



Teachers' Sense-making of English *Guru Penggerak* in Implementing Deep Learning through Mindful, Meaningful, Joyful Learning Principles

Adelmi Kurniawati Ds¹, Hasanuddin Fatsah², Muziatun Mukadji³,
Moon Hidayati Otoluwa⁴, Sartin Miolo⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Negeri Gorontalo

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-03-11 Revised: 2026-06-29 Accepted: 2026-06-29</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Deep learning;</i> <i>English teaching;</i> <i>Guru Penggerak;</i> <i>MMJ principles;</i> <i>teacher perceptions</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.9914</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Muziatun Mukadji muziatun@ung.ac.id Universitas Negeri Gorontalo</p>	<p><i>This study examines English Guru Penggerak teachers' perceptions of Deep Learning through the Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) framework in junior high school English classrooms in North Gorontalo Regency. In this study, Deep Learning refers to a pedagogical policy within the Indonesian education system rather than artificial intelligence or machine learning. The study addresses two research questions: how teachers perceive Deep Learning through the MMJ principles and how they describe their readiness to implement them. A descriptive qualitative design was employed involving eight English Guru Penggerak teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and supported by document analysis of teaching modules, worksheets, and assessment instruments. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including coding, cross-participant comparison, and document triangulation. The findings indicate that teachers generally perceived MMJ positively and considered it relevant to English language learning. They associated the framework with a safer classroom climate, greater student participation, stronger motivation, and more meaningful learning experiences. However, teachers demonstrated varying levels of conceptual understanding, with some still developing their understanding of MMJ while others articulated its principles more comprehensively. Teachers also showed uneven readiness to implement the framework. Pedagogical readiness was reflected in contextual learning tasks, reflective practices, and interactive classroom activities, whereas assessment readiness remained the weakest</i></p>

dimension. In addition, leadership support, professional learning communities, academic supervision, infrastructure, workload, and time allocation influenced implementation. The study concludes that MMJ implementation remains vulnerable to “joyful but shallow” enactment when enjoyable learning activities are not supported by purposeful awareness, meaningful learning, reflection, feedback, and evidence of student learning progress.

1. Introduction

Educational reform has increasingly shifted from emphasizing curriculum coverage toward promoting learning quality, learner agency, and meaningful knowledge construction. Across many educational systems, reforms no longer focus solely on what students should learn but also on how learning enables them to think critically, solve authentic problems, collaborate with others, and transfer knowledge across contexts.

Such developments reflect the growing recognition that effective education requires learning experiences that engage students cognitively, emotionally, and socially rather than merely ensuring the completion of prescribed instructional content. Consequently, contemporary educational reforms place teachers at the center of pedagogical transformation because they are responsible for interpreting policy expectations and translating them into classroom practice.

Within this broader movement, the concept of Deep Learning has gained increasing attention as an educational orientation that promotes conceptual understanding, reflective thinking, learner engagement, and the meaningful application of knowledge. Deep Learning differs fundamentally from surface learning, which often emphasizes memorization and procedural task completion. Instead, it encourages students to actively construct understanding, connect new knowledge with prior experiences, monitor their own learning processes, and apply learning in authentic situations. From this perspective, learning quality is reflected not only in students' academic achievement but also in their capacity to understand, reflect, communicate, and continuously improve their learning.

In language education, the principles underlying Deep Learning are particularly relevant because language learning is inherently communicative, interactive, and meaning-oriented. Learning English successfully requires learners to participate actively in meaningful communication, negotiate meaning, respond to feedback, and gradually develop confidence in using the target language. Consequently, contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT) has progressively moved away from teacher-dominated instruction toward learner-centred approaches that emphasize authentic communication, collaboration, learner autonomy, and formative assessment. These perspectives share an important assumption with Deep Learning: meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct understanding through purposeful participation rather than passively receiving information.

The relationship between Deep Learning and English Language Teaching can also be understood through the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT emphasizes meaningful communication as the primary objective of language instruction, where classroom activities are designed not merely to practice linguistic forms but to encourage learners to use language for authentic purposes. Likewise, learner-centred pedagogy positions students as active participants who negotiate meaning, reflect on their learning, and gradually assume greater responsibility for their own progress. Within these perspectives, classroom enjoyment alone is insufficient.

