

Exploring The Types of Task Differentiated Strategies (DS) In Teaching Writing

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Abstract

Writing skills are often regarded as one of the most challenging aspects to acquire in the English language, especially for second language learners (ESL). Malaysian teachers, in particular, face difficulties in teaching writing due to the diverse learning needs of their students. The Cambridge Baseline Study conducted in 2013 emphasized the need for Differentiated Instruction (DI) in Malaysian classrooms, which consist of mixed-ability students. As a response, the Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced eight differentiated strategies, including task differentiation, in the English Language Scheme of Work (SOW) Form 3. This qualitative study investigates the application of task differentiated strategies in the teaching of writing. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations involving four secondary school ESL teachers in the Kuala Lumpur area. The analysis focused on identifying the types of task differentiated strategies employed by teachers during writing activities in mixed-ability ESL classrooms and examining how these strategies assist students in their learning process. The findings revealed three primary task differentiated strategies commonly utilized by the

teachers in this study: scaffolded writing tasks, collaborative writing, and individualized writing goals. The findings show that task differentiation strategies are beneficial in improving students' writing skills. The study recommends additional investigation into diverse forms of differentiation strategies for various language skills.

Keywords: ESL Teachers, Writing Skills, Scaffolded Writing Tasks, Collaborative Writing, Individualized Writing Goals

1.0 Introduction

Background of Study

This study aims to examine the use of task differentiation strategies in assisting students during writing tasks in mixed ability ESL classrooms. The purpose of this study is to identify the types of task differentiation strategies used during writing activities to assist students in their writing lessons and to investigate how the approaches used by teachers aid to improve students' performance in a mixed-ability ESL classroom. Hazita (2016) noted that while it is well-established that a Malaysian child begins receiving English language education at the age of 6, early English language education does not assure effective language learning, as exemplified in the Malaysian scenario. In the teaching and learning process, students may encounter a lot of difficulties to grasp the instructions given by the teacher. Depending on the students' cognitive and competence levels, performing tasks and activities in the classroom can be both simple and challenging. Students' inability to execute tasks provided by teachers in the classroom may be attributed to their varying proficiency levels, which include low, moderate, and high. According to Gregory and Chapman (2012), one-size-fits-all instruction is no longer applicable, especially in a mixed-ability classroom. The implementation of mixed-ability classrooms in all Malaysian secondary schools in 2019 demands the deployment of efficient teaching approaches. In accordance with that, differentiated strategies are a key tool for resolving issues that arise in the classroom when teaching and learning English to varied learners. In simpler terms, employing task differentiated strategies help students to improve their writing skills, and ultimately making the process of writing in English easier. The study will also contribute to a better learning environment for both students and teachers as it provides useful insights into the types of task differentiation strategies that teachers employ and how implementing these strategies can help to increase student motivation while improving students' acquisition of writing skills.

1.1 Problem Statement

The four primary English language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—must thus be mastered by students. Yet, one impediment to ESL students' success is their inability to write (Cole and Feng, 2015). Writing is an important skill in the production of language. The fact that it is employed in so many different areas makes it a crucial ability to acquire. Writing becomes a crucial aspect of learning a new language for ESL students. In this respect, Berman and Cheng (2010) reported that students find writing to be more challenging than listening and reading. Additionally, Ismail (2019) says that many Malaysian teachers struggle to teach writing skills owing to their students' diverse learning demands. More often than not, students in mixed-ability classrooms have difficulty comprehending and completing their tasks. Due to the varying competency levels, teachers will find it difficult to meet all of the students' demands at the same time (Asep, 2014). The teachers will thus need to employ various strategies depending on the students' level of writing ability. The differentiated

strategies will be employed in this study to overcome the students' issues concerning writing skill.

