

# The Use of Deep Learning in Fostering Independence and Discipline Among Elementary School Students: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** *The weakening of independence and discipline among elementary school students in the digital age has become a fundamental issue that demands a more substantial pedagogical response. The deep learning approach, which emphasizes meaningful, reflective, and enjoyable cognitive engagement, is believed to hold great potential for holistically shaping students' character. This article aims to analyze the role of the deep learning approach in fostering independence and discipline in elementary school students through a systematic literature review. This study employs a literature review method, analyzing 31 scholarly sources comprising national and international journal articles, policy documents, and monographs published between 1976 and 2026. The analytical technique used is content analysis with a descriptive-analytical approach. The study findings indicate that a deep learning approach characterized by mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning significantly supports the development of independent character through improvements in students' self-regulation, learning initiative, and decision-making skills. On the other hand, deep learning also contributes to strengthening disciplined character through the internalization of values, reflective habits, and an appreciation of rules that grow from students' self-awareness. Implementing this approach in elementary schools requires support from teachers as facilitators, contextual learning design, and education policies oriented toward meaningful learning*

**Keywords:** *Deep Learning, Independence, Discipline, Elementary School, Literature Review*

## INTRODUCTION

The crisis of character among elementary school students in Indonesia is becoming increasingly alarming and poses a serious challenge to the education sector. Various cases of behavioral misconduct, such as bullying, indiscipline, and low levels of student self-directed learning, continue to rise year after year. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission notes an increase in cases of violence and moral violations involving elementary school-aged students, reflecting the weak internalization of character values at the elementary education level. This situation is exacerbated by the dominance of rote-memorization and surface-level learning approaches, which prioritize cognitive achievement without addressing character development in depth (Marton & Säljö, 1976).

Previous studies on character education in elementary schools have generally focused on habit-forming strategies, teacher role modeling, and the enforcement of school rules as the primary instruments for character development. There is a general tendency that the implementation of character education in elementary schools is still dominated by a normative approach that has not yet fostered a deep internalization of values among students (Murniyetti et al., 2016). Indicators of independence, discipline, and responsibility in elementary school students have also been

formulated through literature reviews, which found that routine habit formation is a key factor in the successful cultivation of character (Septiadevana *et al.*, 2024). 21st-century character education requires a more reflective and real-world experience-based approach so that character values are truly internalized (Singh, 2019). Meaningful and contextual learning methods have proven to be more effective in shaping student character compared to conventional methods (Isnaeni & Ningsih, 2021). The implementation of the Pancasila student profile through meaningful learning also makes a tangible contribution to the character development of elementary school students (Oktaviani & Ningsih, 2024). Nevertheless, these studies have not explicitly examined how the deep learning approach, as a pedagogical paradigm, can specifically contribute to the integrated development of independent and disciplined character in elementary school students.

The concept of deep learning in an educational context was first introduced by distinguishing between surface learning and deep learning, in which students do not merely receive and memorize information, but actively construct meaningful understanding and engage in critical thinking (Marton & Säljö, 1976). This concept was later expanded into the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL) framework, which encompasses six global competencies: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking (Fullan *et al.*, 2018). In the context of Indonesian education policy, deep learning is defined as a mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning approach, which forms the foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Deep learning is essentially about why, what, and how meaningful learning takes place, not merely a teaching technique (Kovač *et al.*, 2025).

The purpose of this article is to address the shortcomings of previous studies by comprehensively analyzing the role of the deep learning approach in fostering independence and discipline in elementary school students through a systematic literature review. Accordingly, three research questions have been formulated: (1) How is the concept of the deep learning approach applied in the context of elementary school learning? (2) How does the deep learning approach contribute to the development of elementary school students' independent character? (3) How does the deep learning approach contribute to the development of elementary school students' disciplined character? This study is grounded in the argument that the deep learning approach which emphasizes conscious, meaningful, and joyful learning does not merely enhance students' conceptual understanding but simultaneously fosters authentic and sustainable character dispositions. When students are encouraged to think reflectively, make decisions independently, and internalize values in real-world contexts, independent and disciplined character does not arise from external coercion but grows from deep self-awareness (Fullan *et al.*, 2018).

