

**Co-teaching, A comparative Study to Assess The
state of Adoption for Co-teaching Practice Across
Elementary Schools in The US and Saudi Arabia**

Khalaf G. Alanazi Mohammed A. Alshehri

التدريس التعاوني، دراسة مقارنة لتبني ممارسته في المدارس الإبتدائية في الولايات المتحدة والمملكة العربية السعودية

المستخلص :

لقت فكرة التعلم التعاوني رواج بين المعلمين لدورها في تحسين قدرة الطلاب على التعلم. وهدفت هذه الدراسة لتقييم حالة التدريس في المدارس في الولايات المتحدة والمملكة العربية السعودية. وتم اختيار المدارس من منطقتين مختلفتين، وينفيلد، كانساس في الولايات المتحدة والدمام في المملكة العربية السعودية. وكان السؤال الأساسي في الدراسة الاستقصائية هو كيف يؤثر التدريس التعاوني على البيئة الصفية؛ وكانت الأسئلة الثانوية التي يجري التحقيق فيها كيف يؤثر التدريس التعاوني على طريقة التدريس في الفصل الدراسي، ومزايا وعيوب التعلم التعاوني. وتشير النتائج إلى أن المملكة العربية السعودية لا تزال منخفضة بالمقارنة مع الولايات المتحدة في اعتماد التعليم التعاوني، كما قدمت الدراسة مجموعة من التوصيات بناء على آراء كل من المعلمين ومديري المدارس والطلاب. حول كيفية تحسين التدريس في المملكة العربية السعودية وكيف يمكن تضمينها كجزء من منهج تدريب المعلمين، وتغيير سياسات التعليم للاعتراف بالتعلم التعاوني كوسيلة تعليمية رسمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التعلم التعاوني - الدراسة الإستقصائية .

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Abstract

Co-teaching is being embraced by educationists for its differential value in improving student learning ability. A survey was conducted to assess the state of adoption for co-teaching practice across schools in US and Saudi Arabia. The schools were drawn from two different geographies, Winfield, Kansas in US and Dammam in Saudi Arabia. The primary question in the survey was how co-teaching affects the classroom environment; and the secondary questions being investigated were how co-teaching affects the classroom teaching method, and the advantages and disadvantages of co-teaching. The findings indicate that Saudi Arabia is still low as compared to US in the adoption of co-teaching, as reported by teachers, school principals and students. Subsequent recommendations on how to improve co-teaching in Saudi Arabia involve including it as part of teacher-training curriculum, and changing the education policies to recognize co-teaching as a formal instructional method.

Key word : Cooperative learning – Survey.

Introduction

We have a wonderful experience that helps us to learn and participate in the classroom as graduate students. Actually, there are many aspects that we like in learning while we are studying our master degree. The most interesting method of teaching that we like as students is co-teaching. We did not learn in classrooms that had more than one teacher in all our school levels, but we had two courses in the graduate program that had two instructors in the classrooms. There were some great benefits to us and our classmates in those two courses. Sometimes, we can ask questions to the co-teacher that we did not understand from the other teacher, also we can get chances to speak up and participate throughout the lesson when there were two teachers. However, some of our classmates got confused when they asked for explaining some homework instructions, so we would say that co-teaching can be a beneficial for the students when the two instructors have cooperated and designed their lesson together. For instance, we had opportunities to visit some schools in Arkansas City, Kansas, and we observed many new aspects that we have never seen and done our academic life. We learned different strategies, and we realized that many classrooms were doing a co-teaching method which means there were two teachers in the classroom. We saw how powerful this method in

elementary school level, also how students respond to the two teacher's instructions. In activity time, the two teachers can cover and work with all students, also they can support the special need students which is a strong reason of doing co-teaching.

Literature Review

Co-teaching is a teaching concept that has become very popular within the education field. The areas of research focus include defining co-teaching, approaches/models of co-teaching, and the advantages and disadvantages of co-teaching. The areas of research focus have been identified by using a search method. Some of the keywords we used to narrow on the search included “pros and cons of co-teaching,” “what is co-teaching,” “benefits of co-teaching,” “teachers together,” and “co-teaching experience.” The issue of co-teaching should be given educators’ attention since it provides ways to support students with exceptionalities in the regular education classroom. The aim of the research was to identify the main issues associated with co-teaching and how it is beneficial to elementary school students.