Productive English learning requires meaningful interaction, purposeful instructional design, continuous feedback, and opportunities for learners to develop communicative competence. Therefore, the principles of Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) learning introduced within Indonesia's Deep Learning policy appear conceptually compatible with established theories of effective language teaching.

Recognising these educational developments, the Indonesian Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has recently strengthened the implementation of Deep Learning (*Pembelajaran Mendalam*) within the Merdeka Curriculum. Rather than introducing a completely new curriculum, the policy encourages teachers to organise learning through three interconnected principles: Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful learning. Mindful learning emphasizes students' awareness of learning goals and self-regulation throughout the learning process.

Meaningful learning encourages students to connect new knowledge with their experiences and apply learning in relevant contexts. Joyful learning seeks to establish psychologically safe, engaging, and motivating classroom environments that encourage active participation. Collectively, these principles represent a shift from procedural instruction toward learning experiences that promote deeper understanding and sustained learner engagement.

Despite its conceptual clarity at the policy level, the enactment of Deep Learning depends largely on teachers' interpretations. Educational policies rarely enter classrooms as fully developed instructional practices. Instead, teachers actively interpret policy messages, negotiate them with existing professional knowledge, and adapt them according to contextual realities. Policy enactment scholars therefore argue that educational reforms should not be understood as linear processes of implementation but as complex processes of interpretation, mediation, and professional decision-making.

Similarly, research on teacher cognition suggests that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and contextual understandings substantially influence how pedagogical innovations are translated into classroom practice. Consequently, teachers' perceptions become an important lens for understanding how educational reforms are realized within classrooms.

This issue becomes particularly significant within English Language Teaching. English is a performance-based subject in which successful learning depends not only on students' linguistic knowledge but also on their willingness to communicate, confidence to make mistakes, motivation to participate, and opportunities to receive meaningful feedback. Adolescents at the lower secondary level frequently experience anxiety when learning English, especially when classroom environments emphasize correctness rather than communication. Consequently, classroom climate plays an essential role in determining students' participation and language development. The MMJ framework therefore appears highly relevant because it simultaneously addresses cognitive engagement, meaningful learning experiences, and positive emotional conditions that support language learning.

Within the Indonesian educational context, *Guru Penggerak* occupy a particularly strategic position in implementing educational reforms. Beyond their instructional responsibilities, *Guru Penggerak* is expected to serve as instructional leaders who facilitate professional learning, model innovative teaching practices, and support curriculum implementation within their schools. Their interpretations of Deep Learning are therefore important not only for their own classrooms but also for broader professional communities in which they influence colleagues' pedagogical practices. Understanding how these teacher leaders perceive MMJ consequently provides valuable insight into the early enactment of Indonesia's Deep Learning policy.

Although studies examining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum have increased in recent years, existing research has predominantly focused on teachers' readiness, curriculum adaptation, implementation challenges, or general perceptions of educational reform. Comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how teachers conceptualise Deep Learning itself

through the MMJ framework, particularly within English Language Teaching. Furthermore, previous studies generally treat teachers as a homogeneous professional group, while limited attention has been given to Guru Penggerak as teacher leaders who are specifically expected to model policy-aligned pedagogical practice. As a result, important questions remain regarding how these teachers interpret Deep Learning conceptually, how they evaluate its relevance to English language teaching, and how they anticipate potential challenges in its classroom enactment.

Another limitation of existing research concerns the tendency to evaluate policy implementation primarily through observable classroom practices rather than through teachers' professional interpretations. However, teachers' perceptions constitute an essential stage of policy enactment because instructional decisions originate from how teachers understand educational ideas before translating them into classroom actions. Exploring teachers' perceptions therefore provides a deeper explanation of why implementation may vary even when teachers operate within similar curriculum frameworks.

