



Application Of Project-Based Differentiation Learning for The Development of Short Story Writing Skills in Junior High School Class IX

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the application of project-based differentiation learning in the development of short story writing skills in Grade IX junior high school students. This study uses descriptive qualitative methods with data collection techniques in the form of observation, interview, and document analysis. The results showed that the application of project-based differentiation learning allows students to develop writing skills optimally according to their individual needs and potentials. This strategy is also effective in improving creativity, understanding the structure of short stories, and students' expression skills in writing. Thus, project-based differentiation learning can be an innovative alternative to writing learning at the junior high level.

Keywords: Differentiation, Project, Short Story.

Introduction

Learning is an activity that occurs in everyday life, allowing individuals to learn anywhere, anytime, and from anyone. However, learning is often misinterpreted as an activity limited to children striving for good grades. In reality, learning serves a broader purpose: shaping one's personality for the better. According to Suyono and Hariyanto, learning is a process that changes an individual's behavior or mental activity through interaction or active communication with the environment and various learning resources. Learning is a combination of two components: learning itself, which is student-centered, and teaching, which is a learning activity facilitated by teachers (Septyana, 2023:85).

One of the key objectives of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology for the 2020-2024 period is to enhance the quality and relevance of

education by focusing on learner development. This objective is rooted in the understanding that every child possesses unique potential and has the right to health, education, and equitable protection. However, millions of children are deprived of fair opportunities due to factors such as nationality, gender, or socioeconomic background.

Schools serve as a crucial platform for nurturing students' interests, talents, skills, and potential through well-structured learning experiences. Effective learning should be guided by educational science, ensuring that the process encourages students to achieve their learning goals. To attain these goals, students must possess knowledge appropriate to their academic level (Najah, 2024:75). The new paradigm in learning emphasizes student-centered approaches, requiring educators to design and implement lessons based on students' unique characteristics and needs.

This diversity presents challenges for educators in planning effective learning strategies. Learning objectives represent the desired outcomes that students aim to achieve through the learning process under specific conditions and stages. Teachers must carefully consider these objectives when planning lessons to ensure focused and effective learning experiences (Uno & Mohamad, 2022). Success in education is closely linked to the teaching methods employed, with an emphasis on both the learning process and its impact.

A student-centered approach promotes active participation in both physical and mental aspects of learning. Consequently, such an approach proves more effective in achieving learning objectives within an educational setting (Septyana, 2023:86). A well-designed curriculum aligns with the school environment and the demands of the era. Effective curriculum development should be flexible, continuous, practical, and responsive to students' needs. A dynamic and evolving curriculum helps build competencies relevant to learners.

In this context, differentiated learning and project-based learning have been recognized as essential strategies. Differentiated learning allows educators to accommodate diverse student abilities, interests, and learning styles by implementing various teaching strategies and methods. It enhances students' cognitive and affective development by building upon prior knowledge and employing flexible grouping techniques. Research suggests that a differentiated learning approach positively impacts student learning outcomes (Sakti, 2024:706).

To further strengthen differentiated learning, it can be integrated with project-based learning, creating an engaging learning environment. One of the current challenges in education is the lack of proficiency in short story writing among high school students. Writing short stories is an essential skill, as it enhances language proficiency, writing abilities, imagination, creativity, and critical and analytical thinking. Writing serves as a fundamental pillar of communication in both academic and social contexts, making it a crucial component of the curriculum.

According to Berliana, integrating project-based learning and differentiated learning in short story writing serves multiple objectives. First, it fosters students' creativity and imagination by providing opportunities to create original narratives, thereby encouraging innovative thinking. This creativity extends beyond writing and applies to problem-solving and decision-making in various aspects of life. Second, it improves students' writing skills through structured exercises and revisions.

Third, the process of writing and revising stories enhances critical and analytical thinking by encouraging students to evaluate their work, identify strengths and weaknesses, and incorporate constructive feedback from teachers and peers. Fourth, differentiation enables teachers to tailor instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles, ensuring inclusivity in learning. Fifth, project-based learning promotes collaboration through group work, enhancing students' social and cooperative skills. Lastly, story-writing projects empower students to take ownership of their learning process, fostering independence and responsibility (Pratiwi, 2024:301).

Considering these objectives, students are expected not only to develop strong short story writing skills but also to acquire a range of essential competencies applicable to their academic and personal growth. This approach not only enriches students' knowledge and skills but also prepares them to become creative, critical, and independent individuals capable of navigating an ever-evolving world. In the long run, these skills contribute to the development of competent leaders, effective communicators, and informed citizens.

