



English Teachers' Perceptions of Implementing the Deep Learning Approach in Elementary Schools

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: 2025-10-07 Revised: 2025-11-13 Published: 2025-12-02 Keywords: <i>Approach;</i> <i>English;</i> <i>Deep Learning;</i> <i>Perceptions;</i> <i>Teacher.</i>	This study examines how elementary school English teachers perceive and implement the deep learning approach, revealing generally positive views toward its potential to enhance creativity, independence, and active student participation. Using a qualitative case study design, the study involved interviews with fourteen teachers from rural areas in the southern coast of Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Thematic analysis identified three key findings: (1) teachers value deep learning for promoting mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning; (2) differences in teaching experience, institutional support, and access to training lead to varied levels of understanding and confidence; and (3) although most schools provide adequate resources, their use remains limited due to insufficient technical guidance. Deep learning emphasized in recent Indonesian curriculum reforms serves as an alternative to traditional rote-based practices, yet its classroom application remains inconsistent. The study concludes that clearer conceptual training, continuous professional development, and stronger school support systems are essential for ensuring more effective and consistent implementation of deep learning in elementary English teaching.
Artikel Info	Abstrak
Sejarah Artikel Diterima: 2025-10-07 Direvisi: 2025-11-13 Dipublikasi: 2025-12-02 Kata kunci: <i>Pendekatan;</i> <i>Bahasa Inggris;</i> <i>Deep Learning;</i> <i>Persepsi;</i> <i>Guru.</i>	Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana guru bahasa Inggris sekolah dasar memersepsikan dan menerapkan pendekatan deep learning, dengan temuan awal menunjukkan bahwa para guru umumnya memiliki pandangan positif terhadap potensinya dalam meningkatkan kreativitas, kemandirian, dan partisipasi aktif siswa. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif jenis studi kasus, penelitian ini melibatkan wawancara dengan empat belas guru di wilayah pedesaan pesisir selatan Jawa Tengah dan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Analisis tematik mengidentifikasi tiga temuan utama: (1) guru menghargai deep learning karena mendorong pembelajaran yang mindful, meaningful, dan joyful; (2) perbedaan pengalaman mengajar, dukungan institusional, dan akses terhadap pelatihan menyebabkan variasi pemahaman dan kepercayaan diri; dan (3) meskipun sebagian besar sekolah menyediakan sumber belajar yang memadai, pemanfaatannya masih terbatas karena minimnya panduan teknis. Deep learning yang ditekankan dalam reformasi kurikulum Indonesia menjadi alternatif terhadap praktik pembelajaran berbasis hafalan, namun penerapannya di kelas masih belum konsisten. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pelatihan konseptual yang lebih jelas, pengembangan profesional berkelanjutan, dan dukungan institusional yang lebih kuat sangat penting untuk memastikan penerapan deep learning yang lebih efektif dan konsisten dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris di sekolah dasar.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, education systems worldwide including Indonesia are undergoing significant transformation. Traditional, teacher-centered approaches that emphasize rote memorization are gradually being replaced by pedagogies that promote critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving (Chen et al., 2024; Han and Yang, 2024). One pedagogical framework that has gained increasing attention is deep learning. In

education, deep learning refers not to artificial intelligence systems, but to meaningful engagement, comprehensive understanding, and the development of higher-order thinking skills (Akmal et al., 2025; Chen and Singh, 2024).

In Indonesia, the relevance of deep learning has become increasingly visible in elementary English education. As a global lingua franca, English provides access to international communication and broader knowledge resources. Early English mastery builds students' foundational communication skills and prepares

them for lifelong learning (Deasy Yunita Siregar et al., 2024; Santi et al., 2024). Thus, English instruction at the elementary level is expected not only to teach basic language skills but also to cultivate creativity, collaboration, and critical reasoning through meaningful learning experiences.

Curriculum reform in Indonesia reflects these changing demands. From the 1994 Curriculum to KBK, KTSP, K13, and currently the Merdeka Curriculum, the government has attempted to enhance educational relevance and quality (Deasy Yunita Siregar et al., 2024; Martaliana et al., 2021). However, gaps in teacher readiness and school resources have often hindered effective implementation (Sari, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the need for flexible, student-centered, and technology-integrated learning models (Dewi and Ratnaningsih, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum subsequently incorporated deep learning principles by prioritizing critical, creative, communicative, and collaborative competencies (Hidayat and Haryati, 2025; Sari, 2023).