This study is done to answer the following question;

- 1.0 How does scaffolding assist students in the writing class?
- 2.0 How does collaborative writing assist students in the writing class?
- 3.0 How does individualized writing goals assist students in the writing class?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Task Differentiated Strategies

Task differentiated strategies, as defined in Strategy 2 of the English Language Scheme of Work Form 3 by the Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, Ministry of Education Malaysia (2017), refer to instructional techniques that involve providing students with tasks tailored to their individual proficiency levels. The aim of these strategies is to facilitate students' comprehension and achievement of targeted learning outcomes. Although students are presented with the same instructional content and objectives, the teacher must adeptly adapt and modify the tasks to accommodate individual students' unique needs and abilities. In addition, Bardy, Holzäpfel, and Leuders (2021) emphasize that one of the numerous approaches to implementing differentiated instruction involves assigning diverse tasks to students or providing varying levels of support to distinct student groups based on their proficiency levels. This adaptability is enabled by the teacher's adept provision of appropriate tasks tailored to individual students' needs commonly referred to as tiered tasks (Helmke, 2010). Tiering facilitates the simultaneous addressing of the language learning needs of students at varying proficiency levels (Rost, 2002). Essentially, tiering entails instructing the entire class with the same material while offering differentiated (tiered) tasks to cater to individual students' requirements. Furthermore, Anggraeny and Dewi (2023) define differentiated learning as the process of customizing education to suit the unique needs of individual students. Teachers derive their strategies from the content, process, and product dimensions to address student requirements. Differentiated learning aligns with Tomlinson's differentiated instruction (DI) concept from 1999 and 2001. Education professionals employ the term "differentiated instruction" to encompass a wide range of strategies and approaches. It denotes a teaching approach that considers students' needs, acknowledging their distinct learning preferences despite being of the same age group. In a differentiated classroom, commonalities among students are acknowledged and reinforced, while their diversity is consistently valued. Bender (2012) emphasizes that the varied learning styles of students highlight the importance of teachers integrating diverse learning activities into their classrooms. Teachers must recognise that students in a differentiated classroom have varying interests, learning styles, and levels of readiness for learning and take those variables into consideration while designing lessons (Coubergs et al., 2017). This method was in line with the social constructivism (Lev Vygotsky), multiple intelligences (Howard Gardner), and thinking styles (John Dewey) ideas, and Tomlinson advocated DL as what students are able and capable of doing (Burkett, 2013).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Differentiated instruction strategies are grounded in several prominent educational theories, each contributing unique perspectives to enhance teaching and learning experiences. One such theoretical foundation is derived from Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978). According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, ZPD refers to the range of tasks

that a learner can perform with the guidance and support of a knowledgeable other, such as a teacher or more experienced peer. In the context of differentiated instruction, educators identify and address individual students' ZPD, tailoring learning activities to match their developmental level, thereby fostering optimal learning outcomes. Furthermore, Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (2011) also plays a significant role in shaping differentiated instruction practices. Gardner proposed that individuals possess distinct types of intelligences, such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, among others. By recognizing and accommodating these diverse intelligences in the classroom, teachers can engage students in ways that resonate with their unique strengths and preferences, facilitating deeper understanding and learning retention. Additionally, the integration of Bloom's Taxonomy further enriches differentiated instruction. Bloom's Taxonomy categorizes cognitive learning objectives into six levels, starting from basic knowledge recall to higher-order thinking skills like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In a differentiated classroom, teachers can scaffold learning experiences across these cognitive levels, catering to learners' varying abilities and cognitive development. This allows students to progress through Bloom's Taxonomy at their own pace, promoting a more personalized and effective learning journey. By drawing upon these theoretical frameworks, differentiated instruction aims to create inclusive and student-centred learning environments that honour individual differences and foster academic growth. The application of these theories in practice empowers educators to design diverse learning opportunities, recognize students' unique learning needs, and scaffold instruction appropriately, ultimately cultivating a rich and dynamic educational experience for all learners (Magableh & Abdullah, 2021).

