

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, the purpose of the study, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, the state of the arts, and the definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Educational institutions nowadays are having students with more diverse learning backgrounds and abilities. Some teachers face several difficulties during the language teaching and learning process (Nojirdon-qizi, 2024) which one of the obstacle is that the number of students in one class is too large so that this situation makes it difficult for teachers to face students diversity in a class (Yuwono et al., 2023). For some teachers, educating the English language effectively to a broad range of diverse students is an urgent problem that each English language teacher needs to solve. Inclusive education is one of the solutions to this ongoing problem, as its final aim is to make the learning process accessible to all students (Espada C. et al., 2023). This means that education systems should be designed to consider the diversity of learners' needs and characteristics to make it accessible for all learners.

In recent years, the mandate for inclusive education has become the primary strategy to achieve "Education for All," which means ensuring all learners, regardless of their conditions, have access to have quality learning (Mulyadi, 2017). Inclusive education is included as one of the global goals as stated in Sustainable Education Goals number 4 about "Quality education". The goal of quality education is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, regardless of their background, their ability, and their status. It means that inclusive education provides the opportunities for all students, including the students with various disabilities such as physical, emotional, mental, and social disabilities, or students with exceptional intelligence, to fully participate in education within a general educational environment alongside with their peers (Arriani et al., 2022). Thus, inclusive education makes all students have the equitable opportunities to succeed.

In Indonesia, national policy guarantees the right to education for every Indonesian citizen, including those with special needs (Sari et. al., 2022). Inclusive education policy refers to *Undang-Undang Dasar* (UUD) 1945 *Pasal 28H ayat (2)* which states that everyone has the right to receive facilities and special treatment to obtain the same opportunities and benefits to achieve equality and justice. Then, it is stated in *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional* (PERMENDIKNAS) No. 70 of 2009 about Inclusive Education for students who have disabilities and have the potential for intelligence and/or special talents in *Pasal 3 ayat (2)* that every student with physical disabilities, emotional disabilities, mental disabilities, or social disabilities or student with potential intelligence and/or special talents, has the right to participate in inclusive education at a specific educational unit according to their needs and abilities. The other policy supporting this system is written in *Undang-Undang* (UU) No. 8 of 2016 about people with disabilities *Pasal 10* which states that students with special needs have the right to receive quality educational services in all types, pathways, and levels of education. Besides, in supporting the implementation of inclusive education in the schools, the Indonesian government published a book entitled “Panduan Pelaksanaan Pendidikan Inklusif” as a guide to help education stakeholders and teachers to implement inclusive education in the school. Although many regulations support inclusive education, the practical implementation and the realities on the ground face challenges. The inclusive education system needs to be implemented in many more schools.

Implementing inclusive education in schools means that the learning process and all needed curricula should be inclusive which can be accessed by all students. Hockings (2010) stated that inclusive learning and teaching in education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant, and accessible to all. That is why implementing inclusive learning in school requires the suitable curricula to support the diverse students’ needs. This aligns with the mandate from Kemendikbudristek no. 56/M/2022 about *Pedoman Penerapan Kurikulum dalam rangka Pemulihan Pembelajaran* which stated that educational units need to develop curricula with the principle of diversification in accordance with the

conditions of the educational units, regional potential, and students characteristics. One of the official curricula documents (Luke, 2021) in which the adaptation can be adjusted is the syllabus. Syllabus is chosen because it is a design tool that can be crafted and recrafted by the instructor in collaboration with members of the teaching team, academic developers, topic experts, and students (Lutz et al., 2021). Syllabus defines the learning expectations, content areas, instructional methods, and assessment requirements of a course (Luke, 2021) which can be adjusted with the learning needs. Thus, this study focuses on designing a syllabus for supporting inclusive learning in the schools.

In adjusting and developing the syllabus for inclusive learning, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles can be integrated to make the learning accessible to all students (Nojirdon-qizi, 2024). The Universal Design for Learning is chosen for developing the syllabus for inclusive learning because it focuses on removing barriers so that all students can access and engage with the materials. It also changes the learning design instead of fixing the problems and adjusting the students' needs in the classroom (Unal et al., 2020). Therefore, Universal Design for Learning ensures that learning is accessible from the very beginning of the learning plan.

