

## A Systematic Review on the Implementation of Differentiated Instruction for Teaching Writing


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Abstract	Article Info
<p>With increasing diversity in mainstream classrooms globally, the traditional "one-size-fits-all" teaching approach is no longer effective. This has led to the development of new teaching methods, like differentiated instruction, which is now a key focus of educational reform worldwide as it aims to address the diverse learning needs of students, a wide range of learning needs, interests, and readiness levels. Differentiated instruction offers a pedagogical framework that can personalize writing instruction, making it more effective and inclusive. This study adapts a systematic literature review study which aims to identify the trend of differentiated instructions practices and the challenges faced in its implementation for teaching writing. Guided by the PRISMA analysis protocol, this article reviews 18 peer-reviewed articles from google scholar and Scopus on the implementation of differentiated instruction for teaching writing, conducted from 2020 to 2025. A total of 18 peer-reviewed articles were selected based on specific inclusion criteria and analysed thematically following the PRISMA protocol. Thematic analysis reveals that successful DI practices involve flexible grouping, tiered writing tasks, ongoing formative assessment, and student-centered planning. Despite its effectiveness in promoting writing engagement and autonomy, challenges such as teachers' limited training, time constraints, and resource availability hinder optimal implementation. The review concludes with implications for professional development and policy recommendations for enhancing differentiated writing instruction.</p>	<p><b>Article History</b>  <i>Received:</i>  <i>September 10, 2023</i>  <i>Revised :</i>  <i>October 28, 2023</i>  <i>Accepted:</i>  <i>November 30, 2023</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Differentiated Instruction, English language teaching, Teaching Writing, student engagement, systematic literature review.</i></p>
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### INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid educational transformation driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4.0 IR), the need for effective, student-centered learning strategies has become increasingly vital. The complexity of modern education is characterized by the heterogeneity of learners' backgrounds, where each student possesses distinct characteristics, growing up in different environments and cultures according to the geographical conditions where they live (Wahyuningsari et al., 2022). Furthermore, the growth of technology demands students to develop strong communication skills and adaptability to share ideas and innovations effectively (Elayyan, 2021). Consequently, acknowledging and accommodating this inherent diversity has become a primary challenge in contemporary learning environments.

In the midst of this diversity, the inadequacy of the traditional "one-size-fits-all" approach has become glaringly evident. Uniform teaching strategies that overlook variations

in learning styles, thinking processes, and developmental stages are no longer effective (Beck & Beasley, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2021; Sparks, 2015). Relying on a single strategy to carry out instruction is rarely successful because students learn best when the teaching aligns with their specific needs and learning styles (Mohamed, 2025; Mutmainah, 2023; Sapan, 2022). Therefore, inflexible traditional methods often fail to accommodate the diverse readiness and interests of today's learners.

To overcome the limitations of traditional methods, Differentiated Instruction (DI) has emerged as an innovative and promising pedagogical approach (Merawi, 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2003). DI operates as the direct opponent of the "one-size-fits-all" strategy by considering student diversity and promoting flexible classroom teaching (Karst et al., 2022). It is defined as a teaching framework that accommodates all student differences, personalizing instruction to meet the unique needs and characteristics of each individual (Kastanja, 2024; Moallemi, 2024; Ramadhan, 2023). Through DI, teachers can effectively cater to diverse learning profiles, making it a critical component of modern educational reform.

The core principle of DI lies in its adaptability specifically modifying content, processes, and products to suit individual learners. Its theoretical foundations are deeply rooted in well-established educational theories, including Piaget's constructivism (1969), Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1999), and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1976). Interestingly, DI also shares similarities with the ancient Confucian concept of "teaching students according to their aptitude" (Hua, 2019). Initially conceived by Ward (1961) to address the needs of special and gifted students, DI has since broadened its focus to encompass the diverse needs of all learners in the mainstream classroom (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000; Tomlinson et al., 2003).

In the context of language learning, particularly English Language Teaching (ELT), DI provides a vital avenue to accommodate varying student abilities. Language and communication skills inherently require a student-centered approach that emphasizes multiple intelligences and diverse learning paths (Elayyan, 2021). Aligning well with the demands of 21st-century education, DI enables language educators to move beyond rigid syllabi and create more inclusive environments where students can acquire linguistic competencies effectively (Hussin, 2018).

More specifically, within ELT, the application of DI in teaching writing holds significant potential. Writing is a complex cognitive skill, and students often enter the classroom with vastly different levels of readiness. For example, writing instruction can be differentiated by allowing students varying amounts of time to complete assignments, providing different writing product options, and tailoring the teaching of skills related to the writing process itself (Hall et al., 2003). By differentiating writing instruction, teachers can foster greater engagement and help students articulate their ideas more autonomously.

Numerous studies affirm the effectiveness of DI across various contexts. Research indicates that DI increases student interest and achievement (Kusadi, 2022), enhances creative thinking (Pane et al., 2022; Utaminingsih et al. 2025), and positively impacts overall learning outcomes (Laia et al., 2022; Suwartining, 2021). However, the implementation of DI is not without its challenges. It is widely regarded as a complex educational change that many teachers, especially beginners, feel unprepared to execute (Geel, 2019; Kackur & Vanlaar, 2022; Mills et al., 2020; Smets, 2020). Challenges such as inadequate training, limited preparation time, large class sizes, and misconceptions about flexible grouping frequently hinder its successful adoption, particularly in contexts like Indonesia (Digna et al., 2023; Gibbs & McKay, 2021; Mutmainah, 2023; Putra, 2023; Sofiana et al., 2024). These hurdles highlight the importance of structured support, mentorship, and ongoing professional development (Hermansyah, 2023; Supriana, 2024).

