

Contrastive Study of Deep Learning in Senior and Vocational High School English Instruction

¹Kusuma Adilla, ²Semi Sukarni, ³Juita Triana

^{1,2,3}Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo

Purworejo, Indonesia.

adilla.umpwr@gmail.com , semisukarni@umpwr.ac.id , juitatriana@gmail.com

Abstract. This study aims to analyze differences in the implementation of deep learning in English language instruction at Senior High Schools (SMA) and Vocational High Schools (SMK). This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, utilizing data collection techniques such as observation and interviews with two English teachers at SMA and two English teachers at SMK. The data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model that includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of deep learning in both educational levels equally apply the principles of meaningful, joyful, and mindful learning. In high schools, learning focuses more on developing critical thinking and communication skills through activities such as speaking classes and group discussions linked to students' daily lives. Meanwhile, in vocational high schools, learning is more oriented toward workplace needs, such as job interview simulations, writing job applications, and skill-based projects aligned with students' fields of expertise. The main difference lies in the orientation of learning, where high schools emphasize academic and communication aspects, while vocational high schools place greater emphasis on work readiness and vocational contexts. Nevertheless, both levels share the same goal: to create active, meaningful, and relevant learning experiences for students.

Keywords: deep learning, joyful, meaningful, mindful

Introduction

Education in Indonesia has undergone various changes in its system and curriculum. These changes have been influenced by political, social, and cultural changes that have affected the direction and priorities of education (Hidayat et al., 2025). Education today faces increasingly complex challenges amid rapid

* Corresponding author: Kusuma Adilla: adilla.umpwr@gmail.com

globalization, advances in digital technology, and changes in society and culture (Suryadi, n.d.). Improving the quality of learning is one of the main priorities of Indonesia's education system in this era of curriculum reform (Handayani et al., n.d.). Education in Indonesia today requires a learning process that focuses not only on superficial mastery of material, but also on the development of higher-order thinking skills, problem solving, creativity, and communication skills. It is no longer enough for students to simply acquire factual knowledge; they must also develop comprehensive skills that enable them to adapt, collaborate, innovate, and solve problems (Widiyawati et al., 2021). To meet these needs, educational models must shift from a traditional teacher-centered paradigm to a student-centered approach that encourages active learning and relevance to the real world (Al-Qoyyim & Kurniawan, 2025). Given these demands, deep learning has become the strategy of choice to meet them.

In this section, the authors aim to present the results of previous research in order to identify research gaps—areas that have not yet been explored by previous researchers. The first exploratory study on the pedagogical application of deep learning, conceptualized in an English language classroom and examining how it contributes to the development of students' learning skills in high school, was conducted by (Pramudya et al., 2025), concluding that deep learning positively contributes to the development of students' skills. Additionally, (Prihantoro et al., 2025) investigated the concepts, implementation, and challenges of deep learning in Indonesian education. The findings of the study indicate that the use of deep learning methods has a positive impact on improving students' motivation, participation, and ability to think reflectively. Another exploratory study was conducted by (Utomo & Prayitno, 2025), which explored appropriate and implementable strategies for designing a deep learning approach suitable for vocational high schools (SMK) in Indonesia. This study revealed that project-based learning, digital reflection, and interdisciplinary collaboration are effective strategies for improving students' conceptual understanding and practical skills.

Another study examined English teachers' readiness to implement deep learning strategies (Fitrah et al., 2025). The results of the study indicate that although teachers demonstrate sufficient knowledge, their competence in applying these strategies remains underdeveloped (Riani & Sujarwati, 2025). For other related studies, such as English teachers' perceptions of the implementation of deep learning were conducted by Wahyuni and Noor (2025) and Aji & Yayuk (2025). Additionally, a study on the views of Indonesian vocational school students regarding deep learning in English language education had been done by Apoko et al. (2025).

Based on a review of the literature from previous studies, it can be concluded that no previous research has addressed this specific theme or employed a design like the one used in this study. Therefore, the uniqueness of this study lies in its research objective, which is to examine how the deep learning approach is implemented in English language instruction at senior high schools and vocational high schools, as well as to identify differences in its implementation between the two. Recognizing that deep learning approaches are relevant to the current situation and have a significant impact on the Indonesian

education system, the researcher felt it was important to conduct research on this topic.

