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# Deep learning: An alternative English learning approach for college students

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## Abstract

*The Indonesian government has introduced a deep learning approach based on three principles: mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. This approach is considered essential to address learning challenges by ensuring that education is not only focused on content mastery but also on the application of knowledge in real-life contexts. Learning English as a general course for non-English major university students often faces challenges of low motivation, limited engagement, and lack of perceived relevance. Applying deep learning principles in this context is therefore urgent, as it can help create a more supportive learning atmosphere, enhance student motivation, and strengthen the practical connection between English and students' real-life needs. This study aims to explore deep learning approach implementation and the impacts for non-English major university students who learn English as general course. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method using a closed-ended questionnaire based on a Likert scale, distributed to 108 students from three different study programs. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, validated by source triangulation. The results show that the majority of students perceived that lecturers successfully applied the principles of mindful (90%), meaningful (96%), and joyful learning (95.6%) in the learning process. Students reported increased focus, emotional engagement, relevance of the material to real-life contexts, and higher learning motivation. These findings indicate that the deep learning approach has a significantly positive impact on the effectiveness of English language learning. However, a small portion of students expressed disagreement, suggesting that there is still room for improvement, particularly regarding lecturer readiness and infrastructure support. Therefore, educator training and capacity building are essential steps to ensure the successful implementation of deep learning.*

**Keywords:** college students; deep learning; English learning; general course

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia faces some challenges in learning process. Education experts from Kemendikdasmen (2025) believe that Indonesian education internal challenge lies in the learning crisis that impact on the declining learning quality even though access to primary and secondary education is quite good. Ineffective learning approaches have an impact on the low literacy and numeracy skills of Indonesian students, as reflected in the PISA results. In 2022, Indonesia took

placed in 59 from 81 countries with the score 359 in literacy field, placed in 67 from 81 countries with the score 366 in numeration field, and placed in 65 with the score 383 science field. Low literacy and numeracy occur because there is a gap in the effectiveness of learning in schools that have not provided teachers with ample opportunities to develop students' creativity and critical thinking skills. (Madhakomala et al., 2022); (Wahyudi et al., 2022); (Sibuea, 2017); (Susanto et al., 2024) agreed that teachers' competence in Indonesia still need to be improved. Government together with education experts recently construct learning approach called deep learning to overcome those challenges.

Deep learning, introduced by the government as a program primarily intended for primary and secondary education (DikDasMen), emphasizes mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. However, it is important to question how urgent and relevant the application of this concept is for college students. In higher education, particularly for non-English majors taking English as a general course, learning often faces challenges of low motivation, limited engagement, and lack of perceived relevance. Applying deep learning principles in this context is therefore urgent, as it can help create a more supportive learning atmosphere, enhance student motivation, and strengthen the practical connection between English and students' real-life needs. Mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning are recommended to be applied wider in Indonesia (Mubarok et al., 2024); (Silvania et al., 2025); (Ramadana & Halim, 2025); (Andayani, 2022); (A. W. Sari & Niswa, 2025). In its implementation, deep learning focuses on authentic learning experiences and prioritizes real practice, as well as encouraging higher-order thinking skills and collaboration. Learning not only focuses on mastering content, but also applying the knowledge in real situations. Learners are expected to be able to apply their knowledge to new contexts and develop a deep understanding of the concepts learned. The learning process also involves self-reflection where learners evaluate and give meaning to their learning process. Practical knowledge is expected to give better exposure of learning. Bose (2021) said that practical knowledge can guide learners to a deeper understanding of a concept through the act of personal experience. Dernova (2015) supported this theory by saying that experiential learning can provide students' engagement into direct experiences closed to real-world situations and also can ensure students' strong motivation to learn.

