CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research content, covering the study's background, research questions, objectives, significance, framework, and review of prior studies.

A. Background

In daily life, language abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing are crucial for effective communication. These language abilities are generally classified into two primary types: oral and written. Oral language skills encompass listening and speaking, while written skills include reading and writing (Handayani, Mantra & Suwandi, 2019). Mastering language skills is crucial for everyone, as it is through communication that people connect with one another. The ability to communicate effectively in a language is fundamental to success (Widiastuti, 2019). This research explores the assessments that teacher use to evaluate students' speaking abilities in the Speaking class at a Senior High School in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia.

Finally, with utmost sincerity, the researcher expresses gratitude to Allah SWT, without whose blessings and guidance none of this would have been possible.

According to Harmer (2007), speaking involves the ability to speak fluently while possessing the necessary knowledge of language features and the ability to process information in real time. Various experts have identified indicators of speaking skills. Brown (2004) in Akhyak & Indramawan (2013) mentions that speech competence is demonstrated through imitation, intensive, responsive, interactive, interpersonal, and extensive activities.

Assessment plays a vital role in developing students' speaking abilities, particularly through teachers' evaluations. Effective assessment provides feedback that helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses in speaking skills, such as fluency, pronunciation, and coherence. This feedback guides targeted improvements (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). In academic settings, speaking assessments evaluate a student's ability to articulate ideas effectively and engage

with course material (Hartell-Young et al., 2007, as cited in Ipiña & Astigarraga, 2019). Brown (2003) emphasizes that assessment is an ongoing process encompassing a broader range of activities. Within the Merdeka Curriculum, flexibility and personalization of teaching are prioritized to address students' diverse needs.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning by providing flexibility in the learning process, including adaptive assessments that address individual student needs (Kemendikbud, 2022). This is in line with the concept of differentiated instruction, as outlined by Tomlinson (2001), which entails modifying content, processes, and assessments to cater to the varied needs of students. These flexible assessment practices ensure that students receive personalized feedback to effectively enhance their speaking skills.

This research focuses on differentiated learning, which emphasizes personalized teaching approaches that cater to students' unique needs and abilities. Teacher play a crucial role in this framework, as they design and implement assessments tailored to individual students' speaking abilities, such as fluency, pronunciation, and confidence, fostering an inclusive and meaningful learning experience.

The Merdeka Curriculum aligns with the principles of differentiated learning, as outlined by Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2021), which advocates for context-based teaching designed to address each student's unique characteristics and needs. Authentic assessments are particularly crucial in this context, where students' speaking abilities are evaluated in real-life, meaningful situations to offer more relevant and personalized feedback.

The focus of this study is on exploring teacher' practices in assessing students' speaking abilities within differentiated learning. It seeks to investigate how teacher adapt their assessment methods to accommodate varying levels of speaking proficiency and how these practices align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. By understanding teacher' strategies and approaches, this study aims

to highlight the critical role of differentiated assessments in supporting equitable language development and enhancing students' speaking skills.

In the Merdeka Curriculum, differentiated learning seeks to address the varied needs of students by modifying teaching methods and learning activities. This approach recognizes that students have varying levels of abilit, especially in speaking, which is a key skill in language development. According to Brown (2001), speaking is a complex skill because it involves both linguistic and emotional competencies, making it one of the most challenging skills to assess.

In the context of differentiated learning, assessing speaking skills requires methods that accommodate the diverse abilities of students while also encouraging their growth. The complexities of speaking, such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and confidence, demand assessment strategies that suit individual needs. In line with Schunk's (2012) Constructivist Learning Theory, these strategies are essential for creating meaningful learning experiences and providing appropriate support for students at different proficiency levels. Therefore, differentiated assessment is important to ensure that feedback aligns with each student's speaking abilities and helps them improve in a targeted way.

While previous studies have examined speaking assessment or differentiated instruction separately, few have explored how teachers adapt assessment methods for students with different speaking levels within the Merdeka Curriculum. Moreover, no study has explicitly analyzed assessment practices based on the four pillars of differentiated learning (content, process, product, and learning environment) while categorizing students into high, medium, and low proficiency levels.

Therefore, this study offers novelty by combining these elements, revealing not only the assessment methods but also the challenges teachers face in ensuring fairness and effectiveness in differentiated speaking assessment at Senior high school level.

