

UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF *DEEP LEARNING* INSTRUCTION IN INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRAK

Penerapan pembelajaran mendalam (*deep learning*) sebagai orientasi pedagogis kurikulum nasional Indonesia menempatkan guru sebagai aktor penting dalam menerjemahkan konsep pembelajaran yang penuh perhatian, bermakna, dan menyenangkan ke dalam praktik pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Studi ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi pengetahuan guru bahasa Inggris tentang pengajaran pembelajaran mendalam dan bagaimana pengetahuan tersebut membentuk praktik yang mereka laporkan. Penelitian menggunakan studi kasus kualitatif yang dibatasi pada satu sekolah menengah atas negeri Islam, yaitu MAN 1 Garut, Jawa Barat. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan dua guru bahasa Inggris yang dipilih secara purposif. Untuk menjaga keterpercayaan temuan dan mengurangi subjektivitas interpretasi, data dianalisis secara sistematis menggunakan analisis tematik reflektif dengan proses pengodean, peninjauan tema, dan penelusuran keterkaitan antara data empiris dan interpretasi penelitian. Keterbatasan jumlah partisipan diposisikan sebagai karakteristik desain studi kasus yang memungkinkan eksplorasi mendalam terhadap pengalaman dan penalaran guru dalam konteks tertentu, bukan sebagai dasar generalisasi statistik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengetahuan guru tentang pembelajaran mendalam bersifat tidak merata. Ketiga pilar pembelajaran dikenali secara terminologis, tetapi konsep *mindful learning* ditafsirkan secara berbeda dan belum sepenuhnya dipahami dalam pengertian metakognitif yang ditekankan dalam kebijakan. Sebaliknya, pengetahuan prosedural guru relatif kuat, terlihat dari kemampuan menerapkan berbagai praktik pembelajaran kontekstual, kolaboratif, dan berorientasi pada keterlibatan siswa. Temuan utama menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan antara kemampuan guru dalam menerapkan praktik yang mendukung pembelajaran mendalam dan kemampuan mereka menjelaskan prinsip teoretis yang mendasari praktik tersebut. Bahkan, pengalaman mengikuti pelatihan belum sepenuhnya membangun keyakinan guru dalam mengidentifikasi praktiknya sebagai pembelajaran mendalam. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran mendalam cenderung diasimilasi ke dalam repertoar pedagogis yang telah dimiliki guru, sehingga pengembangan profesional perlu diarahkan pada penguatan pengetahuan berprinsip melalui refleksi terhadap praktik nyata guru dan pengaitan praktik tersebut dengan prinsip pembelajaran yang eksplisit.

Kata kunci: *EFL, kognisi guru, pembelajaran yang penuh perhatian–bermakna–menyenangkan, pengajaran pembelajaran mendalam, pengetahuan guru*

ABSTRACT

Indonesia's adoption of *deep learning* as the pedagogical orientation of its national curriculum places teachers at the centre of efforts to translate mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning into English language teaching practice. This study explores what English teachers know about *deep learning* instruction and how their knowledge shapes their reported practice. A qualitative case

study was conducted in a single state Islamic senior secondary school, MAN 1 Garut, West Java. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two purposively selected English teachers. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and reduce interpretive subjectivity, the data were systematically analysed using reflexive thematic analysis involving coding, theme development and review, and the tracing of interpretations back to the empirical data. The small number of participants was treated as a feature of the case study design, allowing in-depth examination of teachers' experiences and reasoning within a specific context rather than statistical generalisation. The findings show that teachers' knowledge of *deep learning* was unevenly developed. Although the three pillars were recognised terminologically, mindful learning was interpreted differently and did not fully correspond to the metacognitive meaning emphasised in policy discourse. In contrast, teachers demonstrated relatively strong procedural knowledge through their use of contextual, collaborative, and engagement-oriented teaching practices. The main finding is a gap between teachers' ability to enact practices consistent with *deep learning* and their ability to articulate the theoretical principles underlying those practices. Participation in professional training had also not fully strengthened teachers' confidence in identifying their existing practices as *deep learning*. These findings suggest that *deep learning* is being assimilated into teachers' existing pedagogical repertoires rather than substantially reorganising them. Professional development should therefore strengthen principled knowledge by using teachers' own successful practices as starting points for reflection and connecting those practices to explicit learning principles.

Keywords: *deep learning* instruction; teacher knowledge; teacher cognition; EFL; mindful-meaningful-joyful learning

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform in Indonesia has increasingly shifted from changing curriculum documents toward transforming classroom pedagogy. Following the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has promoted *pembelajaran mendalam* (*deep learning*) as a pedagogical orientation intended to improve how learning is experienced and enacted rather than as a replacement for the existing curriculum (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025). The framework emphasises three interconnected principles: mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. In madrasah, this pedagogical direction is implemented alongside the *Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (Love-Based Curriculum), creating an additional layer of expectations for teachers to translate policy concepts into classroom practices (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2025). Consequently, the implementation of *deep learning* depends not only on the formulation of policy but also on how teachers interpret its key concepts, connect them with their existing knowledge, and translate them into instructional decisions.

