

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of The Study

According to Mulyasa in Waruwu and Bilo, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is a new paradigm in education that provides greater freedom and flexibility to teachers and students in the learning process.¹ This approach aims to liberate teachers from attachment to a rigid curriculum and uniform learning standards so that they can design more relevant and exciting learning experiences according to students' needs and interests. Teachers are free to use innovative teaching methods and exciting materials to make the learning process more dynamic and centered on students' needs.

Since July 2023, SMPN 1 Cilegon has been actively implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, with an innovative, differentiated learning approach, for Grade 7 students. This approach is designed to meet each student's individual learning needs, allowing them to learn according to their own pace and learning style. The implementation of differentiated learning at SMPN 1 Cilegon has shown significant results, especially in improving students' English proficiency, especially in reading skills (see Appendix 1).

Based on these positive results, the researcher proposes that differentiated learning can be one of the strategic alternatives to improve students' overall learning outcomes, especially in the area of English reading skills. By implementing this approach, other schools can also experience the same benefits so that the quality of education in Indonesia can continue to improve.

Reading skills are always incorporated in each lesson theme. The ability to read is essential for a student because it is one of the foundations for

¹ Waruwu, E. W., & Bilo, D. T. (2024). Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar: Strategi Untuk Meningkatkan Hasil Belajar Siswa Dalam Pendidikan Agama Kristen. *Sinar Kasih: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama dan Filsafat*, 2(2), 254-268.

understanding and increasing knowledge of other subjects. Therefore, children must learn to read so that they can read to learn.

Technology development in the 5.0 era is very influential and significant in many aspects of our lives. The younger generation is expected to have good English awareness because IT 5.0 needs to develop, and the role of English in accessing and using information needs to increase. This is one of the reasons spoken and written English proficiency is undeniable, considering that English is one of the international languages spoken worldwide, and what we find in people's daily activities today is not difficult. Reading comprehension involves the interaction of cognitive processes and linguistic knowledge. Students must develop reading comprehension skills to access information, communicate effectively, and engage in critical thinking. However, many students struggle with reading comprehension, especially in a second or foreign language.

In Indonesia, English is not an official language, nor is it a second language, but a foreign one. Students learn English as a first foreign language. This implies that students get acquainted with the language in only a few hours in school. Therefore, of course, there are many difficulties encountered in learning the language. Moreover, as Lechner and Boli stated, reading can improve the ability to understand words, improve thinking skills, increase creativity, and get acquainted with new ideas.²

EFL students from Indonesia have a variety of reading challenges. According to Grabe and Stoller, reading comprehension can be challenging for English language learners. Their capacity to comprehend can be impacted by differences in their linguistic backgrounds, competence levels, and cultural elements.³ The most common occurrence is needing help grasping the text's idea or main point. The limited vocabulary in English is one of the issues. Students often need help comprehending what is being said in an English book because they cannot connect the many words in the text to form a

² Frank J Lechner and John Boli, *The Globalization Reader*, 6th ed. (USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019).

³ Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2019). *Teaching and researching reading*. Routledge.

comprehensive meaning. Additionally, according to Grabe, reading is the capacity to understand written content.⁴ Reading aptitude results from three processes: reading, processing, and understanding meaning. Nunan also pointed out that reading is a receptive ability that involves receiving information from a written or printed text and interpreting it to make sense.⁵ As a result, reading helps students learn the English language quite well.

The variety of students' abilities, interests, and needs provides one of the difficulties in teaching reading comprehension. To better understand how teachers might adapt reading teaching to meet the needs of various learners, Tomlinson explains the foundational ideas and methods of differentiated instruction. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to consider students' unique needs and interests to help them develop their reading comprehension abilities. Differentiated instruction can accomplish different tactics, such as altering the lesson's process, outcome, or learning environment.⁶ Karadag and Yasar discovered that differentiated learning improves students' interest and attitudes toward the lessons being taught.⁷

Based on the above description, an English teacher should consider assisting students in their reading-learning process. Teachers must be creative in introducing effective learning approaches or techniques so that students never give up on the challenges they face. Accordingly, the teaching method needs to be adjusted to the student's level of aptitude and comprehension.

⁴ Grabe, W. (2008). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University press.

⁵ Nunan, D. (1999). *Second Language Teaching & Learning*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers, p. 7625 Empire Dr., Florence, KY 41042-2978.

⁶ Tomlinson, C. A. (2013). Differentiated instruction. *Fundamentals of gifted education: Considering multiple perspectives*, pp. 287-300.

⁷ Karadag, R., & Yasar, S. (2010). Effects of differentiated instruction on students' attitudes towards Turkish courses: action research. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 9, 1394-1399.

B. Identification of The Problem

From the research background above, the identification of the problem is as follows:

1. The vital role of being fluent in English in the age of society 5.0.
2. Indonesian EFL students encountered a variety of reading challenges.
3. Teachers use the less successful method and teaching strategy to develop the English reading skills of Indonesian EFL students.

