THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN TEACHING WRITING AT A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN KEDIRI

(Research Article)

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia has transformed teaching and learning, introducing innovative approaches to education. Differentiated instruction (DI) offers a significant opportunity for English teachers to address diverse student needs, particularly in teaching writing. This qualitative case study explores how and to what extend DI is planned and implemented in a writing class at a Junior High School in Kediri, Indonesia. In the study, the teacher implemented DI in content, process, and product using the Genre-Based Approach (GBA), encompassing four stages: Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modelling of the Texts (MOT), Joint Construction of the Texts (JCOT), and Individual Construction of the Texts (ICOT). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis from 32 seventh-grade students and one teacher, selected via purposive sampling. The data were analysed using thematic analysis and direct quotations. Findings reveal that DI, tailored to students' interests and readiness, enhanced engagement and writing skills. Students reported positive perceptions of DI's flexible and inclusive approach. This study provides insights for English teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and suggests future research on DI in other language skills and classroom management strategies.

Keywords: Merdeka curriculum; differentiated instruction; teaching writing; Genre-Based Approach (GBA); junior high school

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1.   Introduction

The emergence of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia has changed the educational system and has become a new breakthrough in the teaching and learning process. It was implemented based on Ministerial Decree No. 56/M/2022 of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education Indonesia regarding Guidelines for Implementing Curriculum in the Framework of Learning Recovery (Merdeka Curriculum). Consequently, it encourages teachers to adapt to the Merdeka Curriculum to achieve learning goals in the classroom.

Differentiated instruction is one of the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum in terms of its implementation in the classroom. This differentiated concept encourages teachers to take sides with students in fulfilling their differences and needs (Tomlinson,2017; Bondie et al., 2019; Tanjung & Ashadi, 2019). There are some kinds of differentiated instructions the teacher can implement, including product, process, and content, and it could be done based on students' readiness, learning profile, and interest (Ismail, 2019; Kotob & Arnouss, 2019; Tomlinson, 2017). Kusuma and Luthfiah (2020) also state that the key to differentiated instruction implementation is reasonable decisions or common sense to meet students' needs. As a result, teachers can decide what differentiated instruction is implemented in the classroom.

Implementing differentiated instruction is a breakthrough for teachers, especially English teachers, to implement differentiating process, content, and product. In the differentiated process, the teaching and learning process can be done based on the student's learning profile and interests (Heacox, 2012). The teacher can focus on the activities of the sense-making process (Masyhudianti, 2022). Hence, grouping based on the student's level of readiness, profile, or interest is important so that they can work, think, and personalize the material well. According to Heacox (2012), content refers to the topics and concepts of learning in the classroom. Therefore, in differentiating content, the teacher needs to provide material based on their level of comprehension, interest, or learning profile. Furthermore, differentiating products means that students create a product based on what they have already learned so they can think, apply, and demonstrate their understanding (Tomlinson in Santangelo and Tomlinson 2012). This product must be based on the lesson, and it can be done individually or in groups.

Based on the preliminary research in one of the junior high schools in Kediri, it was found that the English teacher is *guru penggerak* (organizer teacher) and has been implementing differentiated instruction, especially for teaching writing based on Kurikulum Merdeka since 2022. She also became the *Narasumber Berbagi Praktik Baik* (the expert in best practice sharing) of Merdeka Curriculum implementation from the Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia. Thus, because the concept of differentiated instruction is categorized as a fresh and innovation, it is crucial to explore the implementation of differentiated instruction more, especially in teaching writing. Some studies have been conducted regarding differentiated instruction in teaching English. Tanjung and Ashadi (2019) conducted library research to review and examine differentiated instruction in EFL contexts in some countries such as Iran and Persia. It concludes that differentiated instruction can meet students' needs and interests and help them succeed in learning English. Moreover, Utami and Monik (2021) conducted research and development and tried to develop material-based differentiated materials for teaching writing to eighth-grade students of Junior high school based on students' levels, including lower, average, and upper students. The research proved that the developed material could improve students' writing competency. Subsequently, Rahmani and Riyanti (2022) conducted quantitative

research and tried to examine the undergraduate students of the English Education Department regarding DI in the classroom, which implies students' pedagogical element regarding the implementation of DI in the classroom.

The above research differs from this research because it tried to describe the implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching writing in one of the junior high schools in Kediri. The study regarding the implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching writing to one of the junior high schools has not yet been conducted, considering that the Merdeka Curriculum is new in Indonesia. Therefore, the researcher conducted research to describe the implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching writing to one of the junior high schools in Kediri, and the research question of the study was created as " How and to what extend does the Differentiated Instruction (DI) is planned and implemented in a writing class at a Junior High School in Kediri?".

