Challenges in Collaborative Practices: A Focus on Team Teaching in English TPD

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Abstract

Team teaching is a widely recognized collaborative practice within Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programs, offering opportunities for shared responsibility, professional growth, and enhanced student outcomes. However, its implementation often encounters significant challenges, which remain underexplored in the context of English education. This study aims to investigate the barriers faced by English teachers in implementing team teaching, addressing a critical gap in the literature. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five English teachers experienced in team teaching. Thematic analysis revealed three major challenges: interpersonal issues such as miscommunication and lack of trust, institutional constraints including insufficient planning time and inadequate administrative support, and pedagogical misalignments stemming from differing teaching philosophies. These findings highlight the complexities of team teaching and underscore the need for targeted interventions. The study recommends fostering trust, allocating dedicated planning time, and aligning pedagogical approaches through professional development programs. These insights contribute to the theoretical discourse on collaborative practices in TPD and offer practical guidance for optimizing team teaching, thereby enhancing teacher effectiveness and student learning.

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative practices in Teacher Professional Development (TPD) have gained increasing recognition as a critical strategy for enhancing teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. According to Kankpog, and Sulemana (2024), collaboration fosters mutual learning, enabling teachers to share expertise, co-create innovative instructional strategies, and address classroom challenges in a supportive environment. In the field of English language teaching, collaboration is particularly crucial, as educators must navigate the complexities of diverse student needs, incorporating a variety of materials, methods, and cultural contexts (De Backer, 2024). Moreover, the growing emphasis on

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collaboration reflects a paradigm shift in professional learning, moving away from short-term, isolated workshops toward more sustainable, community-driven approaches (Dunham et al., 2022). These models prioritize ongoing dialogue, reflection, and shared experiences among teachers. However, despite its theoretical advantages, collaborative practices are open to challenges. For instance, team teaching, a collaborative method where two or more teachers jointly plan, deliver, and assess lessons, has been praised for its potential to enhance teaching and learning outcomes (Roberts et al., 2023). Yet, as (Abbasi, 2020) note, the success of such initiatives often depends on effectively addressing significant challenges, such as interpersonal conflicts, institutional barriers, and pedagogical misalignment.

Team teaching, where two or more teachers collaboratively plan, deliver, and evaluate lessons, offers substantial pedagogical and professional benefits (Tajino et al., 2016). It promotes shared responsibility, leverages the strengths of diverse teaching styles, and fosters reflective practice among educators (Hoa, 2022). In English language teaching, these benefits are particularly pronounced, as team teaching allows teachers to address the multifaceted nature of language instruction through complementary approaches to listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Canaran, 2017). Moreover, team teaching encourages a dynamic classroom environment, blending creativity with structured learning to enhance student engagement and outcomes (Walsh, 2022). Despite these advantages, the practical implementation of team teaching frequently needs to be addressed. Studies by (Lago et al., 2022) emphasize critical issues such as role ambiguity, where teachers may struggle to define their responsibilities, imbalanced workload distribution, which can lead to feelings of resentment, and conflicting pedagogical styles that hinder cohesive lesson delivery (Do & Hascher, 2023). Such challenges often overshadow the intended benefits of team teaching, reducing its effectiveness in practice. Addressing these barriers requires a deeper understanding of the interpersonal, institutional, and pedagogical dynamics involved in team teaching.

Despite its numerous advantages, implementing team teaching often faces significant challenges across multiple levels. Interpersonal issues, such as miscommunication and a lack of mutual trust, frequently disrupt the collaborative relationship between teachers (Tika et al., 2023). Additionally, institutional barriers, including insufficient time for collaborative planning, inadequate administrative support, and ambiguous role definitions, further complicate the process. Differences in pedagogical approaches, such as contrasting teaching philosophies, varied instructional strategies, and divergent classroom management styles, can also create conflict and reduce efficiency. These obstacles are particularly evident in TPD programs designed to encourage team teaching, as they demand long-term commitment and alignment among educators, administrators, and other stakeholders (Mursidin, 2020). While research by (Mohamed, 2020) highlights these challenges, there is still a need to examine their specific manifestations in the context of English language TPD. Teaching English brings unique complexities, requiring innovative approaches to address its diverse linguistic and cultural aspects. Teachers must simultaneously balance the development of students' grammatical proficiency, communicative abilities, and cultural understanding (Connor & Nazari, 2020). In this environment, team teaching presents a significant opportunity to enhance instructional practices by integrating the diverse strengths of collaborating teachers (Jaleniauskienė et al., 2019).