Universal Design for Learning moves beyond simply accommodating students with disabilities after the fact, instead, it proactively designs the curriculum structure itself to be flexible for everyone (CAST, 2024). The implementation of Universal Design for Learning in various countries has shown positive results in improving access and quality of inclusive learning (Rao et al., 2019; Wea et al., 2025). A study in remote Australia by Thompson & Williams (2019) showed that UDL successfully increased aboriginal students' participation in learning by 45% through a culturally responsive approach (Mackey et al., 2023). By demanding that the syllabus offer the principles of Universal Design for Learning covering; Multiple Means of Representation (flexible ways to access content), Multiple Means of Action and Expression (flexible ways to demonstrate knowledge), and Multiple Means of Engagement (flexible ways to stay motivated), Universal Design for Learning directly enables the implementation of diverse, active, and student-centered strategies for all learners in an equitable way.

While the integration of Universal Design for Learning in general education has been extensively researched globally, its specific application for inclusive learning within the Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) context remains underexplored. Previous studies in Indonesia have primarily focused on the general challenges of inclusive school management (Sari et al., 2022) or the psychological readiness of teachers in inclusive classrooms (Mulyadi, 2017). Besides, the implementation of inclusive learning in public schools seems still exclusive and lacks support (Suhendri, 2020). There are no proper guidelines or rules that can be used as a guide by the teachers in completing the learning steps for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Sari et al., 2022). As a result, the implementation of inclusive learning in educational units feels meaningless. Therefore, an inclusive learning support system must work. There is a noticeable scarcity of research that provides a concrete, actionable framework for redesigning English syllabi using Universal Design for Learning principles. Most existing English syllabi in public schools are still designed with a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which inadvertently creates barriers for students with diverse cognitive and different needs.

Besides, a survey for this research has been conducted through a questionnaire and interviews to the English teachers. The teachers stated that the syllabi and the curriculum documents do not sufficiently support the implementation of the inclusive learning system in the schools. They also said that it is hard for teachers, especially the teachers who are not used to teach the disabled students, to teach the students with diverse needs in one class. This aligns with what Sari et al. (2022) stated that the main problem in implementing inclusive education in schools is the lack of professional teachers with special needs, and skills in inclusive education. As a result, the governments empower regular teachers or subject teachers, who do not have special skills to act as inclusive teachers. Then, the English teachers often struggle to turn the general policies about inclusive education into the actual application of inclusive learning such as making the syllabus and lesson plan. While there is the national guide from the minister of education '*Panduan Pelaksanaan Pendidikan Inklusif*' which gives a broad overview about inclusive education, it still lacks the specific details

needed for inclusive learning, especially English inclusive learning. It does not explain how to adapt the core skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which require different ways of teaching. This creates a major gap between the ideal of “Education for All” in inclusive learning and the reality of school documents that are too rigid to meet the needs of every student.

Therefore, supporting documents such as curriculum and syllabus or guidelines for implementing inclusive learning are needed so that the teachers can improve the quality of inclusive learning practice. However, this study addresses this technical gap by integrating the principles of Universal Design for Learning into the English syllabus to support the inclusive learning practice in schools. Unlike previous research that focuses on classroom interventions *after* the learning has begun, this study emphasizes a proactive approach by embedding inclusivity into the English syllabus. By doing so, this research contributes to the *state of the art* of inclusive English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia by shifting the focus from "adjusting the student" to "redesigning the system" through the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the research background, the researcher conducted the research questions to be addressed through this proposed study as follows:

1. To what extent is the existing English syllabus integrated with Universal Design for Learning principles for English Inclusive Learning?
2. How are the procedures of integrating Universal Design for Learning principles into the English syllabus for English Inclusive Learning?
3. How is the design of the English syllabus integrated with Universal Design for Learning principles for English Inclusive Learning?
4. How is the validity of the English syllabus integrated with Universal Design for Learning principles for English Inclusive Learning?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Aligned with the research questions, the purposes of this study are written as follows:

1. To analyze the existing English syllabus integrated with Universal Design for Learning principles for English Inclusive Learning.
2. To describe the procedures of integrating Universal Design for Learning principles into the English syllabus for English Inclusive Learning.
3. To design the English syllabus integrated with Universal Design for Learning principles for English Inclusive Learning.
4. To measure the validity of the English syllabus integrated with Universal Design for Learning principles for English Inclusive Learning.

