

LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS ON DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION IN WRITING CLASS: A STUDY IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

This research investigates sixth grade of elementary school students' perceptions after learning writing descriptive text with Differentiated Instruction (DI). The current research employs survey research with questionnaire as the instrument. There are four key dimensions assessed from the questionnaire: the effectiveness of DI, supports from the teacher, ease of understanding, and students' learning motivation. The findings reveal that DI significantly improved students' writing by simplifying complex tasks into manageable steps and making the learning process more engaging. Students appreciate the clear guidance and support from their teacher, which increased their confidence and comfort. DI also tailored instruction to individual needs, facilitating better comprehension and enjoyment of writing. The research concludes that DI effectively enhances students' writing skills and suggests that future research should explore the long-term impacts of DI, integrate diverse assessment tools, and examine the role of teacher training in optimizing DI implementation.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, Writing, Descriptive Text

INTRODUCTION

Since Differentiated Instruction (DI) can adapt teaching strategies to meet each student's unique learning needs, it has gained popularity in the field of education (Stockard *et al.*, 2018). DI seeks to target each student according to their learning profile, individual peculiarities, and past knowledge by utilizing tailored instructional approaches (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2003). DI involves designing learning tasks, processes, or products with numerous versions or tiers, which are then given to students based on their assessed competencies (Smale-Jacobse *et al.* 2019). DI is predicated on the notion that every student is an individual with distinct abilities and learning preferences (Aleven *et al.*, 2016). Teachers can utilize DI to suit the needs of individual students and maximize their learning potential by setting distinct learning objectives and activities for students at different levels.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction can potentially address the various obstacles students encounter

when learning to write by incorporating DI. This is due to DI may modify the lessons to fit the needs of each student. These needs are caused by the variations of learning styles, learning velocities, and language proficiency. DI establishes a supportive learning environment that encourages active engagement and boosts students' confidence in writing by customizing lessons to each student's areas of strength and growth (Ayuningtyas *et al.*, 2023).

DI has been studied and used for a number of goals, including raising low-performing students' academic achievement (Kotob & Abadi, 2019), strengthening reading skills (Saleh, 2021; Santisteban, 2014), and enhancing teachers' instructional strategies (Ernest *et al.*, 2011; Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020). The use of DI technique significantly improves students' reading comprehension abilities. Using a variety of resources efficiently enhances students' abilities (Saleh, 2021). Besides that, DI can improve reading comprehension in a study involving

Colombian elementary students who had halted their education, especially in terms of their capacity to draw conclusions and contrast narrative texts (Santisteban, 2014).

Additionally, DI has been utilized to raise students' academic performance in mixed-ability classrooms. Low-achieving students were found to do better academically when DI was implemented. It has been demonstrated that DI, especially in inclusive classroom environments, improves teachers' instructional strategies (Kotob & Abadi, 2019). Even though some instructors have already used some DI techniques, the study found that more thorough training and assistance are still required in order to successfully adopt a wider range of DI tactics in the classroom (Ernest *et al.*, 2011; Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020).

The purpose of this research is to gather perceptions and feedback from sixth grade of elementary school students regarding the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in their classroom. This study is motivated by previous studies that show the positive impact of DI on various aspects of student performance, such as improving reading skills, boosting the academic achievement of low-performing students, and fostering overall better learning outcomes. By finding out learners' perceptions about DI, this research aims to contribute in the context of English language teaching that elementary school students are benefited from the implementation of DI particularly in the writing subject.

METHOD

The researchers employed survey research with one-shot design to explore perceptions related to the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) at one public elementary school in Palangka Raya, Indonesia. The participants were 29 sixth grade students who study English as a compulsory subject. When the

participants of this research were in the even semester of 2023/2024 (February 2024), they learned English through Differentiated Instruction (DI). They experienced learning English adjusted to their proficiency levels.

