

DIFFERENTIATED ENGLISH MATERIALS AND FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY**I Made Bhanu Aditya Parameswara¹, Ni Wayan Surya Mahayanti², Luh Putu Dian Kresnawati³**Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha^{1,2,3}E-mail: bhanu@student.undiksha.ac.id¹, surya.mahayanti@undiksha.ac.id²,
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ABSTRAK

Keragaman karakteristik belajar siswa sekolah dasar menghadirkan tantangan tersendiri dalam pembelajaran *English*, terutama pada pengembangan kemampuan *listening comprehension* yang memerlukan paparan bahasa lisan secara bertahap dan berkelanjutan. Kondisi tersebut mendorong pemanfaatan *differentiated English materials* sebagai salah satu alternatif yang sejalan dengan implementasi *Merdeka Curriculum*, dengan tujuan memberikan pengalaman belajar yang lebih responsif terhadap kebutuhan peserta didik. Untuk memperoleh bukti empiris mengenai efektivitasnya, penelitian ini melibatkan 60 siswa kelas V SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri yang terbagi ke dalam kelompok eksperimen dan kelompok kontrol menggunakan desain *quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group*. Kelompok eksperimen mengikuti pembelajaran berbantuan *differentiated English materials*, sedangkan kelompok kontrol menggunakan materi konvensional. Data diperoleh melalui tes *listening comprehension* yang telah melalui proses validasi. Hasil pengujian prasyarat menunjukkan bahwa distribusi data belum sepenuhnya memenuhi asumsi normalitas sehingga analisis perbedaan antarkelompok dilakukan menggunakan uji nonparametrik Mann-Whitney U. Meskipun rerata skor *post-test* kedua kelompok mengalami peningkatan dibandingkan *pre-test*, analisis inferensial menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan hasil belajar tidak signifikan ($p = 0,809$). Temuan ini memperkaya bukti empiris mengenai implementasi *Differentiated Instruction* pada pembelajaran *English* di sekolah dasar dengan menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan penggunaan *differentiated English materials* bergantung pada integrasi strategi pembelajaran, keberlanjutan latihan *listening*, serta kualitas fasilitasi guru, bukan semata-mata pada penyediaan bahan ajar yang terdiferensiasi.

Kata Kunci: *Diferensiasi Pembelajaran, Materi Bahasa Inggris Berdiferensiasi, Pemahaman Menyimak, Kurikulum Merdeka, Sekolah Dasar*

ABSTRACT

The diversity of learning characteristics among elementary school students presents a considerable challenge in English instruction, particularly in developing listening comprehension, which requires gradual and sustained exposure to spoken language. This condition has encouraged the use of differentiated English materials as an instructional alternative aligned with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, aiming to provide learning experiences that are more responsive to students' diverse needs. To obtain empirical evidence regarding their effectiveness, this study involved 60 fifth-grade students from SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri, who were assigned to an experimental group and a control group using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. The experimental group received instruction supported by differentiated English materials, whereas the control group learned through conventional instructional materials. Data were collected using a validated listening

comprehension test. Preliminary assumption testing indicated that the data did not fully satisfy the normality assumption; therefore, differences between the two groups were analyzed using the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test. Although the post-test mean scores of both groups increased compared with their pre-test scores, the inferential analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in learning outcomes ($p = .809$). These findings contribute to the growing body of empirical evidence on the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in elementary English education by demonstrating that the effectiveness of differentiated English materials depends on the integration of instructional strategies, sustained listening practice, and effective teacher facilitation, rather than solely on the availability of differentiated instructional materials.

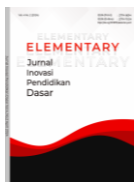
Keywords: *Differentiated Instruction, Differentiated English Materials, Listening Comprehension, Merdeka Curriculum, Elementary School*

INTRODUCTION

In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, the ability to understand spoken language often develops more slowly than expected despite continuous exposure to classroom instruction. Young learners are required to interpret sounds, recognize unfamiliar vocabulary, distinguish important information, and construct meaning simultaneously, while opportunities to encounter authentic spoken English beyond school remain relatively scarce. This condition places listening comprehension in a unique position because successful participation in oral communication depends largely on learners' capacity to process linguistic input before producing language themselves. Rather than functioning merely as a receptive skill, listening comprehension provides the cognitive foundation through which vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical awareness, and communicative competence gradually emerge, making it an indispensable component of elementary English education (Ardinata & Parmiti, 2021; Hadi et al., 2023; Kochkorova, 2025).

