Integrating Alternative Assessment with Differentiated Instruction: Insights from a University-Level Setting

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Abstract: Alternative assessment aims to enhance the practicality and authenticity of educational evaluation by shifting from traditional testing to more dynamic and holistic approaches. However, the potency of this assessment still requires further elaboration on differentiated instruction context. To address this, a qualitative case study examined the impact of alternative assessment, specifically video projects, in such inclusive educational settings. The study involved 15 participants who had undergone an English intensive program at the university level. Data were collected through online open-ended questionnaires designed to capture cognitive, affective, and conative impacts. The findings reveal that alternative assessment in differentiated video projects aligned with students' interests and abilities significantly enhances students' understanding, motivation, and active learning behaviors. The study also identified challenges, including difficulties with independent project execution and intrinsic motivation barriers. Overall, the study suggests that differentiated video projects can enhance engagement, motivation, and active learning when implemented thoughtfully and with adequate support.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluating learning progress based on specific objectives is known as assessment, which encompasses various forms, including alternative assessments. Alternative assessment emphasizes practicality and authenticity, allowing students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-life scenarios (Ajjawi et al., 2024). Unlike traditional assessment methods that often rely on standardized tests and rote memorization, alternative assessments provide a more comprehensive evaluation of a student's abilities by focusing on their performance in meaningful, contextualized tasks. This approach not only enhances the relevance of the learning experience but also prepares students for real-world challenges by encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of theoretical concepts in practical situations (Kong & Yuen, 2022).

Yusop et al. (2022)present a variety of alternative assessment methods to enhance learning and evaluation. These include fieldwork, where teachers carefully select samples to manage the volume of work to be checked; posters, which involve group tasks to help students grasp complex content and the relationships between components; and

presentations, aimed at improving students' oral communication skills. Additionally, article reviews promote critical, analytical, and evaluative thinking, while concept maps help students identify key points and their interconnections within a system. Role-play allows students to assume the roles of specific characters in defined situations, offering a practical learning experience. Projects involve authentic and complex tasks, and portfolios enable students to compile evidence of their achievements. Demir (2021) adds self-assessment, peer assessment, and computer-assisted learning as parts of alternative assessment. These diverse assessment methods cater to different learning styles and promote a comprehensive understanding of the material.

Alternative assessment has been shown to significantly enhance university students' learning outcomes (Sokhanvar et al., 2021). By enabling students to apply their knowledge and skills in realistic contexts, this form of assessment fosters greater learning motivation and satisfaction, leading to more active engagement in the learning process (Phongsirikul, 2018). Additionally, alternative assessment can develop crucial cognitive skills, including self-reflection, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Fitriyah, 2021). Based on earlier research findings, alternative assessment was advantageous for learning. With the potential of alternative assessment to improve teaching quality and learning English material, developing and using it in English differentiated instruction is essential.

Differentiated instruction has taken a spotlight in the present Indonesian educational framework. This approach involves catering to students' diverse needs based on their interests, readiness, and learning profiles through the adaptation of curricular elements in the areas of content, process, and product (Ismail, 2019; Kotob & Arnouss, 2019; Tomlinson, 2017). Various studies, including those by Idamayanti et al. (2022) and Naka (2017), suggest that differentiated instruction positively influences students' learning outcomes. By aligning with the teacher's lesson plan, it enhances students' motivation and academic achievements. Teachers, on the other hand, also can use differentiated learning to facilitate meaningful learning experiences within classrooms characterized by diverse student traits, learning styles, and prior knowledge (Mirawati et al., 2022; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010) highlight that adapting differentiated instruction entails modifying four key components, including the product. These products are essential for evaluating students' thorough understanding and practical application of knowledge and skills by adjusting the assessment forms to align with students' abilities, interests, or readiness. When modifying the product or assessment, teachers can use alternative assessments to not only gauge students' learning outcomes but also to engage them actively in the learning process (Brown, 2021). This method ensures that assessments are meaningful and tailored to each student's unique learning path, fostering a more personalized and effective educational experience.

To determine the effectiveness of implementing alternative assessments in a differentiated instruction setting, one can look at students' insights throughout the learning process. Getie (2020) states that students' insights reflect their social reactions to external influences or stimuli. Recognizing and comprehending these responses in educational activities are essential for educators, as emphasized by Ajjawi et al. (2020). Amir (2015) categorizes insights into cognitive, affective, and conative. Cognitive views pertain to an individual's knowledge, skills, and information about a subject, emerging when there is a

change in understanding or insight. Affective views relate to emotions, attitudes, and judgments towards something, manifesting when there is a change in what the audience appreciates or likes. Conative views involve actual behavior, including actions or habits. By assessing these varied types of responses, educators can gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of alternative assessments on student learning.