During the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI), one of the researchers became the classroom teacher. In the first meeting, the students were invited to observe pictures related to "My Dream" and identify the social function, generic structure, and language features of the descriptive text. The researchers then divided the activities according to the students' levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). At the topic identification stage, the researcher provided guidance tailored to each student's level of understanding. After that, the students were involved in planning their writing by summarizing ideas, which was also adapted to their abilities. In the next meeting, the researchers invited the students to write based on the summary of ideas created in the previous meeting. The researchers provided specific examples and guidance according to each student's level (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). A different approach was used to support the students' development at the descriptive text writing stage. The last meeting focused on revising their work. The researchers provided guidance and feedback on revisions based on each student's level (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). The students were given the opportunity to improve sentence structure, add details, and make revisions according to their level of understanding. After the learning process with DI, the students filled in questionnaire.

The questionnaire in the current research aimed to determine or measure student responses regarding the learning process using the Differentiated Instruction method. A questionnaire was a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the

purpose of gathering information from respondents (Matza *et al.*, 2013). Questionnaires could be designed for various research purposes, including collecting demographic information, measuring attitudes and opinions, assessing knowledge, and gathering feedback. The type of questionnaire used was about opinions. Students had to respond to statements that measure students' views or opinions about the learning method.

The questionnaire comprised 4 dimensions (the effectiveness of DI, supports from the teacher, ease of understanding, and students' learning motivation) and in total there were 10 items in the form of statements. Each answer consisted of four choices, namely Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire used Indonesian language to make it easier for students to understand the statements. Data from the questionnaire was then calculated and presented in the form of percentage.

RESULTS

There were four dimensions of statements that were used in the research. The first dimension was the effectiveness of the Differentiated Instruction method. It aimed to measure the extent to which students consider the Differentiated Instruction method to be effective in helping them understand the lesson material. It helped the researchers evaluate whether this method was effective in achieving learning objectives.

Table 1. The Effectiveness of the Differentiated Instruction Method

No	Statements	Answer			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	Learning to write descriptive text become easier with the new	52%	48%	0%	0%

	learning method that has just been implemented.				
2.	The learning methods is more interesting.	66%	34%	0%	0%
3.	I feel more confident while studying during the lesson.	66%	34%	0%	0%

Table 1 shows that many students found that Differentiated Instruction (DI) made the learning process of writing descriptive text easier as the teacher broke down the process into smaller, manageable steps. This approach helped clarify expectations and reduced the difficulties they previously experienced. The students also noted that the method was more engaging and enjoyable, featuring interactive activities that captured their attention. Additionally, the structured approach and clear guidance from the teacher boosted their confidence in writing, as they felt more capable and understood how to approach the tasks correctly.

The second dimension was the support from teacher. It aimed to measure the level of support and guidance provided by the teacher in the context of Differentiated Instruction implementation. It helped the researchers understand the role of the teacher in providing guidance to students during learning.

Table 2. Support from Teacher

No	Statements	Answer			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	The teacher provided assistance to students during the	55%	45%	0%	0%

	learning process.				
2.	The teacher provided explanation of the learning methods that will be used.	83%	17%	0%	0%
3.	The students are free to ask questions during the lesson.	62%	38%	0%	0%

Table 2 shows that many students appreciated the teacher's assistance during lessons, which made them feel more secure when they encountered difficulties. They valued how the teacher was always available to help and explain. The clear explanations provided by the teacher about the new learning method also played a crucial role in making students feel prepared and aware of what to expect. Additionally, students felt supported by the open communication in the classroom, knowing they could freely ask questions and receive clarification whenever needed.

The third dimension was ease of understanding. It aimed to assess whether the use of Differentiated Instruction makes learning material easier for students to understand and whether the method helps them in solving problems or learning tasks. It also measured the positive impact of the method on student understanding.

Table 3. Ease of Understanding

No	Statements	Answer			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	The learning style helped me in writing descriptive	72%	28%	0%	0%

text.

Table 3 shows that the method effectively addressed students' learning needs, making it easier for them to understand writing descriptive text. By incorporating differentiated instruction tailored to their individual levels, students found the learning process more effective. They appreciated how the method aligned with their needs, noting that it made grasping the writing concepts simpler.

The fourth dimension was learning motivation. It aimed to measure the effects of Differentiated Instruction on student motivation in learning. It helped the researchers assesses whether the method increases students' interest in following lessons and completing learning tasks.

