CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the research findings, which were analyzed using thematic analysis, and discusses the theoretical framework. The findings regarding the challenges and strategies in teaching English to autism spectrum disorder students were classified into three themes: (1) addressing ASD students characteristics and behavior, (2) maintaining effective communication with ASD students, and (3) integrating collaborative partnership with stakeholders in teaching English to ASD students. By exploring the initial research questions presented in Chapter Two, this chapter aims to offer valuable insights and support the researcher in formulating conclusions based on the research.

4.1. Addressing ASD Students' Characteristics and Behavior
4.1.1. Challenges in Addressing ASD Students' Characteristics and Behaviors

In grasping the data, the participant indicated one of the challenges in teaching English to autism spectrum disorder (further will be called ASD) students is addressing ASD students' characteristics and behaviors, particularly in social and learning needs. In particular, the participant described how they needed to help ASD students to regulate their emotion, social interactions and maintain focus during learning. The teacher further noted that one verbal student was hyperactive and struggling to maintaining focus. He was easily distracted by noise and struggling to maintain focus when he found the learning was dull. The other two students were non-verbal, similarly hyperactive, struggling to regulate emotions, sensitive to environmental factors such as noise and disruptions from classmates, affecting the relationship between the ASD students in that class. Since two of the students were non-verbal, when they felt discomfort, they often cried without reason, showing physical aggression, such as hitting and pulling hair. Since they easily get bored with the learning process, they might run around the classroom or even

the school field, stand on the chair or table, even climb the cupboard. As illustrated in the following excerpt,

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Excerpt 1

Challenges in Addressing ASD Students' Characteristics and Behavior

"And two of them are non-verbal autistic children, and one of them is also very hyperactive. Since they are non-verbal, they cannot communicate what they feel." (Interview I, 61-62, P, Author's translation)

"Sometimes the students suddenly cry without a reason. Even tantrums can occur, and sometimes the child becomes disturbed or uncomfortable with their friends." (Interview I, 157-159, P, Author's translation)

"Sometimes, during English lessons, the students do not want to study or prefers to play around outside, running around" (Interview I, 164-166, P, Author's translation)

"This has happened several times, where a child gets into a fight or becomes angry with their peer, then pulls hair, hits, and so on." (Interview I, 186-187, P, Author's translation)

The data showed that the participant indicated that addressing ASD students' characteristics being one of the challenges. This is consistent with study done by Maysuroh (2024) she noted teaching English to ASD students presents unique challenges related to regulating emotions, social interactions, and maintaining focus. This aligns with Adnyani et al. (2023), they highlighted that ASD students often struggle with regulating emotions, engaging in social interactions, and maintaining focus, which can significantly impact their language acquisition and overall educational experience. Additionally, ASD students may face obstacles in communication and social awareness, limiting their ability to engage effectively in language learning activities (Padmadewi, 2024). These students often exhibit unusual behaviors that can impact their learning process (Brahim, 2022). These challenges stem from the neuropsychiatric disabilities that affect ASD students' ability to interact socially, making it essential for teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate these specific needs (Maysuroh, 2024).

The teacher described frequently dealing with incidents where students denied to follow instructions or do tasks. For example, where she was

teaching numbers, some students refused to follow instructions to demonstrate numbers with their hands. In such situations, the teacher could not compel the students to comply, as it might disrupt their emotional state and lead to tantrums or other reactions. So, to teach numbers one to five could take a long time for the students to comprehend and need of repetition. Another instance of this issue occurred when students refused to engage with the materials prepared by the teacher. Their refusal was evident through behaviors such as hitting the table and tearing the book. Additionally, As illustrated in the following excerpt,

Excerpt 2
Challenges in Addressing ASD Students' Characteristics and Behavior
"Moreover, after preparing for it (lesson plan and teaching media), we cannot predict the mood or what might happen with the child." (Interview, 154-155, P, Author's translation)

The findings of behavioral issue in teaching ASD students aligns with Bock et al. (2016) they note that ASD students often exhibit challenging behaviors such as tantrums, refusal to follow instructions, and resistance to studying. These behaviors can be attributed to the discomfort experienced by students with ASD in less structured environments, leading to frustration and noncompliance (Bock et al., 2016). Additionally, students with ASD may have difficulties with social skills, communication, and behavioral challenges like obsessions and repetitive behaviors, which can impact their academic performance Kahveci et al., (2023). When asked to repeat tasks, some students with ASD may respond negatively with tantrums or refusals (Gelbar et al., 2021). Special education teachers may find that students with special education needs, including those with ASD, struggle to express their feelings accurately, leading to inappropriate responses and tantrums in class (Qi & Nordin, 2023). This reaction stems from the students' frustration and a sense of redundancy in performing tasks they feel they have already accomplished, which can further complicate their learning process and classroom management for teachers.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by the teacher in addressing the characteristics and behaviors of ASD students highlight the complexity of managing their emotional regulation, social interactions, and focus during

