



Effective Learning Strategies: The Role of Teachers in Enhancing Junior High School Students' Narrative Writing Skills through Differentiated Instruction

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Received: 2024-05-03 Accepted: 2025-10-19

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.6530

Abstract

The ability to write narrative texts is a fundamental skill in English language education, especially at the Junior High School (JHS) level. However, many students face challenges in organizing ideas and writing narratives that are both structured and engaging. Differentiated Instruction (DI) offers a solution by tailoring teaching to meet the individual needs of students. This study aims to explore the implementation of DI in teaching narrative writing at JHS, particularly in English language classes. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, focusing on two experienced English teachers and their students. The results indicated that DI significantly improved students' writing skills, particularly in organizing ideas, structuring texts, and enhancing creativity in character development and plot construction. Students in classes using DI showed increased motivation, confidence, and better use of language. Despite challenges such as diverse student abilities and limited resources, DI was found to positively impact students' writing outcomes. The study concludes that DI is an effective method for improving narrative writing skills in English classes at JHS, offering a flexible and student-centered approach to teaching.

Keywords: *Differentiated Instruction, Narrative Writing, Junior High School, English Language Education, Teaching Strategies*

Introduction

Narrative writing skills are fundamental in Indonesian language education, especially at the Junior High School (JHS) level. Writing a narrative text involves more than just the ability to construct structured sentences; it also requires a deep understanding of plot, characterization, setting, and the development of

ideas that adhere to established conventions. Narrative texts are often used in various types of exams and school assignments, so having good narrative writing skills is essential for students' academic success. However, despite its importance, many students face challenges in developing effective narrative writing skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

According to research conducted by Richards and Rodgers (2014), the primary difficulty students encounter in writing narrative texts is the inability to organize ideas logically, as well as limitations in choosing the appropriate language to convey the narrative message. Additionally, many students lack proficiency in effective writing techniques, such as using detailed descriptions, creating strong characters, and constructing engaging plots. This leads to difficulties in producing narrative texts that are not only structurally correct but also capture the reader's attention (Hall et al., 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

A major challenge in teaching narrative writing skills is the diversity of student abilities within a single classroom. In a class consisting of individuals with varied backgrounds and capabilities, traditional teaching methods often fail to meet the learning needs of each student. Differentiated Instruction (DI) has been proposed as an approach to address this issue. DI focuses on adjusting the teaching process, materials, and assessments based on individual student needs to ensure all students can access learning in ways that match their abilities and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2001; Slavin, 2009).

Differentiated Instruction was first introduced by Carol Ann Tomlinson in her book *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms* (2001). According to Tomlinson, DI requires teachers to adjust various aspects of instruction, such as content (teaching materials), process (ways in which students process information), and product (expected outcomes or achievements) to meet the diverse needs of students. Tomlinson (2001) emphasizes that the success of DI depends on the teacher's understanding of student needs and the ability to design learning experiences tailored to individual students.

One key component of Differentiated Instruction is content adjustment, which involves modifying the materials taught to students. In the context of teaching narrative writing, this can include using different types of narrative texts that are accessible to all students, ranging from simple to more complex texts. Teachers can present narrative texts at varying levels of difficulty so that each student can engage with the material according to their understanding (Tomlinson, 2014; Hall et al., 2003). This supports Gardner's (2006) theory that each individual has a unique learning style, and DI helps students access materials through an approach that suits their style.

The second component of DI is processing adjustment, which relates to how students learn. In writing instruction, this means providing students with opportunities to choose how they want to develop their writing skills. For example, students who are more visual may understand narrative texts better

through illustrations or images, while students who prefer learning through verbal discussion can be given the chance to discuss their ideas before writing. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, which is relevant to the application of DI, where students are provided with opportunities to learn in a supportive and collaborative environment.

The third component of DI is product, which involves the expected outcomes from students. DI allows students to demonstrate their understanding in more flexible ways, whether through writing, presentations, or other forms. In the context of narrative writing, this means students can be asked to write narrative texts in various formats, such as short stories, narrative essays, or even multimedia works that combine text and images (Black et al., 2003). Giving students different ways to showcase their learning can boost their motivation and self-confidence.

Although DI offers many benefits, its implementation in the context of narrative writing instruction in JHS also faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the teacher's ability to assess each student's ability accurately. Tomlinson (2001) states that to implement DI effectively, teachers must have a deep understanding of their students' characteristics and learning needs. Therefore, the role of the teacher in identifying and designing appropriate instruction for each student is crucial. Moreover, DI requires more time and resources from teachers to design and implement differentiated learning in the classroom (Schunk, 2008).