There have been several previous studies in the area of students' insights into alternative assessment contexts, such as by Phongsirikul (2018), who showed that students' positive attitudes towards alternative assessment stem from experiencing remarkable learning outcomes. In addition to this idea, Juma & Patel (2024) stated that alternative assessments can be used to assess not just knowledge, but also skills and attitudes, which are important components of a well-rounded education. Kong & Yuen (2022) found that while students generally viewed alternative assessment favorably as an authentic task fostering higher-level thinking skills, its effectiveness was compromised by inadequate support and repetitive assessment formats. This is in line with Fajarsari (2016), who found that alternative assessments can pose challenges for students who lack proficiency or struggle to articulate their ideas across various domains.

In the university-level setting, one lecturer has implemented alternative assessment practices by assigning an individual video project that is differentiated according to each student's personal interests. For instance, students interested in sports create video projects related to sports, while those interested in professions focus on occupational themes. This approach is intended to boost motivation by aligning the assessment with each student's passions and strengths, potentially making the learning experience more meaningful and relevant. However, there is a lack of empirical research on students' insights and experiences regarding using such differentiated video project assessments, particularly in English language learning contexts. This gap in research underscores the need to understand how students perceive differentiated video project assessments in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses.

Consequently, this study aims to explore students' views and experiences with differentiated video project assessments in an English intensive program at the university level. By examining students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral insights into this assessment form, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence on the benefits and challenges of differentiated alternative assessments, addressing a gap in existing research on personalized learning within English language instruction.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a case study approach to explore the insights of first-year EFL students on a differentiated video project assessment. This method is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences and viewpoints within a specific context. The study involves 15 first-year EFL students who have participated in an English intensive program and have experience in individual video projects as an alternative assessment designed based on their interests at the university level. Each participant will provide informed consent forms, which will ensure the confidentiality

of their personal information through the use of pseudonyms, and their participation in the study will be entirely voluntary

Data collection was conducted using an online questionnaire comprising eight open-ended questions. These questions were carefully designed and divided into three sections to capture the cognitive, affective, and conative insights of the students, as mentioned by Amir (2015). This structure allows for a comprehensive understanding of their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors related to the differentiated video project assessment. Researchers visited participants in the class and distributed the online questionnaires. Before filling out the questionnaire, necessary explanations were provided to the students.

The data analysis process was conducted in several stages to ensure thorough and accurate interpretation. Initially, the responses from the open-ended questionnaires were translated into English. Following this, key terms and themes were identified within the responses based on cognitive, affective, and conative responses, aligned with Amir (2015) framework to ensure a systematic and comprehensive analysis. These indicators guided the interpretation of the students' responses and helped clarify how differentiated video projects impacted their learning experiences. These critical elements were then classified according to the concepts that emerged, providing a structured framework for analysis. The classified data were meticulously explained and analyzed to uncover patterns and insights. Finally, the findings will be carefully examined and presented coherently, emphasizing key themes supported by illustrative quotes or excerpts from the open-ended questionnaire.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data for this study were obtained from students' insights through online open-ended questionnaires regarding the use of video projects as an alternative assessment designed based on their interests. The student responses measured in this study encompassed three main variables: cognitive, affective, and conative, as mentioned by Amir (2015). The cognitive responses assessed the students' understanding and intellectual engagement with the differentiated video projects. The affective responses evaluated their emotional reactions, levels of interest, and motivation. Finally, the conative responses examined their behavioral intentions and actions related to the use of differentiated video projects.

Students' Insights on Cognitive Variables

The cognitive variables that are closely related to knowledge, skills, and information are explored in this part. The finding indicates that students believe that the use of differentiated video projects based on their interests can help them to understand the materials, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

> *"Yes, it is because video project-based assessments that match my interests and abilities make the material more interesting and relevant to me". (ND-01)*

This excerpt highlights the positive impact of interest-aligned video projects on cognitive engagement. The student notes that when assessments are tailored to their interests and abilities, the material becomes more engaging and relevant. This finding suggests that differentiated video projects not only capture the students' attention but also

facilitate a deeper understanding of the content. Another student also gave similar responses, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

> *"It is interesting and makes it easier for me to understand the learning material". (ANC-01)*

The excerpt reinforces the idea that the project is not only interesting but also helpful in understanding the learning material more easily. This indicates that when educational assessments are aligned with student's personal interests, they become more engaging and foster a deeper level of interest. When students find the interesting assessment relevant to their own experiences and passions, they are more likely to invest time and effort into their learning, leading to improved cognitive outcomes.

