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**Editorial Page**

Utamax is an international journal of education aiming to build bridges between research and policy and address issues of concern to the different levels and types of education, transversal topics and 'big issues' for policy agendas. This includes an active and ongoing discussion of national and international education policy. The journal is also concerned with teaching and teacher education in general and devoted to all concerned with education and moral values.

Utamax: Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education is an international journal published triannual in March, July and November. The journal is dealing and committed to no single approach, discipline, methodology or paradigm to address the ultimate or 'big issues' of research and deliver the current trends in education. Authors must register to this journal before submitting their work, and they must follow the journal's Author Guidelines. Article submission is made through the online submission system of this journal. Further inquiries may be addressed to the Editors at [utamax@unilak.ac.id](mailto:utamax@unilak.ac.id)

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June 2025, Pekanbaru, Indonesia



It With great enthusiasm and a deep sense of academic commitment, I am pleased to present Volume 7, Number 1 of *Utamax: Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education*, the March 2025 edition. This issue reflects the collaborative effort of a dynamic scholarly community committed to advancing research, pedagogy, and innovation in education. I express my sincere appreciation to our contributing authors, peer reviewers, managing and associate editors, and the dedicated team at LPPM Universitas Lancang Kuning. Their consistent dedication and academic integrity have enabled the publication of this diverse and intellectually enriching collection.

This volume features seven rigorously reviewed articles that address timely issues in education across various levels and instructional settings. Each paper brings forward novel insights and practical strategies that are not only relevant to the Indonesian context but also extend their significance to educators, researchers, and policymakers around the globe.

The opening article by Maya Puspitasari explores English teachers' perceptions of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in junior secondary schools within semi-urban environments. Through qualitative inquiry, the study reveals that while teachers acknowledge the value of HOTS, their application is hindered by structural and contextual limitations, including inadequate resources and students' limited readiness. This paper contributes meaningfully to global discussions on equity in education by underscoring the need for tailored teacher training and systemic support. The emphasis on group-based professional development offers a viable strategy to empower educators and enhance pedagogical competence in similar educational settings across the world.

Following this, the second article by Hastini and colleagues presents a detailed examination of how speaking worksheets designed for professional communication improve student performance in higher education. The findings show significant gains in grammar, fluency, vocabulary use, and student engagement. This research is particularly relevant to institutions seeking to bridge the gap between academic English and professional workplace communication. By incorporating real-life scenarios and active learning strategies, the study provides an adaptable model for curriculum designers in English for Specific Purposes programs. Its implications are far-reaching for countries prioritizing employability and global communication skills in their higher education agenda.

The third paper by Nursalim and co-authors investigates the cognitive and psychological challenges faced by Indonesian EFL learners in the TOEFL reading section. The study identifies gaps between students' knowledge of reading strategies and their ability to apply them effectively under pressure. Drawing on cognitive linguistics, it offers a compelling explanation of how test anxiety, focus lapses, and limited mental stamina impact reading performance. This research is not only timely but essential for educators and testing authorities worldwide who are rethinking language assessment methods to better align with cognitive readiness and emotional resilience.

In the fourth contribution, Donal Matheos Ratu and collaborators examine the transformative role of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in writing education. What distinguishes this study is its comprehensive analysis of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive learner engagement. Rather than merely focusing on academic outcomes, the authors shed light on how learners develop leadership, collaboration, and reflective thinking through meaningful projects. The integration of emotional scaffolding, peer collaboration, and formative feedback emerges as an effective instructional model. For global educators aiming to shift from traditional writing instruction to more empowering and reflective pedagogies, this study offers a practical and inspiring blueprint.

The fifth article by Hidayati and her team explores the intersection of language competence and professional identity formation among EFL student-teachers during international teaching practicum programs. Through comparative case analysis, the study reveals how language skills influence classroom presence, self-perception, and adaptive teaching behavior. This research contributes significantly to the field of teacher education, especially in an era of increasing transnational mobility and multilingual learning environments. It emphasizes the importance of identity-based pedagogical approaches and reflective practice in preparing future teachers for diverse and challenging classroom realities.

In the sixth article, Jufriadi and Wahibah critically examine the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy within Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia. This study explores how the values of Islamic pedagogy, such as service, community benefit, and ethical responsibility, can be integrated into modern educational reforms. Although the conceptual synergy is evident, the paper highlights practical barriers, including curriculum alignment and institutional resistance. The contribution is particularly valuable for global policymakers and educational leaders seeking to harmonize traditional knowledge systems with contemporary reform agendas.

Finally, Ida Vera Sophya and colleagues present a compelling study on the use of a multidimensional eclectic teaching strategy in junior high school English education. The integration of cognitive, behavioral, humanistic, and social learning theories provides a rich instructional approach that supports diverse learning needs. The results indicate measurable improvements in student performance, with the eclectic method offering flexibility and depth in language learning. However, the study also reminds us that successful implementation relies heavily on teacher awareness and creativity. This finding is relevant to educational systems that are striving to personalize instruction and cultivate learner autonomy.

Altogether, the articles in this volume reflect a shared commitment to addressing the complexities and diversities of modern education. Whether through pedagogical innovation, curriculum reform, identity development, or language assessment, each paper offers scholarly depth, practical relevance, and the potential to inform global educational discourse.

On behalf of the editorial team, I warmly invite our readers, whether scholars, practitioners, or students, to engage with this issue. We remain committed to fostering international dialogue, academic excellence, and impactful research through every volume of *Utamax: Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education*.

With sincere appreciation and best academic wishes,  
*Utamax: Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education*



**Dr. Budianto Hamuddin**  
Editor in Chief