2.   Method

2.1.   Research design

This study employed qualitative case study design, conducted at a junior high school in Kediri from September to December 2023. A qualitative case study research design is a qualitative method of inquiry that entails an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon in a real-world context. In this type of research, researchers gain an in-depth understanding of a complex phenomenon in the natural context. Depending on the researcher's objectives and/or research questions, the specific case study can focus on an individual, a group, or an organization (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this study, researchers collected detailed data from multiple sources, including observation, interviews, and document analysis.

2.2.   Participants

The participants were composed of 32 seventh-grade students and one teacher in a writing class selected using purposive sampling at a Junior High School in Kediri, Indonesia.

2.3.   Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through an observation form, an interview form both of which were developed by the researchers, and via document analysis. The interviews were conducted with the participating teacher to find out the implementation of differentiated instruction, and with the students to uncover their opinions about the activities of differentiated instruction in the classroom. The observations were also carried out to determine the activities of the teaching and learning process in the classroom, while the document analysis was conducted to determine the supporting data, including the lesson plan, the worksheet, and the assessment. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis and direct quotation of the qualitative data analysis methods.

2.4.   Validity and Reliability

To ensure data validity, the researchers employed methodological triangulation, combining observation, interviews, and document analysis to enhance the accuracy and quality of

interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). Moreover, the data were analyzed using the theory of Miles et al. (2014), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion: drawing/verifying.

3.   Results

Based on classroom observations, the teacher implemented differentiated processes, content, and products for seventh-grade students in the first semester, focusing on descriptive texts about people. Details of the elements, learning outcomes, materials, and objectives are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Learning outcomes, materials, and objectives taught in seventh-grade students in the first semester

Element	Learning Outcomes	Material	Learning Objectives
Writing and presenting	By the end of Phase D, students **communicate their ideas and experience** through simple, organized paragraphs, demonstrating a developing use of specific vocabulary and simple sentence structures. Using models, **they plan, create and present informative, imaginative and persuasive texts** in simple and compound sentences to structure arguments and to explain or justify a position. They include basic information and detail and also vary the sentence construction in their writing. Students express ideas in the present, future, and past tenses. They use time markers, adverbs of frequency and common conjunctions to link ideas. Their attempts to spell new words are based on known English letter-sound relationships, and they use punctuation and capitalization consistently.	Descriptive text	1. Compose paragraphs about arguments and opinions using planning, examples, specific vocabulary and simple sentence structures about descriptive text (people) 2. Communicate ideas and experiences of their information texts through simple and structured paragraphs about descriptive text (people)

The teacher also implemented the diagnostic test before implementing the differentiated instruction. The diagnostic test was used to determine the students' interests, readiness, and learning style to conduct differentiated instruction in the classroom. A clear description of the diagnostic test can be seen in Figure 1 below:

SURVEY PEMENUHAN KEBUTUHAN BELAJAR MURID		
PERTANYAAN	**YA**	**TIDAK**
MINAT BELAJAR MURID		
1. Apakah kamu menyukai deskripsi orang yang berhubungan dengan ...?		
a. Artis		
b. Pemimpin Rakyat		
c. Pahlawan		
2. Apakah kamu menyukai menulis deskripsi orang ...?		
a. Di kertas poster		
b. Melalui aplikasi rekam suara		
c. Melalui aplikasi rekam video		
3. Apakah kamu menyukai menulis deskripsi orang ...?		
a. Secara langsung		
b. Dengan direkam suaranya		
c. Direkam (audio)		
d. Direkam (video)		
4. Apakah kamu menyukai publikasi karya di ... ?		
a. Mading		
b. Medsos		
KESIAPAN BELAJAR MURID		
5. Apakah kamu sudah mempunyai ... pengetahuan kosa kata dan grammar bahasa Inggris untuk mendeskripsikan orang?		
a. banyak		
b. cukup		
c. sedikit		

A. WAWANCARA

Kegiatan wawancara ditujukan untuk menvalidasi kebenaran data yang diperoleh saat survey bila ditemukan keraguan atas data tersebut, dengan pertanyaan yang sama tetapi dilakukan secara lisan dan secara langsung.

