

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION ON WRITING COMPETENCE AMONG GRADE XI STUDENTS: EXPLORATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of differentiated instruction on the writing proficiency of Grade XI students at SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung. Employing a quasi-experimental design, 60 students were divided equally into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received tailored instruction based on students' interests and learning profiles, while the control group followed conventional methods. Pre- and post-tests were administered, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and analysis of variance. Results revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group's writing scores, with a mean gain of 28.67 points compared to 9.5 in the control group. Additionally, thematic analysis of student interviews, guided by Braun and Clarke's framework, identified three key themes: positive impact on engagement and comprehension, advantages enhancing learning dynamics, and minimal barriers with significant benefits. Students found the method enjoyable, structured, and effective in supporting their learning. These findings suggest that differentiated instruction not only improves students' academic outcomes but also fosters motivation and active participation. Theoretically, the study supports learner-centered instructional models, while practically, it offers insights for educators seeking more inclusive and effective strategies. Despite limitations related to sample size and context, the research provides a strong case for broader implementation and further exploration of differentiated instruction in varied educational settings.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, Kurikulum Merdeka, English Language Learning, Writing Proficiency.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a complex area that encompasses various fields, including language acquisition and foreign language proficiency, alongside the natural sciences (Javadi-Safa, 2018; Zein et al., 2020). Language as a communication tool and social interaction's constituent element holds a pivotal place in the school curriculum. Among all foreign languages, English has evolved into a central position as a global communication facilitator (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017). English as a mandatory subject is learned in elementary school through higher education and focuses on the four primary language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Arif & Hakim, 2021; Isadaud et al., 2022).

English in the Indonesian national curriculum is an attempt to make the students familiar with technology and science around the world (Intiana et al., 2023). Higher levels of English language competence have also been further augmented by the emphasis of the Ministry of Education and Culture on emancipated learning (merdeka belajar) that aims to develop students' life skills and teacher autonomy in the classroom (Husaeni, 2023; Madu et al., 2024). Such pedagogy facilitates inclusive and student-centered learning that allows learners to be independent, critical, and creative thinkers. Part of the vision is that writing is a significant skill

that not only promotes creativity and self-expression but also fosters communication and critical thinking.

Nevertheless, preliminary observations in SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung classrooms discover that students struggle with writing in English. The greatest challenges are how to get ideas and use appropriate vocabulary. According to teacher assessment results, 19 of 30 students were below the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM) in writing activities. This indicates a serious discrepancy between curriculum expectations and student performance. One of the contributing factors suspected in this poor performance is the lack of alignment between teaching strategies and individual learning needs of students.

Though writing is emphasized in the curriculum, current instructional approaches have a tendency to apply generic models of instruction that do not provide room for students' diverse talents. Differentiated instruction is an emerging teaching approach that corrects this deficiency by modifying content, process, and product based on students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles (Langelaan et al., 2024; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). This is a philosophy in synergy with independent curriculum philosophy but without yet being well studied in the context of English writing teaching among Indonesian secondary schools.

This is why this current study is aimed at investigating the impact of differentiated instruction towards 11th-grade students' capability improvement at SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung. Using a quantitative comparative approach with control and experimental groups, the present study tries to contribute to current discussion regarding productive instructional strategies. It aims to provide empirical understanding of how differentiated instruction can be utilized in order to enhance writing performance and offer pedagogical recommendations to enhance Indonesian English language teaching.

METHOD

Research Object and Setting

This research was conducted at SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung and focused on the impact of differentiated instruction on students' English writing proficiency. The study involved two 11th-grade classes: XI IPS 1 (experimental group) and XI IPA 4 (control group). These groups were selected purposively based on English teachers' data regarding average writing performance.

Research Design and Data Type

This study employed a quantitative experimental research design with a comparative approach. The data used were primary data in the form of students' writing test results collected through pre-tests and post-tests. This design enabled the researcher to examine the causal effect of differentiated instruction on writing proficiency.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants in this study were 11th-grade students of SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung. A purposive sampling technique was used to select two intact classes. The consideration for sample selection was based on the teacher's notes indicating comparable average writing scores across both groups before treatment.

Research Procedure and Data Collection Techniques

The research procedure was carried out in several stages:

- **Pre-test administration:** Both groups were given the same writing test to measure their initial proficiency.
- **Treatment implementation:** The experimental group received instruction based on the principles of differentiated instruction—modifying content, process, and product according to student needs—while the control group continued with conventional instruction.

- **Post-test administration:** After the treatment period, both groups completed a writing post-test with the same rubric and topic as the pre-test.

The data collection instrument was a writing task evaluated using standardized rubrics covering idea development, vocabulary, grammar, and coherence which developed by Brown. After completing the entire research procedure, the students' writing scores were compiled and are presented as follows.

