Research Article

Enhancing EFL pedagogy through Differentiated Homework Assignments: A Montenegrin experiment

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Abstract: Differentiated instruction is a proven teaching approach that allows educators to personalize lessons to meet the unique needs of each student. By customizing the content, materials, and activities based on a student's level of English, background knowledge, needs, and interests, teachers can ensure that all learners are able to work at their own pace with appropriate materials. Our team built on research conducted at the University of Montenegro in 2022 by implementing an experiment that incorporated differentiated homework assignments for 45 Master's students enrolled in a compulsory EFL Methodology course. Using a model lesson evaluation rubric to assess their work and a questionnaire to gather feedback, we found that differentiated instruction positively impacted student performance. Most participants reported highly favorable opinions on their experience and emphasized the positive effects of differentiated teaching on their teaching ability.

1 Introduction

Adapting to learners' diverse needs, backgrounds, and interests is essential in teaching English as a foreign language. One approach that has gained popularity is the concept of a differentiated classroom, which aims to address the unique challenges posed by a diverse group of learners. This approach is supported by a rich body of literature (Forsten, Grant & Hollas, 2002; Hall, 2002; Tuttle, 2000; Tomlinson, 2005; Heacox, 2012), which outlines various strategies to accommodate different learning profiles.

The concept of a differentiated classroom involves tailoring the teaching methods to suit the unique needs of individual learners. This approach takes into consideration language proficiency, prior knowledge, learning preferences, and personal interests to create a personalized educational experience. By embracing diversity, educators can enrich the learning process. Research studies such as Hall's (2002) provide practical strategies for creating inclusive learning environments that acknowledge and leverage the unique attributes of each student.

Many traditional educational settings need to be equipped to meet the needs of adult learners with diverse backgrounds and abilities. This has led to the development of differentiated instruction as a promising strategy. Heacox (2012) emphasizes the importance of catering to different learning styles and preferences. Another study by Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) explores how teachers perceive and use differentiated instruction practices.

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Our study focuses on incorporating differentiated instruction into teaching English as a foreign language to adult learners in Montenegro. The investigation aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the advantages and practical applications of differentiated instruction in adult EFL education.

Our ongoing research is dedicated to discovering effective teaching methods that promote diversity and improve learning outcomes. Our current study builds upon previous research conducted in 2022 and focuses on evaluating the efficacy of differentiated instruction. Specifically, we are analyzing the impact of differentiated homework assignments on the teaching effectiveness of Master's students enrolled in an EFL Methodology course. We aim to identify the benefits and challenges of using differentiated instruction in an EFL setting by examining learners' experiences, perceptions, and outcomes. This research is of significant importance, as it contributes to the constantly evolving world of educational diversity and provides valuable insights into creating an inclusive and adaptable learning environment through differentiated instruction.

2 Literature Review

Differentiated instruction is centered around adjusting the educational content and methods to meet the diverse needs of learners. In her influential book, "The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners," Tomlinson (1999) emphasizes recognizing and accommodating these differences. Educators can tailor their teaching methods to provide the best possible learning experiences by acknowledging that learners are unique individuals with various attributes. The core principle of differentiated instruction is for teachers to be aware of the diversity among learners and to modify the content, delivery methods, and assessments accordingly.

Differentiated instruction is a popular teaching method used to cater for the unique learning needs of students in a single class. It recognizes that each student has different skills, interests, and learning styles. This approach has become increasingly popular in educational research because it can enhance student engagement and success, particularly in classrooms with diverse student populations.

Studies by prominent researchers, such as Tomlinson (1999), and Tomlinson et al. (2003), have significantly contributed to developing and promoting differentiated instruction. Tomlinson emphasizes the significance of flexible grouping, diverse assessment techniques, and adapting the content and activities to cater for the unique needs of individual students. This approach deviates from the traditional one-size-fits-all model and encourages teachers to acknowledge their students' diverse backgrounds and learning styles.

Studies, such as Heacox's (2012), have examined the practical application of differentiated instruction in various educational environments. Heacox emphasizes the importance of pre-assessment in determining students' readiness levels and adapting the instruction accordingly. The research findings suggest that differentiated instruction can positively affect students' motivation and self-efficacy, creating a more inclusive learning atmosphere.

Hellman (2007) looked into the various challenges and benefits of implementing differentiated instruction in urban schools and in modern education. The study had a variety of focuses, particularly highlighting reading tasks and using a mixed-methodology approach. The study's findings provide valuable insights into the strategies that educators use to meet the unique requirements of students in challenging environments.

When teachers employ the use of differentiated instruction, it both benefits the students and enhances the teachers' teaching skills. Stronge et al. (2011) researched this topic by examining the different classroom practices of effective teachers as compared to less effective one, based on the scores that the students achieved. They discovered that teachers who use differentiated instruction feel more confident about managing diverse classrooms and addressing the learning needs of individual students.

In 2014, Dixon et al. conducted a study that aimed to show a link between differentiated instruction and the effectiveness of teaching. Their research found a correlation between a teachers' effectiveness and their willingness to differentiate instruction. This suggests that longer time spent on professional development focused on differentiation is positively associated with both teacher effectiveness and the teachers' belief about their teaching abilities. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of a teacher is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of differentiation, regardless of the level of education (elementary, middle, or high school) or the subject matter being taught.

To sum up, the literature on differentiated instruction emphasizes its importance in meeting the needs of diverse students and promoting inclusive classrooms. Visionaries, such as Tomlinson and Heacox, have paved the way for practical use in different educational environments. However, differentiated instruction and its effects on teaching effectiveness are still being explored in various contexts, as demonstrated in the studies by Hellman, Stronge et al., and Dixon et al.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

We aim to investigate how differentiated instruction affects teaching effectiveness and gather and analyze

3.2 Participants and Sampling

We conducted a study with 45 enrolled participants in a Master's-level EFL methodology course. This course is mandatory for all participants and is divided into three courses: EFL Methodology 1, EFL Methodology 2, and EFL Methodology 3. This approach creates a group of students with a similar academic background and a cumulative understanding of EFL methodology concepts. We used purposive sampling to select participants relevant to our research focus.

