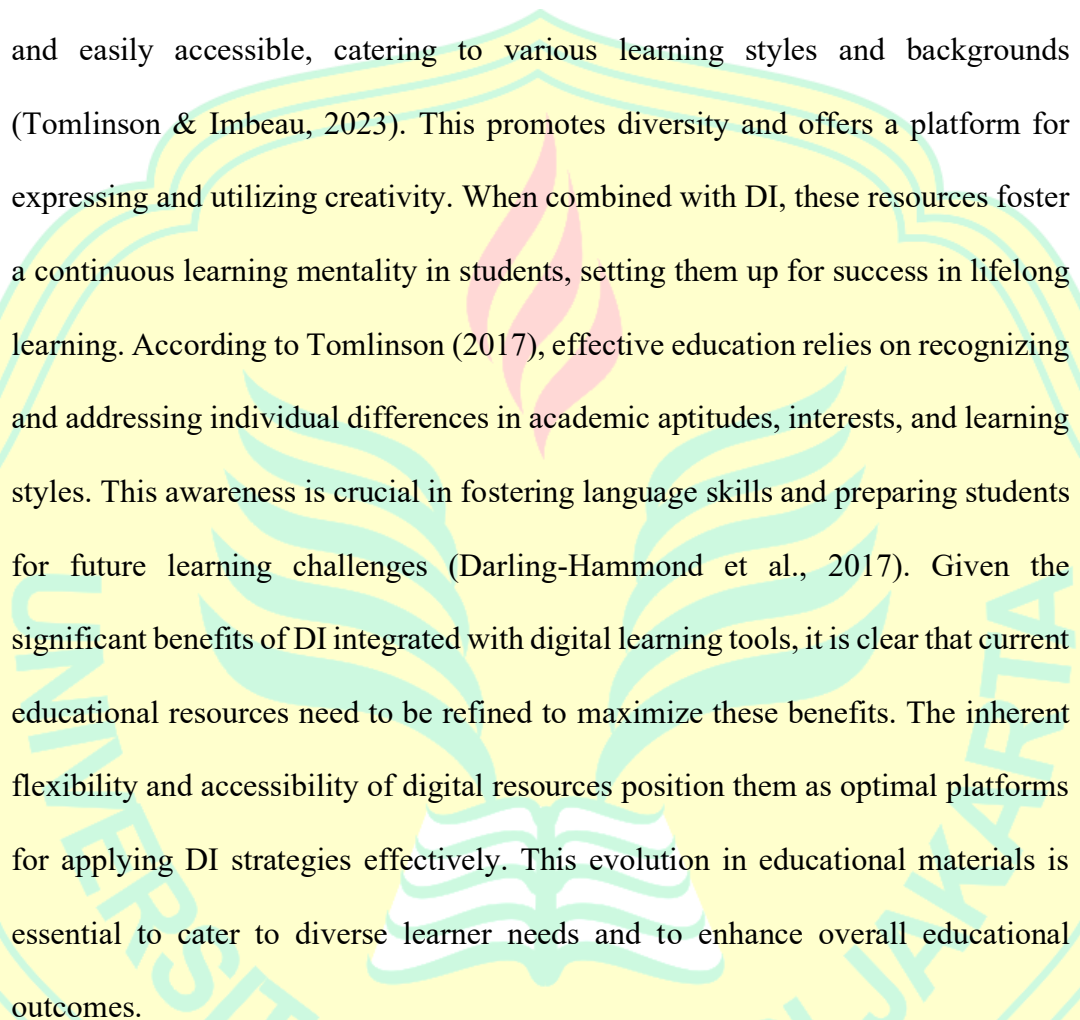# CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Every student has a different background, interest, and learning profile, which can challenge teachers in delivering effective lessons. Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a strategy designed to address these diverse learning needs by providing personalized educational experiences. DI could be a strategy to help the teachers teach the lesson (Pena, 2023). According to Pozas, Letzel-Alt, and Schwab (2023), DI acknowledges individual differences and aims to respond effectively to varying learning needs.

