




# Role of Differentiated Instruction in Enhancing Writing Skills of English as a Foreign Language Learners

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## Abstract

Writing, as one of the most complex language skills, requires the integration of cognitive, linguistic, and organizational processes, and is often the most challenging skill for learners to master. Traditional one-size-fits-all approaches frequently overlook learner diversity, limiting effectiveness. The study investigates the impact of differentiated instruction (DI) on enhancing writing skills among seventh-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether DI strategies—including flexible grouping, tiered assignments, and individualized feedback—can foster measurable improvements in writing proficiency and learner motivation. Using an experimental design, a sample of 80 students was divided equally into an experimental group (DI-based instruction) and a control group (traditional instruction). Quantitative data were collected through writing performance assessments and motivational questionnaires, analyzed using non-parametric statistical tests, while qualitative classroom observations provided contextual insights. Findings showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in both writing proficiency and motivation, confirming the universal benefits of DI across different learning styles. The results demonstrate that DI not only supports skill development but also promotes engagement and confidence in EFL learners. The implications of the study highlight the importance of tailoring instruction to diverse learner needs in order to improve outcomes in EFL writing classrooms. Limitations include the relatively small sample size and context-specific focus, which restrict generalizability. Future research should replicate this study in varied contexts and explore the integration of DI with digital platforms to support sustainable and scalable applications.

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**Keywords:** Differentiated instruction, writing skills, English as a Foreign Language, learner motivation, pedagogy

## Introduction

Writing is one of the most complex and demanding skills in second and foreign language learning. Unlike listening and speaking, which often develops naturally through interaction, writing requires a greater and more conscious effort. Learners must draw on vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, organizational skills, and critical thinking to produce coherent texts. This combination of linguistic and cognitive demands often makes writing the most difficult skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to master. Moreover, writing is not only a linguistic skill but also an academic and social practice that reflects learners' ability to communicate ideas, construct arguments, and participate in academic and

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professional communities (Hyland & Hyland, 2019).

Despite its recognized importance, many EFL classrooms continue to rely on traditional and uniform approaches to teaching writing. Learners are frequently assigned identical tasks, assessed with the same criteria, and provided with generalized feedback regardless of individual readiness, interests, or needs. This one-size-fits-all model does not reflect the realities of diverse classrooms, where learners vary significantly in linguistic background, motivation, and exposure to English. As a result, writing instruction often fails to close achievement gaps, leaving some students behind while others remain unchallenged.

Differentiated instruction (DI) has emerged as a powerful framework to address this issue. DI emphasizes adapting content, process, and product to meet learners' needs (Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 2017). Rather than assuming all students learn in the same way, DI provides multiple pathways to learning, enabling students to engage with material at appropriate levels of challenge. In writing instruction, this may include strategies such as tiered assignments, flexible grouping, targeted scaffolding, and individualized feedback. Such practices foster motivation and achievement by engaging learners more actively and meaningfully. The increasing diversity of classrooms worldwide makes DI particularly relevant today. In multilingual and multicultural settings, students arrive with different levels of exposure to English writing conventions, prior literacy skills, and learning preferences. Some may require foundational support to build simple sentences, while others are already capable of composing complex argumentative essays. Uniform instructional models risk alienating both groups—overwhelming some while under-challenging others. DI addresses this gap by treating learner diversity as an asset rather than a barrier.

Recent research confirms that personalization in writing instruction enhances motivation and self-efficacy (Li, 2023; Wang et al., 2022), while technology-supported DI significantly improves EFL performance (Kao & Hsu, 2024; Rahimi et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022). Empirical studies support the effectiveness of DI in language education. Alghamdi (2020) found that differentiated strategies significantly improved writing fluency and reduced learner anxiety in Saudi Arabian classrooms. Similarly, Wu and Chen (2021) showed that Chinese university students reported higher motivation and better academic writing outcomes when DI principles were applied. Lee et al. (2021) further highlighted that DI, when supported by digital platforms, allowed teachers to offer flexible tasks and personalized feedback, creating more inclusive learning environments. Collectively, these findings underscore DI's potential to enhance writing outcomes across diverse EFL contexts.

Although the body of research on DI is growing, important gaps remain. Few studies have explored its impact on younger learners in middle school, where writing skills are still being consolidated. Much of the existing literature focuses on either motivation or performance, with limited attention to how DI can address both simultaneously. Additionally, while technology-enabled DI shows considerable promise, research on its practical classroom implementation is still developing. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the effectiveness of DI in enhancing writing proficiency, motivation, and engagement among Year 7 EFL learners, using a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative and qualitative data.