learning. The difficulties encountered, such as hyperactivity, sensitivity to noise, and non-verbal communication issues, underscore the need for tailored strategies to support these students effectively. The findings are consistent with existing research, which emphasizes the unique obstacles ASD students face in regulating emotions and engaging in educational activities (Adnyani et al., 2023; Maysuroh, 2024; Padmadewi, 2024). The observed behaviors, such as tantrums, refusal to follow instructions, and physical aggression, align with studies noting that such challenges are often linked to discomfort in less structured environments and difficulties with social skills and communication (Bock et al., 2016; Gelbar et al., 2021; Kahveci et al., 2023). These insights reveal the necessity for educators to develop adaptive teaching strategies that address the specific needs of ASD students, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and understanding in managing their diverse and often unpredictable behaviors (Qi & Nordin, 2023).

4.1.2. Strategies in Addressing ASD Students' Characteristics and Behaviors

The teacher's strategies in addressing ASD students' characteristics and behaviors when ASD students struggling to regulate their emotion is giving students break. The teacher noted that usually this occurred when they were overstimulated, so giving a little break could help them to be calm. This break could include sensory activities, such as playing with squishy toys, balls, or soft toys, or finding small objects like letters or numbers in rice/sand. These sensory activities could also help them to bring back their focus and remind them to the learning materials. Additionally, the teacher also taught them gesture of emotions to help the ASD students expressed their emotion, such as happy (touching both cheeks with the tips of your fingers and smile widely), sad (lowering the corners of your mouth and wipe your eyes as if you are crying), angry (clenching your fists and move your hands downward with an angry facial expression), and surprised (opening the mouth and place both hands on the cheeks with a surprised expression). The teaching process of those

gestures were also helped through flashcards containing the kinds of emotions. As illustrated in the following excerpt,

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Excerpt 3

Strategies in Addressing ASD Students' Characteristics and Behavior

"If a student appears restless or is experiencing overstimulation, as a teacher, I usually provide a brief break for sensory activities. These activities can help calm the students before returning to learning…. sometimes using gestures and flashcards to teach them example of emotions." (Interview II, 19-22;112-114, P, Author's translation)

Sensory-based interventions and sensory integration therapy are widely used to address sensory processing difficulties in children with ASD (Gričar, 2023). These approaches lay the groundwork for more tailored interventions by managing sensory challenges that can affect emotional regulation. For example, utilizing sensory activity schedules has been shown to be particularly beneficial in managing emotions, such as anxiety, in students with ASD (Mills & Chapparo, 2016). This approach complements the strategies of Prelinguistic Milieu Teaching, which focuses on fostering intentional communication through vocalizations, gestures, and eye contact. Dubin et al. (2019) highlight the promise of this method in enhancing communication skills in preschoolers with or at risk for ASD. Building on this foundation, the Multi-Stratal Model of Language Processing (MSMLP) model further underscores the importance of non-verbal cues like gestures, which enable students to express themselves beyond verbal communication (Elleuch, 2024). This holistic view integrates various methods to support and enhance communication and emotional regulation in students with ASD.

In conclusion, the teacher's use of sensory breaks and targeted gestures to address ASD students' emotional regulation reflects a well-rounded approach supported by established research. By incorporating sensory activities such as playing with tactile toys and engaging in search games, the teacher effectively mitigates overstimulation and helps students regain focus. Furthermore, teaching emotional gestures through flashcards aligns with methods like Prelinguistic Milieu Teaching and the MSMLP model, which emphasize the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication. This

integrated approach not only addresses sensory processing difficulties but also enhances ASD students' behavior, offering a comprehensive framework for supporting ASD students in both emotional and educational contexts.

