TEACHER PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DEEP LEARNING APPROACH IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Zelta Jufita Alsidah[1], Asep Hardiyanto[2]
[1,2] Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, Indonesia
zeltajufitaal@gmail.com, asep.hardiyanto@umko.ac.id
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ABSTRACT
As a pedagogical approach that promotes meaningful knowledge, critical thinking, and active student participation, deep learning has been more and more advocated within the Merdeka Curriculum. The amount of data available on how junior high school English instructors use and understand deep learning concepts is, however, still limited. The purpose of this research is to find out how the English instructors at SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi feel about using deep learning in their classrooms. Five English instructors participated in the study, which used a qualitative research methodology to gather data via document analysis, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using methods such as data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drafting and verification. Previous research has mostly ignored the unique context of junior high school English education under the Merdeka Curriculum, therefore this study fills that gap by examining how teachers perceive and implement deep learning in the classroom. Teachers have a favourable attitude towards deep learning and conceptualise it as a method that emphasises introspective understanding and contextual knowledge rather than rote memorisation, according to the results. Time restrictions, assessment misalignment, students' memorization-oriented tendencies, and a lack of pedagogical direction all contribute to its poor classroom implementation. In order to guarantee the systematic integration of deep learning principles, this study provides contextual empirical insights into the realities of deep learning implementation in English classrooms and emphasises the necessity of sustained professional development, aligned assessment systems, and institutional support.
Keywords: *Deep Learning, Teachers' Perceptions, English Classroom Learning, Merdeka Curriculum.*

INTRODUCTION

Deep learning in education is characterized by conceptual understanding, sustained engagement, contextualized learning, and reflective meaning-making, which emerge across diverse educational settings (Chen & Singh, 2024). To instructors, deep learning is a game-changer in the classroom because it encourages students to think critically, take an active role in their own education, and build the kind of higher-order thinking abilities that are crucial when studying a new language. (Fitrah et al., 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2025). Deep learning places a premium on comprehension, critical thinking, and the capacity to apply knowledge in real-world situations, as opposed to conventional methods that often emphasizes passively receiving information and rote memorization. (Indahtriyani, 2025; Nafi'ah, 2025; Rizkillah & Marifah, 2025). Learning is meant to be a thoughtful, purposeful, and enjoyable process, so students aren't only pushed to memorise information but also

to make connections between concepts, reflect on their own learning, and solve important problems. (Azzahra, 2025; Safira S, 2025)

In English classroom learning, deep learning is particularly relevant because language learning requires meaningful communication, reflective thinking, and sustained student participation (Fadhila et al., 2025; Yustitia et al., 2026). This orientation is further supported by contemporary learning theories that emphasize knowledge construction, metacognitive awareness, and meaningful engagement as essential elements of effective learning processes (Hattie & Group, 2017).

Within the global discourse of educational reform, deep learning has been increasingly emphasized as a core orientation for developing meaningful learning and future-ready competencies. The OECD Learning Compass 2030 highlights deep learning as a fundamental approach that supports student agency, reflective thinking, and contextual understanding in classroom instruction (OECD, 2025).

In this perspective, deep learning is not merely associated with cognitive achievement, but also with the development of learners' ability to make meaning, apply knowledge in real-life contexts, and actively participate in learning processes (Rakhmasari & Pratiwi, 2025).

Teacher perceptions of deep learning's favourable effects on student-centered teaching, classroom engagement, and contextual learning activities have been supported by recent empirical research in Indonesian educational settings, including English classes. (Bachtiar, 2022; Inayah, 2024). Deep learning, according to other research, encourages students to think critically and independently by providing them with more opportunities for active participation in class. (Surakarta et al., 2025), According to research, students' critical thinking and problem solving skills may be improved via the use of deep learning techniques that include sociolinguistic activities. These approaches promote adaptable, reflective, and cognitively engaged learning experiences. (Taqiyya et al., 2025; Wardani, 2025). The implementation of deep learning concepts in the classroom is mostly the responsibility of teachers. Instead of focusing on memorisation, instructors can create learning settings that encourage enquiry, reflection, and meaningful interaction. (OECD, 2025). When it comes to implementing new pedagogical strategies, instructional decision-making is heavily impacted by teachers' ideas and views. (Awang et al., 2025; Mahardika & Jaya, 2025).

The Merdeka Curriculum prioritises learner autonomy, contextual learning, and reflective teaching techniques; deep learning is in line with these tenets. (Aribah et al., 2025; Newton et al., 2025). Active classroom participation is seen as a means through which deep learning may help English language teachers foster students' communicative skills and critical language usage. (Benu et al., 2025; Sari, 2022). Despite these theoretical and empirical supports, challenges in classroom enactment remain evident.

Although deep learning principles are promoted in the Merdeka Curriculum for the Indonesian context, how well these ideas are understood and translated by teachers is a major factor in how successful deep learning is when used in the classroom. The year 2025 was mentioned by Kemdikbudristek. Awang et al. (2025) found that instructional decision-making, such as the selection of learning activities, patterns of classroom interaction, and assessment methods, is significantly influenced by teachers' views and pedagogical beliefs. Most of the previous research has focused on issues related to curriculum alignment, teacher preparedness, and overall implementation difficulties across grade levels. But there hasn't been a tonne of research on how junior high English instructors understand, apply, and internalise deep learning ideas to the Merdeka Curriculum's day-to-day lessons.