This issue is particularly important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Meaningful communication, contextualised tasks, learner engagement, and active participation have long been recognised as important dimensions of effective language teaching (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). Contemporary EFL teaching also increasingly recognises learning beyond formal classroom boundaries and the importance of tasks that connect language learning with meaningful contexts (Aiju et al., 2025; Bagasala & Estremera, 2025). Consequently, some practices that teachers already employ may appear compatible with the principles of *deep learning*. However, practical compatibility does not necessarily demonstrate conceptual understanding or pedagogical transformation. Teachers may adopt new policy terminology while interpreting it through established beliefs, experiences, and practical routines. Research

on teacher cognition suggests that teachers' interpretations of reform are shaped by their prior knowledge and the contexts in which teaching takes place (Peng, 2024; Wang, 2022). This possibility is particularly significant for the terms *mindful*, *meaningful*, and *joyful*, whose everyday meanings may differ from their pedagogical meanings. Mindful learning, for instance, may be understood simply as students paying attention, whereas a deeper pedagogical interpretation may involve learners' awareness and regulation of their learning processes. Similarly, joyful learning may be reduced to entertaining activities rather than understood in relation to engagement, autonomy, motivation, and supportive learning conditions.

Teacher knowledge therefore becomes central to understanding how curriculum reform is translated into classroom practice. Such knowledge extends beyond familiarity with prescribed policy concepts and includes the pedagogical reasoning through which teachers select, adapt, and justify instructional practices. Shulman's (1987) conceptualisation of pedagogical content knowledge highlights the importance of transforming subject matter into forms that can be effectively taught, while subsequent scholarship has emphasised the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of teacher cognition. In language education, teacher cognition is shaped by the interaction between teachers' beliefs, professional experiences, institutional contexts, and opportunities for agency during curriculum implementation (Peng, 2024; Wang, 2022). Professional development can contribute to such change, but its effects are more likely to be sustained when professional learning is content-focused, practice-oriented, and connected to teachers' actual instructional contexts rather than limited to the dissemination of new terminology (Sims et al., 2025). Examining teacher knowledge is therefore important for determining whether *deep learning* is understood as a substantive pedagogical orientation or incorporated primarily as a new vocabulary for practices that teachers already possess.

Although discussion of *deep learning* in Indonesia has begun to expand, important empirical limitations remain. Existing studies have largely examined the philosophical, axiological, or conceptual foundations of *deep learning* and its three principles (Feriyanto & Anjariyah, 2024; Gufron & A. R. S., 2024). Other research has addressed related constructs, including mindful teaching, meaningful learning, foreign language anxiety, and teacher professional development (Guay, 2022; Lubis et al., 2024; Xiong et al., 2024), but these studies do not specifically explain how Indonesian EFL teachers interpret the three principles of the national *deep learning* framework and connect those interpretations to their classroom practices. At the same time, studies of curriculum reform often focus on teacher readiness, attitudes, or acceptance, approaches that can identify broad patterns but may provide limited insight into what teachers actually mean when they use particular pedagogical concepts. There is consequently limited empirical evidence concerning how EFL teachers conceptualise *mindful*, *meaningful*, and *joyful learning*, how these understandings inform their reported instructional practices, and what contextual conditions shape their enactment of *deep learning*, particularly within the madrasah context.

This gap is significant because different interpretations of the same policy terminology may lead to substantially different pedagogical decisions. A teacher who interprets mindful learning primarily as maintaining students' attention may employ different strategies from one who understands it as supporting students' awareness and regulation of their learning. Likewise, interpreting joyful learning mainly as entertainment may produce different classroom practices from understanding it as creating meaningful engagement, autonomy, and psychologically supportive learning conditions. The issue is therefore not simply whether teachers use the language of *deep learning*, but whether they possess sufficient conceptual and principled knowledge to explain why particular practices can be understood as supporting *deep learning*.

Examining teacher knowledge at the levels of conceptual meaning, pedagogical reasoning, and reported practice can consequently provide a more nuanced account of how policy reform is interpreted and enacted in EFL classrooms.

