

**DEEP LEARNING CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CASE
STUDY AT SMK NEGERI 1 BENGKAYANG**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of the Deep Learning Curriculum within English Language Teaching (ELT) at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang. The research explores how deep learning principles, such as inquiry-based learning, collaboration, creativity, and reflection enhance students' communicative competence and critical thinking. A qualitative case study design was used, involving classroom observations, interviews with English teachers and students, and analysis of lesson plans. The findings reveal that deep learning practices encourage active participation and authentic language use through project-based and problem-based tasks. Despite positive impacts on student engagement and confidence, challenges were found in aligning assessments, teacher readiness, and limited exposure to authentic English input. The study concludes that integrating deep learning into EFL promotes meaningful language learning and supports the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational education. Deep learning in EFL classroom emphasizes higher-order cognitive processes, creativity, and real-world application, moving beyond traditional memorization of language rules. It aligns with the goals of building global competencies such as character, citizenship, communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, which are essential for success in both academic and vocational contexts.

Keywords: Deep Learning Curriculum, English Language Teaching, Vocational Education, SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang

INTRODUCTION

Language learning in vocational education requires more than grammatical accuracy, it demands communicative competence, creativity, and adaptability to workplace contexts. Language learning in vocational education goes beyond simply mastering grammatical accuracy. It requires developing communicative competence so learners can effectively exchange information in real-world settings. Additionally, creativity plays a crucial role in enabling students to navigate unexpected situations and solve problems innovatively. Equally important is adaptability, which ensures learners can adjust their language use according to the specific demands and culture of various workplace environments. Together, these skills prepare vocational students not just to speak correctly, but to communicate confidently and flexibly in their future careers. The Deep Learning Curriculum promotes these values by emphasizing inquiry, collaboration, and reflection, aligning well with communicative language teaching (CLT)

principles in ELT (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum, deep learning supports the goal of developing student agency and authentic learning. At SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, English teachers have begun integrating deep learning strategies to enhance students' speaking and problem-solving skills through meaningful communicative activities. This study aims to explore how deep learning is implemented in ELT classes, what challenges are encountered, and how it influences students' engagement and language development.

Building on this foundation, the study employs qualitative methods to gather insights from both teachers and students regarding instructional practices and classroom experiences. It investigates the extent to which inquiry-based tasks, collaborative projects, and reflective exercises are incorporated in lessons and how these elements foster a deeper understanding of language use in vocational settings. Additionally, it examines obstacles such as limited resources, varying student motivation, and teachers' readiness to adopt innovative pedagogies. By analyzing these factors, the research contributes to identifying effective strategies for embedding deep learning principles in English language teaching, aiming to better prepare students for the communicative demands of their future careers.

Deep learning presents a promising solution for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in vocational schools by addressing the complex demands of language proficiency needed in real-world, professional contexts. Unlike traditional rote memorization, deep learning encourages students to engage actively with language through critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and authentic communication tasks. This approach helps vocational learners develop not only linguistic accuracy but also the communicative competence and adaptability essential for workplace success. By integrating meaningful, learner-centered activities and reflective practices, deep learning supports continuous improvement and learner autonomy, which are critical in vocational settings. Furthermore, it aligns with the development of global competencies such as character, citizenship, and critical thinking, equipping students with broader skills for lifelong learning and professional challenges. However, successful implementation depends on adequate teacher training, resource availability, and curriculum alignment with vocational goals. Therefore, this study is going to investigate teachers' and students' perspectives to better understand the facilitators and barriers in applying deep learning strategies in English Language Teaching at vocational schools. This investigation will provide insights into how these stakeholders experience and respond to the deep learning approach, identify challenges such as infrastructural limitations, readiness levels, and curricular constraints, and suggest strategies for effective integration. Understanding these perspectives will contribute to designing supportive interventions that enhance the quality and relevance of English education in vocational settings, ultimately improving learners' communicative competence, collaboration, and critical thinking skills essential for their future careers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deep learning in language education involves understanding meaning and applying knowledge to new situations (Marton & Säljö, 1976). Deep learning in language education emphasizes grasping the underlying meaning of content rather than rote memorization. According to Marton and Säljö (1976), it involves actively constructing knowledge and applying it flexibly to new and varied situations. This approach encourages learners to engage critically with language materials, fostering deeper comprehension and the ability to transfer skills beyond

the classroom. By focusing on meaningful learning, students develop stronger communicative abilities and problem-solving skills essential for real-life language use.

