

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Listening is one of the most fundamental receptive skills in English language learning because it provides the primary input for language acquisition. Through listening, learners develop their understanding of pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence patterns, which later support the development of speaking, reading, and writing skills. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, listening instruction at the elementary level remains challenging due to limited exposure to authentic spoken English, insufficient listening-focused materials, and the frequent use of traditional, teacher-centered approaches (Septiyanti & Fajriah, 2021; Newton & Nation, 2020). As a result, many elementary students experience difficulty understanding spoken English, even when they show enthusiasm during classroom activities.

Although some students can enhance their listening comprehension through repeated exposure to English, many others struggle because the materials and teaching methods used do not align with their learning preferences or readiness. Research shows that continuous listening practice, supported by suitable materials and strategies, can enhance students' comprehension and help them become more familiar with pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary (Ali, 2022; Bozorgian, 2012). However, in many schools, listening is still taught using the same materials for all students, without considering differences in learning styles or abilities. This approach often results in learning gaps, even when students are actively engaged in class.

One instructional approach that has been widely proposed to address learner diversity is Differentiated Instruction (DI). Differentiated English materials, grounded in Tomlinson's (2014) theory, are designed by adapting content, process, and learning products to students' readiness, interests, and learning styles (Ratminingsih et al., 2025). In the EFL context, differentiated listening materials allow teachers to provide varied forms of input and tasks so that students can access listening texts through modalities that suit them best. Ariani et al. (2024) reported that elementary English teachers often face difficulties in finding or developing materials that are relevant, varied, and suitable for diverse learning styles Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic (VARK). To respond to this need, Ariani et al. (2024) developed a series of differentiated English e-books for fifth-grade students, designed in line with the Merdeka Curriculum. However, these materials have not yet been empirically tested for their effectiveness, particularly in improving listening comprehension.

Several studies support the use of differentiated materials to enhance listening comprehension. Putri et al. (2023) found that using differentiated listening materials significantly increased students' listening scores in mixed-competence classrooms. Nuralisa et al. (2025) reported that students who engaged with tiered listening tasks adapted to their readiness levels demonstrated greater comprehension accuracy. Similarly, Kochkorova (2025) found that elementary EFL learners using authentic listening materials considered a form of differentiation performed better in listening tests and exhibited more positive learning attitudes. These findings confirm that tailoring listening materials to students' needs and abilities is an effective approach to improving comprehension.

In Indonesia, other research also supports this. Widayanti et al. (2024) found that differentiated materials increased students' engagement in learning. Hadi et al. (2023) reported that differentiated digital storytelling improved listening comprehension in early education. And Musyarrofah et al. (2024) found that differentiated materials helped teachers meet students' diverse needs. These studies indicate that differentiated listening materials can be very effective in supporting English listening comprehension at the elementary level.

Several recent studies also highlight that listening remains a problematic area for young learners. Damayanti et al. (2024) reported that many elementary students struggle with listening because of limited exposure to authentic input and a lack of engaging media. Similarly, Ardinata and Parmiti (2021) found that teachers often face difficulties in providing effective listening assessments, which results in less accurate measurement of students' actual comprehension levels. Trisnawati et al. (2024) emphasized that integrating songs as listening materials could improve comprehension, but without proper instructional design the enhancement was limited. These findings further confirm the urgency of this study, as differentiated English materials are expected to provide more adaptive solutions for fifth-grade students in developing listening comprehension.

In this research, the differentiated materials from the E-book Differentiated English Learning Materials developed by Pande Made Mela Ariani for fifth-grade students (Ariani et al., 2024). These e-books are designed according to the Kurikulum Merdeka, which encourages flexible, student-centered, and needs-based learning. There are four versions of the e-books, each made for a different learning style: Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic. Each version contains six

thematic units with activities, audio, and exercises that match students' learning preferences. Although these materials are well designed, their effectiveness in improving listening comprehension for elementary students in Indonesia has not yet been tested through experimental research.

This study also uses the theory of listening comprehension from Vandergrift & Goh (2012), who explain that listening is an active and strategic process. It involves three main dimensions: perception (recognizing and decoding sounds), parsing (understanding word boundaries and grammar), and utilization (connecting the meaning to background knowledge). Differentiated materials can help students in all these dimensions by providing tasks and supports that match their learning styles and levels of understanding.

