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Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Coteaching in Foreign Language Education (FLE) Contexts: Perceptions of English Student-teachers towards Coteaching

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Per tu, àvia,
for every single moment shared

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Abstract

This Master's dissertation aims to explore the views of student-teachers towards coteaching. Coteaching is an emergent teaching initiative widely used in the current educational system, as a way to promote collaborative work and more inclusive classrooms. While this teaching approach has been extensively studied in some respects, little is known about student-teachers' views and preparedness to implement coteaching as well as the training they are offered during their studies. Therefore, this research project wants to find out about what student-teachers have to say about coteaching. Through an online survey, 28 student-teachers from a Catalan university, who experienced coteaching during their internship, have been asked to share their rational views and emotional perspectives on coteaching. Afterwards, a thematic analysis has been conducted to examine the student-teachers' answers. By the end of the article, in the chapter where conclusions are written, we see that the majority of participants in the questionnaire declare to have had a positive and enriching experience with coteaching. All in all, this research project offers a view of student-teachers' perspectives on coteaching towards inclusion and future professional development and improvement.

Keywords: Coteaching, student-teachers, secondary school, collaborative learning, inclusive education

Aquest treball té com a objectiu explorar la codocència des del punt de vista dels estudiants en pràctiques. La codocència és una iniciativa cada cop més utilitzada en el sistema educatiu actual com a eina per a promoure el treball cooperatiu i la inclusió. Tot i que aquesta pràctica docent s'ha estudiat àmpliament en alguns aspectes, hi ha molt poca informació sobre quina preparació tenen els estudiants en pràctiques en la codocència i la formació que se'ls ofereix per poder impartir-la. Així doncs, aquest projecte pretén descobrir què en pensen 28 estudiants en pràctiques d'una universitat catalana que han tingut experiència amb la codocència. A través d'una enquesta online se'ls ha demanat que expressin les idees racionals, així com també les percepcions emocionals que tenen envers la codocència. Posteriorment, s'ha dut a terme una anàlisi temàtica per tal d'examinar les respostes dels estudiants. Al final de l'article, on es presenten les conclusions, podem observar que la majoria de participants explica haver tingut una experiència molt positiva amb la codocència. En resum, aquest treball ofereix la visió que tenen un grup d'estudiants en pràctiques de la codocència com a eina cap a la inclusió i el desenvolupament i la millora professional.

Paraules clau: codocència, estudiants en pràctiques, ESO, aprenentatge col·laboratiu, educació inclusiva.

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	6
2. Theoretical framework	8
2.1. What is coteaching?.....	8
2.2. Who is involved in coteaching?	8
2.4. Benefits of coteaching	10
2.5. Drawbacks of coteaching.....	12
3. Research questions	13
4. Method.....	14
4.1. Participants.....	14
4.2. Data collection	14
4.3. Methodological approach	15
5. Analysis.....	16
5.1. Definition of coteaching	16
5.2. Benefits of coteaching	17
5.3. Drawbacks of coteaching.....	19
5.4. Conditions for effective coteaching	20
5.5. Training on coteaching	22
5.6. Feelings towards the implementation of coteaching	24
5.6.1. Successes of coteaching in the English classroom.....	24
5.6.2. Problems of coteaching in the English classroom.....	25
5.6.3 Overall feelings	25
5.7. Coteaching in the future	27
6. Conclusions.....	28
7. References.....	32
8. Appendices.....	34
Appendix 1.....	34

List of figures

Figure 1: Coteaching modalities.....	9
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1. Introduction

The school is a diverse place, where students from different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and with different interests, abilities and learning styles cohabit. For this reason, educators need to respond to this diversity and make sure to address every students' needs through "increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education." (UNESCO, 2009: 8).

During a lesson in my Teacher Education Master's Degree the term coteaching appeared. Although I had already heard the concept, I wasn't sure of its meaning. To my surprise, I was then told that during my internship at a secondary school I would have to coteach with one of my peer students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. I started wondering how this practice was carried out, its benefits and drawbacks and I did some research because, as a future English teacher, I was eager to learn more about it.

Special education students started to be included in regular education programmes and stopped being segregated from their peers into special education schools in 1997 in the United States (Murawski & Swanson, 2001). That was possible thanks to a movement called IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), which emerged in the United States of America in the late 1960s. It produced changes in the Public Law, including two main aspects: a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The term 'mainstreaming' appeared, referring to the effort made to mix students with special needs into general education classrooms. Shortly after, 'inclusion' was the next wave of reform (Peery, 2017). Both concepts developed as a need to name the process of these students entering the public education system, but something else needed to be done in order to help all students to adapt to this new context. Therefore, the role of specialists became fundamental to provide support to the students and accompany them throughout the process. For the first time in the educational context, two teachers, a general education teacher and a specialist, came together in one classroom to work jointly so that every student could benefit from the curriculum of the public education and have a successful learning process. This is how coteaching came into existence.