Responding to these gaps, this article focuses exclusively on the first research question derived from a broader qualitative study:

How do English Guru Penggerak teachers perceive the enactment of Deep Learning through the principles of Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful learning in lower secondary English classrooms?

Specifically, the study explores teachers' conceptual understanding of MMJ, its perceived relevance to English language teaching, the benefits associated with its implementation, and teachers' concerns regarding the quality of its enactment. Rather than viewing perception simply as an expression of approval or rejection, this study conceptualises teachers' perceptions as a process of professional sense-making through which policy ideas are interpreted, negotiated, and transformed into pedagogical meaning.

This study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it extends discussions of curriculum enactment by examining how English teachers interpret Deep Learning before implementation becomes observable classroom practice. Second, it contributes to research on teacher cognition by demonstrating that teachers' perceptions represent an active process of professional meaning-making rather than passive acceptance of educational policy. Third, by focusing on English Guru Penggerak, the study provides empirical evidence regarding how teacher leaders interpret a newly introduced pedagogical policy within lower secondary English education. The findings are expected to enrich current discussions of Deep Learning, teacher cognition, and English language teaching while providing practical implications for supporting teachers in implementing the MMJ framework more effectively.

2. Method

This article reports a descriptive qualitative inquiry derived from a broader thesis study. The design was selected because the study aimed to stay close to participants' own meanings and professional interpretations regarding Deep Learning through MMJ principles in lower secondary English teaching. The present article narrows the analysis to the first research question on teachers' perceptions.

The participants were eight English Guru Penggerak teaching at the SMP level in North Gorontalo Regency, Indonesia. Because the total accessible population was small and clearly bounded, all eligible teachers were included. The participants taught in both urban and rural public schools and had teaching experience ranging from ten to sixteen years.

Data were collected mainly through semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed individually to explore how they understood MMJ, how relevant they considered it for SMP English learning, what benefits they associated with it, and what concerns they had about its implementation. To strengthen credibility, selected teaching documents such as modules, worksheets, and assessment instruments were reviewed as triangulation materials.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher first familiarized herself with the transcripts, then developed initial codes related to conceptual understanding, relevance, benefits, and implementation concerns. The codes were grouped into broader categories and refined into themes that represented patterned meanings across participants' accounts. This article presents only the themes directly related to teachers' perceptions of MMJ.

3. Results

Theme 1. Teachers' Conceptual Understanding of Deep Learning through MMJ

Participants generally perceived Deep Learning through the Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) framework as a pedagogical approach that improves the quality of learning rather than introducing a completely new teaching method. Most teachers explained that the principles of MMJ had already been reflected in their classroom practices, but the new policy provided a clearer framework for designing learning that is more conscious, meaningful, and enjoyable. Participant 2 described Deep Learning as an improvement of existing practices within the Merdeka Curriculum, while Participant 5 emphasized that MMJ integrates students' cognitive, emotional, and social development into a holistic learning experience.

Although participants shared positive perceptions of MMJ, their conceptual understanding varied. Some teachers demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the three principles, whereas others acknowledged that they were still developing their knowledge through workshops, teacher learning

communities, and independent learning. For example, Participant 1 admitted having limited understanding of the new policy, while Participant 7 explained that professional development activities had helped strengthen their understanding of Deep Learning. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers viewed MMJ positively and regarded it as a valuable framework for improving English language teaching, although their understanding of its concepts was still evolving.

Theme 2. Teachers' Perceived Relevance of MMJ to English Language Teaching

Participants consistently perceived the Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) framework as highly relevant to English language teaching. They believed that English learning requires more than mastering vocabulary and grammar; it should also encourage students to communicate, participate actively, and connect learning with real-life situations. Participant 2 explained that English learning becomes more effective when students understand how language is used in everyday life rather than simply memorizing linguistic forms. Similarly, Participant 5 emphasized that students learn more meaningfully when they engage in discussions, role plays, and problem-solving activities using English rather than merely listening to teacher explanations.