The rationale for this study lies in the persistent underperformance of EFL learners in writing despite years of instruction. Research consistently identifies writing as the skill in which learners make the slowest and least consistent progress (Hussein et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2023). This stagnation underscores the urgent need for adaptive, student-centered approaches. By implementing DI, teachers can improve writing proficiency while also cultivating motivation and confidence—critical factors for sustained learning.

The problem addressed in this study is the inadequacy of traditional, undifferentiated instruction in meeting the diverse needs of EFL writers. Standardized methods, while convenient for teachers, often ignore learner variability and hinder equitable outcomes. Without differentiation, many students remain disengaged and struggle to meet academic writing standards, which can negatively affect their educational and professional trajectories. Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives: (1) To investigate the impact of differentiated instruction on Year 7 EFL learners' writing proficiency. (2) To examine its role in enhancing motivation and engagement in writing tasks. (3) To provide practical recommendations for integrating DI into EFL writing pedagogy.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute both theoretical insights and practical strategies to the growing literature on differentiated instruction. It also seeks to demonstrate how DI can transform EFL writing instruction into a more inclusive, equitable, and effective practice.

## Literature Review

### *Differentiated Instruction in Language Education*

Differentiated instruction (DI) has become a cornerstone of inclusive education, particularly in classrooms

where learners differ in readiness, learning styles, and motivation. First conceptualized by (Tomlinson, 2001, 2017), DI challenges the assumption that all learners can succeed under a single method of teaching. Instead, it advocates tailoring content (what is taught), process (how it is taught), product (how learning is demonstrated), and learning environment (the conditions under which learning occurs). This framework is especially relevant for language learning, where the diversity of learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a defining characteristic (Adami, 2004; Gregory & Chapman, 2013).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, DI plays a vital role in bridging gaps in proficiency and ensuring equitable access to learning. Unlike native speakers, EFL learners often face barriers such as limited vocabulary, reduced exposure to authentic texts, and anxiety about accuracy (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Differentiated approaches can alleviate these challenges by allowing learners to engage with material at their own level while gradually progressing toward higher proficiency.

### *Theoretical Foundations of DI*

The principles of DI are grounded in several influential learning theories:

1. **Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD):** Learning is optimized when learners receive support to complete tasks just beyond their independent ability. DI operationalizes ZPD through scaffolds such as modeling, peer support, and guided practice, which gradually fade as independence increases.
2. **Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (1993):** Learners demonstrate knowledge in diverse ways—linguistic, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, and interpersonal. This supports DI's focus on offering multiple modes of input and output, such as visual organizers, oral brainstorming, or collaborative peer review.
3. **Bloom's Taxonomy (1956):** This taxonomy remains a practical tool for structuring differentiated writing tasks, ranging from lower-order activities (e.g., sentence completion) to higher-order ones (e.g., argumentative essays). Tiered tasks designed along Bloom's hierarchy ensure progression across proficiency levels.
4. **Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000):** By providing autonomy (choice of tasks), competence (tiered scaffolding), and relatedness (collaborative learning), DI can enhance learner motivation—an essential element in writing development (Nguyen et al., 2022; Park, 2020).

Together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that DI is not only a pedagogical strategy but also an approach firmly rooted in how humans learn.

### *Components of Differentiated Writing Instruction*

Four key components consistently define DI in writing pedagogy:

1. **Content Differentiation** – Adjusting materials to suit learner levels, such as simplified texts for beginners or authentic academic articles for advanced learners.
2. **Process Differentiation** – Employing varied instructional methods, including guided drafting, peer workshops, and individualized conferencing (Hall, 2002).
3. **Product Differentiation** – Enabling learners to demonstrate understanding through diverse outputs such as essays, reflective journals, presentations, or digital projects.
4. **Learning Environment Differentiation** – Structuring classrooms to support collaboration, flexible grouping, and the integration of technology (Tomlinson, 2021).

In EFL writing contexts, these components function synergistically to create inclusive and dynamic classrooms. For example, Rahman et al. (2024) found that tiered tasks and flexible grouping not only improved learners' ability to revise drafts but also reduced writing anxiety in Bangladeshi schools.

