

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Global educational systems have undergone significant transformation in response to the growing demand for learners who are capable of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and the meaningful application of knowledge in real-life contexts. Traditional pedagogical approaches that emphasize rote memorization, teacher-centered instruction, and examination-oriented learning have increasingly been criticized for fostering surface learning rather than deep conceptual understanding (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Hattie, 2023). As a result, contemporary educational discourse has shifted toward the concept of deep learning, which emphasizes students' active engagement, reflective thinking, and the integration of knowledge across cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions. Deep learning positions learning not merely as the acquisition of information, but as a transformative process in which learners construct meaning, connect ideas, and apply their understanding creatively and critically (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Fullan et al., 2018; Chen & Singh, 2024).

Deep learning is understood as a pedagogical approach that promotes meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning experiences by integrating intellectual rigor with emotional engagement and ethical awareness. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) conceptualize deep learning as learning that "creates and uses new knowledge in the real world," emphasizing competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, character, and citizenship. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that deep learning-oriented instruction enhances

students' higher-order thinking skills, intrinsic motivation, and long-term retention of knowledge compared to surface learning approaches (Smith & Colby, 2007; Biggs & Moore, 1993; Zhu & Niyozov, 2024). Consequently, deep learning has become a central reference point in international education reforms aimed at preparing students for the complexities of the twenty-first century.

The adoption of deep learning principles in educational practices closely aligns with Indonesia's national education reform agenda reflected in the *Merdeka Belajar* policy and the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* framework. These policies emphasize student-centered learning, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, independence, and character development as essential educational outcomes (Farhana, 2022; Dasar et al., 2025; Wijaya, 2025). However, despite strong policy support, empirical evidence indicates that the implementation of deep learning in Indonesian classrooms remains uneven. National and international assessments, including PISA, reveal persistent challenges in students' literacy, problem-solving, and ability to transfer knowledge across contexts indicators commonly associated with surface learning practices (Hwang, 2024; Muttaqin et al., 2025; Nana & Brenya, 2024). These findings suggest a substantial gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

At the center of this gap lies the teacher whose role is pivotal in translating curriculum reform into meaningful classroom practice. Teachers are not merely implementers of policy but active agents who interpret, adapt, and enact pedagogical approaches based on their beliefs, knowledge, and professional experiences (Hills A., 2019; Zimotti et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2024). Research has consistently shown that teachers' perceptions and beliefs strongly influence their

instructional decisions, including the selection of teaching strategies, learning activities, assessment practices, and classroom interaction patterns (Pratiwi & Sudirman, 2023; Fitrah, 2025; Riani, 2025). When teachers possess a clear conceptual understanding of deep learning and perceive it as relevant and feasible, they are more likely to design learning experiences that foster inquiry, collaboration, and critical reflection. In contrast, when deep learning is perceived as abstract, time-consuming, or incompatible with assessment demands, teachers tend to revert to traditional, surface-level instruction.

Preliminary findings obtained through informal interviews with several English teachers at SMA Negeri 7 Denpasar revealed variations in teachers' understanding and implementation of deep learning. Some teachers reported integrating deep learning principles into classroom practices through group discussions, project-based learning, and problem-solving activities. These approaches were perceived as effective in increasing student engagement and promoting critical and collaborative thinking skills. However, several teachers expressed uncertainty regarding the implementation of deep learning due to limited conceptual understanding, inadequate professional training, and pressure to achieve curriculum targets and prepare students for examinations.

Furthermore, the preliminary interviews revealed several structural and pedagogical challenges affecting the implementation of deep learning. Teachers highlighted issues such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, and the diverse abilities of students as significant obstacles in designing meaningful and in-depth learning experiences. In addition, an assessment culture that remains heavily oriented toward examination results continues to influence teaching practices,

leading to a tendency toward surface-level instruction rather than deep conceptual exploration. This condition reflects a gap between the intended goals of educational policy, which promote deep learning, and the realities of classroom practice.

Despite these challenges, some teachers demonstrated initiative in gradually integrating elements of deep learning into their English instruction. For instance, they incorporated project-based tasks requiring students to present ideas creatively, facilitated discussions that encouraged argumentation, and connected learning materials to real-life contexts. These practices indicate that there is considerable potential for the development of deep learning, although its implementation remains partial and not yet systematically structured.

