

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

In today's English language learning, teachers often use traditional teaching practices focusing on vocabulary memorization and language forms rather than communication (Celce and Murcia, 2014). These teaching activities often stick to textbooks as a reference which unfortunately according to some studies, are less effective for students to apply communicatively. In line with this, Duff (2014) states that ELT activities that emphasize only vocabulary cause students to lack crucial language-related competencies such as communicative, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse skills. Since the main objective of learning a new language is communication rather than memorization, language lessons ought to attempt toward this goal. As a result, the facilitation of varied learning topics is required to make language learning more effective and usable in communicative situations in modern life. In addition, according to Alghamdi, et al (2019), teachers should use a variety of contextualized language inputs that are carried out through content and meaningful situations in the classroom to provide more opportunities for language learning in the classroom to offer students more chances to absorb and employ various language structures.

Given that each student has different abilities, experiences, talents, interests, and learning styles in education. Teachers must pay attention to differences in students' character and provide for their needs. In connection with this, the Merdeka Curriculum is an option for restoring learning in Indonesia, so as not to

be left behind by countries in the world (Nugraha, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum was created so that students feel freedom in education and can develop their potential according to the interests and talents of the students themselves and the teacher (Sili, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum itself offers a choice of differentiated learning, which in this learning model, each learning design will be based on diversity and differences in students' interests and learning styles.

Differentiated learning is a learning model that allows students to acquire subject matter based on their capabilities, interests, and unique needs (Tomlinson 2017). Tomlinson (2001) stated that the differentiated learning model is an effort to adjust the learning process in the classroom to meet individual student learning needs. It can also be said that differentiated learning provides flexibility and can accommodate students' learning needs to increase their potential according to their readiness, interests, and different learning profiles. Differentiated learning can meet students' learning needs and help achieve optimal learning outcomes in the classroom by identifying or mapping students' learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Student learning profiles are related to language, culture, health, family circumstances, audio, visual, audio-visual, kinesthetic, and other specific factors.

Gray (2020) also reported that the differentiated learning model encourages self-organization. In differentiated learning, students are given varied choices regarding learning materials, teaching methods, and assessment. The main goal of

differentiated learning is to ensure that every student can reach their maximum potential and feel motivated in the learning process.

Differentiated learning accommodates learners' learning needs, so teachers must facilitate learners according to their needs, because each learner has different characteristics, so they are not given the same treatment in the learning process. In implementing differentiated learning, teachers must prepare learning with various treatments and actions for each learner. Furthermore, Santos, et al (2018) reported that the benefits of a differentiated learning model include: facilitating the development of the creativity component, providing a substantial reduction in failure, learning encouraging different adaptations based on expertise, and supporting regularity in behavior.

From these opinions, it can be concluded that differentiated learning also involves the use of varied teaching approaches due to the different learning styles of students so teachers need to use a variety of teaching methods that suit the needs of students. For example, for more visual-learning students, teachers can use visual media such as videos or pictures to help their understanding. For auditory students, teachers can use discussion or lecture methods to facilitate their understanding. By using teaching approaches that suit students' learning styles, the learning process will be more effective and students will be more engaged in learning.

Ngaisah & Aulia (2023) stated that each student needs different teaching approaches according to their characteristics and uniqueness, so they will be able to understand the competencies and learning materials well. Therefore, the

learning process must consider student characteristics and individual differences. Differentiated learning models are proven to increase student interest and motivation, from interest and willingness to learn, this increases students' creative thinking ability (Pane, et al. 2022).

In line with previous statements, Edith and Rizo (2015) explain that teachers should try to match their students' learning styles to classroom activities. Learning styles are various ways of learning. A learning style could be described as a student's consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning. The learning styles here include auditory, visual, and kinesthetic.