The university curriculum in Indonesia positions English as a compulsory general course; however, the challenge lies in designing a curriculum that not only fulfills institutional requirements but also maximizes the role of English in equipping students with skills that are valuable both for their academic development and for real-world applications. English learning process for non-English major students in college should not only be oriented towards mastering content, but also be able to apply the knowledge in real situations. Besides giving good environment for their comfortable learning atmosphere, teacher also need to show students the important of English in their life. English skill is very important in students' life (Alfian, 2019); (Febriyanti, 2017); (Andayani, 2022); (Raniadi & Firdaus Umar, 2023); (Aris & Mulyono, 2023).; (Jossita, 2020). Jamilah (2016) said English need to be learnt in order to achieve various goals, such as to communicate with foreigners, to read books and articles of their majors, to get high score of TOEFL, to be able

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to use internet better, and even to be able to sing English songs in good pronunciation. Teachers need to improve the English learning awareness and let students understand the important English learning in life rather than simply prepare them for passing examination. F. Sari et al., (2023) concluded that English teachers need to design relevant course to the students' needs. The course should cover workplace related learning needs on the basis of students' needs analysis. Deep learning approach in line with the goal of learning English for non-English students in university so that this approach also can help students who take English as general course in university. The brilliant idea of deep learning approach should also be tried for college students since the government of Indonesia only plans to apply deep learning in early childhood, primary and secondary education levels, especially in the aspects of infrastructure, human resources and policies.

Deep learning as learning approach for college students actually has been researched by some researchers in all around the world. Shi (2022) studied about the present condition and characteristics of English education quality evaluation in colleges and combines the characteristics of deep learning. To provide a feasible solution for evaluating English education, this paper develops a quality evaluation model based on deep learning. The study further explains the theoretical foundation of the model and presents a comparative analysis between the training results of the deep learning algorithm and the algebraic algorithm, thereby offering readers a clearer understanding of how the model functions and its potential advantages. Through simulation analysis, they concluded that the English education evaluation based on deep learning suggested in this paper has achieved good evaluation results.

Wang (2024) advocated for a transformative shift towards deep learning within higher English education, positing it as a pivotal metric of student learning efficacy. He introduced a learning architecture model that emphasizes engagement, spatial, and experiential learning dimensions. This model integrates data on learner interactions and deep learning activities to reconstruct the paradigm of English education at the collegiate level. In parallel, Shi (2022) also highlighted the role of deep learning in evaluating college English education, while (Dernova, 2015) emphasized experiential learning as one of the essential foundations for adult education practices. Similarly, Ramadana & Halim (2025) demonstrated the effectiveness of project-based learning in enhancing mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning in EFL contexts, an approach that resonates with Cahyani (2025), who examined the integration of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning principles in Indonesian language and literature instruction. Moreover, Sylvania et al. (2025) explored how AI-enhanced classrooms can facilitate these dimensions, while Mubarok et al. (2024) identified challenges and potential solutions in applying mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning in primary education.

From another perspective, studies on English needs analysis have consistently revealed a gap between curriculum design and learners' real-world requirements. Alfian (2019) and Febriyanti (2017) analyzed English learning needs of non-English majors in Indonesian universities and emphasized the urgency of aligning instructional design with students' academic and professional contexts, which was also confirmed by Jamilah (2016) and (F. Sari

et al. (2023) in their studies on students' needs and learning strategies. Furthermore, Andayani (2022) and Jossita (2020) reinforced the importance of English proficiency as a determinant of students' competitiveness in higher education and beyond, while Aris & Mulyono (2023) identified specific needs among tourism students, showing discipline-specific variations. At the same time, broader discussions on Indonesia's educational challenges (Madhakomala et al., 2022; Sibuea, 2017) underline systemic barriers to innovative learning, particularly the lack of integration between pedagogical innovation and teacher preparedness.

Taken together, these studies illustrate that while deep learning has been conceptually and empirically applied across diverse contexts ranging from English education, needs analysis, and experiential learning the explicit integration of mindful, meaningful, and joyful principles into English learning for non-English majors in Indonesian higher education remains underexplored. Thus, the novelty of this study lies in bridging this gap by reconstructing a holistic and humanistic deep learning model that addresses both cognitive engagement and affective dimensions, tailored to the realities of Indonesian higher education.