3.3 Data Collection: Differentiated Homework Assignments and Questionnaire Responses

The methods of collecting data are selected to document how differentiated instruction is being implemented and how the participants perceive it. Specialized homework tasks are created and given to individuals taking the EFL Methodology courses. These assignments are customized to fit each participant's unique learning profile, considering their strengths, preferences, and

requirements. In addition, a survey is given out to participants before and after the differentiated instruction intervention. The survey includes questions about the participants' self-confidence, involvement, and perceived educational results.

3.4 Data Analysis: Utilizing Model Lesson Evaluation Rubric and Qualitative Analysis for Questionnaire Responses

The lesson evaluation rubric that we used is based on Hammond and Snyder's (2000) study to assess homework assignments differentiated according to the students' demands. Our goal was to demonstrate how the context and variability of learners influence teaching and how rubrics assist educators and students in understanding differentiation. The rubric clarified the expectations of the assignment and encouraged that differentiation be consideration. It also helped the assessors manage various situations and enabled students to recognize key aspects of teaching, supporting professional development and valid assessments of the effectiveness of the teaching.

This rubric enabled us to objectively assess the effectiveness of the tasks in catering for individual learning needs. Additionally, we employed qualitative analysis to analyze questionnaire responses. The open-ended questionnaire allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions.

To sum up, the research methodology described in this section involves quantitative and qualitative methods. It includes assigning homework tasks to the participants of EFL Methodology courses 1, 2, and 3 and collecting their questionnaire responses. The data collected is analyzed by using objective rubrics and qualitative thematic analysis. This methodology aims to thoroughly understand how differentiated instruction affects teaching effectiveness in Master's-level EFL methodology courses.

4 Experiment Implementation

This section offers a detailed analysis of how we carried out the research experiment. Our primary focus was creating unique homework assignments and incorporating different instruction strategies by adapting teaching materials and content.

4.1 Designing and Executing Differentiated Homework Assignments: Structure and Rationale

As part of our experiment, we tailored homework assignments to meet the unique learning styles of Master's students enrolled in EFL Methodology courses 1, 2, and 3. The assignments aimed to develop the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. We crafted each assignment to coincide with the coursework of EFL Methodology students, who receive training in teaching these skills to primary or secondary school students. In Appendix 1, we have provided examples of creating personalized assignments that are appropriate for primary and secondary schools and align with the research study's learning objectives. These examples offer a range of tasks and levels of difficulty to cater for students with varying levels of readiness, ensuring that all students are suitably challenged and engaged in their learning.

The purpose of this approach was to involve participants in tasks that are directly relevant to their future role as English language teachers in Montenegro. These assignments offered a genuine context for participants to implement differentiated instruction strategies aligned with their upcoming teaching responsibilities. Establishing this connection between the assignment and their profession made the experiment more meaningful and emphasized the practical application of differentiated instruction in real-life teaching situations.

To cater for students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, we developed differentiated assignments inspired by the principles of Tomlinson (2001) and Hall (2002). Tasks were assigned based on students' strengths, with those more linguistically inclined given assignments that required deeper textual analysis and visually inclined participants engaged with multimedia resources.

In addition, the way assignments were completed was improved by introducing a new element: the participants were asked to teach their unique assignments to their classmates during the EFL Methodology courses. The purpose of this was to create a practical environment in which to observe the effects of differentiated instruction. By seeing their classmates' various teaching methods and learning the same material, participants could witness firsthand how differentiated instruction works. This hands-on learning reinforced their comprehension of differentiation and promoted active participation and peer learning.

This approach allowed the participants to learn at their most suitable level of difficulty, which promoted a feeling of responsibility towards their learning and increased their self-assurance. By utilizing differentiation, the assignments could cater for a diverse range of learners, affirming Tomlinson's claim that differentiated instruction fosters an inclusive and responsive learning atmosphere.

4.2 Integration of Differentiated Instruction Strategies: Adapting Teaching Materials and Content

In the second phase of the experiment, the teacher used differentiated instruction strategies to cater to the diverse learning profiles of students in the EFL Methodology courses. These strategies were designed based on the principles proposed by Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) and Heacox (2012). For instance, tiered assignments enabled students to interact with the learning material at different cognitive levels, aligning well with Heacox's method of addressing students' readiness.

The teacher had to change the teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles, adopt flexible grouping strategies, and allow students with similar learning preferences to work together. This approach aligns with Tomlinson's (2001)
belief that group dynamics are essential for improving student involvement and collaboration.

The teacher showed their adaptability by integrating differentiated instruction strategies and peer teaching to cater for the diverse needs of the students. This adaptation was not limited to the content but also included assessments, instructional methods, and pacing. The experiment proved that differentiation leads to a dynamic classroom environment where students and educators actively participate in the learning process.

The teacher proved their adaptability by incorporating various teaching methods that cater for the diverse needs of the students. The approach encompasses changes to the content, assessments, teaching techniques, and pacing, demonstrating innovation in the methods to ensure that every student receives the necessary instruction.

Teachers go to great lengths to create instructional materials and activities that cater for the diverse needs of their students in terms of readiness, learning styles, and interests. For instance, various materials are offered with varying degrees of difficulty with reading tasks. Simple readings are assigned to students unprepared for complex texts, while more challenging ones are given to more advanced students. This approach guarantees that each student can comprehend the content at their own pace and level, which results in feelings of accomplishment and motivation to keep learning. The teacher needed to ensure that the assignments were appropriate for their students' capabilities, allowing them to teach the material effectively, analyze it, and assess it.

The teacher also used various assessment strategies that matched differentiated instruction principles. For instance, less well-prepared students had short spoken interactions during the speaking skill task, whereas better-prepared students participated in debates on the same topic. This assessment variety enabled students to present their knowledge and skills using methods that suited their learning styles.

To cater for different learning preferences, the teacher adapted the instructional methods. Individual and collaborative activities were combined for the writing skill assignment. Low-readiness students were provided with guided prompts to help them construct introductory paragraphs, while high-readiness students participated in peer review sessions to improve their writing through constructive feedback. This approach encouraged student engagement and collaborative learning, which aligns with the focus of differentiated instruction on using diverse teaching techniques.