Despite the growing body of empirical research on the implementation and challenges of DI, studies providing a systematic review specifically on the practice of DI for teaching writing remain limited in number. Because of this scarcity, the synthesized results regarding

how DI is practically applied in writing instruction and the specific obstacles teachers face in this domain are still unclear. There is a pressing need to consolidate existing literature to map the current trends systematically.

To address this gap, this study utilizes a systematic literature review method to analyze publications related to the implementation of DI in English language teaching, focusing on writing skills. The purpose of this study is to map the current trends of practices, benefits, and challenges of DI in writing instruction to provide comprehensive insights for teachers, educators, researchers, and policymakers. A deeper review of these challenges is expected to help stakeholders minimize and prevent implementation problems. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the current trends and practices of implementing Differentiated Instruction in teaching writing?
2. What are the primary challenges faced by educators when applying Differentiated Instruction in writing instruction?

## Literature Review

### Concept of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is an innovative pedagogical paradigm designed to accommodate the diverse needs, backgrounds, and learning styles of students in a single classroom. Historically, the concept was introduced by Ward (1961) to cater specifically to special and gifted students. However, as classrooms became increasingly heterogeneous, the framework was broadened to encompass all types of learners (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000; Tomlinson et al., 2003). DI operates as the direct antithesis of the traditional "one-size-fits-all" teaching method. Instead of assuming that all students learn at the same pace and in the same way, DI actively acknowledges student diversity and promotes flexible classroom teaching (Karst et al., 2022).

Theoretically, DI is deeply rooted in three foundational educational philosophies. First, it draws from Piaget's (1969) Constructivism, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge based on their experiences. Second, it aligns with Gardner's (1999) Theory of Multiple Intelligences, recognizing that students possess different types of cognitive strengths, such as linguistic, logical, or spatial intelligences. Third, it is heavily influenced by Vygotsky's (1976) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes providing the right amount of scaffolding to help students achieve tasks they cannot yet complete independently. By integrating these theories, DI ensures that learning is personalized, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate (Kastanja, 2024; Moallemi, 2024).

### Principles and Components of DI

The implementation of DI is guided by specific core principles that allow teachers to modify their instruction systematically. According to Tomlinson (2014), differentiation is not a chaotic, individualized lesson plan for every single student; rather, it is a structured approach based on ongoing student assessment. Teachers primarily differentiate instruction based on three key student characteristics: *readiness*, which refers to a student's current knowledge and skill level; *interest*, encompassing the topics that naturally engage the student; and *learning profile*, representing their preferred mode of learning, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.

To effectively address these diverse characteristics, educators can modify four specific, interrelated classroom elements: content, process, product, and the learning environment. Differentiation of *content* involves adjusting what the students need to learn or how they will access the information, for example, by providing reading materials at varying complexity levels. Meanwhile, differentiating the *process* focuses on the activities in which students engage to make sense of or master the content, which can be achieved through strategies like tiered activities or flexible grouping. Furthermore, teachers can differentiate the *product*, which refers to the culminating projects that ask students to rehearse, apply, and extend what they have learned. This might involve allowing students to demonstrate their understanding by choosing

between writing an essay, creating a video, or delivering a presentation. Finally, the *learning environment* itself can be differentiated by adapting the way the classroom works and feels, ensuring the physical and emotional space provides both quiet areas for focused, individual work and dynamic, collaborative spaces for group tasks.

### **Differentiated Instruction in English Language Teaching**

In the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT), classrooms are inherently diverse due to students' varying linguistic backgrounds, prior exposure to English, and language acquisition rates. The application of DI in ELT aligns perfectly with the demands of 21st-century education, which requires a student-centered approach to develop strong communication skills (Elayyan, 2021; Hussin, 2018). Using a uniform strategy in ELT is rarely successful, as language learners require different types of input and output opportunities (Mohamed, 2025; Sapan, 2022). DI empowers English teachers to create an inclusive environment where students with lower proficiency receive the necessary linguistic scaffolding, while advanced learners are appropriately challenged with more complex communicative tasks.

### **Differentiated Instruction in Teaching Writing**

Among the four language skills, writing is often considered the most complex cognitive task, making differentiation highly necessary. In teaching writing, students often struggle with different aspects of the process, ranging from brainstorming and grammar to vocabulary selection and structural organization. Differentiating writing instruction means allowing students varying amounts of time to complete assignments, providing different writing prompts based on student interests, and teaching specific skills related to the writing process as needed (Hall et al., 2003). For example, teachers might use tiered writing tasks where some students write a simple descriptive paragraph using sentence starters, while others write a comprehensive analytical essay. Research by Utami et al. (2021) also indicates that allowing topic choice in writing through differentiated strategies significantly enhances student engagement and the quality of the final writing product.

