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Implementation of Differentiated Learning Strategies in Writing Narrative Text for the Elevent Grade at SMAS Pertiwi Medan

Devi Maharani¹, Anggraini Thesisia Saragih²

- ¹ Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan
- ² Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan

Correspondence E-mail: devimaharanii143@gmail.com, rereanggraini7380@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research examined the implementation of differentiated learning strategies in enhancing students' narrative writing skills at Class XI SMAS Pertiwi Medan. Using a qualitative approach with classroom observations and teacher interviews, the investigated study how differentiated affected students' learning writing development. The implementation focused on four key components: content adjustment varied difficulty levels through materials, learning process variations using group discussions and peer tutoring, diverse product choices allowing students to create summaries, comics, videos, or drama performances, and creating a supportive learning environment. Students grouped into three ability levels using fairy

tales as learning materials. The findings significant positive revealed impacts: increased student motivation and engagement through autonomy and choice, improved narrative writing quality in structure and creativity, and enhanced student independence and confidence. However, implementation faced challenges including time limitations and resource constraints.The study concluded that differentiated learning effectively accommodated student diversity and significantly improved narrative writing skills while fostering independence and confidence. despite implementation challenges.

Keywords:

Implementation, Differentiated, Learning, Strategies, Narrative Text

INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape in Indonesia is undergoing significant transformation, particularly through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes flexibility,

student-centered learning, and the development of creativity and independence among students (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This curriculum is designed to provide students with more autonomy in the learning process and emphasizes the importance of differentiated instruction as a key pedagogical strategy to meet the diverse needs of learners. Differentiated instruction, as emphasized by Tomlinson (2001), is an approach that adapts the teaching environment, content, process, and product based on students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles.

At the heart of the Merdeka Curriculum is the belief that students are unique individuals who bring different backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles into the classroom. Therefore, teachers must move beyond traditional uniform methods and instead design instruction that allows all students to succeed according to their abilities and potential. SMAS Pertiwi Medan, a private senior high school in North Sumatra, is among the institutions that have adopted this curriculum in their Grade X and XI English classes, aiming to create more inclusive, responsive, and engaging learning experiences.

However, despite the shift to a more flexible and student-centered curriculum, challenges in mastering specific English language skills persist—particularly in narrative writing. Writing remains one of the most difficult language skills for students to master, as it requires the ability to organize ideas logically, apply appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and follow specific text structures (Harmer, 2004). Observations at SMAS Pertiwi Medan revealed that many students, especially in Grade XI, struggle with constructing coherent and well-developed narrative texts. They often lack the confidence, strategies, and motivation to express their ideas effectively in written form.

In response to these challenges, this study investigates the effectiveness of differentiated learning strategies in teaching narrative writing within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. By examining how content, process, and product differentiation are implemented and how these strategies impact students' writing performance, the study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to improve English instruction in Indonesian high schools. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. How is the strategy of differentiated learning implemented in writing narrative texts for Grade XI students of SMAS Pertiwi Medan?

2. What is the impact of the implementation of differentiated learning strategies on the narrative writing skills of students at SMAS Pertiwi Medan?

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of differentiated learning strategies at SMAS Pertiwi Medan significantly improved students' engagement and narrative writing skills.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the implementation and impact of differentiated learning strategies on students' narrative writing abilities. The study was conducted at SMAS Pertiwi Medan, focusing on 17 students from Grade XI and their English teachers. The data collection techniques included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis. Observations helped identify instructional practices and how differentiated strategies were applied in real-time classroom settings. Interviews with teachers and students offered valuable insights into their experiences, challenges, and responses to the instructional methods employed. Supporting documentation such as lesson plans, student assignments, and assessment rubrics was also analyzed to triangulate the findings.

The instruments used in this research comprised observation sheets, interview guides, audio recording tools, and field notes. The data were processed using the interactive model of analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1984), consisting of three core components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model allowed the researchers to systematically filter, organize, and interpret qualitative data, leading to credible and reliable insights. This approach is widely regarded in qualitative research for its flexibility and depth (Creswell, 2014), and has been effectively applied in similar educational research contexts (Wahyuni, 2023).

RESULTS

The implementation of differentiated learning strategies at SMAS Pertiwi Medan was characterized by the adaptation of content, process, and product according to students' individual needs and characteristics. In terms of content differentiation, students were grouped based on

their proficiency levels low, medium, and high. The low level group was provided with simplified versions of fairy tales such as "Cinderella," accompanied by graphic organizers to help identify key story elements. The medium-level group analyzed more complex texts and engaged in tasks such as identifying themes and rewriting story endings. The high-level group explored original texts with deeper themes, analyzed narrative techniques, and created their own versions of fairy tales (Ahmad, Hesmatantya, & Mayasari, 2024).