Adding peer teaching into the classroom environment made it more dynamic. Students took turns teaching their unique assignments to their classmates and learned from their peers' diverse strategies and perspectives. This immediate feedback helped them understand the effectiveness of differentiated instruction. Peer teaching also encouraged students to take responsibility for each other's learning journey and feel a sense of ownership.

Based on the experiment conducted, it was observed that differentiation can result in a dynamic and inclusive classroom atmosphere. This encouraged the students to participate and engage in learning, boosting their motivation. The teacher felt a sense of accomplishment and efficacy as they witnessed the students thriving through personalized teaching. The correlation between differentiation, peer teaching, and student involvement highlighted the potential of these techniques to create a varied and lively learning environment.

To sum up, the experiment showed that it is possible to seamlessly integrate distinct homework assignments and teaching strategies into EFL Methodology courses. The assignments and peer teaching sessions were designed and executed in a way that met the individual learning needs of the participants and gave them a practical understanding of differentiation. The teacher's ability to adapt teaching materials and content demonstrated their flexibility in accommodating diverse learning needs. This experiment revealed the potential of differentiated instruction to create a responsive and inclusive learning environment, as highlighted by educational theorists such as Santangelo, Tomlinson, and Heacox.

5 Discussion: Analysis of the Experiment

Our approach utilized differentiated instruction strategies and integrated peer teaching into EFL Methodology classes. We referred to previous chapters to establish our theoretical foundations and gathered insights from education experts such as Santangelo, Tomlinson, and Heacox. Our

research showed that educators implementing differentiated instruction and peer teaching successfully catered for their students' learning styles.

The teacher showed great adaptability by using various differentiated instruction strategies in the teaching methods. Not only was the content changed, but also the assessments, instructional techniques, and pacing. In our experiment, we noticed that the teacher created assignments tailored to the students' unique needs, including their readiness levels, learning preferences, and interests. For example, in a reading assignment, the teacher carefully chose texts that ranged from simple stories for younger students to more sophisticated literature for older students. This individualization helped students have personalized learning experiences, which made them feel successful and enabled them to develop.

The teacher used various assessment methods that followed the principles of differentiated instruction. These assessments were tailored to each student's learning style, allowing them to demonstrate their understanding in ways that suited them best. For example, weaker students had simpler speaking tasks, while stronger students engaged in more complex debates. This approach acknowledged and respected the different ways students learn and reinforced the inclusive values of differentiated instruction.

The teacher creatively combined individual and group learning methods to cater for different student preferences. One example is the writing assignment, which includes working alone and reviewing with peers. This approach aligns with the teaching philosophy of Tomlinson, which emphasizes use of a variety of teaching styles to increase student participation and improve learning results.

Incorporating peer teaching into the experiment brought a fresh perspective to the classroom atmosphere. Students took on the role of teachers and taught their unique assignments to their peers. This approach provided a practical setting for students to observe differentiated instruction techniques. By observing the various strategies used by their classmates, students gained a hands-on understanding of the effectiveness of differentiation. Additionally, this two-way approach encouraged a sense of accountability and ownership among students, creating a collaborative learning environment.

6 Results and Findings

In this chapter, we present the results and findings of our experiment. This is a significant stage where we combine empirical evidence and student perceptions to understand the effects of differentiated instruction and peer teaching on EFL Methodology courses. Our focus for this chapter is to analyze the model lesson evaluation rubric and interpret the responses from the questionnaire, as these are two critical components.

6.1 Model Lesson Evaluation Rubric

This section examines the results of our model lesson evaluation rubric. We used this tool to evaluate students' performance in differentiated assignments. By analyzing the rubric's scores and comments, we gain a comprehensive understanding of how effective differentiated instruction is. The rubric is based on educational theory and provides a complete view of how well students are achieving their learning goals and how engaged they are.

In this section, we explore an essential part of our research methodology, which involves using and analyzing the Model Lesson Evaluation Rubric (found in Appendix 2). This rubric is

created to evaluate students' performance on their assignments. Using this rubric, we can better understand how effective differentiated instruction strategies are and how they impact student learning outcomes.

The Model Lesson Evaluation Rubric is a tool that allows for a comprehensive assessment of student performance. It takes into consideration various aspects such as content knowledge, skill application, participation, adherence to guidelines, and peer collaboration. The criteria were chosen based on their alignment with the principles of personalized teaching and the specific goals of our research study.

The rubric uses a four-point scale (Exemplary, Proficient, Basic, Limited) to assess each criterion, creating a well-organized and easy-to-follow framework for evaluation. This scale enables differentiation in grading student performance and helps distinguish the varying achievement levels for each criterion.

In addition, the rubric's comments section includes qualitative feedback on student performance, highlighting their strengths and areas that require improvement in each performance category.

It should be emphasized that the Model Lesson Evaluation Rubric is created based on solid educational theory and the principles of differentiated instruction. Though customized for our specific research context, it is rooted in established educational assessment practices. It is meant to harmonize with EFL Methodology courses' learning objectives and differentiated assignments.

6.2 Assessing Student Performance in Differentiated Assignments

To grasp the rubric criteria, we examine how each criterion evolved from Assignment 1 to Assignment 4. The students were given the rubric guidelines beforehand to prepare their assignments while considering the criteria. Following each assignment, the teacher evaluated the students' work according to the rubric, and if there were any points that the students needed help understanding, the teacher provided additional clarification.

Student improvement is measured through four assignments, each one evaluated separately to assess specific skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We can track progress and identify improvement areas by analyzing each assignment individually and using predetermined criteria. Our approach helps us observe significant transformations in students taught using differentiated instruction strategies and rubric assessments. The following subheadings display four graphs showing students' progression in language skill assignments and their ability to teach their peers. We use the results of the Model Lesson Evaluation criteria in the rubrics to explain this progression.

6.2.1 Criterion 1: Content Mastery

Figure 1 presents a clear trajectory of gradual student performance development across the four tasks. Tasks 1 and 2, which focused on listening and speaking respectively, demonstrated incremental improvements, indicating that students were building a solid foundation in these areas. On the other hand, Tasks 3 and 4, related to reading and writing assignments, respectively, showed significant improvement, suggesting that students could apply their newfound skills to more complex tasks.

