fullan emphasizes that authentic learning happens when students are emotionally engaged and see relevance in what they learn [8]. For Islamic education, this relevance comes from linking Qur'anic values to real-life moral challenges and fostering dialogue that helps students reflect on their choices, intentions, and behavior.

Furthermore, the integration of deep learning supports the Merdeka Curriculum framework in Indonesia, which calls for student-centered, inquiry-driven learning aligned with local values and school autonomy. Muhammadiyah schools, through ISMUBA, have the institutional flexibility and ideological foundation to lead in implementing such integrated pedagogical models. However, successful implementation requires curriculum reform, teacher training, and authentic assessment mechanisms that reflect the goals of both deep learning and Islamic education [14].

In conclusion, while ISMUBA has a strong moral and spiritual foundation, its effectiveness in shaping character depends heavily on the method of delivery. Deep learning offers a philosophically and pedagogically sound framework to elevate ISMUBA instruction beyond rote learning, helping students engage intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually with Islamic values. A model that integrates these principles holds significant promise in addressing the current crisis in student character while promoting holistic and transformative Islamic education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative field research design to explore the implementation of a deep learning-based ISMUBA instructional model and its role in fostering students' integrity character. A qualitative approach was deemed suitable for capturing the complex, contextual, and value-laden nature of character education in an Islamic school setting [1]. As Creswell notes, qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to interpret participants' experiences and meaning-making processes through detailed descriptions and direct interaction [2].

The research was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah 12 Pamulang, South Tangerang, Indonesia. This school was purposively selected based on its status as a flagship Muhammadiyah institution with a structured ISMUBA curriculum and a history of character education initiatives. Despite its religious emphasis, recent counseling reports documented a significant number of behavioral issues among students, making it an appropriate site for studying the effectiveness of instructional innovations [3].

Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included ISMUBA subject teachers, school leaders, and upper-grade students. The inclusion criteria for teachers required a minimum of three years of teaching experience and active involvement in ISMUBA planning and delivery. This sampling method ensured that the data collected were both relevant and rich in insight [4].

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) participant observation, and (3) document analysis. Interviews were conducted with five ISMUBA teachers, two administrators, and six students, focusing on their perceptions, instructional practices, and observed character outcomes. The interview protocol was guided by open-ended questions and designed to elicit in-depth responses [5].

Observations were conducted during ISMUBA classes, weekly rituals (e.g., *Didikan Subuh* and *Dhuha Ceria*), and student character programs. Field notes were taken to capture classroom dynamics, instructional methods, student engagement, and interactions during reflective and ritual-based learning activities. Document analysis included reviewing lesson plans, character assessment reports, school policies, and ISMUBA teaching modules [6].

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employed triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, and documents), as suggested by Denzin [7]. In addition, member checking was applied by allowing participants to review transcriptions and validate interpretations, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the results [8].

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, following the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [9]. During the reduction phase, raw data were coded into emergent themes related to deep learning indicators, character outcomes, implementation challenges, and enabling conditions. The data were then displayed in matrix tables to visualize patterns and relationships before final conclusions were drawn.

Ethical considerations were addressed by securing informed consent from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process, and pseudonyms were used in reporting results. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines of Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta and aligned with broader qualitative research ethics principles [10].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of a deep learning-based ISMUBA instructional model at SD Muhammadiyah 12 Pamulang significantly contributed to the development of students' integrity character. Character values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and discipline were observed to improve through various learning activities rooted in religious values and delivered through student-centered, reflective, and contextual pedagogy.

A. Integration of Deep Learning in ISMUBA Practices

The instructional design employed at the school incorporated key aspects of Fullan's deep learning competencies, particularly *character*, *collaboration*, and *critical thinking* [1]. Teachers intentionally designed ISMUBA lessons to include project-based learning, moral reflection, group problem-solving, and the discussion of Islamic teachings related to character. For instance, students participated in thematic group projects that required them to apply Qur'anic principles of honesty (*ṣidq*) and responsibility (*amānah*) in real-life school situations.

Daily rituals such as *Didikan Subuh* and *Dhuha Ceria* were enhanced with storytelling and reflection sessions. During these sessions, students were encouraged to share personal experiences related to the themes of trust, respect, and kindness. This integration supported the development of what Lickona terms "moral feeling," as students connected emotionally with the values being taught [2].

Observations showed increased engagement and sincerity among students during worship and group tasks. Teachers reported that students were more willing to admit mistakes and reflect on their behavior. One student, for example, acknowledged copying a classmate's homework and later apologized in front of the group after a reflective discussion on *istighfar* and repentance in Islam. This supports Marton and Säljö's assertion that meaningful learning occurs when students internalize and emotionally process the material [3].

B. Outcomes in Student Character Development

The application of deep learning strategies resulted in observable improvements in four main character dimensions:

1. Honesty – Students demonstrated increased transparency in their interactions. Teachers noted a reduction in disciplinary incidents related to lying or cheating on tasks.

2. Responsibility – Through collaborative projects, students learned to manage roles, meet deadlines, and take ownership of their duties.

3. Empathy – Several class projects involved service-oriented themes, such as organizing charity drives or assisting classmates with learning difficulties, fostering a spirit of care and cooperation.