Participants also emphasized that the MMJ framework creates a more supportive learning environment for lower secondary students. Several teachers noted that enjoyable learning helps reduce students' fear of making mistakes and increases their confidence to speak English. At the same time, they stressed that the three principles should be implemented as an integrated framework rather than as separate components. As Participant 6 stated, enjoyable learning without clear learning goals may lose its educational value, while Participant 3 highlighted that students' awareness of learning objectives makes learning more meaningful and enjoyable. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers perceived MMJ as a suitable pedagogical framework for creating communicative, engaging, and student-centred English classrooms.

Theme 3. Teachers' Perceived Educational Benefits of MMJ

Participants perceived that implementing the MMJ framework brought several educational benefits to English language learning. They consistently reported that MMJ increased students' learning motivation, classroom engagement, and willingness to participate in English activities. Teachers explained that when learning was designed to be meaningful and enjoyable, students became more active in asking questions, expressing ideas, and communicating in English. Participant 3 noted that students showed greater enthusiasm because they understood the purpose of learning and felt more involved in classroom activities. Likewise, Participant 6 observed that students were more confident to participate and collaborate with their peers when the learning environment was supportive and enjoyable.

Beyond improving participation, participants also believed that MMJ supported deeper understanding and long-term learning. Several teachers explained that students were more likely to remember and apply English when learning activities were connected to real-life contexts and their own experiences. Participant 5 emphasized that meaningful learning helped students understand concepts more deeply rather than simply memorizing vocabulary or grammar, while Participant 8 stated that students became more independent and responsible for their own learning. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers viewed MMJ not only as a strategy to create enjoyable classrooms but also as a pedagogical framework that promotes active participation, meaningful understanding, and sustainable learning outcomes

Theme 4. Teachers' Concerns Regarding the Enactment of MMJ

Although participants expressed positive perceptions of the MMJ framework, they also raised several concerns regarding its implementation in English classrooms. A common concern was that teachers might misunderstand MMJ as merely creating enjoyable classroom activities without ensuring meaningful learning and clear instructional goals. Several participants emphasized that joyful learning should not be interpreted simply as games or entertainment but should remain focused on achieving learning objectives. They also noted that successful implementation requires teachers to have a sound understanding of all three principles—Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful—rather than applying them separately or superficially.

Participants further highlighted the importance of continuous professional development to support effective enactment of the MMJ framework. They believed that collaboration through teacher learning communities, workshops, and professional discussions would help teachers develop a shared understanding of Deep Learning and avoid inconsistent classroom practices. As reflected in several interviews, participants viewed MMJ as a promising pedagogical framework; however, its success depends largely on teachers' professional competence in translating policy into meaningful classroom practice. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers' concerns were directed not at the policy itself but at the quality and consistency of its enactment in everyday teaching.

4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that English Guru Penggerak teachers generally perceived Deep Learning through the Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) framework as a pedagogical orientation that supports the improvement of English language teaching rather than as a completely new instructional approach. Participants associated MMJ with learner-centred instruction, meaningful communication, and active student engagement, suggesting that they interpreted

the policy through the lens of their existing pedagogical knowledge and classroom experiences.

This finding supports the perspective of teacher cognition, which argues that teachers do not implement educational reforms mechanically but actively interpret and reconstruct new policy ideas based on their professional beliefs, knowledge, and teaching contexts. The variation in participants' conceptual understanding also indicates that teachers' perceptions are continuously shaped through professional learning and collaborative reflection rather than through policy dissemination alone.

The study further reveals that teachers perceived the MMJ framework as highly compatible with the communicative nature of English language teaching. Participants believed that meaningful and enjoyable learning encourages students to communicate more confidently, participate actively, and connect classroom learning with authentic contexts. These perceptions align with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasize meaningful interaction, learner participation, and authentic language use as essential elements of effective language learning.

Rather than viewing joyful learning as entertainment, participants considered it an important condition for reducing students' anxiety and fostering a positive classroom environment that supports language development. This finding suggests that teachers recognized the complementary relationship between cognitive engagement, emotional support, and meaningful communication in promoting successful English learning.