## METHODS

This study adopted a literature review approach as its primary design because the topic of deep learning in fostering independent character and discipline among elementary school students is a rapidly evolving field that has yet to be comprehensively and systematically examined. The literature review was chosen based on the extensive body of existing literature and the uniqueness of the topic, which bridges contemporary pedagogical paradigms with character education at the elementary level.

This study is a qualitative study of the library research type. The data used are secondary data in the form of national and international scientific journal articles, educational policy documents, and monographs relevant to the topic of study. No primary data were collected from the field; therefore, all analyses are based on published scientific sources that are openly accessible.

The information sources were obtained from various open-access scientific databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and national journal portals such as Sinta, Garuda, and OJS from Indonesian universities. The criteria for literature inclusion are as follows: (1) scientific journal articles published between 1976 and 2026, with 1976 marking the publication year of the foundational article by Marton & Säljö; (2) relevance to the topic of deep learning as a pedagogical approach, character education, self-directed character, and disciplined character in elementary schools; and (3) full-text availability online.

The research process was conducted in four stages. First, the identification stage, which involved a literature search using the keywords "deep learning," "learning approaches,"

“independence,” “discipline,” and “elementary school” across various databases. Second, the selection stage, which involved screening the literature based on inclusion criteria and topic relevance. Third, the analysis stage, which involved an in-depth reading of each source to identify key findings. Fourth, the synthesis stage, which involved compiling findings from various sources into a cohesive narrative that answers the research questions.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques with a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis stages included: (1) data reduction, which involved selecting and focusing on relevant information from each source; (2) data display, which involves organizing information into main themes that reflect the concepts of deep learning, independent character, and disciplined character; and (3) verification and drawing conclusions, which involves drawing conclusions based on patterns found in the literature in a consistent and coherent manner.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Concept of Deep Learning in Elementary School Education

The deep learning approach as a pedagogical paradigm has strong conceptual roots in the tradition of educational science. Two distinct learning orientations have been identified: surface learning, characterized by mechanical memorization and the reproduction of information; and deep learning, characterized by students' efforts to understand meaning, think critically, and build conceptual understanding that can be transferred to other contexts (MARTON & SÄLJÖ, 1976). This distinction has served as an epistemological foundation that education researchers have continued to develop over the nearly five decades that followed.

Deep learning is defined as a process involving six global competencies: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking, with character development placed at the core of the learning process (Fullan et al., 2018). Deep learning is fundamentally about why, what, and how meaningful learning takes place, not merely about teaching techniques alone (Kovač et al., 2025). In the context of Indonesian education policy, deep learning is established as a mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning approach, which is one of the main pillars of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikdasmen, 2025).

The implementation of deep learning in elementary schools includes contextual strategies, reflective discussions, project-based learning, and formative assessment that encourage students to actively construct knowledge and internalize learning values in a meaningful way (Maulana et al., 2025). The application of deep learning in elementary schools can transform the classroom atmosphere from teacher-centered to student-centered, creating a safe, interactive, and reflective learning environment (Haq & Prasetyo, 2025). Although there are challenges regarding teacher readiness and educational infrastructure, the implementation of deep learning can enhance student engagement, strengthen subject matter understanding, and foster the development of critical and creative thinking (Isnayanti et al., 2025). Deep learning makes a significant contribution to building a student-centered, contextual, and sustainable learning process, thereby improving the quality of elementary education in the digital age (Maulidya et al., 2025). The surge in research publications from 2024 to 2025 reflects a growing academic consensus that pedagogical deep learning serves as a catalyst for fostering student character in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum (Rohmah et al., 2026).