Investigating English learning through the deep learning approach in Indonesia still requires further exploration. While previous studies have generally examined deep learning in the context of primary and secondary education, there is a lack of research focusing on its application in higher education, particularly for non-English major university students. The deep learning framework introduced by the Indonesian government emphasizing mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning has not yet been specifically studied in relation to English as a compulsory general course at the tertiary level. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to explore how this approach is implemented in English learning for non-English major students and to evaluate its impacts on their engagement, understanding, and overall learning experience. Moreover, we need to support the seriousness of the Indonesian government in improving learning process especially English learning. Here, writers explained how deep learning that is constructed by the government is implemented in college for non-English major students. This study explained how the deep learning implemented and how the impacts toward students were.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method of data analysis. The use of a descriptive method in qualitative research tends to capture social phenomena. Through the database processing capabilities of the descriptive qualitative method, it significantly aids in conducting observations in the form of measurable quantities, such as numerical data (Sholikhah, 2016).

Based on how the data were obtained, they were categorized into two types: primary and secondary data. Primary and secondary data had significantly different definitions (Ajayi, 2023). Primary data referred to the main data collected directly from the research subjects or first-hand sources, while secondary data referred to data not obtained directly from the research subjects or primary sources but used to complement and support the primary data

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(Nasution, 2023). This study used a qualitative descriptive method with a closed-ended questionnaire as the research instrument. A questionnaire was a vital instrument in achieving high-quality social science research (Ikart, 2018). In this study, respondents marked one of the answers they considered correct. The Likert scale was used to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of individuals or groups regarding social phenomena (Wu & Leung, 2017). The Likert scale in this study ranged from a minimum score of 1 to a maximum score of 4, in order to clearly determine whether the respondents' answers leaned toward agreement or disagreement. Thus, the responses were expected to be more relevant (Sugiyono, 2016).

The subjects of this study were students from three different study programs at a private university in Indonesia who were enrolled in English language courses. They came from four different classes. The total number of students in these four classes was 108, all of whom participated in the study. The respondents who filled out the questionnaire were selected using the total sampling technique, comprising all 108 students. The questionnaire asked about the implementation of a deep learning approach by the lecturers and the impact felt by students based on the deep learning principles: mindful, meaningful, and joyful. The questionnaire was designed to align with the principles of deep learning, aiming to honor lecturers, students, and other education stakeholders, while also providing a learning experience that involved understanding, application, and reflection (Kemendikdasmen, 2025).

The stages of research implementation included a survey through the distribution of questionnaires to the students attending the classes. Their responses were used to identify their perceptions and learning experiences. The study also involved document analysis and reflection, analyzing documents such as syllabi, semester learning plans (RPS), and teaching notes. A literature review was conducted by collecting various sources related to deep learning in English language education, particularly those discussing aspects of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. These sources included academic books, indexed journals, and the latest educational policies. Limited classroom observations were also carried out during several English language learning sessions to identify the application of the studied learning approach.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through three main stages (Miles et al., 2023) including data reduction where collected data were selected, categorized, and focused on relevant aspects such as the application of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning; data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic tables; and conclusion drawing and verification where the researcher concluded findings based on emerging data patterns. During the reduction stage, data relevant to the research focus were strictly filtered, simplified, and organized into general patterns to facilitate easier analysis. These patterns were then structured into organized information ready for further analysis, which constituted the core of the data presentation stage. The analysis process concluded with the conclusion-drawing stage, which was not final but continuously verified throughout the research process. Verification was carried out through continuous reflection during writing, data review, and discussions with others to achieve mutual understanding or intersubjectivity (Rijali, 2018).