The present study addresses this gap through a qualitative case study of English teachers in a madrasah context. Rather than attempting to measure the prevalence of particular understandings or generalise findings to the wider population of Indonesian English teachers, the study seeks an in-depth reconstruction of how teachers make sense of *deep learning* within their own instructional context. This case-oriented approach is appropriate because teacher knowledge and pedagogical reasoning are contextually situated and may not be adequately captured through predetermined response categories. The study therefore treats teachers' accounts as situated evidence of their interpretations and reported practices, while recognising that such accounts do not by themselves establish the effectiveness of the practices described.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore English teachers' knowledge of the concepts and implementation of *deep learning* instruction in the EFL context. Specifically, it addresses three research questions: (1) How do English teachers conceptualise mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning in EFL instruction? (2) How do they report translating these concepts into classroom practice? and (3) What conditions do they perceive as enabling or constraining the implementation of *deep learning* instruction? Rather than evaluating teachers against predetermined policy standards, the study reconstructs the knowledge, interpretations, and reasoning underlying their reported practices. The findings are expected to contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of *deep learning* implementation and to inform professional development that helps EFL teachers move beyond terminological familiarity toward more explicit connections between classroom practices and the pedagogical principles that justify them.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore English teachers' knowledge and understanding of *deep learning* instruction in the EFL context. The study was conducted at MAN 1 Garut, a state Islamic senior secondary school in Garut Regency, West Java, Indonesia, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The school was selected because it had implemented the *deep learning* framework alongside the *Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (Love-Based Curriculum), including mandatory online teacher training. The school also provides both general academic and vocational skills programmes, providing different instructional contexts for English teaching. This context is relevant because teachers' interpretations of curriculum reform are influenced by their professional knowledge and the educational environment in which they work (Peng, 2024; Wang, 2022).

Two English teachers were selected through criterion sampling. T1 was a female teacher teaching Grade 11 classes of approximately 36 students, while T2 was a male teacher with approximately 20 years of teaching experience who taught English in the vocational skills programme. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews consisting of 18 open-ended questions covering mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, as well as contextual conditions affecting implementation. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian with occasional Sundanese code-mixing and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Teaching modules provided by the participants were also examined as supporting contextual documents.

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2021). The analysis involved familiarisation with the data, initial coding, development and

review of themes, definition of themes, and interpretation. A hybrid deductive-inductive strategy was applied. The three principles of *deep learning*, mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, served as initial organising categories, while specific codes were generated from the interview data, including *mindful-as-readiness*, *reflection-relocated*, *ice-breaking/game boundary*, *correction-without-exposure*, and *coverage-versus-depth*. Similarities and differences between participants were compared, with divergent interpretations retained as analytical findings rather than averaged into a single account.

Trustworthiness was supported through verbatim transcription, member checking, contextual description, disconfirming evidence, and an audit trail linking themes to coded excerpts. The study acknowledges that the findings primarily reflect teachers' self-reported understandings and practices rather than direct classroom observation. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participant identities were protected through pseudonyms. All data were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis identified a consistent pattern across the two teachers: their knowledge of *deep learning* was not uniformly developed across conceptual, procedural, and principled dimensions. While both teachers could identify and enact practices that were compatible with mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, their explanations of why those practices constituted *deep learning* were less theoretically elaborated. The findings are organised around five themes: divergent conceptualisations of mindful learning, contextualised but differently anchored meaningful learning, relational and process-oriented interpretations of joyful learning, affective reasoning in corrective feedback, and structurally mediated opportunities for reflection and professional learning.

One Label, Two Meanings: Divergent Readings of Mindful Learning

The most pronounced conceptual divergence concerned the meaning of *mindful learning*. Although both teachers recognised the term as part of the *deep learning* framework, neither articulated it in terms of students' metacognitive awareness or regulation of their own learning. Instead, the two teachers mapped the concept onto different pre-existing constructs. T1 equated *mindful* with *meaningful*, explaining that students should not merely memorise vocabulary or grammar but should experience English as something real and usable in everyday life. T2, in contrast, interpreted *mindful* as the establishment of attentional readiness before instruction, emphasising refocusing, classroom conditioning, and students' readiness to attend.

The divergence is analytically important because it indicates that recognition of policy terminology did not result in a shared pedagogical meaning. The same label functioned as a container for two different forms of teacher knowledge: for T1, *mindful* was absorbed into a meaning-oriented conception of learning, whereas for T2 it was absorbed into classroom-management practice. Thus, the teachers did not appear to reject the policy concept; rather, they interpreted it through constructs that were already available in their professional repertoires.

Their responses concerning how they recognised genuine engagement further support this interpretation. Both relied primarily on observable behavioural indicators such as gaze, gestures, responses, and apparent calmness. Neither referred to strategies designed to make students' internal thinking or monitoring processes explicit, such as self-assessment, learning logs, exit tickets, or think-aloud activities. This pattern suggests that their knowledge of mindful learning was stronger at the level of observable classroom behaviour than at the level of metacognitive process.

Importantly, this does not mean that the teachers' practices were incompatible with mindful learning. Rather, it indicates a gap between enactment and conceptual articulation. T2's distinction between silence and genuine concentration, for example, shows an awareness that visible compliance is not equivalent to engagement. However, the criteria remained primarily behavioural and teacher-observed rather than explicitly connected to learners' capacity to monitor and regulate their own learning. Mindful learning was therefore enacted indirectly, but not clearly theorised as a metacognitive process.

