



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)

www.ijepc.com



THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION APPROACH ON WRITING SKILLS AND MOTIVATION

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 20.10.2024

Revised date: 31.10.2024

Accepted date: 10.12.2024

Published date: 17.12.2024

To cite this document:

Ghazali, M. A., Yusuf, A. B., Zaini, S. H., Hamzah, M., & Bakar, N. I. A. (2024). The Effect Of Differentiated Instruction Approach On Writing Skills And Motivation. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 9 (56), 299-308.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.956019

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Abstract:

Differentiated instruction is an instructional technique which focuses on the process of tailoring lessons to meet each student's individual interests, needs and strengths. This research was aimed at finding out the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in English on the writing skills and motivation of the fourth-grade students. This research used quasi-experimental design involving two sample groups: treatment and control group. The participants were Year Four students. There were 60 students participated in this study (30 students in an experimental group and 30 students in a control group). The participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using test and questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study showed that there is a significant difference in the achievement of writing skill and motivation between the control group and the treatment group after the intervention. At the $\alpha=0.05$ ($p=0.000$) level of significance, the results of the independent-sample t-test revealed a significant difference between the mean post-test scores of writing skills and motivation of the experimental group and the control group. In conclusion, differentiated instruction method can have a positive effect on the writing skills and motivation of students in English classroom. The implication of the study is that the curriculum planners, administrators and educators should plan and work hand in hand in developing their instructional techniques. The findings of this study may contribute to the knowledge base for differentiated instruction and a foundation for future studies.

Keywords:

Differentiated Instruction, Writing Skills, Motivation

Introduction

English language proficiency has become a necessity for everyone in this digital age due to dynamic change in the world of education in the Era of Globalization and Revolution Industry 4.0. In the 21st century, English plays an important role in various aspects such as the achievement of information, entertainment, business and trade, education, employment as well as an official language in international relations (Souad & Ramdane, 2019). In addition, English is also widely used in the field of technology in line with the rapid development of the world, especially in the field of medicine and engineering (Nishanthi, 2018). Therefore, it could be seen that English became very important in Malaysia. Although the national language of Malaysia is Malay, but the importance mastery of the English language is indisputable (Isadaud et al., 2022). English has been made a second language in Malaysia and is a core subject at the level primary or secondary school. Therefore, this global language has been taught in formal since preschool. Students are exposed to listening skills, speak, read and write in English starting from preschool until to the university level (Maharam Mamat, 2016). To improve the mastery of English among the community Malaysia, a policy to Dignify the Malaysian Language Strengthens the English Language (MBMMBI) has been implemented in stages starting from 2010. This policy has the goal of producing a society that can master the Malay and English language well.

Literature Review

Malaysia is committed to developing an education system for all students where equality and excellence are the main goals of the education process (Noriah, Rosadah & Rahayah, 2009). Differentiated learning enables all students get learning results based on student learning needs (Hall, Strangman & Meyer, 2003). The 'English Language Scheme of Work' which is in line with the CEFR has been suggested English teachers to use differentiated teaching in teaching and learning process. There are seven different teaching strategies suggested to English teachers that is different in terms of tasks, type and amount of support, results, time for completing an assignment, individual learning preferences and needs, question types as well as feedback (Bakla, 2020). These different teaching strategies can be used as a reference for teachers in teaching and learning process of English subject.

Jalaludin et al (2008) and Che Musa et al (2013) have expressed concern about the low achievement of Malaysian students' English literacy despite having studied English for 11 years at school. Skills the most difficult is writing skills (Farooq et al., 2020). This is also supported by Tan and Santhiram (2007) who stated that the standard of students' English writing skills in Malaysia is at a low level. Nik Safiah (2004) thinks that language skills in English is difficult for teachers to teach and difficult for students to master. This is because writing skills is a complex process, and a systematic level of mastery is required in this process (Che Zanariah & Fadzilah, 2011). According to Mastan et al. (2017), writing skills in the first language known as the mother tongue, or in the second language which is a foreign skill that are difficult to master, whether by school students or professionals because the cognitive processes involved in the writing process are complicated. Rosanna Jaafar (2020) supports that the most difficult language skill mastered by students are writing skills.