C. Scope and Limitation of the Problem

The researcher concentrated on the primary issue in this study, which is covered in the background section. Using a differentiated approach, the researcher learn how Indonesian EFL students construct and acquire reading comprehension. The SMPN 1 Kota Cilegon school as the site of the research. The goal of this study is for the researcher to identify the types of reading challenges that students encounter. The researcher then gather the data of the use of differentiated approach in improving the students' English reading comprehension, enabling them to approach challenges with an optimistic mindset.

D. Formulation of Problem

In accordance with the background of the problem, identification of the problem, and limitations of the problem described above, the research problems can be stated as follows:

1. How can differentiated learning enhance students' English reading comprehension?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of using differentiated instruction to address the diverse needs of English language learners?

E. Objective of Problem

Based on the formulation of the problem, the researcher identifies the following research objective:

1. To find out how differentiated learning can enhance students' reading comprehension
2. To find out the benefits and challenges of using differentiated instruction to address the diverse needs of English language learners

F. Previous Studies

Several studies have been conducted to determine the use of the differentiated learning approach. The first is a study that Parviz Alavinia and Sima Farhady published in 2012. *Using Differentiated Instruction to Teach Vocabulary in Mixed Ability Classes with a Focus on Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles* is the project's title. The researcher used an experimental, quantitative methodology and a test as the instrument. The outcome showed that the class using differentiated teaching achieved significantly better post-test performance, confirming the positive impact of differentiated teaching on the learning process. Moreover, notable differences emerged among different groups of learners with various learning styles and multiple intelligences, indicating that differentiated teaching effectively meets diverse learning needs. In addition, participants in the experimental group reported increased comfort and confidence in their ability to succeed, highlighting that differentiated instruction and small group work significantly empower students as learners.

The second is a study that Rika Sandi Arianto and colleagues released in 2023. *Building Students' Confidence in Speaking English through Differentiated Instruction* is the study's title. The researcher used a case study method. The instruments for this research were an observation checklist, an interview guideline for teachers and students, a questionnaire, and documentation. The outcome showed that the two English teachers had built

students' confidence by performing all the elements of Differentiated Instruction in the speaking classroom. The students enjoyed the activities their teachers provided and were more confident in speaking English because the teachers delivered the lessons according to their interests and abilities.

The third is a study that Stefanie Moreno released in 2015. *Differentiated Instruction: Strategies for English Language Learners Listening Comprehension Development* is the study's title. The researcher used a literature review. According to the study's findings, differentiated instruction for listening comprehension can undoubtedly be applied, as detailed in the instruction for listening comprehension section. The various strategies for differentiated instruction may pose different levels of challenge for EFL teachers in Cape Verde. This is particularly true considering the typical classroom settings in Cape Verdean high schools, with approximately 28 students per class and 50-minute sessions. The author notes that differentiating according to students' learning profiles can be difficult due to potential classroom management issues. Additionally, having students work on different tasks might result in increased noise and challenges in managing time effectively for students to share their findings with the entire class, which is crucial for peer learning and deepening understanding of the topics.

This research describes the application of the Differentiation Approach in the field of education and is related to the studies mentioned above. However, the previous research only sought to investigate the effectiveness of the differentiation approach in the learning process. In this study, the researcher will give an overview and provide illustrations for a more specific issue related to how EFL students in Indonesia establish reading activities through the Differentiated Approach.

G. Significance of Study

Integrating the study's importance into theoretical and practical fields, the researcher hopes that the present study will benefit society at large, particularly regarding the necessity of teaching and learning in English education.

1. Theoretically

The current study could potentially serve as a valuable resource for expanding understanding of how the Differentiated Approach can enhance students' reading comprehension.

2. Practically

The current study's findings are expected to have practical implications for students, teachers, and the researcher.

1. For the Students

The goal of the current study is to help students create reading activities using an efficient method, in this case, the Differentiated Approach. The researcher believes that by adopting an optimistic mindset, EFL students can overcome their reading challenges.

2. For the Teachers

Teachers can assess the differentiated approach once they know how it helps students improve their reading comprehension. If the approach proves successful, educators must stick with it to develop even better teaching strategies.

3. For the Researcher

The Differentiated approach will allow the researcher to evaluate the method. If it proves effective, the researcher will develop the method for her students in the future. The study will also serve as a review for subsequent research.

H. Writing Organization

The study is divided into five chapters, each of which has several points that describe the chapter.

Chapter I Introduction, consists of Background of The Study, Identification of The Problem, Scope and Limitation of Problem, Formulation of Problem, Objective of Study, Previous Studies, Significance of Study and Writing Organization.

Chapter II Theoretical Foundation, it consists of The Theory of Reading, The Teaching of Reading, The Benefit and Challenge of Differentiated Learning, and The Theory of Differentiated Approach

Chapter III Research Methodology, it consists of Research Design, Research Instrument, Place and Time, Participant, Data Collection Technique and Data Analysis Technique.

Chapter IV Research Finding and Discussion.

Chapter V Conclusion and Suggestion.