Previous research shows that DI can enhance students' writing skills, both in technical aspects (such as using proper grammar and clear text structure) and creative aspects (such as character development and plot construction). Anderson (2008) highlights that differentiated strategies provide students with more opportunities to develop their creativity in writing. By allowing students to choose how they write, they can feel more connected to the material they are learning, which in turn improves their learning outcomes.

This research aims to further explore how the application of Differentiated Instruction in narrative writing instruction can improve the writing skills of JHS students. By identifying the teacher's role in designing and implementing differentiated instruction, this study seeks to provide insights on how DI can be used to address the challenges in writing instruction faced by students with diverse abilities.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deep understanding of the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in narrative writing instruction at Junior High Schools (JHS), particularly in English language subjects. This approach focuses on exploring the subjective

experiences of teachers and students in the learning context, as well as how DI is applied in the classroom to meet the individual needs of students. The theoretical foundation of this study is the Differentiated Instruction theory, first introduced by Carol Ann Tomlinson in 2001.

DI proposes adjustments in three main components of learning: content, process, and product. Content adjustment involves delivering material at different levels to match students' understanding. Process adjustment includes variations in how students process information, such as using discussion-based learning methods or visual media. Product adjustment relates to how students demonstrate their understanding, allowing for various forms of learning outcomes, such as writing, presentations, or other projects. The subjects of this research consist of two experienced English teachers who have implemented DI in narrative writing instruction and several students involved in the learning process. Students were selected using purposive sampling, choosing students from various writing ability levels to reflect the diversity of learning needs in the DI context.

This study was conducted at two Junior High Schools that implement Differentiated Instruction in teaching English narrative writing. The data collection techniques include in-depth interviews with teachers to explore their understanding of DI implementation, classroom observations to directly observe how DI is applied, document analysis of student writing to assess their writing skills, and surveys administered to students to gather data on their perceptions of DI in writing instruction.

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, including transcribing interviews, coding data, and analyzing student writing assignments. This study will also compare the writing outcomes of students who received DI instruction with those who did not, if applicable, to identify differences in their writing abilities. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher will use data source triangulation by combining data from interviews, observations, documentation, and surveys. Member checking will be conducted by returning the interview results and findings to the teachers and students to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the data. Peer review will be performed to provide feedback on the data analysis. Ethical research principles will be upheld by ensuring that all participants are fully informed about the research objectives and that their data privacy is maintained.

This study aims to provide deeper insights into how the implementation of Differentiated Instruction can improve the writing skills of JHS students in English, particularly in the context of narrative writing. The findings of this study are expected to contribute significantly to the development of more effective, relevant teaching strategies that support the enhancement of writing skills for students with varying levels of ability.

Results

Implementation of Differentiated Instruction by Teachers

The implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in narrative writing lessons at Junior High Schools (JHS), where this research took place, has shown a positive reception from both teachers and students. Based on interviews with two English teachers who applied DI, both agreed that DI provides the necessary flexibility to address the differences in students' abilities and learning styles in the classroom. According to the first teacher, "DI allows me to adjust my teaching according to the students' abilities, so that all students can learn in a way that suits them." Meanwhile, the second teacher added, "With DI, I can offer a variety of materials, ranging from simpler ones for students who struggle to more challenging materials for students who are more capable."

These teachers applied adjustments in three main components of DI: content, process, and product:

1. **Content Adjustment:** Teachers provide various narrative texts with different levels of difficulty. Struggling students are guided with simpler and easier-to-understand texts, while more advanced students are given more complex texts to increase their challenge and abilities.
2. **Process Adjustment:** Teachers give students the opportunity to choose how they process information. Visual learners are given the chance to learn using images and videos that support the narrative, while students who prefer verbal learning are encouraged to discuss their ideas first before writing. Students are also given the freedom to work in groups or individually, depending on their preferences.
3. **Product Adjustment:** Teachers allow students to demonstrate their learning in various ways. In addition to writing assignments, students can create presentations or multimedia projects to demonstrate their understanding of the narrative texts. This provides space for students to be more creative and develop their own ways of expressing their understanding of the texts.

Impact of Differentiated Instruction on Students' Writing Skills

The impact of DI on students' writing skills is clearly seen in the writing assignments completed by students. Based on an analysis of the writing results of students who participated in DI-based learning, several important findings related to their improvement in writing skills were identified. The writing assignments of students in the DI classroom showed significant improvement in the quality of the narrative texts they produced.