Data analysis in qualitative research was conducted before entering the field, during fieldwork, and after leaving the field. Before conducting data analysis, triangulation was carried out to test the credibility of the data used for interpretation and conclusion drawing. The steps in qualitative data analysis included data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Yuliani, 2018). To increase the validity of the research results, the researcher used source triangulation—comparing data from classroom observations, student questionnaire responses, and the results of the literature review and document analysis. Thus, the integrity of the research findings was maintained, as they were based on mutually reinforcing empirical and theoretical data (Nurfajriani et al., 2024)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The implementation deep learning in the classroom

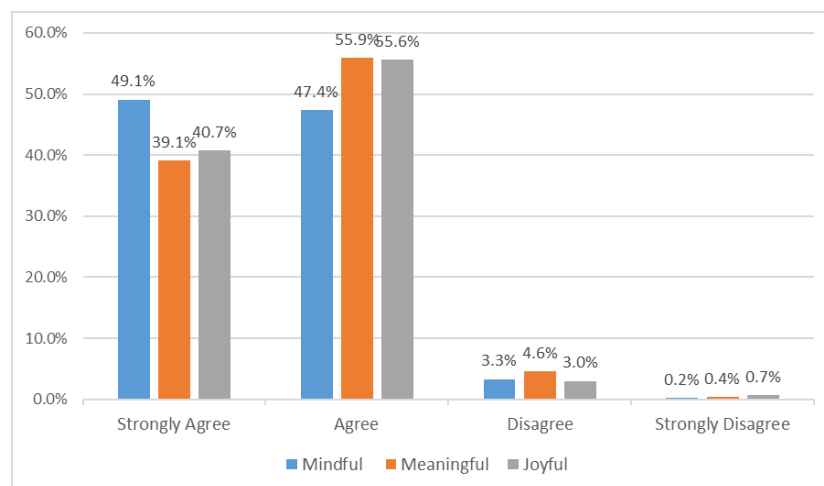


Figure 1. Graphic Implementation of Deep Learning in The Classroom

This chart presents survey data collected from university students regarding the implementation of the deep learning approach in English language learning, particularly focusing on the aspects of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. Respondents were asked to provide their responses based on four Likert scale categories: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. According to Sugiyono (2016), the Likert scale is a scale used to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of individuals or groups toward social phenomena. Similar to Wu & Leung (2017), this scale enables researchers to categorize responses systematically for analytical interpretation.

In this study, the researcher conducted a survey aimed at students enrolled in English language courses. The primary objective of the survey was to explore the implementation of deep learning concepts by the lecturers. To clarify the findings, the survey data were visualized in the form of a diagram. This method follows the recommendation of Ikart (2018) who emphasized the importance of pre-tested survey instruments to capture reliable data.

The questionnaire items were developed based on the principles of deep learning (Kemendikdasmen, 2025), consisting of mindful, meaningful, and

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joyful learning. These three principles are aligned with previous findings that highlight the importance of student-centered learning environments (Mubarok et al., 2024; Silvania et al., 2025). In mindful learning, the survey focused on students' self-awareness, attention, and reflection during the learning process. This approach echoes the view of Dernova (2015) who stated that experiential and reflective practices help students internalize knowledge more effectively.

Survey results indicated that 49.1% of students strongly agreed that lecturers implemented the mindful learning aspect, 47.4% agreed, 3.3% disagreed, and 0.2% strongly disagreed. These results align with Ramadana & Halim (2025), who reported that mindful learning strategies positively influence students' engagement in EFL contexts.

The meaningful learning aspect was designed to assess the relevance of the course content to students' real-life contexts. Similar findings were reported by Alfian (2019) and F. Sari et al. (2023), who emphasized that English instruction for non-English majors becomes more effective when contextualized to students' needs and experiences. In this study, 39.1% of students strongly agreed, 55.9% agreed, 4.6% disagreed, and 0.4% strongly disagreed that lecturers implemented meaningful learning. This confirms that students felt the material was relevant and applicable in real contexts, consistent with Andayani (2022) who highlighted the necessity of contextual English learning in higher education.