### **Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Instruction**

Despite its proven benefits in increasing student interest, creative thinking, and achievement (Kusadi, 2022; Laia et al., 2022; Pane et al., 2022; Utaminingsih et al. 2025), implementing DI remains a significant challenge for many educators. Differentiation is widely regarded as a complex educational change that requires a paradigm shift in how teachers view lesson planning and classroom management (Geel, 2019; Kackur & Vanlaar, 2022; Mills et al., 2020; Smets, 2020). A major obstacle is the misconception of differentiation itself; for instance, many teachers fail to implement flexible grouping dynamically, resulting in stagnant learning environments (Gibbs & McKay, 2021; Putra, 2023). Furthermore, systemic constraints significantly hinder full implementation. Teachers frequently report inadequate training, a lack of preparation time to design multiple lesson components, diverse student readiness levels that are difficult to manage, and overwhelmingly large class sizes (Digna et al., 2023; Mutmainah, 2023; Sofiana et al., 2024). These challenges underscore the critical need for continuous professional development, mentorship, and clear institutional guidelines to help teachers seamlessly integrate DI into their daily teaching practices (Hermansyah, 2023; Supriana, 2024).

## **METHOD**

The method used in this research is the SLR method which aims to map previous research on the application of DI in English language teaching. This is aimed at understanding the development of the concept of DI in English language teaching. The data of this research is taken from Google Scholar and Scopus database starting from 2020 until 2025. The researcher used Google Scholar database as the main source of information because it is considered to have wider coverage than other indices. In this study, researchers analyzed documents related to DI collected using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application, then processed with the PRISMA protocol method (Haddaway, 2022). The researcher collected data by searching for journal articles with the keywords “differentiated instruction for teaching writing”, “differentiated

instruction on writing skill”, “differentiated instruction on writing performance” on the Google Scholar database through the PoP application. Criteria for the selected articles, namely: the article uses English, the article has been cited by several journals, the article discusses differentiated instruction in teaching English, preferably focusing on the writing process. The processes, such as identification, screening, eligibility, inclusion, and exclusion, have been involved while conducting the review, as demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Publications

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Published 2020 to 2025	Published before 2020
Published in Google Scholar and Scopus	Published in other databases, except for Google Scholar and Scopus
Written in English	Not written in English
Published in peer-reviewed journals	Not published in peer-reviewed journal.
A thematic focus is on differentiated Instruction on writing skill.	A thematic focus is not on differentiated Instruction on writing skill.
Empirical, primary research	Not empirical, not primary research

### Problem Formulation

Schiavenato and Chu (2021) proposed PICO; namely Population or Problem (P), Interest (I) and Content (Co) were used to guide the development of the research questions to formulate the main question for the present systematic review (Table 2):

**Table 2**

Question Formulated Based on the PICO Methodology

P = Population	I = Interest	Co = Content
Teachers	Practice and challenges on English language teaching focusing on writing skill	Language teaching; more specifically the implementation of differentiated Instruction

Subsequently, two research questions were developed: 1) What are the practices of differentiated instruction implemented by language teachers for teaching writing; and 2) What are the challenges faced by language teachers in implementing differentiated instruction on writing skill?