Deep Learning

The deep learning approach has been implemented in Indonesia all school levels, including high schools and vocational schools. The implementation of deep learning has been promoted through the “*Merdeka Belajar*” framework, which encourages teachers to design student-centered, reflective, and contextually meaningful learning activities (Wahyuni & Noor, 2025). Deep learning is an approach that focuses on deeper mastery, connections between ideas, analytical thinking, and application in everyday contexts (Ambarita et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, deep learning is not a curriculum, but rather a learning approach—just like other approaches that have previously been implemented nationwide in schools: active learning, contextual teaching and learning, and the scientific approach (Apoko et al., 2025). Unlike artificial intelligence (AI)-based deep learning, this method emphasizes meaningful, conscious, enjoyable learning that involves students' thinking, feelings, and social growth (T. Wisnu Warnia Wr et al., 2026). This method emphasizes relevant, conscious, and engaging learning that encompasses students' cognitive, emotional, and social aspects (Prihantoro et al., 2025). In this approach, teachers are expected to apply the eight dimensions of the graduate profile: spiritual, ethical, intellectual, emotional, social, creative, global, and independence (Kembara, 2025). In this learning process, teachers play the role of facilitators who design meaningful learning through active learning strategies and tasks that are relevant to students' lives. In this way, deep learning focuses not only on cognitive learning outcomes, but also on developing students' attitudes, skills, and abilities in using knowledge contextually, especially in English language teaching.

English is an international language. Therefore, Indonesia has made English a compulsory subject at all levels of education. Most Indonesians learn English to communicate on the global stage, build cross-cultural relationships, and enhance interaction within the international community (Boy Jon et al., 2021). At school, proficiency in English enables students to engage with the world, gain knowledge, and improve their speaking and writing skills (Nasrullah & Saifuddin Amin, 2024). Indonesia has made significant progress in English language education through the government's efforts to improve teacher training, develop the curriculum, and use English as the medium of instruction in various schools (Daud, 2024). Deep learning in English language learning, particularly in listening, speaking, reading, and writing comprehension, can improve the quality of learning through contextual activities, in-depth learning, and meaningful interactions between students (Rahimi & Sevilla-Pavón, 2024). The application of deep learning approaches in English language learning, especially in high schools and vocational schools, is the first step towards creating progressive learning.

Deep Learning at Senior High School

According to (Pramudya et al., 2025) the implementation of deep learning in English language teaching at the high school level has shown significant

ability to improve students' speaking skills, confidence, collaboration, and creativity. With a contextual learning approach, interdisciplinary projects, and the use of technology, students are encouraged to connect the material with real-life experiences and situations, making the learning process more meaningful and student-centered. This approach also opens up opportunities for students to share their personal views, which encourages active engagement, including for those who previously participated less. However, the application of deep learning does not mean completely abandoning traditional methods. Methods such as grammar teaching, structured explanations, role-playing activities, and focused exercises remain crucial for strengthening students' basic skills. Therefore, it is important to maintain a balance between innovative and traditional methods so that the learning process becomes more varied, interesting, and effective, and can meet the needs of students who still require clear guidance.

Deep Learning at Vocational High School

The primary goal of vocational high schools is not merely to equip students with practical skills for their future careers, but also to help them develop the ability to communicate effectively in English (Putra et al., n.d.). According to (Utomo & Prayitno, 2025) in previous research, a deep learning approach in vocational education, particularly in vocational high schools, is essential for meeting the competency requirements of the 21st century and the digital age. Meaningful, enjoyable, and mindful learning through approaches such as project-based learning, digital reflection, and interdisciplinary collaboration can connect theory and practice more effectively. Authentic assessment using portfolios, project presentations, and reflective journals has proven to be more effective in measuring students' ability to apply what they have learned. The successful implementation of deep learning requires improving teachers' skills through pedagogical training, emotional and social reinforcement, and professional learning communities, along with the use of digital technology as a driver in the learning process. This approach is a strategic necessity to make vocational education more responsive to technological advances and working conditions.

Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative study. Data were collected through observation and interviews. Observations were conducted by observing the teaching process at the high school and vocational school levels in the context of English language learning using an in-depth learning approach. In addition, the interview method was conducted by interviewing English teachers. The respondents in this study consisted of two English teachers from senior high schools and two from vocational high schools. The participants were selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) currently teaching English at the high school or vocational high school level, (2) have knowledge and experience in applying the principles of deep learning, and (3) are willing to participate in an interview and classroom observation. The respondents were assigned the codes T1, T2, T3, and T4 to maintain confidentiality. The interview data were presented with the corresponding code and date interview. Observations and interviews were conducted at the Senior High School on February 10, 2026, and February 11, 2026. Then, on February 12, 2026, and February 13, 2026, the researcher

collected data at the Vocational High School. This study utilized two tools: an observation checklist and an interview guide. The data obtained from observations were used to identify differences in the application of deep learning methods in English language instruction at the high school and vocational school levels. Additionally, the data generated from interviews served to corroborate the observational findings. The interactive data analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman was applied to analyze the data. This data analysis process consists of four steps: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion.

In data collection, data was collected from two instruments, namely an observation checklist and an interview guide. Data from observations was used to find differences in the application of deep learning approaches in English teaching in high schools and vocational schools. Furthermore, data from interviews was used to support data from the observation checklist regarding differences in the application of the deep learning approach in teaching English in high schools and vocational schools. Data reduction was carried out by selecting data by the researcher and removing data that was not related to the focus of the study. Data presentation was carried out by presenting the data in the form of evidence and descriptions.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the authors analyze the application of deep learning in English language instruction at the high school level. The author employed classroom observation during English lessons and conducted interviews with two high school teachers. The aspects compared in the implementation of deep learning in senior high schools (SMA) and vocational high schools (SMK) include the application of deep learning principles such as meaningful learning, joyful learning, and mindful learning. Another aspect compared is the implementation of the 8 Graduate Profiles in SMA and SMK. Deep learning in Senior High Schools (SMA) and Vocational High Schools (SMK) has several distinguishable differences. In SMA, learning focuses more on theoretical understanding, the development of critical thinking skills, and preparation for continuing education at the university level. Meanwhile, in SMK, learning places greater emphasis on practical skills and work readiness in line with students' fields of expertise.

Table 1. Observations result of deep learning principles in Senior High School

Indicators	Implementation
Meaningful Learning	- Teachers convey learning objectives clearly and contextually. At the start of each lesson, teachers explain the learning objectives and what will be studied that day. - Teachers relate the material to the students' real lives. In the Narrative Text material, teachers present figures as inspiration, such as environmental activists, and relate them to situations relevant to students, such as disposing of trash in its proper place. - The material is relevant to the students' needs and experiences. Narrative texts are useful for honing

	creativity, improving language skills, and expanding vocabulary. News texts can broaden students' knowledge and improve their critical thinking skills.
Joyful Learning	- Learning encourages students to discover the meaning of the material because students not only learn about theory but also absorb the moral messages that can be taken from the material. - Assignments require understanding, not just memorization. Teachers give assignments to analyze opinions and facts and write narrative texts. - The classroom atmosphere was positive and enjoyable because the teacher inserted jokes and games in between lessons. - Teachers create warm interactions and show appreciation for students, making students enthusiastic about participating in class. - Teachers use varied teaching methods or media such as attractive PowerPoint presentations and AI. - There is no pressure or excessive fear among students because teachers guide them to learn as cheerfully as possible. - Learning encourages cooperation and togetherness because teachers give group assignments to create narrative texts.
Mindful Learning	- Teachers give students time to think before answering. This can also be seen when teachers assign tasks to find opinions and facts in a text. The same applies when teachers assign tasks to answer vocabulary questions found in previous lessons. - Students showed focus and active engagement. This was evident when students were able to answer the teacher's questions correctly and all students were able to come to the front to write down their answers. - Teachers encourage reflection during or after learning, and students are able to evaluate their learning process. At the end of the lesson, teachers ask students what they have learned or gained, and students are able to answer. - Teachers provide constructive feedback. This is evident when teachers walk around to observe students' work, answer questions, and offer suggestions.

Table 2. Observations result of 8 Graduate Profiles applied in Senior High School teaching process

Indicators		Implementation
8 Graduate Profiles applied by students	Believe in and be devoted to God Almighty	Students pray before starting their lessons.
	Independent	Students work on assignments independently or not in groups.
	Critical Thinking	Students can analyze the differences between facts and opinions.