2.3.1 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Differentiated instruction strategies are grounded in several prominent educational theories, each contributing unique perspectives to enhance teaching and learning experiences. One such theoretical foundation is derived from Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978). According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, ZPD refers to the range of tasks that a learner can perform with the guidance and support of a knowledgeable other, such as a teacher or more experienced peer. It entails assisting learners as they work on tasks or activities that are just beyond their current level of competence but can be completed with assistance. This scaffolding assists learners in bridging the gap between what they can do on their own and what they can achieve with assistance.

2.3.2 Multiple Intelligence

The Gardner (2011) hypothesis that students learn through eight intelligences forms the foundation of the differentiated instruction approach. Gardner (1983) initially named seven intelligences, then added another to bring the total to eight. The original seven were logical or mathematical, verbal or linguistic, musical, visual or spatial, bodily or kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Gardner then added the naturalist. As teachers educate, they employ a variety of intelligences. not only one or two rather diverse learners learn in various ways through various intelligences (Gardner, 2011). While coping with tasks in differentiated learning, students rely on their greatest intelligences. Due to the fact that every student learns differently, teachers should adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate a wider range of learners (Morgan, 2014).

2.4 Mixed Ability Classrooms

A mixed ability classroom, according to Ur (2009), is one that includes several learner types with various levels of intelligence, backgrounds, and learning styles. Meanwhile, according to Chapman and King (2005), a mixed ability classroom, consists of students who have varying degrees of talents, interests, and learning capacities. Burkett (2013) provided an explanation of the wide range of learners by pointing out that students in the same class do not learn at the same rate, using the same methods, behaving in the same ways, or showing the same interests. As a result, teachers must make plans and modifications in order to support each student's growth. In addition, Kaur (2010) mentioned that teachers are the most important component in connecting with their students and that they should be aware of the distinctions amongst the learners in her study on teaching mixed-ability classes. She continued by saying that the learning and capabilities of any two students could never be the same. Even though it offers certain opportunities, teaching mixed-ability classes is one of the most demanding responsibilities. Bhandari (2020) claims that a teacher who lacks professional competency and experience will be unable to modify any type of teaching or learning activity to suit advanced, average, or below average learners. Owing to the wide range of students' skills and proficiencies, addressing the right teaching styles to match to the students' capabilities and learning is difficult at times. Malaysian classrooms frequently comprise students of various intellectual backgrounds, and the country's increasing student diversity need equitable access to robust educational opportunities. Taking this into consideration, teachers must consequently construct lesson and evaluation plans which can accommodate to a variety of students' learning preferences. Having said that, catering to learners' variety is one of the important themes in Malaysia's recent educational reform initiatives, which include the establishment of the School Transformation 2025 Program (TS25) in 2015.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative study research method. In this study, the researcher focuses on ESL teachers, aiming to gain insights into their utilization of task differentiated strategies in a mixed-ability classroom, particularly during writing activities. Utilizing interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the study delves into the context, participants, and activities of interest. The qualitative research design aligns with the research objectives, enabling inductive analysis of the data to uncover recurring patterns and common themes that transcend the information gathered. Four ESL teachers from various public secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur have been chosen to participate in order to help supply the data required for the completion of this research. For the sake of anonymity, each teacher was assigned a pseudonym. During the duration of the study, the participants will be referred to as Teachers A, B, C, and D. The participants have a bachelor's degree in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) and are fluent in English, which makes data collection procedure more efficient and useful. The responses of the participants are transcribed again in Microsoft Word. Following several evaluations of the post-observation transcription, an analysis is performed to look for evidence of a change in participants' responses as a result of their involvement in the classroom observations. Several questions in the post-observation interviews were the same or comparable to those in the initial interview. The responses to each participant's interview will be evaluated several times in order to conduct the cross-case interview analysis. Also, the analysis of various instructional resources given by the participants will also be incorporated in the within-case analysis. Cross-case analysis of

instructional materials will comprise numerous reviews of all teaching materials using the categories identified by the researcher. The codes used to construct themes during cross case analysis were utilised to analyse the teaching materials.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Scaffolded Writing Tasks