The joyful learning aspect was intended to assess whether the learning environment provided enjoyable and motivating experiences. Prior research (Cahyani, 2025; Silvania et al. 2025) confirms that enjoyable classroom environments enhance students' engagement and motivation. The survey results showed 40.7% of students strongly agreed, 55.6% agreed, 3.0% disagreed, and 0.7% strongly disagreed. These findings resonate with Mubarok et al. (2024), who highlighted the importance of fun and supportive atmospheres in sustaining students' long-term motivation.

Overall, the survey findings show that lecturers have successfully implemented the three essential aspects mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning—in English classes. Among them, meaningful learning had the highest level of agreement, followed by joyful and mindful learning. This suggests that students valued the relevance of the material most, while also appreciating the engaging and reflective classroom atmosphere. These findings are consistent with Shi (2022) and Wang (2024), who both emphasized the role of deep learning in improving the effectiveness of English language education.

In line with Miles et al. (2023) and Nurfajriani et al. (2024), the triangulation of data sources and systematic analysis strengthens the validity of these findings. Furthermore, previous studies (Jamilah, 2016; Febriyanti, 2017; Aris & Mulyono, 2023) also confirm that addressing student needs and contexts is a key determinant of success in English language teaching. Therefore, the high level of student satisfaction shown in this survey not only reflects effective teaching but also illustrates the practical realization of deep learning principles within higher education in Indonesia.

## 2. The Impact of Deep Learning on Students

The following graph presents the level of impact felt by students from the application of deep learning methods in English language learning. This graph serves as the basis for analyzing the extent to which this approach has been integrated into daily teaching practices and how students interpret their learning experiences. As reflected in the implementation of deep learning approaches by lecturers, this chart presents survey data from students regarding the impact of deep learning in English language learning, specifically in terms of the mindful, meaningful, and joyful aspects.

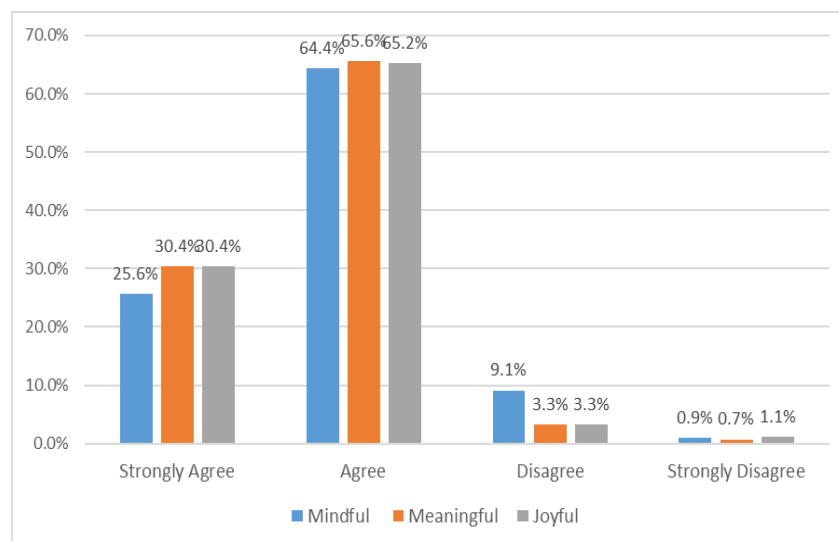


Figure 2. Grafik Impact of Deep Learning towards Students

In this study, the researcher conducted a survey targeting students enrolled in English courses. The main objective of the survey was to explore the impact of the deep learning approach that had been applied. To clarify the findings, the researcher visualized the survey data through diagrams. These diagrams help map students' perceptions into several categories based on how they understand the concept of deep learning, particularly in relation to the three main aspects: mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. These categories form the analytical framework for interpreting the data (Ajayi, 2023; Ikart, 2018).

