

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research context, research questions, research objectives, the significance of the research, and the definition of key terms.

A. Research Context

A new era in Indonesian education began in 2025 with the national implementation of the Deep Learning approach, as a national framework that shifts the focus of learning from surface-level knowledge toward a deeper, more meaningful understanding.¹ Through the MMJ (Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful) principles, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education aims to grow awareness among students in Indonesia who need not only academic competencies but also critical thinking skills, character building, and the ability to deal with a more complex world.

Teachers hold a key role in this transformation. The MMJ framework may not work as an abstract policy; its success depends on how each teacher understands and implements these principles into actual classroom teaching practices. Mindful learning requires teachers to foster students' awareness and engagement, not only to keep them focused. Meaningful learning requires that learning tasks be connected to students' real lives. Joyful learning requires an environment that makes students feel emotionally safe and motivates them to participate in learning. Each of these principles requires teachers to be

¹ Pusat Kurikulum dan Pembelajaran, *Naskah Akademik Pembelajaran Mendalam: Menuju Pendidikan Bermutu untuk Semua* (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025), 4.

pedagogically knowledgeable, creative, and highly professionally prepared. This is what makes teachers' understanding of MMJ a critical starting point. MMJ is a newly introduced framework, and the existence of a policy does not guarantee that teachers have internalized its principles. More importantly, how teachers understand these principles directly shapes what they do in the classroom. A teacher who understands mindful learning only as keeping students focused will teach very differently from one who understands it as developing students' capacity to self-regulate their thinking. Exploring this understanding is therefore not a side issue. It is central to whether Deep Learning works in practice.

The challenge here is that the gap between policy plans and reality in the classroom remains very wide. Several recent studies have begun to document this gap. Tatipang et al. found that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Manado acknowledge the pedagogical value of MMJ principles but face significant difficulties in implementing them. Limited teaching time, curriculum rigidity, and classroom management challenges prevent these principles from being fully implemented.² A follow-up study by Tatipang et al. found that teachers' conceptual understanding remains partial and inconsistent. Mindful learning is often viewed as an effort to maintain student concentration; meaningful learning is consistently sidelined by exam-oriented instruction; and joyful learning is seen as momentary entertainment

² Devilito Prasetyo Tatipang et al., "Is It A New Path? Or A New Problem?: An Explorative Study Of Deep Learning In Indonesian EFL Secondary Classroom," *International Journal of Environmental Sciences* 11, no. 8 (2025): 2497.

rather than concrete emotional and cognitive engagement.³ Similar findings were reported by Riani and Sujarwati, who studied junior high school teachers in Bengkulu and found that although Deep Learning was viewed quite positively, the teachers faced significant difficulties in applying these principles in their daily teaching activities.⁴

Overall, these studies lead to consistent and significant findings: teachers' understanding and application of MMJ are influenced not only by individual competencies but also by the institutional context in which they work. This is where a critical gap in the existing literature is found. All the studies cited above were conducted in public secondary schools (public high schools or junior high schools). Until now, no research has examined how teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) understand and apply the MMJ Deep Learning framework within the context of Madrasah Aliyah, a secondary school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This difference is of considerable importance. Madrasah Aliyah institutions possess a different educational identity, shaped by the integration of Islamic values into the entire curriculum, regulatory differences from public schools, and a student and teacher community formed within a specific cultural and religious framework.

³ Devilito Prasetyo Tatipang et al., "EFL Teachers Understanding and Readiness for Deep Learning Approach (A Qualitative Insight of Indonesian Secondary School)," *Research and Innovation in Applied Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (February 2026): 212, <https://doi.org/10.31963/rial.v4i1.5997>.

⁴ Asma Riani and Iis Sujarwati, "The Preparedness of English Teachers to Implement Deep Learning in Middle School," *EDUCASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengajaran, Dan Pembelajaran* 10, no. 2 (July 2025): 238, <https://doi.org/10.21462/educasia.v10i2.359>.

How the principles of MMJ are understood, adapted, and applied in this specific context remains entirely unexplored in the literature.

More importantly, existing research on Deep Learning in madrasah settings has focused exclusively on Islamic subjects. Siregar et al. examined its implementation in Islamic Religious Education at MTs Muallimin Medan, while Riyad et al. analyzed it in PAI classes at MAN 19 South Jakarta, and Syagif studied it in Arabic language instruction at MTsN 1 Kota Bima. None of these studies involved English as a Foreign Language. This is a significant gap, because EFL occupies a distinct position in the madrasah curriculum. It is a secular subject taught within an institution built on Islamic values, community expectations, and a particular vision of education. How EFL teachers at MA interpret and enact MMJ principles within this specific institutional culture is a question that has not been addressed.

There is also evidence that EFL teachers in madrasah settings face implementation challenges that differ from those in public senior high schools. Madrasah Aliyah operates under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Kemenag*), while the Deep Learning framework was issued by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (*Kemendikdasmen*). These are separate regulatory bodies with different professional development, meaning MA teachers receive new pedagogical policies through a different institutional pathway. Restika and Maisarah found that EFL teachers at an Islamic secondary school encountered four categories of challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum: instructional difficulties, limited access to curriculum-aligned materials,

uncertainty in module design and assessment, and insufficient institutional support.⁵ Since Deep Learning operates within the same Merdeka Curriculum framework, these conditions are likely to shape how MMJ principles are understood and enacted at MAN 2 Tulungagung. Whether and how EFL teachers navigate these conditions in applying MMJ remains unexplored.