Figure 1. The diagnostic test before implementing differentiated instruction

Furthermore, the test was done using a survey of the students based on their learning profile, interest, and readiness with the answer yes and no. Moreover, the teacher also looked at the students' scores to determine their readiness for the material. The teacher also interviewed the students to validate the data.

Meanwhile based on the students' interests, there are four questions with some choices in each question. The first question is, "Do you like describing people as actresses/actors, leaders, or heroes?". Then, the second question is, "Do you like writing descriptive text on poster paper, writing on a paper than recording it, or taking a video of it?". Subsequently, the third question is, "Do you like describing people directly, by recording it, or by taking a video of it?". The last question is, "Do you like to publish your writing in a wall magazine or social media?". The results of students' diagnostic tests based on interest can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 The results of the diagnostic test based on students' interest

Student's Interests in Descriptive Text	Total Students	The Activity of Differentiated Content and Product
Actress/Actors	14	The students in this group were given materials (descriptive text about actresses/actors. They could also write descriptive text about actresses/actors.
Society Leader	10	The students in this group were given about society leaders. They could write a descriptive text about society leader.
Heroes	8	The students in this group were given materials (descriptive text about heroes). They could write a descriptive text about heroes also.
Writing descriptive text directly	8	The students could write the text directly on a paper.
Writing descriptive text in the form of audio	12	The students could write the text and then record their voices.
Writing descriptive text in the form of a video	12	The students could write the text and then submit it to the teacher in the form of a video.
Publish the writing in the wall magazine	20	The students published their final individual work in the wall magazine.
Publish the writing on social media	12	The students published their final individual work on social media

Based on Table 2, there were 12 students who wanted to write descriptive texts about actresses/actors, 10 students about society leaders, and 8 students about heroes. They could also write descriptive text based on their interests. Then, there were 8 students who wanted to write the text directly on paper, 12 students in the form of audio, and 12 students in the form of video. Subsequently, there were 20 students who wanted to publish their individual work on the wall magazine, and 12 students on social media.

The question regarding the readiness to learn is, "Do you already have much, enough, or little knowledge about grammar and vocabulary to describe people?". The results of students' diagnostic tests based on learning style can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 The results of diagnostic tests based on students' readiness for learning

Students' Readiness in Learning	Total Students	The Activity of Differentiated Process
Having no knowledge of grammar and vocabulary	10	Students in this group were gathered with students who had good grammar and vocabulary. They were given vocabulary used to describe people. They were also given examples and guided writing forms.
Having little knowledge of grammar and vocabulary	12	
Having enough knowledge regarding grammar and vocabulary	10	The students in this group made descriptive text by arranging vocabulary into good sentences with the appropriate grammar and generic structure.

Based on Table 3, 10 students had no knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; 12 students had little knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and 10 students had enough knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

Moreover, the teacher taught using the Genre-based approach in which there are four stages, including Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modelling of the Texts (MOT), Joint Construction of the Texts (JCOT), and Individual Construction of the Texts (ICOT). In BKOF, the differentiated content was implemented in MOT, and the differentiated product was implemented in JCOT and ICOT. Moreover, the differentiated process was implemented in ICOT.

In BKOF, the students were given some trigger questions to build their knowledge about descriptive texts about people. While in MOT, students observed and gathered information from descriptive text examples about people based on students' interests. Group A, who like artists, was given descriptive text examples about people with the content artist. Group B, who likes society's leaders, was given descriptive text examples with the content of society's leaders from the Kediri regency. Group C, who like heroes, was given descriptive text examples with content about heroes. The activity in MOT is called differentiated instruction based on students' interests. Meanwhile, in JCOT, students gathered with other students who had the same interests and were guided by the teacher to write descriptive texts based on their interests.

In ICOT, the teacher implemented a differentiated process in which students with no or little knowledge about grammar and vocabulary gathered with students with good grammar and vocabulary. They were given vocabulary used to describe people individually. They were also given examples and guided writing forms. Meanwhile, students with good vocabulary and grammar made descriptive text by arranging vocabulary into good sentences with the appropriate grammar and generic structure. Furthermore, the teacher also implemented differentiated products based on students' learning profiles and interests. Each student was asked to write differentiated content based on their interest in the form of a poster for the student with a visual learning style, in the form of audio or video for students with an auditory learning style, and in the form of a poster or recording that can be done movingly for the students with

the kinesthetic learning style. Then, in ICOT, the teacher also implemented a differentiated product based on students' interests, in which they can publish their writing in the form of posters on the class magazine wall, videos on social media, and records on the teacher's WhatsApp.

