CHAPTER I
BACKGROUND

This chapter covers several points related to the study's introduction. The first section discusses the study's background. The second section identifies the research problem. The third section presents the research questions. The fourth section describes the research purpose. The fifth section explains the significance of the research. The sixth section outlines the conceptual framework. The final section covers the study's contributions.

A. Background

In English Language Teaching (ELT), the impact of instruction often depends on the quality of interactions between teachers and students. In principle, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) fosters a teaching atmosphere that promotes interactions and individual attention for students, along with corrective feedback. Unfortunately, a considerable gap often exists between pedagogical ideals and the realities of the public education system. Within the current Indonesian context, one of the most pressing and controversial issues is the structural problem of large class sizes, which has recently intensified due to demographic shifts and specific provincial mandates.

This topic is important to investigate because it addresses the direct tension between educational accessibility and pedagogical quality. The West Java Provincial Government recently issued Decree Number 463.1/Kep.323-Disdik/2025 to increase accessibility and decrease dropout rates. While aimed at social inclusion, this policy enables public senior high schools to have a maximum of 50 students per study group. However, this regional mandate creates a stark regulatory contradiction with the national educational framework. Under Permendikbud Number 22 Year 2016 concerning the Standard of Process for Primary and Secondary Education, the national government explicitly mandates that the maximum capacity for a single classroom at the senior high school level must not exceed 36 students. This national benchmark is legally designed to safeguard pedagogical quality and ensure optimal teacher-student interaction.

Increasing class sizes from the national standard of 36 to the regional mandate of 50 fundamentally alters the infrastructure of classroom management. In ELT, effective classroom management is not merely about maintaining silence, but creating an organized environment conducive to meaningful language output and student interaction. According to Evertson and Poole (2021), classroom management in high-density environments often shifts from pedagogical facilitation to strict behavioral control and crowd mitigation. When a single educator faces 50 learners, management becomes heavily constrained by physical discipline. Teachers are forced to navigate severe temporal and cognitive constraints, prioritizing basic order over the nuanced instruction and individual scaffolding required by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Consequently, this regulatory and practical mismatch creates a critical practical dilemma for EFL teachers as "street-level bureaucrats" who must navigate the state's demand for inclusion vis-à-vis the curriculum's demand for language competence. Operating at the frontlines of policy implementation, these educators must somehow reconcile the state's demand for mass inclusion, the national mandate for quality standards, and the classroom realities of managing a high-density student population. Understanding this dynamic is essential for providing practical solutions to classroom management and policy evaluation at the secondary level.

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Several researchers have explored this topic, including Molavi (2024), who suggests that in large classes, discipline and control consume excessive teacher energy, leading to insufficient instruction on language depth. Similarly, Cervantes (2022) states that achievement levels are inversely related to class size, as instruction becomes constrained by diverse individual needs. Furthermore, Tadesse et al. (2021) argue that the high levels of interaction necessary for language development are often lacking in larger classes due to cognitive load and time constraints. In response to these pressures, Marzulina (2022) found that teachers often resort to "survival strategies," such as lowering student demands, which may inadvertently leave individual learners behind.

While many researchers have examined the challenges of large classes, one aspect remains underexplored: teachers' lived experiences under the West Java 2025 Policy. Most previous studies were conducted before this decree or focused primarily on student outcomes. A significant policy and empirical gap remains regarding how the "50 student rule" affects teachers' craft and their perceptions of ELT in this new regulatory environment. This study seeks to fill this gap by capturing the professional experiences and expectations of EFL teachers in West Java.

The theoretical perspective framing this research is grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and classroom management. CLT provides the pedagogical ideal for interaction, while effective classroom management highlights the teacher's role in maintaining an organized learning environment for tasks made increasingly difficult by larger class sizes. Additionally, this study utilizes the "street-level bureaucracy" framework to analyze how teachers implement and adapt to high-level education policies within the constraints of their daily classroom reality.