Process differentiation was implemented through various instructional activities tailored to different learning styles. These included group discussions, peer tutoring, storytelling, journaling, and multimedia presentations. Teachers employed a variety of methods including direct instruction, student-led learning, and visual aids like mind maps to enhance understanding. These strategies allowed students to engage with the material in ways that aligned with their strengths and preferences (Wahyuni, 2023).

Product differentiation was also evident in the variety of assessment formats available to students. Learners were encouraged to demonstrate their understanding and creativity through written narratives, drama performances, digital comics, and video storytelling. Teachers used flexible and formative assessment methods, including oral presentations, peer evaluations, and personalized feedback, to evaluate students' progress (Heningjakti & Surono, 2023).

The impact of these differentiated strategies was significant. Students exhibited increased motivation and engagement, largely due to the autonomy and relevance embedded in the learning activities. The quality of their narrative writing improved, with noticeable enhancements in story structure, vocabulary use, and coherence. Furthermore, students displayed greater confidence and independence in their learning. Differentiated instruction helped bridge performance gaps, especially by supporting lower-achieving students while still challenging those with higher abilities. The inclusive environment fostered by differentiated strategies created a more supportive and dynamic classroom atmosphere overall (Wahyuni, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2024).

The study shows that implementing differentiated learning strategies at SMAS Pertiwi Medan improved students' engagement, writing organization, vocabulary, and confidence by aligning instruction with their varying needs and abilities. These results are in line with previous findings by Ahmad, Hesmatantya, and Mayasari (2024), who demonstrated that tiered content and varied instructional strategies led to increased writing competence and student motivation in EFL classrooms. Moreover, Wahyuni (2023) found that differentiation helped close performance gaps and enhanced creativity, confirming that personalized learning paths can be especially effective in narrative writing contexts.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study support the theoretical foundations of differentiated learning as proposed by Tomlinson (2001) and are consistent with findings by Ahmad, Hesmatantya, and Mayasari (2024). The flexible adjustment of content, process, and product within the classroom enabled teachers to address the varying levels of readiness and learning styles among students. The effectiveness of this strategy was evident in the observable improvements in students' engagement and narrative writing quality (Wahyuni, 2023). By allowing students to choose tasks aligned with their interests and abilities, differentiated learning provided a motivating and supportive environment.

The study also revealed practical challenges in implementing differentiated instruction. Time constraints for lesson planning and resource preparation were notable obstacles. Teachers were required to prepare multiple sets of materials and assessments to suit different learning levels, which increased their workload. Another challenge was the need for continuous professional development to equip teachers with the necessary skills and mindset to implement differentiated strategies effectively (Heningjakti & Surono, 2023).

Despite these limitations, the benefits outweighed the drawbacks. Teachers observed that students became more active and confident, while students reported feeling more involved in and responsible for their learning. This indicates that differentiated instruction not only enhances academic outcomes but also contributes to students' personal growth and self-efficacy (Wahyuni, 2023; Tomlinson, 2001).

The analysis also aligns with Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. The implementation of differentiated learning, by giving students choice and control over

content and products, boosted students' intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory reinforces the value of collaborative activities such as group discussions and peer tutoring, which were evident in the differentiated process at SMAS Pertiwi Medan and shown to enhance both cognitive and social development.

Students not only showed better academic performance but also developed higher creativity and confidence. Their written products became more diverse and authentic ranging from short stories to dramatic performances and illustrated comics. These findings confirm that when learning is personalized and supportive, students are more likely to engage deeply, take creative risks, and develop a growth mindset.

Overall, while the implementation of differentiated learning at SMAS Pertiwi Medan demonstrates significant promise, it also underscores the need for further refinement. Providing visual organizers, individualized feedback, learning contracts, and reflective tools can enhance the strategy's effectiveness. With appropriate professional development and institutional support, the differentiated approach holds strong potential to foster holistic student development. at SMAS Pertiwi Medan improved students' engagement, writing organization, vocabulary, and confidence by aligning instruction with their varying needs and abilities. These results are in line with previous findings by Ahmad, Hesmatantya, and Mayasari (2024), who demonstrated that tiered content and varied instructional strategies led to increased writing competence and student motivation in EFL classrooms. Moreover, Wahyuni (2023) found that differentiation helped close performance gaps and enhanced creativity, confirming that personalized learning paths can be especially effective in narrative writing contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that the implementation of differentiated learning strategies significantly enhances the narrative writing abilities of Grade XI students at SMAS Pertiwi Medan. By addressing individual learning differences through flexible content, process, and product strategies, teachers fostered a more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environment. Despite logistical and professional development challenges, the overall impact on student motivation, creativity, and academic achievement was profoundly positive.

Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of differentiated instruction and its application in other language skill areas such as speaking, reading, and listening. Schools are encouraged to invest in teacher training and resource development to optimize the benefits of this instructional model.

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