Definition of Co-Teaching : Co-teaching is a type of teaching method that is used to deliver instructions to students in different teaching environments. It constitutes at least two teachers who have agreed to share responsibilities to deliver learning instructions to one group of students. The learning instructions are mainly based on an agreement between the teachers on the

objectives or contents to be delivered to the students (Kariuki, 2013). It initially started as an association between special education and general education. This was a reaction to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015) that advocated for the provision of support to students suffering from various forms of disabilities in general education classes. In its initial implementation period, co-teaching was defined as a type of teaching that incorporated special and classroom education teachers where general education teachers had extensive knowledge of the content while the special education teachers had professionalism in the process of delivering instructions to educate different students who might learn in a particular manner (Kariuki, 2013). The other way co-teaching is also used is in middle and secondary classrooms to provide the instruction and support to students. This is where one member of the group offers to play the role of the leader while the other students rotate to offer support (Forbes & Billet, 2014).

Approaches/Models of Co-Teaching : Co-teaching has numerous teaching approaches that offer different techniques for the two teachers to collaborate and work together within the classroom. A sample of co-teaching approaches includes team teaching, alternative teaching, station teaching, and parallel teaching (Forbes & Billet, 2014).

1. *Team teaching* : Team teaching is a co-teaching approach in which both teachers deliver similar instructions to the students simultaneously. In this method, students feel that they have two content teachers within the classroom instead of one learning support teacher and one content teacher in class. Educators using team teaching approach use various techniques to signal one another that one of the teachers is about to stop in order to allow the other teacher to offer instructions. These techniques include jumping, slapping or raising hands when one teacher stops (Embury&Dinnesen, 2012).
2. *Alternative teaching* : Alternative teaching is a co-teaching approach used where many students require specialized attention. In this method, a large group of students is taught by one teacher while another small group is taught by another teacher (Vermette, Jones, & Jones, 2010). It is a technique that operates well with students who might have challenges to learn, hence requiring more extensive learning support (Forbes & Billet, 2014).
3. *Station teaching* : Station teaching is a teaching approach in which teachers maintain their individual classrooms however they divide the contents and rotate the students rotate between the classrooms. The teachers then switch the groups after teaching one group. Teachers used different contents in each of the groups (King-Sears, 2014).

4. *Parallel teaching* : Parallel teaching is a teaching approach where teachers teach similar information to students, though they usually split the class and then teach the students at the same time in various spaces within the classrooms. It is a suitable teaching approach for re-teaching and reinforcement activities (Kariuki, 2013).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Co-Teaching

Co-teaching has both strong sides and drawbacks discussed below.

Advantages . Co-teaching has various advantages. First, there is a reduced ratio of student to teachers due to the physical presence of the two teachers in the classroom. This enables teachers to offer specialized help to the students (Murdock, Finneran, &Theve, 2015). Besides, there is the chance for one teacher to be in class and offer feedback on the changes that should be established to assist the students to grasp complicated ideas (Vermette, 2010). Students can also get emotional and academic help from another teacher in case he or she has personality conflicts with the other teacher; hence, education standards improve (Forbes, 2014).

Disadvantages : Co-teaching takes time to be effective in the classroom, and the co-teachers need time to plan together and time constraints of a busy school day that means the co-teachers rarely have time to plan together unless they make arrangements to do so before or after school hours. The available co-teachers are time constrained since they are compelled to cover a particular learning

content within a particular period. Besides, inadequate common planning period affects lesson planning for teachers as well as discussion of the needs of students. The issue of personality conflict might also occur between the co-teachers; hence, they might not be able to agree to collaborate in the classroom (Seymour & Seymour, 2014). Co-teaching is an important area of research focus. The study has allowed us to discover its advantages and disadvantages to learn some of the problems that students face in school and how co-teachers help them to achieve learning objectives. We selected the topic to study since it was important in the achievement of the action research and suggests a promising avenue for further research.

Search Method

In trying to research on the topic, the search method that was used was the online database “ERIC Database.” ERIC is an online education research platform where students can be able to carry out research using the available resources. It is a database that has been used in Southwestern College; hence, it is essential in the present research to provide adequate information on the area of research focus. From the analysis of the literature, some of the topics that emerged included “pros and cons of co-teaching,” “benefits of co-teaching,” “definition of co-teaching,” “teachers together” and “co-teaching experience.” These were mainly

established through the use of keywords to find the different topics to concentrate on in the research.

Purpose, Rationale, and Context : For purposes of this study, Co-Teaching will be defined as 2 general education teachers working collaborative with 1 class or 2 classes of students combined for a specific lesson or series of lessons that could be in the same subject area or interdisciplinary. We will be looking forward to a possibility of transferring the concept of co-teaching to Saudi Arabia. We have to talk about how we will be able to take the concept to Saudi Arabia. This is because there are different types of elementary schools than the elementary schools in the United States. For instance, each classroom in Saudi Arabia has one teacher to students studying in first grade to sixth grade classes, as is typical in the US. Nevertheless, specialist teachers usually work with the fourth grade to sixth grade students for subjects such as language, science and mathematics teachers.