Meaningful Learning: Shared Principle, Different Anchors

Unlike mindful learning, the teachers demonstrated substantial convergence in their understanding of *meaningful learning*. Both described learning as meaningful when new material was connected to something recognisable and consequential in students' lives. However, the contexts to which they anchored meaning differed, revealing two distinct forms of contextualisation. T1 primarily constructed meaningfulness through students' everyday and digital experiences. Her advertisement project required students to promote their parents' businesses through posters and oral presentations. The task therefore connected English with students' immediate social environment while simultaneously integrating several language skills. T2 constructed meaningfulness more strongly through students' anticipated occupational futures. His use of automotive, garment, and electronics contexts positioned English as a resource for employment and professional communication. His spontaneous reference to English for Specific Purposes further indicates that this connection was not merely incidental but reflected an identifiable pedagogical orientation.

These differences suggest that both teachers possessed a functional understanding of contextualisation, but the *source of relevance* differed. For T1, relevance was predominantly experiential and identity-based; for T2, it was predominantly vocational and future-oriented. The distinction matters because it demonstrates that meaningful learning was not interpreted as a single instructional technique. Instead, it operated as a broader principle that teachers adapted according to their perceptions of students' lives and futures. The data also reveal that contextualisation was not consistently sufficient for teachers to determine whether learning had actually become meaningful. When asked how she knew that a lesson was meaningful, T1 shifted from students' engagement and personal connection to their ability to answer exercises correctly. This movement reveals a second layer of teacher reasoning: contextual relevance was used to initiate meaningfulness, but achievement or correct performance was used to verify it. Meaningfulness was consequently treated partly as a learning process and partly as an outcome that could be inferred from successful task performance.

The local-culture examples reinforce this unevenness. T2 described projects based on local traditions and food production, including student visits to a producer to develop a procedure text. Such practices extended meaningful learning beyond the textbook and into locally situated knowledge. T1, by contrast, acknowledged that she had rarely developed materials from local folklore and more often used materials from outside the local context. The contrast suggests that contextualisation was available in both teachers' repertoires but was enacted at different levels of cultural proximity. The broader finding is therefore not simply that both teachers used contextual learning. Rather, meaningfulness functioned as a relatively stable practical principle whose interpretation depended on the teacher's perceived source of relevance. This explains why both teachers could produce practices compatible with *deep learning* despite having different pedagogical emphases.

Joyful Learning: From Entertainment to Relational and Purposeful Engagement

The teachers' accounts also challenged a narrow interpretation of *joyful learning* as simply making lessons entertaining. Both explicitly distinguished pedagogically purposeful activities from activities intended merely to amuse students. This distinction indicates that their practical knowledge of joyful learning was more developed than a simple activity-based interpretation might suggest. T1 located joy primarily in the teacher–student relationship. Her emphasis on being a teacher whom students "like" positioned emotional connection and interpersonal acceptance as prerequisites for students' willingness to engage with learning. T2, meanwhile, located joy in the quality and relevance of the learning process itself. His rejection of teaching irrelevant material to vocational students suggests that a lesson could be enjoyable precisely because students perceived its usefulness.

These accounts reveal two complementary mechanisms through which joy was constructed: relational safety and purposeful relevance. Neither teacher equated joy exclusively with games. Their distinction between ice-breaking activities and content-related games further demonstrates this. Ice breakers were understood as mechanisms for restoring attention and motivation, whereas games were considered pedagogically legitimate when connected to instructional content. This distinction is significant because it shows that the teachers possessed an implicit hierarchy of activities. An activity was not considered valuable merely because students enjoyed it; its legitimacy depended on whether it contributed to learning. T1's scrambled-sentence race and digital maze, for example, embedded practice within the language content, while T2's jigsaw activity required students to reconstruct and explain information rather than simply receive it. Their shared emphasis that "receiving is not learning" reflects a procedural understanding of active participation.

Psychological safety constituted another important dimension of joyful learning. T1 established a classroom rule prohibiting ridicule of peers' accents or grammatical errors, while T2 used participation incentives that lowered the immediate risk associated with speaking publicly. Although their techniques differed, both were directed toward reducing affective barriers to participation. Joyful learning therefore emerged from the data less as an emotional endpoint and more as a condition that supports students' willingness to participate, take risks, and remain engaged in learning.

