

Meaningful and Joyful Learning in The Digital Era: Islamic and Christian Faith-Based Schools in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesian education landscape is shifting toward the Deep Learning approach, which emphasizes mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning as the foundations for holistic student development (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). In the digital era, with an abundance of information and rapid technological advancements, strengthening character, reflection, and spiritual awareness has become increasingly essential (Gulo & Tapilaha, 2024). This creates opportunities for faith-based schools to integrate spiritual values into active and contextual pedagogy (Saukah, 2025). Yet, limited research examines how meaningful and joyful learning aligns with Islamic and Christian educational values. This study addresses this gap by examining how Deep Learning principles relate to religious values and how they are implemented at SMA Muhammadiyah 1, Yogyakarta, and SMA IPH Surabaya. Using a qualitative literature review and comparative interpretative analysis, the study draws on seventeen sources, including national Deep Learning policy documents, educational literature, religious texts, and school-level documents. The data were analyzed thematically to identify shared principles and distinctive emphases across Islamic and Christian educational perspectives. The findings indicate that both traditions emphasize self-transformation through reflection, moral responsibility, and a commitment to service. SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Yogyakarta emphasizes *akhlak*, social responsibility, and *ilmu-amal*, while SMA IPH Surabaya focuses on faith reflection, spiritual academic balance, and service learning. The study concludes that integrating spiritual values enriches meaningful and joyful learning by strengthening ethical awareness, empathy, and purposeful engagement, which are essential competencies for responsible learning in the digital era.

Keywords: *Deep Learning, Faith-Based Schools, Integration of Spiritual Values, Islam and Christianity, Meaningful and Joyful Learning.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational reform in Indonesia positions Deep Learning as a key direction for improving learning quality, emphasizing mindful, meaningful, and joyful processes as the foundation for holistic development (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). This framework aligns with global perspectives that highlight deeper learning, student agency, and purposeful engagement (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In this view, Deep Learning integrates cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions to make learning more grounded and personally relevant for students.

In today's digital era, characterized by an abundance of information, rapid technological advancements, and shifting social interactions, traditional lecture-based approaches are increasingly misaligned with students' learning needs (Kassab et al.,

2025; Haleem *et al.*, 2022). Strengthening reflective habits, character formation, and spiritual awareness has therefore become essential for supporting responsible and ethical learning (Gulo & Tapilaha, 2024). These conditions create opportunities for faith-based schools to integrate spiritual values into active, contextual, and relational pedagogy (Saukah, 2025).

However, despite the growing emphasis on character formation and holistic development within the Deep Learning framework, existing studies in the Indonesian context remain focused mainly on policy discourse and general pedagogical principles. There is limited academic literature that explicitly examines how meaningful and joyful learning is consciously articulated and enacted within faith-based school practices. In particular, limited attention has been given to how Islamic and Christian educational values shape the interpretation and implementation of Deep Learning at the school level. As a result, the role of religious perspectives in informing meaningful and joyful learning remains underexplored within Indonesia's plural educational landscape.

To address this gap, this study examines how Deep Learning is interpreted and implemented within faith-based high schools in Indonesia, with particular attention to Islamic and Christian educational values. Drawing on cases from SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Yogyakarta and SMA IPH Surabaya, the study explores the implications of aligning faith, knowledge, and meaningful, joyful learning in the digital era.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative interpretive research design, drawing on literature and document analysis. Qualitative approaches are appropriate for exploring meaning, values, and interpretations embedded within educational concepts and practices, particularly when examining how policy frameworks and religious perspectives are understood and enacted in academic contexts (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Sources

The data sources consist of seventeen documents, including national policy texts on Deep Learning, peer-reviewed educational literature, Islamic and Christian educational writings, and selected school-level documents from SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Yogyakarta and SMA IPH Surabaya. These sources were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study's focus on meaningful and joyful learning, religious values, and faith-based education.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The documents were read iteratively to identify recurring concepts related to meaningful learning, joyful learning, character formation, and spiritual values. Initial codes were generated inductively and then organized into broader themes that reflect shared principles and distinctive emphases across Islamic and Christian educational perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness

To enhance the study's trustworthiness, data triangulation was employed by comparing insights across policy documents, academic literature, and school-level texts. Reflexive analysis was also used to ensure transparency in interpreting values and meanings within the documents under analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Deep Learning in the Indonesian Context

The Indonesian Deep Learning framework defines learning as a mindful, meaningful, and joyful process that engages students' thinking, emotions, values, and actions. Within this approach, meaningful learning connects knowledge with real-life experiences and a moral purpose. In contrast, joyful learning nurtures intrinsic motivation and emotional well-being as students discover their purpose in learning. This aligns with Fullan and Quinn's (2018) view that Deep Learning enables students to "engage the world and change the world."