### *Empirical Evidence*

Early empirical studies established the promise of DI in both general and language education. Wu et al. (2015) found that Taiwanese students receiving differentiated writing instruction demonstrated greater fluency and accuracy than those in traditional classrooms. Similarly, Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) reported that DI improved academic outcomes while enhancing learner motivation and self-efficacy. Nevertheless, these earlier studies were often small in scale and lacked longitudinal scope, limiting their generalizability.

Recent scholarship has focused on DI in increasingly diverse and digitalized classrooms. For instance, Alzu'bi and Alshraideh (2020) confirmed DI's effectiveness in writing instruction, Wu and Chen (2021) demonstrated that adaptive learning technologies amplified outcomes, and Valiandes and Neophytou (2021) provided longitudinal evidence for DI's role in sustained learner progress. Marks et al. (2021) highlighted the practical advances in applying DI principles in classroom settings. Technology-mediated differentiation has emerged as particularly significant. Digital tools, automated feedback systems, and online collaboration platforms have been shown to improve writing proficiency and learner confidence (Kao & Hsu, 2024; Rahimi et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022).

Additional empirical studies reinforce these findings: [Alghamdi \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that DI strategies enhanced writing fluency and reduced anxiety among Saudi learners. [Wu and Chen \(2021\)](#) reported improved academic writing outcomes and stronger motivation among Chinese university students exposed to DI. [Hussein et al. \(2021\)](#) found that tiered writing tasks improved accuracy and coherence in Egyptian secondary classrooms. [Nguyen et al. \(2022\)](#) revealed that DI's effectiveness in Vietnam was strongly linked to teacher training and confidence. [Torres-Rodríguez and Martínez-Granada \(2022\)](#) showed that combining task-based learning with DI improved engagement in Spanish EFL classrooms. [Park \(2020\)](#) found that differentiated feedback increased learner confidence and accuracy. ([Rahman et al., 2023](#)) demonstrated that DI strategies improved accuracy, organization, and motivation in Bangladeshi schools. [Tomlinson \(2021\)](#) linked DI to neuroscience, suggesting that brain-compatible teaching supports deeper learning and sustained motivation. [Zhao and Wang \(2024\)](#) showed how online platforms make DI scalable in large EFL classrooms. Together, these studies confirm DI's value across cultural contexts and highlight the crucial role of teacher training and technology integration.

### *Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing DI*

Despite its benefits, DI is not without challenges. Teachers often report heavy workloads in designing tiered tasks and providing individualized feedback ([Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012](#)). Large class sizes, time constraints, and standardized curricula further limit differentiation ([Nguyen et al., 2022](#)). Students may also resist non-traditional methods when accustomed to rigid instructional practices. At the same time, new opportunities are emerging. Learning management systems (LMS), automated writing tools, and online collaboration platforms make differentiation more manageable and scalable ([Zhao & Wang, 2024](#)). Moreover, professional development programs that equip teachers with DI strategies have been shown to increase both confidence and instructional effectiveness ([Torres-Rodríguez & Martínez-Granada, 2022](#)).

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study employed a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods design to evaluate the impact of differentiated instruction (DI) on the writing skills of seventh-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The research integrated quantitative methods, which captured measurable improvements in writing proficiency and motivation, with qualitative approaches, which provided richer insights into learners' perceptions of the intervention. A pre-test/post-test control group design was adopted to ensure comparability between groups and to assess the effectiveness of the DI intervention over time.

Two groups were formed: an experimental group, which received instruction based on differentiated strategies, and a control group, which followed a conventional writing curriculum. The DI strategies included tiered assignments, flexible grouping, multimodal instruction, and individualized feedback, while the control group adhered to a teacher-centered approach with uniform tasks for all students.

### *Sampling and Participants*

The study included 80 seventh-grade students enrolled in a private school in Kosovo. Students were evenly distributed between the experimental group ( $n = 40$ ) and the control group ( $n = 40$ ). The participants were aged between 12 and 13 years, representing both male and female learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Prior to placement in groups, all students completed a baseline English proficiency assessment aligned with CEFR standards. The results indicated that the majority of students were at an A2–B1 level of English proficiency, with some variation between individuals. This diversity made the sample particularly suitable for testing the effects of DI, which aims to address heterogeneous classroom needs.

The school context was also important: as a private institution, the classrooms were relatively small, with an average student–teacher ratio of 20:1. However, like many EFL contexts, the student cohort demonstrated varying prior exposure to English. Some had engaged with English through extracurricular activities or private tutoring, while others had limited exposure outside the classroom.