Research on collaborative practice challenges has attracted many researchers' attention in recent years. This research focuses on various aspects, such as the challenges of social and collaborative learning assessment in higher education (Boud & Bearman, 2024), collaborative learning practices against barriers to effective student collaboration (Le et al., 2017), and advances and challenges of collaboration as an area of learning and research for mathematics teachers (Fiorentini & Losano, 2024). However, currently, there are still few studies that discuss challenges in collaborative practices that focus on team teaching. Therefore, research on collaborative practice challenges focusing on team teaching in English TPD aims to address the existing gap. This research is to explore the challenges of team teaching in English TPD. By examining the barriers English teachers face in implementing team teaching, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature. Specifically, it aims to provide actionable insights into how these challenges can be mitigated to enhance collaborative practices. The study contributes to a broader understanding of how team teaching can be optimised within TPD programs, particularly in contexts where English plays a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes. The following question will serve as a guiding for this research: What are the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing team teaching?

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the challenges English teachers face in implementing team teaching within the context of Teacher Professional Development (TPD). A qualitative approach is ideal for examining social phenomena and understanding participants' lived experiences, as suggested by (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This research specifically employs a phenomenological approach to uncover the nuanced interpersonal, institutional, and pedagogical challenges of team teaching, as phenomenology is well-suited to investigating how individuals interpret and navigate their shared realities (Van Manen, 2023). This design aligns with the study's goal of providing in-depth insights into collaborative teaching practices in English education. The participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure their relevance to the research focus. Five English teachers were chosen based on specific inclusion criteria, such as prior experience with team teaching in TPD programs and active participation in collaborative professional development initiatives. According to (Quinn Patton, 2002), purposive sampling is a widely accepted method in qualitative research for selecting participants who provide rich, detailed information about the phenomenon under study. These participants, with a minimum of three years of teaching experience, are well-positioned to offer meaningful perspectives on the complexities of team teaching.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, a method known for its ability to capture detailed and context-specific information (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while ensuring that the core areas of interpersonal, institutional, and pedagogical challenges were covered. Open-ended questions were designed to encourage participants to share comprehensive narratives. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and richness of the data, consistent with best practices in qualitative research (Clarke & Braun, 2017).Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, following the process outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method involves systematically identifying and interpreting patterns and themes across the data set. The analysis began with familiarization through repeated reading of the transcripts, followed by the generation of initial codes. These codes were grouped into potential themes, which were then reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Thematic analysis offers flexibility in identifying implicit and explicit patterns, making it particularly effective for exploring the multifaceted challenges of team teaching (Nowell et al., 2017)

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied, as suggested by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the data, member checking to validate the accuracy of interview transcripts, and triangulation by comparing insights from different participants. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and methodology, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of findings to similar contexts. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail of the research process, including coding decisions and thematic development. Finally, confirmability was achieved by documenting reflexive notes throughout the research to minimize researcher bias and maintain objectivity. Together, these measures enhance the rigor and reliability of the study's findings. By grounding the research methodology in established theoretical and analytical frameworks, this study aims to provide a robust understanding of the challenges associated with team teaching in English TPD.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study revealed critical challenges in implementing team teaching within the context of English Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programs. By employing thematic analysis on in-depth interviews with five experienced English teachers, three prominent themes emerged as the main obstacles: interpersonal challenges, institutional barriers, and pedagogical misalignments. These themes reflect the multifaceted difficulties teachers encounter when collaborating in team teaching

settings, where effective coordination and mutual understanding are essential for success. The findings of this study shed light on the lived experiences of English teachers engaged in team teaching, revealing a nuanced interplay of interpersonal, institutional, and pedagogical factors. These challenges reflect broader systemic issues in educational settings, as underscored by (Dunham et al., 2022), who argue that collaborative teaching demands comprehensive support at multiple levels. Together, these findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address these challenges and enhance the implementation of team teaching in TPD programs.

Interpersonal Challenges

Interpersonal challenges emerged as a critical obstacle, with miscommunication and a lack of mutual trust being frequently cited by participants. These issues were found to hinder effective collaboration and create barriers to achieving common goals. As highlighted by Tika et al. (2023), trust and clear communication are essential for successful teamwork, and their absence can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Participant 1 shared their frustrations:

> *"Sometimes, I feel my co-teacher doesn't fully trust my ability to handle certain aspects of the lesson. This creates tension, and instead of complementing each other's strengths, we end up stepping on each other's toes."(P1)*

Such experiences highlight how interpersonal dynamics can undermine the collaborative spirit that team teaching seeks to foster. While Tajino et al., (2016) argue that shared responsibility in team teaching promotes reflective practice and professional growth, the reality for many teachers is marred by personality clashes and differing communication styles (Do & Hascher, 2023). Participant 3's observation further illustrates this issue:

> *"Our personalities clash at times. While I am more flexible and adaptive, my partner prefers rigid lesson plans. It's hard to find common ground."(P3)*

