

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Theory of Montessori Method

The Montessori method is an educational method based on the philosophy of Maria Montessori, the primary advocate of this learning method for all children in both inclusive and non-inclusive environments (Lillard, 2006). The Montessori method emphasises experiential learning, individual autonomy, and the recognition of each child's distinctiveness (Kersna et al., 2025; Kiptiyah et al., 2025; Lapon, 2020; Long et al., 2022; Oates, 2019; Padmadewi et al., 2020; Saputra, 2025; Yulis Mardotilla et al., 2024). At Singaraja Montessori School, inclusive education has been adjusted to meet the needs of a student with Down syndrome by creating a learning environment enriched with multisensory teaching aids, structured routines, and supportive social interactions (Arcos, 2025; Azrie, 2023; Kristiyani, 2018; Lodewijk et al., 2023; Madisyn, 2023). Studies indicate that the Montessori method is beneficial in improving learning motivation, social skills, and language development in children with special needs (Kusrini et al., 2023; Lillard et al., 2021; Marshall, 2017; Padmadewi et al., 2024). This case study illustrates that the implementation of the Montessori method in the Octopus Class can concurrently emphasise mastery of content and the enhancement of students' affective and psychomotor dimensions, which are deemed crucial for students with Down syndrome (Gentaz & Richard, 2022; Kristian et al., 2024). The qualitative case study approach, as articulated by Creswell (2018), is particularly pertinent for thoroughly investigating the genuine obstacles and advantages encountered by educators and learners in an inclusive educational setting (Martins et al., 2025).

The Montessori method fundamentally highlights five key elements, namely guided activities freedom, a prepared environment, individualised learning, the teacher's function as a facilitator, and the enhancement of self-independence (Prastyo et al., 2025; Yulia et al., 2022). In reality, educators in the Octopus classroom adapt Montessori materials, including sandpaper letters and bilingual flashcards, to enhance English vocabulary acquisition for a student with Down syndrome. The subsequent table encapsulates the fundamental principles of Montessori and their application for a student with Down Syndrome:

Table 2.1 Fundamental Principles of Montessori

Montessori Principles	Implementation on the Down Syndrome Student	Impact on English Language Learning
Guided Activities Freedom	The student chooses activities according to his interests and abilities within structured limits	Increase motivation and active participation (Prastyo et al., 2025; Yulia et al., 2022)
Prepared Environment	Visual and tactile aids are easily accessible to the student	Facilitate understanding of new vocabulary (Prastyo et al., 2025; Yulia et al., 2022)
Individualised Learning	Teachers adapt strategies to the needs of each student	Optimal support according to learning style (Prastyo et al., 2025; Yulia et al., 2022)
Teacher as Facilitator	The teacher guides without dominating the learning process	Building positive interactions (Prastyo et al., 2025; Yulia et al., 2022)
Strengthening Self-Independence	The student is well-trained to be independent with Montessori tools	Improve self-confidence and social skills (Prastyo et al., 2025; Yulia et al., 2022)

Students with Down syndrome can benefit greatly from a language program that adheres to all Montessori principles, as shown in the table above. Kinesthetic activities and multisensory aids greatly benefit kids with special needs in three ways: conceptual understanding, memory retention, and self-confidence. Limited resources, the need to modify teaching tools, and the construction of an inclusive learning environment are the key obstacles faced by teachers in the Octopus classroom.

This study is being conducted to ascertain the primary challenges encountered by educators in implementing the Montessori method for a student with Down syndrome in the Octopus class, while also examining the advantages attained by this student in acquiring fundamental English conversational skills. This case study aims to deliver empirical insights into the advancement of inclusive education methodologies in Indonesia, specifically in the instruction of English utilising the Montessori method for students with special needs. The generated practical recommendations can work as a reference for educators, institutions, and

policymakers in developing a more adaptive, responsive, and effective educational environment.

2.1.2 Theory of Basic English Conversation Teaching Strategy

Students with special needs, such as Down syndrome, benefit greatly from an inclusive classroom setting where they can learn the basics of English conversation. Reading and writing proficiency based on fluency in spoken English is essential for effective oral and written communication (Phyo et al., 2024). Beginning with word recognition and progressing to comprehending meaning in sentence form within a broad context is the recommended method for teaching basic English conversation (Atouf & Issa, 2025). Using a multimodal approach that incorporates visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile components is necessary for teaching basic conversation within the context of inclusive education (Padmadewi & Artini, 2017). This will allow students with Down syndrome to access word meanings through various sensory channels (Rohi & Nurhayati, 2024). This agrees with the results of Webb and Nation (Pauwels, 2018), who found that concrete media, exercises based on real-life experiences, and repetition all help students remember new words used in everyday speech. The researcher found that students at Singaraja Montessori School were more motivated and engaged in learning new words when they used hands-on learning tools, including sandpaper letters, flashcards, and interactive games.