The findings of the study provide evidence that scaffolded writing tasks emerged as the prevailing type of task differentiated strategy employed by all four participating teachers. Scaffolded writing tasks involve breaking down the writing process into manageable steps and providing support at each stage to assist learners in developing their writing skills. This approach acknowledges the varying proficiency levels within a mixed-ability ESL classroom and aims to cater to the diverse needs of students. The teachers consistently expressed the effectiveness of implementing scaffolded writing tasks in their classrooms as a means to facilitate the development of writing skills. By employing this strategy, they aimed to address the diverse needs and abilities of their students, ensuring that each student receives the necessary support to progress in their writing proficiency. In scaffolded writing tasks, beginners are often introduced to guided sentence frames or templates that offer a structured framework for organizing their thoughts and formulating coherent sentences. These sentence frames serve as a scaffold, providing support and guidance as students gradually gain confidence and proficiency in writing. While more advanced students can gradually transition towards more independent writing, with reduced reliance on sentence frames or templates. The teachers in this study had varying responses to how they have implemented scaffolded writing tasks in their classrooms. The subsequent excerpts are derived from the interviews conducted with the teachers, illustrating their implementation of this strategy during writing activities:

Teacher A

“Okay, like for writing activities, the one that I usually do is umm...the weak students they will have to arrange sentences only, while the intermediate, they will be given templates, so usually they need to fill in the blanks, while the higher level of proficiency students, they will write the full essay by themselves.”

(Excerpt 1)

Teacher B

“...because for writing lesson, for example when the students need to write a short paragraph or an essay about a topic...I can provide points to those who are really poor, so they will make use of the points, to construct the sentences. For the intermediate, I will usually ask them to construct longer sentences, like...ask them to incorporate, for example sentence connectors to help them construct more compound and complex sentences...and then for the good ones, they will be given...like a single instruction on what and how they need to write about the topic. They need to come up with their own points.”

(Excerpt 2)

“I have to make sure that they don't know that I'm giving them differentiated tasks and it's because of their proficiency, so I need to make sure it's neutral. So, what I normally do is that I would label them. I will colour code them, and I will make them choose colours. But within the colours, I already presume what they're going to choose. So,

when they pick the colour, they would get a task. So, the tasks are all different colours right, and within the colours, I already have different levels. So, let's say green, so within the green, I already have the hard ones, the intermediate ones and the easy ones. So, let's say when the poor students choose green colour, I will give them the easy one. Because only I know what's within my hand. So, that's one way I normally do. And most of the times, within the task, for the easy ones, I will give them sentence...how do I say...they will just have to filling the gaps. And then the middle one, normally I will provide them with points. For their task is to...connect the sentences. Or they need to rearrange the sentences. And then, for those who are good, normally I will just give them some hints of what they could write about. Not exactly solid points, but just hints. Then they would brainstorm, then they can start writing. So that's one thing I normally do because I prefer my students to write by themselves."

(Excerpt 3)

Teacher C

"For my class, okay there are a few students, I know this group of students...I have to give them scaffolded writing like give them prompts, all these clues, guided work, and they just have to like combine the words, construct the sentences. And then another group of students, who are a little bit proficient, in the medium range...I'll just give them a few main points, so that they can expand their ideas from that, and another group of students they just get the topic and some gist of it. Just that maybe one sentence of what they can write about the topic. And then they go about expanding their ideas."

(Excerpt 4)

Teacher D

"I have this experience with my Form 1 students, it is a mixed ability class, okay...I would assign the lower proficiency students with the tasks that require them to only fill in the blanks of a reading text. So, there will be just a basic writing. However, for the more advanced students, I would give them a topic and they would do the writing by themselves."

(Excerpt 5)

"There's this one in which the lower proficiency students only have to do the mind maps...and they only need to write the points for an essay, and for the intermediate ones, usually I will give them sentences and they need to rearrange, and they also need to construct and combine the sentences. For higher proficiency ones, I would give them the starter of the sentences and they need to continue by writing the whole essay."