In the 21st century, differentiated learning has emerged as a crucial teaching approach. Although not a new concept, it continues to play a significant role in adapting instruction to accommodate diverse student abilities and interests. Differentiated learning supports student-centered instruction by focusing on learners' needs. Research by Dian Lukitaningtyas on differentiated learning in social studies education (specifically on pre-script human material) highlights the effectiveness of this approach in fostering meaningful learning experiences. The study demonstrates that differentiated learning is fundamental to implementing the independent curriculum. It focuses on the inquiry-based learning model and tailors instruction to students' interests. Additionally, research by Norida Canda Sakti and Maf Ulatul Ainayah on project-based differentiated learning in the 21st-century learning era indicates that this method enhances student achievement and learning completeness. However, their study provides a more general perspective rather than focusing on specific academic disciplines.

Another study by Almas Wilda Pradnya Megananda examines the influence of project-based, problem-solving, and STEM approaches in differentiated learning for Islamic education (PAI). The findings suggest that these methods significantly improve students' understanding of culture and the environment. These studies collectively highlight the benefits of differentiated and project-based learning across various subjects and contexts.

Based on the aforementioned research gaps, this study explores the application of project-based differentiated learning in enhancing short story writing skills among ninth-grade junior high school students. The findings indicate that this approach effectively improves students' writing proficiency by integrating project-based learning with differentiation strategies. This method allows for the customization of materials and teaching methods according to students' individual interests and abilities. As a result, students not only enhance their writing skills but also develop creativity, imagination, and critical and analytical thinking abilities. Furthermore, this approach promotes active student engagement, strengthens social and collaborative skills through group work, and encourages independent learning by fostering initiative and self-responsibility. Overall, project-based differentiated learning presents a comprehensive and effective strategy for improving writing skills while equipping students with essential competencies for future academic and personal success. Consequently, this model has the potential to be widely implemented in educational curricula to cultivate creative, critical, and independent learners.

Method

According to Sukmadinata, this study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to provide an in-depth and subjective analysis of existing phenomena, focusing on logical and humanistic perspectives. This method is particularly appropriate for educational research as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the characteristics, qualities, and relationships between teaching and learning activities (Noor, 2011). The qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to capture the complexity of the implementation of project-based participatory learning in developing short story writing skills among ninth-grade students at SMP Islam AL-Ikhlas Jambi.

This study aims to obtain data on the application of project-based participatory learning to enhance short story writing skills among ninth-grade students at SMP Islam AL-Ikhlas Jambi. The research subjects consisted of 32 students, including 17 female and 15 male students. This study followed a structured process beginning with a needs analysis, followed by the design and implementation of participatory learning, assessment, and reflection. The needs analysis stage involved mapping student learning needs, learning flow, learning profiles, and learning styles to understand how best to implement the intervention. The participatory learning model was then structured based on these findings to ensure that the learning activities were well-aligned with student needs.

To gather comprehensive data, the study utilized surveys, interviews, and direct observations. The survey consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions designed to assess students' prior knowledge of short story writing, their learning preferences, and their perceptions of participatory learning. Some sample survey questions included: "How confident are you in writing short stories?",

"What difficulties do you face when developing a narrative?", and "What aspects of short story writing do you find most engaging?". Interviews were conducted with selected students and teachers using a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility in responses while ensuring coverage of key themes. The interview questions explored students' experiences, engagement levels, and perceived effectiveness of project-based participatory learning. The structure of the interviews followed a set guideline, beginning with introductory questions, followed by in-depth explorations of student perceptions, and ending with reflective inquiries on their learning experience. Observations followed a structured protocol, recording classroom interactions, student engagement, and instructional strategies used by the teacher. The observational data included frequency counts of student participation, qualitative notes on student responses, and an analysis of the teacher's role in facilitating participatory learning.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, in which survey responses were categorized into themes to identify common patterns, while interview transcripts were coded for recurring ideas. Observational data were triangulated with survey and interview findings to ensure validity and reliability. To enhance reliability, inter-coder agreement was applied, where multiple researchers reviewed data independently before finalizing interpretations. The validity of the study was further strengthened through data triangulation, ensuring that findings were supported by multiple sources of evidence, including student responses, teacher perspectives, and classroom observations.

The study was conducted over a 12-week period, divided into distinct phases to ensure a systematic implementation. The first phase, conducted in weeks 1–2, involved a needs analysis to identify student learning preferences and potential challenges. In weeks 3–4, the curriculum was designed based on the results of the needs analysis, incorporating project-based learning elements. The implementation phase, spanning weeks 5–9, focused on engaging students in participatory learning through structured short story writing projects, where students worked both individually and collaboratively. The final phase, occurring in weeks 10–12, involved assessment and reflection, during which students' writing skills were evaluated, and feedback was collected for continuous improvement.