Several studies related to the topics discussed in this research have been examined. These previous studies were intended to facilitate the compilation and

retrieval of various sources to strengthen the topic raised by the researcher. Husna (2020) discussed exploring the assessment in speaking classroom. This research was conducted in Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Department of English Language Education. Then, Hanan & Mohamad (2024) explored teachers' perceptions of differentiated learning in teaching English-speaking skills to upper secondary school students. Their conceptual paper examined practical implementation, challenges, and the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in enhancing students' engagement and speaking proficiency. The last one from Barlian et al. (2023) explored the implementation of differentiated instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum, specifically in English subjects at Senior high schools. The study highlighted that differentiated instruction emphasizes teaching materials tailored to students' readiness levels, interests, and learning styles. Several previous studies that have been mentioned examine the field of speaking assessment. This study takes several related studies because the studies have the same context as the current study.

However, this study differs from previous research as it focuses on exploring speaking assessments and the criteria used by teacher in differentiated learning. The criteria sought are not only criteria in ordinary assessments, but this study seeks to find out about the assessment criteria in the aspects of fairness and effectiveness from the perspective of teacher in the speaking classroom. The title of this study has also been raised with various speaking abilities to distinguish it from previous studies. Then, this study placed on the exploration of speaking assessment and the criteria applied by teacher in the evaluation process.

B. Research Questions

In light of the previous information in the research background, this study identified two research questions as follows:

1. What assessment methods does teacher use to evaluate students' different levels of speaking abilities in differentiated learning under the Merdeka Curriculum?

2. What challenges does teacher face when implementing assessment methods for students' different speaking abilities in differentiated learning under the Merdeka Curriculum?

C. Research Purposes

In response to the research questions above, this study seeks to examine teacher' assessment practices in differentiated instruction to evaluate the diverse speaking abilities of students. Consequently, this research aims to accomplish two key objectives, as outlined below:

1. To identify and evaluate the assessment methods used by EFL teacher for students with varying speaking proficiency in differentiated learning.

2. To explore the challenges EFL teacher face when implementing assessment methods with students varying speaking abilities in differentiated learning and to understand the strategies the teacher uses to address these challenges.

D. Research Significances

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of education. Theoretically, it can serve as a reference for EFL teacher in Senior High Schools implementing differentiated learning under the Merdeka Curriculum. By examining how teacher assess students' speaking abilities at different proficiency levels, this research aims to provide insights into the application of fair and effective differentiated assessments.

Practically, this study benefits students, teacher, and researchers. For students, the findings are expected to motivate them to actively participate in speaking classes through assessments tailored to their abilities. For teacher, this research helps refine assessment strategies by identifying challenges and biases in evaluating speaking skills.

This study involved one EFL teacher and analyze speaking assessments based on four key aspects outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum: content, process, product, and learning environment. By exploring factors that influence fairness and effectiveness in assessment, this research aims to improve the quality of English language assessment, making it more inclusive, reliable, and responsive

to students' needs.

E. Theoretical Framework

Assessment is the structured process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to evaluate students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and performance in a specific area of learning. Brown (2004) states that assessment is a vital part of the educational process, acting as a means to measure students' and provide feedback that guides both teaching and learning. It encompasses a range of activities, from formal tests and exams to informal observations and discussions, all aimed at supporting student development and ensuring educational goals are met.

Assessment is an important task for teacher in speaking class, since the evaluation allows teacher to measure students' competence in class using existing criteria. Assessments also provide helpful feedback to students about how they are progressing. It helps students by letting them know their mistakes and how to remedy them. Assessment of speaking can be one of the most judgmental issues for a person, where people tend to relate to native/non-native speakers based on pronunciation (Luoma, 2004).

Brown (2004) categorizes assessment into two types: informal and formal, as well as formative and summative assessments. Formal assessment refers to exams based on a grading system that tracks students' understanding. In contrast, informal assessment involves evaluating students without using standard grading criteria. Norm-referenced assessment involves evaluating students based on their average performance in the class. According to Brown (2004), informal assessment can take various forms, starting with unplanned comments, responses, coaching, and other spontaneous feedback from students.

