

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter explains what inspired the study and is divided into five parts. The first part discusses the background, outlining the issue and why the researcher chose this topic. The second part focuses on defining the research question for Chapter Four of the thesis. Next, operational definitions are provided to clarify key terms used throughout the thesis. The fourth part discusses the research aim, detailing what the study hopes to achieve. Finally, the significance of the study is explored, highlighting its practical implications and real-world relevance.

#### **1.1. Background of the Study**

In today's interconnected world, English proficiency has become a fundamental skill, offering significant advantages in academic, professional, and social aspects. A study by Pujasari and Hikmatullah (2023) found that student-teachers perceive teaching English as a means to empower future generations to succeed in a globalized, competitive world. They view English not just as a language but also as a tool for promoting local cultures and wisdom. By integrating local content into English instruction, they believe students can develop a global perspective while remaining connected to their roots. For Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students, acquiring English language skills is crucial, not only for their educational success but also for their broader social integration. Individuals with higher English proficiency levels have better access to resources, improved communication with peers and educators, and enhanced career prospects (Efendi, 2024; Rahman & Akter, 2023). However, for ASD students, learning English often entails overcoming unique challenges related to communication deficits, social interaction difficulties, and sensory sensitivities (Maysuroh, 2024). Thus, understanding and addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that these students can benefit from the opportunities that English proficiency provides.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to students with ASD involves a range of complex and nuanced challenges. These students frequently exhibit diverse and specific needs, such as difficulties with verbal and non-verbal

communication, irregular patterns of behavior, and heightened sensory sensitivities (González et al., 2022). Traditional EFL teaching methods, which often rely heavily on verbal instruction and conventional classroom interactions, may not be effective or engaging for ASD students (Maysuroh, 2024). Consequently, educators must adapt their approaches to accommodate these needs, utilizing strategies that align with the students' individual learning profiles. The challenges include not only modifying instructional materials but also managing classroom dynamics, addressing behavioral issues, and ensuring that teaching methods are both inclusive and effective (Padmadewi, 2024). Therefore, understanding the unique challenges encountered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers when instructing ASD students is crucial. By pinpointing these issues, effective strategies can be identified to overcome them.

This study aims to delve into the specific challenges faced by an EFL teacher working in a special education school in Tasikmalaya, Indonesia. By focusing on this localized context, the research seeks to provide a detailed examination of the obstacles encountered and the strategies employed by the teacher to overcome them. The study will explore how these challenges impact instructional practices and identify practical solutions that could be applied in similar educational settings. Through a comprehensive analysis of the teacher's experiences and the unique context of the Tasikmalaya special education school, the study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of EFL instruction for ASD students.

*Sekolah Luar Biasa* (SLB), or Special Education Schools, are institutions dedicated to meeting the educational needs of students with various disabilities, including ASD. These schools are designed to provide tailored educational experiences that accommodate the diverse needs of their students. In an SLB setting, classes for ASD students are structured to support varying levels of communication abilities, sensory processing issues, and behavioral challenges. The curriculum and teaching methods are adapted to ensure that each student's unique needs are addressed, fostering an environment that promotes learning and development. This specialized approach is crucial for supporting ASD students in achieving their educational goals and preparing them for future opportunities.

Teaching methods employed in SLB schools are carefully designed to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities. For ASD students, these methods often include the use of visual aids, structured routines, and individualized instruction. Visual supports such as picture schedules and communication boards help bridge gaps in communication and enhance understanding. Structured routines provide predictability, which can reduce anxiety and improve focus. Additionally, one-on-one support and tailored learning plans are commonly used to address individual learning styles and challenges. These strategies aim to create a supportive and adaptable learning environment that accommodates the diverse needs of ASD students and facilitates their progress in English language acquisition.

Previous research has identified several key challenges in teaching EFL to ASD students, including difficulties in communication, behavior management, and adapting instructional materials. Studies have shown that effective strategies for overcoming these challenges include the use of visual supports, individualized learning plans, and consistent communication with caregivers (Brahim, 2022; Maysuroh, 2024). Visual supports help clarify instructions and enhance comprehension, while individualized plans ensure that teaching methods are aligned with each student's unique needs (Maysuroh, 2024). Behavior management strategies, such as positive reinforcement and structured routines, are essential for maintaining a productive learning environment (Brahim, 2022). By drawing on these findings, the current study aims to further explore and validate these strategies within the specific context of the Tasikmalaya special education school.

The primary goals of this research are to enrich the existing body of literature on EFL instruction for ASD students, contribute to the field of inclusive education, and improve educational practices for teaching English to ASD students. By providing an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by an EFL teacher in an SLB setting, the study seeks to offer practical insights and recommendations that can enhance instructional practices and support student outcomes. Ultimately, the research aims to promote more effective and inclusive educational experiences for ASD students, ensuring that they receive high-quality instruction tailored to their individual needs and abilities. The findings of this study may inform the

development of teacher training programs, curriculum design, and instructional materials that better cater to the needs of ASD students in EFL contexts.

## **1.2. Formulation of the Problem**

Based on the background above, the researcher addresses the following question, “What are the EFL teacher’s challenges and strategies in teaching English to autism spectrum disorder students?”

## **1.3. Operational Definitions**

To avoid misinterpretation of this research, here are the operational definitions of each keyword:

- 1.3.1. Teaching English** : Refers to the practice of instructing verbal and non-verbal elementary autism spectrum disorder students whose first language is not English in the acquisition and development of English language skills in the focus of development of communication, social interaction, and behavior.
- 1.3.2. Autism Spectrum Disorder Students** : Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) students are individuals who require additional support and accommodations in their educational settings due to having problems at paying attention, making a social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviors. In this context, verbal and non-verbal autism spectrum disorder students.
- 1.3.3. EFL Teacher Challenges** : Refers to the difficulties and obstacles that teachers encounter while teaching English to ASD students. These challenges often require significant mental and physical effort to manage and overcome, testing the teacher's abilities and resilience in adapting instructional

methods to meet the diverse needs of their students.

**1.3.4. EFL Teacher Strategies** : Refers to the methods and approaches employed by teachers to effectively teach English to ASD students. These strategies are designed to address the unique challenges faced in the classroom, leveraging both innovative and evidence-based practices to facilitate learning, enhance communication, and overcome obstacles encountered in the teaching process.

#### **1.4. Aim of the Study**

The study describes EFL Teacher challenges in teaching English to autism spectrum disorder students and how they address the strategies of the challenges.

#### **1.5. Significances of the Study**

##### **1.5.1. Theoretical Use**

This research will enrich the literature of EFL teacher's challenges and strategies in teaching English to elementary students with autism spectrum disorder. The research aims to reveal the challenges and strategies that the teacher addressed in the process of teaching. This research will also contribute in the understanding of teaching English to students with special needs, specifically elementary students with autism spectrum disorder.

##### **1.5.2. Practical Use**

This research provides reference for teachers that teaching English to students with special needs, specifically elementary students with autism spectrum disorder. The research findings can be applied by the teachers in general, teachers in the field of special education, and writers to enlighten the same phenomenon/issue. Moreover, this result of this study can be used to address specific challenges, inform practices, improve processes, or contribute to policy-making with the same concerns as the phenomenon being addressed.

### **1.5.3. Empirical Use**

The empirical use of this research lies in its ability to provide evidence-based insights into the challenges and strategies for teaching English to autism spectrum disorder students. By focusing on data collected from real-life experiences of EFL teachers, the study offers practical, actionable recommendations that can improve educational practices and outcomes for students with special needs, specifically autism spectrum disorder students.