Preliminary observations conducted at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri indicate that fifth-grade students show positive participation during English learning activities. In listening lessons, teachers have utilized various instructional media, including audio recordings, visual aids, and projectors. During classroom activities, it was observed that students responded actively to listening tasks; however, variations in students' levels of understanding were also apparent. Some students required more support to comprehend listening passages, particularly when the audio was delivered at a faster pace or included unfamiliar vocabulary. In such cases, students experienced difficulty identifying main ideas or specific details from the spoken texts. These conditions suggest that students may benefit from listening materials and activities that are adjusted to different levels of readiness and learning needs.

Difficulties in listening comprehension may also be related to the development of other language skills. When learners have limited opportunities to accurately recognize English sounds during listening activities, this may influence their ability to pronounce words correctly. In turn, this condition can affect reading fluency, as reading aloud requires the ability to connect written forms with accurate sound representations. Vandergrift & Goh (2012) emphasizes that listening serves as an essential source of linguistic input that supports oral production and literacy development. Therefore, listening comprehension plays an important role in supporting the integrated development of English language skills.

The selection of SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri as the selection of the research site was guided by contextual and curriculum related considerations. The school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes student-centered learning and provides flexibility for the application of differentiated instruction. In addition, fifth-grade classrooms consist of students with varied learning characteristics, which offers a relevant context for examining the implementation of differentiated English materials. Informal communication with English teachers also indicated that listening activities remain an area that requires continuous instructional support, particularly for tasks involving longer texts and inferential comprehension. These factors make SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri an appropriate setting for investigating the effect of differentiated English materials on students' listening comprehension.

This study aims to investigate the effect of differentiated English materials, particularly those developed by Pande Made Mela Ariani, on the listening comprehension of fifth-grade students. The materials are designed to accommodate diverse learning styles visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic by providing varied

forms of input and learning activities. Through the use of differentiated instruction, listening materials are expected to support students' engagement and facilitate more meaningful comprehension during listening activities. In addition, this study is aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize student-centered, flexible, and needs-based learning. The findings of this research are expected to contribute insights into the implementation of differentiated English materials and their role in supporting listening comprehension at the elementary school level.

1.2 Problem Identification

Based on the background of the study and the preliminary classroom observations, several critical issues were identified as follows:

- a. The results of the preliminary listening comprehension test administered to fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri revealed substantial variations in individual auditory performance. While numerous students demonstrated enthusiastic and active participation during standard classroom listening activities, pronounced differences emerged in their actual ability to decode main ideas and extract specific details from spoken texts. These diagnostic findings clearly indicate that a uniform teaching model is insufficient to meet diverse student needs. Consequently, learners require distinct, layered forms of instructional support to effectively optimize their listening comprehension skills
- b. The preliminary assessment further indicated that students demonstrated highly varying levels of proficiency in recognizing English words presented in acoustic forms. This challenge was particularly evident when students

encountered unfamiliar phonemes or less transparent sound–spelling relationships. Such linguistic variation suggests that young learners process spoken English through disparate cognitive mechanisms, which directly impacts their overall comprehension and subsequent pronunciation development. Therefore, continuing to ignore these cognitive variations may exacerbate existing achievement gaps within the classroom.

- c. Students' performance on listening tasks involving extended passages, accelerated speech rates, or unfamiliar vocabulary highlighted significant differences in their capacity to isolate key information. These findings imply that the structural complexity of oral texts and the cognitive demands of the tasks heavily dictate student success. When materials are too advanced or completely un-scaffolded, students with lower readiness levels experience cognitive overload. Accordingly, introducing listening materials with systematically varied tiers of complexity appears vital to better accommodate students' different levels of linguistic readiness.
- d. The English listening materials currently deployed in daily classroom instruction are predominantly structured for rigid, whole-class learning models. Although this traditional approach supports generalized institutional objectives, it severely limits opportunities to provide tailored experiences that honor differences in readiness, preferences, and individual learning styles. In this regard, the core principles of Differentiated Instruction offer a compelling alternative for modern educators. By intentionally adapting content, processes, and learning products to match

diverse learner traits (Tomlinson, 2014), teachers can cultivate a more inclusive and effective listening environment.