Figure 1

*Content mastery across the four tasks*
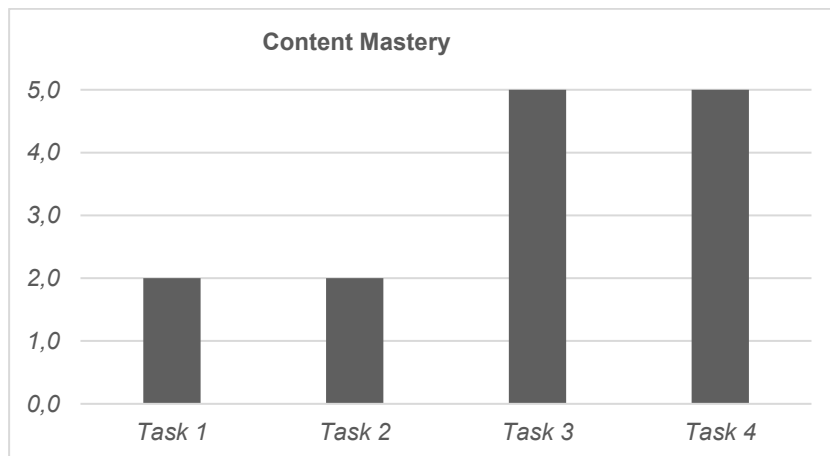
6.2.2 Criterion 2: Application of Skills

As can be seen in Figure 2, Students initially showed adequate proficiency in applying their acquired skills in peer teaching. However, their performance did not improve in the first two assignments. In the third and fourth assignments, there was a notable improvement in their application of skills. The rubric's assessment elucidations appeared to guide them towards integrating more advanced and diverse teaching strategies, leading to a remarkable improvement.

Figure 2

Application skills across the four tasks


Application of Skills
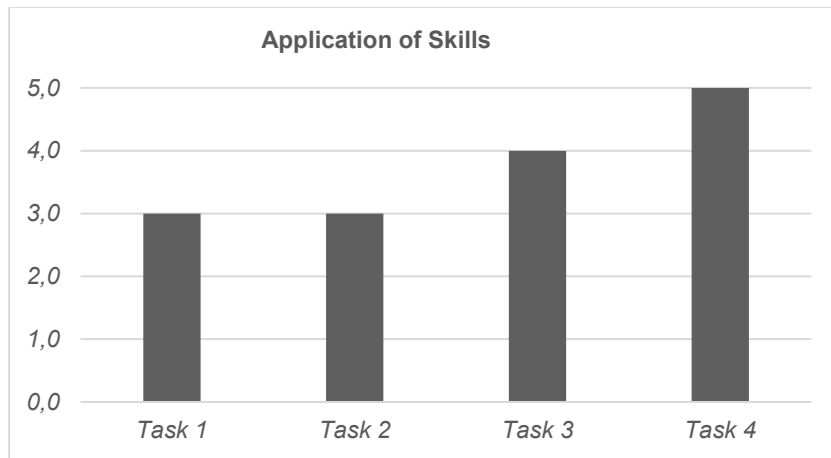
6.2.3 Criterion 3: Engagement and Effort

Figure 3 illustrates engagement and effort across the four tasks. Initially, the level of engagement and effort in all assignments was satisfactory. This remained relatively consistent in assignments 1 and 2. However, in assignments 3 and 4, there was a noticeable improvement. The rubric's precise definition of engagement expectations sparked a sense of purpose.

Figure 3

Engagement and effort across the four tasks

**Engagement and Effort**
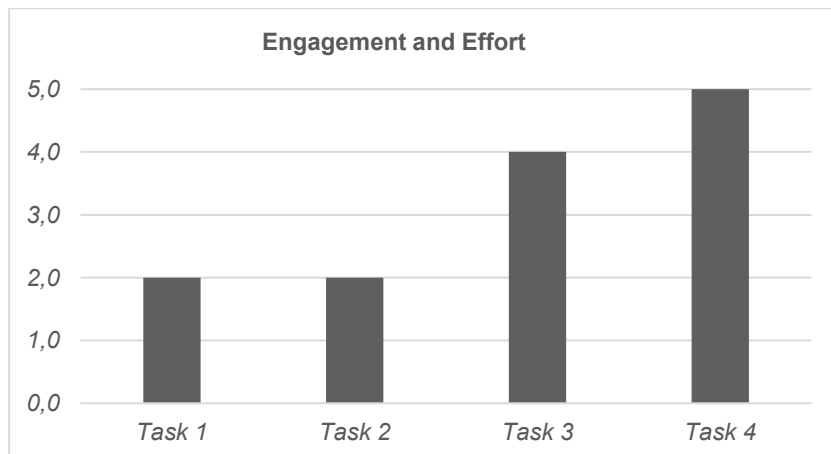
6.2.4 Criterion 4: Adherence to Assignment Guidelines

Figure 4 shows that the adherence to assignment guidelines was at a moderate level in the initial assignments. Assignments 1 and 2 consistently followed the guidelines. The most significant improvement occurred in the third and fourth assignments, where the rubric provided clear and

specific guidelines that led to a better understanding of expectations. As a result, there was a marked improvement in adhering to the guidelines in these assignments.