The role of teachers is central to the success of this approach. The Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Abdul Mu'ti, emphasized that effective deep learning requires competent and well-prepared teachers (Tempo, 2024). However, studies indicate that teacher understanding remains inconsistent. For example, only 62.4% of teachers in Nagekeo Regency reported clear comprehension of deep learning practices (Kasi et al., 2025). Challenges also persist in implementing multimodal literacy and technology-assisted English learning due to limited facilities and inadequate training (Dwi Jayanti and Damayanti, 2023; Ulul Albab et al., 2023).

Deep learning is built upon three core principles: meaningful learning, mindful learning, and joyful learning (Fatmawati, 2025; Hendrianty et al., 2024; Kim and Kwon, 2023). Meaningful learning connects new knowledge with students' prior experiences. Mindful learning encourages active engagement and flexible thinking (Raup et al., 2022; Wijaya, 2025). Joyful learning fosters a positive and creative classroom atmosphere that motivates learners (Kholifah Al Marah Hafidzhoh et al., 2023; Pane et al., 2025). These principles are highly compatible with English learning, which requires communication practice, authentic contexts, and student-centered activities (Riedmann et al., 2025).

Research consistently highlights the benefits of deep learning for improving higher-order thinking, digital literacy, engagement, and comprehension (Aditama et al., 2025; Suwandi et al., 2024; Tian et al., 2023). However, practical challenges remain significant, including limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and varying teacher motivation (Hasanah and Pujiati, 2025; Sunaengsih et al., 2025). Furthermore, gaps between curriculum expectations and classroom practices indicate the need to examine teachers' perceptions and readiness (Dewi et al., 2020).

Teacher engagement encompassing competence, motivation, and professional pride is critical to implementing deep learning effectively (Dewi et al., 2021; Sasmoko et al., 2018). Teachers must continuously adapt, innovate, and adopt student-centered pedagogies to meet modern educational demands (OECD, 2017; Sugden et al., 2021). Their perceptions, shaped by cognitive, affective, and contextual factors, play a key role in determining whether deep learning can be successfully integrated into English classrooms (Atmojo et al., 2025; Sari and Arta, 2025).

Although deep learning has been widely discussed in national policy documents and previous studies, there remains a clear research gap concerning how elementary school English teachers perceive and implement deep learning, particularly in rural and coastal regions of Indonesia. Most existing studies focus on secondary education, urban settings, or general subject areas, leaving elementary-level English instruction underexplored. Furthermore, no previous research has specifically examined teacher perceptions in the southern coastal areas of Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, where disparities in facilities, teacher training, and contextual challenges are more pronounced.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the preparedness of elementary school English teachers in the southern coastal regions of Central Java and Yogyakarta in implementing the deep learning approach. The research focuses on the following questions:

1. What are elementary school English teachers' perceptions of implementing the deep learning approach in English language teaching?
2. What learning strategy do teachers use in integrating deep learning into English teaching?

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research methodology with a case study design, characterized by issue exploration, comprehensive understanding of phenomena, word-based data collection, text-based analysis, and interpretation of findings with deeper meaning (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Sugiyono, 2016). The research aimed to investigate English teachers' readiness to implement the deep learning approach across 14 elementary schools located in Yogyakarta and the southern coast of Central Java, Indonesia. To contextualize the scope of the study, the participants involved were English teachers from several schools in these regions.

The data were obtained from 14 English teachers teaching in elementary schools in Purworejo Regency (SDN Pagak, SDN Girirejo, SDN Jatimalang, SDN Jatinegoro, SDN Jogoresan, SDN Jogoboyo, MIM Krendetan), Kebumen Regency (SDN Wiromartan, SDN 1 Lembupurwo, SDN Selotumpeng, SDN Tlogopragoto, SDN Mirit), and Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta (SDN Glagah, SD Muhammadiyah Temon). Having identified the participants, the study proceeded to collect data using interviews as the primary instrument.