A different concern becomes visible when classroom practices are examined more closely. Although elementary learners rarely demonstrate identical levels of readiness, prior knowledge, interests, or ways of processing information, instructional activities frequently continue to rely on uniform teaching materials that assume all students learn through similar pathways. Such instructional uniformity may unintentionally restrict learners who require alternative forms of support to comprehend spoken texts, particularly during activities involving authentic audio or teacher explanations. Classroom experiences consequently become less responsive to learner diversity, while teachers simultaneously face the demanding task of managing heterogeneous classrooms with limited instructional resources and constrained teaching time. Under these circumstances, accommodating individual learning differences extends beyond a pedagogical preference and becomes a practical necessity that remains difficult to realize consistently in everyday instruction (Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023; Wisudawan et al., 2021).

Educational reform introduced through the Merdeka Curriculum has shifted attention toward learning environments that are expected to be more adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to student diversity. Instead of emphasizing identical instructional experiences for every learner, the curriculum encourages teachers to maintain common learning objectives while providing multiple opportunities for students to achieve them according to their individual characteristics. Such expectations inevitably transform the role of instructional materials, which are no longer viewed solely as sources of content but also as instruments for facilitating meaningful participation among learners with different abilities and learning preferences.



Within this policy landscape, the development of differentiated instructional resources represents an effort to translate curriculum principles into classroom practice by connecting learner diversity with flexible pedagogical design (Firdausi & Christanti, 2024; Lubis et al., 2023).

From this perspective, differentiated instruction offers more than the modification of teaching activities; it represents a pedagogical orientation that seeks to provide equitable access to learning through adjustments in content, learning processes, assessment, and classroom environments according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. For elementary English classrooms, these adjustments may be realized through learning materials that combine visual, auditory, reading, and kinesthetic experiences so that learners encounter spoken language using multiple forms of instructional support rather than relying on a single mode of presentation. Recent investigations have described differentiated English materials as feasible for elementary education while simultaneously revealing teachers' expectations for resources containing multimodal activities, flexible assessment, and varied learning experiences capable of supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Ariani et al., 2024; Dewi et al., 2024; Permatasari et al., 2024; Sudeni et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the availability of differentiated materials alone does not automatically resolve instructional complexity, indicating that further empirical examination remains necessary to understand how such materials function when applied to the development of elementary students' listening comprehension.

The growing adoption of differentiated instruction in English language education has generated encouraging yet inconclusive evidence regarding its educational value. While several investigations have documented improvements in students' classroom engagement, learning motivation, and participation, academic achievement has not consistently demonstrated comparable patterns across different instructional settings. Learning environments enriched through digital storytelling, authentic listening resources, and multimodal instructional experiences have been associated with more meaningful listening activities, allowing learners to interact with spoken language through richer contextual support (Hadi et al., 2023; Kochkorova, 2025; Trisnawati et al., 2024). Likewise, technology-assisted instructional designs have been reported to expand learning opportunities by creating more flexible and interactive classroom experiences that potentially strengthen language learning outcomes, although the magnitude of these effects appears to depend heavily on the instructional context in which they are implemented (Zheng & Lee, 2023).

An examination of more recent literature reveals that instructional adaptation alone cannot adequately explain variations in learning outcomes. The effectiveness of differentiated instruction appears to be intertwined with teacher preparedness, classroom organization, time allocation, and the ability to coordinate multiple learning activities within mixed-ability classrooms. These pedagogical demands become increasingly complex in elementary education because teachers are expected to respond to diverse learner characteristics while simultaneously maintaining common curricular targets for the entire class. Consequently, differences in implementation quality may contribute substantially to the varied findings reported across previous studies, suggesting that instructional resources function within a broader pedagogical ecosystem rather than operating as independent determinants of student achievement (Bhandari et al., 2025; Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023; Mirawati et al., 2022).

Within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, scholarly attention has predominantly centered on preparing teachers to implement differentiated learning rather than evaluating its direct influence on language performance. Existing investigations have largely explored the

feasibility of developing differentiated English materials or documented teachers' perceptions and instructional needs in accommodating learner diversity. These studies have consistently described differentiated learning resources as appropriate for supporting inclusive classroom practices and have highlighted the necessity of multimodal activities accompanied by comprehensive instructional guidance for elementary teachers (Ariani et al., 2024; Dewi et al., 2024; Permatasari et al., 2024; Sudeni et al., 2022). Even so, empirical evidence demonstrating whether differentiated English materials produce measurable improvements in elementary students' listening comprehension remains limited, leaving important questions regarding their instructional effectiveness insufficiently addressed.