Tomlinson (2014) states that teachers foster a sense of ownership over learning experiences by providing students with options and independence in their engagement with the topic. Flexible grouping, a key feature of DI, enables teachers to form small groups based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, promoting collaborative projects and activities aligned with students' choices. By using diverse instructional materials such as books, films, and multimedia, DI caters to different interests and accommodates various learning modalities. Regular evaluations of students' interests and learning profiles through surveys, discussions, and informal assessments allow teachers to adjust their teaching methods effectively (Graham et al., 2021). Furthermore, DI could continuously monitor students' academic processes (Dack, 2019).

Integrating DI with digital learning resources, particularly in English language learning, has shown promise in enhancing students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Ayuningtyas et al., 2023). Digital resources are flexible and easily accessible, catering to various learning styles and backgrounds (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). This promotes diversity and offers a platform for expressing and utilizing creativity. When combined with DI, these resources foster a continuous learning mentality in students, setting them up for success in lifelong learning. According to Tomlinson (2017), effective education relies on recognizing and addressing individual differences in academic aptitudes, interests, and learning styles. This awareness is crucial in fostering language skills and preparing students for future learning challenges (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Given the significant benefits of DI integrated with digital learning tools, it is clear that current educational resources need to be refined to maximize these benefits. The inherent flexibility and accessibility of digital resources position them as optimal platforms for applying DI strategies effectively. This evolution in educational materials is essential to cater to diverse learner needs and to enhance overall educational outcomes.

One such digital learning resource is MyEnglishStep.com (MES), which was developed to support junior high school students and teachers in distance learning scenarios. MES, aligned with Kurikulum 2013, offers materials for listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. However, MES lacks the incorporation of DI strategies, particularly in listening and speaking skills. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has recently introduced

Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes the need for DI in digital learning resources to meet the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standards (Kurka, 2022). In the newest curriculum, it requires the skills of listening and speaking to be fulfilled, which relevant with the DI strategies. Listening is critical for understanding spoken language, which is necessary for acquiring pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax, while speaking, in turn, is vital for expressing thoughts and understanding the world (Newton & Nation, 2020). The interconnected nature of listening and speaking means that developing one skill enhances the other, creating a synergistic effect that boosts overall language proficiency (Mart, 2020). By focusing on these skills, MES can provide a more comprehensive and effective learning experience, addressing the diverse needs of learners and aligning with educational standards like the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Therefore, in response to the new curriculum, MES has been redesigned to include additional materials, envisioning classroom activities incorporating DI across four key elements: content, process, product, and learning environment. This research particularly focuses on the content aspect of DI, aiming to integrate DI strategies into teachers' materials and encourage greater student engagement in the classroom. Implementing DI is expected to enhance students' critical and creative thinking skills. The assessment of DI's alignment with Kurikulum Merdeka is based on evaluating student readiness through pre-tests, gauging interests via questionnaires or inventories, and understanding learning profiles through similar tools (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). By varying teaching methods, materials, and assessment techniques, teachers can address the unique abilities and learning styles

of each student, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment, specifically in boosting the listening and speaking skills.

Consequently, this study aims to investigate the incorporation of DI strategies in the old MES and new MES to see the gap between those two, especially in listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, through the gap from the old MES will be addressed to the new MES by highlighting students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. So, MES can personalize, engage, and meet individual needs, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of English language instruction that align with Kurikulum Merdeka.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how MES can be used to facilitate DI strategies, particularly in enhancing students' listening and speaking skills.

1.3. Research Question

1. How is DI incorporated in the old MES to develop students' listening and speaking skills?
2. How is DI incorporated in the new MES to develop students' listening and speaking skills?

1.4. Scope of the Study

This research will analyze the gaps in the old MES regarding the lack of DI strategies and propose enhancements to incorporate DI effectively. Data will be

gathered through an initial Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with teachers to provide insights into how MES materials can better support DI.

1.5. Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

   This research is about the investigation of DI content in the old and the new MES.

2. Practical Significance

   1. Benefits for Researchers:

      This research will facilitate future implementations across multiple stakeholders, streamlining classroom resources and catering to students and teachers based on their backgrounds. Researchers believe DI sets high standards for creating an inclusive learning environment, advancing education to new levels.

   2. Benefits for Teachers:

      The findings will guide teachers in diversifying classroom materials and implementing the new MES effectively.

   3. Benefits for Students:

      Integrating DI into MES will help students identify their preferred learning styles and comprehensively understand classroom materials.