During my internship at a secondary school I implemented coteaching with a peer student-teacher without having received any previous instruction on this teaching approach. While we were planning our teaching unit and the lessons for our students, coteaching would usually come up for discussion. We had read a few articles on the topic, but far from being experts,

most of our actions were based on our instincts. However, and with uncertainty, whether we were doing it properly or not, we could observe a positive outcome in several aspects for us, as teachers, and for the students. The main impact was the possibility to give each student personalized attention and by doing so, to educate our students in an inclusive context. After the experience, we were intrigued to hear about the perceptions from other English student-teachers.

This is how this research project started. On the one hand, from a personal need to delve into coteaching, its benefits and drawbacks, its different modalities and the influence it can have in schools towards a more inclusive education. On the other hand, to hear what student-teachers have to say about it, for future professional development and improvement.

The present article is part of a larger collaborative classroom-based research project. Three Master's dissertations presented in June 2020 in the English branch of the MUFPS¹ have been created with the aim of providing a vision on the main features of coteaching and its implementation. The first paper (Boada, 2020) offers a literature review on the research done in the field of coteaching. The second part of the project is the present article, based on coteaching perceptions of English student-teachers. The last one (Terès, 2020) focuses on the experience of implementing coteaching during an internship period and analyses the data collected. Creating a common project has allowed us to explore together an emerging teaching approach considered to promote more inclusive educational contexts whilst developing our teamwork skills.

In this article I will first include a theoretical framework, where I will introduce and define coteaching, the people involved in it and the different coteaching practices. Furthermore, the possible benefits and drawbacks of coteaching are discussed. Secondly, the research questions and the main objectives will be presented. In the third place, methods of data collection and analysis will be explained. Then, the analysis based on the data collected through an online questionnaire (see Appendix 1) will follow. Finally, conclusions will be drawn based on the information obtained in the analysis.

¹ MUFPS stands for “Màster Universitari en Formació de Professorat d'Educació Secundària Obligatòria i Batxillerat, Formació Professional i Ensenyament d'Idiomes”.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will briefly define coteaching and the people involved in this teaching modality. Afterwards, coteaching in practice will be presented. Lastly, benefits and drawbacks of coteaching practices will be discussed.

2.1. What is coteaching?

There are many definitions of coteaching. According to Murawski (2010), the first one was provided by Bauwens, Hourcade and Friend in 1989. They defined coteaching as “an educational approach in which two teachers work in a coactive and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviourally heterogeneous groups of students in an integrated setting.” (Murawski: 25).

It is important to distinguish coteaching from general cooperation. In general cooperation teachers collaborate and share, but each of them has their own classroom, whereas in coteaching teachers are present in the same class.

Another definition that perfectly exemplifies what coteaching consists of, is provided by Murawski (2003), who states that coteaching happens “when two or more educators co-plan, co-instruct, and co-asses a group of students with diverse needs in the same general education classroom.” (Murawski: 2). The aim of the author is to outline the importance of not only sharing the classroom, but also of educators planning together what they are going to do and why, instructing the students in the most effective ways and assessing constantly students (academically, behaviourally, socially, and emotionally). For educators, engaging in all the activities equally is extremely relevant. Kohler-Evans (2006, cited in Friend et al., 2010: 11) reinforces the idea of equity between coteachers, by saying that “strong personal partnerships and building a parity-based relationship” are crucial for a successful coteaching. What is more, the author says that coteaching can be referred to as a professional marriage.

2.2. Who is involved in coteaching?

Coteaching studies and practices have evolved rapidly in the recent years as a way to promote educational inclusion and with it, definitions and terminology have also experienced changes. Friend (2008) referred to coteaching as the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist. Two years later, Friend et al. (2010) used the words “two (or more) teachers”. Even though the terms are different, the objective is the same: people instructing a group of students with individual needs in general education settings. Therefore, we observe several terms to refer to the subjects involved in the implementation of

coteaching. Some of them are two educational professionals (Dieker, 2016), certified teachers (Condeman, Bresnahan & Pedersen, 2009) or two or more professionals (Cook & Friend, 1995). Dieker (2016) offers a classification that includes the most common teams of educators in coteaching practices:

- Special and general educators
- Paraprofessional and a special or general educator
- Two general education teachers
- Speech/language pathologists and a special educator or general educator
- Social worker and a special educator or general educator
- Other support personnel (volunteers) and special educator or general educator
- Elective teachers (P.E., music, art, computers, foreign languages, etc.) and a special educator or general educator

In conclusion, a definition that illustrates the possibility of different subjects being involved in coteaching says that: “usually we think as co-teaching as involving a general and special educator, but co-teaching can occur between or among two or more special educators, two or more general educators or even two or more other professionals.” (Conderman, Bresnahan & Pedersen, 2009: 3).