Ethical protocols were carefully followed: written parental consent and student assent were obtained, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained.

### *Instructional Intervention*

The intervention spanned nine months (an academic year) and was embedded within the school's English curriculum. Teachers in the experimental group underwent a short professional development program on DI strategies before implementation.

The intervention integrated the following core elements:

1. **Flexible Grouping:** Students were grouped dynamically based on formative assessments. For example,

during narrative writing lessons, students who struggled with vocabulary were grouped for targeted support, while more advanced learners collaborated on complex tasks such as peer-editing.

2. **Tiered Assignments:** Tasks were designed at three levels of difficulty. For example, in an expository writing unit, lower-level learners produced short paragraphs with sentence starters, mid-level learners wrote guided essays, and advanced learners developed extended essays with independent research.
3. **Individualized Feedback:** Teachers provided written and oral feedback tailored to student performance. Feedback emphasized iterative improvement, with students submitting multiple drafts of the same piece.
4. **Multimodal Instruction:** Lessons incorporated visual prompts (images, charts), auditory input (audio stories, teacher read-alouds), and kinesthetic tasks (collaborative brainstorming on classroom boards) to ensure accessibility for diverse learning styles.

The control group, in contrast, followed a **traditional writing program** where all students were expected to complete the same assignments with limited opportunities for feedback or revision.

### *Data Collection Instruments*

To ensure the validity and reliability of findings, multiple data sources were employed:

1. **Pre- and Post-Writing Assessments**

- Conducted at the beginning and end of the intervention.
- Tasks were designed to elicit descriptive and expository writing, scored with a rubric assessing organization, vocabulary, grammar, coherence, and content development.

2. **Student Motivation Surveys**

- A five-point Likert-scale questionnaire measured changes in student motivation and attitudes toward writing.
- Items addressed enjoyment of writing, confidence in ability, and perceived usefulness of writing skills.

3. **Teacher Observations and Reflective Journals**

- Teachers documented classroom dynamics, challenges, and emerging successes throughout the intervention.
- These qualitative records supported triangulation of results.

4. **Student Interviews and Focus Groups**

- Conducted with a sub-sample of 20 students from both groups to capture learners' perceptions of writing tasks and instructional methods.
- Semi-structured interviews focused on engagement, perceived fairness, and challenges.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical approval was secured from the school's review board. Confidentiality was guaranteed through pseudonyms in reporting, and no identifying details were disclosed. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw at any stage without penalty. Teachers implementing DI received training to minimize bias and ensure fair instructional delivery across groups.

### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (version 27). Tests of normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Shapiro-Wilk) revealed that the data were not normally distributed, justifying the use of non-parametric tests. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to measure within-group differences between pre- and post-test writing scores. The Mann-Whitney U test compared differences between the experimental and control groups. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Wilcoxon tests for pre- and post-comparisons. Reliability was ensured through inter-rater scoring of writing assessments. Two experienced EFL teachers independently graded all writing samples, and the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated. Results showed high reliability (ICC = 0.88), confirming consistency in scoring.

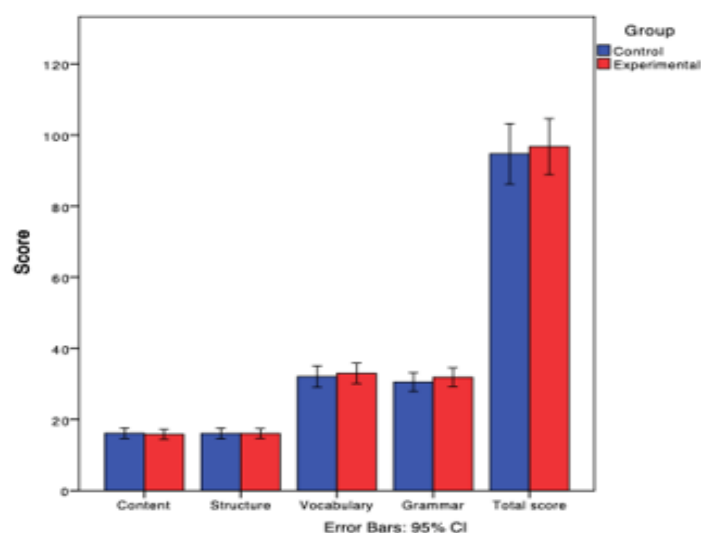
Qualitative data (interviews, journals, and focus groups) were analyzed through thematic coding. An inductive coding approach was applied, followed by cross-checking among two researchers to enhance inter-coder reliability. Themes were categorized into perceived benefits, challenges, and motivational factors.

