

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**WRITING ACTIVITIES IN MIXED
ABILITY ESL CLASSROOMS:
EXPLORING THE USE OF TASK
DIFFERENTIATED STRATEGIES**

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Dissertation submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
(Teaching English as a Second Language)

Faculty of Education

July 2023

ABSTRACT

Writing skills are often regarded as one of the most challenging aspects to acquire in the English language, especially for second language learners (ESL). Malaysian teachers, in particular, face difficulties in teaching writing due to the diverse learning needs of their students. The Cambridge Baseline Study conducted in 2013 emphasized the need for Differentiated Instruction (DI) in Malaysian classrooms, which consist of mixed-ability students. As a response, the Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced eight differentiated strategies, including task differentiation, in the English Language Scheme of Work (SOW) Form 3. This qualitative study investigates the application of task differentiated strategies and their impact on students during writing tasks. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations involving four secondary school ESL teachers in the Kuala Lumpur area. The analysis focused on identifying the types of task differentiated strategies employed by teachers during writing activities in mixed-ability ESL classrooms and examining how these strategies assist students in their learning process. The findings revealed three primary task differentiated strategies commonly utilized by the teachers in this study: scaffolded writing tasks, collaborative writing, and individualized writing goals. Moreover, the study highlighted the multifaceted ways in which these strategies support students during writing activities, including accomplishing tasks within allocated time, fostering a sense of achievement and confidence, and enhancing motivation and engagement. The results indicate that task differentiated strategies have proven effective in facilitating students' learning process in writing skills. The study suggests further exploration of other forms of differentiation strategies for different language skills. This research contributes to the ongoing debate on the advantages of differentiated methods as a viable and acceptable educational approach in Malaysian public schools, while also adding to the existing knowledge and informing future practices in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, all glory and thanks to God, the Almighty, for His showers of blessings that have taken my research to a successful end.

I am sincerely indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Mazlen binti Arepin, for her exceptional guidance, unwavering support, and invaluable insights throughout this research. Her dedication, sincerity, and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping the success of this study. I am truly thankful for her mentorship and the opportunities she has provided me. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all the remarkable lecturers who have imparted their wealth of knowledge and wisdom during my academic journey. Their patience, understanding, and willingness to provide learning opportunities have contributed significantly to my personal and intellectual growth.

To my beloved parents, Ma and Abah, I am forever grateful for your unconditional love, prayers, unwavering support, and belief in me. You have gone above and beyond to ensure my growth and development into the person I am today. Your constant reassurance and presence, especially during challenging times, have been a source of solace and strength. Without you, none of this would have been possible. To my amazing siblings, thank you for embracing my little adventures. Thank you for always standing by my side and allowing me to explore and embark on new journeys.

My heart is filled with gratitude and appreciation for those who have supported me in bringing the ideas within this paper to life. My dear friend, Marissa Sofea, I am forever grateful for your unyielding presence and support from the very beginning. Your infectious positivity and resolute belief in my abilities have propelled me forward. The memories we have created together, filled with laughter and tears, will forever occupy a cherished corner of my heart. To those whom I treasure deeply, who hold a special place in my heart, thank you for always believing in me, even when I doubted myself. Your persistent support and encouraging words mean the world to me. Lastly, to you, the reader, I extend my sincere gratitude for taking the time to give this paper a chance. May good health and a promising future be bestowed upon each and every one of us.

Thank you all, from the bottom of my heart.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of this study, the problem statement, and the purposes for which the study is conducted. The research objectives and research questions are further explained in the following section of this chapter. The significance of this study, the limitations, and the definition of key terms used in this study are further clarified towards the end of this chapter.

1.2 Background of Study

English is taught as a second language in Malaysia, and so English proficiency is becoming increasingly important. To that end, the government's objectives to enhance, establish, develop, and sustain the level of English language education continue to be reinforced and supported by all, particularly educators. It is currently taught at the primary, secondary, and university levels in the Malaysian education system. Six years of elementary school and five years of secondary school are dedicated to teaching students English. English is the second most important language after Malay, however not all Malaysian learners are fluent in it. Regardless of whether they attend school in an urban, suburban, or rural setting, students are frequently still having trouble mastering the language despite having been exposed to it since they were young (Ramiza & Albion, 2013). In addition, Hazita (2016) noted that while it is well-established that a Malaysian child begins receiving English language education at the age of 6, early English language education does not assure effective language learning, as exemplified in the Malaysian scenario. At many different levels, issues and problems with language acquisition are perpetually present. According to a study by Yahaya et al. (2011), many Malaysian companies argue that our graduates have no employment prospects due to the lack the English language proficiency necessary for the job. Selvaratnam (2019) discovered that 50% of Malaysian graduates fared below average in terms of their proficiency in the English language, writing and communication abilities, and work attitudes. Many students who studied English as a