B. Research Problems

The central problem of this research lies in the critical tension between the pedagogical requirements of English Language Teaching (ELT) and the structural constraints imposed by the West Java Provincial Government's recent education policy. Specifically, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes high-quality interaction, while effective classroom management addresses the structural demands of high-density environments. At the same time, Decree Number 463.1/Kep.323-Disdik/2025 permits a maximum of 50 students per class to prioritize educational accessibility.

This policy creates a significant challenge for EFL teachers in West Java, who are positioned as "street-level bureaucrats." They must navigate a dilemma: fulfill the state's mandate for social inclusion while maintaining the curriculum's standard for communicative competence. Previous literature suggests that such large class sizes often shift the teacher's focus from instruction to classroom

management, leading to “survival strategies” that may compromise student learning outcomes.

Despite the gravity of this issue, research that specifically explores how teachers perceive and experience their professional “craft” under this new 50-student class size in West Java remains limited. Most existing studies are either outdated or focused primarily on student perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding the lived realities of the educators who must implement this policy.

Consequently, this study focuses on capturing the nuanced perceptions and lived experiences of senior high school EFL teachers in West Java. Addressing this problem is significant because it provides an essential policy evaluation framework and offers deep insights into the practical impact of large-class policies on the quality of ELT instruction. By filling this empirical gap, the research contributes to the broader field of education policy and ELT pedagogy in Indonesia.

In this study, the term constraints inherent in the policy is operationalized into two dimensions: structural and pedagogical barriers. Structurally, these constraints refer to the physical and logistical limitations imposed by the 50-student mandate, including severe time limitations per student, high cognitive load for the teacher, and physical classroom density. Pedagogically, these constraints signal the operational breakdown of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, where limited interaction space and effective management structures reduce the teacher's capacity to facilitate optimal language acquisition.

C. Research Questions

Based on the background and the research problem identified above, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do EFL teachers perceive the pedagogical implications of the 'Large Class Size Policy' (50 students) within the West Java educational context?
2. In what ways do EFL teachers navigate their instructional and classroom management practices under the constraints of this policy?

D. Research Purpose

In accordance with the research questions, this study is conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze EFL teachers' perceptions concerning the pedagogical implications of the ‘Large Class Size Policy’ (50 students) within the West Java senior high school context.
2. To explore how EFL teachers negotiate their instructional and classroom management practices in overcrowded settings under the constraints of this policy.

E. Significance of the Research

This research may impact the theory, practice, and policy of English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in the context of the post-2025 education policy in West Java. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes significantly to understanding how structural barriers affect social relations and interactional possibilities in language learning. By examining how high classroom density alters ‘communicative pedagogy’ (Yuan & Lee, 2022), this study challenges the direct transposition of Western Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) into high-density classrooms. Consequently, it provides a more nuanced, context-sensitive theoretical framework for ELT in developing contexts. It also expands upon the work of Tadesse et al. (2021) regarding cognitive and temporal constraints, while clarifying the concerns raised by Molavi (2024) that the quality of instruction often suffers when teachers are forced to prioritize basic order over pedagogical depth.

Furthermore, this study offers a significant empirical and contextual contribution by providing primary data on the impact of the 50:1 student-teacher ratio in the Indonesian senior high school setting. Addressing the lack of substantial evidence noted by Uljayeva (2024), these findings serve as a crucial practical contribution for EFL teachers. The documented "survival strategies" and classroom management techniques offer a localized reference for educators navigating these severe structural and pedagogical constraints. They also support Hayes's (2024) argument that professional development is most effective when teaching strategies

are contextualized rather than imported from foreign environments. By documenting the "voices" of educators, this study seeks to transform these common, reactive survival responses into a more structured pedagogical framework that helps teachers move toward more individualized instruction despite class-size limitations.