Therefore, the phenomenon observed at SMA Negeri 7 Denpasar reflects a transitional phase in teaching practice, where teachers are adapting to a new pedagogical paradigm that emphasizes deep learning. The diversity in teachers' perceptions, instructional practices, and the challenges they encounter highlights the importance of further investigation. Consequently, this study is significant in exploring how English teachers perceive, implement, and respond to the challenges of deep learning in classroom settings, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of instructional practices within the context of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

The urgency of understanding teachers' implementation of deep learning becomes even more pronounced in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction at the senior high school level. English learning today requires more than grammatical accuracy or vocabulary acquisition; it demands the ability to analyze texts, construct arguments, communicate meaningfully, collaborate in

problem-solving tasks, and reflect critically on language use in diverse contexts (Rahmawati, 2023; Alzahrani & Alnufaie, 2024; Yuliana et al., 2023). Deep learning offers a pedagogical framework that aligns closely with these goals by encouraging authentic language use, higher-order literacy, and metacognitive awareness. Nevertheless, empirical studies indicate that many EFL classrooms in Indonesia remain dominated by textbook-driven instruction and exam-oriented practices, limiting opportunities for deep engagement and meaningful language use (Pratiwi & Sudirman, 2023; Riani, 2025; Estrada-Molina et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of research on deep learning in Indonesian education, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding teachers' perceptions and actual classroom practices in senior high school EFL contexts. Existing studies predominantly focus on primary education, theoretical conceptualizations of deep learning, or general curriculum implementation without examining how English teachers interpret and enact deep learning principles in situ (Sinaga et al., 2025; Solahudin, 2024; Nana & Brenya, 2024). Moreover, limited empirical attention has been given to urban, resource-rich school settings where institutional support may exist but pedagogical challenges persist. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of how English teachers conceptualize deep learning, how these perceptions shape their instructional practices, and what challenges they encounter during implementation.

The studies reviewed above reveal four specific gaps that the present study is designed to address. First, a contextual gap. Empirical work on deep learning in Indonesia has clustered in primary schools and in general subject areas, so that the senior high school EFL classroom, where examination pressure, textual complexity,

and the demand for authentic communication intersect most sharply, remains thinly documented (Sinaga et al., 2025; Artadhewi et al., 2022; Ar-Rasyid & Dewindri, 2025). Second, a methodological gap. The dominant designs are policy expositions, bibliometric mappings, and multi-site readiness surveys, which establish breadth but cannot trace how an individual teacher moves from a written *Modul Ajar* to an enacted lesson (Solahudin, 2024; An et al., 2025; Nuryanti et al., 2025; Satosa et al., 2025). What is absent is a single-site, multi-source case study capable of following the pedagogical chain from planning, to enactment, to perceived benefit and constraint. Third, a perspective gap. Existing studies privilege the teacher's voice, whereas students, whose lived experience is the ultimate measure of whether learning is mindful, meaningful, and joyful, are rarely consulted directly (Tatipang et al., 2026; Riani & Sujarwati, 2025; Macduff, 2005). Fourth, a setting gap. Almost no attention has been paid to urban, resource-rich public schools in which institutional support is already present yet pedagogical depth may still be uneven; such settings are analytically valuable precisely because they isolate pedagogical rather than infrastructural determinants of implementation quality (Muttaqin et al., 2025; Gao, 2023).

This gap is equally evident in the Balinese context. Scholarship produced at Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha has established a substantial local evidence base on learner-centred English pedagogy, including project-based learning and its effect on productive skills (Astawa et al., 2017; Artini et al., 2018), the design of competency-based instructional models (Ratminingsih et al., 2021), the cultivation of learner autonomy and twenty-first century competencies (Padmadewi et al., 2020; Myartawan et al., 2013), literacy and assessment innovation (Padmadewi et

al., 2022; Prawira et al., 2023; Diarsini et al., 2022), and mindful learning, authentic tasks, and learner engagement (Saputra et al., 2020; Utami et al., 2021; Santosa, 2017). None of this work, however, has examined deep learning as a single integrated construct comprising the 6Cs competencies together with the mindful–meaningful–joyful triad, and none has done so in a senior high school English classroom operating under the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The present study therefore addresses the convergence of these four gaps by conducting an in-depth, multi-source case study of deep learning implementation in the English classes of SMA Negeri 7 Denpasar, examining teachers' planning documents, enacted classroom practice, perceived benefits and challenges, and students lived learning experiences within a single institutional setting.