- e. While specialized differentiated English materials based on learning styles have recently been engineered by Ariani et al. (2024), empirical validation remains noticeably incomplete. Specifically, rigorous experimental research designs investigating the direct effectiveness of these adaptive resources in elevating primary school listening scores remain remarkably scarce. This obvious empirical deficit underscores the urgent need for further objective investigation. Therefore, the present study seeks to provide concrete statistical evidence regarding the true efficacy of differentiated English materials in supporting young EFL learners' listening development.

1.3 Limitations of The Research

The investigation focused exclusively on fifth-grade students' listening comprehension, while other English language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing, were beyond the scope of the study, was not examined in detail. In addition, this study was only conducted in two classes as a research sample, so the results obtained are contextual and not intended to be generalized widely.

The research was also limited to the implementation of differentiated English materials in the context of listening comprehension. The data collected only covered a certain period of time during the implementation of learning, so the results of the study did not reflect the long-term development of students' listening comprehension.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the problem and the limitations, this research has a research question that the researcher aims to answer.

1. Is there any significant effect of differentiated English materials on the listening comprehension of fifth-grade students?

1.5 Research Objective

Following the research question, this research objective is.

1. To investigate the effect of differentiated English materials on the listening comprehension of fifth-grade students using conventional learning materials

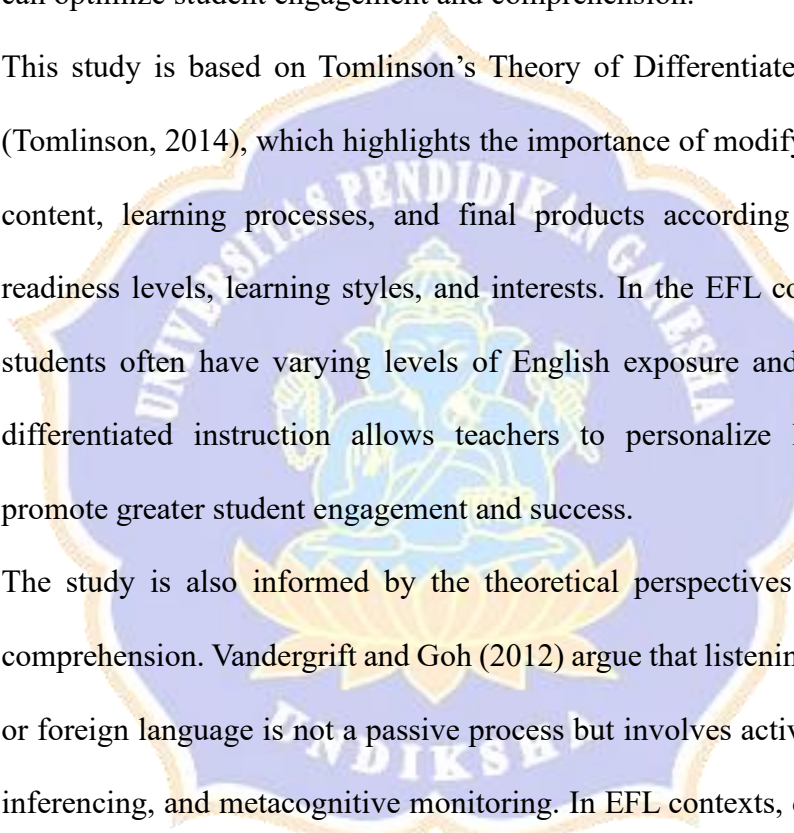
1.6 Significance of The Research

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically.