## Results

### Quantitative Results

#### Pre-Test Comparisons

To establish baseline equivalence between the control and experimental groups, a Mann–Whitney U test was conducted. Results revealed no significant difference in pre-test writing scores between groups (Control:  $M = 95$ ; Experimental:  $M = 100$ ;  $U = 752$ ,  $p = 0.644$ ). Descriptive statistics confirmed this finding, with both groups showing comparable medians and standard deviations. Effect size was negligible ( $r = -0.051$ ), indicating that prior to the intervention, both groups were statistically similar in writing performance (See Figure 1).

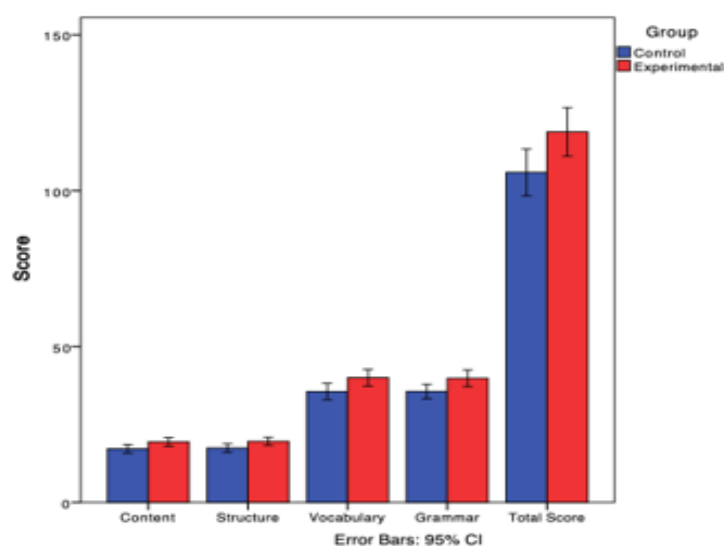


**Figure 1:** Pre-test scores comparison between control and experimental groups, graphically presented.

This outcome confirmed that any differences observed at post-test could be attributed to the differentiated instruction (DI) intervention rather than pre-existing disparities.

#### Post-Test Comparisons

Following the nine-month intervention, significant differences emerged between groups. The experimental group outperformed the control group on post-test scores ( $U = 546$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ). When analyzing subtest components individually (organization, grammar, vocabulary, and coherence), the experimental group demonstrated consistent gains across all domains. (See Figure 2)



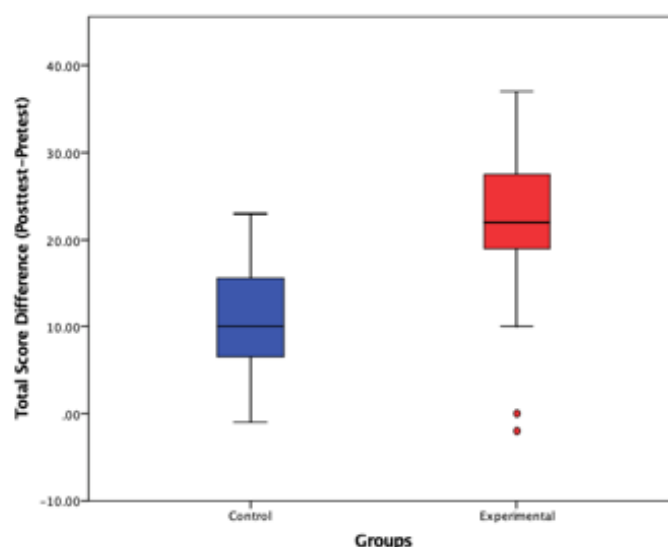
**Figure 2:** Post-test scores comparison between control and experimental groups

Effect size analysis indicated an intermediate impact ( $r \approx 0.30$ ), suggesting that the DI-based intervention had a meaningful effect on writing achievement.



### Gain Scores (Post–Pre Differences)

When examining gain scores (post-test minus pre-test), the difference was particularly striking. The experimental group exhibited substantially larger improvements than the control group ( $U = 190$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). This reinforces the effectiveness of DI in fostering measurable progress in EFL writing skills (See [Figure 3](#))



**Figure 3:** Total score difference (post-test – pre-test) comparison between the control and experimental groups.

All these findings graphically highlight the experimental group’s clear trajectory of growth compared to the relatively modest progress in the control group.