These observations collectively indicate several unresolved issues that deserve closer empirical attention. Experimental evidence focusing specifically on elementary EFL learners remains considerably less abundant than research conducted in secondary or higher education contexts, despite the distinct developmental characteristics of younger learners. Moreover, the relationship between learning-style-based differentiated English materials and listening comprehension has received relatively little investigation within Indonesian elementary classrooms implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Responding to these gaps, the present study employs a quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of differentiated English materials in improving the listening comprehension of fifth-grade elementary students. Beyond evaluating instructional outcomes, this study seeks to contribute empirical evidence that refines current understanding of how differentiated learning resources operate within contemporary elementary English education and offers practical implications for implementing learner-responsive instruction in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

The classroom setting determined the organization of this study from the outset because the participating school maintained existing class memberships throughout the academic year, making random reassignment of students impossible. Under these conditions, a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design was considered the most appropriate approach for examining whether differentiated English materials contributed to students' listening comprehension. The study took place during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at SD Negeri 1 Banyuasri, Bali, Indonesia, involving sixty fifth-grade students distributed across two intact classrooms with comparable academic characteristics. Class VC, consisting of 30 students, participated in learning activities using differentiated English materials, whereas Class VB, with an equal number of students, followed instruction through the conventional materials regularly employed by the school. Before classroom implementation commenced, permission was obtained from the school administration, participation was conducted solely for educational research purposes, and students' identities were treated confidentially throughout the study.

Learning activities were organized across four instructional meetings covering the topics of *parts of the body*, *descriptive adjectives*, *comparative adjectives*, and *months and dates*. Rather than modifying curricular objectives, the instructional intervention provided alternative learning pathways by integrating visual illustrations, audio recordings, reading resources, and interactive classroom tasks that accommodated students' diverse learning characteristics while maintaining equivalent learning targets for all participants. Students' listening comprehension was measured before and after the intervention using a researcher-developed achievement test comprising twenty objective items representing the dimensions of

perception, parsing, and utilization. Prior to implementation, the instrument underwent expert review by specialists in English Language Education and experienced elementary English teachers to establish content validity, followed by a pilot test to refine item clarity, evaluate overall consistency, and ensure its feasibility for classroom use. The finalized instrument was subsequently administered in the main study.

Interpretation of the findings relied on a sequence of analytical procedures designed to ensure that the selected statistical technique matched the characteristics of the collected data. Score distributions from both groups were initially summarized through descriptive statistics to provide an overview of students' performance before and after the instructional period, followed by Shapiro–Wilk and Levene's tests to examine normality and homogeneity assumptions. Because the assumption of normal distribution was not fully satisfied, comparisons between the experimental and control groups were subsequently performed using the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test through IBM SPSS Statistics. Statistical decisions were interpreted using a significance level of 0.05, allowing the analysis to determine whether the implementation of differentiated English materials produced a statistically significant difference in fifth-grade students' listening comprehension.

RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

Findings

The statistical analysis was carried out in two stages to provide a comprehensive overview of students' performance before examining differences between the two instructional groups. Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize the distribution of *pre-test* and *post-test* scores, allowing changes in students' achievement to be observed across the intervention period. The subsequent analysis focused on statistical comparison using a non-parametric procedure because the distribution of the data did not fully satisfy the normality assumption established during the preliminary analysis. The descriptive summary of students' *listening comprehension* scores is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' *Listening Comprehension* Scores

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Pre-test</i>	Experimental	30	62.33	10.06	45	80
	Control	30	66.33	7.76	40	75
<i>Post-test</i>	Experimental	30	76.00	10.62	55	95
	Control	30	77.17	4.86	70	85

A comparison across the two measurement occasions indicates that both groups achieved higher listening comprehension scores following the instructional intervention than at the beginning of the study. The experimental group showed an increase in the mean score from 62.33 to 76.00, while the control group improved from 66.33 to 77.17. Although the experimental group demonstrated slightly greater score variability than the control group, as reflected by the standard deviation values, both groups exhibited a comparable pattern of improvement. These descriptive findings provide an initial overview of students' learning

outcomes, whereas the statistical significance of the differences between groups was further examined using the Mann–Whitney U test.

Table 2. Results of the Mann–Whitney U Test

Comparison	Sig. (p)	Decision
Pre-test	.092	No significant difference
Post-test	.809	No significant difference

The inferential analysis presented in Table 2 was performed using the Mann–Whitney U test to compare the listening comprehension scores of the experimental and control groups. The significance values obtained for both the pre-test ($p = .092$) and post-test ($p = .809$) exceeded the predetermined significance level of .05, indicating that no statistically significant differences were observed between the two groups at either stage of measurement. These findings suggest that, despite improvements in post-test performance within both groups, the implementation of differentiated English materials did not produce significantly different listening comprehension outcomes compared with the conventional instructional materials. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was retained.