4.2. Maintaining Effective Communication with ASD Students

4.2.1. Challenges in Maintaining Effective Communication with ASD Students

Effective communication is crucial for teaching, particularly in classroom management. The participant highlighted that maintaining effective communication in her classroom was challenging. These challenges affected both receptive and expressive language. With two non-verbal students and one verbal student, all of them faced similar difficulties in receptive and expressive language skills. Receptive language skill involves understanding what others are saying. The teacher stated at times ASD students struggled to understand what the teacher was saying. For example, when the teacher said "Look at me", "Let us count from 1 to 5", and "Sit down please", the ASD students did not immediately understand to what she was saying and she needed to repeat it again until the students understand her. Sometimes she integrated gesture to illustrate what she was saying so the students could understand it better. Meanwhile, expressive language skill is the "output" of language, the ability to express your wants and needs through verbal or nonverbal communication. The example of ASD students' expressive language skill difficulties was they found naming object challenging. So, when the teacher taught vocabulary such as "Sleep", "Eat", and "Book", the ASD students might not be able to name them or identified it through pictures. The students' difficulties in understanding receptive and expressive language skill were challenging for the teacher to deal with. This participant demonstrated this challenge in the following excerpt,

Excerpt 3
Challenges in Maintaining Effective Communication with ASD Students
"For first-grade students, learning English is still at the introductory level because they still face many difficulties in understanding the Indonesian language." (Interview, 69-70, P, Author's translation)

> "For these two children, their receptive and expressive language skills, even in daily activities, still involve many instructions or simple statements and words that they have not yet fully understood." (Interview, 297-300, P, Author's translation)

Data indicated that ASD students encountered more challenges with communication and social skills compared to students with other disabilities (Matthias et al., 2021). Vlcek et al. (2020) noted that ASD students encountered challenges in maintaining effective communication, including receptive and expressive language skills. These challenges encompassed difficulties in socialization, forming friendships, attention, following instructions, and executive functioning. Individuals with ASD often exhibited impairments in social communication and interaction, alongside engaging in restricted, repetitive behaviors and challenging behaviors like aggression and self-injury (Verschuur et al., 2021). Moreover, students with ASD frequently struggled with forming and maintaining social bonds, which could further hinder their communication abilities (Padmadewi, 2024) In conclusion, students with ASD encounter numerous challenges in maintaining effective communication, impacting both receptive and expressive language. These challenges span educational and social aspect, requiring tailored interventions, support systems, and educational strategies to meet the unique communication needs of individuals with ASD.

4.2.2. Strategies in Maintaining Effective Communication with ASD Students

To address challenges in maintaining effective communication with ASD students, who often face difficulties with receptive and expressive language skills, the teacher emphasized that teaching these skills requires an extensive and repetitive process. Given that her ASD students are in the first grade, they need continuous instruction and training to develop effective communication. To enhance this training process, the teacher implemented strategies such as giving rewards to motivate and reinforce positive behaviors and utilizing various educational teaching tools to aid learning. Additionally, she used a range of gestures to communicate basic instructions, vocabulary, emotions, activities, and time-related concepts, helping to bridge

communication gaps and support the students' understanding and expression. The gestures include:

1. Basic Instructions Gestures:
   - "Come here": Hand moves with palm up towards herself.
   - "Sit down": Palm downward, pressing the air.
   - "Stand up": Upward lifting motion.
   - "Stop": Hand raised with palm forward.

2. Vocabulary Gestures:
   - "Eat": Hand motion as if holding a spoon to mouth.
   - "Drink": Hand motion as if holding a glass to mouth.
   - "Sleep": Hands together like a pillow beside the head.
   - "Book": Palms open as if opening a book.

3. Emotions Gestures:
   - Happiness: Fingertips on cheeks, smiling widely.
   - Sadness: Mouth corners lowered, wiping eyes.
   - Anger: Clenched fists, downward motion with angry expression.
   - Surprise: Hands on cheeks, open mouth with surprised expression.

4. Activities Gestures:
   - "Play": Hands swinging as if on a swing.
   - "Run": Hands and feet moving quickly in place.
   - "Dance": Hands and hips moving with dance motions.
   - "Sing": Hand near mouth as if holding a microphone, mouth open as if singing.

5. Time-Related Gestures:
   - "Morning": Hand moves from bottom to top as if the sun is rising.
   - "Afternoon": Hand moves from middle to bottom as if the sun is setting.
   - "Night": Hands on cheeks as if sleeping, head lifted slightly.

Incorporating those gestures could significantly enhance the receptive and expressive language skills of ASD students. By integrating body language

and expressions, and intonation these gestures provide better illustration and understanding. Furthermore, the teacher employed a reward system to reinforce and appreciate the students' efforts. When students successfully understand or imitate the teacher's gestures, they would receive rewards as a form of positive reinforcement. These rewards could be verbal, such as a high five or praise like "Good job," or tangible gifts like sweets or drawing featuring their favorite cartoon characters. This method not only encouraged continuity in learning but also fostered a positive and engaging classroom environment.