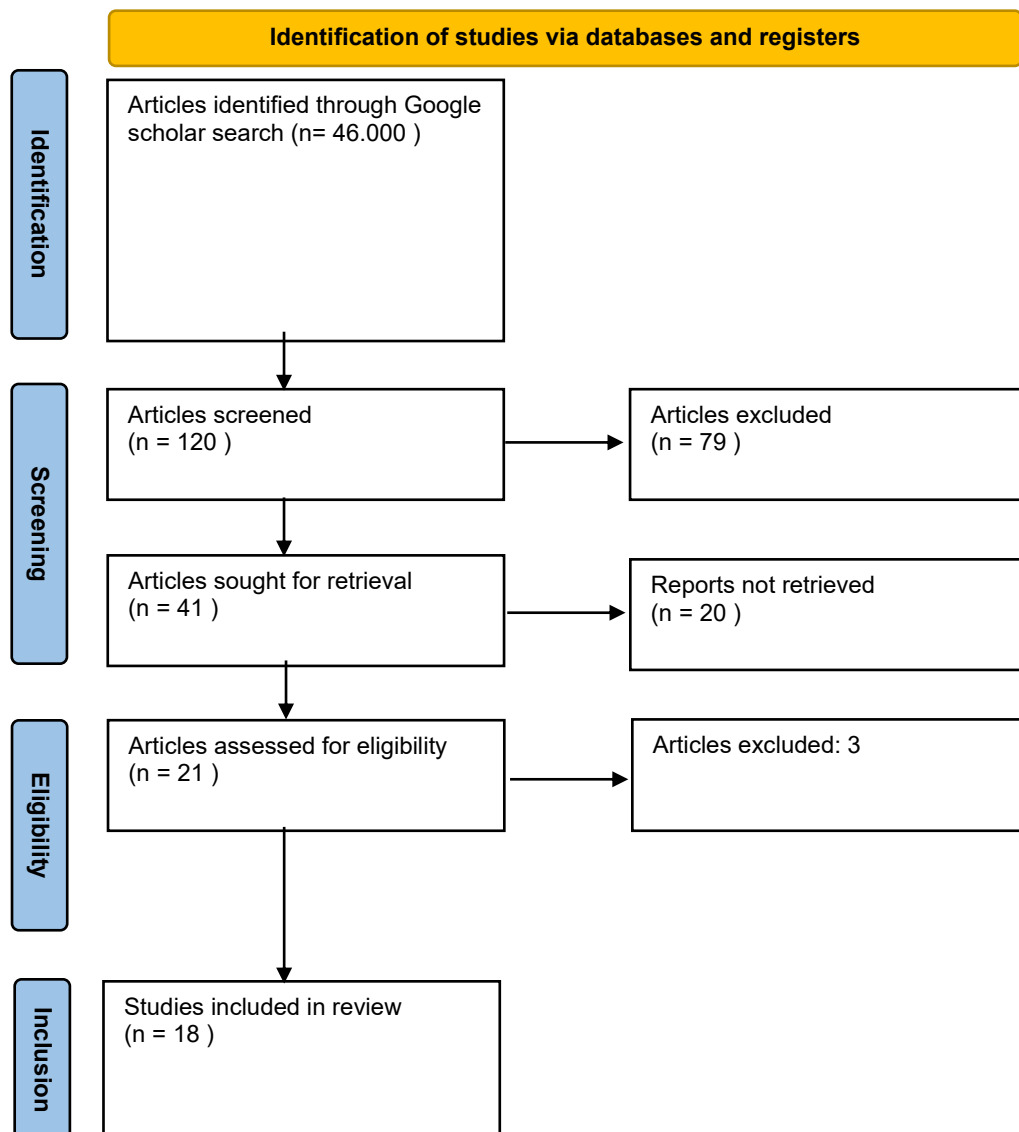
### Procedure

To identify the relevant papers and resources for this systematic literature review, Google Scholar as the primary databases that encompass a broad spectrum of educational journal articles was consulted. Based on the guidelines for systematic literature review provided by Creswell (2012), the following steps of the systematic review involved three processes. First, identification of relevant databases to ensure that the articles gathered would provide the answers to the research questions. Second, selection of articles through a systematic screening process. Third, confirmation on the eligibility of the selected articles for further analysis. In addition, the current systematic review applies the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) and meta-analysis defined by Moher et al. (2015), and its application in the present review is shown in Table 3. The four-step procedure was implemented through identification, selection, eligibility and inclusion.

## Data Extraction

The following diagram presents the process of data extraction.

**Table 3**  
PRISMA Diagram for the Systematic Review



In this analysis, new studies were identified through the Google Scholar and Scopus database by searching for journal articles with the keywords “differentiated instruction for teaching writing”, “differentiated instruction on writing skill”, “differentiated instruction on writing performance” in the Google Scholar and Scopus database. Criteria for the selected articles, namely: the article is in English, the article has been cited by several journals, the article discusses DI in teaching English, preferably focusing on the writing process. The total number of records identified from Google Scholar and Scopus published in 2020 to 2025 was 46,000 articles. Then the researchers conducted an automatic filter through the PoP application. There were 120 articles that passed the PoP application's automatic filter. The results of screening on 120 articles, 79 articles did not focus on English language teaching in the aspect of writing skills so that researchers took 41 English articles that discussed DI for teaching writing. However, 6 duplicate articles were found, and 14 articles were not the result of empirical research so that 21 articles remained. In fact, in the eligibility check, 3 articles were excluded because there was

no open access. Finally, the final result of this analysis was 18 new research articles included in this study.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of 18 peer-reviewed articles published from 2020 to 2025 reveals several significant findings concerning the application of differentiated instruction (DI) in teaching writing. Three primary themes emerged from the synthesis of literature: the instructional strategies utilized by teachers, the benefits reported among students, and the implementation challenges encountered in diverse classroom contexts.

### **RQ 1: What are the current trends and practices of implementing Differentiated Instruction in teaching writing?**

To answer Research Question 1 on the practices of DI in language, they were: group and pair work activity, integration of various teaching approaches, modification on activities and material, granting autonomy, management and planning, and learning support. The second research question which is the constraints to implement DI are environmental constraints, unsuitable materials, lack of knowledge, socio economy constraints, and examination-oriented assessment.

#### **The practice of differentiated Instruction in teaching Writing**

Many of the studies reviewed show that teachers often use different teaching methods to meet the varied needs of students in writing classes. One popular method is using tiered writing tasks. This means all students work on the same topic, but the assignments are adjusted based on their skill levels. For example, easier instructions or guidance for students who need help and more challenging, open-ended questions for advanced students (Fikni et al., 2024; Tomlinson, 2017). Another commonly cited strategy is flexible grouping, which supports peer collaboration and enables the sharing of ideas, peer editing, and constructive feedback in a low-stakes environment (Gibbs & McKay, 2021).

In addition, scaffolded support plays a crucial role in differentiated writing instruction. Teachers frequently provide graphic organizers, sentence frames, and modelling exercises to support students who require additional guidance (Digna et al., 2022). Another key theme is the emphasis on student choice in writing topics, which significantly enhances engagement and intrinsic motivation (Hall, 2020; Utami et al., 2021). Formative assessment such as teacher conferencing, rubrics, and self-assessment also emerges as a central component (Mutmainah, 2023).