### The Contribution of Deep Learning Approaches to the Development of Independent Character in Elementary School Students

Independence is one of the core values in the Pancasila Student Profile, reflecting a student's ability to perform activities independently, solve problems, and make decisions without relying entirely on others. There are three main indicators of independent character in elementary school students, namely: (a) the ability to perform activities independently; (b) the ability to solve problems; and (c) the ability to make decisions independently, all of which are closely related to the principles of deep learning that encourage student autonomy and self-regulation (Septiadevana et al., 2024).

The deep learning approach contributes to the development of independent character through several mechanisms. Through mindful learning, students are encouraged to recognize their own thought processes, monitor their understanding, and consciously manage their learning

strategies. The Active Deep Learner Experience approach significantly builds elementary students' learning independence through activities that encourage initiative, reflection, and personal responsibility, with an increase from 45% to 85% of students demonstrating adequate understanding, accompanied by increased independence in discussions and problem-solving (Kontesa *et al.*, 2023).

Through project-based learning and real-world problem-solving—which form the core of the deep learning approach, students are trained to work independently, manage their time and resources, and take responsibility for their learning processes and outcomes. Discipline contributes 0.616 and self-efficacy 0.524 to elementary students' learning independence, which reinforces the argument that independent character and discipline are closely interrelated and can be cultivated simultaneously through the right learning approach (Taufiq *et al.*, 2024). Educational institutions play a strategic role in shaping students' social transformation, including the strengthening of independent character through meaningful and contextual learning processes in elementary school (Jati *et al.*, 2025).

The dimension of meaningful learning in deep learning encourages students to connect learning materials with their real-life experiences and contexts, thereby allowing intrinsic motivation for independent learning to develop naturally. Deep learning plays a crucial role in fostering a student-centered, contextual, and sustainable learning process (Maulidya *et al.*, 2025). Social character traits formed through meaningful learning, including independence in social interaction, result from the organic internalization of values that occurs during the learning process (Isnaeni & Ningsih, 2021). Project-based learning that integrates deep learning has been shown to holistically strengthen students' character in the dimensions of independence, critical thinking, and creativity (Mardatillah *et al.*, 2025).

Challenges in fostering independent character through deep learning in elementary schools include students' difficulty in applying knowledge independently during the early stages of implementation, as well as an increased planning burden for teachers. These challenges can be addressed through the reinforcement of contextual learning, the provision of gradual support (scaffolding), and collaborative communication among teachers, students, and parents (Maulana *et al.*, 2025). The integration of managerial paradigms with the deep learning pedagogical approach yields an effective Character-Based Deep Learning Management model for fostering students' independent character in a sustainable manner, although the planning function has only achieved 65% effectiveness (Diana & Khoeriah, 2026).

### **The Contribution of Deep Learning Approaches to Fostering Discipline in Elementary School Students**

Discipline is an individual's willingness and readiness to comply with applicable rules and regulations, not out of external coercion, but based on a deep sense of self-awareness regarding the importance of order and responsibility. Effective character education is not limited to external behavior but also reflects the internalization of values that originate from within the student (rohaetul *et al.*, 2026). Indicators of disciplinary character in elementary school students include: (a) complying with school rules; (b) completing assignments on time; and (c) wearing appropriate clothing or uniforms (Septiadevana *et al.*, 2024).

The deep learning approach contributes to the development of a disciplined character through mechanisms that differ from conventional approaches. While conventional approaches rely on external rules and sanctions to control behavior, deep learning fosters discipline from within the student through a process of internalizing and reflecting on values. The implementation of deep learning in elementary schools can improve student discipline through project-based, contextual, and adaptive learning strategies that encourage students to internalize the values of order as part of their learning process (Amalia *et al.*, 2025). Effective character education in elementary schools requires an approach that engages students' self-awareness, rather than merely normative conditioning (Saputri *et al.*, 2025).