Corrective Feedback: Strong Affective Reasoning, Limited Learning-Theory Reasoning

Corrective feedback provided one of the clearest examples of the distinction between procedural knowledge and principled knowledge. Both teachers had developed specific strategies for correcting students' English while protecting their confidence and social standing. However, their justifications were predominantly affective and managerial rather than grounded in theories of second-language acquisition or feedback effectiveness. T1 preferred to correct students herself because referring an incorrect response to classmates might cause embarrassment or make the student feel discredited. T2 similarly protected the student's opportunity to attempt a response before involving a stronger peer. Although the procedures differed, both strategies were organised around a common concern: maintaining students' willingness to participate.

This convergence indicates that the teachers possessed a coherent practical principle, feedback should correct without damaging participation. Their knowledge was therefore not merely a collection of techniques. However, the reasoning stopped largely at the social and emotional consequences of correction. Neither teacher explicitly connected the choice of immediate correction, repeated attempts, peer involvement, or reformulation to questions of uptake, noticing, retention, or language development.

The finding consequently illustrates the central knowledge pattern across the interviews: teachers could explain what they did and why it worked socially, but were less able to explain why a particular technique might support learning from a theoretical perspective. This distinction is important for understanding why teachers may successfully enact practices that resemble *deep learning* while remaining uncertain about whether those practices actually qualify as such.

Reflection: Evidence of Procedural Adaptation Rather Than a Stable Metacognitive Principle

Reflection revealed another distinction between teachers' practical routines and their conceptualisation of *deep learning*. Both teachers recognised reflection as important, but neither consistently treated it as a structured process through which students examine and regulate their own learning. T1 reported that reflection was ideally conducted at the end of each lesson but became abbreviated when instructional time was constrained. T2 had developed a different routine by moving reflection to the beginning of the following lesson, where students were asked to recall the previous topic. Although both practices preserve an element of looking back on learning, they serve somewhat different functions. T1's reflection is oriented toward students' perceptions of difficulty and the learning experience, whereas T2's version functions primarily as retrieval and a diagnostic check for deciding whether the previous material needs to be retaught.

The contrast demonstrates that reflection had been incorporated into classroom routines but had not yet become a clearly articulated metacognitive practice. In T2's case, recalling previous content provides useful evidence of retention, but it does not necessarily require students to evaluate their strategies, identify misconceptions, or regulate future learning. Similarly, T1's brief end-of-lesson questions provide an opportunity for reflection but are vulnerable to being compressed by time constraints. Thus, reflection represents another case in which procedural enactment exceeds principled explanation. Teachers recognise the practice and adapt it to structural constraints, but its deeper metacognitive function remains underdeveloped in their accounts.

Structural Mediation: Reform Enactment Between Agency and Constraint

The teachers' accounts show that the enactment of *deep learning* was not determined by teacher knowledge alone. Time, class size, curriculum coverage, facilities, assessment pressures, artificial intelligence, and opportunities for professional collaboration shaped what teachers could practically sustain. Time emerged as a particularly important mediating condition. T1 described deliberately allocating more time to complex chapters and limiting projects to maintain feasibility, whereas T2 highlighted the competing demands of curriculum coverage, particularly in Grade 12, where teachers must negotiate the curriculum with examination specifications. These accounts indicate that teachers exercised agency rather than simply complying with curriculum pacing. However, their agency operated within structural boundaries.

Class size produced a similar tension. T1's class of 36 students made individual differentiation difficult, meaning that practices aligned with *deep learning* could become difficult to sustain at scale. By contrast, T2 reported relatively strong technological and workshop facilities, suggesting that material resources were not necessarily the primary constraint in his context. Yet his concern that excessive reliance on technology could reduce innovation demonstrates that access to resources does not automatically produce pedagogical depth.

Professional development exposed the same gap found in the teachers' conceptual knowledge. T2 had completed two training cycles and a mandatory ministry-wide online course but remained uncertain about whether his practices genuinely constituted *deep learning*. T1, meanwhile, identified school-level English teacher collaboration as a more immediate professional need. These accounts suggest that exposure to reform training does not necessarily translate into conceptual confidence. More importantly, they indicate that teachers may need opportunities to interrogate their own practices and connect them explicitly to the principles underlying the reform.

Taken together, the structural data show that *deep learning* implementation is best understood as a process of negotiated enactment. Teachers are not passive recipients of policy, but neither are they completely autonomous implementers. They interpret and adapt the reform through existing pedagogical repertoires while responding to time, class size, assessment, institutional resources, and professional learning opportunities.

Cross-Case Synthesis: Procedural Richness, Conceptual Divergence, and Thin Principled Knowledge

Across the five themes, a consistent pattern emerges. The two teachers demonstrated substantial procedural knowledge: both could describe and justify a wide range of classroom practices involving contextualisation, active participation, psychological safety, feedback, reflection, and student engagement. Their repertoires were not superficial. Many practices they described could reasonably support dimensions of *deep learning*.