The reviewed literature also highlights a range of positive outcomes associated with DI in writing instruction, including improved writing skills and increased student confidence (Putra, 2023). However, challenges such as limited teacher training, time constraints, resource limitations, and difficulty in assessment fairness remain widespread (Argyropoulou & Zafiri, 2024; Gibbs & McKay, 2021; Gultom, 2022 Hall, 2020).

In its implementation, DI is carried out through a series of interconnected, continuous, and recurring stages, forming a cyclical process. The process begins with diagnostic assessment, which is the most fundamental phase in DI. Unfortunately, diagnostic assessments are often absent in classroom practice, which tends to focus only on evaluating learning outcomes. Consequently, instruction is frequently delivered without considering students' initial conditions, often applying a one-size-fits-all approach (Fajriah et al., 2025; Fikni et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2024).

Diagnostic assessment, conducted at the beginning of learning, helps teachers gauge students' mastery and needs related to curriculum objectives. It informs both teachers and students in setting goals and learning paths. To fully understand learners' profiles, the assessment must cover both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects. Cognitive diagnostics provide insights into students' literacy and numeracy competence levels, prior subject knowledge, and learning styles (Al, 2024; Gultom et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, non-cognitive diagnostics reveal student interests, talents, and psychological readiness. Diagnostic tools may include written tests, surveys, interviews, observations, games, group forums, and aptitude or psychological tests. These results benefit students, teachers, and even parents (Elistya et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2025).

To ensure the principle of “teaching at the right level” is met where learners truly receive instruction aligned with their needs and profiles. Diagnostic assessment must be complemented by curriculum analysis (Jawiah et al., 2023). Based on the chosen curriculum (national, emergency, or independent), teachers set learning objectives adjusted to diagnostic results (Rahayu & Dewi, 2025). Curriculum analysis helps teachers design lesson plans as references during instruction, ensuring effectiveness and alignment with learning goals.

### **Content Differentiation**

Once diagnostic assessment and curriculum analysis are completed, content differentiation begins. This involves tailoring the scope of materials to student interests, learning readiness, and literacy/numeracy levels. Topics, depth, and difficulty are selected accordingly, ensuring relevance and context (Argyropoulou & Zafiri, 2024; Geel et al., 2022). Content differentiation also includes the choice of teaching materials, such as books, learning guides, modules, worksheets, maps, diagrams, photos, magazines, newspapers, interactive videos, observation sheets, interview guides; mobile apps and online learning platforms (especially for distance learning). These materials must match learners’ readiness, interests, and learning styles (Fajriah et al., 2025). Teachers should continuously evaluate whether content and materials remain appropriate and support progressive learning (Jawiah et al., 2023; Utami & Rismadewi, 2021).

### **Process Differentiation**

Following student profile identification, teachers apply process differentiation. Rather than focusing solely on what is taught, this approach emphasizes how students learn, acknowledging that each learner possesses unique readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. Differentiating the process involves employing a variety of instructional strategies such as scaffolding, guided practice, collaborative tasks, and flexible grouping to ensure that all students can access and engage meaningfully with the material. For instance, teachers may design learning activities that allow advanced students to explore enrichment tasks, while providing more structured and supportive instruction for those who require additional assistance. Furthermore, teachers may offer students choices in how they prefer to learn through visual media, kinesthetic activities, or auditory materials thus accommodating different learning styles and preferences. The goal of process differentiation is to optimize student engagement, support individual learning trajectories, and ultimately maximize each student’s academic potential. By creating a responsive classroom environment where instructional methods align with learner variability, educators can promote more inclusive and effective learning experiences. Classroom learning environments may also be differentiated to support diverse needs and boost motivation. This requires ongoing formative assessment, focusing not on scores but on feedback for improvement. It helps evaluate whether instruction meets students’ needs and whether they’re progressing. The goal is to ensure rich, contextual learning experiences that foster student success (Goyibova et al., 2025; Rahayu & Dewi, 2025; Sari et al., 2023).

### **Product Differentiation**

Product differentiation typically occurs toward the end of a learning cycle, allowing students to demonstrate mastery in varied ways. Based on diagnostic results and curriculum analysis, students are offered choices for final projects or assessments, which serve as summative assessments like poster, video, paper, presentation, application or other technologies. This approach allows comprehensive evaluation while providing authentic, real-world learning experiences (Lestari et al., 2024; Sugebo et al., 2025; Utami & Rismadewi, 2021).

## **Evaluation Phase**

This final phase involves analyzing summative assessment results to draw conclusions about student progress. It is not meant as judgment but as part of a growth-oriented approach, prompting reflection and preparing the next learning cycle (Fajriah et al., 2025; Jawiah et al., 2023; Rahayu & Dewi, 2025; Sari et al., 2023).

Throughout this differentiated learning cycle via content, process, product, and evaluation students, teachers, and schools receive continuous feedback. DI thus becomes a regular, dynamic process rather than a one-time assessment. According to Tomlinson & Moon (2013), assessment is the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to help teachers make decisions. It supports understanding learners, improving instruction, and building a strong learning community.