Formative assessment is a continuous, interactive process of obtaining evidence and feedback to enhance and improve instruction. According to Brown (2004, p. 5-6), formative assessment is when the teacher evaluates their students in developing their competencies and skills to support their ongoing growth. Summative assessment is a comprehensive evaluation at the end of an

instructional period to determine students' learning. It often involves a final exam, standardized test, or end-of-term project. Additionally, Brown (2004) describes summative assessment as the process of evaluating or summarizing a student's achievements, typically conducted at the conclusion of a course or instructional unit.

A speaking assessment evaluates an individual's oral communication skills in a specific language. This type of evaluation is often applied in language learning and testing environments to determine students' proficiency in verbal expression and communication. Speaking assessments may include activities such as giving presentations, engaging in dialogues, responding to questions, or discussing particular topics. For a speaking assessment to be effective, it must begin with the development of suitable assessment tasks that include specified or objective criteria (Brown, 2003). The choice of criteria depends on the intended purpose of the assessment (Luoma, 2004). Given the increasing emphasis on equitable and efficient evaluation practices in educational settings, it is imperative to address both fairness and effectiveness to ensure accurate and just outcomes for all students (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Students' different speaking abilities refer to the varied levels of oral communication proficiency among learners, influenced by factors such as linguistic background, learning environment, psychological readiness, and exposure to the target language. These abilities encompass pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary usage, and the capacity to express ideas clearly and effectively. According to Brown (2001), speaking is a multifaceted skill that involves not only linguistic competence but also the confidence to convey thoughts in real-time, making it a complex area for both learners and teachers.

To assess these diverse abilities, teacher utilize a range of methods tailored to individual needs. Oral presentations allow students to organize and present ideas coherently while demonstrating fluency and confidence (Harmer, 2007). Role-plays and dialogues simulate real-life interactions and evaluate skills like turn-taking, spontaneity, and interaction (Thornbury, 2005). Pronunciation drills

help assess and improve articulation and intonation patterns (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010). Standardized rubrics provide structured evaluations of fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary use (Luoma, 2004), Self-assessment and peer feedback motivate students to evaluate their speaking abilities and gain insights from their peers (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). These differentiated assessment methods ensure that teacher can provide the necessary support to help students develop their speaking skills effectively, catering to the unique needs of each learner.
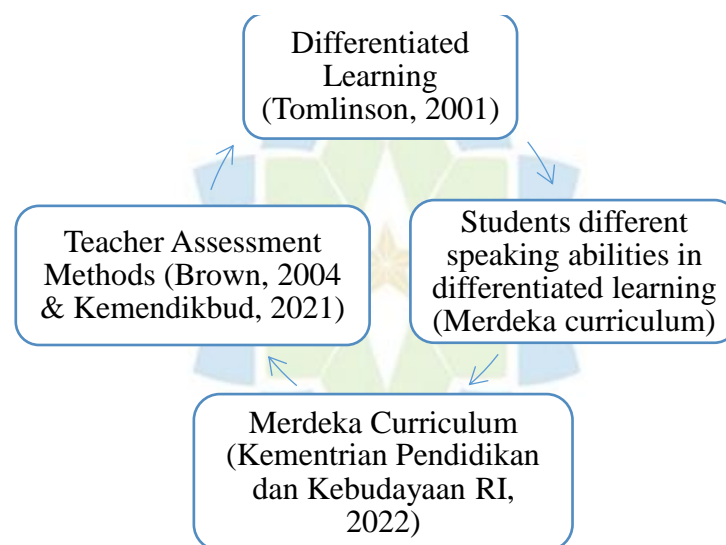

Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework

Figure 1.1 depicts the theoretical framework of the research, highlighting differentiated learning as introduced by Tomlinson (2001). This approach focuses on adapting teaching methods and assessments to address the varied needs of students, ensuring that each learner is provided with support tailored to their unique abilities and strengths.

This approach is particularly crucial in language learning, where students exhibit varying levels of speaking abilities. Teacher need to adapt their assessment methods to evaluate these differences effectively. Boud and Falchikov (2020) highlight the importance of assessment for learning, which focuses on using assessments to support and guide students' progress, ensuring that they receive meaningful feedback that promotes further development. This is essential in the

context of speaking, where students' skills can vary significantly across a wide range of criteria, such as fluency, pronunciation, and confidence.