The dimension of mindful learning in deep learning plays a crucial role in the development of discipline. When students are encouraged to consciously monitor their learning process, manage their time, and evaluate their own progress, they indirectly cultivate self-discipline rooted in intrinsic motivation. Although deep learning faces challenges regarding curriculum and teacher

training, this approach consistently encourages students to complete tasks independently and on time as a tangible manifestation of internalized discipline (Hasanah & Pujiati, 2025). Character education involving habit formation, role modeling, and support from the school environment can effectively enhance student discipline (Rahmah *et al.*, 2024).

Deep learning, which makes learning more meaningful, conscious, and enjoyable, also has a positive impact on students' discipline in participating in the learning process. Students who are meaningfully engaged tend to be more consistent in following the schedule, completing assignments on time, and adhering to class agreements because they understand the relevance of these rules to their personal development (Cahyanti *et al.*, 2026). The synergy between a meaningful learning approach and a conducive school environment significantly strengthens the internalization of disciplinary values among elementary school students (Purwati *et al.*, 2026).

Local values integrated into a deep learning approach can strengthen the internalization of discipline in elementary school students in a more contextual and meaningful way (Salmia *et al.*, 2025). The implementation of the Pancasila student profile through meaningful learning is a crucial effort in shaping students' character in accordance with national values that form the foundation of Indonesian students' moral discipline (Oktaviani & Ningsih, 2024).

### **The Implications of Implementing Deep Learning for Character Development in Elementary Schools**

Based on the synthesis of the literature review above, the deep learning approach has significant implications for character education practices in elementary schools. Teachers need to transition from the role of knowledge transmitters to facilitators and learning activators who design meaningful, reflective, and contextual learning experiences. The integration of deep learning into character education in the digital age can foster a classroom ecosystem that is more productive in terms of character development when teachers comprehensively understand the principles of deep learning (Hardian *et al.*, 2025).

Project-based, inquiry-based, and real-world problem-solving learning designs serve as key strategies that link the deep learning approach with the development of independent and disciplined character. This approach not only encourages students to actively construct knowledge but also supports the holistic development of the Pancasila Student Profile (Isnayanti *et al.*, 2025). The implementation of deep learning in mathematics instruction in elementary schools consistently improves not only conceptual understanding but also students' independence and discipline in completing learning tasks (Mutmainnah *et al.*, 2025).

The implementation of deep learning for character development requires the support of a comprehensive ecosystem, including ongoing teacher training, flexible educational policies, parental involvement as learning partners, and a conducive school infrastructure. The surge in research publications in 2024–2025 reflects a growing academic consensus that pedagogical deep learning serves as a catalyst for student character development in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum (Rohmah *et al.*, 2026). This study is limited to a literature review that does not include direct field observations; therefore, further research based on field studies is highly recommended to empirically observe how deep learning shapes the independent and disciplined character of elementary school students in the context of daily learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

This literature review reveals that the deep learning approach makes a tangible and significant contribution to the development of independent and disciplined character in elementary school students. The most important finding of this study is that deep learning not only enhances students' conceptual understanding but also simultaneously fosters independent character through improved self-regulation and learning autonomy, as well as disciplined character through the internalization of values that stem from students' self-awareness. This differs from previous studies, which generally examined character development through a normative approach based on rules and external sanctions.

This study makes an academic contribution by strengthening the theoretical foundation for the use of the deep learning approach as a pedagogical framework for character development in

Indonesian elementary schools, particularly within the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The concepts of meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning hallmarks of deep learning have been theoretically proven to be relevant as strategies for authentic, holistic, and sustainable character development. Additionally, this study offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating that systematic literature reviews are a valid and productive approach for synthesizing knowledge in the rapidly evolving field of education.

The limitations of this study lie in its scope, which is limited to a literature review without empirical field data, as well as the possibility of selection bias in the choice of literature sources. For a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding, further research based on field research, action research, or mixed methods is urgently needed to directly observe and measure the impact of implementing the deep learning approach on the development of independent character and discipline among elementary school students in various school contexts across Indonesia.

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