In today's digital era, characterized by an abundance of information, rapid technological advancements, and shifting social dynamics, these principles are becoming increasingly essential for fostering students' identity, character, and competence. Deep Learning promotes reflective and relational learning, helping students interpret their experiences and contribute responsibly within a complex technological landscape.

3.2. Religious Perspectives on Meaningful and Joyful Learning

3.2.1. Islamic Perspective

Islamic educational philosophy views learning as a unified process that integrates faith, knowledge, character, and social responsibility. Classical and contemporary Islamic education literature also highlights this unity, emphasizing that learning must cultivate ethical character, commitment, and devotion to God (Nata, 2012; Arifin, 2017; Azra, 2015). Saukah (2025) highlights that Islamic learning encourages students to read both *ayat-ayat qauliyyah* (revelation) and *ayat-ayat kauniyyah* (signs in creation), fostering reflective engagement and ethical discernment. This foundation aligns closely with the principles of meaningful learning, which in Islam connects intellectual

understanding (*'ilm*) with spiritual awareness (*īmān*). The Qur'an affirms this relationship (QS Al-Mujādilah 58:11), positioning the pursuit of knowledge as both an intellectual and spiritual calling. Accordingly, learning is considered meaningful when it cultivates virtues such as justice, responsibility, compassion, and *ihsan* (QS An-Nahl 16:90), thereby enabling students to move beyond cognitive mastery toward noble character and social responsibility.

Joyful learning in Islam is rooted in *rahmah*, which is a caring, gentle, and emotionally safe environment that reflects the Prophet's example of empathy and compassion (QS Ali 'Imrān 3:159). Joy is understood not merely as entertainment but as intrinsic satisfaction derived from understanding, connection, and contribution to others. Classrooms grounded in *rahmah* encourage curiosity, creativity, and expression without fear, allowing students to ask questions, explore ideas, and discover meaning with confidence. Islamic traditions of reflective inquiry further enrich this process. Learners are encouraged to contemplate creation, interpret real-world phenomena, and connect their observations with spiritual insight (QS Fussilat 41:53). Through this reflective stance, learning becomes a holistic activity that strengthens moral awareness, nurtures a sense of purpose, and supports responsible engagement with contemporary challenges.

3.2.2. Christian Perspective

Christian education views learning as a holistic process that forms the mind, heart, and character in alignment with God's purpose. Human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and entrusted to steward creation with wisdom and integrity (Genesis 1:28). Learning becomes meaningful when students recognize their God-given call and develop the knowledge, skills, and character needed to contribute responsibly to their communities (Van Brummelen, 2009; Smith & Smith, 2011; Romans 12:2). Teaching is described as a relational practice in which teachers guide students to discover meaning, connect learning to real-life contexts, and grow in character (Goodson, 2014; Oppewal, 2016). Meaningful learning, therefore, encourages students to link understanding with compassion, responsibility, and service toward others (Matthew 22:39).

Joyful learning arises from experiencing God's love, grace, and faithful presence. Classrooms are understood as communities of care where students feel safe, valued, and supported in their learning (Goodson, 2014). Joy is expressed through curiosity, gratitude, and wonder toward God's creation, enabling students to engage with openness and hope. Teachers model Christ-like attitudes, such as patience, empathy, and encouragement, creating an environment that fosters exploration, reflection, and collaboration. Christian educational practices such as reflection, service learning, and purposeful collaboration (Randall, 2003; Prabhu Das, 2021) help students recognize

how their gifts can bless others. Within this framework, joyful learning is not merely entertainment; it is the result of a nurturing and purposeful environment that supports academic growth, spiritual formation, and meaningful contributions.

3.3. Comparative Analysis: Islamic and Christian Perspectives

The comparative analysis reveals both shared foundations and complementary emphases in how Islamic and Christian educational traditions conceptualize and enact meaningful and joyful learning.