From a policy and analytical perspective, this research contributes to ‘evidence based policy making’ by offering a critical ‘bottom up’ evaluation of Decree Number 463.1/Kep.323-Disdik/2025 vis-à-vis the national mandates of Permendikbud Number 22 Year 2016. While the regional decree promotes educational equity and social inclusion, aligned with the socioeconomic theories of Guzmán, Barragán, and Vitery (2021), this research assesses the potential gap between policy intent and actual instructional quality. It exposes the pedagogical costs of administrative efficiency measures and provides a critical analysis that motivates educational stakeholders, such as the West Java Education Office, to rethink current class-size mandates. Ultimately, this study advocates for more targeted training and policy initiatives, as suggested by Tashakori (2026), to support teachers operating under the constraints of large-scale educational policies. It also aims to ensure the future competitiveness of West Java graduates in a demanding global economy.

F. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is engineered to map the systemic and pedagogical tensions experienced by senior high school EFL teachers in West Java who operate under a high-density classroom mandate. This framework synthesizes three core pillars: macro-level educational policy directives, mid-level professional role adjustments, and micro-level classroom execution barriers.

At the macro level, the study establishes a critical "policy friction" between national quality benchmarks and regional accessibility mandates. On one side, the national framework, through Permendikbud Number 22 Year 2016, sets a strict pedagogical boundary, restricting class sizes to a maximum of 36 students to guarantee the process quality standards and interactional integrity. Conversely, the local government’s response to socioeconomic demands for equity and higher enrollment rates materialized in Decree Number 463.1/Kep.323-Disdik/2025,

which inflates the permissible classroom capacity to 50 students. This study views this regulatory mismatch not merely as an administrative hurdle, but as a structural determinant that fundamentally shapes the entire ecosystem of language acquisition.

Bridging this macro policy divide and the actual classroom is the mid-level theoretical framework of "Street-Level Bureaucracy". This lens positions EFL teachers as frontline policy implementers who possess public service discretion but are severely constrained by inadequate organizational resources; in this case, an overwhelming student-teacher ratio. Under this structural weight, teachers cannot passively execute the curriculum; instead, they become policy arbiters who must constantly navigate the dilemma of ensuring mass social inclusion while attempting to uphold standard curricular competencies.

At the micro level, this framework captures how these policy-driven "structural and pedagogical constraints" disrupt ideal English Language Teaching (ELT) methodologies. Theoretically, the English curriculum is built upon Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and effective classroom management, which together guide how interactive learning and environmental organization are structured. However, according to Evertson and Poole (2021), when class size reaches extreme thresholds, the infrastructure of classroom management undergoes a functional mutation: moving away from proactive pedagogical facilitation toward reactive behavioral control and crowd management.

To cope with this shift, teachers are forced to deploy "navigation or survival strategies" (e.g., loose assessment techniques, simplified grouping, and lowered learning demands), as identified by Marzulina (2022). This framework shows that teachers' classroom management choices are direct products of their perceptions of these constraints.

Ultimately, this study conceptualizes the interplay between regulatory friction, street-level discretion, and classroom management compromises as determining the final quality of localized, context-sensitive ELT pedagogy in Indonesian secondary education.

To provide a clear visual representation of the systemic and pedagogical tensions explored in this study, Figure 1.1 illustrates the trajectory from macro-level policy friction down to micro-level classroom navigation.