1.4 Scope of the Study

In order to achieve the objectives that have been mentioned above, the researcher decides to make a limitation of the study. This study focuses on designing English syllabus integrated with Universal Design for Learning principles for English inclusive learning. The target of inclusive learning refers to the regular classroom that includes students with special needs, specifically those categorized as slow learners, individuals with low IQ, or those with intellectual disabilities. The syllabus is intended for tenth (10) graders of Senior High School and focused on the reading and writing skills. Furthermore, the development of this syllabus is grounded by the three principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL); multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression, which are suited for inclusive learning.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this research are expected to provide meaningful contributions both theoretically and practically to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and inclusive education. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on curriculum development and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This study offers a framework for how UDL as an educational concept, can be implemented for English language curricula-in this research it is the syllabus- in high schools. This research reinforces the theory that learning barriers are often rooted in the curriculum rather than the student. So, instead of fixing the problem in the class, this study designs the lessons that can be accessed and followed by every student to avoid the problem in the class from the very start.

As for the practical implications, this study provides a tangible model and guidelines for developing an inclusive syllabus for English teachers. It offers teachers a roadmap to diversify their teaching methods, materials, and assessments, thereby reducing the burden of making last-minute adjustments for students with different learning needs. While for students, both with and without disabilities, will benefit from a more flexible and engaging learning environment. The results can serve as a reference for schools and educational institutions in implementing inclusive education. Therefore, this study can be used for developing further research related to the Universal Design for Learning and curriculum design for inclusive learning.

1.6 State of the Arts

The inclusive education landscape has evolved from simply placing students in the same room toward ensuring that all students can learn together. While the global community recognizes Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as the standard for equity, there is still a ‘manual-less’ gap in Indonesia’s curricula. Several previous studies have discussed Universal Design for Learning (UDL) implementation. Nojirdon-qizi (2024) investigated UDL in English classes and found that most students didn’t know about UDL, and many had never been in classes where teachers applied UDL principles. It shows that the UDL application in ELT remains limited, underscoring the need for a clear learning plan that includes UDL, including syllabus. Another study by Unal et al. (2020) showed that when teachers learned about UDL, they got better at making lesson plans that work for all students. This means training teachers and including UDL in curriculum documents like syllabus can help create more inclusive classrooms.

A review by Almeqdad et al. (2023) found that UDL helps both teachers and students, especially those with disabilities, by encouraging engagement and different ways to learn and express knowledge. Kennette and Wilson (2019) also found that students and teachers in Canada agreed that UDL strategies make learning more flexible and fair. They demonstrated that UDL principles, such as offering multiple means of representation and engagement, are practical and valued tools for creating more accessible and equitable learning environments. Meanwhile, Ratri et al. (2025) developed an English syllabus for young learners

in Indonesia that included local culture, which helped students understand better and keep their cultural identity. But this study did not include UDL principles or focus on older students in inclusive classrooms. Building on these studies, this research aims to fill the gap by creating an English syllabus for Indonesian senior high schools that integrates UDL principles and fits the Kurikulum Merdeka to support inclusive learning.

While prior studies have investigated UDL implementation in classrooms and lesson planning (Unal et al., 2020; Nodirjon-qizi, 2024), assessed its effectiveness through meta-analysis (Almeqdad et al., 2023), explored faculty and student perceptions (Kennette & Wilson, 2019), and developed context-specific English syllabi in the Indonesian EFL context (Ratri et al., 2025), none has specifically produced a UDL-based English syllabus designed to address learner variability in Indonesian inclusive secondary school classrooms. This study fills that identified gap and advances the state of the art of inclusive English language teaching and learning in Indonesia.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and prevent ambiguity in this research, the definition of key terms is defined as follows:

- a. **Inclusive Education:** Inclusive education is the educational system that proactively provides the opportunities for all students, including those with various physical disabilities, emotional disabilities, mental disabilities, social disabilities, or students with exceptional intelligence, to participate fully in education within a general educational environment alongside their peers (Arriani et al., 2022). It focuses on removing systemic barriers to ensure equitable access to quality learning for all students.
- b. **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Universal Design for Learning or UDL is a framework designed to enhance and optimize the educational process for all individuals (Rose & Meyer, CAST, 2024). This is a framework for instructional design based on cognitive neuroscience that aims to provide all students with equal opportunities to learn. Universal Design for Learning has three core principles:

1. Multiple Means of Engagement that refers to stimulating interest and motivation.
 2. Multiple Means of Representation that refers to presenting information in different formats.
 3. Multiple Means of Action and Expression that refers to offering diverse ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge.
- c. Syllabus: Syllabus is an official curricular document that defines the learning expectations, content areas, instructional methods, and assessments requirements of a course (Luke, 2021). It is a strategic instructional document that outlines learning expectations, content areas, teaching methodologies, and assessment requirements for a specific course. In the context of the Indonesian *Kurikulum Merdeka*, this refers to the Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP) or the curriculum design tool that guides the teacher's instruction over the academic year.