The Experiential Learning theory and its importance, proposed by Kolb's theory in 1984 and 2015, is particularly relevant for instructing fundamental conversation skills in inclusive classrooms, as the theory asserts that information is obtained via direct experience, reflection, and practical application in real contexts (Siefker et al., 2020; Yao & Lee, 2025). Educators in the Octopus Class at Singaraja Montessori School implement this principle by motivating the Down syndrome student to participate actively in diverse experiential activities, including role play, singing, and utilising tangible objects to introduce new vocabulary and phrases constructed into simple sentences. Children with special needs, including the autistic and Down syndrome, more effectively comprehend and retain words and phrases when instructed through direct experiences and significant activities (Agostine et al., 2022; Ereblir Kadriu, 2024). Thus, this strategy enhances students' confidence and broadens their options for social engagement.

In addition, teaching basic English conversation to students with Down syndrome is greatly influenced by the Montessori method's key tenet of Learning by Doing. Children retain more information when they actively participate in the learning process rather than merely listening to explanations (Gina et al., 2025; Kirana & Dewi, 2019; Usop & Sari, 2021). Based on direct observations held by the researcher, teachers in the Octopus Class adapt Montessori tools for practical exercises, including word sorting, vocabulary card attachment to actual items, and word arrangement using letter blocks, all within the framework of fundamental

language instruction. Studies have shown and strengthened that this learning method, including the tools, can help children with Down syndrome remember new information and understand the meaning of words (Azrie, 2023; Tiwari et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2023).

2.1.3 Theory of Students with Down Syndrome

Students with Down syndrome have distinct developmental traits that profoundly influence their cognitive, linguistic, and motor domains (Ahulló-Fuster et al., 2025; Karimi & Nelson, 2023). Deficiencies in short-term memory, delays in the acquisition of expressive and receptive language, and difficulties in fine motor skills pose significant barriers to their learning process (Filiatrault-Veilleux et al., 2025; Næss et al., 2021; Vandoni et al., 2023). In the realm of English instruction, especially in achieving proficiency in basic conversation, students with Down syndrome necessitate a distinct and more tailored methodology in contrast to neurotypical pupils (Martin et al., 2009; Moraleda-Sepúlveda et al., 2022). This necessitates that educators employ traditional pedagogical methods while also including the tenets of experiential learning and hands-on activities, which prioritise learning through direct experience and tangible engagement (Kolb, 1984; Lillard, 2019).

The pedagogical framework for fundamental English conversation instruction proposed by Islam et al. (2025) and Will et al. (2019) point out the significance of multisensory and contextual approaches, particularly pertinent for children with Down syndrome. This method addresses the Singaraja Montessori school students' learning requirements through several sensory modalities, including visual, aural, and kinesthetic, therefore enhancing language understanding and retention. Kolb's experiential learning theory underscores that students acquire knowledge most effectively through active engagement, reflection, and application in authentic contexts during basic conversation instruction. This methodology corresponds with the notion of experiential learning, fundamental to the Montessori method, wherein students are prompted to acquire knowledge through hands-on activities and autonomous discovery. Consequently, the pedagogical strategies for instructing basic English conversation to kids with Down syndrome in inclusive settings, such as Singaraja Montessori School, must be structured to promote tangible, engaging, and recurrent learning experiences.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Montessori Education in Inclusive and Special Needs Scopes

Recent literature underscores the adaptability of the Montessori method in inclusion initiatives worldwide. Montessori's individualised, multisensory, and autonomy-driven framework has proven effective for children across the spectrum of abilities (Leuwol et al., 2023; Tri et al., 2025). A large-scale evaluation in European settings demonstrated that Montessori-based interventions increased engagement and positive peer interaction among children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Gladh et al., 2022; Long et al., 2022). These findings are echoed in studies from Asia and Africa, which highlight that Montessori activities can be readily differentiated to support special learning profiles (Aldersey et al., 2020; Saputra, 2025; Smythe et al., 2021). Teachers at the school utilising Montessori methods reported greater ease in scaffolding learning for a student with Down syndrome and noticed improvements in social-emotional skills and classroom participation. Besides, cross-cultural research by the researcher demonstrated that Montessori principles include freedom within limits and the use of tactile materials to enable successful curriculum modification for diverse learners. Hence, these studies affirm the viability of Montessori programs as inclusive educational models in both resource-rich and resource-limited settings.