1.6.1 Theoretical

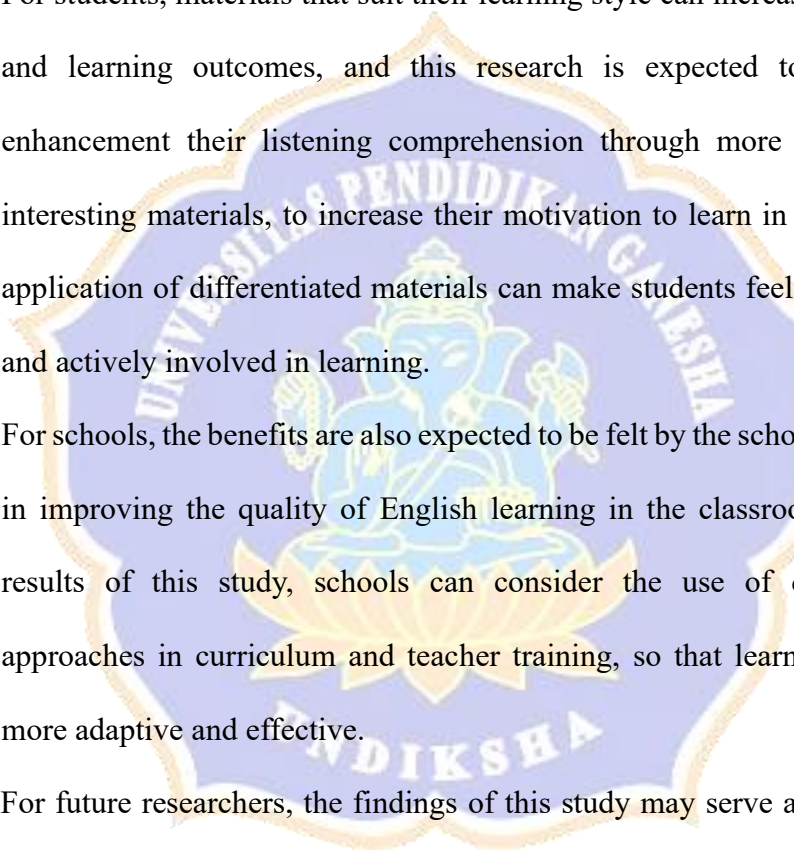
The significance of the research can be seen from the theoretical and practical significance.

- a. The implementation of this study is aligned with the principles of the Emancipated Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in Indonesia, which emphasizes differentiated, student-centered, and context-responsive learning. The curriculum encourages educators to adapt instruction based on individual student characteristics, needs, and backgrounds, making the use of differentiated materials highly relevant and supportive of equitable English language learning.

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- b. This study used Neil Fleming's VARK Learning Styles Model (2001), which categorizes learners into four sensory modalities: Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic. This model suggests that learners absorb and process information differently based on their preferred learning style. Designing listening materials that reflect these modalities, such as using visual aids, interactive tasks, written transcripts, and hands on activities that can optimize student engagement and comprehension.
- c. This study is based on Tomlinson's Theory of Differentiated Instruction (Tomlinson, 2014), which highlights the importance of modifying teaching content, learning processes, and final products according to students' readiness levels, learning styles, and interests. In the EFL context, where students often have varying levels of English exposure and proficiency, differentiated instruction allows teachers to personalize learning and promote greater student engagement and success.
- d. The study is also informed by the theoretical perspectives on listening comprehension. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue that listening in a second or foreign language is not a passive process but involves active prediction, inferencing, and metacognitive monitoring. In EFL contexts, differentiated listening activities can help students develop these skills by providing tailored tasks that align with their cognitive and linguistic development stages.

1.6.2 Practical

These are potential benefits of this research, such as:

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- a. For teachers, this study may provide valuable insights into the development of listening materials that accommodate students' diverse needs. It may also serve as a reference for designing and utilizing instructional materials that consider students' interests, learning needs, and levels of readiness. Such an approach is expected to support a more effective and engaging learning process.
- b. For students, materials that suit their learning style can increase motivation and learning outcomes, and this research is expected to help them enhancement their listening comprehension through more relevant and interesting materials, to increase their motivation to learn in English. The application of differentiated materials can make students feel more valued and actively involved in learning.
- c. For schools, the benefits are also expected to be felt by the school, especially in improving the quality of English learning in the classroom. With the results of this study, schools can consider the use of differentiated approaches in curriculum and teacher training, so that learning becomes more adaptive and effective.
- d. For future researchers, the findings of this study may serve as a reference for further investigations into differentiated English materials. The study may also provide a foundation for examining the application of differentiated learning approaches to additional language skills, including speaking, reading, and writing.