3.3.1. Shared Foundations of Meaningful and Joyful Learning

The analysis indicates that Islamic and Christian perspectives share several foundational commitments that support meaningful and joyful learning. Both traditions view faith as the basis for moral and character formation, positioning education as a process that shapes responsible, compassionate, and ethically grounded individuals. Islamic education emphasizes virtues such as *amanah*, *'adl*, and *ihsan* (Nata, 2012; Arifin, 2017; Azra, 2015), while Christian education highlights love, service, and Christ-like character as core expressions of learning (Van Brummelen, 2009; Smith & Smith, 2011). Although articulated through different theological frameworks, both traditions place moral purpose and character development at the center of the educational experience—an emphasis consistent with broader research on deeper learning and whole-person development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

A second area of alignment lies in the understanding that meaningful learning connects knowledge with real-life contexts and social responsibility. Islamic thought frames this connection through the integration of *iman* and *ilm* and the principle of *ilmu-amal*, where knowledge is enacted through ethical action and service to others (Azra, 2015; Saukah, 2025). Christian education similarly maintains that learning is meaningful when it leads students to serve others with love, responsibility, and humility (Oppewal, 2016; Prabhu Das, 2021). Both perspectives affirm that meaningful learning extends beyond cognitive mastery to include moral agency and contribution to the common good.

Third, both traditions associate joyful learning with relational, caring, and emotionally safe environments. Islamic educational practice emphasizes rahmah, empathy, and the nurturing guidance of the *murabbi*, a teacher who cultivates trust and encourages curiosity without fear (Saukah, 2025). Christian scholarship likewise emphasizes classrooms as communities of care in which students feel valued, supported, and able to engage in learning with gratitude and wonder (Goodson, 2014). Across both contexts, joy is understood not as entertainment but as a natural outcome of belonging, engagement, and meaningful participation.

Ultimately, Islam and Christianity share the view that education aims to achieve holistic transformation, encompassing the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual

dimensions of the learner. Islamic models describe this through ethical maturity and inner cultivation (Arifin, 2017), while Christian perspectives frame it as the formation of mind, heart, and action directed toward the flourishing of others (Randall, 2003). These shared commitments provide a strong foundation for implementing Deep Learning principles in faith-based schools, demonstrating that meaningful and joyful learning is highly compatible with value-driven education across both traditions.

3.3.2. Complementary Emphases in Islamic and Christian Perspectives

Although Islamic and Christian perspectives share many standard foundations, each carries its own emphasis that enhances and complements the other.

In Islamic education, meaningful learning is closely connected to moral discipline and the unity of faith and knowledge. Students are encouraged to view learning as an *amanah*, a trust from God, in which knowledge must be put into practice through ethical conduct and social responsibility (*ilmu–amal*). Values such as *amanah*, *‘adl*, and *ihsan* shape how learners understand meaning, while joyful learning grows from *rahmah*, empathy, and the nurturing role of the *murabbi* who guides students with gentleness and moral clarity (Nata, 2012; Arifin, 2017; Azra, 2015; Saukah, 2025).

Christian education provides a complementary emphasis by focusing on identity, relationships, and calling. Meaningful learning is understood as helping students recognize their God-given call and use their knowledge and gifts to serve others with love and integrity. This perspective emphasizes the development of wisdom, purpose, and Christ-like character as key outcomes of learning (Van Brummelen, 2009; Smith & Smith, 2011). Joyful learning is associated with a caring community in which students feel safe, valued, and supported. It is an atmosphere that nurtures curiosity, gratitude, and wonder toward God’s creation (Goodson, 2014). This relational approach encourages students to engage in learning with hope and to see their growth as part of a larger calling to contribute to the flourishing of others (Oppewal, 2016; Prabhu Das, 2021).

Together, these emphases offer complementary strengths for faith-based Deep Learning. Islamic perspectives offer a robust moral and ethical foundation, along with a disciplined approach to knowledge as a responsibility. In contrast, Christian perspectives emphasize relational care, personal purpose, and reflective growth. When viewed side by side, these distinct emphases complement and expand the possibilities for supporting meaningful and joyful learning in diverse faith-based educational contexts.

3.3.3. Implications for Deep Learning in Faith-Based Schools

The comparison between Islamic and Christian perspectives reveals that both offer a robust foundation for implementing Deep Learning in faith-based schools. Their shared focus on faith, character, and responsibility supports the view that meaningful

and joyful learning can emerge from values already present in each educational context. This alignment indicates that schools need not abandon their identity to adopt Deep Learning; instead, the framework naturally aligns with the moral and spiritual aims of both perspectives.

The differences in emphasis also offer practical insights. The Islamic perspective, with its focus on *amanah*, *'adl*, *ihsan*, and the unity of faith and knowledge, can reinforce the “meaningful” dimension of Deep Learning by encouraging students to see learning as a responsibility that should lead to ethical action and social contribution. Meanwhile, the Christian perspective, which emphasizes identity, relationships, and personal purpose, enhances the “joyful” dimension by fostering classrooms that are caring, reflective, and supportive, which describe conditions that help students feel safe, valued, and engaged.

