CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research background, problem identification, limitations of the study, research questions, research objectives, and the significance of the research.

1.1 Research Background

Assessment in the educational context is a series of activities that include collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to determine students' level of understanding and performance during the learning process (Amelia et al., 2023). Both teachers and students must pay attention to assessment, as the process and results provide crucial information for assessing student learning. According to Widiastuti et al. (2020), as part of the teaching and learning process, assessment is a method teachers can use to determine students' knowledge and skills, learning outcomes, and strengths and weaknesses. This allows teachers to motivate students to improve their abilities. Furthermore, assessment also allows teachers to provide appropriate feedback on what students have learned, the extent to which they have understood the material, and how students are progressing in their learning (Widiastuti et al., 2020).

Usman et al. (2024) explain the objectives of assessment in education, namely: (1) to help student learning align with learning outcomes, (2) to assess student achievement, (3) to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching programs, and (4) to serve as a basis for decision-making regarding student learning in the future. Therefore, a good assessment should serve as a benchmark for current development

as well as a direction for future steps. Assessment is the process of collecting and discussing information from various sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of what students know, understand, and can do based on their learning experiences (Usman et al., 2024). According to Black and Wiliam (1998), assessment results should be used to further improve learning, which marks the end point of the assessment process for students. Thus, assessment has a very important position in the world of education.

In the curriculum currently implemented in Indonesia, the Emancipated Curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*, the assessment process plays a crucial role in supporting student learning. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and provides teachers with the flexibility to adapt learning strategies, including assessment methods, to suit the needs, learning styles, interests, and potential of each student (Susanti et al., 2024). Therefore, assessment is not only conducted at the end of learning activities but is also integrated throughout the learning process. As stated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), assessment in the Emancipated Curriculum is conducted continuously, both during and after the learning process, to obtain comprehensive information about student competencies and provide meaningful feedback that supports learning. Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), emphasizes that assessment systems should be designed to support teaching, monitor progress, and guide future learning. This demonstrates the crucial role of assessment in educational transformation.

Therefore, an appropriate assessment approach is required to ensure effective implementation and support learning objectives. A suitable assessment

approach is essential for the effective implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum. Padmadewi and Artini (2019) emphasize that assessment practices in education have three main objectives: Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), and Assessment of Learning (AoL). Each has its own function in evaluating the learning process for both teachers and students (Padmanabha, 2021). Assessment as Learning (AaL) plays a role in developing students' metacognitive skills and positioning them as active participants in the assessment process. Through monitoring their own learning and utilizing feedback, students learn to adjust, adapt, and even make significant changes to their learning strategies. Teachers use AaL to help students develop the skills necessary for more effective learning (Padmanabha, 2021). Assessment for Learning (AfL) is a crucial component of the learning process, implemented not only at the end of a lesson but also throughout the learning process. AfL helps teachers identify students' learning needs and provides timely feedback, so students understand how, when, and where their knowledge can be applied. Continuous implementation of AfL also supports teachers in planning the next steps in learning and encourages active participation and continuous improvement of student competencies (Padmanabha, 2021). Assessment of Learning (AoL) serves to evaluate student learning outcomes and report their academic progress to parents and other stakeholders. Teachers generally use tests to assess students' abilities and competencies, although in practice, AoL can also take the form of final projects such as debates, performances, or standardized tests such as school and national exams. AoL is crucial in providing assessment, guidance for improvement, and accountability for teachers, schools, and parents regarding student achievement, so that the results can be used as a basis

for broader educational decision-making (Padmanabha, 2021). By understanding the goals and functions of AaL, AfL, and AoL, teachers can choose and apply appropriate assessment strategies in learning, whether through daily activities, providing feedback, or evaluating final assignments, so that each strategy directly supports the optimal development of student competencies.