Table 1 Students' Score on Experimental & Control Class

c	Statisti	Category	Experimental Class		Control Class	
			Pre -Test	Post -Test	Pre -Test	Post -Test
	87-100	Excellent	-	9	-	-
	74-86	Very Good	-	20	-	-
	61-73	Good	4	1	-	6
	47-60	Fair	25	-	10	21
	34-46	Poor	1	-	20	3
	20-33	Very Poor	-	-	-	-

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from the students' writing pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the mean, standard deviation, and score distribution in both groups before and after treatment. The independent sample t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in post-test writing scores between the experimental and control groups. In addition, ANOVA was applied to compare variations in writing proficiency and determine the effectiveness of differentiated instruction across student sub-groups. These analyses aimed to reveal the impact of differentiated teaching strategies on students' writing performance in a systematic and objective manner.

vity	Acti	N	Experimental Class			Control Class		
			in	ax	ean	in	ax	ean
est	Pret	3	4	7	55	3	5	45
	0	5	0	.83	5	5	.33	
test	Post	3	7	9	84	4	6	54
	0	0	5	.5	0	5	.83	

The descriptive statistics reveal a notable disparity in performance improvement between the Experimental and Control classes. In the Experimental Class, students' writing scores improved substantially following the implementation of differentiated instruction, with the average score rising from 55.83 (range: 45–70) in the pre-test to 84.5 (range: 70–95) in the post-test—an increase of approximately 28.67 points. This significant gain in both mean and score range reflects the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in enhancing student writing proficiency. Conversely, the Control Class, which received conventional instruction, exhibited more modest progress. The mean score increased from 45.33 (range: 35–55) to 54.83 (range: 40–65), reflecting an improvement of about 9.5 points. While this suggests some positive impact from the treatment discourse, the overall effect was less substantial. These findings

underscore the greater efficacy of differentiated instruction in fostering students' writing development compared to traditional methods.

Independent Sample T-test

To find out whether the improvement that took place in the control class and experimental class had a significant difference or not, an analysis was carried out on the increase in student scores so that it was compared with the improvement differences between control and experimental.

Table 3 Differences Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Differences	Experimental	30	28.6667	7.6489	1.3964
	Control	30	9.5000	6.6111	1.2070

It can be seen from the data above that there is a significant difference in mean improvement between the experimental class and the control class. The experimental class increased by 28.66, while the control class increased by 9.50. Although the results of the independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test showed that the control class and experimental class were significantly improving student writing skills, when compared, it was found that the experimental class was much more effective in improving student writing skills. This can be seen from the difference in the increase between 28.66 and 9.50.

Table 4 Difference Independent Sample T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	.421	.513	10.38	58	.000	18.1667	1.85
Equal variances not assumed	-	.513	6.81	5	.000	18.1667	1.85

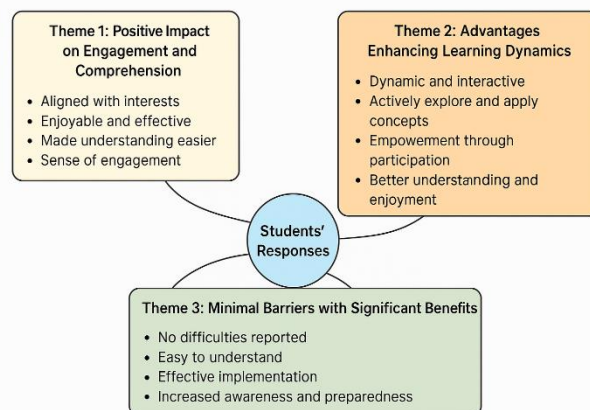
The analysis demonstrates a statistically significant impact of utilizing differentiated teaching as a pedagogical technique in enhancing students' writing proficiency. The significant score of 0.238 obtained from Levene's Test for Equality of Variances suggests that the variances of the Experimental and Control groups can be considered equal. Therefore, the t-test for Equality of Means assuming equal variances was used. The t-value was 10.38 with 58 degrees of freedom, and the two-tailed significance was 0.000, which is significantly lower

than the alpha level of 0.05. Consequently, we can reject the null hypothesis (H0) and support the alternative hypothesis (H1), so confirming that differentiated instruction has a substantial and favorable impact on students' writing proficiency.

The substantial mean difference of 19.17 between the Experimental and Control groups further highlights the efficacy of differentiated teaching. The students in the Experimental Class, who were provided with individualized training, achieved considerably higher results on the post-test compared to those in the Control Class, who got a different type of education. The standard error difference of 1.85 suggests a small margin of error, which implies that the findings are reliable and precise. The results highlight the significant influence of tailored instruction on increasing student performance, particularly in enhancing writing skills. This educational strategy is highly beneficial in promoting student outcomes.

Students' Perception

Based on Naeem et al. (2023) thematic analysis framework, the interview data was analyzed through six phases: familiarization, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Thematic analysis revealed three major themes: (1) Positive Impact on Engagement and Comprehension, (2) Advantages Enhancing Learning Dynamics, and (3) Minimal Barriers with Significant Benefits.