Data were collected through interviews consisting of 18 questions designed to elicit in-depth insights into teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding deep learning practices. Three types of interviews were employed: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured, allowing the researchers to gather both consistent and spontaneous responses (Harding, 2018; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). Once the interviews were completed, the next stage involved analyzing the collected data.

After data collection, all interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a narrative analytic approach. Relevant segments from the transcripts were selected, interpreted, and synthesized to identify key insights reflecting teachers' preparedness for deep learning implementation. The findings were examined in relation to the research questions, and conclusions were drawn based on recurring patterns within participants' narratives. Presenting the data narratively allowed for clarity, coherence, and a comprehensive understanding of the emerging findings.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

This section presents the research findings obtained from in-depth interviews with 14

elementary school English teachers. The interviews consisted of 18 questions designed to explore various aspects of teachers' understanding of the deep learning approach and the strategies they employed in implementing it within English learning activities. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively to identify key patterns, themes, and insights, which are elaborated in the following subsections.

1. English Teacher' Perceptions of the Deep Learning Approach

This subsection presents a comprehensive overview of 14 elementary school English teachers' perceptions of the deep learning approach, drawing on data collected through ten semi-structured interview questions. The teachers' backgrounds revealed considerable variation in teaching experience. Two participants had been teaching English for more than 15 years. Respondent 3 stated, "I have been teaching English in elementary schools since 2010, so it has been at least 15 years," while Respondent 13 recalled, "as far as I remember it was 2009, so it was about 16 years." In contrast, many teachers had only recently begun teaching English due to reassignment or because English was reintroduced under the Merdeka Curriculum. Respondent 1 explained, "I just started teaching English this year... because previously... there was no English learning in elementary schools."

Most teachers had participated in Merdeka Curriculum training, but exposure to deep learning concepts was inconsistent. Several teachers reported only partial or surface-level training. Respondent 11 noted, "I attended a deep learning workshop... but it was only explained briefly and focused more on designing teaching modules." Meanwhile, others relied heavily on independent study to understand recent pedagogical approaches. As Respondent 14 expressed, "I am required to always be updated... so I study it independently." Training inequality was also evident, particularly among honorary teachers who lacked access to formal workshops. Respondent 8 shared, "I have not attended any direct training because I have not had my turn as an honorary teacher."

Teachers generally held positive perceptions of deep learning, describing it as meaningful, enjoyable, and student-centered. Respondent 4 described it as learning where “students... feel happy playing while learning,” and Respondent 11 emphasized that it helps develop “students’ independence and creativity in developing their talents.” When contrasting deep learning with traditional instructional methods, all respondents agreed that deep learning is more effective and relevant for 21st-century learners. Respondent 12 highlighted that traditional learning is “only limited to the transfer of knowledge,” while deep learning encourages deeper comprehension and active participation. Respondent 10 further noted that “deep learning uses more digital media,” reflecting teachers’ recognition of the role of technology in modern classrooms.

The findings also explored teachers’ understanding of three core principles of deep learning: mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. Joyful learning was the most familiar concept among participants. Respondent 9 explained that joyful learning creates a “comfortable and enjoyable” environment that helps students absorb material more easily. Mindful learning was associated with strategies to maintain students’ focus and awareness. Respondent 1 noted, “children will pay more attention... if I insert quizzes, games, or discussion materials,” while Respondent 6 described using ice breakers “to eliminate students’ boredom and tiredness.” Teachers viewed meaningful learning as instruction that connects knowledge to students’ everyday lives. Respondent 3 explained that meaningful learning occurs “when the learning... will be useful in real everyday life.”

Finally, the findings showed that most teachers had not participated in workshops specifically focused on designing deep-learning-based instructional tools, although they believed they should be capable of developing such tools. Respondent 11 stated, “I am little by little able to compile learning tools that reflect the principles of deep learning.” A few teachers, such as Respondent 8, had attended relevant online training. Overall, the findings suggest that while teachers

have positive perceptions and an emerging conceptual understanding of deep learning, their practical implementation and professional preparation remain limited, highlighting the need for more systematic support and targeted training.

