

# OBSTACLES IN TEACHING READING TO ASPERGER SYNDROME STUDENTS IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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## Abstract

Teaching reading to Asperger's Syndrome students especially in primary level is difficult. Students with Asperger syndrome often struggle to comprehend other people's perspectives, experiences, or even the possibility that other people may hold experiences, emotions, or opinions that diverge from their own. This study aims to outline the challenges associated with teaching English reading to individuals with Asperger syndrome. This study used a descriptive qualitative methodology. The primary school pupils with Asperger syndrome are the focus of this study. To determine the barriers Asperger syndrome students have when learning to read in English, the researcher employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Based on the results, the author came to the conclusion that teaching English reading to primary kids with Asperger syndrome presents a variety of challenges that call for a customized strategy. The biggest challenge was keeping their eyes open for long stretches of time, which affected their focus and participation in class. The author also noted that these children could have trouble digesting and comprehending complicated directions, so it's critical to provide structured instructions that are broken down into smaller, more doable steps. To keep students' interest and attention, teachers must give clear directions, divide work into manageable chunks, and come up with creative ways to do things.

**Keywords:** Asperger Syndrome Students; Obstacles; Teaching Reading

## Abstrak

Mengajarkan membaca kepada siswa Sindrom Asperger khususnya di tingkat sekolah dasar sangatlah sulit. Siswa dengan sindrom Asperger sering kesulitan memahami sudut pandang, pengalaman, atau bahkan kemungkinan orang lain memiliki pengalaman, emosi, atau pendapat yang berbeda dengan dirinya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguraikan tantangan yang terkait dengan pengajaran membaca bahasa Inggris kepada individu dengan sindrom Asperger. Sindrom Asperger. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi deskriptif kualitatif. Siswa sekolah dasar dengan sindrom Asperger menjadi fokus penelitian ini. Untuk mengetahui hambatan yang dimiliki siswa sindrom Asperger ketika belajar membaca dalam bahasa Inggris, peneliti menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Berdasarkan hasil tersebut, penulis sampai pada kesimpulan bahwa pengajaran membaca bahasa Inggris kepada anak-anak sekolah dasar dengan sindrom Asperger menghadirkan berbagai tantangan yang memerlukan strategi yang disesuaikan. Tantangan terbesarnya adalah tetap membuka mata dalam jangka waktu yang lama, sehingga memengaruhi fokus dan partisipasi mereka di kelas. Penulis juga mencatat bahwa anak-anak ini mungkin mengalami kesulitan dalam mencerna dan memahami petunjuk yang rumit, jadi sangat

penting untuk memberikan instruksi terstruktur yang dipecah menjadi langkah-langkah yang lebih kecil dan lebih bisa dilakukan. Untuk menjaga minat dan perhatian siswa, guru harus memberikan arahan yang jelas, membagi pekerjaan menjadi bagian-bagian yang dapat dikelola, dan menemukan cara-cara kreatif dalam melakukan sesuatu.

**Kata kunci:** Hambatan; Pembelajaran Membaca; Siswa *Syndrom Asperger*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is used by human beings to communicate with one another. Humans and language are a unity that cannot be separated. Language has an important role in human life; by using language, people can express their ideas, emotions, and desires (see Kartika et al, 2020; Sari et al, 2021; Saputra et al, 2022). Language is a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, and/or written symbols. Keraf in Smarapradhipa (2005:1), provides twodefinition of language. The first is lanlanguage as a stated means of communication between members of the public is in the form of a symbol of the sound produced by means of said human. Second, language is a communication system that uses symbols, which are arbitrary. Based on the definition of language above, the writer concludes that language is used by human beings to communicate with one another. Humans use language as a tool of communication which includes the giver and receiver of information (see Putra & Rochsantiningasih, 2018; Arifin, 2019; Mundiarti et al, 2022).

Language skill includes four skills: Hernowo in Yuliati (2013:23) suggested by reading the students can increase vocabulary, develop intelligence interpersonal, and trigger our imagination. In other word, by reading able make people can relax, interact with feeling and thoughts, obtain information, and improve their knowledge. Teaching English as a foreign language is not easy because it is something new for the students, and for the

first-year students, they will certainly face many problems (see Kartika, 2011; Suprayitno et al, 2019; Abshori et al, 2020). In addition to the initial challenges, teaching English as a foreign language requires patience and adaptability on the part of the teacher. The students may struggle with pronunciation, grammar rules, and vocabulary acquisition, making it crucial for the teacher to provide continuous support and guidance throughout the learning process.