In case there is any student who struggles in learning, then such student will have special education teacher who will offer support in certain subjects at special classroom. In the United States, elementary schools usually have two teachers who work at the same classroom during the same time in order to support every student in some part of the school day. Therefore, our study will not concentrate on special need students. We will concentrate on how the two teachers with the same subjects at same academic

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level of schools can work together in order to offer improved learning environment to students. This strategy will offer support to the needs of all the students who study same subjects at the same time.

The primary research question that will be addressed in the study:

- How does Co-Teaching affect the classroom environment?

The secondary research questions that the study will address is:

- How does Co-Teaching affect the classroom teaching method?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Co-Teaching?

Participants: The participants in the study will comprise of two principals, four general education teachers and two focus groups 6 to 10 students in two elementary schools in Winfield, Kansas as well as two principals, four general education teachers in two elementary schools in Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

Innovation : The innovation from this research will be to work with other members of the school to transfer the concept of co-teaching to Saudi Arabia. It will involve seeking the consent of the principals, general education teachers and the focus group consisting of 6-10 students in the two elementary schools. This study is an innovation since it will involve introducing a new concept to Saudi Arabia hence we will carry out an innovation to establish whether it can work effectively. The area of focus in the study will involve two elementary schools in Dammam, SA and Winfield, KS to identify the functionality and implementation of the concept in Saudi Arabia.

Data Collection Plan

The primary research question that will be addressed in the study:

- How does Co-Teaching affect the classroom environment?
- The participants will be school principals and general teachers.
- Baseline data is not needed in this study.
- The data collection strategies that we have considered are:

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An explanation of how the data collection strategies will provide the study with the data to answer the question is provided below. We will interview four general teachers in two different elementary schools in Winfield, Kansas. We will ask both broad and specific questions that will show how much co-teaching affects the teaching methods. We will conduct a survey that has different questions than the interview, so the teachers will answer six questions that show us how co-teaching affects the teaching methods. We will send an electronic survey to four general teachers in two different elementary schools in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, so we can study how much experience they have in co-teaching. Observational data might be conducted in two elementary schools in Winfield, Kansas. We could observe two general teachers in each school who are implementing co-teaching. We will be able to determine whether co-teaching affect the teaching methods to meet all students' needs at the same subject in the same time successfully or unsuccessfully.

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Co-Teaching?
 - Participants: Principals, general teachers and students.
 - Baseline data is not needed in this study.
 - The data collection strategies that could be used:
3. Survey.
 4. Focus group.
 5. Observational data.

An explanation of how the data collection strategies will provide the study with the data to answer the question is provided below. We will conduct a survey that has 6-10 questions in two different elementary schools in Winfield, Kansas, and two different elementary schools in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Four principals, eight general teachers and two focus groups of 6-10 students will participate in the survey to answer questions that about the advantages and disadvantages of co-teaching. Focus group will be a data collection strategy that will include the two focus groups and two researchers in a discussion table in two elementary schools in Winfield, Kansas, and it will provide an opportunity to discuss the advantage and disadvantage of doing co-teaching by sharing feelings and suggestions. Observational data might be used in two elementary schools in Winfield, Kansas, so we can observe two general teachers at the same classroom in each school who are implementing the co-teaching; hence, we will be able to observe what are the advantages and disadvantages of doing co-teaching.

Plan for Increasing Validity

For increasing validity, we will make sure to record data accurately, so we will use some tools that will help us in recording the data that we have collected such as taking notes, audio records and filming the interview if possible. Triangulating data sources will be our second way for increasing validity, so we will use

multiple sources of data including literature review, interview, and survey. The last way that we will use for increasing validity is we will make sure there is no bias that can affect our decision or prevent us from seeing positive or negative sides of the topic that we are investigating. Therefore, we will review the biases, assumptions, and preconceived ideas that we have written in our paper. Also, we will include the information on biases and how we dealt with them in the research report.

Analysis

The survey approach was preferred after considering the issue of little time available to conduct the study, as the researchers are in the final stretch of their last year in school. An online survey would be easier to administer and analyze as compared to other data collection approaches. The two school principals from Winfield who took part in the survey extremely agree that co-teaching affects the classroom environment positively. One school principal interviewed holds a strong opinion that students learn better in co-teaching classes as compared to their previous learning performance; while the other principal also agrees to this opinion. One principal strongly agrees that co-teaching improves students' engagement in co-teaching classes; while the other principal simply agrees to this opinion.