Tomlinson (2001) states that there are four important elements in differentiated instruction namely content, process, product and environment. Content means learning content or learned skills. The process brings meaning modification of strategies involving learning activities. Product refers to student results based on their ability. The environment is the condition of the classroom that bring comfort to students. These four elements are supposed to be modified by the teacher according to their current situation. The teacher modifies the elements based on three aspects of student diversity, namely student learning profile, student readiness and student interests. Shareefa (2020) has identified that there are three advantages of differentiated instruction approach such as causes positive psychological changes amongst students, encouraging academic achievement and benefiting teachers and parents in positive ways. In the study Tamirat and Chen (2020) have explained some of the benefits of differentiated instruction are to increase the motivation of students and teachers, to improve the relationship between students and teachers and to close the gap between teachers and students. Meanwhile, those teaching methods also affect students' mastery and motivation in writing sentences. This is because student achievement depends on the appropriate use of strategies (Zamri, 2015). Yahya Othman and Suzanawaty Osman (2014) found that students who are less proficient in writing are caused by teachers who do not diversify their teaching methods. At the same time, if the teacher does not apply appropriate media and techniques, students will lack concentration and will be less motivated during learning to write (Septian Diah Rosanti, 2011). Abdul Razak and Nor Asmah (2010) also stated that the teaching of modern teachers is still teacher centered, and they only teach based on textbooks. Pupils are passive because teachers still teach in a traditional and teacher-centered way (Anthony & Yahya, 2017). This situation will indirectly cause the achievement of low English writing skills. This is supported by Maharam Mamat's (2016) study that the level of motivation may affect English language achievement. Therefore, differentiated teaching can be used as one of the teaching methods to increase mastery of building sentences among students in primary schools (Halida Jawan & Zamri, 2021).

In addition, there are also quantitative studies in the form of survey on the implementation of different teaching methods that have been conducted. Fairuz et al. (2017) said that differentiated teaching has an impact on student motivation. Mior Muhammad Saiful Nizan (2019) also stated that differentiated teaching is received at UKM's PERMATA Pintar Center and students show a tendency to study it further in Malay. Danial Arif (2020) also submitted that Malay language teachers have a deep interest in applying different teaching methods in their teaching and learning process. Thian et al (2022) proved that teachers have a positive perception on different teaching methods and their effect on student mastery in language skills. Najiba Abdullah et al. (2014) in their quasi-experimental study found that different teaching methods are an effective approach in improving the achievement of writing skills in Arabic as a Foreign Language in Malaysia. This study involves one variable that is achievement. Therefore, the researcher plans to conduct a study involving two variables namely achievement and motivation to see the difference in students' achievement and motivation using different teaching methods. This research was conducted to improve students' writing skills and motivation in writing through differentiated instruction approach in English lesson.

Methods

In this study, a quantitative approach was employed. A quasi-experimental design was used to test the effectiveness of the differentiated instruction approach using two groups (control group and experimental group). This study also involved the data collected from both groups before and after the intervention. Quasi-experimental method is the most suitable research design to look at the effect of the intervention (Miller et al, 2020). Quasi-experimental design is a research

design which establish a cause-and-effect relationship between dependent and independent variables, and it does not rely on random assignment, but on non-random criteria. The researcher chose two groups of students which are homogeneous. One group is considered a control group without intervention, and the other group is given treatment whereby they are taught using differentiated instruction approach during their English class.

Both groups (the control and experimental group) were given a pre-test before the researcher administer the treatment to ensure the homogeneity factor. Then, the control group will be taught English lesson using conventional method and the experimental group undergo treatment. After the treatment, both groups were given post-test on writing skills and post-questionnaire on motivation.

Data is collected from one primary school in Tanjung Malim, Perak. The school is a government school. Respondents are selected by purposive sampling. They are the fourth-grade students. Data were collected from their test to assess their writing skills and the 5-Likert scale questionnaire on motivation. The pre- and post-tests use the same test paper, that is, use the same pictures and apply the same principles to build sentences. This test paper consists of 5 items. Pupils are required to write 5 simple sentences based on the picture using the '5W1H' principle, namely 'Where', 'When', 'Who', 'What', 'Why' and 'How'. To ensure the validity of the test content, the question items were constructed based on Curriculum and Assessment Standard Documents (DSKP) English Year 4 so that the constructed items are related with the learning content learned by students. Items are drafted based on Learning Standards that have been determined with reference to the Standards Learning Writing Skills based on DSKP English Year 4 (2017). Test questions are constructed by the researcher based on the themes that have been taught in textbook Year 4.