Pachtman & Wilson (in Ahmadi et al, 2013) added benefits of being a motivated reader by stating that it is important to motivate students to read by providing them opportunities to select their desired materials. In other words, students would likely to read more when they are allowed to choose their reading materials because they would discover that reading is an enjoyable. Several students in primary school Immersion Ponorogo especially Asperger's Syndrome students have difficulty initiating and sustiatining social contact. Asperger Syndrome is a developmental disorder that affects a child's ability to socialize and communicate effectively with others. Myles (2001:6) states that Asperger's syndrome is now widely accepted as a pervasive developmental disorder that falls within the broad parameters of Autism Spectrum Disorder (DSM-IV). Myles & Simpson (1998) addition that the Asperger syndrome students have great difficulty understanding the perspective or experiences of others, or indeed that others may have experiences, feelings or views that are different from their own.

## **METHOD**

The researcher used a qualitative descriptive approach to find out the obstacles Asperger syndrome students in learning English reading. Borg and Gall (Sugiyono, 2000:213) state that qualitative research is much more difficult to do well than quantitative research because the data collected is usually subjective and the main measurement tool for collecting data is the investigator himself. This study was conducted at the Elementary School Immersion in Ponorogo. The reason for choosing this school is because in this school, Asperger syndrome students are learning in the same class as regulars, and the number of Asperger syndrome students, or more than one, can make the implementation of social stories more appropriate.

This research was conducted in April–May 2021 at the Elementary School Immersion in Ponorogo. The subject of this research is the Asperger syndrome students at the elementary school in Ponorogo. The students were 3 males and 1 female. The data for the research are the result of observation, interviews (depth interviews), and documentation. This data was obtained from the teachers who teach the Asperger students and friends as well as employees in SD Immersion.

In this research, we use the techniques of collecting data, such as observation technique, interview technique, and documentation technique. This research uses the following instruments to collect data: (1) an observation sheet; the writer uses observation to know clearly what is done in the school about how the implementation of social stories is teaching speaking Asperger students; and (2) an interview sheet; the writer uses an interview (a depth interview) to know how the Asperger students are learning English speaking. This data was obtained from the

shadow teachers and friends, as well as the other teachers or employees in SD Immersion, and (3) documentation; this source consists of documents and records such as diaries, personal texts, photographs, and case notes.

The writer uses triangulation techniques for simplifying analysis on detecting learning obstacles to assist students in speaking class. Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates the validation of data through cross-verification from more than two sources. Patton (in Sugiyono, 2010:214) states that triangulation can build on the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of any single approach.

In this research, the writer uses the data analysis of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014: 14), which contains: (1) Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, classifies, directs, disposes of unnecessary, and organizes data. With data reduction, the potential universe of data is reduced in an anticipatory way as the writer chooses a conceptual framework, research questions, cases, and instruments. (2) Data display is a collection of structured information that gives the possibility of drawing conclusions and taking action. With the presentation of the data, the writer will be able to understand what is happening and what should be applied based on an understanding of data presentation. (3) Conclusion drawing: the conclusions drawn will be handled loosely and kept open so that they are not clear initially, then will become more detailed and deeply drawn. This conclusion is also verified during the study for the purposes of testing its correctness, robustness, and suitability, which is validity.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Observation

The writer held classroom observation to gather information of teaching speaking and learning process at primary school Immersion Ponorogo on Mei 4th 2021. The following table shows students' activity during the teaching of reading.

Table 1: Students' activity in English reading

No	Aspect	Indicator	Students' Response							
			Clearly Seen				Not Clearly Seen			
			KZ	KH	GD	RF	KZ	KH	GD	RF
1	Eyesight	Often close eye when reading			√		√	√		√
		Interested in book story	√	√	√	√				
		Attention of the teacher				√	√	√	√	
2	Hearing	Difficulty to listen to the teacher explanation	√		√			√		√
		Close ear when communicating			√		√	√		√
3	Physical	Difficulty when expressing something	√	√	√					√
		Can Imitate the expression of the teacher	√	√	√	√				
		Understand how to response like in the stories	√	√	√	√				
4	Attention	Cannot focus	√	√	√	√				
		Weak attention	√	√	√	√				
		Occupy themselves during the lesson	√	√					√	√
5	Intellectual	Cannot response when teacher ask		√			√		√	√
		Seldom ask question						√	√	√
		Seldom imitate when teacher asks						√	√	√
6	Attitude	Often disrupting the friend		√			√		√	√
		Often being alone	√	√	√	√				
		Angry when being disturbed	√	√	√	√				
		Difficulty on receiving praise and criticism	√	√	√	√				
		Active but strange	√	√	√	√				