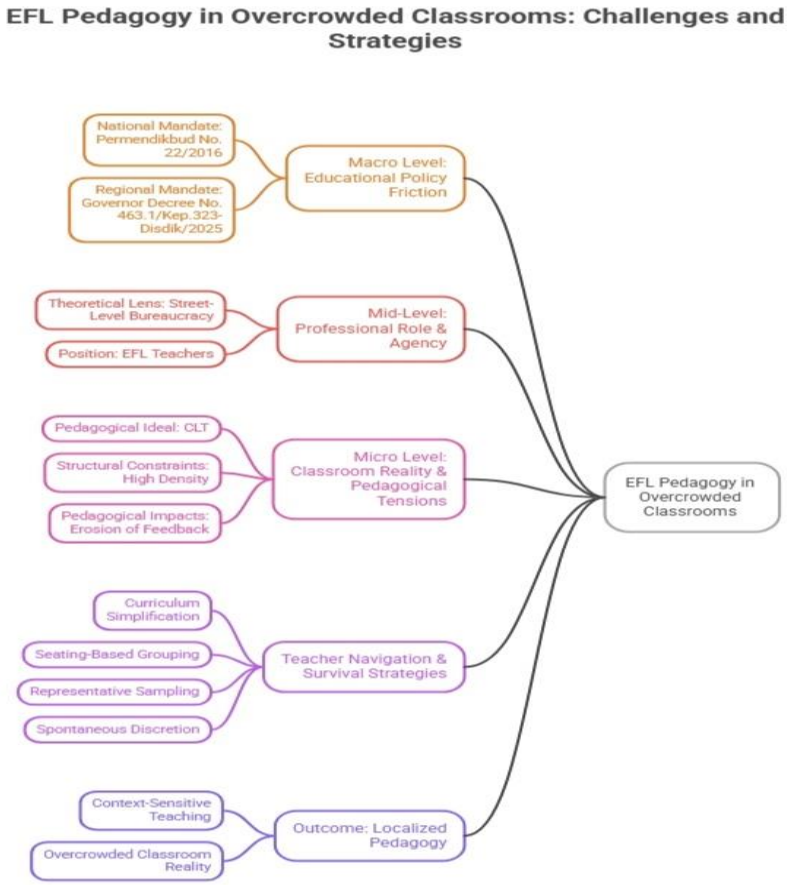


Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study: Interplay between Macro Policy Friction, Mid-Level Street-Level Bureaucracy, and Micro-Level Classroom Negotiation.

To provide a comprehensive visual representation of the inter-variable relationships and systemic tensions examined in this study, Figure 1.1 summarizes the theoretical flow from the macro to the micro level. The chart above illustrates how policy friction between regional and national mandates positions English teachers as "street-level bureaucrats" who must navigate the reality of overcrowded classrooms containing 50 students. Through this framework, it becomes evident how the ideal principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) clash with structural classroom constraints, compelling teachers to employ a repertoire of

navigational strategies or "survival strategies" to sustain a localized and contextualized learning process.

G. Contributions of the Study

The findings of this study are projected to offer tangible and distinct contributions across theoretical, practical, and policymaking domains. Theoretically, this study advances the application of Street-Level Bureaucracy theory within the specific realm of English language pedagogy in developing nations. While existing literature uses this framework widely in public administration, this research contextualizes it within the micro-ecosystem of a high-density EFL classroom. By mapping how teachers exercise professional discretion amid the systemic, structural, and pedagogical constraints of a 50-student mandate, this study enriches the literature on teacher agency. Furthermore, it provides a crucial theoretical counter-narrative to standard Western assumptions about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and classroom management models, illustrating how these instructional and managerial frameworks must adapt when facing policy-driven infrastructure shifts.

Building upon these theoretical insights, this research simultaneously offers a significant practical and pedagogical contribution as a highly localized, empirical reference for English educators who are actively navigating high-density classrooms. By explicitly documenting practitioners' lived experiences and tactical maneuvers, this research provides a repertoire of contextualized classroom management techniques and survival strategies that go beyond mere crowd control. Instead of relying on imported professional development models that presume ideal class sizes, EFL teachers in West Java and similar regions can utilize the findings of this study to implement realistic classroom management and peer interaction designs that are feasible within a 50-student limitation.

Finally, at the institutional level, this study provides a vital bottom-up empirical feedback loop for educational policy arbiters, specifically the West Java Provincial Education Office (Dinas Pendidikan Provinsi Jawa Barat). By contrasting the regional operationalization of Decree Number 463.1/Kep.323-Disdik/2025 against the national quality benchmarks mandated by Permendikbud

Number 22 Year 2016, this research lays bare the hidden pedagogical costs of administrative inclusion and efficiency measures. The insights generated from this study contribute directly to evidence-based policymaking, offering data-driven arguments that can motivate stakeholders to adjust future enrollment regulations, allocate proportional classroom resources, or design targeted instructional training to support frontline teachers.

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