On the clarity of learning instructions and information indicators, the analysis of students' insights on the use of differentiated video projects based on their interests shows that students are easy to use/operate in learning, as reflected in the following excerpt.

> *"Yes, it is more practical and easy to assess my understanding toward the materials that I
> just learned because there are clear instructions on what I should do". (MFJ-02)*

The excerpt highlights the importance of clear instructions in enhancing the usability and effectiveness of differentiated video projects in learning. The student acknowledges that the clarity of instructions makes it easier to assess their understanding of the materials. This suggests that well-defined guidelines and prompts provided in the video projects contribute to a more streamlined and efficient assessment process. In contrast, the excerpt AN-02 from the student presents a different perspective.

> *"It is not easy because carrying out activities or projects like this requires us to determine in
> advance what we will do in the activity". (AN-02)*

The excerpt reflects a perspective that highlights the challenges associated with executing activities or projects like differentiated video projects. The student expresses that such assessments are not easy because they necessitate thorough preparation and planning beforehand. This interpretation suggests that students perceive these projects as requiring significant forethought and organization. It also highlights the need for educators to provide students with sufficient guidance and support in preparing for and navigating through such activities to enhance their learning experiences and outcomes.

Students' Insights on Affective Variables

The affective variables that are closely related to conditions when students face something using emotions such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasm, motivation, and attitudes are explored in this part. The finding indicates that students believe that the use of differentiated video projects based on their interests can help them to learn independently, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

> *"Yes, because I have to complete the assessment at my own pace". (AP-03)*
> *"Yes, because assessments that match my interests and abilities make me more motivated
> and interested in learning independently". (ND-03)*

The excerpts highlight the positive impact of interest-based video projects on their ability to learn independently. AP-03 emphasizes the value of self-paced learning, suggesting that being able to complete assessments at their own pace fosters a sense of autonomy and personal responsibility in their learning process. This implies that such projects can accommodate different learning speeds and styles, allowing students to take the time they need to fully grasp the material without feeling rushed. ND-03 underscores the project helps her to take initiative and manage their own learning, fostering a greater sense of independence. By providing students with the opportunity to learn at their own pace and in areas of personal interest, these projects support the development of independent learning skills, which are crucial for lifelong learning and academic success. However, the excerpt ANC-03 from the student offers an alternative viewpoint.

> *"No, it does not help me to work independently because I need friends to discuss with".*
> *(ND-03)*

The excerpt highlights a contrasting perspective on the use of differentiated video projects in fostering independent learning. This student indicates that these projects do not facilitate independent work for the student because the student relies on peer discussions. The student may find it challenging to work independently without the opportunity to exchange ideas and receive feedback from their peers. This perspective underscores the importance of considering individual differences in learning preferences while some students thrive with self-directed tasks, others may benefit more from a learning environment that incorporates collaborative elements.

In addition to these results, students' insights analysis shows that the use of differentiated video projects can increase student motivation in learning, as reflected in the following excerpt.

> *"That's right because with this project I am more interested in direct practice and direct use*
> *of what I have learned previously". (AN-04)*

The excerpt highlights the motivational benefits of differentiated video projects. The student expresses that these projects enhance their interest by allowing for direct practice and application of previously learned material. This suggests that practical, hands-on activities can significantly boost student engagement and enthusiasm for learning. The opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical context makes the learning experience more dynamic and relevant, which in turn fosters a deeper interest and motivation. The excerpt AP-04, on the other hand, performs different insights, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

> *"No, because my motivation in learning depends on myself, it does not come from the*
> *learning system". (AN-04)*

The excerpt provides a contrasting viewpoint on the influence of differentiated video projects on student motivation. This student asserts that their motivation to learn is intrinsic and not influenced by the learning system or the specific projects assigned. This indicates that while some students may find external factors like differentiated video projects motivating, others rely primarily on internal motivation. The student's response suggests that

personal drive and self-motivation are key factors in their engagement and learning process, rather than the design or nature of the assessment tasks.