Under the Merdeka Curriculum, learning by considering students' characteristics will be more enjoyable for students because they do not feel burdened and teachers are also helped in the learning process. This curriculum suggests grouping students based on their learning styles. There are two major groups, which are audio-visual groups and kinesthetic groups. Both groups will be given different learning instructions, according to their learning style. For example, kinesthetic students are instructed to observe the environment directly and convey the results of their observations through presentations in front of the class. On the other hand, the audio-visual group will be given observation instructions through learning resources from the internet, or textbooks and convey their findings through mind-mapping, and notes. This instruction is described as a Differentiated Learning Model (also known as Differentiated Instruction).

Based on the observation conducted through interviewing the English teacher at MTsN 2 Medan, it was found that the differentiated learning design

started to be adapted in grade seven, taking into consideration the learning styles of the students, which are auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners. Then through interviews, the implementation of this learning model is based on the reason that some students are less focused on participating in learning and look uncomfortable, which according to the teacher, is due to the lack of varied learning activities that suit students' needs. However, the English teacher admitted that the learning design that has been prepared is still not fully optimized because there is a lack of learning design for auditory learners. The interview transcript with the teacher can be seen below

Researcher : Currently, the government is encouraging schools to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, in which learning is directed through a Differentiated learning model. Well, for grade seven, has this learning model been implemented?

Teacher : That is right, specifically in grade seven, differentiated learning has started to be implemented this year and teachers who teach in grade seven are still adapting and trying to design differentiated learning.

Researcher : Okay. For differentiated learning, has it been outlined in the lesson plan earlier?

Teacher : No, it has been implemented directly without developing an existing lesson plan.

Researcher : During the learning process in class, is the learning for each student's learning style done separately, either in groups or even on different days?

Teacher : The combination of learning variations is done together, but sometimes there are activities for certain learning styles that are carried out on other days.

Researcher : Seeing that there is no specific design that helps teachers in directing differentiated learning in the classroom, do you think the existing activities have met the needs of students' interests, readiness, and learning styles?

Teacher : I think the teaching process is not enough to implement differentiated learning, plus the teachers are still in the adaptation stage and need to learn more to be able to recognize the diversity of students' interests, readiness, and learning styles, especially auditory learners.

Furthermore, based on the results of the interview with the English teacher at MTsN 2 Medan, the researcher tried to compare those perspectives with the existing lesson plan. After further review, it was revealed that there were some activities for auditory learners (listening section), which contradicts the teacher's previous statement that learning for auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners is still uneven. Based on this preliminary data, it is interesting for the researcher to look further into the Differentiated Learning aspect that the teacher used in teaching. Therefore, the researcher wants to conduct a study entitled The Implementation of Differentiated Learning in Teaching English to Seventh-grade Students of MTsN 2 Medan.

B. The Problems of the Study

This research questions are as follows:

1. What are the aspects of Differentiated Learning implemented in teaching English speaking skills for grade seven at MTsN 2 Medan?
2. How is the implementation of the process of Differentiated Learning in teaching English speaking skills for grade seven of MTsN 2 Medan?

C. The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the aspect of Differentiated Learning implemented in teaching English speaking skills for grade seven at MTsN 2 Medan.
2. To examine the implementation of the process of Differentiated Learning in teaching English speaking skills for grade seven of MTsN 2 Medan.

D. The Scope of the Study

Related to the identification of the problems, this research focuses on the teacher as the implementer of the learning model. This research explains how English teachers implemented the Differentiated Learning Model in Teaching English speaking skills to seventh-grade students at MTsN 2 Medan.

E. The Significances of the Study

The study findings are expected to be useful and can provide a theoretical and practical contribution.

1. Theoretically, this study contains further information or references on the Implementation of Differentiated Learning.
2. Practically, this study is expected to have practical applications, including:
 - a. For teachers, can improve their teaching methods and provide the best solutions for any problems encountered and can make the atmosphere and perceptions about learning English better and more enjoyable.
 - b. For schools, it is hoped that the research results of this research can be useful as a reference for educational institutions to implement differentiated learning from year to year so that it continues to improve and develop
 - c. For researchers, Further researchers who are interested in the design and implementation of Differentiated Learning in English subjects for junior high school level can get the basic information from this study to do further research.