Moreover, the teacher faces several challenges in implementing assessments for diverse speaking abilities, particularly when trying to balance individualized support with standardized criteria. According to Schunk (2020), the constructivist learning theory suggests that learners develop skills through active engagement with their environment, which complicates the assessment of speaking abilities since these assessments must account for both cognitive and affective factors. Teacher may struggle with creating assessments that fairly represent students' skills without overlooking the impact of motivation or self-confidence. The Merdeka Curriculum, as outlined by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022), supports this personalized approach by emphasizing flexible, student-centered learning that adapts to the unique needs and contexts of each student. This framework aligns well with differentiated learning, ensuring that assessment practices are not only fair but also aligned with the goal of fostering individual student growth and success in speaking proficiency.

Differentiated instruction is a pedagogical approach where the teacher designs and implements varied strategies to accommodate students' individual needs (Tomlinson, 2001). This includes modifying instructional methods, materials, and assessments to foster an inclusive learning environment. In the realm of speaking skills, differentiated instruction enables teacher to scaffold learning according to students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. It is a teaching approach in which educators develop and apply diverse strategies to meet the unique needs of each student (Tomlinson, 2001). This includes modifying instructional methods, materials, and assessments to foster an inclusive learning environment. A key component of differentiated instruction is the use of initial or diagnostic assessments, that assists teacher in recognizing each student's strengths, weaknesses, readiness levels, and learning preferences. These evaluations inform the design and execution of personalized teaching strategies that cater to the varied needs of learners.

While differentiated instruction is teacher-centered in its design, differentiated learning shifts the focus to the student experience. Differentiated learning examines how students engage with and benefit from tailored instruction, particularly in addressing challenges like speaking anxiety, fluency, and pronunciation. Central to both concepts are the dimensions of readiness, interest, and learning profile, which guide how instructional and assessment strategies are designed and implemented.

In differentiated instruction, these dimensions guide teacher in designing adaptive teaching strategies and assessments that scaffold learning appropriately. Tomlinson (2017) emphasizes that addressing readiness ensures tasks are neither too easy nor too difficult, enabling learners to work within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's ZPD theory, as revisited by Schunk (2020), reinforces that instructional scaffolding tailored to a student's readiness facilitates optimal learning. Interest aligns with Harmer's (2007) assertion that engaging students with relevant and motivating topics in speaking tasks can boost confidence and reduce anxiety. Meanwhile, learning profiles, guided by Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1993, as cited in Armstrong, 2017), allow teacher to cater to individual preferences, improving task engagement and effectiveness.

In differentiated learning, these assessments translate into students experiencing tasks adapted to their abilities, preferences, and interests, making the process more student-centered. Black and Wiliam's (2018) updated work on formative assessments emphasizes the importance of tailoring feedback and tasks to enhance student understanding and motivation. Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI (2022) highlights the significance of contextual and student-centered assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum, encouraging practices that adapt to diverse student needs.

Differentiated assessment also acts as a bridge between differentiated instruction and differentiated learning, ensuring that teaching strategies and student experiences are tailored to individual needs. In differentiated instruction, assessments such as diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluations help teacher

identify students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, guiding instructional design. Diagnostic assessments, for instance, uncover speaking challenges like pronunciation, fluency, and confidence, enabling teacher to scaffold learning effectively based on students' Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Formative assessments provide ongoing feedback, ensuring tasks remain adaptive and aligned with students' progress (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Summative assessments, such as presentations or role plays, measure outcomes while reflecting individual strengths and preferences.

In differentiated learning, assessments emphasize how students engage with and benefit from tailored tasks, focusing on their experiences and growth. Authentic assessments in real-world contexts, such as debates or interactive dialogues, align with Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences and the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on contextual, student-centered learning (Kemendikbud, 2022). This dual focus ensures that both teaching practices and learning outcomes are responsive to diverse student needs, fostering effective skill development in speaking while promoting equitable and meaningful learning experiences.

This research bridges these two frameworks by examining how differentiated assessment practices, informed by readiness, interest, and learning profile, support the development of speaking skills in students within the Merdeka Curriculum. The integration of these dimensions ensures that both instructional design and assessment are responsive to the unique needs of each learner, fostering equitable and meaningful learning experiences. The Merdeka Curriculum's focus on student-centered learning supports such approaches by empowering students to engage with tasks at their own pace and comfort level (Kemendikbud, 2021).