### Inter-Rater Reliability

To ensure scoring reliability, two independent raters evaluated all writing samples. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) exceeded 0.90 for both pre- and post-tests, indicating excellent agreement. Only two rubric items showed slightly lower ICC values (above 0.80), still within the “good” range. This confirms that assessment outcomes were consistent and reliable. A Kruskal–Wallis test was performed to assess whether learning styles influenced achievement. No significant differences were found for pre-test ( $p = 0.166$ ), post-test ( $p = 0.211$ ), or gain scores ( $p = 0.993$ ). These results suggest that the positive effects of DI were universal across learning styles, benefitting all students regardless of their preferred mode of learning.

### Qualitative Results

In addition to statistical improvements, qualitative data offered insights into the lived experiences of learners and teachers in the DI classroom. Thematic analysis of teacher journals, classroom observations, and student interviews identified three core themes:

#### 1. Increased Motivation

- Students in the experimental group expressed higher levels of enthusiasm for writing assignments, especially when provided with choice in topics or formats. For example, learners appreciated the opportunity to select between writing a narrative, an expository essay, or a creative story.
- Teachers reported that previously disengaged learners began participating actively when assignments aligned with their interests.

#### 2. Improved Writing Organization

- Many students reported that scaffolding tools, such as graphic organizers and guided writing prompts, helped them structure their ideas more effectively.
- Teacher observations confirmed that over time, students in the DI group developed stronger paragraph unity and logical sequencing compared to their peers in the control group.

#### 3. Enhanced Confidence and Self-Efficacy

- Students highlighted the value of **personalized feedback**, which allowed them to improve drafts iteratively.
- Several learners noted that feedback tailored to their individual weaknesses (e.g., grammar, vocabulary) helped them “feel like writers” rather than passive learners.

### Comparison Between Groups

The contrast between experimental and control groups was evident in both quantitative and qualitative data:

- **Control group:** Minor improvements were observed in grammatical accuracy and vocabulary, but progress was incremental and largely limited to areas emphasized by the uniform curriculum. Students reported boredom and limited engagement, with some expressing frustration about repetitive tasks.
- **Experimental group:** Demonstrated substantial advancements in writing fluency, cohesion, creativity, and overall motivation. Students showed greater willingness to take risks in writing and to revise drafts multiple times, behaviors rarely observed in the control group.

## Discussion

The present study investigated the effects of differentiated instruction (DI) on the writing proficiency of Year 7 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Findings provide strong evidence that DI not only enhances writing achievement but also fosters learner motivation and confidence. Both quantitative and qualitative results converged to demonstrate that the intervention group significantly outperformed the control group in writing proficiency while also reporting higher levels of engagement. These results are consistent with a growing body of literature that underscores the value of learner-centered pedagogies in language classrooms. By tailoring instructional methods to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, DI created conditions for deeper learning and more equitable participation.

They also align with recent research on technology-supported DI, which demonstrates measurable gains in motivation, confidence, and writing outcomes (Kao & Hsu, 2024; Rahimi et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, the study reinforces theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), showing that scaffolded support leads to autonomy. In multilingual classrooms, DI is increasingly recognized as a tool for equity and inclusion (De Jong, 2024; Hendriksen, 2024). Although challenges such as teacher workload and student adjustment persist, these can be mitigated through professional development and institutional support.

The statistical improvements observed in the experimental group are consistent with prior research demonstrating DI's capacity to boost academic achievement (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2021). In this study, the experimental group showed significant post-test gains in organization, vocabulary, grammar, and coherence. Effect size calculations confirmed a moderate impact, indicating that DI had a meaningful influence on learning outcomes. The absence of pre-test differences suggests that the improvements cannot be attributed to baseline advantages, but rather to the intervention itself. This strengthens the internal validity of the findings and reinforces the argument that DI is particularly effective in heterogeneous classrooms, where learners begin at different proficiency levels. Moreover, the lack of significant differences across learning styles indicates that DI's benefits were universal. This challenges earlier critiques that differentiation relies too heavily on "learning styles" frameworks Pashler et al. (2008) and instead suggests that DI's multiple entry points foster inclusivity regardless of preference.

On the other hand, the qualitative findings enrich the statistical outcomes by showing how and why DI worked in practice. Three interrelated themes emerged: motivation, organization, and self-efficacy.