According to Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen (2018), deep learning develops six global competencies: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking, all essential in English communication and vocational contexts. Fullan, Quinn and McEachen (2018) identify six global competencies fostered through deep learning: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. These competencies are crucial in both English communication and vocational settings, where learners must navigate complex social interactions and professional demands. Developing character nurtures personal responsibility and ethical awareness, while citizenship highlights active participation in community and societal contexts. Collaboration and communication skills enable effective teamwork and clear expression, essential for workplace success. Creativity and critical thinking empower students to innovate and solve problems efficiently, adapting their language use to dynamic vocational environments. Together, these competencies form a comprehensive skill set that deep learning aims to cultivate for holistic learner development. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to design project-based learning (PBL) experiences that connect classroom learning to real-life challenges.

In language education, this approach complements communicative methodologies that prioritize real-world use of language, critical thinking, and collaboration (Biggs & Tang, 2011). It encourages learners to move beyond passive reception of information toward active participation in meaningful communication. By emphasizing interaction and problem-solving, students develop not only language skills but also cognitive abilities essential for navigating complex social and professional contexts. Collaboration further enriches the learning experience by fostering diverse perspectives and mutual support, which are vital for mastering language in authentic settings. Integrating these elements creates a dynamic classroom environment where language functions as a tool for connection and critical inquiry rather than mere accuracy. Both CLT and deep learning emphasize learner autonomy, active participation, and meaningful communication.

Deep learning in English Language Teaching (ELT) emphasizes active engagement, critical analysis, and meaningful application of knowledge rather than surface-level memorization. It fosters deeper understanding by encouraging learners to connect prior experiences with new language tasks, promoting skills beyond rote learning such as critical thinking, creativity, and communicative competence (Marton & Säljö, 1976; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1982). This approach aligns with frameworks like Biggs' 3P Model, which highlights the interplay between presage factors, learning processes, and learning outcomes to support deeper language acquisition. Pedagogical strategies that support deep learning in ELT include inquiry-driven tasks, task-based learning, reflective activities, and formative assessment techniques, all aimed at developing learners' ability to apply language in authentic contexts. However, challenges such as traditional teaching methods, resource constraints, and the need for teacher professional development must be addressed to fully implement deep learning principles. Overall, deep learning transforms English classrooms into dynamic, student-centered environments, equipping learners with higher-order skills essential for both academic and vocational success.

The process of teaching English with deep learning involves several stages centered on active learner engagement and the development of higher-order thinking. According to recent

studies, this process begins with designing inquiry-based tasks that promote critical analysis, problem-solving, and authentic language use in context (Bachtiar, 2025; Marton & Säljö, 1976; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1982). Teaching strategies include observation, socialization, training and mentoring, and evaluation to ensure sustained teacher and learner development (Bachtiar, 2025). Deep learning pedagogy encourages students to connect new knowledge with prior experience, fostering creativity, communication, collaboration, citizenship, character, and critical thinking—the six Cs vital for vocational and communicative competence (Quinn & McEachen, 2018; Bachtiar, 2025). Formative assessments and reflective practices support learner agency and self-regulation, essential for deep engagement. The classroom becomes a dynamic environment that moves away from rote memorization toward meaningful, learner-centered activities, facilitated by supportive pedagogical frameworks like Biggs' 3P Model (Presage, Process, Product) that link learner characteristics, teaching methods, and outcomes. Challenges such as limited resources and teacher readiness require attention to achieve effective implementation. This holistic approach prepares students not only to master English linguistically but also to adapt and thrive in diverse real-world and vocational contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2018), exploring the implementation of deep learning in English classes at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang. Participants consisted of two English teachers and twenty students from Grade XI Accounting and Office Administration programs. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and document analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify emerging patterns related to instructional design, engagement, and challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The teacher's perspective in integrating deep learning into English Language Teaching (ELT) reveals a transformative shift in pedagogical approaches. Teachers experience a move from traditional, content-focused instruction toward more student-centered, inquiry-based learning that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and communicative competence. Teachers report increased student engagement and deeper cognitive involvement, appreciating the curriculum's emphasis on meaningful interaction and reflective practice. However, they also recognize challenges such as adapting to new methodologies, balancing diverse learner needs, and the necessity for ongoing professional development to fully realize the potential of deep learning in the ELT classroom. This perspective highlights the vital role of teachers as facilitators of dynamic and contextualized language learning, essential for preparing students to meet real-world communicative demands effectively. The following table shows the teachers' perspective of integrating deep learning on EFL classroom.