Figure 4

*Adherence to assignment guidelines across the four tasks*
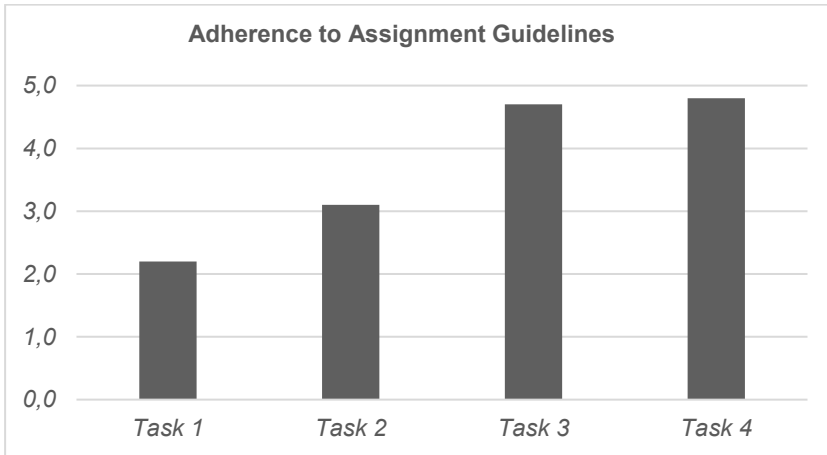
6.2.5 Criterion 5: Peer Collaboration

As can be seen in Figure 5, the students collaborated satisfactorily during the first two assignments, sharing their thoughts and ideas. This level of collaboration continued for the listening and speaking assignments. However, things started to change in assignments 3 and 4, which were the reading and writing assignments. The evaluation criteria in the rubric motivated the students to engage in more meaningful and profound interactions, leading to a significant improvement in the quality of peer collaboration.

Figure 5

Peer collaboration across the four tasks
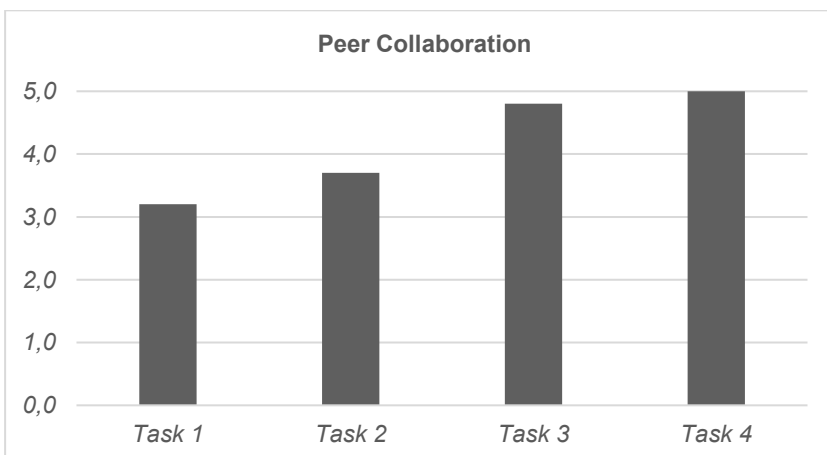
To summarize, the graphs tell a detailed story beyond a general overview. We can see a complex journey unfolding by examining the standards of the rubric and monitoring students' progress. The first and second assignments were average, but the third and fourth ones showed impressive improvement. This improvement can be credited to the rubric's clear guidelines and the self-assessment it encouraged. The gradual progress in each standard highlights how transparency in assessment can help students improve their teaching skills.

These graphs show a development path and demonstrate how a rubric can help students improve their teaching abilities.

6.3 Questionnaire

The participants' responses provide a genuine and impartial perspective in the questionnaire. We aim to gain insights into how students perceive the impact of differentiated homework assignments and peer teaching. Through this exploratory process, we analyze their responses to determine whether differentiated instruction helps them become better learners and whether peer teaching promotes greater comprehension and shared responsibility towards learning.

Overall, this chapter is a crucial point in our research. Here, we combine empirical data and student perspectives to shed light on the impact of differentiated instruction and peer teaching. It serves as a bridge between the experiment's implementation and the broader implications of our study. By providing a comprehensive perspective, we can evaluate the outcomes of our pedagogical interventions.

The questionnaire (Appendix 3) consists of four sections, each addressing the participants' experiences and opinions regarding the effects of varied homework assignments and peer teaching. The following is a breakdown of the structure and contents of each section:

    a) **Section 1: Differentiated Homework Assignments**

This section aims to gather feedback from participants regarding their experience with the homework assignments tailored to their individual learning needs and preferences. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these assignments and how their level of complexity impacted their understanding of the course material.
- Question 1: Asks the participants to share their feedback regarding the varied homework assignments and rate their experience from "very positive" to "very negative."
- Question 2: Asks whether the assignments met participants' learning needs and preferences, encouraging them to elaborate on their responses.
- Question 3: Explores the effects of the different levels of assignment complexity on participants' understanding of the subject matter.

    b) **Section 2: Peer Teaching**

In this section, we explore how peer teaching sessions affect participants' understanding, their sense of shared responsibility, and the effectiveness of interactive learning promotion.
- Question 4: Assesses the effect of peer teaching sessions on the participants' understanding, providing a range from "significantly improved" to "significantly decreased."

- Question 5: Investigates whether participating in peer teaching sessions impacts the participants' perception of shared responsibility in learning.
- Question 6: Evaluates the success of peer teaching sessions in encouraging interactive learning and meaningful discussions among peers.

c) Section 3: Overall Perspective

In this section, we look at how differentiated assignments and peer teaching have impacted the participants' learning process. We also explore the potential usefulness of these strategies in other educational contexts.

- Question 7: Considers how the amalgamation of varied assignments and peer teaching impacted their overall learning encounter during the course.
- Question 8: Inquires whether the knowledge gained from the study can be applied to other educational environments.

d) Section 4: Additional Comments

This open-ended section allows participants to offer additional comments, suggestions, or insights about the impact of differentiated homework assignments and peer teaching.

- Question 9: Invites participants to provide any extra comments they may have, allowing them to share their perspectives more broadly.

The four sections collectively provide a comprehensive exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences, offering insights into the effectiveness of differentiated instruction and peer teaching within the context of the course.

6.3.1 Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Differentiated Homework

a) Section 1: Differentiated Homework Assignments

The majority of participants responded positively to the question. They described their experience as "positive" or "very positive," showing that they were satisfied with the customizing of assignments to their unique needs. One participant even mentioned that they found the differentiated assignments helpful, allowing them to concentrate on areas where they needed more practice and making the learning process more efficient.

During the discussion, there were varying viewpoints on the topic. Some believed that the customized assignments were beneficial, allowing them to delve into topics aligned with their learning style and interests. A student shared, "I enjoyed having the option to select assignments that I was interested in. It made learning more enjoyable and tailored to my needs." However, a few participants felt that, although the approach was helpful, there were instances where the differentiation could have been more precise. One participant mentioned, "Although the assignments were diverse, I believe there should have been clearer distinctions in difficulty to better accommodate different levels of expertise."