Table 4. Learning Motivation

No	Statements	Answer			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	I feel very comfortable during the lesson.	66%	34%	0%	0%
2.	I feel very enthusiastic about writing descriptive texts during the lesson.	62%	38%	0%	0%
3.	I am aided in understanding descriptive text with the new learning method that we just did.	76%	24%	0%	0%

Table 4 shows that many students felt comfortable during the lessons due to a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere, which encouraged active participation. They appreciated the welcoming environment, which made them feel more at ease. The method included motivating elements, such as

engaging topics and creative exercises, which made the writing process enjoyable. Additionally, the use of clear examples, step-by-step instructions, and visual aids helped students better understand descriptive text, leading to improved writing outcomes and greater satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The questionnaire results reveal that Differentiated Instruction (DI) significantly affected students' writing skills and overall learning experience. In terms of the effectiveness of the DI method, the results show that more than half of the students in the class felt that writing Descriptive Text became easier with the new method, which divided the process into smaller, manageable steps. This approach not only clarified expectations but also reduced the challenges previously faced by students. Additionally, most students found the method engaging and enjoyable, which aligns with research by Stockard *et al.*, (2018) and Tomlinson *et al.*, (2003) that highlights DI's ability to create an interactive and stimulating learning environment. The boost in confidence reported by most of the students as it further supports DI's role in providing structured guidance and clear expectations, enhancing students' self-efficacy and task approach (Aleven *et al.*, 2016).

Regarding support from the teacher, the results underscore the crucial role of effective guidance. With more than half of the students in the class feeling adequately assisted during lessons and most of them are appreciating the clear explanations of the learning method, and it is evident that well-defined instructions and consistent support contribute significantly to students' preparedness and sense of security (Kotob & Abadi, 2019). Meanwhile, more than half of the students felt free to ask questions and it highlights the positive impact of open communication on learning, supporting research that

emphasizes the importance of a responsive teaching approach in facilitating better student engagement and comprehension (Aleven *et al.*, 2016; Smale-Jacobse *et al.*, 2019).

The dimension of ease of understanding demonstrates that DI effectively addresses individual learning needs. Most of the students who found the method helpful in learning to write descriptive text reflects DI's ability to clarify concepts and improve overall comprehension (Ayuningtyas *et al.*, 2023). By tailoring instruction to various learning levels, DI supports better understanding and aligns with findings that emphasize the method's effectiveness in catering to diverse learning needs and enhancing learning outcomes (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2003).

Finally, the results related to learning motivation show that DI positively influences students' engagement and enthusiasm. With more than half of the students felt comfortable during lessons and expressed enthusiasm for writing, it is clear that a supportive environment and engaging activities are key motivators (Saleh, 2021; Santisteban, 2014). Additionally, most of the students felt that clear examples and visual aids significantly assisted their understanding of descriptive text, underscoring the effectiveness of DI in making learning enjoyable and satisfying. This aligns with research indicating that motivational elements and clear instructional support are vital for increasing students' interest and participation (Kotob & Abadi, 2019).

In summary, the findings illustrate that Differentiated Instruction effectively enhances students' writing skills by making learning more accessible, providing essential support, improving comprehension, and boosting motivation. These outcomes reflect the broader benefits of DI in accommodating diverse learning needs and fostering a positive educational experience.

CONCLUSION

The questionnaire evaluated the implementation of Differentiated Instruction (DI) across four dimensions. The results reported that DI significantly enhanced students' ability to write descriptive text as the teacher broke down the process into manageable steps, clarifying expectations, and making learning more engaging and enjoyable. The students valued the clear explanations and support from their teacher, which increased their confidence and comfort during lessons. DI also helped the students better understand writing concepts by tailoring instruction to their individual needs. The method fostered a positive learning environment with engaging topics and creative exercises, boosting motivation and making the learning process more enjoyable. Overall, DI effectively improved students' writing skills through clear guidance, personalized support, and motivating experiences. For future research, it is recommended to explore the long-term impacts of DI on students' writing abilities and consider integrating various assessment tools to further validate its effectiveness. Additionally, investigating the role of teacher training in implementing DI could provide valuable insights for optimizing instructional strategies.

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