CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

1. Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a learning strategy that takes into account individual student development. Differentiated instruction responds to differences in students' interests, needs, and learning readiness, where teachers proactively structure and adjust content, processes, products, and environment to suit the needs of each student (Tomlinson, 2017). The foundation of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes that learning must be designed according to the needs of each student, makes it a learning model that provides equal opportunities for students to develop and absorb new knowledge (Rufus, 2024). Thus, creating an inclusive learning environment leads to improved student learning outcomes.

Understanding and applying differentiated instruction's components is an important part of successfully implementing it to be adequate and fit for purpose. According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction has four components: content, process, product, and environment. These four components are interconnected and adapted to students' needs, readiness, and interests.

a. Content relates to curriculum and learning materials based on students' needs and learning styles. In this component, teachers can provide diverse learning materials and use different teaching methods to deliver them.

b. Process refers to how students understand and manage information. In this component, teachers should design meaningful and varied learning based on students' interests and needs. Strategies can include group work, the use of technology, or discussion to support learning.

c.   The product is the result of learning. In this component, teachers can provide options for students to show what they have learned according to their abilities and interests, such as projects, tests, reports, or other activities.

d.   Environment refers to classroom conditions that support learning. In this component, teachers must create a conducive and comfortable classroom environment. This includes classroom rules, procedures, seating arrangements, lighting, and all processes affecting the atmosphere.

Another important part to support the effectiveness of differentiated instruction is applying the basic principles of differentiated instruction. Tomlinson (2014) claimed there are five basic principles related to differentiated instruction. Namely (1) quality curriculum, which is a curriculum that has clear goals so that teachers know what to aim for at the end of learning; (2) continuous assessment, which is an assessment carried out at the beginning, during, and the end of learning; (3) responsive teaching, where teachers can adapt their teaching to the needs of learners, this can be done through formative assessment; (4) leadership and classroom routines, where teachers can lead their students to follow learning in a conducive atmosphere; (5) learning environment, including the physical environment of the school and classrooms that are comfortable and safe for students to learn.

Although differentiated instruction offers many benefits, its implementation is not free from challenges. Teachers and schools often face these challenges. For teachers, preparing and designing differentiated instruction requires more time and effort, as well as a lack of support from other teachers. Meanwhile, for schools, the main challenge is human resources in improving the capacity and quality of teachers and the readiness of students to accept all learning processes (Suryati et al., 2023).

In essence, differentiated instruction is not only strategic but a mindset that puts students at the center of learning, appreciates and accommodates student diversity by tailoring education to their unique characters. Through differences in content, process, product, and environment, it can create inclusive and dynamic learning so that all students have equal opportunities to develop.

2. The Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that contains diverse intra-curricular learning where the content is optimized so that students have enough time to deepen concepts and strengthen competencies (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Teachers and students in education units or schools that use the Merdeka Curriculum are free to innovate and have the freedom to learn independently and imaginatively (Yulianto, 2022). The Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Mendikbud Ristek) initiated the Merdeka Curriculum to evaluate the 2013 curriculum improvement (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). The Merdeka Curriculum was created to improve the previous curriculum to give students a more holistic learning experience (Azmi et al., 2023).

The goal of the Merdeka curriculum, as an effort to realise holistic and effective learning for students, will be achieved if you know about the characteristics of the Merdeka curriculum. Referring to Wahyudin et al., (2024) There are four characteristics of a Merdeka curriculum, namely: 1) Understanding learners' learning needs and abilities through assessment; 2) Tailoring learning to students' learning profiles; 3) Prioritizing learners' learning progress over the completion of the delivered curriculum content; 4) reflect on student learning progress through collaboration with other educators.

Based on the understanding above, the Merdeka Curriculum is here as an answer to optimize learning by giving space for students to develop according to their respective potentials and for teachers to innovate. With this, the Merdeka Curriculum is hoped to be a foundation for practical, inclusive, and adaptive learning to future challenges.