By delving into the real-life experiences and practical implementation of deep learning by English instructors in junior high school classes, this research provides valuable contextual and interpretive insights. This study fills a gap in the literature by examining English instructors within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. It does this by examining topics that have not been thoroughly investigated in other studies, therefore shedding light on the relationship between curriculum policy rhetoric and real classroom practice.

While there has been some research on deep learning and teacher perceptions in broader educational settings, very little has looked at Indonesian EFL teachers' perspectives on and use of deep learning within the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level. Instead of looking at teachers' experiences and methods of teaching in English language learning environments, much of the available research focuses on curriculum policy, broad implementation difficulties, or theoretical debates around deep learning. Thus, the purpose of this research is to examine how English instructors at SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi feel about using deep learning to teach English

within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the Merdeka Curriculum, this study seeks to answer the following question: How do English instructors at SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi feel about using deep learning in their classrooms?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Research Design

Using a qualitative case study technique, this research looked at how English instructors felt about using deep learning in the classroom. The research was deemed suitable for a case study design due to its emphasis on investigating teachers' perspectives, experiences, and pedagogical approaches within a particular educational context, namely SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi. Instead of statistically assessing variables, this method allowed the researcher to comprehend deep learning's interpretation and implementation in a real classroom setting (Creswell, 2018).

Research Site and Participants

The research was place at SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi, an English-only junior high school that follows the Merdeka Curriculum. The five English instructors who took part in the study were chosen on purpose because they met three requirements: (1) they were working as junior high school English teachers, (2) they had prior experience implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, and (3) they were actively engaged in classroom instruction. The participants were hand-picked for their extensive expertise in the field, guaranteeing that the qualitative data they provided would be comprehensive and insightful. (Mahfira et al., 2019)

Data Collection Technique

We used document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations to compile our data. Five English teachers from SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi participated in this research. They were chosen by purposive sampling and were required to meet certain criteria, including being actively engaged in classroom instruction, teaching English, and applying the Merdeka Curriculum. All five educators were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format to delve into their thoughts, feelings, actions, and struggles around the incorporation of deep learning into their lessons. In order to make data analysis easier, the interviews were videotaped and transcribed word for word (Creswell, 2018). Teachers' normal

English lessons were observed to see how deep learning strategies were put into place. This included looking at student involvement, critical thinking, classroom interaction, and the meaningful usage of English. Based on the class schedule, each instructor was watched during classroom teaching at least once, and each observation lasted around 40 minutes. The deployment of deep learning was documented via the use of observation notes, which documented classroom activities, student involvement, and instructional tactics. Furthermore, in order to determine if instructional planning is in line with deep learning concepts, document analysis was conducted on assessment papers, lesson plans, and teaching materials.

Technique of Data Analysis

Information was examined by means of an interactive model that was suggested by (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014) This includes gathering data, processing it, displaying it, and finally, making and verifying conclusions. During the data reduction stage, all documents, including interview transcripts and observation notes, were coded and categorised according to predetermined research indicators. These indicators included teachers' attitudes and understanding of deep learning, as well as their classroom implementation practices, implementation challenges, and support needs. After data reduction, narrative and theme displays were made to aid in understanding. Triangulation using interviews, observations, and document analysis confirmed the conclusions reached from data patterns and linkages, adding credence to the results.

1. Data Collection

Document analysis, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews was to get a better grasp of the instructors' knowledge, attitudes, perceived difficulties, and support requirements in relation to deep learning's implementation. Teachers' pedagogical choices and the degree to which deep learning traits manifested in English class activities were investigated via classroom observations. In order to determine if the intended lessons were in line with the concepts of deep learning, an analysis was conducted on the relevant papers, including lesson plans, teaching materials, and assessment records. Data triangulation, which makes use of many sources of information, increased the reliability of the results.

2. Data Reduction

Only relevant data was kept, while irrelevant material was discarded. We looked for significant patterns and themes in the data by summarising and categorising it.

3. Data Display

To help explain the implementation and perception of deep learning in English classrooms, narrative descriptions and topic categorisations were used to portray the reduced data.

4. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

After analysing the data, we double-checked our findings to make sure they align with our study goals. By comparing data collected from classroom observations and interviews, triangulation was used to increase the credibility of the results.

RESULTS

Here we provide the study's results, derived from five English instructors' participation in semi-structured interviews and classroom observations at SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi. Data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification were the methods used to analyse the data. Data is structured according to study indications, which include educators' familiarity with deep learning, their feelings about the method, their classroom practices, difficulties in implementing it, and their need for assistance.

Teachers' Understanding of Deep Learning

All of the participating educators had a common concept of deep learning as a method of teaching that places more emphasis on meaningful understanding and contextual comprehension than on rote memorisation, according to the results. As a method of instruction, deep learning allows students to zero in on the meaning, interpretation, and purpose of their English language learning tasks, according to teachers.