Their responses underscore the role of co-teaching in improving learning. Both principals agree that co-teaching teachers in their

school cooperate consistently. They both reported that sometimes teachers co-teach constantly, and that sometimes, the principals encourage their teachers to co-teach. One school principal who participated in the survey believed that co-teaching was beneficial; while the other principals held a weaker opinion, stating that sometimes co-teaching was beneficial. However, both principals agree that co-teaching has more positive sides than negative sides. For the survey conducted on co-teaching amongst two school principals in Damman, Saudi Arabia, both school principals indicated that they had asked their teachers to co-teach, as all believed that co-teaching has a positive impact on the school environment. The school principals surveyed believed that students learn better and student engagement levels would increase through co-teaching. They all encouraged teachers to embrace co-teaching because they believe in the benefits of co-teaching, which surpass the disadvantages.

The survey also captured responses from Winfield teachers who are charged with executing co-teaching. Half of teachers from Winfield strongly agree that co-teaching has the potential to positively affect the classroom environment; while the other half simply agree to this opinion. Three teachers from Winfield who took the survey believe that students learn better through co-teaching as compared to earlier learning modes, while one teacher thinks that sometimes this is true. They agree that students'

engagement is improved through co-teaching, with one teacher holding a strong opinion on this. These teachers agree to teacher cooperation during co-teaching. Most of them sometimes prefer co-teaching to teaching alone. They also recognize the importance of comprehensive planning for less than five hours before co-teaching. Two teachers from Winfield apply team teaching approach, while the other two prefer either parallel teaching or station teaching. They teach comfortably and their students respect co-teaching. Some dislike co-teaching when introducing new lessons, but most of them prefer it. They find co-teaching tenable, despite the challenges that they may face. A general opinion is that co-teaching is beneficial.

All the teachers at Dammam have co-taught. Most of them think co-teaching can bring positive impact on the classroom environment. They all think that co-teacher brings better learning, and improved student engagement levels. On the matter of collaboration for co-teaching purposes, opinion was half-split, with some strongly believing in easy collaboration while others being unsure. A half-split opinion was also witnessed on the matter of preference of co-teaching over individual teaching. Despite that, they all recognize the importance of planning before co-teaching, for less than five hours. Most of Dammam teachers surveyed were not sure of all the four co-teaching approaches, but some had the knowledge. They have managed to maintain

confidence even when they present a distinct lesson to their students. Some students know the rules to follow, while others do not know the rules applicable whenever two teachers show up to teach in their classroom. All the survey Dammam teachers have experience in co-teaching, though they do not have presently practice co-teaching frequent enough. They believe that they have the will to practice co-teaching and learn co-teaching principles because it is beneficial and has more advantages than disadvantages.

A good percentage of the Winfield students surveyed have a general liking for co-teaching classes. They believe that co-teaching is beneficial, and that it has more merits than demerits. For the nine students surveyed, five indicated that they often liked co-teaching. Three students sometimes liked co-teaching, while one always liked co-teaching.

These survey findings underscore the importance of co-teaching as a teaching method. The teachers across schools in Saudi Arabia need to make more effort to adopt more co-teaching practice. The teachers have the will to learn more about co-teaching, so education stakeholders need to address the problem from a training perspective. The findings also indicate that planning is also important before teachers set out to teach co-taught lessons. Such planning should not take too much time (less than five hours). Good enough, the school principals who took the survey

recognize the importance of co-teaching, and they have moved to build an enabling environment for their teachers to pursue co-teaching.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabian schools still lag behind in the adoption of co-teaching. Most of the teachers do not even know all the four approaches of co-teaching. In comparison, the US has made significant strides in the adoption of co-teaching as an instructional method. Effort should be made to improve co-teaching practice in Saudi Arabia. This approach would help to reduce student-to-teacher ratio and enhance the learning ability of students (Prizeman, 2015). There is a policy perspective to this matter, where the lead education policymakers in Saudi-Arabia need to entrench co-teaching as one of the required instructional method in schools. The other step is to offer training to the teachers on what co-teaching is all about. They need to know the various approaches of co-teaching. They should also learn the importance of lead planning time, collaboration, and how one can apply co-teaching in a classroom setting.

For Further Study

This study opens up new questions such as the desirable skillset that teachers must possess to be able to apply co-teaching. Which specific training do the teachers across Saudi Arabia need in order

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to be able to apply co-teaching. Other areas of study that may be explored include the merit of co-teaching against individual teaching. One would want to know how effective is co-teaching as compared to individual teaching when both are applied as the sole approach in teaching.

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