The items used in questionnaire is adapted from the 'Motivational Orientation of Differentiated Instruction in English Language Teaching' (MoDiELT) questionnaire which was created by Mohd Hasrul Kamarulzaman in 2017. His questionnaire measures the level of student motivation towards differentiated instruction in English. The reliability value of this research instrument has been measured and Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.958. The number of items for the MoDiELT questionnaire is 68. The results of the test were analyzed using an Independent t-test whether to accept or reject the hypothesis.

Result

The data of this research was obtained from the test distributed to the control and experimental group before and after the intervention. For the pre-test data of writing skills, the researcher analyzed the normality of the data. Normality test conducted on the entire sample using the Shapiro-Wilk normality test. The data distribution is normal, so Independent T-Test was conducted.

Table 1. Independent T-test Result Of Writing Skills Score Before Intervention

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
UjianPra	Equal variances assumed	.016	.902	.346	18	.733	.200	.577	-1.013	1.413
	Equal variances not assumed			.346	17.971	.733	.200	.577	-1.013	1.413

Table 1 shows that the value of $t=0.346$, $p>0.05$, which is $p=0.733$. H_{01} is not rejected, and there is no significant difference in the achievement of writing skills between the control group and the treatment group before the intervention. This means that the performance of these two groups is equivalent between the pre-test scores of the control group (mean=1.80, s. d=1.32) and pre-test scores of the treatment group (mean=1.60, s.d=1.27). Students' achievement between the control group and the treatment group is not significantly different before the intervention of differentiated instruction is implemented. Next is to answer the second research question. Table 2 shows that the value of $t=-0.201$, $p>0.05$, which is $p=0.843$. H_{02} is not rejected. So, there is no significant difference in the motivation of language writing skills between students of the control group and the treatment group before the intervention. This means that the motivation of these two groups is equivalent between the scores of the pre-questionnaire of control group (mean=29.60, s.d=6.96) with pre-questionnaire of treatment group (mean=30.20, s.d=6.39). Students' motivation between the control group and the treatment group do not have much difference before the intervention was implemented.

Table 2. Independent T-test Result Of Motivation Scores Before Intervention

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed		.018	.894	-.201	18	.843	-.600	2.989	-6.879	5.679
	Equal variances not assumed			-.201	17.869	.843	-.600	2.989	-6.883	5.683

The third research question is discussing on the significant difference in writing skills between the experimental and control groups after the intervention. Table 3 shows that the value of $t=-2.449$, $p<0.05$, which is $p=0.025$. H_{03} is rejected, and there is a significant difference in the achievement of writing skills between the control group and the treatment group after the intervention. This means that there a significant difference regarding performance of these two groups with the scores of the control group (mean=2.50, s.d=0.85) and the scores of the treatment group (mean=3.50, s.d=0.97). The intervention has succeeded in creating the achievement gap between the control group and the treatment group. In other words, differentiated instruction methods can help to increase the test scores of the treatment group.

Table 3. Independent T-test Result Of Writing Skills Score After Intervention

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.243	.628	-2.449	18	.025	-1.000	.408	-1.858	-.142
Equal variances not assumed			-2.449	17.686	.025	-1.000	.408	-1.859	-.141

Last is to answer the fourth research question. Table 4 shows a value of $t=-7.792$, $p<0.05$, which is $p=0.000$. H_{04} is rejected and there is a significant difference in the motivation between students in the control group and the treatment group after the intervention. This means that there is a significant difference between the scores of the control group (mean=47.40, s.d=4.27) with scores of the treatment group (mean=68.70, s.d=7.51). Differentiated instruction methods could help in increasing the motivation of students in the treatment group.

Table 4. Independent T-test Result Of Motivation Score After Intervention

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.849	.109	-7.792	18	.000	-21.300	2.734	27.043	15.557
Equal variances not assumed			-7.792	14.272	.000	-21.300	2.734	27.152	15.448