The following is how one educator defined this concept:

T1: "Learning that emphasises comprehension rather than rote memorisation is deep learning."

Another educator made a similar point:

Thirdly, "deep learning is learning that focuses on understanding, not just memorisation."

These comments show that educators see deep learning as requiring more from students than just memorisation; they envision it as a sort of cognitive engagement that encourages students to provide explanations of meaning and context. Teachers seem to agree that deep learning represents a departure from traditional, memorization-based lessons.

Teachers' Attitudes toward the Deep Learning Approach

The results show that educators are generally supportive of using deep learning in ESL courses. The use of deep learning, according to educators, makes lessons more engaging and motivates students to take an active role in their own education.

One teacher stated:

> "Deep learning makes learning more meaningful and students more active." (T3)

Additionally, educators have seen that students are more engaged in class discussions and assignments when the emphasis is on comprehension and reflection. However, educators have recognised that students' lack of familiarity with reflective and analytical learning impacts the reliability of its application in the classroom.

Classroom Practices of Deep Learning

Teachers reported using activities including group discussions, question and answer sessions, presentations, and reflective writing assignments to integrate deep learning in the classroom. The goals of these exercises are to foster discussion, logic, and a more in-depth comprehension of English literature.

One teacher explained:

> T5: "I typically engage in group work, including question and answer sessions, presentations, and textual analysis."

Teachers did, in fact, encourage students to elaborate on concepts, answer questions, and reflect on course material on occasion, according to classroom observations. Teachers did acknowledge that these strategies weren't always part of their class plans, but rather used infrequently and without much planning.

Challenges in Implementing Deep Learning

According to the results, there are a number of obstacles that educators must overcome in order to regularly use deep learning. Limited instructional time, students' memorization-oriented learning habits, and evaluation processes dominated by written examinations are the most often mentioned problems.

One teacher stated:

> T4: "Students' habits of memorizing and evaluating using written tests make it difficult to achieve optimal in-depth learning."

Teachers also reported that time constraints and curriculum demands often require them to prioritize completing learning materials rather than implementing reflective and in-depth learning activities.

Teachers' Needs for Support

Teachers also exhibit a great need for institutional and professional support when implementing deep learning, according to the results. The significance of hands-on experience, explicit instructional direction, and ongoing professional development was highlighted by educators.

One teacher stated:

> T1: "I need practical training and guidance to be able to apply deep learning consistently."

Based on these results, it's clear that educators need more than just a theoretical grasp of deep learning to put it into practice methodically in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

Researchers found that rather than focusing on rote memorisation, English instructors saw deep learning as a method that encouraged students to think critically about what they were learning and how it applied to real-world situations. Teaching professionals have defined deep learning as an approach to education that places more emphasis on conceptualisation and analysis than on memorisation. According to Biggs and Tang's (2011) theoretical paradigm, which distinguishes between deep and surface learning, this discovery supports the idea that deep learning is characterised by meaning-making, conceptual comprehension, and active involvement.

Although teachers demonstrated positive perceptions toward deep learning and recognized its potential to improve student engagement and instructional quality, the findings indicate that implementation remains inconsistent. Classroom observations showed that deep learning practices were implemented inconsistently and were not yet systematically integrated into lesson planning and instructional

practice. This perception–practice gap appears to result from both pedagogical and contextual factors.

From a pedagogical standpoint, educators have indicated a lack of concrete instructions for regularly incorporating deep learning into English language classes. Teachers struggled to implement deep learning's conceptual ideas into assessment methods and organised learning activities, despite their familiarity with these principles. Curriculum change also presents similar difficulties, as instructors need more specific models of teaching in order to successfully apply new pedagogical strategies (Mahardika & Jaya, 2025).

Contextual constraints also affected implementation. Limited instructional time, curriculum demands, and assessment practices dominated by written testing often reduced opportunities for reflective and in-depth learning activities. This condition indicates a misalignment between the pedagogical orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum and prevailing classroom assessment practices (Kemdikbudristek, 2025).

In addition, educators stressed the need of institutional backing and professional development opportunities for successful deep learning implementation. Continuous professional development, aligned evaluation systems, and practical pedagogical assistance are necessary for sustained educational reform (Fulan et al., 2018). Teachers have a good grasp of the idea and appreciate deep learning, but its use in English classes is still in its early stages, influenced by both favourable views and practical constraints.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research show that English instructors at SMP Negeri 3 Kotabumi see deep learning as a useful method of instruction that places more emphasis on students' ability to recognise context, reflect on their own learning, and actively participate in class rather than rote memorisation. The adoption of deep learning is met with favourable attitudes from teachers, who see its promise in elevating the standard of English language education. However, instructional time, evaluation procedures, students' habitual learning patterns, and insufficient pedagogical direction mainly restrict and inconsistently implement deep learning. Systematic professional development, aligned assessment techniques, and

continuous institutional support are necessary for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and deep learning, even when teachers' perspectives are conceptually linked. These results show that using deep learning strategies in English classes is an issue of systemic pedagogy that requires support from school and instructional levels, and not only a question of teacher conviction.

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