These insights suggest that faith-based schools can integrate Deep Learning in ways that are morally grounded, relationally supportive, and spiritually meaningful. Islamic perspectives clarify ethical responsibility and disciplined character, while Christian perspectives enrich learning through relational care, reflection, and a sense of purpose. These complementary strengths are especially relevant in the digital era, where students must learn to navigate information critically while grounding their decisions in clear ethical and spiritual values. These findings directly address the study’s objective of examining how Deep Learning is interpreted and enacted through religious values in faith-based high schools.

3.4. Implementation in Schools

3.4.1. Implementation in SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Yogyakarta

SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Yogyakarta integrates meaningful and joyful learning through project-based, value-oriented practices that connect Islamic character formation with contemporary pedagogy. The school’s commitment to *iman–ilmu–amal* shapes the design of learning experiences, where academic competencies are accompanied by indicators of *amanah*, *'adl*, and *ihsan*. These values guide teachers in designing lessons that deepen students’ conceptual understanding and encourage responsible application of knowledge.

Meaningful learning is developed through inquiry-based and discovery-based strategies that incorporate Islamic reflective practices such as *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*. Teachers guide students to examine concepts not merely through memorization, but through understanding relationships, causes, and implications. These approaches are crucial in the digital era, where students must navigate vast amounts of information and develop a moral foundation, critical thinking, and responsible social behavior. Lessons are consistently contextualized through real-life issues in Yogyakarta, such as environmental conservation, local culture, social dynamics, and creative

entrepreneurship, thereby enabling students to view knowledge as a tool for *amal shalih* and meaningful social contribution. Interdisciplinary project-based learning is a central feature in which subjects such as science, social studies, history, and the arts are combined with Islamic values to create integrated and authentic tasks.

Assessment practices support this approach by reducing task overload and integrating evaluation across subjects. Students are assessed through portfolios, project outputs, reflections, and performance tasks that capture both cognitive progress and the demonstration of values such as responsibility, collaboration, and fairness. This authentic assessment model emphasizes process, reasoning, and contribution rather than isolated test scores.

Joyful learning is cultivated through a relational, humanizing classroom atmosphere shaped by *rahmah*. Teachers act as *murabbi*, who are mentors who guide with empathy, patience, and respect. Classrooms are structured to be dialogic and inclusive, employing open discussions, healthy humor, and appreciation of student participation to foster confidence and emotional safety. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their projects, engage in self-assessment, and develop creativity and independence under the guidance of supportive instructors.

Through these practices, SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Yogyakarta demonstrates how Islamic values can strengthen the goals of Deep Learning. By integrating ethical character, contextual relevance, interdisciplinary inquiry, and a caring classroom environment, the school fosters learning that is conceptually rich, socially meaningful, spiritually grounded, and emotionally engaging.

3.4.2 Implementation in SMA IPH Surabaya

Implementation of meaningful and joyful learning at SMA IPH Surabaya is guided by the school's mission and Graduate Profile, which integrates academic competencies with character formation, critical thinking, collaboration, and responsible citizenship. These practices are increasingly relevant in the digital era, where students need discernment, collaboration, and reflective habits to engage information responsibly. Teachers design learning so that students understand the purpose of each lesson and can connect new concepts with real-life contexts.

Meaningful learning is fostered through active learning practices, in which students deepen understanding through questioning, guided exploration, discussion, and collaborative problem-solving. Teachers clarify learning goals at the beginning of the lesson, then support students as they analyse ideas, test assumptions, and apply concepts in different contexts. A practical example is the Science Club, where students design simple bridge models, test their stability, revise their designs, and reflect on the process. This activity strengthens critical thinking, perseverance, and teamwork, while

providing students with the satisfaction of solving real-world problems through hands-on exploration and experimentation.

Joyful learning is nurtured in a positive and caring classroom atmosphere, where teachers demonstrate patience, empathy, and encouragement. Students are given space to express ideas, take risks, and collaborate without fear of failure. Programs such as the Student-Led Conference (SLC), internships, and leadership roles in the Student Council (OSIS) promote student agency, helping learners take ownership of their progress.

A second example of meaningful and joyful learning is *IPH for Humanity*, a Grade 12 service-learning initiative. Students collaborate to identify community needs, plan fundraising strategies, and implement support projects. The process is interdisciplinary, linking subjects such as Mathematics, Religious Studies, and Economics, while also developing communication, leadership, and teamwork skills. Through this experience, students develop empathy, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of purpose as they witness the tangible impact of their efforts on the community.