2. The Learning Strategies Used in Implementing Deep Learning Approach In English Learning Activities

This subsection summarizes the learning strategies employed by elementary school English teachers in implementing the deep learning approach, supported by direct quotations to strengthen the findings. Overall, teachers described strategies aligned with mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, emphasizing contextualized instruction, varied media use, student engagement, and the need for adequate institutional support.

In designing learning activities, teachers consistently highlighted the importance of adapting instruction to students’ daily experiences. Respondent 2 stated, “I choose materials that are fun and relevant to students’ daily lives... I once used a short animated film and searched for its meaning with students.” This reflects the belief that relatable content increases student comprehension and motivation. Similarly, Respondent 7 emphasized contextual relevance, noting that she designs activities by “adjusting to the environment and conditions of students. Learning can be taken from the lives that students encounter every day.” Meanwhile, Respondent 11 pointed out the importance of structured planning and differentiated instruction, explaining, “Passive students tend to need more stimulus than active students. The point is I design learning activities with a differentiated learning method.”

To foster mindful learning, teachers implemented strategies that help students stay mentally and physically present. Game-based learning and healthy competition emerged as commonly used methods. Respondent 8 explained that maintaining focus is challenging “unless they use strategies such as game-based learning and competition between students.” Digital tools were also highlighted as effective supports.

Respondent 4 shared, "I usually use audio-visual based digital media so students can learn directly by watching and listening to English videos with focus and absorbing deeper meaning." These strategies show an effort to stimulate attention through multisensory learning.

In supporting meaningful learning, teachers encouraged students to connect English lessons with real-world contexts. Respondent 11 described her approach: "I often direct students to practice what they have learned... for example by making a simple conversation video." Respondent 13 similarly guided learners to interact with their surroundings, stating that she asked students "to explore outside of class to record vocabulary from what they see." Such tasks help students discover personal and practical relevance, making learning more lasting and purposeful.

To promote joyful learning, teachers integrated enjoyable activities such as songs, games, and digital content. Respondent 1 said, "I usually use songs or other media that are interesting to students... even TikTok videos as English learning media." Respondent 8 mentioned using games and rewards to foster enthusiasm, explaining that these strategies help "encourage students' enthusiasm to compete." These methods create a positive atmosphere that reduces anxiety and increases engagement.

Teachers also discussed the availability of resources. Although facilities such as laptops, projectors, Chromebooks, and internet access were considered sufficient, they were not fully optimized. Respondent 2 commented, "Devices are already available; they just require clear conceptual direction and training to utilize them." Respondent 4 added that the existing tools allow students to "learn and seek references from these resources."

Institutional support was reported as generally strong. Respondent 2 shared that schools "always support every teacher who wants to explore and develop better learning methods," while Respondent 11 emphasized the principal's role in facilitating discussions and solutions through internal meetings.

Finally, teachers expressed a need for specialized training, particularly due to

limited English backgrounds. Respondent 1 stressed the importance of "conceptual and detailed training with clear implementation steps," and Respondent 12 requested "a workshop specifically for learning English using a deep learning approach." Teachers also hoped for improvements in the curriculum, with Respondent 4 wishing that deep learning would produce "students who are creative and enthusiastic and do not feel burdened."

B. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that elementary school English teachers generally perceive the deep learning approach positively, especially in terms of its potential to promote student-centered, engaging, and creativity-oriented learning. This attitude aligns with previous research emphasizing that deep learning encourages higher-order thinking, active engagement, and collaborative competencies essential for 21st-century learning (Akmal et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2024; Tian et al., 2023). The teachers' recognition of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning as core elements indicates that these principles are conceptually relevant in the Indonesian elementary education context.

However, the teachers' understanding was uneven, with many showing stronger familiarity with joyful learning compared to mindful and meaningful learning. This pattern suggests a partial conceptualization of deep learning, reinforcing earlier studies showing that teachers tend to adopt its more visible or easily implemented components while overlooking other essential elements (Fatmawati, 2025; Kholifah Al Marah Hafidzhoh et al., 2023; Kim and Kwon, 2023). Limited and unequal access to professional development opportunities further explains this discrepancy, echoing broader findings in Indonesian education where insufficient or inconsistent training hampers teachers' capacity to apply innovative pedagogies effectively (Atmojo et al., 2025; Hendrianty et al., 2024; Kasi et al., 2025).