Discussion

The statistical findings obtained in this study invite a broader interpretation of how differentiated English materials function within elementary English classrooms. Although both groups demonstrated improvement in their listening comprehension performance across the instructional period, the absence of a statistically significant difference between the two groups indicates that the instructional materials alone were insufficient to produce measurable gains beyond those achieved through conventional classroom instruction. Rather than suggesting that differentiated instruction lacks educational value, this outcome highlights the multifaceted nature of language learning, where instructional resources interact with numerous pedagogical and contextual factors before observable learning gains emerge. Viewed from this perspective, improvements in listening comprehension should be understood as the cumulative result of sustained instructional experiences instead of the immediate consequence of introducing alternative learning materials during a relatively brief intervention. This study contributes to elementary English teaching practice by demonstrating that differentiated English materials are most effective when implemented as part of an integrated instructional approach that combines adaptive pedagogy, continuous assessment, and sustained listening support, rather than as standalone instructional resources.

This interpretation becomes more meaningful when differentiated instruction is considered as a comprehensive pedagogical framework rather than a collection of adaptive learning resources. The philosophy underlying differentiation encourages teachers to respond continuously to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles by adjusting instructional processes, assessment practices, classroom interactions, and learning environments in addition to instructional content. Consequently, when only one dimension of differentiation is modified while other classroom practices remain relatively unchanged, the resulting instructional experience may not be sufficiently different to produce statistically distinguishable learning outcomes. Similar observations were reported by Mirawati et al. (2022), who emphasized that meaningful differentiation requires coordinated implementation across multiple instructional

components, while Bhandari et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of teacher preparedness, systematic planning, and instructional consistency in heterogeneous classrooms. A comparable perspective was also presented by Zaini and Kandasamy (2025), who argued that sustainable improvements are more likely to emerge when differentiated strategies become an integral part of everyday teaching practice rather than functioning merely as supplementary instructional materials.

Beyond instructional design, the developmental characteristics of elementary learners also provide an important context for understanding the present findings. Acquiring listening comprehension involves a gradual process in which learners repeatedly construct meaning from spoken language through continuous exposure, meaningful interaction, and progressively richer linguistic experiences. The differentiated materials implemented in this study undoubtedly offered students more varied learning opportunities; nevertheless, such variation may require a longer period of consistent classroom application before measurable academic differences become evident. This interpretation resonates with Maryana et al. (2025), who demonstrated that improvements in listening performance became more visible when differentiated learning was accompanied by sustained digital practice and continuous formative feedback. Likewise, Wakerkwa (2023) emphasized that elementary learners benefit most from repeated language exposure supported by systematic teacher guidance, suggesting that instructional materials primarily facilitate learning processes rather than independently determining students' language achievement.

Another perspective emerging from these findings concerns the realities of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within elementary English education. The curriculum promotes learner-centered instruction that acknowledges individual differences; however, translating these principles into everyday classroom practice demands considerably more than the availability of differentiated teaching resources. Teachers are simultaneously expected to organize flexible classroom management, design multimodal learning experiences, monitor students' progress, and make ongoing instructional adjustments while maintaining common learning objectives for the entire class. Earlier investigations have consistently identified these practical demands as major challenges for classroom implementation. Dewi et al. (2024) reported that elementary English teachers required differentiated materials supported by varied learning activities and comprehensive instructional guidance, whereas Barlian et al. (2023) and Sutrisno et al. (2023) argued that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends on substantial pedagogical transformation rather than simply replacing conventional teaching materials. Complementing these findings, Lutfi et al. (2026) highlighted that inclusive classroom management constitutes a critical element in accommodating learner diversity, reinforcing the view that instructional materials achieve greater effectiveness when integrated into broader pedagogical practices rather than implemented as isolated classroom interventions.

When the present findings are considered alongside previous investigations, they do not necessarily contradict earlier evidence supporting differentiated instruction; instead, they reveal that instructional outcomes are highly dependent on the circumstances under which differentiation is implemented. Many studies reporting positive impacts have described learning environments where differentiated practices extended beyond instructional materials to include adaptive teaching strategies, ongoing assessment, and continuous teacher feedback. Under such conditions, learners were provided with multiple opportunities to engage actively with learning tasks while receiving instructional support that evolved throughout the learning process. This broader pedagogical orientation is reflected in the work of Mirawati et al. (2022), Bhandari et al. (2025), and Zaini and Kandasamy (2025), all of whom emphasized that the effectiveness of

differentiated instruction is closely associated with the coherence of classroom implementation rather than with the presence of differentiated resources alone. Collectively, these studies suggest that instructional materials represent one element within an interconnected instructional system whose overall effectiveness depends on the quality of pedagogical decision-making.