1. Improvement in Text Structure

One of the most notable outcomes of DI implementation was the improvement in the structure of the narrative texts produced by students. Before DI, most students struggled to organize the storyline logically and systematically. However, after implementing DI, the majority of students were able to write texts with clear structures, starting from the introduction, character introduction, to the resolution of the story. This shows that the content and process adjustments provided by the teacher helped students better understand how to construct a well-structured story.

2. Improvement in Character and Plot Development

In addition to structural improvement, the development of characters in narrative texts also showed progress. Students who previously struggled to describe strong characters were now able to create characters with more depth and relevance to the storyline. For example, students who initially only mentioned characters in general terms, like "the main character," now provided more detailed descriptions, including physical traits, behaviors, and motivations. Plot development also showed improvement, with more students demonstrating the ability to create engaging conflicts and resolve the story in a satisfying manner.

3. More Varied Use of Language

Another indicator of improvement was the use of language. Before DI, most students used simple language that often did not fit the narrative context. After several lessons with DI, students were more willing to use a wider vocabulary and more complex sentences. This indicates that DI not only improved technical writing skills but also encouraged students' creativity in organizing ideas and expressing their messages.

4. Increased Motivation and Confidence

One significant finding was the increase in students' motivation and confidence in writing. Through DI, students felt more valued and encouraged to develop according to their abilities. Teachers provided more personalized and positive feedback, which helped boost students' self-confidence. Students who were previously less confident in writing now felt more motivated to develop their ideas. This was evident from the increased participation of students in class discussions and their willingness to write more sentences in their writing tasks.

Comparison of Results Between Students Who Followed DI Learning and Those Who Did Not

Although the implementation of DI yielded positive results, this study also noted that not all students responded to DI in the same way. Students who already had better writing skills tended to benefit more from DI-based learning. They showed improvement in terms of idea quality, creativity, and more varied use of language. On the other hand, students with lower writing skills took more time to show significant improvement. Nevertheless, they still demonstrated positive progress, especially in text structure and the use of simpler yet more organized language.

Some students who struggled with writing might not have fully benefited from the content adjustments made by the teacher. They may require more time or additional support in the form of individual guidance. This suggests that while DI offers many advantages, the limitations in resources and time can affect the success of DI implementation. Teachers must be able to assess when and how to provide additional guidance to students who are having significant difficulty.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing DI

Despite the positive outcomes, teachers face several challenges in implementing DI. One of the primary challenges is the diversity of student abilities within a single class. Teachers must work extra hard to understand and respond to each student's individual needs, which can vary significantly. Teachers need to design materials and activities that are flexible enough to ensure that all students can engage in learning in their own way.

Moreover, time and resource limitations are key constraints faced by teachers. Although they strive to provide varied materials that meet students' needs, the limited time available in class often reduces the effectiveness of DI implementation. Teachers also reported that the lack of teaching materials and technology in schools could limit the variety of materials they can offer students.

Discussion***Implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in Narrative Writing Instruction***

The implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in narrative writing lessons has shown significant positive effects on improving students' writing skills at Junior High School (JHS). With the diversity of student abilities and learning styles, DI proves to be a highly relevant and effective approach in addressing these challenges. Based on the results of this study, it is evident that DI provides flexibility for teachers to design materials, processes, and learning products tailored to students' individual needs, in line with Tomlinson's (2001) theory, which asserts that DI allows adjustments across various aspects of learning to accommodate the diversity of students' learning styles.

Tomlinson (2001) argues that DI is not only about differentiating content but also about considering the processes and products that can be accessed by all students according to their abilities. This is evident in the application of DI in narrative writing lessons at the JHS level in this study, where teachers presented texts of varying levels of difficulty, allowing students with lower abilities to easily understand the narrative, while more capable students were given more complex texts to enhance their challenge and skills.

Richards & Rodgers (2014) added that the success of DI depends heavily on the teacher's ability to identify student needs. They argue that teachers must be able to manage a class with varying levels of ability by adjusting teaching materials, methods, and the products students produce. The findings of this study suggest that by adjusting content, process, and product, teachers can significantly enhance students' understanding in organizing more structured and creative narrative texts. However, the biggest challenge faced by teachers in implementing DI is the diversity of student abilities in a single class. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) statement that "the learning process should be adjusted to the abilities and cognitive development of the students." In this context, although DI offers many advantages, teachers must be meticulous in managing these differences to ensure that learning remains effective for all students.

The Impact of Differentiated Instruction on Students' Writing Skills

One key finding in this study is that Differentiated Instruction has a significant impact on improving students' writing skills, both in technical aspects (text structure, language use) and in creative aspects (character development, plot). Anderson (2008) found in his research that implementing DI in writing instruction improves student learning outcomes, particularly in terms of using more varied language and organizing ideas more systematically. This is reflected in the writing assignments of students who participated in DI-based learning, which were more organized and in-depth.