These conflicts suggest a gap between the theoretical potential of team teaching and its practical application. While team teaching offers numerous benefits, such as collaborative lesson planning, shared responsibilities, and professional growth, its effectiveness is often hindered by interpersonal conflicts, misaligned teaching philosophies, and logistical constraints. To address these challenges, trust-building initiatives and structured communication frameworks are crucial (De Backer, 2024). Schools can implement regular team-building workshops or allocate time for joint reflection sessions, as suggested by Abbasi (2020). These activities can help teachers establish mutual understanding, clarify expectations, and develop shared goals. Additionally, fostering a culture of open dialogue can help teachers navigate conflicts constructively and build a more cohesive teaching partnership. Encouraging teachers to engage in peer observations, feedback sessions, and mentorship programs can further strengthen collaboration and reduce misunderstandings (Roberts et al., 2023). School administrators can also provide mediation support when conflicts arise, ensuring that disagreements do not disrupt instructional effectiveness. By institutionalizing these strategies, schools can create a more supportive and harmonious environment for team teaching.

Institutional Constraints

Institutional barriers, particularly insufficient time for collaborative planning and inadequate administrative support, emerged as significant challenges reported by participants. These obstacles were seen as major hindrances to effective teamwork and collaboration, leading to stress, frustration, and reduced motivation among teachers. Without dedicated time for joint lesson planning and structured collaboration, teachers often struggle to align their teaching approaches, share best practices, or engage in meaningful professional discussions. Dunham et al. (2022) argue that robust institutional frameworks, including adequate time and support, are essential for the success of

collaborative practices in teacher professional development (TPD). Schools that fail to allocate sufficient resources for collaboration risk undermining the potential benefits of team teaching and shared instructional strategies (Do & Hascher, 2023). Participant 4 highlighted the frustration caused by time constraints, noting that last-minute coordination often resulted in disorganized lessons and ineffective classroom management. The participant further explained that without administrative support in scheduling and resource allocation, collaboration remained superficial rather than genuinely impactful. This sentiment underscores the need for school leaders to prioritize structural support by integrating scheduled collaboration periods into teachers' workloads and fostering a culture where teamwork is valued and incentivized. Participant 4 highlighted the frustration caused by time constraints:

> *"We are expected to collaborate, but the school schedule leaves no room for joint planning sessions. It feels like we're being set up for failure."(P4)*

Such logistical challenges are compounded by a lack of administrative support. Participant 2 remarked:

> *"The administration encourages team teaching but doesn't provide the resources or support to make it work effectively. We're left to figure everything out on our own."(P2)*

These comments reflect broader systemic issues in educational institutions, where team teaching is promoted without adequate structural backing. While collaboration is often encouraged as a best practice, its implementation remains challenging due to institutional constraints such as insufficient planning time, lack of clear guidelines, and limited administrative support. Lago et al. (2023) also emphasize the critical role of administrative support in addressing logistical barriers. Ambiguous role definitions were another institutional challenge that frequently arose. Participants described how unclear delineation of responsibilities often led to workload imbalances and friction, as some teachers felt burdened with a disproportionate share of lesson planning, grading, or classroom management. This finding supports Mursidin and N (2020) observation that undefined roles in team teaching create inefficiencies and tensions among teachers. Without clear expectations, collaboration can become disorganized, leading to frustration and decreased motivation. To mitigate these issues, educational institutions should establish formalized role assignments, ensuring that teachers understand their specific contributions within a team-teaching framework. Clearly defined responsibilities, whether related to lesson planning, student assessment, or classroom facilitation, can help prevent misunderstandings and promote a more equitable workload distribution.

Pedagogical Misalignments

Pedagogical misalignments emerged as a significant theme in this study, highlighting the challenges posed by differing teaching philosophies and instructional strategies. These differences often hinder effective collaboration and the smooth delivery of team-taught lessons (Walsh, 2022). When teachers hold contrasting views on classroom management, student engagement, or assessment methods, conflicts can arise, affecting both their working relationship and the overall learning experience. Such conflicts can create tension and disrupt the cohesiveness of lessons, particularly when teachers struggle to balance their approaches (Connor & Nazari, 2020). Without structured dialogue and alignment efforts, these differences may result in fragmented instruction, where students receive mixed messages about expectations and learning objectives. English language teaching adds another layer of complexity, requiring teachers to integrate diverse priorities such as grammatical accuracy, communicative competence, and cultural understanding. This balancing act becomes even more difficult when teachers have different pedagogical backgrounds or levels of experience. Participant 5 encapsulated this issue, stating:

"My teaching philosophy is student-centered, but my partner leans towards a more traditional, teacher-centered approach. This often leads to disagreements on how to conduct the class."(P5)