Furthermore, based on some responses from the students regarding the differentiated instruction activities in the classroom. The student said that differentiated instruction is very interesting due to its material and the task differences, like the S1 below.

> *"This learning is very interesting. In the beginning, the teacher also held a test, so students were grouped based on that group... There are materials… and the tasks are different from each other. I like English lessons." (S1).*

Another student also said that this differentiated instruction accommodates and involves the students' differences.

> *"I am very happy because it is very interesting. I feel like all of the students are involved in learning. We are asked to choose the material…and also assignments are adjusted between different students." (S2).*

In addition, student 3 also said that the learning was fun and interesting and that all of the students were active in the classroom.

> *"It is very exciting and fun; all my friends are very active in the classroom. They are very excited, because we are given the freedom to choose the material and the writing product." (S3)*

These responses indicate that students valued DI's flexibility and inclusivity. The positive feedback suggests that DI fosters engagement by allowing students to select materials aligned with their interests (e.g., actors, leaders, heroes) and produce varied outputs (e.g., posters, videos), enhancing motivation and participation. This aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning, though the reliance on diagnostic tests and group work may require careful management to sustain effectiveness. Thus, it can be concluded that students had positive perspectives regarding differentiated instruction.

4.   Discussion

The study effectively answers the research question by describing how differentiated instruction (DI) was implemented in the teaching of writing at a Junior High School in Kediri under the Merdeka Curriculum. The research provides detailed insights into how the teacher adapted the content, process, and product of instruction based on students' interests, learning profiles, and readiness. It also highlights the role of diagnostic assessments in identifying these factors, ensuring that instruction was tailored to meet each student's needs. The study's findings demonstrate that DI, when properly implemented, can significantly enhance student engagement, motivation, and writing skills including some indicators: vocabulary, grammar, content, organization, mechanics, and capitalization (Amalia et al., 2025; Bokkassam & Mishra, 2024; Zotomayor, et al., 2023; Hizriani et al., 2022; Masyhudianti, 2022).

One of the key discoveries in this study is the practical application of differentiated content based on students' interests, such as actors, society leaders, and heroes. The use of the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) allowed for content to be structured around these interests, which proved to be an effective way to engage students and deepen their connection with the material. Byrnes emphasizes that genre-based tasks enhance awareness of distinct modes of writing, enabling students to engage with content at various complexity levels while developing critical literacy skills (Byrnes, 2014; Osifo, 2019; Puzio et al., 2020). The differentiation of process and product was also pivotal. Students had the option to express their learning through different formats—written text, audio, or video—aligning with their preferred learning styles. This flexibility not only catered to diverse learners but also fostered a sense of ownership over their work.

Furthermore, the study finds that the implementation of diagnostic assessments was essential in identifying students' learning profiles and readiness. The non-cognitive diagnostic tests, which assessed students' interests, psychological profiles, and emotional readiness, were used alongside cognitive assessments to ensure a holistic understanding of each student's needs. These assessments helped the teacher design personalized learning experiences that catered to the diverse abilities of students in the class. Obeidat et al. (2025) confirm that differentiated instruction strategies significantly improve writing abilities in these students compared to traditional methods, showing the effectiveness of targeted approaches grounded in informed assessments. This approach to assessment aligns with the findings of Aringka et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of diagnostic assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum to identify students' challenges and weaknesses.

The research successfully achieves its goal of answering the research question by demonstrating how differentiated instruction can be effectively implemented in a writing class. The teacher's ability to adapt content, process, and product based on diagnostic assessments and student interests was key to the success of the DI approach. The positive feedback from students further supports the effectiveness of DI in increasing engagement and enhancing the writing process. Despite the overall success of the DI implementation, the study encountered some challenges and inconsistencies that require further exploration. Classroom management proved to be a challenge during the Individual Construction of Texts (ICOT) phase, where students worked independently on their writing tasks. Managing a diverse classroom with varying task demands required additional effort, and the teacher faced difficulties in maintaining the desired level of focus and productivity. An important aspect of this challenge centers around maintaining student motivation and engagement. Bai and Guo's research indicates that the writing context, such as the provision of interesting materials and constructive feedback, plays a crucial role in sustaining students' enthusiasm for writing Bai & Guo (2019). When teachers fail to consider these elements, students can experience a decline in interest, which hampers their writing development and disrupts the structured management necessary to maintain focus during writing sessions. This issue points to the need for further exploration into effective classroom management strategies when implementing DI, especially during independent learning phases.