Excerpt 4
Strategies in Maintaining Effective Communication with ASD Students
"The language usually used, expressive language, and receptive language for these children need to be very extra, especially for a foreign language... I often use aids or educational teaching tools." (Interview I, 99-100;172-174, P, Author's translation)
"For even a small amount of progress, we give a reward. So, when we give a reward, the child wants to repeat, wants to repeat, then maintain what has been achieved, and then wants to learn again or continue… With rewards like that, the child shows progress… giving high-fives, praising them, and then providing rewards like dates or brownie." (Interview I, 192-195;208;218-219, P, Author's translation)

Data indicated that gestures were crucial for language skill development in typically developing children (Ramos-Cabo et al., 2019). Nonetheless, there was a lack of clarity regarding the specific relationship between gestures and language development in individuals with ASD (Ramos-Cabo et al., 2019). Employing alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems, which encompass gestures, signs, picture symbols, and speech-generating devices, has been recognized as a method to enhance communication for students with ASD in educational environments (Douglas & Gerde, 2019). Studies emphasize the importance of gestures as a communication mode in children with ASD, showing that children with ASD and developmental delays frequently depend on gestures for communication (Delehanty & Wetherby, 2022). Additionally, research has examined the communicative function and integration of gestures in children with ASD,

highlighting their crucial role in facilitating communication within this population (Ye et al., 2021).

The use of rewards as positive reinforcement for ASD students had been a common practice in interventions aimed at enhancing learning outcomes (Mosner et al., 2019). While many interventions utilize various forms of rewards to motivate students with ASD, the effectiveness of these strategies could vary (Mosner et al., 2019). Research has predominantly focused on the use of positive reinforcement, with limited attention given to negative reinforcement in ASD (Damiano et al., 2015). However, studies suggested that the reward system in individuals with ASD may be malleable, indicating that interventions focusing on social reinforcement could potentially enhance brain activity in response to social stimuli in this population (Baker et al., 2020). Overall, the literature highlighted the significance of using rewards as positive reinforcement in interventions for ASD students. Gaining insight into the neural mechanisms of reward processing in individuals with ASD can guide the creation of more effective intervention strategies that use rewards to improve learning and social outcomes for this population.

In conclusion, effective communication with ASD students benefits from using gestures and rewards. The teacher employed various gestures to teach basic instructions, vocabulary, emotions, activities, and time concepts, which aligns with research showing gestures aid communication for children with ASD (Delehanty & Wetherby, 2022; Ramos-Cabo et al., 2019). The use of rewards reinforced learning and maintains student engagement, supporting positive behavior and progress (Mosner et al., 2019). Effective communication with ASD students requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates gestures and rewards to enhance both receptive and expressive language skills. The teacher in this study employs a range of gestures to convey basic instructions, vocabulary, emotions, activities, and time-related concepts, which helps bridge the communication gap for first-grade students with ASD. This method aligned with existing research, which underscored the importance of gestures as a vital communication tool for children with ASD and developmental delays

(Delehanty & Wetherby, 2022; Ramos-Cabo et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2021). While the effectiveness of these strategies could vary, the integration of gestures and rewards is supported by research and demonstrates a practical application of communication theory in an educational setting. Further exploration into the specific relationship between gestures and language development in ASD students, as well as the potential impact of reward systems on learning outcomes, could provide valuable insights for refining intervention strategies and enhancing educational practices for this population.

4.3. Integrating Collaborative Partnership with Stakeholders in Teaching English to ASD Students

4.3.1. Challenges in Integrating Collaborative Partnership with Stakeholders in Teaching English to ASD Students

Integrating collaborative partnership with stakeholders in teaching English to ASD students is essential for achieving an effective learning process with ASD students. However, the teacher indicated that some challenges arose in this area, particularly with the parents. She stated that some families were in a phase where they could not accept their children's condition. This lack of acceptance could be problematic because, when the teacher attempted to collaborate on aspects such as the students' learning progress, difficulties, and other concerns, the parents might not focus on these critical areas. The teacher highlighted these challenges in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4
Challenges in Integrating Collaborative Partnership with Stakeholders in Teaching English to ASD Students
"The issues that typically arise are for parents of children with special needs. They go through phases where not all parents are able to accept their child's condition or challenges." (Interview, 349-351, P, Author's translation)   "So, there are processes where parents are still searching for various alternatives because some parents have not yet accepted their child's condition. They believe their child will develop, but progress is just delayed. They think that when their child grows up, things will be different." (Interview, 351-354, P, Author's translation)

Many researches had shown that positive attitudes towards inclusive education for students with ASD are prevalent among families, particularly

those with children who have special educational needs (Rueda et al., 2015). The support and acceptance provided by families create a nurturing environment that contributes to the academic and overall success of ASD students (Ripotola & Chavez, 2024). Additionally, parental knowledge and attitudes towards ASD play a significant role in facilitating the inclusion of children with ASD in mainstream settings (Gómez-Marí et al., 2022). Effective collaboration with families is critical to the success of ASD students in educational settings. However, challenges such as parental acceptance of their child's condition can hinder this collaboration.