Several previous studies have highlighted the assessment strategies implemented by English teachers. Priscilla et al. (2021) showed that teachers implement vocabulary assessment throughout the learning process by utilizing textbooks, dictionaries, and online resources. Teachers also create multiple-choice and essay questions, assigning more than ten questions per session, integrating vocabulary with other materials, and assigning assignments regularly. Meanwhile, Silalahi et al. (2022) found that teachers use various forms of writing assessment, such as exercises, homework, essays, descriptive and narrative texts, and scientific reports. Writing assessment is implemented in combination with other language skills, with frequencies varying from weekly to occasional, and its portion in exams is determined at the teacher's discretion. Furthermore, Hagenimana at al. (2023) reported that competency-based assessment is mostly implemented through clarifying questions to check student understanding. Other forms of assessment, such as redirection questions, self-reflection, and critical thinking questions, are implemented but rarely used. Teachers also face challenges in designing assessment instruments that require higher-order thinking skills due to time constraints, limited question-building skills, and a tendency to choose simpler assessment formats. As a result, most assessments still focus on lower-order thinking skills in Bloom's Taxonomy.

Based on the explanation in the previous paragraph, it is clear that previous research has focused solely on the implementation of assessments based on specific skills such as vocabulary, writing, and competency-based assessments, without considering individual student learning needs. Furthermore, teacher-implemented assessments generally focus on conventional techniques and are not geared toward developing higher-order thinking skills. No research specifically addresses how assessments are implemented in the context of differentiated learning, particularly in terms of the strategies used to accommodate student differences. This gap highlights the need for further research to examine how teachers implement assessments that are responsive to the diverse needs of students in differentiated learning.

Given the central role of assessment in the Emancipated Curriculum, it is crucial to consider how assessment practices can be adapted to support differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is an approach that adapts learning experiences to students' interests, learning styles, and developmental levels, thus differing from conventional methods (Widayanti et al., 2024). In this context, assessment is a crucial mechanism to ensure that learning practices align with diverse student profiles and provide equitable opportunities for each learner to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Differentiated learning can be implemented through four main aspects: content differentiation, process differentiation, product differentiation, and learning environment differentiation (Noman & Kaur, 2014). Content differentiation focuses on adapting materials, learning resources, and learning activities. Teachers can provide alternative reading materials with varying levels of difficulty, use

various resources such as videos, articles, or simulations, adjust the depth and breadth of material to suit student readiness, and integrate culturally relevant materials to increase engagement (Susanto et al., 2022). Process differentiation emphasizes adapting learning methods, strategies, and approaches to suit students' diverse learning needs and preferences. Strategies that can be implemented include flexible grouping, providing multiple pathways to mastery (e.g., through differentiated assignments or choice boards), using a variety of instructional strategies such as hands-on, inquiry-based, hands-on, or technology-based learning, and implementing formative assessments and ongoing feedback to monitor progress and guide the learning process (Restu et al., 2023). Product differentiation emphasizes how students demonstrate their understanding. Strategies include providing a choice of assignment formats such as essays, presentations, videos, or creative projects; providing assignments with varying levels of complexity; encouraging peer collaboration; and leveraging students' strengths and interests to express their learning (Sa'ida, 2023). Learning environment differentiation focuses on adapting the physical and psychological conditions of the classroom. This can include seating arrangements, appropriate lighting and noise levels, access to necessary technology, and creating an inclusive classroom climate to support diverse student needs, preferences, and characteristics (Tomlinson, 2014).

Furthermore, in line with the implementation of differentiated learning, assessment practices also need to be adapted to support student diversity fairly and effectively. Teachers' assessment practices are expected to accommodate the diversity of students' needs, abilities, learning styles, and preferences (Tomlinson,

2014; Özüdoğru, 2022). Therefore, teachers need to design and implement differentiated assessment methods that fairly reflect students' learning profiles, provide a comprehensive picture of their development, and serve as a basis for making appropriate instructional decisions (Popham, 2017). Differentiated assessment has been shown to increase student engagement, foster independent thinking, and promote academic achievement, particularly when assessments are tailored to individual learning styles and needs (Safawi & Akay, 2022; Tomlinson, 2014). Thus, differentiation in assessment is not merely a means of evaluating learning outcomes, but also a pedagogical approach that is equitable, inclusive, and able to maximize the potential of each student (King-Sears, 2009).