1. **Motivation:** Students' enthusiasm increased when they were given choice and voice in writing tasks. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy as a key driver of motivation. DI strategies that allowed learners to select topics or formats satisfied this need for autonomy and deepened engagement.
2. **Organization:** Learners reported that tools such as graphic organizers and scaffolded activities helped them manage the complexity of writing tasks. This finding resonates with Vygotsky and Cole (1978). ZPD, as scaffolding enabled learners to accomplish tasks just beyond their independent ability.
3. **Self-Efficacy:** Individualized feedback promoted confidence in writing. Students explained that targeted feedback addressing their specific weaknesses gave them a sense of progress and achievement. This reflects Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Lev, 1997), in which mastery experiences and constructive feedback strengthen learners' belief in their ability to succeed.

Together, these themes illustrate the mechanisms through which DI influenced learning outcomes, complementing the statistical evidence with lived experiences.

This study makes several theoretical contributions:

1. **Constructivist Foundations:** It provides empirical support for constructivist models of learning (Bruner, 1997; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), demonstrating how scaffolding and tailored instruction enable learners to actively construct knowledge.
2. **Motivational Theories:** The motivational gains observed are consistent with Dörnyei and Ushioda



(2021) work on language learning motivation, confirming that individualized approaches are more effective than uniform instruction.

3. **Equity in Learning:** By showing that DI benefits learners across proficiency levels, the study reinforces arguments for DI as an equitable pedagogy that helps reduce achievement gaps in multicultural classrooms.

The results of this study suggest several practical implications for EFL practitioners:

1. **Curriculum Design:** Writing curricula should integrate tiered tasks and flexible grouping. For example, teachers can design prompts at multiple difficulty levels, ensuring accessibility for weaker learners while still challenging advanced students.
2. **Feedback Practices:** Personalized feedback should be emphasized. Teachers should encourage iterative drafting and revision cycles, using feedback not only to correct errors but also to promote reflection and growth.
3. **Motivational Strategies:** Allowing students to choose topics or formats significantly boosts engagement. Learner choice should become a standard element of writing pedagogy.
4. **Teacher Training:** Professional development must focus on DI strategies, including task design, assessment, and classroom management. Without training and institutional support, implementation may remain inconsistent.
5. **Technology Integration:** Digital tools (e.g., collaborative writing platforms, adaptive apps) can facilitate DI by supporting flexible pacing, immediate feedback, and collaborative learning (Lee et al., 2021).

Despite its advantages, DI is not without challenges. Teachers in this study reported increased planning demands when creating differentiated materials. This concern is echoed in the literature (Pashler et al., 2008; Tobin & McInnes, 2008). To mitigate workload, schools should provide time for collaborative planning and develop resource banks of tiered assignments. Another challenge was student resistance at the start of the intervention. Learners accustomed to teacher-centered instruction initially struggled with the dynamic nature of DI. However, resistance diminished as the program progressed, and students came to appreciate the benefits of tailored learning. This suggests that persistence and consistency are essential for successful implementation. Finally, institutional support is crucial. Without adequate training, reasonable class sizes, and resources for individualized materials, teachers may struggle to sustain DI practices.

This study thus provides strong evidence that differentiated instruction is a powerful pedagogical approach for improving EFL writing skills. By incorporating flexible grouping, tiered assignments, multimodal strategies, and individualized feedback, DI created an inclusive classroom environment that supported learners across proficiency levels. Beyond improved writing outcomes, students in the DI group demonstrated higher levels of motivation, confidence, and engagement—factors essential for long-term language learning success. While challenges related to workload and implementation remain, the benefits of DI clearly outweigh these difficulties, confirming its value as a framework for EFL writing pedagogy.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to examine the role of differentiated instruction (DI) in improving writing skills among Year 7 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. By employing a quasi-experimental design and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the research provided robust evidence that DI significantly enhances students' writing proficiency, motivation, and self-confidence. The results clearly demonstrated that students in the experimental group who received DI-based instruction outperformed their peers in the control group across multiple domains of writing—organization, vocabulary, grammar, and overall coherence. In addition, qualitative insights revealed that students experienced greater motivation, confidence, and ownership of their learning when provided with flexible grouping, tiered tasks, and individualized feedback.

These findings align with theoretical models such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (1997), as well as with recent research emphasizing student-centered and adaptive teaching methodologies. In doing so, this study contributes to the growing body of empirical evidence supporting DI as an effective, inclusive, and equitable approach to EFL pedagogy.