However, their conceptual knowledge was uneven, most clearly demonstrated by the divergent interpretations of mindful learning. More importantly, their principled knowledge was comparatively thin. When asked why particular practices were appropriate, explanations generally drew on students' motivation, confidence, relevance, classroom order, participation, or future employment rather than explicit learning theories or metacognitive principles.

The distinction between these layers is analytically important. The findings do not indicate that the teachers lack knowledge or that their practices are incompatible with *deep learning*. Rather, they indicate an asymmetry between knowing how to enact potentially *deep learning* practices and knowing how to conceptualise and theoretically justify those practices. This asymmetry also explains the uncertainty expressed by T2 after participating in formal training: professional exposure had expanded his repertoire but had not necessarily provided a sufficiently stable conceptual framework for judging whether his existing practices represented *deep learning*.

The overall pattern therefore suggests that *deep learning* is currently being assimilated into teachers' existing professional repertoires rather than substantially reorganising those repertoires. The reform appears to have introduced a new vocabulary through which teachers reinterpret practices they already value, relevance, participation, emotional safety, contextualisation, and active learning, while the theoretical distinctions among the three pillars remain less stable. This finding provides the empirical basis for a practice-first approach to professional development in which teachers begin with successful classroom cases and work backwards toward explicit pedagogical principles, rather than receiving the policy vocabulary as an abstract set of definitions detached from their existing practice.

Discussion

Terminological Drift and the Uneven Development of Teacher Knowledge

The findings reveal a divergence in how the two teachers interpreted *mindful learning*, despite both having been exposed to the same national policy framework and professional

training. T1 associated mindful learning with meaningfulness and students' connection to real-life use of English, whereas T2 interpreted it primarily as the establishment of attentional readiness before instruction. Neither interpretation explicitly centred on learners' metacognitive awareness and regulation of their own learning. This indicates that the introduction of common policy terminology has not necessarily produced a common conceptual understanding.

The finding is important because the Indonesian *deep learning* framework positions mindful learning as part of a learning process in which students are consciously involved in understanding and reflecting on their learning experiences (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025). Feriyanto and Anjariyah (2024) similarly emphasise that mindful learning involves conscious engagement rather than physical attention alone. The present findings extend this discussion by showing how policy terminology can undergo semantic drift when it enters teachers' existing pedagogical repertoires. In this case, the term *mindful* was not simply misunderstood; it was reassigned to concepts that were already familiar to the teachers, meaningfulness for T1 and classroom attentional management for T2.

This finding is consistent with Peng (2024), who argues that language teacher cognition develops through the interaction of prior knowledge, experience, and educational context. However, the present study adds a more specific empirical dimension to this argument by demonstrating that policy assimilation may occur at different levels of teacher knowledge. Teachers may recognise and use the terminology while simultaneously attaching different meanings to it. Thus, the issue is not simply whether teachers have received the reform message, but what conceptual structure the new terminology activates within their existing knowledge systems.

This distinction has important implications for professional development. If training primarily introduces definitions, teachers may attach the new vocabulary to familiar practices without developing the conceptual distinctions intended by the reform. Professional learning should therefore provide opportunities to examine concrete classroom cases and distinguish, for example, between students merely appearing attentive and students actively monitoring and regulating their learning.

Meaningful Learning: Contextual Relevance and the Tension with Demonstrable Achievement

Both teachers demonstrated a relatively stable practical understanding of meaningful learning: learning becomes meaningful when English is connected to something relevant in students' lives. However, the source of relevance differed. T1 primarily connected English with students' immediate social and digital experiences, while T2 emphasised occupational and vocational futures. T2's use of local cultural practices as material for English tasks further illustrates how students can become sources of curricular knowledge rather than merely recipients of textbook content.

This finding is consistent with Vargas-Hernández and Vargas-González (2022), who emphasise the importance of connecting learning with learners' existing experiences and knowledge. It also corresponds with research on task-based language teaching, which highlights purposeful language use and meaningful tasks in second-language learning (Bagasala & Estremera, 2025).

However, the findings reveal a more subtle tension. When asked how she determined whether learning had become meaningful, T1 eventually referred to students' ability to answer exercises correctly. This suggests that meaningfulness operated through two partially overlapping criteria: contextual relevance as a condition for meaningful learning and demonstrable performance as evidence that meaningful learning has occurred. The distinction

is important because an engaging or authentic task does not automatically guarantee deeper understanding.

The contribution of the present study therefore lies not simply in confirming that contextualisation is important. It shows that teachers can possess a strong practical repertoire for making English relevant while still relying on relatively conventional achievement indicators to determine whether meaningful learning has succeeded. *Deep learning* consequently involves a potential tension between making learning relevant and demonstrating that the relevance has resulted in understanding and transferable use.