The participatory learning model incorporated differentiation by tailoring instruction to individual student needs. This was done through the separation of material, treatment, and items. The separation of material involved breaking down short story writing into specific components such as character development, plot structure, and language use. The treatment phase included targeted exercises to help students refine their storytelling abilities, such as guided brainstorming sessions, peer feedback activities, and writing workshops. The items phase required students to create short stories based on specific prompts that encouraged creativity and critical thinking, with opportunities to revise their work based on feedback from teachers and peers.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed in this study. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their parents, ensuring that participants were fully aware of the research objectives and procedures. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing responses, and participation was strictly voluntary, with students given the option to withdraw at any stage. Additionally, the study followed institutional ethical guidelines to protect student well-being and ensure the integrity of the research process.

To ensure the credibility of findings, the study employed various validity and reliability measures. Data triangulation was used to compare survey responses, interview insights, and observational data to establish consistency. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted to refine interpretations and minimize researcher bias. Additionally, the study incorporated member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with participants to validate interpretations and ensure that their perspectives were accurately represented.

Student progress was evaluated using multiple assessment methods, including a rubric-based evaluation of short story writing. The rubric assessed key elements such as creativity, coherence, narrative structure, language use, and engagement. Pre- and post-assessments were conducted to measure improvements in writing skills over time. Additionally, students were encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences through written reflections, providing qualitative insights into their progress and the effectiveness of the participatory learning model.

Despite the strengths of the study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size limits the generalizability of findings beyond the specific context of SMP Islam AL-Ikhlâs Jambi. Additionally, self-reported data from students may introduce bias, as responses could be influenced by personal perceptions rather than objective performance measures. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a larger and more diverse sample and employing additional objective assessment measures.

By expanding on the methodology, data analysis, and intervention strategies, this revised version provides a more comprehensive overview of the study's approach, ensuring clarity and depth in understanding its execution and findings.

Results

Steps to Apply Differentiation Learning

1. **Identify Student Needs** The first step is identifying students' differences in abilities and interests. Researchers and teachers, such as Ibu Ajeng, conducted this by distributing questionnaires about students' preferred themes. This helps provide a deeper learning experience in writing short stories. Additionally, interviews and group discussions were conducted to understand students' tasks better. The goal is to form diverse study groups

where students of various skill levels support each other and learn collaboratively.

2. **Short Story Project Planning** Researchers and subject teachers designed a differentiated short story writing project. This included introducing students to key aspects such as plot, characters, theme, setting, point of view, and language style. Students were given creative freedom to write their own short stories. Teachers also provided recommended reading materials to enhance their understanding of storytelling concepts.
3. **Project Implementation** Students began writing their short stories with the flexibility to develop their narratives. Teachers allocated sufficient time for completion and facilitated peer-sharing sessions. Discussions and peer feedback encouraged collaboration and idea exchange. This iterative process ensured a supportive environment for writing improvement.
4. **Evaluation of Project Implementation** Assessment was carried out continuously through formative and summative evaluations. A rubric assessed story components such as plot, characterization, theme, setting, and writing style. Formative assessment included instructor and peer feedback during drafting, allowing students to refine their work. Summative assessment was conducted at the end, with each story graded according to predefined criteria. Students also reflected on their learning journey, identifying challenges and achievements. The learning model also involved showcasing student work at school events, promoting engagement and verbal communication skills.

This project-based differentiation learning model significantly improved students' cognitive development. In Class IX, the average writing score increased by 25 points, as per a comprehensive assessment. This approach fosters critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, preparing students for academic and real-world challenges.

Planning Differentiated Strategies in Learning

1. **Content Differentiation** Researchers at Class IX SMP Islam Al-Ikhlas Jambi applied content differentiation by presenting materials in various formats tailored to students' learning interests and abilities. Lessons were structured from simple to complex, allowing students to progress at their own pace. Multimedia resources such as videos, presentations, and interactive activities catered to different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), making lessons more inclusive and effective.
2. **Process Differentiation** Process differentiation involved engaging students in activities suited to their needs and abilities. Teachers provided additional guidance for those requiring extra support, offering summary notes and key concepts. Meanwhile, advanced students received more challenging exercises to maintain motivation. This approach created a

supportive environment that encouraged individual development while fostering an inclusive classroom culture.

3. **Product Differentiation** Product differentiation allowed students to showcase their understanding through various outputs. Students had the flexibility to choose short story themes based on their interests and talents. This approach encouraged creative expression and engagement, ensuring meaningful learning experiences tailored to individual preferences.