Assessment practices emphasize learning as a continuous, reflective process. Teachers use questioning, formative checks, feedback conversations, and peer or self-assessment routines to monitor progress and guide improvement. Portfolios, presentations, and project outcomes complement summative tests, providing a broader picture of how students develop in knowledge, skills, and character.

Overall, SMA IPH Surabaya demonstrates how meaningful and joyful learning can be strengthened through active engagement, relational care, reflective practice, and authentic service experiences, supporting a deeper understanding and preparing students to contribute responsibly to their communities.

3.5. Integrative Discussion

The analysis of both schools demonstrates that meaningful and joyful learning can be strengthened when pedagogical practices are aligned with the spiritual values and educational missions of faith-based institutions. These findings resonate with the broader Deep Learning literature, which emphasizes engagement, purpose, student agency, and whole-person development as central to responsible learning in contemporary contexts (Fullan & Quinn, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In this sense, religious values do not stand in opposition to Deep Learning; instead, they provide a moral and spiritual grounding that deepens its educational intent.

Across both cases, several consistent patterns emerge. First, meaningful learning is fostered when students connect classroom concepts to real-life experiences and social responsibilities, aligning with Deep Learning principles that view learning as purposeful beyond academic achievement. Second, joyful learning is sustained through relational care, emotionally safe environments, and opportunities for reflection,

supporting students' sense of belonging, agency, and intrinsic motivation. These findings reinforce the view that joy in learning is not merely affective but emerges from meaningful engagement, recognition, and contribution.

At the same time, the findings highlight essential strengths and challenges in implementing Deep Learning within faith-based contexts. A key strength lies in the clarity of moral direction provided by religious values, which supports character formation, ethical discernment, and a sense of purpose in learning. However, the interpretation and enactment of Deep Learning remain highly context-dependent, shaped by school culture, teacher capacity, and institutional vision. This suggests that while faith-based values can strengthen Deep Learning, such approaches require reflective pedagogical leadership and sustained professional development to avoid superficial adoption.

The school practices examined in this study illustrate context-sensitive ways of implementing Deep Learning principles. Project-based and inquiry-driven learning, reflective classroom practices, service-learning initiatives, and relational school cultures function as practical expressions of meaningful and joyful learning. These practices demonstrate how Deep Learning can be enacted not as a standardized model, but as an adaptive framework shaped by local values, community needs, and educational purposes.

Taken together, these findings directly address the study's objective of examining how Deep Learning is interpreted and enacted through religious values in faith-based secondary schools. The analysis suggests that Islamic and Christian perspectives offer complementary contributions to Deep Learning by grounding learning in ethical responsibility, relational care, and purposeful engagement. Within Indonesia's plural educational landscape, such integrations offer promising pathways for strengthening Deep Learning in ways that are morally grounded, contextually responsive, and educationally meaningful.

4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates that the principles of Deep Learning can be meaningfully strengthened by integrating religious values into faith-based education. By examining Islamic and Christian educational perspectives, the study shows that meaningful and joyful learning is deeply connected to reflection, moral responsibility, relational care, and purposeful engagement. The findings confirm that faith-based schools need not separate spiritual formation from contemporary pedagogical innovation; instead, Deep Learning can be interpreted and enacted in ways that are ethically grounded, relationally supportive, and contextually relevant.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing discourse on Deep Learning by extending its scope beyond cognitive and pedagogical dimensions to

encompass moral and spiritual interpretation. By situating Deep Learning within Islamic and Christian educational frameworks, the study highlights how spiritual values shape the meaning of learning, joy, and responsibility, offering a value-driven lens that enriches existing models of whole-person and deeper learning.

In terms of educational practice, faith-based schools can operationalize Deep Learning through reflective pedagogy, contextualized learning, and service-oriented experiences that align with their religious identity. The cases examined demonstrate that practices such as inquiry-based learning, relational classroom environments, authentic assessment, and service learning support both academic growth and character formation. These practices provide practical insights for educators seeking to implement meaningful and joyful learning without compromising faith commitments.

At the policy level, this study supports the relevance of the Indonesian Deep Learning framework by illustrating how its principles can be contextualized within faith-based schooling. The findings suggest that national educational policy can be strengthened by recognizing religious values as legitimate resources for fostering ethical awareness, empathy, and responsible citizenship, particularly in the digital era. This alignment reinforces the inclusivity of Deep Learning within Indonesia's plural educational landscape.

Finally, future research may extend this study by incorporating empirical classroom observations or interviews to deepen the understanding of how meaningful and joyful students and teachers across diverse faith-based contexts experience learning.

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