Joyful Learning as Relational Safety and Purposeful Engagement

The teachers' accounts challenge a narrow interpretation of joyful learning as entertainment. Both distinguished pedagogically purposeful activities from activities intended merely to amuse students. T1 located joy largely in the teacher–student relationship, whereas T2 associated it with the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the learning process. Their use of content-related games, active tasks, and classroom norms against ridicule indicates that joyful learning was understood as a condition that supports students' willingness to participate.

This interpretation is consistent with research on foreign language anxiety, which shows that affective barriers can influence students' willingness to participate and learn (Xiong et al., 2024). It also corresponds with Guay's (2022) discussion of autonomy, competence, and social connection as important conditions for motivation. The role of psychological safety further supports the view that students need to feel sufficiently secure to share ideas, make mistakes, and participate in collective learning (Verwijns et al., 2025).

The novel insight here is that joyful learning was operationalised by the teachers primarily through relational and participation-oriented practices rather than through explicit theoretical knowledge about affective learning. Their practices were therefore richer than their explanations. The teachers appeared to know how to create conditions in which students could participate comfortably, but their reasoning did not explicitly connect these practices to established motivational or affective learning mechanisms. This reinforces the broader pattern of procedural knowledge being stronger than principled knowledge.

Corrective Feedback: Practical Expertise without Explicit Theoretical Articulation

Corrective feedback provides particularly clear evidence of the distinction between what teachers know how to do and how they explain why they do it. T1 prioritised immediate teacher correction to protect students from embarrassment, whereas T2 allowed repeated attempts before involving another student. Although the techniques differed, both were based on a common concern with protecting students' confidence and willingness to participate.

These practices are consistent with the broader literature showing that corrective feedback is an important component of second-language instruction and that different feedback strategies may produce different learning effects (Li, 2023). However, the teachers did not explicitly justify their choices through concepts such as noticing, uptake, restructuring, or opportunities for language development. Their reasoning was predominantly affective and managerial.

This finding strengthens the central argument of the study. The teachers' knowledge should not be characterised as lacking simply because their explanations were not theoretical. Rather, their knowledge was procedurally rich but insufficiently articulated at the level of pedagogical principles. This distinction is important because teachers' practical expertise may remain invisible when teacher knowledge is assessed only through formal definitions or theoretical terminology. Professional development should therefore avoid replacing teachers' existing practices with externally prescribed techniques. Instead, it should make teachers'

implicit reasoning more explicit by asking why a particular feedback strategy is selected, what learning process it is expected to activate, and under what conditions an alternative strategy might be more appropriate.

Reflection and Teacher-Generated Adaptation

Reflection provides another example of the difference between formal pedagogical sequences and teacher-generated adaptation. T2 moved reflection from the end of a lesson to the beginning of the following lesson and used students' ability to recall previous learning to determine whether further instruction was necessary. Although this does not represent reflection in a fully metacognitive sense, it demonstrates that the teacher had developed a functional adaptation to the constraints of classroom time and student learning. The practice also overlaps with formative assessment because evidence of student learning is used to determine subsequent instructional action (Xuan et al., 2022). Similarly, Wang (2022) highlights the importance of teacher agency in adapting curriculum reform to local educational conditions.

The important contribution is therefore not whether T2 followed the formal sequence of reflection prescribed by policy. Rather, it is that policy principles are being reconfigured through teachers' situated problem-solving. Such adaptations should not automatically be interpreted as non-compliance. At the same time, adaptation should not automatically be equated with *deep learning*. The present findings show that teachers can preserve the functional purpose of a pedagogical practice while altering its form, but the underlying conceptual rationale still needs to be made explicit.

Structural Conditions and the Negotiated Nature of Reform Enactment

The findings further demonstrate that *deep learning* is enacted through the interaction between teacher agency and structural conditions. Class size, time allocation, curriculum coverage, examination demands, technological resources, and professional learning opportunities all influenced what teachers could sustain in practice. T1's experience with a class of 36 students illustrates the tension between expectations for individualised attention and the practical demands of managing a large group. T2's experience shows a different form of tension: although technological resources were available, he remained cautious about excessive technological dependence and the possibility that students might outsource their work to artificial intelligence. These findings are consistent with Wang's (2022) ecological account of teacher agency and with Daud's (2024) identification of contextual conditions as important considerations in Indonesian English instruction.

The findings therefore support understanding *deep learning* implementation as negotiated enactment rather than straightforward policy transmission. Teachers neither simply reproduce policy prescriptions nor operate independently of them. They negotiate policy expectations through the resources, constraints, student characteristics, assessment pressures, and professional cultures of their schools.

The Central Contribution: Procedural Richness but Principled Thinness

Across the findings, a three-layer pattern becomes visible. First, the teachers possessed terminological knowledge: both recognised the language of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. Second, they demonstrated substantial procedural knowledge: both could describe and enact contextualised tasks, active learning, psychologically supportive interactions, feedback strategies, and reflective routines. Third, and most unevenly developed, was principled knowledge: the ability to explain the pedagogical and theoretical principles that connect particular practices to *deep learning*.