The results of the analysis of student responses to the use of differentiated video projects on the attractiveness indicator show that students are more interested and do not feel bored in learning, as reflected in the following excerpt.

> *"Facilitating practical assessment that is in line with the interest makes me more interested and the assessment is not boring". (AB-05)*

The excerpt shows the positive impact of interest-aligned practical assessments on student engagement. The student notes that when assessments are tailored to their personal interests, they become more captivating and less monotonous. This suggests that differentiated video projects, which allow students to explore topics they are passionate about, can significantly enhance the attractiveness of learning activities. By making the learning process more relevant and enjoyable, these projects help maintain student interest and prevent boredom.

On the curiosity indicator, the analysis of student perspective results indicates that students have a sense of curiosity after having differentiated video projects with consideration, as reflected in the following excerpt.

> *"Yes, with this project, I will be able to study everything that interests me more deeply and will make me want to learn more about it". (AN-06)*

The excerpt provides the stimulating effect of differentiated video projects on student curiosity. The student expresses that the project enables them to delve deeper into subjects that interest them, which in turn sparks a desire to learn more. This suggests that when students are allowed to explore topics of personal interest through tailored assessments, it fosters a deeper intellectual engagement and a proactive attitude toward learning.

Students' Insights on Conative Variables

This section explores the conative variables, which are closely related to responses involving actual behavior, including actions and habits. The finding indicates that students believe that the use of differentiated video projects based on their interests can help to increase student activity in learning, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

> *"That's right because I have to study and explore the topic or thing that I will do in my project, I am required and encouraged to always actively ask questions about how and whether the results I get are in accordance with the existing ones". (AN-07)*

The excerpt highlights how differentiated video projects can enhance student activity and engagement in learning. The student notes that these projects require them to study and explore their chosen topics in depth, which encourages continuous inquiry and active participation. This implies that interest-based projects motivate students to take a more hands-on approach to their learning, prompting them to ask questions and seek validation of their findings.

On the tendency of students indicator, the results of student insights analysis show that students tend and are inspired to use differentiated video projects based on their interests in assessment, as reflected in the following response.

> *"Yes, the assessment implementation is good, interesting, and useful. So, I will be happy if I can be assessed by using a video project based on my interest". (NA-08)*

The excerpt underscores students' positive reception of differentiated video projects tailored to their interests. The student appreciates the implementation of these assessments, finding them engaging, beneficial, and enjoyable. This indicates that personalized video projects not only capture students' interest but also motivate them to participate in the assessment process. The preference for interest-based projects suggests that such assessments can inspire greater enthusiasm and willingness to engage with the material, leading to a more positive and effective learning experience. However, not all students responded positively to the conative demands of differentiated video projects, as illustrated in the following contrasting excerpt.

> *"I don't really enjoy doing video projects because they feel repetitive, and sometimes I'm not sure if they actually help me learn more. It can be hard to come up with ideas or stay motivated to work on the project, especially if there's not enough guidance." (RA-04)*

This excerpt highlights a student's frustration with the differentiated video project assessment, noting that the repetitive nature and lack of direction can hinder their motivation and engagement. This student indicates that, despite the interest-based nature of the project, the format itself may not always lead to increased activity or deeper learning. The response suggests that without sufficient guidance and variation, some students may find it challenging to stay engaged and see the project's relevance to their overall learning, which could reduce the intended benefits of differentiated assessments.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the use of alternative assessments in the form of differentiated video projects based on students' interests significantly enhances various aspects of their learning experience. These results align with previous research that highlights the benefits of personalized and interest-based learning approaches. According to Tomlinson & Imbeau (2010), differentiated instruction that considers students' individual interests and learning profiles can lead to increased engagement and improved academic outcomes, including in the assessment process. Similarly, other studies such as Kusurkar et al. (2023) and Kurtz et al. (2019) found that if students perceive an assessment to be appropriate and teaching to be empathic, motivating, understandable, and helpful, they are more likely to adopt a deep approach to learning.