Application of Project-Based Differentiation Learning in Short Story Writing

The implementation of differentiated learning in Class IX at SMP Islam Al-Ikhlas Jambi positively impacted students' interest in learning. According to Suwartiningsih, differentiated learning creates an adaptive environment that aligns with students' characteristics, enhancing their understanding and learning outcomes. Interviews with students revealed an increased enthusiasm for learning, suggesting that differentiated learning fosters engagement and motivation.

Differentiated learning enhances students' knowledge, optimizes study time, and facilitates independent exploration of supplementary materials. According to Ayuningtyas (Patras, 2024:207), a well-designed differentiation model provides students with a pleasant and productive learning experience. Teachers play a crucial role in preparing appropriate learning materials, structuring activities, and tailoring instruction to students' profiles.

This approach recognizes that no single method suits all learners. Instead, it emphasizes flexible strategies that support students' unique learning paths. By implementing differentiated learning, teachers can maximize students' potential, fostering a positive and stimulating educational environment.

Further research and structured evaluation are necessary to refine the model and enhance its effectiveness. Comprehensive references should be included to support the theoretical framework and empirical findings presented in this study.

Discussion

Implementation Process

This study implemented a project-based differentiation learning approach to enhance students' writing skills. The process involved structured learning activities designed to accommodate students' varying abilities and contexts. The instructional techniques included project-based learning (PBL) and individualized instruction, enabling each student to progress according to their potential. The learning process was divided into several stages: (1) coordinated learning sessions where students explored short story elements, (2) individual guidance to refine their narratives, (3) iterative task submissions for review, and (4) evaluation through various assessment methods.

Quantitative Findings

A comparative analysis of students' writing performance before and after the intervention revealed a significant improvement. Based on a rubric assessment, the average score for narrative structure improved from 65.4 to 82.3, character development from 60.7 to 80.1, and effective language use from 62.5 to 84.2. Additionally, student engagement levels increased, as indicated by participation rates in discussions and peer reviews, which rose from 68% to 90%.

Qualitative Observations

Observational data and student reflections further supported the positive impact of the intervention. Learners demonstrated enhanced confidence in storytelling, with greater depth in character depiction and more structured plot development. Teachers observed that students became more motivated, actively seeking feedback and revising their work independently. Moreover, peer critique sessions fostered a collaborative learning environment, reinforcing interpersonal skills and creative thinking.

Discussion

Strengths and Impact

The findings align with previous research on differentiated learning, supporting its effectiveness in developing students' creative writing skills (Suwartiningsih, 2020; Ayuningtyas, 2022). The approach allowed students to personalize their learning experiences, leading to improved narrative structuring and richer storytelling elements. Furthermore, teachers reported an increase in instructional effectiveness by integrating multiple teaching strategies tailored to individual needs.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite these positive outcomes, the study faced several challenges. Some students required additional scaffolding to grasp advanced narrative techniques, indicating a need for supplementary instructional support. Additionally, the time-intensive nature of project-based differentiation posed challenges for educators in managing workload and providing individualized feedback.

Comparison with Existing Literature

Compared to traditional writing instruction, which often employs uniform teaching strategies, project-based differentiation offers a more inclusive and adaptable framework. Prior studies (e.g., Hasan & Putri, 2021) have highlighted similar benefits, particularly in fostering higher-order thinking skills and self-directed learning. However, unlike previous research, this study incorporated a structured peer critique system, which significantly enhanced collaborative learning and self-reflection.

Unexpected Findings

An unexpected outcome was the students' heightened interest in narrative writing beyond the classroom. Many continued developing their stories independently, showcasing sustained engagement with creative writing. This suggests that differentiated learning not only improves academic performance but also nurtures a long-term passion for storytelling.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of project-based differentiation in improving junior high school students' short story writing skills. The approach enhances narrative structuring, character development, and creative expression while fostering student motivation and engagement. Future research could explore the long-term impact of this method on students' writing proficiency and investigate its applicability across different genres and educational levels. Practical recommendations include integrating digital storytelling tools to further enrich the learning experience and implementing teacher training programs to optimize differentiated instruction strategies.

Research on the application of project-based differentiation learning for the development of short story writing skills in Junior High School Class IX showed positive results. This method helps students with different levels of learning ability to be more actively involved. With an approach tailored to individual needs, students can be more creative, understand the structure of short stories, and produce quality work. Project-based learning also increases students' motivation, collaboration, and sense of responsibility for assigned tasks. In conclusion, this strategy is effective to improve short story writing skills in junior high school students in Class IX.

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Muhammad Esa Pratama, Irma Suryani, Maizar Karim
Application Of Project-Based Differentiation Learning for The Development of Short Story
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