## **Group and Pair Work Activities**

Groups or pairs were formed based on students' backgrounds (shared interests, learning profiles, and readiness during activities and use of materials). Mostly, teachers make group into three categories: upper group, medium group and lower group. In addition, some teachers implemented flexible group activities to promote collaboration among students like peer tutoring / peer teaching. For this strategy, teacher should prepare the tutor, give guidance how to peer their friends in order to achieve the goal of instructional objectives. Teachers prepare to train the advance students to be the tutor of small group in peer teaching activities. However, the application of DI in the literature shows several differing practices. For example, in the article by Fikni et al. (2024), it is explained that DI categorizes students into three groups based on learning styles: auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic groups. According to Utami & Rismadewi (2021), this approach is considered less effective due to schools having limited teaching staff, media, and facilities. It is feared that if such a strategy is implemented, the learning environment may become less conducive. One group might disrupt another, making classroom management and instructional organization very difficult. While it's common in classrooms to use learning styles for grouping: auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic groups, current research cautions against relying solely on learning styles as a basis for instruction. Instead, it's often more effective to use a variety of instructional modes for all students (multimodal teaching) and differentiate based on readiness and interest.

## **Integration of Various Teaching Approach**

Teachers' choice of teaching approaches is based on their beliefs that philosophy of what works best for the students in helping them to understand the lesson. Among the approaches employed were cooperative learning, teacher oriented, teaching philosophy, socio cultural approach and information communication technology (ICT). These approaches are integrated so that the planned DI can be implemented with various methods and strategies to boost teaching and learning process (Al, 2024; Argyropoulou, 2024; Lestari, 2024).

## **Adaptation of Activities and Materials**

The teaching materials and activities are modified during the language lessons in practicing DI. This was to ensure that the materials and activities are suitable and relevant to students' learning. Among the practices found in these studies was that the teaching activities were organized developmentally according to the students' abilities. The teachers also planned the lesson based on students' interest, learning profile and readiness such as using music, mind maps, pictures, discussions, role play, storytelling, presentations, brainstorming, projects and learning stations. Other than that, the teachers also motivated the students to relate the reading materials with the enrichment activities to escalate understanding of the lesson (Khan et al., 2024; Gultom et al., 2022). In addition, the assessment process in language learning were also based on students' interest, learning profiles and readiness. The assessments were done in order for teachers to plan further actions (Dorfberger & Eyal, 2023; Lombarkia & Guerza, 2022).

## **Providing Autonomy in Learning**

The notion of student autonomy in implementing DI is a significant theme as autonomy is important to make the students feel that they are in control of their own learning.

It allowed students to play their roles of agents of learning that gave them the power of ownership. This triggered the students a sense of belonging and feeling appreciated throughout the learning process. The opportunities given for the students to participate actively in the teaching and learning process were found to have motivated the students. Thus, learning becomes a more meaningful process (Fajriah et al., 2025; Geel et al., 2022; Goyibova et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2023).

### **Planning and Management**

Focus on lesson planning and management in practicing DI was evident in fifteen (15) studies. It is vital to plan and manage teaching and learning as they enhance the process. These were done by setting up classroom rules and regulation so that the students understand their roles whereby teachers were able to facilitate the class and the organize the process well. Some teachers also involved their students in structuring the classroom rules and regulations to make them feel more responsible towards their learning process and environment. Besides that, the teachers drafted the lesson plans carefully and specifically to meet the students' levels and needs. Another practice that enhanced planning and managing learning was by streaming the students according to their academic level. For example, differentiating instructions is according to the students' cognitive ability. Lastly, teachers were found to have adapted the philosophies of planning and management in the teaching and learning process so that the learning environment could be managed effectively (Al, 2024; Argyropoulou & Zafiri, 2024; Dorfberger & Eyal, 2023; Elistya et al., 2024; Fajriah et al., 2025; Fikni et al., 2024; Geel et al., 2022; Goyibova et al., 2025; Gultom et al., 2022; Jawiah et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2025; Rahayu, 2025; Sari et al., 2023; Sugebo et al., 2025).

### **Teaching and Learning Support**

Teaching and learning support are a form of physical and mental assistance given by the teachers to the students before and after the learning process. Students' participation and involvement in the learning process requires support from teachers, peers and parents to enhance their learning and ultimately the students' achievement. Support given also motivates students. One of the practices observed in the DI was the monitoring done by the teachers, parents and peers. It was done during the reading sessions. Interestingly, teaching and learning support was also practiced among the teachers; an aspect that should be ventured further; particularly in relation to the concept of lesson study (Dorfberger & Eyal, 2023; Elistya et al., 2024; Fajriah et al., 2025; Goyibova et al., 2025; Gultom et al., 2022; Jawiah et al., 2023; Lestari et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2023; Sugebo et al., 2025).

### **RQ 2: What are the primary challenges faced by educators when applying Differentiated Instruction in writing instruction?**

Findings addressing RQ2 indicate three principal challenges that constrain educators' use of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in writing classrooms. First, learning environment constraints reported in fifteen studies encompass heavy teacher workload and limited time, large or poorly arranged classrooms, weak student interaction in mixed-ability groups, policy pressures that limit teacher autonomy, insufficient parental, material, and financial support, and student resistance to ability-based grouping. Second, a lack of knowledge and experience noted in fourteen studies reflects limited pre-/in-service training, few practical examples or observation opportunities, and a consequent fallback on traditional, one-size-fits-all methods. Third, exam-oriented education (documented in two studies) forces a narrow, test-focused pedagogy that reduces opportunities for differentiated, creative, and formative assessment practices. Together, these interrelated barriers contextual, professional, and systemic substantially impede meaningful implementation of DI in writing instruction and point to the need for targeted institutional support, professional development, and assessment reform.