Despite these positive perceptions, participants consistently emphasized that the effectiveness of MMJ depends on teachers' ability to integrate the three principles into coherent classroom practice. Their concerns were directed not toward the policy itself but toward the possibility of superficial implementation when joyful activities are not accompanied by clear learning goals and meaningful learning experiences.

This finding extends previous discussions on policy enactment by highlighting that successful curriculum reform relies not only on teachers' acceptance of new policies but also on their professional capacity to translate policy into pedagogically meaningful practice. Therefore, strengthening teachers' conceptual understanding through continuous professional development and collaborative learning communities remains essential for realizing the intended goals of Deep Learning in English language classrooms.

5. Conclusion

This study explored English Guru Penggerak teachers' perceptions of the enactment of Deep Learning through the Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) framework in lower secondary English classrooms. The findings indicate that teachers generally perceived MMJ as a pedagogical framework that enhances the

quality of English language teaching rather than as a completely new instructional approach. Participants viewed MMJ as relevant to the communicative and learner-centred nature of English learning because it promotes meaningful communication, active student engagement, and a supportive classroom environment. At the same time, the findings revealed that teachers' conceptual understanding of MMJ varied, leading to concerns that the framework could be implemented superficially if its three principles were not integrated coherently into classroom practice.

This study contributes to the growing discussion on teacher cognition and curriculum enactment by demonstrating that teachers' perceptions play a central role in translating educational policy into pedagogical practice. The findings suggest that the successful implementation of Deep Learning depends not only on policy adoption but also on teachers' professional understanding and continuous learning.

Therefore, sustained professional development, collaborative teacher learning communities, and ongoing pedagogical support are essential to strengthen teachers' capacity to enact the MMJ framework effectively. As this study involved a limited number of English Guru Penggerak teachers from one regency, future research is encouraged to include broader educational contexts and multiple data sources, such as classroom observations and students' perspectives, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of Deep Learning in English language education.

6. Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all English Guru Penggerak teachers who generously shared their time, experiences, and perspectives throughout this study. Their valuable insights made this research possible. The authors also extend their appreciation to the supervisors and lecturers of the English Education Master's Program for their academic guidance and constructive feedback during the completion of this research. Finally, the authors are grateful to SMP Negeri 4 Atinggola and all parties who provided support throughout the research process.

7. References

- Ausubel, D. P. (2000). *The acquisition and retention of knowledge: A cognitive view*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. Routledge.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81–109.
- Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. Continuum.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia. (2025). *Pembelajaran mendalam (Deep Learning): Menuju pendidikan bermutu untuk semua*. Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah.
- Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia. (2022). *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Kemendikbudristek.
- Barkhuizen, G., & Consoli, S. (2021). Pushing the edge in narrative inquiry. *System*, 102, 102656.
- Cheng, X., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Sustaining university EFL learners' writing performance through comprehensive written corrective feedback. *Sustainability*, 13(15), 8192.
- Jeon, J., Lee, S., & Coronel-Molina, S. M. (2024). Rethinking AI: Bias in speech-recognition chatbots for ELT. *ELT Journal*, 78(4), 435–445.
- Ricita, D. A., Halim, A., & Sunarti. (2025). Exploring teachers' and students' perceptions of deep learning: Integrating meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning in ELT classrooms. *Borneo Educational Journal*.
- Putra, M. E., Sani, N. L., Sabrina, Nugraha, D., & Haryanti. (2026). Teachers implementation of Deep Learning in ELT: An activity theory perspective. *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa, dan Sastra*.

Adelmi Kurniawati Ds, Hasanuddin Fatsah, Muziatun Mukadji, Moon Hidayati Otoluwa, Sartin Miolo
Teachers' Sense-making of English Guru Penggerak in Implementing Deep Learning through Mindful, Meaningful, Joyful Learning Principles

- Ngo, J. (2025). A critical review of post-pandemic ELT intersections: Language, identity, and sustainability. *English Learning Innovation*.
- Loan, H. T. B. (2024). Exploring Self-Determination Theory in ELT: A content analysis of research trends between 2020 and 2024. *ICTE Conference Proceedings*.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Pearson.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. UNESCO.