3. English Language Teaching (ELT)

English Language Teaching (ELT) draws on the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) or second language (ESL), which includes various techniques and approaches to improve students' English language skills, such

as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Wahyudin et al., 2024). Along with technological developments and pedagogical innovations, English language learning (ELT) is now showing dynamic developments; English teaching methods are becoming more in-depth, personalized, and interactive, such as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) methods (Vaishnav, 2024). With these methods, teachers have a variety of approaches that can be adapted to students' needs to achieve English learning goals.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English is not used as the main language. So it is necessary to understand the principles of English language teaching (ELT) in the EFL context that can make learning more effective and meaningful. Some of the principles used in EFL are the use of the first language (L1), task-based English teaching (TBLT), and technology integration. Suantara (2023) claimed that the first language (L1) can help students understand difficult topics, socialise in class, master new vocabulary, and receive instructions. In addition, the task-based teaching (TBLT) approach can improve communication skills because students are more interactive with real-world communication (Eka Sari et al., 2023). Another principle that is also important in today's era is technology integration, which makes the learning experience more enjoyable and effective, so that it can improve language skills and student engagement (Sari, 2024).

The complexity of learning English in EFL classes, where many skills must be taught by teachers and mastered by students, poses various challenges. The main challenge faced by students is the absence of an active role in English outside the classroom, so they are not used to using English practically every day (Akbari, 2015). In addition, students feel anxiety in learning English, which is influenced by attitudes of lack of self-confidence, overthinking, and nervousness (Astuti et al., 2022). Therefore, the role of teachers is very important to overcome these problems, but many teachers face challenges in limited knowledge and teaching development, due to lack of professional training, adequate resources, and facilities (Mumary Songbatumis, 2017).

Based on the explanation above, the context of English language teaching (ELT) draws on teaching English to speakers of other languages with several methods that can be used, such as communicative language teaching (CLT), audiolingual, and task-based language teaching (TBLT). English is not used as the primary language in EFL classes, so task-based approaches and technology in learning are emphasized to improve student understanding and interaction. However, challenges such as student anxiety must be overcome by teachers who face limited teaching resources. Therefore, teacher professional development is needed to improve learning effectiveness.

3.1 Differentiated Instruction in EFL

The diverse skills and needs of students in EFL classrooms make differentiated instruction a strategy that has attracted much attention in the field of English language education (Yuniawati, 2024). This is because differentiated instruction principles offer many benefits to a diverse EFL classroom, namely: increasing responsibility and self-awareness, encouraging student performance, developing collaboration, increasing motivation, and student engagement (Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023). Thus, the goals of English language learning in a diverse EFL classroom can be met.

To achieve the success of differentiated instruction in EFL classrooms, teachers must understand when and which parts to differentiate. According to Naka (2018), three stages must be differentiated in the EFL classroom, namely: 1) differentiating materials and adjusting them to each student's level of English; 2) applying various teaching methods and activities so that students can find interesting and easy ways to learn; 3) giving students the choice of sharing their knowledge in a way that interests them.

In implementing differentiated instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, teachers face challenges in preparing differentiated

instruction. This is because each class is filled with many students and has limited time for designing and planning learning activities, making teacher readiness less than optimal (Sofiana et al., 2024).

From the explanation above, differentiated instruction is an important strategy for teaching English in EFL classrooms because it can accommodate the needs of diverse students. However, for differentiated instruction to be effective, teachers must understand how to implement it properly and overcome its main challenges: time constraints and diverse students.

B. Study of the Relevant Research

There are several relevant studies related to the application of differentiated instruction in English classes in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The first is research by Wahyuni (2023) related to differentiated learning in the Merdeka curriculum. The results of this study show that differentiated learning has begun to be applied in English teaching through three stages, namely: (1) mapping students' learning styles and interests; (2) implementing learning; and (3) evaluating. This research used a descriptive qualitative method with data collection through interviews and documentation. The second study, conducted by Barlian et al. (2023), shows that differentiated learning in the Merdeka curriculum for English lessons is effectively implemented through four components: content, process, product, and environment. This study used qualitative methods, with data collection through interviews and documentation.

The last, research by Ahmad et al. (2024) explored the implementation of differentiated instruction in English classes using qualitative methods through a phenomenological approach. The research found that students prefer learning activities that match their interests and readiness because they are considered more interesting and effective, thus increasing engagement and learning achievement. However, there are obstacles in its implementation such as limited time in the learning process and limited resources.

The gap between this study and the above research lies in the research method. While the above research only highlights the effectiveness of differentiated instruction implementation from the perspective of teacher through interview and document analysis. Meanwhile, this research uses the qualitative approach of a case study method to generate more in-depth knowledge related to the implementation of differentiated instruction, including its challenges and solutions. Furthermore, this study utilizes observation and interview as data collection to gain accurate insights into teachers' theoretical understanding and practical application of differentiated instruction in the classroom.