### **Learning Environment Constraints**

Fifteen (15) studies highlighted several constraints in implementing DI which are

related to the learning environment or contextual factors (Al, 2024; Argyropoulou & Zafiri, 2024; Dorfberger & Eyal, 2023; Elistya et al., 2024; Fajriah et al., 2025; Fikni et al., 2024; Geel et al., 2022; Goyibova et al., 2025; Gultom et al., 2022; Jawiah et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2023; Sugebo et al., 2025; Rahayu, 2025). First, the teachers' workload and lack of time. The teachers reported on the need for more time to prepare the lesson as well as to implement the activities to be done accordingly. This includes preparing activities to cater for the different students need. Second, the environment constraints was also caused by the lack of interaction and communication during the language lessons. This occurred when the students with different language abilities were put together during work group. This lack was also heightened by the teachers' focus on finishing the syllabus due to time constraints. In addition, the classroom layout and big classroom size contributed to the constraints of conducting group and collaborative work. Thus, resulting in the teachers conducting a more teacher centered approach.

Third, policy changes that require different types of transformations at different levels; including of teachers, schools and the curriculum do not allow teachers full autonomy and flexibility in their teaching; including in implementing DI. Expectations due to policy changes has caused work pressure and difficulties for teachers to be more flexible in their teaching process.

The fourth constraints were caused by the lack of learning support which lead to the students' deteriorating motivation and finally complicated the implementation of DI. From the analysis, parents were found not supportive of teachers' implementation of DI as some parents disagreed to modification made based on students' ability. In addition, lack of facilities and financial support were also found contributing to the challenges in implementing DI in language teaching.

Finally, teachers were also found not motivated to practice DI because they focus more on high performance students. This focus also was found to be demotivating the less or low performance students. In addition, students also disagreed to be segregated according to classes or groups of the same level because they felt embarrassed when given different assignments according to their individual readiness or capability. Meanwhile, when doing group work, students were not focusing on the learning as they were more interested in playing with each other.

### **Lack of Knowledge and Experience**

Fourteen (14) studies reported the constrain in implementing DI well due to the lack of knowledge and experience among teachers (Argyropoulou & Zafiri, 2024; Dorfberger & Eyal, 2023; Fajriah et al., 2025; Fikni et al., 2024; Goyibova et al., 2025; Gultom et al., 2022; Jawiah et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2023; Sugebo et al., 2025; van Geel et al., 2022; Rahayu, 2025). Knowledge and experience are important factors in feasibility of a teaching process because empirical and theoretical knowledge have an impact on teachers' competence. Based on the analysis of the articles, specific training and sharing regarding DI are limited which result in the lack of knowledge and information on how to practice the approach. Without proper training or practical examples, they may feel overwhelmed and unsure where to begin. In addition, some teachers may not have had the opportunity to observe or practice DI during their teacher education programs. As a result, they tend to rely on traditional methods that treat all students the same. Lack of knowledge and experience has affected teachers' physical and mental readiness and ultimately their ability to practice DI.

### **Challenges in an Exam Oriented Education**

Two (2) studies reported that teacher could not practice DI due to the need to prepare students for the national examinations. Students are often trained to do more and more exercises, focusing on repetitive drills and test-specific strategies to boost exam performance. This approach, commonly referred to as "teaching to the test," narrows the curriculum and

limits opportunities for creative, critical, and holistic learning experiences. As a result, students may become disengaged, viewing learning as a mechanical process rather than an enriching journey. Moreover, this emphasis on standardized testing can hinder the implementation of DI, which aims to address the diverse learning needs, interests, and abilities of students. Exam-oriented assessments is said to be unfair because it assesses students only on their performance in the examination. It does not take into account the learning process where other forms of assessment where presentation skills or communication skills can be assessed. In addition, teachers too do not support examination as the only measure of performance because of the different intelligences among students. Similarly, the varied students' levels and ability makes assessment time consuming and difficult (Geel, 2022; Lestari, 2024).

## DISCUSSIONS

Differentiated instruction (DI) has emerged as a progressive pedagogical approach in modern education, particularly within the context of language teaching. By adapting instruction to suit students' readiness, interests, and learning styles, DI aims to create an inclusive and effective learning environment. This essay synthesizes findings from a systematic literature review that explores how language teachers implement DI and the challenges they face in the process.

This analysis is based on 18 studies conducted globally, guided by two main research questions: first, what DI practices are implemented by language teachers? Second, what are the barriers to its implementation? Findings addressing the first question reveal that teachers differentiate content, process, and product of instruction. Common practices include grouping students based on readiness, integrating technology and cooperative methods, and designing diverse learning activities tailored to students' needs. For instance, forming heterogeneous learning groups has proven effective in enhancing students' understanding of instructional content (Utami et al., 2021). Teachers also strive to capture student interest by linking lessons to their socio-cultural contexts (Sari et al., 2023) and emphasize learner autonomy by involving students in the planning process (Pozas et al., 2020).