Given these considerations, it is essential to investigate teachers' implementation of deep learning in senior high school English classrooms, particularly by examining their perceptions, instructional practices, and experienced constraints. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for bridging the gap between educational policy and classroom practice, refining teacher professional development, and strengthening the implementation of deep learning in EFL education. Therefore, this study focuses on English teachers at SMA Negeri 7 Denpasar to explore how deep learning is perceived and implemented within authentic classroom contexts and to identify the challenges that shape its enactment.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the synthesis of theoretical perspectives and empirical studies on deep learning implementation, several interrelated problems can be identified. First, previous research indicates that teachers' understanding of deep learning concepts

is often fragmented and inconsistent, leading to varied interpretations and practices across classrooms (Fitrah, 2025; Zimotti et al., 2024; Pratiwi & Sudirman, 2023). Second, numerous studies report a persistent gap between curriculum expectations and actual classroom practices, particularly in EFL settings where assessment pressures and time constraints remain dominant (Riani, 2025; Rahmawati, 2023; Brown et al., 2024). Third, the integration of deep learning strategies into English instruction is frequently constrained by practical challenges, including large class sizes, limited professional training, and assessment systems that prioritize surface learning outcomes (Estrada-Molina et al., 2024; Hwang, 2024; Nana & Brenya, 2024; Aviyanto et al., 2024). Finally, there is a notable lack of context-specific empirical evidence examining how senior high school English teachers perceive and implement deep learning in Indonesian classrooms, especially in urban public schools. These unresolved issues form the basis of the present study and highlight the need for an in-depth qualitative investigation.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do English teachers implement deep learning pedagogy in SMA Negeri 7 Denpasar?
2. How do teachers perceive the benefits and challenges of implementing deep learning strategies in English classroom practices?
3. How do students describe their learning experiences and engagement in English classes where deep learning is implemented?

1.4 Research Objectives

In line with the research questions above, the objectives of this study are formulated as follows:

1. To analyze how English teachers implement deep learning pedagogy at SMA Negeri 7 Denpasar.
2. To analyze how teachers perceive the benefits and challenges of implementing deep learning strategies in English classroom practices.
3. To analyze how students describe their learning experiences and engagement in English classes where deep learning is implemented.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English language education, particularly in promoting deep learning in EFL classrooms within the Indonesian context.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on deep learning by providing empirical insights into how English teachers in Indonesia, specifically at SMA Negeri 7 Denpasar, perceive and apply deep learning principles in their teaching. It strengthens the conceptual understanding of how deep learning can be aligned with language learning objectives that emphasize higher-order thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. The study also supports the educational paradigm promoted by *Merdeka Belajar* and Profil Pelajar Pancasila, both of which advocate for transformative learning experiences that move beyond rote memorization and focus on student-centered learning. In doing so, it enriches the

discourse on pedagogical innovation in EFL and offers a contextualized understanding of deep learning practices in Southeast Asia.

Beyond this contribution, the study is theoretically significant because it addresses a specific gap in the way deep learning has so far been investigated in Indonesia. Most available studies are either policy expositions or multi-site readiness surveys; both capture breadth but leave the situated reasoning through which individual teachers translate the mindful, meaningful, and joyful principles into English lesson design largely undocumented (Kemendikdasmen, 2025; Fitrah, 2025; Nuryanti et al., 2025). Concentrating the inquiry on one school in which deep learning has already been institutionally adopted makes it possible to trace the complete pedagogical chain, from written planning documents, to observed classroom enactment, to teachers' own accounts of benefit and constraint, and finally to students lived experience of the resulting lessons. It is precisely this chain that determines the quality of teaching. A benefit that teachers perceive but cannot enact, and a constraint that teachers experience but cannot articulate, will not surface in large-scale survey data, yet both directly govern what students actually receive in the classroom. Documenting perceived benefits and challenges at this level of resolution therefore yields knowledge that is analytically transferable to comparable urban public senior high schools and directly usable in the design of school-based professional development.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to benefit multiple stakeholders as follows.

1. For English teachers, the study can serve as a reflective tool to assess and improve their classroom strategies, encouraging them to adopt instructional methods that nurture students' critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity.
2. For school administrators and curriculum developers, the research provides valuable information for designing professional development programs and teaching guidelines that integrate deep learning principles effectively.
3. For students, the implementation of deep learning can help them develop essential 21st-century competencies, such as communication, analytical reasoning, and innovation, which are vital for their academic and professional futures.