Another aspect that emerged was the significant amount of time required to administer the diagnostic assessments. While these assessments were crucial for tailoring instruction, the time

spent on them appeared to detract from the overall flow of the lesson. One major factor impacting the time involved in diagnostic assessments is the administration and analysis of assessment data. For instance, Csapó and Molnár highlight the complexity of using diagnostic assessments in heterogeneous classrooms, asserting that teachers must continuously monitor student progress in real time and provide feedback that can inform instructional adjustments Csapó & Molnár (2019). This feedback loop, while essential for effective differentiated instruction, can be time-consuming and often detracts from instructional time dedicated to the writing process itself. Teachers may benefit from exploring time-efficient tools or methods to gather the necessary data to inform their DI strategies. The findings of this study offer several practical applications for educators, particularly in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The successful implementation of DI in this writing class suggests that similar strategies could be applied across different subjects to accommodate the diverse needs of students. By differentiating content, process, and product, teachers can create more inclusive and engaging learning environments that motivate students and improve their academic performance. Additionally, the use of diagnostic assessments to personalize instruction provides a model that can be adopted by other educators seeking to implement DI in their classrooms.

The study also suggests that the findings can be applied beyond the specific context of Kediri, offering valuable insights for other schools in Indonesia and globally, particularly in education systems that emphasize personalized learning and student-centered teaching practices (Illananingtyas, 2025; Masyhudianti et al., 2025; Rasyidah, 2025; Salim & Masyhudianti, 2024; Pangestuti & Uswah, 2025). The flexibility of DI makes it a versatile strategy that can be adapted to various educational contexts, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or ability level, have the opportunity to succeed.

When comparing the results of this study to existing literature, the findings align with the work of Tomlinson (2017), who advocates for differentiated instruction as a means of addressing the diverse needs of students in the classroom. Similarly, Bondie et al. (2019) highlight the benefits of DI in promoting student engagement and improving learning outcomes. However, this study adds new value to the literature by showcasing the practical application of DI within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, an educational reform still in its early stages. The study emphasizes the importance of diagnostic assessments in informing DI practices, a feature that has not been extensively explored in previous research on DI, and contributes to the growing body of literature on DI by providing a detailed case study of its implementation in an Indonesian junior high school. It extends the work of Santangelo & Tomlinson (2009), who discussed the benefits of DI in postsecondary education, by demonstrating how these strategies can be effectively used in a secondary school setting. The use of the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) as a framework for teaching writing further enhances the contribution of this study, as it provides a concrete example of how DI can be applied in the teaching of specific skills, such as writing.

5.   Conclusions

The implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching English to one of the Junior High Schools in Kediri used the Genre-Based Approach (GBA), including Building Knowledge of Field (BKOF), Modelling of the Texts (MOT), Joint Construction of the Texts (JCOT), and

Individual Construction of the Texts (ICOT). Before implementing differentiated instruction in teaching English, the teacher implemented a diagnostic test to know the student's interests and readiness. Meanwhile, in the BKOF stage, the teacher asked the students prompted questions regarding the descriptive text. In this study, in MOT, the teacher implemented differentiated content based on the student's interest in the material regarding descriptive text (actresses or actors, social leaders, and heroes), which can be conducted by giving learning sources with topics based on their interest. In JCOT, students write descriptive text with the same interest group. In ICOT, the teacher implemented a differentiated process based on the student's readiness for the material. In this study, they were given vocabulary used to describe people individually based on their abilities in grammar and vocabulary. They are also asked to publish their work based on their interest, such as on magazine walls or on social media. Students' perspectives towards differentiated instructions are also positive. The limitation of this research is that the teacher took so much time to conduct the diagnostic test. The classroom management in ICOT was less, so the teacher needs to be more prepared before implementing differentiated instruction. This study could be a clear description of the implementation of differentiated instruction for English teachers since the Merdeka Curriculum is considered new in Indonesia. Future research may focus on differentiated instruction in other skills and classroom management of teaching English using differentiated instruction.

In conclusion, it is safe to claim that the study provides valuable insights into the implementation of differentiated instruction in a Junior High School in Kediri under the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings suggest that DI can be an effective tool for improving student engagement and writing skills by catering to individual learning profiles, interests, and readiness levels. Despite the challenges encountered, such as classroom management and time constraints for diagnostic assessments, the study offers important lessons for future research and practice. The application of DI in other subjects and educational settings could further enhance its impact, and the use of diagnostic assessments to inform instructional decisions remains a key strategy for personalized learning.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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