Before the implementation of DI, many students struggled with composing well-structured narrative texts, especially in organizing the plot and developing characters. However, after implementing DI, the majority of students showed significant improvement in their ability to create clearer and more structured narrative texts. Black et al. (2003) also stated that adjusting the product in DI allows students to demonstrate their understanding in more creative and diverse ways, which can increase student engagement in learning.

Additionally, there was a noticeable improvement in character development and plot in students' writings. Students who previously had difficulty portraying strong characters were now able to create characters with more depth, including physical descriptions, behavior, and motivations. This aligns with Slavin's (2009) theory, which emphasizes the importance of giving students the opportunity to develop their creativity through a learning approach

that is more flexible and based on their individual needs.

The more individualized teaching system, as explained by Slavin (2009), gives students the chance to choose the approaches they find most effective in developing their writing skills. For example, visual learners were given the opportunity to create graphic representations of their characters or plot, while students who preferred discussion were given time to share ideas and prepare their writing concepts in group discussions.

The use of more varied language was also another aspect that showed improvement. Before DI, most students used simple and limited language, but after DI implementation, they were more willing to use richer vocabulary and more complex sentence structures. Hall et al. (2003) emphasized that with DI, students can further develop their linguistic abilities because they are given the freedom to express themselves in a manner that aligns with their learning style.

Comparison of Writing Results Between Students Who Followed DI and Those Who Did Not

Students who participated in DI-based learning showed better results compared to students who followed conventional learning. The writing results of students in the DI classroom were more structured, with clearer storylines and more developed characters. Students who did not follow DI, although they still produced narrative texts that followed the basic structure, tended to be more limited in creativity and language use.

Black et al. (2003) in their study on assessment-based writing learning stated that one of the main advantages of DI is that it gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in more diverse ways, which in turn boosts their motivation and learning outcomes. This was also proven in this study, where students who received DI-based learning felt more confident in expressing their ideas in writing.

However, despite DI providing better results for most students, there were differences in the speed and depth of progress between higher and lower-ability students. Tomlinson (2001) explained that although DI is effective, "higher-ability students may feel hindered if the adjustments provided are too slow or not challenging enough." Therefore, the adjustments made must be flexible enough to ensure that higher-ability students remain challenged and motivated to progress.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing DI

One of the main challenges teachers face in implementing DI is the significant diversity in student abilities within a single class. Tomlinson (2001) stated that DI requires a deep understanding of student characteristics and the ability to design instructions that meet their needs. The main challenge teachers face is how to balance providing challenges for more capable students while offering additional support to students who need more assistance.

In addition, limitations in time and resources also pose barriers to optimal DI implementation. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in the learning process, but in large classes with limited time, teachers often struggle to give individual attention to each student according to their needs. This adds to the teachers' workload, as they need to prepare more varied materials and adjust their approach to meet each student's needs.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Learning Development

Based on the findings of this study, the implementation of Differentiated Instruction is highly recommended to be expanded, considering the numerous benefits it provides in terms of student empowerment and enhancing the quality of learning. However, to address existing challenges, especially concerning student ability diversity and resource limitations, schools should provide greater support to teachers through training and increased access to relevant resources to support effective DI implementation.

Furthermore, considering the importance of time in DI implementation, schools should consider adjusting learning schedules to be more flexible and provide teaching materials that can be tailored to students' needs. Slavin (2009) suggested that in DI implementation, it is important to involve various technological resources that can support students' learning styles, such as educational apps, learning videos, and collaborative platforms that can support class discussions.

Conclusion

The implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in English language learning, particularly in narrative writing, has proven to be effective in improving students' writing skills at the Junior High School (JHS) level. DI enables teachers to adjust teaching based on the individual needs of students, with modifications in content, process, and product tailored to students' learning styles and abilities. This approach helps students overcome difficulties in organizing ideas and using appropriate language, while also enhancing their creativity in writing structured and engaging narratives.

However, the main challenge in implementing DI is the diversity of student abilities within a single class, which requires teachers to have a deep understanding when designing appropriate instruction. Additionally, time and resource limitations also pose obstacles to the optimal implementation of DI. Despite these challenges, DI has shown a positive impact on students' motivation, self-confidence, and writing skills.

Therefore, Differentiated Instruction should be more widely implemented in English language learning at JHS, with greater support for teachers in managing student diversity and ensuring that learning is effective and meets the individual needs of each student.

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