Based on initial observations, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja, one of the schools implementing the Emancipated Curriculum, have understood the basics of assessment in the Emancipated Curriculum and have received training in differentiated learning. Teachers apply differentiated learning to adapt the learning process to students' needs, interests, and abilities. Learning activities used include web-based games by forming groups of students with different abilities, differentiated assignments, essays, giving assignments of varying levels of complexity and presentations or creative projects. Where teachers use an assessment approach for learning to help teachers adapt teaching strategies to students' needs through providing continuous feedback, as well as encouraging peer collaboration, which uses an assessment approach of learning to assess students' final achievement of competencies. In practice, teachers use differentiated assessment, which adapts assessments to students' abilities, interests, and learning styles, and non-differentiated

assessment, which is applied generally. Initial interviews indicate that some teachers implemented differentiated assessment, while others did not, resulting in assessment practices that did not always fairly and effectively reflect the diversity of students' needs, abilities, learning styles, and preferences. In other words, not all students received assessments tailored to their learning profiles, resulting in a comprehensive picture of individual development and the basis for making appropriate instructional decisions is not yet fully optimal.

One example of differentiated assessment in differentiated learning is Product Differentiation, where students demonstrate their understanding through creative work, such as creating video presentations, telling stories, or participating in role-plays. This approach not only allows students to express their competencies in various ways but also increases their confidence and engagement in learning. This preliminary data showed that teacher has already had preference to conduct assessment strategies within differentiated learning. Although several strategies have been implemented, teachers also face several obstacles, such as large numbers of students, limited time, and also limited understanding of the concepts and practices of differentiated assessment. The results of these preliminary data showed significant urgency for this study to explore comprehensively how teachers implemented those strategies and whether differentiation in assessment also occurs, as is expected by the curriculum. As well as to explore the challenges of implementing the strategies specifically.

Based on the review of previous studies, it is evident that existing research on assessment in English language learning has predominantly focused on specific types of assessment, such as vocabulary assessment, writing assessment, and

competency-based assessment, as well as the challenges teachers face in implementing these assessments. These studies tend to examine assessment practices in isolation, emphasizing particular language skills or assessment techniques without situating them within a differentiated learning framework. Consequently, assessment is often discussed as a separate activity rather than as an integrated component of differentiated learning.

Furthermore, although previous studies acknowledge the importance of formative assessment, feedback, and student involvement, they do not explicitly examine how assessment strategies are designed and implemented to accommodate students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. This indicates that the relationship between differentiated learning and differentiated assessment has not been sufficiently explored, particularly in terms of classroom-based practices.

In the context of the Emancipated Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning, flexibility, and differentiation, assessment is expected to function as an adaptive mechanism that supports diverse learners. However, empirical studies that specifically investigate assessment strategies within differentiated learning settings, especially in EFL classrooms at the junior high school level, remain limited. In addition, few studies have examined whether differentiated assessment is implemented consistently across different learning strategies and what challenges teachers face in applying differentiation principles to assessment practices.

Therefore, this study is important to conduct to investigate how assessment strategies are applied by English teachers in differentiated learning, as well as to

identify the challenges faced in the implementation process. This study is intended to fulfil the gaps by doing an exploration to describe assessment strategies and also whether they risk differentiation and the challenges encountered by the English teachers during the implementation at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. The practice of assessment strategy within differentiated learning is still rarely discussed in empirical research, especially in local contexts such as SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. Therefore, this study is important to conduct to investigate how assessment strategies are applied by English teachers in differentiated learning, as well as to identify the challenges faced in the implementation process. Through this research, it is hoped that it can provide a real contribution in broadening teachers' insights regarding assessment practices that are responsive to students' diverse learning needs. Through this research, it is hoped that it can provide a real contribution in broadening teachers' insights regarding assessment practices that are responsive to students' diverse learning needs.