A different pattern emerges when comparing the present study with investigations reporting statistically significant improvements in English learning. Previous evidence has shown that differentiated learning supported by technology, authentic language exposure, and individualized learning pathways can produce measurable gains in both language performance and student engagement. Maryana et al. (2025), for instance, demonstrated that sustained learning through a mobile application strengthened students' listening performance because individualized practice was accompanied by continuous formative feedback. Likewise, Artini et al. (2025) described teachers' positive perceptions toward differentiated strategies for accommodating learner diversity, while Dewi et al. (2024) documented teachers' expectations for multimodal English materials capable of supporting flexible classroom instruction. Rather than representing conflicting evidence, these variations indicate that instructional duration, technological integration, teacher expertise, and opportunities for repeated language exposure may collectively shape the extent to which differentiated instruction influences students' learning outcomes.

Another contribution of the present study lies in extending the current discussion surrounding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary English education. Earlier investigations predominantly concentrated on identifying teachers' instructional needs, designing differentiated learning resources, or examining the feasibility of implementing learner-centered practices in schools. Dewi et al. (2024) primarily explored teachers' expectations regarding differentiated English materials, whereas Sudeni et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of assessment practices capable of accommodating diverse learner characteristics. Similarly, Barlian et al. (2023) and Sutrisno et al. (2023) positioned differentiated instruction as an essential strategy for realizing the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, while Lutfi et al. (2026) highlighted inclusive classroom management as a prerequisite for responding effectively to learner diversity. By empirically examining the influence of learning-style-based differentiated English materials on elementary students' listening comprehension through a quasi-experimental design, the present study broadens existing evidence and suggests that adaptive instructional resources are unlikely to generate optimal learning outcomes unless they operate in concert with responsive pedagogy, continuous assessment, and well-managed classroom interaction. Conceptually, these findings refine the current understanding of differentiated instruction by positioning instructional materials as one component within a broader ecosystem of pedagogical adaptation rather than as an independent instructional intervention.

Several practical implications may therefore be considered when designing future English instruction for elementary learners. The findings encourage teachers to integrate differentiated English materials with explicit listening strategy instruction, systematic vocabulary development, formative assessment, collaborative learning experiences, and frequent exposure to authentic spoken English so that instructional adaptation extends beyond learning resources themselves. Continuous observation of students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles also becomes essential because these characteristics may evolve throughout the learning process and require corresponding instructional adjustments. At the same time, the findings should be interpreted with awareness of several limitations, including the relatively short intervention period, the involvement of two intact classrooms within a single elementary

school, and the focus on listening comprehension as the sole learning outcome. Future investigations are therefore encouraged to involve larger participant groups, longer intervention periods, multiple school contexts, and additional variables such as learning engagement, teacher readiness, instructional fidelity, and classroom interaction in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how differentiated English materials contribute to English learning within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

CONCLUSION

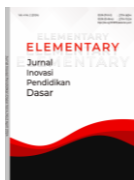
The findings of this study demonstrate that differentiated English materials did not produce a statistically significant improvement in fifth-grade students' listening comprehension compared with conventional instructional materials. Instead, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of differentiated instruction depends on its integration with responsive pedagogy, continuous teacher facilitation, and meaningful listening experiences rather than on instructional materials alone. Accordingly, this study extends current understanding of Differentiated Instruction and contributes to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by providing empirical evidence that learner-centered English instruction is more effective when supported by coherent instructional design than by differentiated learning resources alone. Furthermore, the study offers a practical reference for integrating differentiated materials into elementary English classrooms through a comprehensive instructional approach.

The practical implications encourage *English* teachers to integrate *differentiated English materials* with explicit *listening* strategy instruction, systematic vocabulary development, authentic language exposure, formative assessment, and ongoing instructional adjustments that respond to students' evolving learning characteristics. Such integration has the potential to create richer learning experiences while supporting the learner-centered orientation promoted by the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Future investigations are expected to examine the implementation of *Differentiated Instruction* across broader educational contexts by involving larger participant groups, longer intervention periods, and multiple elementary schools to strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Further studies may also explore complementary variables, including learning engagement, teacher readiness, instructional fidelity, *self-regulated learning*, motivation, and *listening* strategy use, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping elementary students' *English listening* development.

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