8 Graduate Profiles applied by teachers	Creative	Students can produce products or works such as narrative texts.
	Collaboration	Students are able to work together on group assignments and respect the opinions of their peers.
	Effective Communication	Students are able to convey ideas clearly and politely. This can be seen in speaking class activities where students come to the front of the class to convey or tell stories using English.
	Believe in and be devoted to God Almighty	The teacher always reminds us to pray before starting class.
	Independent	Teachers provide opportunities for students to learn and make decisions independently.
	Critical Thinking	Teachers facilitate analysis, evaluation, and problem solving, such as walking around the classroom to see the results of students' work and then providing feedback.
	Creative	Teachers provide space for diverse ideas, works, or solutions.
	Collaboration	Teachers design collaboration-based learning.
	Global Diversity	Teachers respect differences in students' views. For example, they do not force students to agree with the teacher's opinion.
	Effective Communication	Teachers facilitate reflection on the learning process and outcomes.

Based on the observation results, the implementation of learning at the high school level indicates that the principles of meaningful, joyful, and mindful learning have been applied in the English language learning process. Regarding meaningful learning, teachers were observed clearly communicating learning objectives at the beginning of each lesson. This helps students understand the direction and purpose of learning, making the learning activities more focused. Additionally, teachers also connect the material to students' real lives, for example, by using inspirational figures in narrative texts relevant to students' daily lives. This approach makes the learning material more meaningful because students not only learn the theory but also understand the values and moral messages contained within it. This is further supported by the results of teacher interviews.

“English language instruction, particularly that which emphasizes mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, has already been implemented. All teachers have made every effort to make learning as enjoyable, as meaningful, and as effective as possible.” (T1, February 10, 2026)

Teachers strive to create a fun learning atmosphere so that students are interested in English. According to teachers, fostering a love for English is an important first step, because without student interest, the learning process becomes more difficult. This is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted how enjoyment in the learning process fosters students' emotional engagement, making it easier for them to understand, remember, and apply the

knowledge they have acquired (Safira & Astuti, 2025). Therefore, teachers use various learning techniques and media, as well as incorporating humor or jokes to create a more relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere.

“When encouraging students, the first step is to foster a love for the English language. If a student doesn’t like it, it will be very difficult for them to learn English. Enjoyment is indeed a key factor—even though I try to make the students happy, there will always be some who aren’t. We try to minimize that dislike as much as possible, so it doesn’t turn into antipathy toward English. Yes, the learning process varies with different techniques, different media, and is often interspersed with fun jokes.” (T1, February 10, 2026)

In an effort to foster mindful learning, teachers encourage students to actively engage in the learning process, especially through speaking activities or speaking classes. These activities are carried out regularly in each learning session so that students become accustomed to expressing their opinions in English. Although some students still experience difficulties or stutter when expressing their ideas, these activities continue to provide opportunities for students to think critically and practice their courage in communicating. Meanwhile, meaningful learning is achieved by relating the learning material to the students' real lives. Teachers strive to show that English language skills are not only useful in education, but also in everyday life, both within the family and in society. In this way, students are expected to understand the practical benefits of the material they are learning.

“The learning activity that best embodies deep learning while also developing students’ character and competencies is the Speaking Class. By speaking, students learn happily, fully aware that one day they will need English. Even if it’s not for their own future—for instance, if they aren’t planning to go to college—English will still be relevant to their future, perhaps in their family life. For example, when they become a father. ‘My dad is cool; he’s good at English.’ His child will be proud.” (T1, February 10, 2026)

In teaching practice, teachers also design activities that encourage collaboration and interaction among students, such as chain writing and chain translation activities in groups. Through these activities, students are encouraged to discuss, help each other understand the meaning of sentences, and develop critical thinking skills. In addition, technology such as PowerPoint and digital devices, are also used as learning support media, although they are not used in every meeting.

“To foster collaboration, we usually use chain writing or chain summarizing,” (T2, February 11, 2026)

“Because these days, with deep learning, you need to master the technology. So I use it whenever possible. But I don’t use it every time, not at every opportunity. Why? Because if we use it every time—for example, with Quizizz—it takes up a lot of time. For example, I might use Quizizz once or twice a semester, not every time. Because just the time spent on that alone is already significant. Then you have to wait for students to join, then they work on it, and then there might be technical issues, and so on. As for explanations, I use PowerPoint presentations more frequently. Because that’s what makes things easier for me, and if a student doesn’t understand, I can share the PowerPoint in the group. So students can learn on their own. As for the strategies and teaching methods, there are various approaches. There are projects, in-class activities, project-based learning—various methods depending on the material we want to convey.