1.2 Problem Identification

Based on the background description, several problems can be identified related to the implementation of assessment strategies in English learning at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. Although the Emancipated Curriculum emphasizes the importance of continuous assessment and the implementation of differentiated learning, field practice indicates that teachers are not yet fully capable of implementing assessments in accordance with the principles of differentiation. Initial observations and interviews indicate that teachers have implemented various assessment strategies, such as Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessment of Learning (AoL). However, the implementation of differentiated assessment still

faces obstacles, including large number of students, limited time, and teachers' limited understanding of the concepts and practices of differentiated assessment. As a result, not all assessments can fairly and effectively reflect students' needs, interests, and learning profiles.

This situation indicates a gap between the concept of differentiated assessment required by the Emancipated Curriculum and actual school practice. Therefore, this study is important to describe how English teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja implement assessment strategies in the context of differentiated learning and to identify the challenges faced in its implementation.

1.3 Limitation of Study

Based on the problems above, this study focused on exploring various assessment strategies employed by English teachers within differentiated learning and identifying whether there was differentiation of the assessment conducted, as well as the challenges faced by English teachers in using assessment strategies in differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja. This study used observation and interview techniques with a qualitative approach. The observed schools were limited to junior high schools in Buleleng Regency, especially English teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja, whose schools had implemented the Emancipated Curriculum and whose teachers had implemented assessment strategies in differentiated learning.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1   What are the English teachers' assessment strategies within differentiated learning employed in teaching and learning process at SMP Negeri 4

Singaraja?

1.4.2   What are the challenges of teachers in employing the assessment strategies within differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja?

1.5 Research Objectives

1.5.1   To describe the English teachers' assessment strategies within differentiated learning employed in teaching and learning process at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja.

1.5.2   To describe the challenges of teachers in employing the assessment strategies within differentiated learning at SMP Negeri 4 Singaraja.

1.6 Research Significances

1.6.1   Theoretical Significance

The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of scientific knowledge in the field of assessment, particularly in the context of differentiated learning. This study broadens understanding of the relationship between assessment strategies and differences in student readiness, interests, and learning profiles, and strengthens the theoretical foundation that assessment functions not only as a measure of achievement but also as an integral part of adaptive learning. Overall, this study provides a strong conceptual foundation for understanding assessment in English Language Education, especially in accommodating diverse student profiles through differentiated learning.

1.6.2   Practical Significance

a.   For English Teachers

This research is expected to provide English teachers with deeper insights into the various assessment strategies applied in the context of the Emancipated Curriculum, particularly in differentiated learning. By understanding how to implement appropriate assessment strategies, such as Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), and Assessment of Learning (AoL), teachers can be more responsive to differences in student abilities, needs, interests, and learning styles. Teachers are also expected to be able to implement differentiated assessment, which is an assessment tailored to the differences in student learning profiles, so that each student receives fair, targeted assessments that support the optimal development of their abilities, in accordance with the principles of the Emancipated Curriculum.

b.   For Educational Institutions

This research is expected to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the assessment strategies practiced by English teachers in the context of the Emancipated Curriculum and differentiated learning. Educational institutions can use approaches that support the implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum, including providing training and mentoring to teachers on the application of Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), Assessment of Learning (AoL), and differentiated assessment

in differentiated learning, providing relevant resources, and designing flexible assessment policies to adapt to the needs, interests, and potential of each student. With this approach, educational institutions can ensure assessment strategies are inclusive, responsive, and support the optimal development of each student.

c. For Other Researchers

This research is expected to serve as a reference for other researchers who wish to conduct further studies on English teacher assessment strategies in the context of the Emancipated Curriculum and differentiated learning. The results of this study are expected to provide useful insights and a knowledge base to support further research on assessment practices that are fair, responsive to students' diverse needs, and aligned with the principles of the Emancipated Curriculum.