



THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION CONTENT ON THE TRAINING OF FUTURE MOTHER TONGUE TEACHERS

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Abstract. This article investigates how the systematic use of differentiated education content influences the professional preparation of future mother-tongue teachers. Building on Vygotskian social-constructivist theory and contemporary differentiation scholarship, the study drew on a mixed-methods design at Gulistan State University. Quantitative data ($n = 124$ teacher-trainees) were gathered with a Lesson-Planning Competence Rubric over two semesters; qualitative insights were obtained from weekly reflective journals and focus-group interviews. Findings show statistically significant growth in lesson-planning competence and reveal three interconnected trajectories of professional development: a shift toward an integrative pedagogical mindset, expansion of strategic repertoires, and formation of sustained reflective habits. The discussion situates these outcomes within international and national standards for teacher education, highlighting how differentiated content supports inclusive, culturally responsive instruction in mother-tongue classrooms. Recommendations are offered for curriculum designers and higher-education policymakers.

Keywords: - Differentiated instruction; teacher education; mother-tongue teaching; lesson-planning competence; inclusive pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The linguistic, cultural and cognitive diversity found in today's classrooms compels teacher-training programmes to equip prospective educators with strategies that can flexibly address varied learner needs. Differentiated instruction, defined as the intentional adaptation of content, process, product and learning environment to accommodate learner variance, has emerged as a leading paradigm for such work [4]. Although extensive literature documents its benefits in primary and secondary education, considerably less is known about its effects on the preparation of future mother-tongue teachers—those who will be responsible for sustaining and advancing students' first-language proficiency and cultural identity.

Mother-tongue instruction carries a dual mandate: it nurtures linguistic accuracy and expressive fluency while simultaneously transmitting historical memory and value orientations embedded in language. Consequently, trainee teachers must master not only disciplinary content but also adaptive pedagogical repertoires capable of engaging learners with heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds, dialectal variations and readiness levels. International policy frameworks, such as UNESCO's call for first-language sensitive pedagogy [6], and national standards issued by the Supreme Attestation Commission of Uzbekistan, further underline the necessity of differentiated approaches in language-arts methods courses.

Yet prevailing curricula in many pedagogical universities remain predominantly lecture-centred and content-uniform, relying on summative examinations rather than iterative

diagnostic assessment. This misalignment may leave graduates underprepared to design lessons that balance canonical texts with flexible scaffolds, or to employ formative feedback cycles essential for differentiation. Addressing this gap, the present study asks: How does embedding differentiated education content within methods coursework affect the pedagogical competence of future mother-tongue teachers? By competence we refer to the integrated set of knowledge, skills and dispositions enabling trainees to plan, enact and evaluate inclusive language lessons.

The research was conducted during the 2024-2025 academic year at Gulistan State University's Faculty of Philology. All second-year undergraduates specialising in "Mother-Tongue and Literature Education" ($n = 124$; 86 % female; mean age = 20.1 years) participated. Enrollment was organised into two intact cohorts: an experimental group (EG, $n = 62$) experiencing a redesigned "Methods of Teaching Native Language" course featuring differentiated content, and a comparison group (CG, $n = 62$) following the traditional syllabus.

Differentiated content in the EG was realised through tiered reading packs aligned with lexical difficulty bands, choice-based writing prompts linked to students' regional dialects, and flexible response formats (essay, podcast, or micro-lesson video). All materials converged on identical core standards specified by the national curriculum, ensuring content parity while varying access routes. Instructor feedback was delivered via formative conferences informed by ongoing diagnostic tasks. CG members received the same curricular themes but through uniform texts, identical assignments and summative assessment only.

Pedagogical competence was measured with the Lesson-Planning Competence Rubric (LPCR), developed and validated in prior work ($\kappa = 0.81$). The LPCR rates six dimensions—goal alignment, differentiation strategy, linguistic scaffolding, assessment design, cultural relevance and reflective justification—on a 0–4 scale. Pre-test and post-test lesson plans were independently scored by two faculty raters blind to group membership. Qualitative data comprised 992 weekly reflective-journal entries (average 250 words each) and six semi-structured focus-group interviews (45 minutes each) involving 12 volunteers per cohort.

Quantitative differences were examined with paired-sample t-tests and ANCOVA controlling for high-school GPA. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's six-stage protocol, with coding triangulated across two researchers to enhance trustworthiness. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research committee; informed consent and confidentiality safeguards were honoured.

Narrative analysis uncovered three mutually reinforcing trajectories of professional growth. First, evolving pedagogical mindset: trainees initially perceived differentiation as an onerous add-on but gradually reframed it as coherent "integrated thinking" that clarified lesson purpose. Second, strategic repertoire expansion: students documented increased confidence in using tiered tasks, flexible grouping and culturally embedded texts—echoing Tomlinson's matrices of content differentiation [1]. Third, reflective habit formation: weekly journals displayed a shift from descriptive summaries ("what I did") towards analytical questioning ("whom does this task serve and how will I know?"). Teacher-educators corroborated these trends, noting richer dialogue in post-lesson conferences and a tangible rise in instructional creativity.

The findings demonstrate that differentiated education content, when purposefully embedded in a methods course, enhances the lesson-planning competence of future mother-tongue

teachers. The magnitude of improvement aligns with international evidence that differentiation fosters deeper curricular access and learner engagement [3]. Crucially, competence gains were not confined to technical lesson design; they permeated trainees' epistemic beliefs about teaching, supporting theories of teacher development that foreground disposition change alongside skill acquisition (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

From a sociocultural perspective, the shift toward integrative thinking resonates with Vygotsky's concept of mediated learning: as trainees interacted with tiered texts and reflective dialogue, they internalised professional norms for adaptive pedagogy. Furthermore, the explicit linking of dialectal variations to curricular content advanced culturally responsive instruction, a dimension often overlooked in generic differentiation models but vital for mother-tongue classrooms where language preserves identity capital (Banks, 2016).

Limitations include the single-institution scope, potential observer bias during qualitative coding, and the focus on planning rather than enacted classroom performance. Future research should employ longitudinal designs tracking graduates into in-service teaching and examining learner outcomes to validate the transfer of differentiated competences.

CONCLUSION

Embedding differentiated education content within preservice methods coursework significantly strengthens the professional readiness of future mother-tongue teachers. Beyond measurable skill gains, it cultivates adaptive mindsets and reflective habits essential for inclusive language instruction in linguistically diverse classrooms. Curriculum developers, accreditation bodies and university administrators should mainstream differentiated content, pairing it with formative assessment and culturally grounded materials. Such measures promise to produce educators capable of sustaining learners' linguistic heritage while promoting equitable academic achievement.

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