Although the material we present can still be taught using all learning methods; it's just a matter of how we set them up.” (T1, February 10, 2026)

The implementation of learning is also aligned with the development of the Graduate Profile in students. Religious values are demonstrated through the practice of praying before lessons begin. Students' independence is evident in their ability to complete tasks on their own. Additionally, students' critical thinking skills develop through activities that involve analyzing facts and opinions in texts. Students' creativity is also evident in their ability to produce works such as narrative texts.

The aspect of collaboration is evident through group work activities that encourage students to collaborate and respect their peers' opinions. Effective communication skills are also evident when students present ideas or stories during speaking classes. This demonstrates that learning focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the development of students' social and communication skills.

The teacher's role is also crucial in supporting the achievement of this Graduate Profile. Teachers do not merely act as content deliverers but also as facilitators who create space for students to think critically, be creative, and collaborate. Teachers also demonstrate an attitude of respecting the diversity of students' perspectives, reflecting the value of global diversity. Thus, the learning process in high school is not solely oriented toward academic achievement but also toward character development.

In terms of the students' role, deep learning-focused instruction positions them as active learners. Students are given the opportunity to collaborate in teams, exchange information with peers, and independently seek knowledge using digital tools. Therefore, the implementation of deep learning at the high school level emphasizes the importance of mastering communication, critical thinking, and collaboration skills through group discussions and presentations.

Table 3. Observations result of deep learning principles in Vocational High School

Indicators	Implementation
Meaningful Learning	- Teachers convey learning objectives clearly and contextually at the beginning of the lesson. They explain what will be learned. - Teachers relate the material to the students' real lives. This is conveyed in the middle of the lesson, where teachers make students aware that English is an important subject for their future. By mastering English, a person can have added value in the eyes of companies. - The material is relevant to the needs and experiences of students. The material at vocational schools is tailored to the needs of students to prepare them for the world of work, such as job interviews. - Learning encourages students to discover the meaning of the material. Not only are they taught the theory, but also the benefits of learning the material so that students understand how it can

- benefit their lives.
- Joyful Learning
- Assignments require understanding, not just memorization. Teachers give assignments that require students to write hypothetical narratives, encouraging them to think critically rather than just memorize.
 - The classroom atmosphere was positive and enjoyable because the teacher incorporated icebreakers into the lesson.
 - There is no undue pressure or fear among the students because the teacher fosters a warm and respectful atmosphere. The teacher acts as a friend to the students without diminishing the students' respect for the teacher.
 - The students seemed enthusiastic about the lesson. This was evident when they scrambled to ask the teacher whether their assignments were correct or not.
 - Students are not afraid to ask questions and express their opinions. They are able to come to the front of the class and actively ask the teacher questions about the assigned tasks.
 - Learning fosters cooperation and camaraderie. Teachers create opportunities for discussion and incorporate pair-based icebreakers to build rapport among students.
- Mindful Learning
- The teacher gives students time to think before answering. This is evident when students are given an open-ended assignment to create conditional sentences and write them on the board. Before the students come to the front, the teacher gives them time to think first.
 - Students demonstrate focus and active engagement. This is evident when students understand the material presented and are able to come to the front of the class to demonstrate the assigned task.
 - Teachers encourage reflection during or after lessons and provide constructive feedback. Teachers give students the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.
 - Students are able to explain their reasoning or thought process. This is evident when students can explain the reasons behind what they have done.
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Table 4. Observations result of 8 Graduate Profiles applied in Vocational High School teaching process