Support in the learning process from teachers, peers, and parents is a crucial component of effective DI. This support not only helps students academically and emotionally but also boosts teacher morale through collaboration and shared instructional strategies (Elistya et al., 2024; Mohamed, 2025). Overall, the implementation of DI allows teachers to personalize learning and provide meaningful educational experiences based on individual student profiles.

However, implementing DI comes with its own set of complex challenges. Environmental factors, such as limited time and high workloads, are significant obstacles to planning and executing DI (Rahayu & Dewi, 2025). Teachers require additional time to develop lesson plans and tailor instructional methods to various student groups (Sari et al., 2023). Moreover, a curriculum focused on standardized testing and frequent changes demotivates teachers from innovating (Rasheed & Wahid, 2018). A lack of teacher expertise and experience in DI also poses a major barrier (Johnsen et al., 2020).

Other issues include the unavailability of appropriate teaching materials and insufficient professional training, making it difficult for teachers to address students' diverse learning needs. Socioeconomic factors further hinder the implementation of DI. Resource limitations prevent access to effective teaching tools, and students from low-income backgrounds often struggle to focus due to unpreparedness, which in turn hampers teachers' creativity in delivering instruction (Laari et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, numerous studies report the positive impact of DI on academic achievement, engagement, and student motivation especially in teaching writing skills (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020; Mohamed et al., 2025). Early implementation of DI strategies can address systemic educational issues, particularly those related to student participation and achievement.

Student perceptions of DI have also been largely positive. Learners report increased motivation and enjoyment in personalized learning environments. This aligns with the belief that student attitudes significantly affect learning outcomes (Stern, 1983; Krashen, 1986). Therefore, educators must consider student perspectives when designing DI strategies for foreign language classrooms (Elistya et al., 2024; Lombarkia & Guerza, 2022).

Nonetheless, common misconceptions about DI persist. Some teachers assign the same tasks and materials to all students, which contradicts the core principles of DI (Nunley, 2006). These misconceptions often stem from a lack of preparation and time (Aftab, 2015; Gibbs & Beamish, 2021). While some teachers group students by readiness level, such practices may unintentionally discourage lower-level students if not handled sensitively (Yuksel, 2012). The peer-tutor system is sometimes used to aid instruction, but it may lead to reduced direct teacher attention for some students. To improve DI implementation, reflective teaching practices are highly recommended (Sellars, 2012). Reducing the student-teacher ratio, validating educational digital content, and regular professional development are also crucial steps toward better DI practice (Ginja & Chen, 2020; Taylor, 2017).

Ultimately, this review affirms that DI is a promising approach to addressing the challenges of teaching in diverse classrooms. Proven strategies such as tiered assignments and student choice align with core DI principles (Tomlinson, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). However, DI remains both a pedagogical necessity and an operational challenge that requires systemic support, ongoing teacher training, and structural reforms to be successfully and sustainably implemented.

### **Limitation of Study**

Limited qualitative study found from the database resulting the limited data even though specific discussion was conducted. Therefore, future studies are highly recommended to conduct a SLR based on a fully qualitative study in order to obtain more comprehensive findings. This study also considers every perspective of practices and the constraints in the implementation of DI in language teaching. The effectiveness of DI itself was not analyzed and discussed by the researchers in this SLR. Therefore, a further study is proposed to analyses the effectiveness of DI in language teaching in order to reveal the feasibility of this approach.

### **CONCLUSION**

This systematic literature review reinforces the growing importance of differentiated instruction (DI) in language education, particularly in the development of writing skills. DI has proven to be an effective approach to address learner diversity, offering tangible benefits such as enhanced academic performance, greater student motivation, and improved classroom engagement. When thoughtfully implemented, DI fosters inclusive, student-centered learning environments that empower students to take ownership of their learning.

However, the review also highlights persistent challenges, including limited teacher training, time constraints, and a lack of adequate resources. These barriers underscore the need for systemic support, especially through targeted professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills necessary to apply DI effectively. Furthermore, collaboration between educators, school leaders, and curriculum developers is essential to ensure the sustainability and practicality of DI within educational frameworks such as the Merdeka Curriculum.

In the spirit of educational reform, DI aligns closely with the Merdeka Curriculum's goals of creating meaningful, interactive, and student-driven learning. By respecting each learner's readiness, interests, and learning profile, DI supports their cognitive, emotional, and social development across various educational phases. In essence, differentiated instruction is more than a teaching method. It is a transformative approach that acknowledges and nurtures the potential of every student, making education more equitable and impactful.

To further advance the implementation of differentiated instruction (DI) in writing

education, future initiatives should consider the development of scalable models of DI training integrated into pre-service and in-service teacher education. Educational stakeholders are encouraged to support longitudinal studies that evaluate the long-term effects of DI on students' writing proficiency, motivation, and autonomy. Moreover, institutional policies should prioritize teacher collaboration and provide digital infrastructure that enables data-driven instruction and formative assessment practices. Researchers are also urged to explore the intersection of DI with emerging technologies such as adaptive learning systems and artificial intelligence to personalize instruction at scale. These steps are essential to ensure that differentiated writing instruction is not only conceptually understood but practically sustained across diverse educational settings.

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