(Excerpt 6)

The insights gathered from the interviews with the teachers shed light on the implementation of scaffolded writing tasks as a prominent task differentiated strategy in the context of writing activities within the classroom. It is evident that the teachers collectively recognize the significance of scaffolded writing tasks and acknowledge its effectiveness in facilitating the writing process for their students. These teachers adopt a consistent method by offering similar assisted writing tasks or prompts to distinct groups of students. For students at the beginner level, the prompts are structured to be more straightforward and concrete, allowing them to focus on expressing their ideas and practicing basic language structures. This approach provides a solid foundation for their writing skills and nurtures their confidence in their abilities. Conversely, advanced

students are presented with open-ended or thought-provoking prompts that stimulate their critical thinking skills and encourage exploration of more nuanced perspectives. These prompts challenge their abilities and foster higher-order thinking, empowering them to advance their writing skills and cultivate a sophisticated understanding of the subject matter.

4.2 Collaborative Writing

The study's findings illuminate collaborative writing as a prominent form of task differentiated strategy, consistently utilized by three participating teachers in this study for facilitating writing activities. Collaborative writing entails the deliberate assignment of group-based writing projects, where students of diverse proficiency levels. Within this collaborative framework, students with beginner-level proficiency are encouraged to actively contribute their ideas, thoughts, and perspectives, thus promoting inclusivity and engagement. Simultaneously, advanced students assume the role of mentors, aiding their peers with tasks related to organization, coherence, and language refinement. This reciprocal exchange of knowledge not only strengthens the learners' writing skills but also cultivates a positive atmosphere of collective learning, where students feel encouraged and motivated to improve together. By implementing collaborative writing, teachers effectively harness the potential of diverse talents and skill sets present within the classroom, optimizing the learning outcomes for all students involved. The following interview excerpts highlight how teachers implemented the collaborative writing strategy during writing activities;

Teacher A

"...I did like mentor mentee, where I put the students with mixed ability in small groups. So...the higher achiever will help the weaker students in competing the tasks. And the weaker students could learn and share their ideas. For example, if I give them a task where they need to write a short paragraph or brainstorming ideas on a certain topic, the low achiever usually have a lot of ideas in their mind, but sometimes they couldn't write them well, so the higher achiever usually will do the writing. Basically, umm...they contribute in different ways even though they are working on the same task."

(Excerpt 11)

Teacher B

"...I did one umm...about writing article on Malaysian traditional clothing, so what I did is that, I made them to sit in groups. So, within groups, I gave them points, and I also gave them sentence structures. So, this is based on the individual capabilities. So, within the group, they have students with different levels of proficiency. And I told them they cannot reveal what they had. But at the end of the day, they had to finish the work. So those who are really good, they have the points. Those who are intermediate, they have the sentence structures. And those who are really poor, they just need to fill in the gaps. So, since they were in a group, now they have to discuss together and come up with one article. So, for the good ones, they have the points, but they don't have the sentences. So, they will have to initiate the conversation. But the poor ones, they already have everything. They just need to fill in the gaps. So, they need to have a good discussion among the group members to get the work done. Since, everyone didn't know what the others had in their hands. So, it was really

interesting because there was this one group that...the boy just needed to fill in the gaps. Since I told them they cannot reveal, if they revealed, I would take back whatever I had given them, and they have to do everything by themselves. So that boy was really struggling to tell his group members that he already had all the materials so why not you just listen to me and we are basically done with the work. But the good one, he was coming with all the points that were related to the topic, explaining oh let's write about tradition clothing, let's talk about Iban. But then, within the poor ones, they did not have anything to do with Iban, they only had the Malay, Chinese and Indian traditional clothing. So, they were like...urrrr...umm. So, there's a gap there. But finally, when they work together, contributing to group work in their own ways, they were able to complete the task. I found it really interesting."