Indicators		Implementation
8 Graduate Profiles applied by students	Believe in and be devoted to God Almighty	Before class begins, the students say a prayer, and on Fridays, Muslim students recite the <i>Asmaul Husna</i> for 10 minutes.
	Independent	Students can think independently when working on assignments that are not group projects.
	Critical Thinking	Students can think critically when asked to create conditional sentences as a pre-test.
	Creative	Students can create job interview questions and answers based on their career goals or interests in a particular job.
	Collaboration	Students can discuss the assignment with their classmates.
8 Graduate Profiles applied by teachers	Effective Communication	Students can express their ideas clearly and politely. This is evident when they present hypothetical statements in front of the class.
	Believe in and be devoted to God Almighty	The teacher always reminds us to pray before class begins, has implemented a school program where Muslim students recite the <i>Asmaul Husna</i> every Friday, and always reminds us to keep the classroom clean.
	Independent	Teachers provide students with opportunities to learn and make decisions independently and encourage students to take responsibility for their learning process and outcomes.
	Critical Thinking	The teacher facilitates analysis, evaluation, and problem-solving by holding a question-and-answer session so that students can ask whether their work is correct or not, and the teacher provides feedback on it.
	Creative	Teachers make room for a variety of ideas, projects, or solutions. This is evident when students ask questions and teachers offer suggestions.
	Collaboration	The teacher designed a collaborative learning activity in which students conducted mock job interviews in pairs.
	Global Diversity	Teachers respect students' differing viewpoints and do not force students to agree exactly with the teacher's perspective.
	Effective Communication	The teacher gives students the opportunity to express their ideas both verbally and in writing by coming to the front of the class and writing on the board. The teacher also trains students to communicate using polite and clear language.

Based on an analysis of the teaching implementation tables at vocational high schools, it is clear that English teaching methods have applied the principles

of meaningful, engaging, and mindful learning. These three components serve to create a learning experience that focuses not only on mastery of the material but also on student participation and the relevance of instruction to their needs. These findings are also supported by interview results; the application of deep learning methods in English instruction also emphasizes three key elements: mindful learning, relevant learning, and enjoyable learning. However, within the context of vocational high schools, this application is more closely tied to the demands of the job market and students' fields of expertise.

"In 10th grade, there's a unit on describing. So, the students can describe tools. There are tools there, and the students describe the ones they usually use." (T4, February 12, 2026)

In terms of joyful learning, the teacher strives to create a pleasant learning environment by avoiding monotonous and overly lecture-centered teaching methods. The teacher fosters warm interactions with students so that the teacher-student relationship feels closer, while still maintaining a sense of respect. Teachers also incorporate ice-breaking activities during lessons to maintain student concentration. This makes students appear more enthusiastic about participating in the lesson. Teachers employ various strategies, such as group discussions, partner activities, and the use of visual aids, to enhance students' interest in learning. Effective classroom management is also considered crucial to ensure students feel comfortable and not overwhelmed during lessons.

"In vocational high schools, it's about the teachers' classroom management skills—how to make learning enjoyable. Because the key here is ensuring students don't feel pressured when the teacher enters the room. Or, back in my day, just hearing the teacher's footsteps—like 'duk-duk-duk'—would make me feel uneasy. Because the teacher was strict and so on. Or lessons where the teacher just sits there lecturing, so the students get sleepy and fall asleep. It's not fun at all. How can we, first and foremost, make it enjoyable for the students and so on. This actually varies from teacher to teacher. Classroom management, for example—whether they can manage the class." (T4, February 12, 2026)

In terms of meaningful learning, teachers relate learning materials to the world of work and students' fields of expertise. For example, students are asked to describe work tools according to their majors or conduct mock job interviews. In grade XII, students are even given the task of making mock job interview videos and writing job application letters tailored to their fields of expertise. These activities provide authentic learning experiences that are relevant to students' future needs.

"Some of the topics covered in vocational high school include job applications and job interviews—skills they'll use after graduation when applying for jobs. So, perhaps, I do place more emphasis on those topics and go into greater detail. For example, I assign tasks like simulating a job interview. This includes speaking practice, such as question-and-answer sessions related to job interviews." (T5, February 13, 2026)

Meanwhile, regarding mindful learning, the teacher gives students the opportunity to think before answering questions or completing tasks. For example, when students are asked to create conditional sentences and write them on the board, the teacher first allows time for students to think about their answers. This demonstrates that the learning process provides space for students to understand the material more deeply. Students also appear focused and

actively engaged in learning activities, such as when they can explain the reasoning or thought process behind the answers they provide. Additionally, teachers offer constructive feedback by conducting Q&A sessions and responding to students' work. This feedback helps students correct mistakes and enhance their understanding of the material being studied. Mindful learning is also fostered through the teacher's efforts to instill a sense of purpose in learning among students. The teacher emphasizes that English proficiency can influence future job opportunities and income levels. Furthermore, the teacher enforces classroom rules designed to maintain focus, such as asking students to put away their cell phones before class begins to prevent distractions.