The following key findings emerged from this study:

- **Improved Writing Proficiency:** The experimental group showed significant gains in writing skills, particularly in coherence, grammar, vocabulary use, and organization.
- **Enhanced Motivation:** Student-centered strategies such as task choice, scaffolding, and multimodal activities fostered enthusiasm and persistence in writing.
- **Greater Self-Confidence:** Struggling learners, in particular, benefited from individualized support, leading to measurable improvements in self-efficacy.
- **Positive Classroom Climate:** Both students and teachers reported that DI created a more inclusive,

engaging, and less stressful environment conducive to creativity and deeper learning.

- **Universality Across Learning Styles:** The intervention's benefits were observed across all learners, regardless of preferred learning style, highlighting DI's broad applicability.

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be made for educators, schools, and policymakers:

#### 1. Curriculum Integration of DI

- Language teaching curricula should embed DI principles explicitly, particularly in writing instruction. Curriculum designers should include models of tiered writing tasks and examples of flexible grouping structures.

#### 2. Teacher Training and Professional Development

- Teachers require ongoing professional development to effectively implement DI. Training should emphasize practical strategies such as designing tiered assignments, using scaffolds for writing, and providing personalized feedback.

#### 3. Use of Technology to Support DI

- Technology can play a pivotal role in streamlining DI implementation. Adaptive learning software, online writing platforms, and digital collaborative tools can reduce teacher workload while offering learners more opportunities for feedback and choice.

#### 4. Encouraging Student Autonomy

- Giving students meaningful choices in writing topics and assignments enhances intrinsic motivation. Schools should encourage teachers to integrate learner autonomy into classroom practices.

#### 5. Institutional Support and Resources

- To address the workload challenges associated with DI, schools should provide time for collaborative planning, access to teaching resources, and manageable class sizes where possible.

Despite its success, implementing DI is not without challenges:

1. **Teacher Workload:** Preparing multiple versions of assignments and individualized feedback requires considerable time and effort. Schools should consider policies that reduce non-teaching duties or provide shared planning time.
2. **Student Resistance:** Initially, some students may resist differentiated approaches due to unfamiliarity. Teachers should gradually introduce DI and explain its benefits to learners.
3. **Assessment Complexity:** Evaluating diverse outputs from differentiated tasks can be challenging. Clear rubrics and consistent scoring practices are essential to ensure fairness.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic support, professional development, and teacher collaboration.

Although the findings are promising, several limitations must be acknowledged: (1) Sample Size and Context: Conducted in one private school in Kosovo with 80 students, the study's findings may not generalize to public schools, larger classes, or other cultural contexts. (2) Duration: The nine-month intervention allowed for observation of improvement, but longer-term studies are needed to assess sustainability. (3) Measurement Tools: Writing assessment is inherently subjective. Although inter-rater reliability was high, subtle biases cannot be entirely ruled out. While interviews and teacher journals provided valuable insights, they may be influenced by individual perceptions. (4) Teacher Expertise: Teachers in the experimental group received only brief training in DI, which may have affected implementation quality. More extensive training could yield stronger results.

Future research should build on these findings by expanding to larger and more diverse samples, including public schools and rural contexts. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine whether DI effects persist over multiple years. Technology-enhanced DI should be investigated especially digital platforms, to allow individualized pacing and real-time feedback. This will enable to understand the long-term impact of DI on writing proficiency and motivation over several academic years. It is also necessary to assess how digital platforms and artificial intelligence can support differentiation in writing instruction. Exploring DI's impact on other language skills (listening, speaking, reading) is also recommended since most research—including this study—has focused heavily on writing skills. It is also recommended to conduct in-depth studies of teachers' experiences with DI, including perceived barriers and strategies for sustainability. Last, but not the least, examining teacher perspectives in greater depth, particularly regarding workload, attitudes, and professional development is also recommended. This will enable to expand research to public schools, rural environments, and multilingual classrooms to test generalizability.

This study concludes that differentiated instruction is not only effective but essential for improving writing proficiency in EFL contexts. By meeting students where they are and providing multiple pathways to success, DI fosters both academic achievement and personal growth. While challenges remain, the benefits—improved proficiency, higher motivation, and stronger confidence—clearly outweigh the difficulties. With adequate training, institutional support, and the integration of technology, DI can become a sustainable cornerstone of EFL pedagogy. Ultimately, differentiated instruction empowers learners to become more confident, autonomous, and capable writers, contributing to their overall language proficiency and academic success.

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