From the observation, the writer observed the some aspects as discussed below:

### ***The eyesight aspect***

One of the four Asperger syndrome students often had a lack of concentration when they were reading. As can be seen when the teacher gave the story books, some Asperger syndrome students felt difficulty and had a lack of concentration to read story books. But the students were interested in storybooks. When the teacher gave the storybooks, they paid attention to the teacher.

### ***The hearing aspect***

Two of the four Asperger syndrome students had difficulty listening to the teacher's explanation. When the teacher gave an explanation, some Asperger syndrome students asked the teacher to repeat what she said. Besides, one of the four Asperger syndrome students got their ears at a close distance when communicating with their friends and teacher.

### ***The physical aspect***

Three of the four Asperger syndrome students felt difficult in expressing something. When the writer observed and asked to students, the Asperger syndrome students looked difficult to respond what the teacher said. When the teacher asked to imitate her, the students could imitate the teacher's expression, and also they could understand how to respond the teacher in a right way.

### ***The attention aspect***

After observing the writer saw the Asperger syndrome students in SD Immersion couldn't focus when reading story books. They had weak attention when the teacher explained the material, the students just bowed and couldn't focus to the books. Two

of the four students just occupied themselves during the lesson.

### ***The intellectual aspect***

Based on the observation, one of the four Asperger syndrome students couldn't respond and two of the four students seldom asked question during the lesson. Moreover, two of the four students seldom imitated when the teacher asked something.

### ***The attitude aspect***

One of four Asperger syndrome students often disrupted their friend when the teachers were explaining. The Asperger syndrome students' in SD Immersion were stayed away from the other students and got angry when they were disturbed, they also got difficulty on receiving praise and criticism from the teacher or friends. When the teacher explained, the Asperger syndrome students just focused to one object like (pencil, eraser, ruler etc).

## **Interviews**

These interviews were conducted to get more information about the problem of Asperger syndrome students in teaching speaking. It was held on Wednesday and Thursday, April 27th and May 12th, 2021, beginning at 09.00–10.30 a.m. The interview was in the form of a small discussion. First, the writer asked the teacher about the general condition of the special education students, primarily Asperger syndrome students in primary school Immersion Ponorogo. The question involved the debility of the Asperger syndrome students, how the teacher taught speaking English to Asperger syndrome students, what kinds of strategies she used when teaching reading, and what obstacles she faced during the teaching process.

From the first interviews, it was known that Asperger syndrome students saw difficulties understanding the material or

instruction from the teacher. The people with Asperger syndrome also felt uncomfortable, shy, and afraid of making mistakes. From the second interview, it was known that the students with Asperger syndrome could lose eye contact, although not for a long time. During the teaching process, the teacher implemented various strategies to support reading comprehension for students with Asperger syndrome. These strategies included visual aids, such as charts and diagrams, to enhance understanding of the material. Additionally, the teacher utilized explicit instruction techniques, breaking down complex concepts into smaller, manageable steps. Despite these efforts, one of the obstacles faced was maintaining consistent engagement and attention from the students with Asperger syndrome, as they occasionally struggled to sustain eye contact for extended periods.

### Documentation

From the documentation, the writer knew that people with Asperger syndrome could not focus and were uncomfortable with the learning process in traditional classes. They performed better when given clear and structured instructions and when tasks were broken down into smaller, more manageable steps. The writer also learned that individuals with Asperger syndrome often have difficulty maintaining eye contact for extended periods, which can impact their engagement and attention in the classroom.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the writer concluded that the obstacles to teaching English reading to Asperger syndrome primary students are multifaceted and require a tailored approach. The main obstacle was the difficulty in maintaining eye contact for

extended periods, which impacted their engagement and attention in class. The writer also identified that these students may also struggle with processing and understanding complex instructions, making it important to provide clear and structured instructions broken down into smaller, more manageable steps. It is crucial for educators to provide clear instructions, break down tasks into smaller steps, and find alternative methods to maintain their engagement and attention. Therefore, creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that understands and accommodates their difficulty with eye contact can further enhance their learning experience.

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