(Excerpt 12)

Teacher C

"And one class, how I conducted task differentiated strategy was, it was the most, I would say the most low proficiency class that I handle in my teaching experience...I gave them the topic, and I drew the mind map of what points do they need and I asked them to draw back in A3 paper, I put them into groups of five, and I asked them to just expand the ideas. So, one in a group I gave five main points, so the topic is about holiday trip. So, it's all about what, when, where, like I used 5W1H that technique in a class, and I asked each one of them in the group to expand the idea. So, all five in the group will have to work together and complete the task... So, the high proficiency level could contribute their ideas as well as help the intermediate and lower proficient ones. And the low achievers also could learn from their peers."

(Excerpt 13)

The analysis of the interview excerpts revealed fascinating insights into the varied approaches adopted by the teachers when incorporating collaborative writing in their mixed-ability classrooms. While each teacher showcased their distinct instructional styles, the underlying objective of promoting collaborative group work and harnessing the collective abilities of students remained constant. In Excerpt 10, Teacher A's implementation of collaborative writing exhibited a mentor-mentee framework, wherein more proficient students assumed the role of mentors while working with their low-proficiency peers. It is worth noting that this mentor-mentee approach within collaborative writing serves as a mutual learning experience for both parties involved. While the low-proficiency students gain valuable insights and support from their more proficient peers, the mentors, in turn, solidify their own understanding of the writing process by actively engaging with and assisting their peers. Teacher B preferred to organize his students into small groups, ideally consisting of three members with varying levels of proficiency. This collaborative writing approach, as explained by Teacher B, bears some resemblance to his previous implementation of scaffolded writing tasks, wherein students were provided with differentiated prompts based on their proficiency levels. Teacher C demonstrates her approach to collaborative writing in a mixed ability classroom, particularly focusing on the majority of low proficient students. With the intention of fostering an inclusive learning environment, Teacher C organizes the students into larger groups consisting of five members. Within these groups, students are encouraged to work together and actively participate in generating main points for a given topic. Teacher C encourages students to consider the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How aspects of the topic, enabling them to explore various angles and perspectives. By employing this

approach, Teacher C provides her students with a sense of freedom and autonomy in expressing their ideas and expanding upon them.

4.3 Individualized Writing Goals

The findings of the study revealed another interesting type of task differentiated strategy which is the individualized writing goals. In the context of tasks differentiated strategies, individualized writing goals refer to the practice of establishing specific objectives for each student that are tailored to their proficiency level and learning needs. By customizing writing goals, teachers can effectively address the diverse abilities and areas of growth among students, promoting meaningful progress in their writing skills. The process begins by assessing the proficiency level of each student, taking into account their current writing abilities and linguistic competence. Based on this assessment, individual writing goals are formulated to provide students with clear targets that are both challenging and attainable. For instance, a beginner-level student may have a goal of writing a simple paragraph with correct sentence structure. This goal focuses on developing foundational writing skills, such as sentence construction, grammar usage, and coherence within a short composition. Conversely, an advanced-level student may have a more ambitious writing goal, such as crafting a well-developed essay with clear organization and supporting evidence. To support students in working towards their individualized writing goals, ongoing feedback and guidance are crucial. Teachers provide continuous assessment and constructive feedback, highlighting areas of improvement and offering specific strategies for growth. The following excerpts are derived from the interview, shedding light on the implementation of individualized writing goals in Teacher B's classroom.

Teacher B

“and at the same time if I may say as well, I also give them writing goals. Like I said for the proficient ones, the goal for them is to disturb, it’s not the one to be finishing the task but to be disturbing the group. So, it’s more to individual writing goals. Some of them, for example, they mixed up the points. So, instead of saying “this one should come first, oh actually this one should come first”. So, instead of describing what the bird looks like, because they were writing on Dodo bird, so instead of saying what the bird looks like, they straight away talked about how it went endangered or how it went extinct in the first place. So, you know...they mix the coherence of the ideas. Some of them, they used present tense you know things like that.”

(Excerpt 15)

“So, from that, they still did their work, they enjoyed it and to me, that’s what matters the most in writing lesson because normally for writing lesson, it can be the same, boring and kind of still intimidating for some students. so, I don’t want that to happen, so I changed it a bit and made them play the game but at the same time I’m still differentiating them.”