The teacher plays a vital role in assessing and developing students' speaking abilities by identifying strengths and weaknesses, providing constructive feedback, and setting clear goals. Effective assessments motivate students, foster reflective learning through self-assessment, and create a supportive environment that reduces anxiety and promotes participation. Regular evaluations help track progress and adjust teaching strategies, ensuring systematic growth in speaking skills (Brown &

Hudson, 2002; Ellis, 2009). In Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are encouraged to use differentiated and formative assessments, emphasizing inclusivity and individual growth to support diverse student needs (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Daryanto, 2020).

F. Previous Study

To prove the originality of this study, it is attempted to be proven by comparing it to other journals or theses to support the research.

Husna (2020) explored the use of speaking assessments in the classroom through a study carried out in the English Language Education Department. Employing a mixed-method approach with descriptive analysis, the research utilized interviews and questionnaires. The findings revealed that teacher aim to assess students' speaking skills to boost their self-confidence. The majority of teacher highlighted pronunciation and vocabulary as the main criteria for assessing speaking, compared to other factors. Additionally, teacher designed engaging assignments, such as performance tasks, tailored to students' interests, prior knowledge, and the level of the speaking class. Both formative and summative assessments were used, with verbal feedback provided on student performance. Although opinions varied regarding the challenges students encounter in speaking classes, this study differs in its emphasis on the subjects and educational levels. Specifically, the current study examines EFL teacher' assessment practices in differentiated instruction at the Senior high school level, aligning with the study's objectives and scope.

Hanan and Mohamad (2024) examined teacher' perspectives on differentiated learning in teaching English-speaking skills to upper secondary school students. Their conceptual paper investigated the practical application of differentiated instruction, the challenges involved, and its effectiveness in improving students' engagement and speaking proficiency. Drawing from existing literature, the study highlighted essential aspects such as differentiated practices in ESL classrooms, instructional strategies, and their impact on student outcomes. The findings pointed to challenges like teacher' limited understanding of differentiated

learning, insufficient resources, and the need for professional development. The study emphasized the importance of equipping educators with strategies to overcome these barriers, offering valuable insights for designing inclusive and effective English-speaking instruction.

Ningsih and Pusparini (2024) conducted a qualitative case study focusing on an EFL teacher in a high school in Surabaya who implemented differentiated learning methods. Through interviews and observations, the study identified challenges in teaching speaking skills, including selecting content appropriate for students' varied proficiency levels, managing passive students, and addressing issues such as confidence, anxiety, vocabulary, and grammar. Environmental factors, such as classroom noise and inadequate facilities, also presented obstacles. Despite these challenges, the teacher employed adaptive strategies, including offering diverse content, rotating speaking opportunities among active students, designing tasks through negotiation, and fostering a calm classroom atmosphere. These approaches enhanced student comfort and engagement by addressing their individual abilities, learning styles, and needs, demonstrating the potential of differentiated learning to create a more inclusive and effective speaking classroom.

Barlian et al. (2023) examined the implementation of differentiated instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum, focusing on English subjects in Senior high schools. Their research emphasized that differentiated instruction focuses on adapting teaching materials to align with students' readiness levels, interests, and learning styles. This aligns with the core philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum, which seeks to empower schools, teacher, and students to innovate and learn independently and creatively. The study found that differentiated instruction had been effectively implemented by addressing four key components: content, process, product, and learning environment. However, challenges such as limited teacher skills and inadequate facilities were noted. To address these issues, the study recommended teacher competency development through workshops, training, and socialization, along with efforts to improve school facilities. The current research, in comparison, focuses specifically on differentiated teaching in speaking skills.

To prove that this research is different from previous research. Previous research did not find out the criteria but instead found out the dominant assessments used in speaking assessments. This research focuses on exploring speaking assessments along with the criteria apply by teacher for the evaluation process. It aims to make it easy for teacher to determine results during the learning process. The criteria sought are not only criteria in speaking assessments, but this study seeks to find out about the assessment criteria in the aspects of fairness and effectiveness from the perspective of teacher in differentiated instruction under Merdeka curriculum for speaking class.

This research raised the title with varying speaking abilities to differentiate this research from previous research. Previous research analyzed the Language Assessment course in general, while this research will specify the speaking assessment used in the speaking class that used differentiated instruction under Merdeka curriculum. Furthermore, this research carried out in offline/face-to-face classes at Senior high school, not in online classes.