MAN 2 Tulungagung is a contextually interesting location for this type of research. Located in East Java, a region with a deep-rooted and well-established tradition of Islamic education, this school implements the Merdeka Curriculum and is expected to fulfill the mandate of the national Deep Learning policy. At the same time, teachers at the madrasah must navigate the challenges and opportunities present within this educational environment. Educational decisions are always made in connection with a broader educational vision and are linked to Islamic values and social expectations. The question of what and how the MMJ framework is reflected in English language teaching practices in the classroom, as well as the challenges faced in its implementation, holds theoretical significance for the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and practical value for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers.

Given this background, this study focuses on the MMJ principle because it is at the core of the Deep Learning approach, which connects curriculum guidelines with real-world classroom practices. Teachers must apply this principle in every teaching decision they make. However, many studies show

⁵ Yesa Restika and Ira Maisarah, "Navigating the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in EFL Classrooms: Challenges and Pedagogical Needs in Madrasah Contexts," *Pedagogy: Journal of English Language Teaching* 13, no. 2 (2025): 215–18, <https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/pedagogy/article/view/10772>.

that teachers' understanding remains incomplete, resulting in incomplete implementation of Deep Learning. Therefore, this study is important to examine how English teachers at MAN 2 Tulungagung understand and practice this principle to support the success of the new curriculum

B. Research Questions

Based on the research context above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How do EFL teachers interpret the Deep Learning principles in the English classroom?
2. How do EFL teachers apply the Deep Learning principles in the English classroom?

C. Research Objective

Based on the research questions above, the objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To examine how EFL teachers at MAN 2 Tulungagung interpret the Deep Learning principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning.
2. To describe how EFL teachers apply the Deep Learning principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning in their English classroom practices at MAN 2 Tulungagung.

D. Significance of The Research

1. **Theoretical Significance:** This study is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Deep Learning pedagogical approach,

particularly the Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) framework, within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesia. The findings may enrich existing theoretical discussions on how Deep Learning principles are understood and enacted in institutional contexts that have received little scholarly attention, specifically Islamic secondary schools (Madrasah Aliyah) in East Java. Furthermore, this study may offer new insights into the intersection of national educational policy, teacher cognition, and classroom practice in the era of Kurikulum Merdeka.

2. Practical Significance:

- a. For teachers, the findings of this study may serve as a reflective resource for EFL teachers who are navigating the implementation of Deep Learning principles in their daily classroom practice. By documenting real challenges and strategies, this study can support teachers in developing more mindful, meaningful, and joyful instructional approaches within their specific institutional contexts.
- b. For schools and madrasah administrators, this study may provide useful insights to inform professional development programs, curriculum planning, and institutional support structures that enable teachers to implement the MMJ framework more consistently and effectively.
- c. For policymakers, the findings may offer contextually grounded evidence to support the development of more inclusive and context-

sensitive Deep Learning implementation guidelines, particularly for Madrasah Aliyah institutions that operate under different regulatory and cultural conditions from public secular schools.

- d. For future researchers, this study may serve as a foundation and reference point for further qualitative investigations into Deep Learning implementation across diverse Indonesian educational settings, including other regions, school types, and subject areas.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Deep Learning

In this study, Deep Learning refers to a national pedagogical approach introduced by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia in 2025. It is not a new curriculum. Rather, it is a framework that defines how teaching and learning should take place within the existing Merdeka Curriculum. The Ministry defines Deep Learning as an approach that honors students by creating learning conditions that are mindful, meaningful, and joyful, through the integrated development of intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, and kinesthetic dimensions.⁶

2. Deep Learning's Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) Principles

⁶ Pusat Kurikulum dan Pembelajaran, *Naskah Akademik Pembelajaran Mendalam: Menuju Pendidikan Bermutu untuk Semua*, 26.

The MMJ principles are the three core principles of the Deep Learning approach established by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia. Mindful learning refers to a learning process in which students are fully aware of their role as learners and can regulate their own thinking and learning.⁷ Meaningful learning refers to instruction that connects new knowledge to students' prior knowledge and real-life contexts. Joyful learning refers to a learning environment that is psychologically safe, motivating, and free from excessive pressure, so that students can explore, think critically, and participate actively. These three principles function as one integrated approach, not as separate or isolated techniques.

F. Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters, as described below.

Chapter One, Introduction, presents the research context that motivates the study, the research questions, the research objectives, the significance of the research for theory and practice, the definition of key terms, and the organization of the study.

Chapter Two, Review of Related Literature, discusses the theoretical foundations of the study, including the Deep Learning framework, the MMJ principles, theories of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, and teacher

⁷ Ibid., 30.

cognition. It also reviews ten previous studies relevant to the topic and presents the conceptual framework that guides the analysis.

Chapter Three, Research Method, describes the research design, the researcher's role, the research site, the data sources, the instruments and procedures for data collection, the method of data analysis, and the strategies for ensuring the validity and trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter Four, Findings, presents the results of the study based on data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. The findings are organized according to the two research questions and structured into ten themes.

Chapter Five, Discussion, interprets the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and previous studies. It explains the significance of the patterns identified in the data and situates the findings within the broader context of EFL teaching and Deep Learning policy in Indonesia.

Chapter Six, Conclusion, presents the conclusions drawn from the study, discusses the implications of the findings for theory, teaching practice, and educational policy, and provides recommendations for future research.