This sentiment illustrates how philosophical differences can lead to challenges in lesson planning, instructional delivery, and student engagement. To mitigate these conflicts, schools and professional development programs should provide structured opportunities for teachers to discuss, negotiate, and integrate their pedagogical beliefs, ensuring a more cohesive and effective collaborative teaching experience. These findings align with Do and Hascher (2023) observation that conflicting pedagogical styles can disrupt lesson delivery and confuse students. The complexity of English language teaching further magnifies these challenges, as noted by Connor and Nazari (2020). Teachers must balance multiple instructional priorities, including grammatical accuracy, communicative competence, and cultural awareness. Participant 3's account illustrates the difficulty of integrating diverse instructional approaches:

"English teaching is multifaceted. While I focus on communicative competence, my partner prioritizes grammar drills. Balancing these approaches in a single lesson is exhausting."(P3)

These tensions underscore the need for professional development programs that address collaborative teaching strategies. Without proper training and guidance, teachers may struggle to integrate their individual teaching styles, leading to conflicts and inefficiencies in the classroom. Workshops and training sessions focusing on aligning pedagogical goals can help teachers develop a shared understanding and approach, ensuring that their collaboration enhances, rather than disrupts, student learning. Additionally, as Tajino et al. (2015) suggest, fostering a culture of reflective practice can enable teachers to navigate pedagogical differences constructively. Reflection allows educators to critically examine their teaching methods, identify areas of improvement, and adapt their approaches based on feedback from their peers (Mursidin & N, 2020). Schools can support this by implementing structured reflection sessions, where teachers discuss their experiences, challenges, and successes in a collaborative setting. Mentorship programs and peer observation initiatives can also provide teachers with opportunities to learn from one another and refine their instructional strategies. By integrating professional development initiatives that emphasize communication, adaptability, and mutual respect, schools can help teachers build more effective and harmonious teaching partnerships, ultimately improving the overall quality of education.

The findings of this study contribute to the broader theoretical discourse on collaborative practices in TPD. As Dunham et al. (2022) argue, the shift from isolated workshops to community-driven approaches requires systemic support at multiple levels, including institutional policies, administrative commitment, and teacher engagement. This study provides empirical evidence of the barriers teachers face in implementing team teaching, such as time constraints, misalignment of pedagogical beliefs, and lack of administrative support, while also highlighting actionable strategies to address these challenges. Practically, the findings offer insights into optimizing team teaching within TPD programs by emphasizing the importance of structured collaboration and reflective practice. Schools must prioritize trust-building, allocate dedicated planning time, and promote alignment in teaching philosophies to create an environment conducive to effective teamwork. Providing professional development opportunities that focus on conflict resolution, communication strategies, and co-teaching models can further enhance the effectiveness of team teaching (Jaleniauskiene et al., 2019). By addressing these challenges, team teaching can realize its potential to enhance professional growth, foster teacher collaboration, and ultimately improve student outcomes. A well-supported team-teaching framework not only benefits teachers but also contributes to a more dynamic and engaging learning experience for students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the challenges English teachers face in implementing team teaching within Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programs. By focusing on interpersonal dynamics, institutional barriers, and pedagogical misalignments, this research sought to provide actionable insights into optimizing collaborative teaching practices. The findings revealed that miscommunication and a lack of mutual trust significantly hinder effective collaboration, echoing existing literature on the importance of interpersonal harmony in team teaching. Institutional barriers, including insufficient time for planning, inadequate administrative support, and unclear role definitions, further complicated the implementation of team teaching. Additionally, pedagogical misalignments arising from divergent teaching philosophies and strategies created conflicts that undermined the cohesiveness of team-taught lessons. These challenges suggest several practical implications for educators and administrators. Building trust among team members through structured communication and team-building activities is essential. Schools must also allocate dedicated time for collaborative planning, provide administrative support, and establish clear guidelines for role delineation. Moreover, professional development programs should focus on aligning pedagogical goals and fostering reflective practices to help teachers navigate instructional differences.

By identifying specific barriers and proposing strategies to overcome them, this study bridges the gap between theoretical ideals and practical realities, offering a roadmap for enhancing the implementation of team teaching in English education. However, this study is not without limitations. The sample size of five participants, though sufficient for qualitative analysis, limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on English teachers in a specific context, which may not capture the full spectrum of challenges faced in other disciplines or regions. Future research should consider expanding the participant pool to include a more diverse range of educators and settings. Longitudinal studies examining the impact of proposed interventions over time would also provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of strategies for overcoming the challenges of team teaching. For theory, this study underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of the interpersonal and institutional dynamics that shape collaborative teaching practices. Practically, it calls for systemic changes in TPD programs to support team teaching, ensuring that educators have the resources, time, and professional development opportunities necessary to succeed. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can unlock the full potential of team teaching as a transformative approach to professional development, ultimately enhancing teacher effectiveness and student outcomes

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