This three-layer pattern constitutes the principal contribution of the study. Previous discussions of Indonesian *deep learning* have largely focused on its conceptual or philosophical foundations (Feriyanto & Anjariyah, 2024; Gufron & A. R. S., 2024), while research on teacher cognition has established that teachers interpret reform through prior knowledge and context (Peng, 2024; Wang, 2022). The present study connects these strands by showing what happens to a pedagogical reform when it enters teachers' existing professional repertoires: the reform may acquire strong procedural visibility without achieving equivalent conceptual or principled depth.

This finding also explains an apparent paradox in the data. The teachers' practices frequently contained elements that could reasonably support *deep learning*, yet one teacher remained uncertain whether his practice actually qualified as *deep learning*. The issue was therefore not an absence of relevant practice. It was the absence of a sufficiently explicit conceptual framework for recognising, explaining, and evaluating those practices. In this sense, the findings suggest that *deep learning* is currently undergoing assimilation rather than full pedagogical reorganisation. Teachers appear to incorporate the new terminology into practices they already value, relevance, participation, contextualisation, emotional safety, and active learning, without necessarily reconstructing the conceptual relationships among mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. This provides a more precise explanation of why policy dissemination and training may produce familiarity with terminology without producing conceptual convergence.

Novelty and Implications for Professional Development

The study's novelty can therefore be located at three interconnected levels. First, it identifies semantic divergence within a common policy vocabulary, showing that the same reform term can activate different pre-existing pedagogical constructs among teachers. Second, it identifies an asymmetry between procedural and principled teacher knowledge: teachers may already possess practices compatible with *deep learning* while lacking explicit theoretical language to justify those practices. Third, it conceptualises implementation as assimilation and negotiated enactment, rather than as a simple movement from policy knowledge to classroom application. These contributions extend existing discussions of teacher cognition and curriculum reform by shifting the analytical question from whether teachers are "ready" for *deep learning* to how the reform is being incorporated into what teachers already know and do. This is particularly relevant in EFL, where practices such as contextualised tasks, communicative activities, corrective feedback, learner participation, and psychological support predate the current *deep learning* reform.

The implications for professional development follow directly from this finding. Training should not repeatedly introduce the terminology of *deep learning* as an abstract set of definitions. Instead, professional learning should begin with teachers' existing successful practices and use structured reflection to make the underlying principles explicit. Teachers can analyse a task they already consider successful, identify the learning process it activates, examine evidence of student understanding, and then determine how the practice relates to mindful, meaningful, or joyful learning. Collaborative lesson analysis, peer discussion, examination of student work, and case-based reflection could help transform tacit procedural knowledge into more explicit principled knowledge.

This practice-first orientation is consistent with Sims et al. (2025), who emphasise sustained and practice-connected professional development, and with Star (2023), who highlights the importance of connecting pedagogical knowledge with instructional practice. For

madrasah, such professional development could be organised through English teacher forums at the school or regional level, allowing teachers to compare how the same policy concepts are interpreted across different classroom situations.

Ultimately, the challenge identified by this study is not that teachers have failed to implement *deep learning*. Rather, they appear to be implementing parts of it before they have fully developed a shared conceptual language for explaining what they are doing and why it constitutes *deep learning*. Professional development should therefore work not only to change practice, but also to make the knowledge underlying existing practice more explicit, principled, and critically examinable.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English teachers' knowledge of *deep learning* instruction is uneven between conceptual understanding and classroom practice. Although both teachers had received formal training, their interpretation of the three pillars remained different, particularly regarding mindful learning, which was more frequently understood as students' attentiveness and classroom readiness than as an internal process of awareness and reflection. In contrast, the teachers demonstrated substantial practical knowledge through meaningful contextual tasks, supportive classroom interaction, joyful learning activities, and adaptive assessment practices. These findings indicate that teachers may already enact elements of *deep learning* without being able to explicitly articulate the principles underlying those practices. Teacher agency was also evident in the way instructional principles were adapted to classroom conditions, suggesting that implementation should not be assessed solely through adherence to prescribed procedures.

The findings imply that professional development for *deep learning* should move beyond repeated dissemination of concepts and terminology toward sustained, collaborative, and subject-specific reflection on teachers' existing practices. Such professional development can help teachers connect successful classroom practices with the principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning while also recognising context-sensitive adaptations as potential forms of pedagogical innovation. However, this study is limited by its focus on one madrasah, two English teachers, and self-reported data. Future research should involve classroom observations, multiple madrasah or school sites, and larger participant groups to examine whether the identified patterns of conceptual variation and teacher adaptation are evident across different contexts. Further research should also investigate how teachers' understanding of *deep learning* relates to students' actual learning experiences and outcomes.

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