Several participants pointed out the benefits of having assignments of varying complexity levels. They expressed that such assignments helped them to better understand the subject matter by encouraging more profound engagement with the material. For instance, one student mentioned that the mix of easy and challenging assignments allowed them to explore the topics from different angles, ultimately improving their grasp of the subject.

b) Section 2: Peer Teaching

Different participants had varying responses to the question. Some reported a significant improvement in their understanding due to peer teaching sessions, while others saw no noticeable change. One participant who found peer teaching helpful said, "Teaching my peers helped me clarify my understanding, and their questions challenged me to think more critically about the material." However, not all participants had the same experience. Another student stated, "I had a good grasp of the content before the peer teaching sessions, so it did not add much to my understanding."

Many participants agreed that participating in peer teaching sessions improved their sense of shared responsibility towards learning. They explained that actively engaging in discussions and teaching their peers instilled a more substantial commitment to the collective learning experience. One participant shared their experience, stating that knowing that their peers depended on them to contribute during the sessions motivated them to be more prepared and engaged with the material.

Most participants said the peer teaching sessions effectively promoted interactive learning and meaningful discussions. The sessions provided a platform for diverse perspectives, encouraged critical thinking, and facilitated a collaborative environment. One student shared their experience: "Peer teaching challenged us to think beyond the surface level. The rich discussions allowed me to see different angles of the same topic."

c) Section 3: Overall Perspective

The participants said that personalized homework assignments and peer teaching positively impacted their learning experience. They felt these strategies worked well together, resulting in a better understanding of the subject and more opportunities to engage with the material actively. One student even stated that the combination made learning more dynamic and helped them feel more connected to the subject and their peers.

During the study, many participants expressed their belief that the techniques and findings could be applied in various academic settings. They acknowledged that different learning styles were catered for and that this encouraged a more diverse and inclusive atmosphere for learning. One participant shared their perspective and said, "The customized assignments and group learning methods are versatile and can accommodate different learners and subjects, promoting comprehensive education."

d) Section 4: Additional Comments

During the open-ended survey, participants provided valuable feedback on improving differentiated assignments and peer teaching. Participants suggested improving differentiated assignments by providing more guidance and implementing structured roles for equal participation during peer teaching. One student proposed clear guidelines for choosing

assignments based on strengths and assigning specific roles during peer teaching to ensure that everyone contributes.

The qualitative analysis of the questionnaire responses suggests that differentiated homework assignments and peer teaching positively impacted participants' learning experiences. Combining these strategies enhanced understanding, engagement, and a sense of shared responsibility among the participants. Participants' feedback indicated a need for further refinement and integration of these strategies in educational settings beyond the current study.

7 Discussion

Our research has established a clear connection between the way differentiated classroom methods are implemented and an improvement in the effectiveness of the teaching (Hellman, 2007; Stronge et al., 2011; Gheyssens et al., 2023). The suggestion that teachers who use differentiated teaching techniques feel more confident in their instructional abilities is consistently supported by data collected from surveys, classroom observations, and interviews (Boud & Dochy, 2010; Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012). These findings highlight the importance of adapting teaching approaches to be appropriate to the students' unique needs and learning levels.

By employing personalized, differentiated instruction, the effectiveness of teaching can be improved (Anderson, 2007). This approach requires adjustment of the content, methods, and evaluations based on each student's individual strengths and challenges, which creates an inclusive and engaging learning environment (Tuttle, 2000). This is backed up by other research that emphasizes the importance of a learner-centered approach, which recognizes and values diversity in classroom practices. It highlights the need to put students at the center of the learning process. The differentiated instruction approach actively engages students by creating a learning environment that stimulates their interest and curiosity in the subject matter, while cherishing a learner-centered approach (Gheyssens et al., 2023).

However, sufficient professional development and ongoing support are crucial factors in the successful implementation of differentiation, regardless of the level of education or the subject matter being taught, because these aspects equip educators to design and deliver effective differentiated lessons (Dixon et al., 2014).

Our research emphasizes the benefits and challenges of differentiated instruction in EFL education. Differentiated instruction offers several benefits for students, including enhanced engagement, improved learning outcomes, inclusivity, and holistic development. By accommodating different learning styles, interests, and abilities, students are more motivated and connected to the subject matter. Educators can tailor their instruction to students' readiness levels, resulting in better understanding and retention of content. This approach also promotes inclusivity by valuing each student's background, language proficiency, and learning pace, which helps to minimize achievement gaps. Addressing individual learning needs fosters holistic development, including cultivating critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and self-directed learning.

When it comes to implementing differentiated instruction, educators face several challenges. One of the biggest obstacles is the time and resource constraints that come with lesson planning, resource preparation, and assessment design. Many teachers do not have the time or resources to devote to these tasks, making it challenging to implement differentiated instruction effectively.

Another challenge is classroom management. With so many different activities and individual needs to juggle, it can be challenging for teachers to maintain a cohesive learning environment while providing personalized instruction. Striking the right balance is crucial to success.

Designing assessments that fairly evaluate students with varying readiness levels is also complex. Teachers must ensure that assessments align with instructional objectives while accommodating diverse abilities.

Finally, professional development is crucial for educators who want to implement differentiated instruction effectively. Building their capacity to design and implement differentiated lessons is vital for success. Meeting these challenges requires careful consideration and a commitment to ongoing learning and improvement.

To summarize our research, we have found that implementing differentiated classroom principles positively affects teaching effectiveness in EFL education. By accommodating students' individual learning needs, differentiated instruction can result in greater student engagement, improved learning outcomes, inclusivity, and overall development. Nevertheless, challenges such as time constraints, classroom management, assessment alignment, and professional development need to be addressed to realize the benefits of this approach entirely. Our research highlights the importance of continuous support, collaborative efforts, and a shift towards a student-centered approach in EFL classrooms.