4.3.2. Strategies in Integrating Collaborative Partnership with Stakeholders in Teaching English to ASD Students

A key challenge for teachers in integrating collaborative partnership with stakeholders in teaching English to ASD students is gaining family acceptance of their children's condition. The teacher addressed this by involving families in the children's education and offering emotional support. The teacher empathized with families, recognizing the difficulties in managing special needs students.

Research showed that family involvement was crucial for the ASD students' progress. The teacher built strong partnerships with parents by listening to their concerns, sharing stories, and setting realistic expectations. This helped in creating mutual understanding and setting achievable goals. Weekly therapy reports kept parents informed about their children's progress, medical needs, and school interventions. Regular communication, through meetings and WhatsApp groups, helped parents stay engaged. Teachers also offered advice on managing specific behaviors, leading to coordinated efforts in monitoring and assessing progress.

Overall, the partnership between teachers, therapists, and parents was vital for the students' success. Open communication, realistic expectations, and collaboration ensured effective support and better outcomes for the child. As illustrated in the following excerpt,

Excerpt 5

Strategies in Integrating Collaborative Partnership with Stakeholders in Teaching English to ASD Students

"These efforts involve showing empathy, listening, sharing stories, sharing expectations, or sharing hopes with parents while maintaining realistic expectations. We ensure not to give false hopes or set expectations too high. Additionally, we provide understanding and advise against expecting too much. It's about maintaining a balance." (Interview, 368-373, P, Author's translation)

"Some children continue to participate in therapy programs. These therapies, attended weekly, generate reports that are consistently communicated to parents. As a teacher, it is crucial to establish good collaboration with parents. Programs implemented at school are communicated to parents through meetings or WhatsApp. We coordinate to continue or optimize the interventions provided at school at home, ensuring consistency and reinforcement of the learning strategies used." (Interview, 325-327;330-331, P, Author's translation)

"As a teacher, I strive to build strong collaboration with parents. Parents often seek advice, asking how to handle specific behaviors or challenges. This creates a coordination not only in monitoring progress but also in implementing interventions and monitoring their effectiveness. We often reflect together with parents, discussing strategies and outcomes to ensure the best support for the students." (Interview, 330-331;334-337, P, Author's translation)

"Some children continue to participate in therapy programs. These therapies, attended weekly, generate reports that are consistently communicated to parents. This ensures that parents are well-informed about their child's progress and any necessary medical actions, such as consultations with doctors or other medical professionals, are coordinated effectively." (Interview, 325-327, P, Author's translation)

Teaching English to ASD students demanded a multifaceted approach that integrates family engagement, empathy, effective communication, continuous updates, collaborative efforts, parental involvement, reflective practice, and a cohesive support system. Hayes and Watson (2013) revealed that families of children with ASD often experienced heightened stress, emotional burdens, and financial strains, underscoring the need for emotional support, access to resources, and respite care to alleviate these challenges.

Data emphasized the complexities educators encountered when teaching ASD students, emphasizing the necessity of employing differentiated instructional strategies to facilitate learning (Brahim, 2022). Parental

involvement played a crucial role in supporting ASD learners' acquisition of English, particularly amid challenging circumstances like the pandemic (Sophya, 2021). Establishing an inclusive and supportive environment is pivotal in nurturing communication skills among ASD students, with studies highlighting the roles of family acceptance, support networks, and cohesive educational systems (Martínez & Carvajal, 2021; Maysuroh, 2024; Padmadewi, 2024). Reflective teaching practices were essential for enhancing English language teaching, enabling educators to address the unique challenges of teaching a second language to ASD students (Hashim et al., 2021) Effective teaching strategies that bolster ASD students' confidence in using English often result from collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, and professionals (Septiana, 2022).

In conclusion, a holistic approach to teaching English to students with ASD involved engaging all stakeholders to provide tailored support and implement effective strategies. By fostering family engagement, empathy, clear communication, ongoing collaboration, parental support, reflective teaching practices, and a unified support framework, educators could create an optimal learning environment that meets the diverse needs of ASD students. Collaborative partnerships among teachers, parents, and allied health professionals had been shown to be particularly beneficial in supporting ASD students in mainstream educational settings (Vlcek et al., 2020).