"Sometimes I put it this way. Take technicians, for example. One technician speaks English, and another doesn't. I'm certain their salaries will eventually differ. If a technician speaks English, they'll at least get to work at an international company. And if it's an international company, they might even have opportunities abroad. Then they might work at a bank abroad. I'm certain their salary will be higher. Compared to when they don't master a foreign language or English." (T4, February 12, 2026)

"Then I make them most aware of how, as students, they must study—they've been entrusted by their parents to study, so they come to school to learn. They realize that once they enter the school, starting from the moment they step through the school gates, they must automatically follow the school rules. Then, when they enter the classroom and the teacher comes in, they have to study. That's why I often ask them to hand in their phones so they can focus. They are fully aware that they are studying. There are no distractions." (T4, February 12, 2026)

In the classroom, educators also incorporate the development of the eight dimensions of the graduate profile. The eight dimensions of the graduate profile that are frequently emphasized include faith and devotion to God Almighty, creativity, teamwork, independence, and communication skills. The learning process focuses not only on mastering subject content but also on character development through daily practices, project-based assignments, and group collaboration. Collaboration through discussions and group projects has helped students hone their social skills and ability to work in teams (Indahtriyan, 2025).

"First is prayer. That's clearly part of it. After praying, I ask them to check the cleanliness. Because as members of the school community, they must maintain cleanliness. But I tend to focus more on creativity because today's students will be required to be creative in the workplace. So I prioritize creativity. Creativity is a skill they must possess for the future. Unfortunately, many of them struggle after graduation. But if they possess a certain level of creativity—something that sets them apart from their peers—I'm confident they'll succeed." (T4, February 12, 2026)

"The graduate profile dimension I often emphasize is collaboration. Critical thinking is rare here because students need to be prompted first. They're more interested in productive or hands-on learning." (T5, February 13, 2026)

In addition, assessment in deep learning at vocational schools is carried out through diagnostic assessments, formative assessments, and project-based authentic assessments. Teachers assess students' understanding through various forms of assignments, such as presentations, discussions, and video projects, so that students' abilities can be observed more comprehensively. Authentic assessment systems that utilize portfolios, project presentations, and reflective journals have proven to be more effective in measuring students' practical skills compared to traditional assessment methods (Utomo & Prayitno, 2025).

“At the beginning, we conduct what’s called a diagnostic assessment to determine their learning styles—whether they’re auditory, kinesthetics, or others. Now, what I do is assign individual and group tasks, and I use those tasks to collect data and determine grades. For example, in the XI TKRD class, I administer a test and use the results to determine grades, and for the 12th-grade class, I assign a task to create a video interview. I then use those videos to determine their grades.” (T4, February 12, 2026)

Based on observations and interviews with high school and vocational school teachers, there are several differences in the implementation of deep learning in English language learning. First, the difference is seen in the learning context. In high school, learning is more focused on developing communication and critical thinking skills through speaking classes and group discussions. The learning material is generally related to students' daily lives and academic skill development. This is consistent with previous research indicating that language materials, such as advisory texts, can be related to real-life situations; students are then expected to think critically about the various issues they face in their daily lives so that they do not merely focus on memorizing structures, but can instead establish connections between linguistic concepts and their practical applications (Pramudya et al., 2025).

In contrast, at vocational schools, learning is more directed at the needs of the world of work and the students' fields of expertise. English material is often linked to vocational contexts, such as describing work tools, writing job application letters, and conducting mock job interviews. This shows that learning at vocational schools is more oriented towards preparing students to enter the world of work.

Second, differences can also be seen in the types of learning activities. In high schools, the most prominent learning activities are speaking classes and collaborative activities such as writing or chain translation. Meanwhile, in vocational schools, learning activities are more in the form of authentic projects, such as making video simulations of job interviews or other project assignments related to the students' fields of expertise. Vocational high school students enjoy project-based and problem-based learning activities that require active participation and real-world communication, and they feel more motivated and confident in using English for meaningful purposes outside the classroom (Indahtriyan, 2025).