In the aspect of mindful learning, the instrument was designed with questions that measure key components in the learning process related to self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-efficacy within an academic context, particularly English learning. The findings align with previous studies indicating that mindful learning enhances focus, metacognition, and stress resilience in academic settings (Mubarok et al., 2024; Cahyani, 2025). Survey results show that 25.6% of students strongly agreed with the impact of mindful learning, 64.4% agreed, 9.1% disagreed, and 0.9% strongly disagreed. This suggests that the implementation of mindful learning is generally well-received and perceived as beneficial, supporting earlier research on the positive correlation between mindfulness and learning outcomes (Wu & Leung, 2017; Nasution, 2023).

In the meaningful learning aspect, questions were designed to evaluate the relevance of materials, intrinsic motivation, and learner autonomy. The data



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show that 30.4% of students strongly agreed and 65.6% agreed that meaningful learning positively affected their English learning process. These findings are consistent with studies highlighting the importance of aligning learning content with learners' personal and professional needs (Alfian, 2019; Febriyanti, 2017; Aris & Mulyono, 2023). Moreover, meaningful learning has been found to foster deeper understanding and engagement, reducing reliance on rote memorization (Dernova, 2015; F. Sari et al., 2023).

In the joyful learning aspect, the survey assessed psychological comfort, enthusiasm, and active participation. Results indicate that 30.4% of students strongly agreed and 65.2% agreed with the positive impacts of joyful learning. These findings corroborate research suggesting that an enjoyable learning environment fosters motivation, reduces anxiety, and enhances classroom participation (Silvania et al., 2025; Ramadana & Halim, 2025). Furthermore, previous studies emphasize that joyful learning environments promote not only affective engagement but also long-term retention of knowledge (Shi, 2022; Wang, 2024).

Overall, the research findings indicate that most students have a highly favorable attitude toward the impact of the three learning aspects—mindful, meaningful, and joyful. This is in line with the notion that deep learning approaches must integrate cognitive, affective, and motivational elements to create a holistic learning experience (Miles et al., 2023; Rijali, 2018). Conversely, the small percentage of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed reflects the complexity of implementing deep learning approaches in diverse classroom contexts, as also noted by Madhakomala et al. (2022) and Susanto et al. (2024).

Based on the implementation by lecturers and the perceived impact by students, it can be concluded that while the majority of students recognize the benefits of the deep learning approach, there remains a gap between acceptance and implementation. This finding resonates with national policy discussions on the need for professional development to strengthen teachers' pedagogical capacity (Kemendikdasmen, 2025; Sibuea, 2017). Thus, continuous training and mentoring are necessary to optimize the integration of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning approaches in higher education English classrooms.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be summarized that English language learning grounded in the principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning is effective in enhancing student engagement, strengthening conceptual understanding, and fostering contextual as well as enjoyable learning experiences. More than 90% of students expressed agreement or strong agreement with the positive impacts of these three aspects, indicating high acceptance and effectiveness of the approach.

The novelty of this study lies in applying the government-promoted deep learning framework, originally designed for primary and secondary education, to higher education contexts specifically English language courses for non-English majors. This highlights its potential transferability and adaptability to university-level learning, which has been underexplored in previous studies.

Nevertheless, a small proportion of students (below 5%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, showing a discrepancy between acceptance and implementation. This suggests that while the approach is generally effective, individual differences in readiness, learning preferences, or contextual factors such as classroom conditions and teaching styles may affect its reception.

Future research is needed to further investigate these discrepancies by examining variables such as lecturer readiness, pedagogical literacy, technological support, and cultural context. Moreover, longitudinal studies could explore how sustained implementation of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning impacts long-term learning outcomes, language proficiency, and learner autonomy. Practically, this study also implies the need for targeted training and mentoring programs for lecturers to maximize the effectiveness of deep learning in higher education.

### **AUTHOR STATEMENTS**

**Dwi Lia Rakhmasari, S.Pd., M.A.**, collected and analyzed the data, wrote the findings and discussion sections, formatted the manuscript according to the journal's guidelines and proofread the manuscript together with author 2. **Berlin Insan Pratiwi, S.Pd., M.Hum**, assisted in ensuring the accuracy of the data and carefully proofread the manuscript together with author 1.

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