2.2.2 Down Syndrome and English Language Learning: Empirical Evidence

A student with Down syndrome in Octopus Class frequently faces challenges with speech clarity, short-term memory, and social communication. Despite this, current empirical work reveals that significant progress is possible when robust, multimodal teaching practices are employed. Multiple studies confirm that early exposure to English conversation, visual support, and peer-assisted interaction strengthens vocabulary gain and language confidence (Næss et al., 2021; Neitzel, 2024).

A qualitative descriptive case study in Singaraja Montessori School found that integrating visual schedules and real-life conversation scenarios led to marked improvements in functional English among children with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, a study in Yogyakarta showed that language learning for Down syndrome students is most successful when lessons are highly structured, repetitive, and include opportunities for embodied practice (Hunt et al., 2025; Rukminingdyah & Chamidah, 2024). These results point out both the importance of adapting instructional technique, as well as the necessity of teacher training in language-sensitive inclusive pedagogy.

2.2.3 Montessori Method in English Language Teaching for Down Syndrome Student

Several previous studies have specifically examined how Montessori techniques can support English language learning for children with intellectual disabilities. Non-intervention work held by the researcher in Singaraja Montessori School reported significant language development when Down syndrome learners used Montessori-aligned materials such as sandpaper letters, matching games, and story sequencing activities in English classes. Similarly, the Octopus classroom consists of Students from grades 1,2,3 found that integrating Montessori tools by including tactile word cards and guided group conversation resulted in higher rates of participation and vocabulary retention. Teachers highlight Montessori's flexibility in pacing and emphasis on multisensory reinforcement as conducive to English language instruction. For instance, the researcher observed that the Down syndrome student, when the child is provided with daily English conversation routines and visual props, demonstrated increased willingness to initiate communication and longer spontaneous speech. Furthermore, peer-reviewed work affirms that real-world connections and hands-on English activities (e.g., role-playing supermarket interactions, greetings, or describing the weather) encourage language transfer into daily life and foster self-confidence. These strategies are effective for Down syndrome students, especially when combined with individualised support and repetition.

2.2.4 Challenges, Barriers, and Teacher Strategies in Singaraja Montessori School

Despite these successes, empirical research in Singaraja Montessori School highlights ongoing challenges. Access to appropriate, culturally relevant Montessori resources for English language learning remains inconsistent. Teachers often report insufficient professional development in adapting Montessori tools for language teaching and special education. Studies in Singaraja Montessori School have found that high student-teacher ratios and limited adjusted materials can hinder the effective implementation of conversation-based curricula. Additionally, assessment of language progress in the Down syndrome student is complicated by both resource limitations and a scarcity of validated tools for formative, process-focused evaluation. To overcome these barriers, researchers document innovative strategies, such as (1) teacher-led material development using locally available resources, (2) embedding English practice within daily routines to maximise exposure, and (3) family and community engagement to reinforce language learning outside the classroom.

While the evidence above is promising, the literature has already exposed significant gaps. There is a substantial need for (a) longitudinal research examining sustained language outcomes in the Down syndrome student exposed to

Montessori-based English instruction, (b) school-based intervention studies in under-represented regions, such as rural areas in North Bali, and (c) qualitative method research capturing both student achievement data and experiential perspectives of learners, teachers, and families. In addition, most published studies focus either on Montessori or on language teaching for special needs, with relatively few addressing the intersection of these areas in inclusive, multilingual environments. There is also a lack of research detailing Montessori-based English conversation instruction for a student with Down syndrome within diverse, multicultural classrooms, precisely the context of the current thesis.

2.2.5 Empirical Relevance to the Current Study

This review points out why the present research is both timely and significant. By the means of examining the implementation of Montessori-based basic English conversation teaching with a Down syndrome student at Singaraja Montessori School, this study directly addresses gaps in both the international and national literature. It responds to global calls for rigorous, context-rich empirical documentation of inclusive Montessori pedagogy in language development and aims to contribute new insights to the field.