Table 1 Teachers' Persepctive on the integration of deep learning in EFL Classroom

Aspect	Teachers' perspective
Curriculum Changes	Teachers noted significant changes in material arrangement, content, and teaching approaches aligned with the 2013 curriculum.
Teaching Strategies	They adapted methods towards project-based learning and the scientific approach, focusing on students' interests and competences.
Challenges	Teachers experienced challenges including limited time allotment for English, adapting to new assessment styles, and managing diverse student needs.
Student Engagement	Teachers observed increased student motivation and active participation in learning activities using deep learning strategies.
Professional Development	Teachers expressed the need for continuous training and support to effectively implement deep learning strategies in their teaching practice.
Overall Impact	Despite challenges, teachers believe the Deep Learning Curriculum enhances students' communicative competence and critical thinking skills effectively.

Teachers applied deep learning through project-based tasks, such as designing English promotional videos, conducting role plays simulating workplace scenarios, and collaborative problem-solving discussions. These activities promoted authentic language use and encouraged critical thinking and creativity. From the teacher's perspective at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, integrating the Deep Learning Curriculum into English Language Teaching has brought positive changes in students' communicative competence, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. Teachers report that the curriculum's emphasis on inquiry-based learning, project-based tasks, and reflective activities engages students more deeply and makes learning more meaningful. It is in line with Aditama, M. G., & Sugiharto, P. A. (2025). Enhancing EFL student engagement through deep learning strategies: Teachers' perceptions and implementation challenges. *Melek Literasi Journal*, 3(1), 61-80. They observe improvements in students' ability to work collaboratively, express ideas clearly, and think critically about language use. However, teachers also acknowledge challenges such as adapting to new teaching methods, managing diverse learner needs, and needing ongoing professional development support. Despite these challenges, teachers believe the deep learning approach aligns well with vocational education goals and prepares students effectively for real-world communication demands. The following table shows the students' perspective of integrating deep learning on EFL classroom.

Table 2 Students' Persepctive on the integration of deep learning in EFL Classroom

Aspect	Student's perspective
Communicative Competence	Students feel more motivated and confident in using English for meaningful communication beyond the classroom.

Collaboration	Group discussions and tasks have helped students develop teamwork and social skills essential for real-world contexts.
Critical Thinking	Inquiry and reflection activities have encouraged students to think critically and creatively about language use.
Engagement and Motivation	Students appreciate active participation and find learning more interesting through project- and problem-based tasks.
Challenges	Some students face difficulties with limited resources and adapting to self-directed and autonomous learning approaches.
Overall Value	Students recognize the deep learning approach as beneficial in enhancing language abilities and preparing for vocational demands.

Students reported higher motivation and confidence when using English for real purposes. They practiced communication strategies, negotiation skills, and collaborative learning, key aspects of both CLT and deep learning. Challenges included insufficient training in deep learning pedagogy, time constraints, and difficulty in developing authentic assessment rubrics for communication-based tasks. The success of deep learning in ELT relies on school-level support, flexible curriculum planning, and professional development. Students' perspective at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang, integrating the Deep Learning Curriculum into English Language Teaching has positively influenced their communicative competence, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. It is in line with Quinn & McEachen, 2018; Bachtiar, (2025) that students appreciate engaging in project-based and problem-based learning activities that require active participation and real-world communication. They feel more motivated and confident in using English for meaningful purposes beyond the classroom. Collaboration through group discussions and tasks has helped them develop social and teamwork skills, while inquiry and reflection activities have encouraged them to think critically and creatively. However, students also note challenges such as limited learning resources and the occasional difficulty of adapting to more autonomous and self-directed learning methods. Overall, students recognize the value of the deep learning approach in enhancing their language abilities and preparing them for future vocational and social communication needs.

CONCLUSION

Integrating the Deep Learning Curriculum into English Language Teaching at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang has enhanced students' communicative competence, collaboration, and critical thinking. Deep learning strategies, particularly project-based and inquiry-based learning, encourage students to use English meaningfully and creatively. To ensure sustainability, schools should provide ongoing teacher training, authentic assessment design, and institutional support aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes higher-order cognitive processes, creativity, and real-world application, moving beyond traditional memorization of language rules. It aligns with the goals of building global competencies such as character,

citizenship, communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, which are essential for success in both academic and vocational contexts. Teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Bengkayang have adopted inquiry-based tasks, collaborative projects, and reflective activities that engage students meaningfully and promote deeper learning. This approach also fosters learner autonomy and motivation while preparing students to navigate the communicative demands of their future workplaces. Challenges such as resource limitations and the need for continuous professional development for teachers have been recognized, but the overall impact points to a positive transformation in English language acquisition and use in vocational education settings.

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