4. Discipline – Ritual participation, punctuality, and group accountability were strengthened, especially during structured activities like *tahfidz* sessions and class clean-ups.

These developments were not only observed by teachers but also affirmed by administrative character reports and interviews with students and parents. The findings align with previous studies by Martiadi and Aliyah et al., which demonstrated that student involvement in reflective, ritual-based, and collaborative activities can significantly enhance moral reasoning and ethical behavior [4], [5].

C. Supporting Factors

Several enablers were identified in the successful implementation of the ISMUBA deep learning model:

- Teacher Competence: Teachers who understood and embraced deep learning principles demonstrated creativity in lesson design, use of local wisdom, and integration of Islamic values in real contexts.

- Religious School Culture: The consistent routine of daily prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and Islamic music contributed to a spiritual learning atmosphere that reinforced moral expectations.

- Leadership Support: The principal facilitated cross-department collaboration, encouraged instructional innovation, and allocated time for reflective programs.

These findings confirm Fullan's assertion that successful deep learning initiatives require structural support and shared vision among school stakeholders [1].

D. Inhibiting Factors

Despite these successes, the study also uncovered several challenges:

- Lack of Structured Modules: Teachers expressed difficulty in accessing ISMUBA materials aligned with deep learning principles. Existing textbooks were content-heavy and lacked space for student reflection or inquiry.

- Limited Pedagogical Training: Professional development opportunities for deep learning were either rare or generic. As a result, some teachers defaulted to lecture-based methods, particularly when pressed for time.

- Weak Parental Involvement: Parents rarely reinforced school-taught values at home, creating inconsistency in character development. This observation echoes Lickona's emphasis on the need for moral education to be a shared responsibility between school and family [2].

- Assessment Limitations: Current evaluation tools focus heavily on academic outcomes, offering little insight into behavioral and reflective growth. Teachers called for authentic assessment models that capture students' integrity and moral decision-making.

These findings are consistent with Handayani's review, which identified similar barriers in Islamic character education, particularly regarding teacher readiness and parental collaboration [6].

E. Alignment with Islamic Educational Philosophy

The ISMUBA deep learning model reflects the essence of *tazkiyah al-nafs*—the purification of the soul—as a central aim of Islamic education. The integration of reflection, emotion, and action in ISMUBA instruction mirrors the prophetic approach to moral teaching. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized transformation through

example, dialogue, and relevance to daily life. These same principles were present in classroom practices observed during the study.

Moreover, the implementation of this model aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy of *olah pikir*, *olah hati*, *olah rasa*, and *olah raga*. Students were not only challenged cognitively but also nurtured emotionally and ethically. This holistic approach fostered deep internalization of values and behavioral consistency across settings.

F. Implications and Contributions

This study contributes empirical evidence that deep learning pedagogy—when embedded within ISMUBA instruction—can effectively foster core character values in elementary Islamic education. It also offers a model for transforming faith-based learning environments through reflective, contextual, and student-centered strategies. The findings underscore the importance of curriculum reform, continuous teacher development, and authentic assessment systems to support this transformation.

The study's implications extend to other Muhammadiyah and Islamic schools seeking to enhance the relevance and impact of their religious instruction. Policymakers and educational leaders should consider investing in ISMUBA module development, facilitating structured training in deep learning pedagogy, and strengthening school-family partnerships to ensure consistent value reinforcement.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the implementation of a deep learning-based ISMUBA instructional model as a strategy to foster students' integrity character at SD Muhammadiyah 12 Pamulang. The findings revealed that integrating reflective, contextual, and emotionally engaging practices into ISMUBA instruction significantly enhanced students' moral development. Character traits such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and discipline were fostered through rituals like *Didikan Subuh*, project-based learning, and collaborative classroom practices. These outcomes affirm that deep learning is a viable pedagogical framework for strengthening Islamic character education in elementary schools.

The study identified several supporting factors, including committed teachers, a religious school environment, and supportive leadership. However, it also highlighted key implementation barriers, such as limited instructional modules, insufficient pedagogical training, weak parental involvement, and inadequate character assessment tools. These obstacles suggest that pedagogical innovation alone is not sufficient; institutional support and stakeholder alignment are equally essential.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum Development: The Muhammadiyah Central Board should develop standardized ISMUBA modules that incorporate deep learning principles, including activities for reflection, dialogue, and contextual application of values.

2. Teacher Training: Schools should provide sustained, practical training for ISMUBA teachers on deep learning strategies, student-centered pedagogy, and formative character assessment.

3. Parental Engagement: Schools must enhance communication with parents and create structured programs that enable value reinforcement at home, ensuring consistency between school and family environments.

4. Assessment Reform: Authentic assessment tools that measure moral reasoning, behavioral consistency, and emotional engagement should be developed and integrated into ISMUBA evaluation frameworks.

5. Scaling the Model: The ISMUBA deep learning model may be adapted and piloted in other Muhammadiyah and Islamic schools to further evaluate its scalability, sustainability, and broader impact on character education.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that a deep learning approach—grounded in Islamic principles and student-centered pedagogy—can meaningfully transform character education in religious elementary schools. With systemic support and ongoing innovation, ISMUBA can evolve into a model of moral education that not only transmits religious knowledge but also cultivates deeply rooted integrity in the next generation.

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