Picture 1. Discovering students' perception on differentiated instruction

Theme 1: Positive Impact on Engagement and Comprehension

Students' responses consistently highlighted that differentiated instruction aligned with their interests and helped them stay focused and engaged. For example, students described the learning method as enjoyable and effective, particularly when working with descriptive text materials. This sense of engagement was reinforced by the structured and student-friendly format of the lessons, which made understanding easier. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that differentiated instruction, when tailored to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, leads to improvements in engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Ramilo & Ting, 2025). Similarly, Subandiyah et al. (2025) found that providing students with choices based on their interests and using flexible grouping strategies significantly increased student engagement and satisfaction compared to traditional, non-differentiated lessons. Together, these results support the idea that differentiated instruction fosters both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning by creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment.

Theme 2: Advantages Enhancing Learning Dynamics

Students expressed that differentiated instruction was not only engaging but also dynamic and interactive, enabling them to actively explore and apply concepts. Phrases like

“interactive,” “active engagement,” and “direct application” captured their sense of being empowered through participation. This finding aligns with evidence showing that active learning strategies, which emphasize student interaction and hands-on involvement, significantly improve academic outcomes. For example, Freeman et al. (2014) found that active learning reduced student failure rates from 32% to 21% and increased performance by approximately 0.47 standard deviations across STEM disciplines. Similarly, Rivadeneira & Inga, (2023) reported that combining interactive methods, such as clicker questions, with collaborative learning activities produced greater student learning gains compared to less interactive approaches. Together, these results underscore the effectiveness of instructional designs that foster active learning and collaboration, reinforcing how differentiated instruction’s dynamic and participatory formats support both deeper understanding and heightened engagement.

Theme 3: Minimal Barriers with Significant Benefits

Students largely reported no challenges, attributing their ease of learning to the clarity and accessibility of the differentiated instruction model. Phrases such as “no difficulties,” “easy to understand,” and “effective implementation” were grouped into a cohesive narrative emphasizing minimal instructional barriers. Additionally, students recognized long-term benefits, including increased preparedness and awareness for broader academic and social contexts. These insights contribute to a sub-theme under benefits, reinforcing the favorable reception of differentiated instruction. This final theme suggests that the model is not only accessible but also extends its value beyond immediate tasks, supporting holistic development. Previous studies have similarly found that differentiated instruction, by accommodating diverse learning profiles through flexible grouping and tailored materials, improves engagement, satisfaction, autonomy, and learning motivation (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019; Sapan & Mede, 2022). Moreover, differentiated instruction has been shown to foster students’ well-being, social inclusion, and academic self-concept, further underscoring its broader positive impact beyond cognitive outcomes (Pozas et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that differentiated instruction significantly improved students' writing proficiency. The experimental class showed an average score increase of 28.67 points from the pre-test to the post-test, while the control class only improved by 9.5 points. The independent sample t-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant ($t = 10.38, p < .001$), indicating that the improvement was not due to chance but rather the effectiveness of the instructional approach. These results align with the study by (Khan & Khan, 2024), which found that differentiated instruction enhanced students' learning autonomy and writing performance. Likewise, research by Sari et al. (2023) supports the claim that differentiated instruction is effective in boosting secondary school students' writing skills in the Indonesian context.

Using Naeem et al. (2023) thematic analysis framework, three primary themes emerged from the student interviews: (1) Positive Impact on Engagement and Comprehension, (2) Advantages of Interactive Learning Dynamics, and (3) Minimal Barriers with Meaningful

Benefits. In the first theme, students reported that the learning method matched their interests and helped them stay engaged, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. The second theme highlighted that the differentiated model allowed for more interactive and hands-on learning, which fostered deeper understanding and retention. In the third theme, students reported little to no difficulty during the learning process, attributing it to the clarity and structure of the differentiated instruction. These themes align with findings from Toofani Asl (2019), which demonstrated that differentiated instruction improved students' narrative writing skills across various proficiency levels by promoting linguistic and rhetorical development.

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that differentiated instruction is not only statistically effective but also perceived positively by students. This suggests that instructional strategies tailored to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles can significantly influence both academic achievement and student satisfaction. The results imply a need for teacher training in differentiated instruction and curriculum designs that support diverse student needs. The success of this approach may stem from its structured yet flexible format, which maintains clarity while promoting individualized growth. Therefore, it is recommended that educators adopt and adapt differentiated instruction strategies to maximize student potential and engagement across a range of academic subjects.

CONCLUSION

This study found that differentiated instruction significantly improved students' writing proficiency, as evidenced by the notable increase in scores among students in the experimental group. Thematic analysis of student interviews further revealed positive perceptions regarding the approach's clarity, interactivity, and ability to foster engagement. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings strengthens the claim that differentiated instruction is an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing both academic outcomes and learner motivation. Theoretically, this research adds to the growing body of literature that supports learner-centered and inclusive instructional models, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts.

Nevertheless, the study has several limitations. The sample size was small and drawn from a single institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the relatively short duration of the intervention may not reflect the long-term benefits or challenges of implementing differentiated instruction. Future research should include more diverse samples across various educational settings and examine longer-term interventions. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer valuable guidance for educators and curriculum developers seeking to tailor instruction to diverse learner needs. Schools and teachers are encouraged to integrate differentiated strategies to support varied learning profiles and improve overall classroom outcomes.

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