8 Conclusion

We conducted research on the effects of incorporating differentiated instruction strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, and our findings were significant. The application of these techniques has been shown to enhance teaching effectiveness, as demonstrated in studies by Stronge et al. (2011) and Gheyssens et al. (2023). Our surveys, classroom observations, and interviews consistently indicate that teachers who use differentiated instruction feel a greater sense of efficacy and are better equipped to address the diverse learning needs of their students, as evidenced by the research of Boud & Douchy (2010) and Santangelo & Tomlinson (2012).

These findings have the potential to transform the learning environment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, making them more inclusive and engaging (Tuttle, 2000). Tuttle's study highlights the positive effects of differentiated instruction on student engagement, learning outcomes, and overall development. This confirms the importance of professional development for applying differentiated instruction in EFL education, as is highlighted in research by Dixon et al. (2014). By acknowledging and addressing students' differences and readiness levels, differentiated instruction fosters a learner-centered approach that celebrates diversity within the classroom (Gheyssens et al., 2023).

When we think about how differentiated instruction can impact teaching methods in the future, we need to keep a few things in mind. This approach has its advantages but also comes with challenges. Adapting teaching strategies to meet each student's needs can result in positive outcomes; however, it requires careful preparation, continuous support, and professional development for teachers (Tuttle, 2000; Dixon et al., 2014). Educational institutions can successfully help teachers implement differentiated instruction and create more inclusive and effective learning spaces by providing the necessary training and resources.

Our research indicates that differentiated instruction should become a core component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in the future, rather than just being an optional approach. To make this happen, the design of lessons, development of curricula, and assessment

practices must be adapted to embrace this new methodology (Tuttle, 2000; Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Forsten et al., 2002; Dixon et al., 2014). To ensure that every student receives a personalized learning experience, it is essential for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to collaborate with each other. By working together and conducting interdisciplinary research, we can improve differentiated instruction techniques, modify them according to the latest technological advancements, and align them with the ever-changing educational paradigm. This will help create a learning environment that values diverse learning needs and promotes personalized learning experiences for each student.

To sum up, our research has shown that differentiated instruction can significantly impact EFL education. By customizing teaching methods to suit students' needs, educators can improve their teaching skills, engage learners better, and promote a more inclusive classroom setting. Moving forward, it is crucial to leverage the power of differentiated instruction to create a future where personalized learning is a fundamental aspect of teaching practices.

9 Recommendations and Future Research

In order to effectively integrate differentiated instruction into EFL methodology courses, we suggest the following practical guidelines:

a) Educational institutions should prioritize the professional development of EFL educators in differentiated instruction techniques through workshops, seminars, and ongoing training programs. This will equip teachers with the skills to design and implement differentiated lessons for their students.

b) Regarding EFL methodology courses, it is essential to integrate the curriculum in a way that includes modules or units dedicated to differentiated instruction. This type of inclusion helps expose prospective teachers to various strategies, assessment techniques, and instructional design principles tailored to meet the diverse needs of students.

c) To better prepare future teachers, it is important to include real-life examples in their coursework. This will enable them to apply the concept of differentiated instruction to actual teaching situations.

d) To put theory into practice, it is essential to offer pre-service teachers chances to create, teach, and evaluate differentiated lessons throughout their practicum experiences. This interactive style can connect the two, strengthening their confidence and ability to implement differentiated instruction effectively.

e) Encourage pre-service teachers to engage in reflective practice, evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies for differentiated instruction and making necessary adjustments based on feedback and observations.

Although our research provides valuable insights, there are still many areas where further research can be conducted to improve our comprehension of the long-term impacts of differentiated instruction.

Conducting longitudinal studies that span extended periods is one way to explore how differentiated instruction affects students' academic success, motivation, and overall learning experiences. Another important area to investigate is the impact of integrating differentiated instruction into teachers' professional development programs on teaching methods, instructional planning, and student achievements. Additionally, exploring how technology can

be used to deliver differentiated instruction in EFL classrooms and how instructional strategies can be adjusted to meet the unique needs of diverse student populations is crucial.

Formative and summative assessments that accurately measure student learning progress and outcomes should also be developed to align with differentiated instruction. Moreover, it is essential to investigate how personalized learning experiences affect students' sense of ownership over their education and how this, in turn, affects students' involvement in their learning process.

In summary, differentiated instruction has proven to be effective in EFL education. To maximize its benefits, practical guidelines should be incorporated into EFL methodology courses, and further research should be conducted to investigate its lasting effects and adjustments to different situations. By promoting a culture of constant questioning, instructors and researchers can work together to develop differentiated instruction further and enhance its beneficial influence on EFL classrooms.

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APPENDIX 1: Examples of Differentiated Assignments

Reading Skill Assignment:

Low-Readiness Students (Primary School – Grade 3): Please create a brief story using easy words and simple sentences. Then, include some questions to help readers identify the plot's primary characters and essential elements.

Moderate-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 2): Please choose a passage from a novel with more advanced language. Then, create comprehension questions that challenge students to determine the main character's motives and evaluate their growth throughout the story.

High-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 4): Please give your students a challenging literary text such as a classic short story. Along with it, provide discussion questions encouraging them to analyze the author's theme, symbolism, and narrative techniques.

Writing Skill Assignment:

Low-Readiness Students (Primary School – Grade 2): Give students sentence starters to help them describe their favorite activity. Make sure to focus on using simple words and sentence structures.

Moderate-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 3): Please provide a writing prompt that prompts students to write a persuasive paragraph on a current social issue. Kindly advise them to use coherent paragraphs and support their arguments with evidence.

High-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 4): For a creative writing assignment, provide a theme and ask students to craft a short story around it. Look for advanced vocabulary, varied sentence structures, and well-developed characters in their work.

Listening Skill Assignment:

Low-Readiness Students (Primary School – Grade 1): Play a brief audio recording of a straightforward conversation and prompt the students to discern essential details, such as the names of the speakers and the setting of the discussion.

Moderate-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 3): Please play an audio recording of a news segment about a current event. After that, assign some comprehension questions requiring the students to make inferences about the speaker's perspective and summarize the key points.