(Excerpt 16)

Teacher B's implementation of individualized writing goals and differentiated roles within the writing activity showcased a comprehensive approach to supporting students' needs and fostering active participation. By grouping students with different proficiency levels and assigning them specific tasks and roles, Teacher B effectively tailored the writing activity to meet the individual capabilities of each student. This approach not only acknowledged the diverse needs of the students but also aimed to challenge and engage them in the writing

process. In alignment with the provided excerpts, Teacher B's focus on individualized writing goals allowed for targeted support and guidance for each student. Overall, the implementation of individualized writing goals within the context of task differentiation serves as a powerful pedagogical tool to address the varying proficiency levels among students. The careful consideration of each student's progress and capabilities allows for the creation of a learning environment that supports their individual needs and promotes growth in their writing skills.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the collected data revealed that Teacher A, B, C, and D primarily incorporated three distinct task differentiated strategies in their classrooms. The first strategy observed was scaffolded writing tasks, where the teachers broke down the writing process into manageable steps and provided support at each stage. The findings of this study indicate that the approach of scaffolded writing tasks is the predominant strategy employed by the teachers in this research. This approach recognized the varying proficiency levels within the mixed-ability ESL classrooms and aimed to cater to the diverse needs of the students. In scaffolded writing tasks, teachers acknowledge the varying abilities within the classroom and aim to cater to the specific needs of each student. By utilizing scaffolded writing tasks, teachers can differentiate the level of support and complexity of the writing tasks based on students' proficiency levels. Beginners can benefit from explicit guidance and support, while more advanced students can gradually transition towards more independent writing with reduced reliance on sentence frames. Additionally, the implementation of differentiated prompts is crucial and tailored to students' individual proficiency levels, providing them with appropriate challenges and opportunities for growth. Through scaffolded writing tasks, teachers can effectively guide students in developing their writing skills while accommodating the varying proficiency levels within the mixed-ability ESL classroom. Another significant finding of this study pertains to the utilization of collaborative writing as a task differentiated strategy in the ESL classrooms. Collaborative writing involved assigning writing tasks that required students to work together in small groups or pairs. This approach facilitated the sharing of ideas, discussions on different perspectives, and the provision of feedback among students, thereby creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment. By working collaboratively, students were exposed to a range of writing abilities, which encouraged them to learn from their peers and expand their own writing skills. The third task differentiated strategy identified was individualized writing goals. One of the key benefits of individualized writing goals is that they provide students with a clear sense of direction and purpose in their writing tasks. Rather than engaging in generic assignments, students are given specific objectives that are aligned with their current writing abilities and learning goals. This targeted approach allows students to understand their areas of strength and areas that require improvement and helps them to focus their efforts accordingly. By having a concrete goal to work towards, students are more motivated and engaged in the writing process, as they have a clear understanding of what they need to achieve. Furthermore, individualized writing goals allow students to work at their own pace and progress according to their individual capabilities.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical implications derived from the findings and discussions of this study underscore the significant role of task differentiated strategies in enhancing students' overall performance, specifically in writing activities. The exploration of task differentiated strategies implemented by teachers in mixed ability ESL classrooms has revealed significant variations in the adoption and application of this approach. This study has highlighted the importance of tailoring instructional methods to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly in the context of writing activities. The findings demonstrate that teachers employ different strategies, such as scaffolded writing tasks, collaborative writing, and individualized writing goals, to create a learning environment that caters to students with varying proficiency levels.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

This research has shed light on the implementation of task differentiation strategies and their positive impact on enhancing students' writing skills development. However, there are several areas that warrant further investigation to expand our understanding of differentiation strategies and their application in ESL classrooms. Firstly, future research can explore other forms of differentiation strategies beyond task differentiation. While this study focused specifically on task differentiation, there are seven other differentiated strategies outlined in the English Language Scheme of Work (SOW) for secondary school students proposed by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Investigating the implementation and effectiveness of these different strategies in ESL classrooms would provide valuable insights into their potential benefits and challenges.

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