Teachers' strategies such as contextualizing lessons, using varied media, and applying differentiated instruction reflect attempts to adapt deep learning principles into practice. These tendencies are consistent with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on contextualized and student-centered

pedagogy (Sari, 2023; Wijaya, 2025). International research similarly highlights that contextual, multimodal, and interactive learning environments support deeper cognitive engagement and inclusivity (OECD, 2017; Sugden et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the variability in how these strategies were understood and applied suggests that teachers are still in the process of internalizing the pedagogical shifts required by deep learning.

The underutilization of available technological resources indicates a gap between infrastructural provision and pedagogical capability. This finding resonates with studies showing that access to technology does not automatically lead to meaningful integration without adequate training and support (Sunaengsih et al., 2025; Ulul Albab et al., 2023). Thus, professional development programs should not only offer conceptual knowledge but also emphasize practical guidance for designing learning tools, assessments, and instructional materials that embody deep learning principles.

School leadership appeared to play a supportive role, which is significant given that institutional encouragement and collaborative environments have been found to increase teacher motivation and openness toward pedagogical innovation (Dewi et al., 2021; Sasmoko et al., 2018). However, the absence of subject-specific training for English instruction remains a challenge, particularly because many elementary teachers are generalists with limited English proficiency. This aligns with earlier research identifying the need for specialized training to improve teacher confidence and instructional quality in EFL settings (Atmojo et al., 2025; Hasanah and Pujiati, 2025).

Teachers' optimism regarding the potential of deep learning was accompanied by concerns about curriculum alignment, especially regarding the readiness of young learners to engage with English materials. This reflects broader tensions between policy ambitions and classroom realities frequently noted in studies on curriculum reform in Indonesia (Deasy Yunita Siregar et al., 2024; Martaliana et al., 2021; Suwandi et al., 2024). These tensions suggest that sustained curriculum refinement and adaptive implementation strategies are necessary to ensure that deep learning remains both feasible and meaningful for learners.

Overall, the findings suggest that while teachers appreciate the philosophical and pedagogical value of deep learning, its effective implementation depends on comprehensive professional development, practical support, and alignment between policy and classroom contexts. This indicates a broader need for systemic strengthening to ensure that deep learning principles can be translated into consistent, high-quality instructional practices in elementary English classrooms.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

The findings reveal that English teachers at the elementary level generally hold positive perceptions of the deep learning approach, considering it a student-centered method that fosters engagement, creativity, and meaningful connections to real-life contexts. Teachers emphasized strategies such as contextualizing lessons, incorporating interactive and game-based activities, and using creative media to ensure mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences. However, their understanding and application of deep learning principles remain uneven, largely due to limited access to specialized training, reliance on self-study, and differences in teaching backgrounds. While schools and principals provided supportive infrastructure and encouragement, many teachers acknowledged that facilities were not fully optimized because of insufficient conceptual and technical guidance. Teachers also expressed optimism that the deep learning approach, supported by the Merdeka Curriculum, could reduce stress, make learning more enjoyable, and enhance student creativity. At the same time, they recognized challenges such as gaps in professional development, inconsistent institutional support, and the need for better curriculum alignment with student readiness. These findings underline that while teachers perceive deep learning as a promising approach, its success depends on sustained training, clearer guidance, and stronger institutional support to ensure consistent and effective classroom implementation.

B. Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance English education and strengthen the

implementation of the deep learning approach in elementary schools. Theoretically, this study extends the conceptual framework of deep learning by demonstrating its practical relevance to EFL instruction in rural Indonesian contexts. Therefore, the government and educational institutions are encouraged to provide continuous professional development programs that address both the conceptual foundations and classroom application of deep learning.

In terms of practical implications, teacher education institutions should integrate deep learning modules into pre-service and in-service training programs to ensure that English teachers develop the competence to design meaningful and student-centered learning activities. Schools are also advised to improve institutional support by optimizing available resources and promoting structured mentoring and professional collaboration among teachers.

English teachers are encouraged to continuously update their pedagogical knowledge and adopt innovative strategies aligned with mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning principles. For future research, scholars are recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups and to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve broader generalization and deeper insights into the effectiveness of the deep learning approach across various educational settings.

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