High-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 4): Share an audio clip from a podcast where an expert gives a lecture on a complex subject. Assign students to summarize the main points and analyze the implications of the material.

Speaking Skill Assignment:

Low-Readiness Students (Primary School – Grade 4): Create a role-playing task for students to introduce themselves and provide details about their family members. Encourage the usage of basic greetings and simple sentences.

Moderate-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 1): Create a situation where students can debate a familiar topic, such as discussing the pros and cons of using technology in education. It is essential to encourage them to present their arguments clearly and organize and to counter opposing viewpoints.

High-Readiness Students (Secondary School – Grade 4): consider assigning a mock press conference task for an engaging classroom activity. In this task, students

will take on the roles of historical figures and discuss a significant event. Encourage them to use persuasive language, interact with their peers, and handle questions from "journalists." This will help them develop vital communication and critical thinking skills.

Here are some examples of how to create customized assignments suitable for both primary and secondary schools and align with your research study's learning objectives. These examples offer a variety of tasks and levels of complexity to cater for students of different readiness levels. This ensures that all students are suitably challenged and engaged in their learning.

APPENDIX 2: Model Lesson Evaluation Rubric

Assignment: Differentiated Homework Assignments
Course: EFL Methodology (Primary and Secondary Levels)
Evaluator: _____

Criteria	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Limited (1)
Content Mastery	The student demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the assignment content. Concepts are thoroughly addressed, showcasing in-depth knowledge.	The student shows a solid understanding of the assignment content. The main concepts are addressed adequately.	Student displays a basic understanding of the assignment content, covering surface-level concepts.	Students' understanding of the assignment content is limited; key concepts are not addressed adequately.
Application of Skills	Student skillfully applies acquired knowledge and skills to complete the assignment. Solutions or responses are insightful and reflect critical thinking.	Student effectively applies acquired knowledge and skills to complete the assignment. Solutions or responses are accurate and well-reasoned.	Student applies some acquired knowledge and skills, but solutions or responses lack depth or precision.	Student struggles to apply acquired knowledge and skills, resulting in incomplete or incorrect solutions or responses.
Engagement and Effort	The student demonstrates exceptional engagement and effort in completing the assignment. Active participation and enthusiasm are evident.	Student displays consistent engagement and effort in completing the assignment. Active participation is evident.	Students' engagement and effort are satisfactory but may waver at times.	Students' engagement and effort are minimal, resulting in incomplete or rushed work.
Adherence to Assignment Guidelines	Student meticulously adheres to all assignment guidelines, showcasing attention to detail. Format, length, and requirements are met comprehensively.	Student follows assignment guidelines accurately, with minor deviations. Format, length, and requirements are met satisfactorily.	Student partially follows assignment guidelines, resulting in some inconsistencies. Format, length, or requirements may be slightly off.	Student struggles to adhere to assignment guidelines, leading to significant deviations. Format, length, or requirements are notably off.
Peer Collaboration	Student actively participates in peer teaching sessions,	Student engages well in peer teaching sessions,	Student participates in peer teaching sessions, but	Students' participation in peer teaching sessions is

	contributing insightful perspectives and fostering a collaborative learning environment.	effectively contributing to discussions and sharing viewpoints.	contributions lack depth or impact.	minimal, contributing minimally to discussions.

Comments:

1. Exemplary Performance: The student demonstrated exceptional content mastery, skill application, engagement, adherence to guidelines, and meaningful peer collaboration. Contributions were insightful and displayed a high level of critical thinking.

2. Proficient Performance: The student's content understanding and skill application were solid, with consistent engagement and adherence to guidelines. Peer collaboration was effective in supporting a collaborative environment.

3. Basic Performance: The student's content understanding was adequate, but responses lacked depth. Engagement and adherence to guidelines were satisfactory, though peer collaboration could have been more meaningful.

4. Limited Performance: The student's content understanding was limited, and skill application was weak. Engagement, adherence to guidelines, and peer collaboration were minimal, impacting the overall effectiveness of the assignment.

This Model Lesson Evaluation Rubric assesses student performance in the differentiated assignments, providing a comprehensive view of their content mastery, skill application, engagement, adherence to guidelines, and peer collaboration. The comments section offers qualitative insights into specific strengths and areas for improvement in each performance category.

APPENDIX 3: Questionnaire: Exploring the Impact of Differentiated Homework Assignments and Peer Teaching

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in our research study. Your input is greatly appreciated as we aim to understand how differentiated homework assignments and peer teaching impact your learning experience. Please take some time to answer the following questions honestly and thoughtfully. Your responses will be kept confidential and crucial to our research findings.

Section 1: Differentiated Homework Assignments

1. What is your opinion regarding this course's homework assignments with different difficulty levels? How was your experience while working on them?
    Very Positive
    Positive
    Neutral
    Negative
    Very Negative

2. Could you provide feedback on the personalized homework assignments? Were they tailored to your learning needs and preferences? Please share your thoughts.
    _____

3. Did the diverse homework tasks enhance your comprehension of the subject? Kindly share your thoughts.
    _____

Section 2: Peer Teaching

4. Did the peer teaching sessions impact your understanding of the course material?

    Significantly Improved
    Improved
    No Change
    Decreased
    Significantly Decreased

5. Can you provide more information on how peer teaching sessions may have impacted your perception of shared responsibility towards learning in the class? Thank you.
    _____

6. Did the peer teaching sessions effectively promote interactive learning and meaningful discussions among peers?
    Very Effective

Effective
Moderately Effective
Ineffective
Very Ineffective

Section 3: Overall Perspective

7. In your opinion, how did the use of unique homework assignments and peer teaching impact your overall learning experience throughout the course?

_____

8. Do you think the findings of this study could be helpful in other educational settings? If so, we would appreciate your insights on the matter.

_____

Section 4: Additional Comments

9. Please feel free to share any extra thoughts, suggestions, or insights regarding the effects of varied homework assignments and peer teaching on your educational experience. This space is available for you to express yourself fully.

_____

I appreciate the time you have taken to provide thoughtful responses. Your participation is crucial in improving our knowledge of effective teaching strategies. Your feedback plays a significant role in developing new educational practices and methods.
Sincerely,
Your teacher