Discussion

This research investigated the effect of differentiated instruction on writing skills and motivation in year four students. The results showed that the differentiated instruction techniques were found to have significant effect on students' writing skills and motivation in the English class based on the findings of the independent sampled t-test. The result indicates that the level of writing skills and motivation of the experimental group is greater than the control group. The findings of this study are consistent with the study carried out by Najiba Abdullah, Meyad, Samsilah Roslan, Maria Chong Abdullah and Pabiyah Maming (2014) where the differentiated instruction method was found to increase student achievement in Arabic writing skills. This can also be supported by Roa'ani and Nor Rul Azlifah's study (2019) which shows that differentiated teaching can improve students' mastery of the Malay language. Therefore, it can be concluded that differentiated instruction approach can improve the achievement of students' writing skills in English. Based on Vygotsky's Proximal Development Zone Theory, through differentiated instruction method, teachers can provide challenging activities for every level of students - weak, average and smart. Weak students will not consider the task given difficult and resulting in them not wanting to continue learning. While the smart students will not find the tasks given easy and cause them to feel unchallenged. Students successfully completed the task according to their respective Zones of Proximal Development. This is indirectly could improve students' achievement according to their progress.

Next, the findings of this study can be supported by the study of Fairuz et al. (2017) which shows that differentiated instruction methods are found to have an impact on students' motivation in Biology. Easa, & Blonder (2023) also supports that differentiated instruction methods can promote student motivation and active engagement during learning and fostering students' positive attitudes towards chemistry in the study. Therefore, it can be concluded that differentiated instruction methods could increase students' motivation to write in English. This is because based on Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, when the intervention is conducted, teachers can recognize and understand students' learning styles and further differentiates teaching based on multiple intelligences of his students. For example, kinesthetic students learn through simulation while students the visual-spatial learning through mind maps. Students enjoy learning based on their learning profile. This can indirectly improve students' motivation in their learning.

Lim and Saemah Rahman's study (2018) stated that students showed a positive increase in achievement and motivation in English subjects by using different teaching methods. This is also in line with the research conducted by Wilma and Faridah (2018) who said that differentiated teaching can create student motivation in addition to improving students' mastery of science. Rathaneswaary Derbala and Ruhizan M. Yasin (2022) also proved that differentiated teaching is a method that is very appropriate, relevant and has the greatest impact on student performance and motivation and can even solve the issue of student differentiation in class. This can be related to Bloom's Taxonomy Theory. In pedagogy, differentiated teaching, teachers can plan activities based on student levels in Bloom's Taxonomy in stages. For example, weak student complete activities at the level of remembering and understanding, students who are average complete activities at the level of applying and analyzing, while students who are good complete activities at the level of evaluating and creating. Pupils are satisfied when they can complete their activities according to their level. This can indirectly improve student achievement and motivation in their learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of differentiated instruction approach during teaching and learning process of English subject is proven to be effective in improving writing skills and motivation of fourth grade primary school children. The result of t-test from the control and experimental group shows the significance level of 0.000 which is less than $\alpha = 0.05$. If the p-value is smaller than alpha, then the null hypothesis is rejected. So, H_{01} stating that there is no significant difference no significant difference in writing skills between the experimental and control groups before the intervention is accepted. H_{02} is also accepted. H_{03} stating that there is no significance difference in writing skills between the experimental and control groups after the intervention is rejected. The same goes to H_{04} . H_{04} stating that there is no significance difference in motivation of students between the experimental and control groups after the intervention is rejected. The mean of test score and motivational score in the experimental group is higher than the control group after intervention. Therefore, the use of differentiated instruction approach in English is effective in improving writing skills and motivational level of the fourth-grade students. It is suggested that the primary school teachers should implement more section in their teaching process using this differentiated instruction approach. By doing so, it enables to improve not only students, but also teachers. For students, this approach could allow greater confidence, greater student engagement, social and academic inclusivity. For teachers, it enables teachers to be more supportive towards students and adhere to standards and curriculum guides. The findings from this research could also be used as reference for other researchers in a similar field concerning differentiated instruction at primary level students.

The research carried out has certain limitations and is limited in nature. Research was carried out in one of the primary schools in Tanjong Malim. The sample of this study involves all fourth-year students at the school. 30 students are not a true representative sample for an area. The results of the study cannot be generalized to all fourth-year students in the country. Aspects of the study that are evaluated only focused on the achievement of students' writing skills and students' motivation to write in English. The use of differentiated instruction methods is conducted for learning writing skills in English class only and it involved sentence construction skills. So, it is recommended for other researchers to explore more on this issue concerning differentiated instruction approach such as conducted research using a qualitative design or mixed-method research design.

Acknowledgment

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the research teams who gave me their full support to produce this article. Hopefully many more articles and book-chapters will be published next year.

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