The cognitive benefits observed in this study are consistent with the findings of Amir (2015), which emphasize that tailored instructional methods can deepen students' understanding and intellectual engagement. Students in the current study reported that differentiated video projects helped them grasp the learning material more effectively, as the projects made the content more relevant and interesting to them. This supports the notion that when learning activities are designed to be meaningful and relevant to students, they are

more likely to invest effort and achieve better comprehension (Riza et al., 2024). Furthermore, research by Zhang & Ma (2023) highlights that students' understanding improves when they can connect new information to their existing knowledge base, a process facilitated by interest-based projects. Additionally, creating video projects engages students in various cognitive processes like planning, researching, scripting, and editing. This multifaceted approach enhances content comprehension and fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills. According to Juma & Patel (2024) and Fitriyah (2021) state that Alternative assessment can also enhance students' cognitive skills such as self-reflection, creativity, and problem-solving.

From an affective perspective, the study revealed that differentiated video projects also positively impact students' emotional responses to learning. Saputri et al. (2023) found that aligning activities with students' interests boosts intrinsic motivation and engagement. The students in this study reported that the ability to choose topics based on their interests made the assessments more enjoyable and less monotonous. This reinforces the idea that student choice is a powerful tool for enhancing affective engagement, leading to more meaningful and personalized learning experiences. Moreover, studies by Maguire et al. (2017) have shown that students' emotional engagement is a significant predictor of academic success. The positive emotional responses observed in this study suggest that differentiated video projects not only enhance interest and motivation but also contribute to a deeper emotional connection to the learning material. This emotional engagement can lead to increased persistence, effort, and overall academic performance, as students are more likely to be committed to tasks that they find enjoyable and relevant (Shernoff et al., 2016). Additionally, student's engagement in the assessment is determined by the motivational value of the task and its manageability, which is reinforced when assessments apply knowledge to real-world scenarios (Singh et al., 2022).

In terms of conative variables, differentiated video projects promote active learning behaviors and habits. Students reported that these projects encouraged deeper exploration of topics and active questioning. Research on active learning, such as by Alqasa & Afaneh (2022) and Jeumpa & Harahap (2023), state that applying acquired knowledge and skills in realistic circumstances promotes students' learning determination and satisfaction, and students thus participate more actively in their learning. In the context of differentiated video projects as alternative assessments, it would allow them to acquire practical real-world skills, and they engaged more actively in the task (Kong & Yuen, 2022). Furthermore, interest-driven activities, highlighted by Li et al. (2024), sustain curiosity and engagement, leading to deeper interaction with the material and a desire to learn more.

Despite the benefits, several challenges were noted in implementing differentiated video projects. Some students struggled with independent work, indicating a need for adequate support and clear instructions (Fox et al., 2017). For instance, clarifying the grading system can reduce uncertainty and anxiety, improving performance (Litchfield & Dempsey, 2015). Additionally, van Wyk (2017) found that constructive feedback from teachers helped students in alternative assessments. This suggests that while differentiated projects promote independence, educators must provide enough guidance to help students through the initial stages. Moreover, while many students engage well with interest-based projects, some may

lack the intrinsic motivation for deep engagement, highlighting the need for a balance of extrinsic motivators and structured guidance (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Finally, students who prefer collaborative learning may struggle with independent projects, emphasizing the need for opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration (Kanevsky et al., 2022).

Moreover, the technological requirements of video projects can present a barrier for some students. Access to necessary tools and skills to create quality video content may vary among students, potentially impacting the equity and inclusiveness of such assessments. As highlighted by Lawrence & Tar (2018), digital divides can exacerbate educational inequalities. Therefore, educators must ensure that all students have access to the required resources and training to successfully complete video projects.

CONCLUSION

This research explored university students' insights on differentiated video projects aligned with their interests, focusing on cognitive, affective, and conative responses. The findings show that such projects significantly enhance engagement, motivation, and active learning behaviors. Cognitively, students found the personalized projects made the material more relevant and understandable, fostering deeper intellectual engagement. Affective responses indicated increased emotional engagement, motivation, and interest in learning. Conatively, the projects encouraged active learning behaviors, prompting students to explore topics in-depth and engage in critical inquiry. However, the study also identified challenges. Some students struggled with the independent nature of the projects, highlighting the need for clear instructions and adequate scaffolding. Additionally, reliance on intrinsic motivation and technological requirements posed barriers for some students, emphasizing the necessity of structured support and equitable access to resources.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that alternative assessment in the form of differentiated video projects based on student's interests can be a powerful tool in enhancing learning experiences when implemented with careful consideration of individual needs and appropriate support mechanisms. Future research should further investigate the long-term impacts of these projects and explore strategies to address the challenges identified, ensuring that all students can benefit from this innovative assessment approach.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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