Third, there are differences in the focus of student competency development. In high schools, the main focus is on developing critical thinking and communication skills through speaking activities. In contrast, in vocational schools, in addition to developing communication skills, learning also emphasizes creativity, collaboration, and readiness for the world of work.

However, both levels of education share similarities in the principle of applying deep learning, which is to create learning that is enjoyable, meaningful, and encourages active student participation. Teachers at both levels also utilize various collaborative learning methods and technological tools to support the learning process, such as Quizizz, PowerPoint, YouTube, and the application of artificial intelligence. This is consistent with previous research indicating that the use of technology plays a role in supporting the successful integration of deep learning (Zeng, 2025).

Overall, the difference in the implementation of deep learning between SMA and SMK lies mainly in the orientation of learning. SMA places more emphasis on developing academic and communication skills, while SMK places more emphasis on vocational contexts and work readiness, although both still prioritize the principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. A deep learning approach grounded in meaningful, mindful, and enjoyable learning is an effective strategy in modern education, and these three elements foster deep understanding, engagement, and student learning outcomes (Feriyanto & Anjariyah, 2024).

The stronger emphasis on vocational contexts in vocational high schools reflects the institutional goal of preparing students to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. Therefore, English language instruction is designed to be more practical and job-oriented, focusing on authentic tasks such as job interviews, workplace communication, and explanations of technical tools related to students' fields of study. In contrast, senior high schools tend to prioritize academic communication skills and critical thinking because students are generally prepared for higher education. Consequently, learning activities in senior high schools place greater emphasis on speaking practice, discussions, and analytical thinking that support academic development. These differences indicate that the implementation of deep learning is shaped not only by pedagogical principles but also by the broader educational goals of each institution.

The findings also indicate that deep learning is implemented flexibly in accordance with future needs and students' learning characteristics. In vocational high schools, project-based and contextual activities appear to boost student motivation because they can directly see the relevance of English to their future careers. Meanwhile, in academic high schools, discussion-based and reflective activities encourage students to develop broader analytical and communicative competencies, which are essential in an academic setting. This suggests that meaningful learning becomes more effective when instructional activities align with the educational orientation and future aspirations of students.

Conclusion

Based on research on the differences in the use of deep learning in English language instruction at Senior High Schools (SMA) and Vocational High Schools (SMK), it can be concluded that the implementation of deep learning at both educational levels focuses on three core principles: conscious learning, meaningful learning, and engaging learning. Teachers at both institutions strive to create learning experiences that are not only centred on the delivery of information but also on student active participation, a detailed understanding of the material, and a pleasant learning atmosphere.

The implementation of deep learning in high schools is focused on enhancing critical thinking skills and communication abilities, particularly through activities such as speaking classes, group discussions, and collaborative activities that allow students to express their opinions and engage in dialogue with their peers. The learning process is also grounded in the context of students' daily lives so that they can experience the tangible benefits of the material they are studying.

Meanwhile, the use of deep learning in vocational high schools is primarily aimed at enhancing skills that align with labor market demands and students' specializations. English language learning is often linked to vocational contexts, such as describing work tools, writing job application letters, and conducting mock job interviews. Additionally, the curriculum integrates the development of graduate profile dimensions through project-based activities, group work, and authentic assessment.

The main difference between the implementation of deep learning in senior high schools (SMA) and vocational high schools (SMK) lies in the orientation of learning. Learning in senior high schools tends to be oriented toward the development of academic and communication skills, whereas in vocational high schools, it is more oriented toward practical contexts and students' readiness to enter the workforce. Nevertheless, both levels of education share the same goal: to create meaningful, enjoyable learning that fosters students' active engagement in the learning process.

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of deep learning must be tailored to educational objectives and students' future needs at each level of education. At the high school level, deep learning can be maximized to enhance students' academic communication and critical thinking skills, whereas in vocational high schools, it can be focused on authentic learning experiences that support career preparation. Thus, teachers should design learning activities that are contextual, collaborative, and relevant to students' future aspirations.

This study was limited to a small number of participants and focused solely on English language learning at a specific institution. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more participants and investigate the implementation of deep learning across various subjects, school types, and different locations. Further research could also explore students' perspectives and analyze the long-term impact of deep learning on academic achievement, communication skills, and students' readiness to enter the workforce.

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