2.3. Coteaching in practice

Coteaching allows teachers to use instructional methodologies that would not be possible with only one teacher present in the classroom. According to Friend & Cook (2010) there are six different modalities of coteaching. Taking into account the needs and abilities of the students, the materials and resources in the classroom and the learning objectives, educators might choose one modality or another in order to make their students' learning successful. Hereafter in Figure 1 the six modalities of coteaching are illustrated and briefly described.

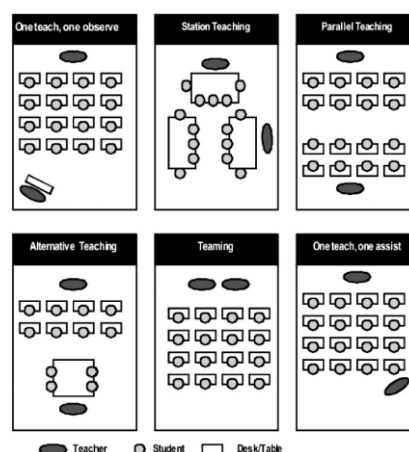


Figure 1. Co-Teaching modalities (Friend et al., 2010)

Coteaching modalities descriptions (Friend et al., 2010):

1. **One teaches, one observes:** in this modality one teacher acts as the ‘main teacher’ and focuses on instruction while the other teacher acts as an ‘observer’ and collects different kinds of data -behavioural, academic or social- on the classroom or specific students.
2. **Station teaching:** this modality entails the division of students in groups -usually three- inside the classroom and their rotation from one station to another. There is one coteacher at two of the stations that teaches one section of content and at the third one the students work autonomously.
3. **Parallel teaching:** in this modality the class is divided in two groups and each teacher gives the lesson to half of the students. One of the objectives of this modality is to increase student participation.
4. **Alternative teaching:** one teacher works with most of the students while the other teacher assists a smaller group that might need more support.
5. **Teaming:** in this modality teachers work together as a team. They both give instruction and intervene equally.
6. **One teaches, one assists:** modality where one teacher leads the instruction while the other circulates in the class in order to help students and offer them assistance.

For further information on coteaching practices research in Catalonia, see Boada (2020).

2.4. Benefits of coteaching

Coteaching has a positive impact, both on students and teachers. Wilson & Blednick (2011) gather a list of benefits based on coteaching experiences from administrators, teachers, parents and students. Concerning the benefits that have a direct impact on students, three main categories can be established: more instructional options, better performance academically and socially, and more inclusion.

More instructional options

Coteaching gives the chance of providing every student in the classroom with different educational options. That means, creating smaller groups and offering more individualized attention as well as varied resources and instruction that take into consideration a wide range of interests and abilities (Wilson & Blednick, 2011).

Better academic and social performance

Thanks to smaller student ratios, the increase of student participation can be observed, resulting in higher engagement and motivation. Murawski (2006) and Dieker (2001) share the idea that co-taught classrooms lead to higher social skills, academic self-esteem and expectations for students with and without disabilities. These benefits come to be due to all students being able to access the general curriculum (Cook & Friend, 1995) and to the individualized instruction through differentiated groupings and strategies, that are possible by having two teachers in the room (Murawski & Dieker, 2004).

More inclusion

Wilson & Blednick (2011) put special emphasis on how coteaching is beneficial for students with special needs: the stigma of special education students being segregated is reduced; their expectations increase; the gaps between students are diminished; and students with and without disabilities interact with one another and cohabit in an educational context where diversity is present and cherished. In short, all students learn tolerance and respect and embrace diversity.

Wilson & Blednick (2011: 11) say that “teaching can be an isolating experience, and co-teaching offers professionals the opportunity to collaborate, problem-solve, and create, all in an effort to provide supportive and effective learning for all students”. In that one sentence we identify many of the advantages of being a coteacher:

Improved instruction and easier classroom management

When coteaching, the educators’ attention is divided. Therefore, intensity of instruction is achieved through an understanding of students’ needs and the consequent adaptation of materials, attention to curriculum challenges, use of diverse and effective teaching and learning strategies, and constant assessment. In addition, it has been proved that in co-taught lessons the students’ behaviour is better and there are fewer disruptions. If there is any problem, since there are two teachers to monitor the students, it is not necessary to stop all the instruction due to a bad behaviour (Benninghof, 2012).

Collaboration, support and professional growth

Coteaching allows to share responsibilities and to give and receive support. Professionals who coteach have the chance to observe a colleague, to learn daily interaction and more opportunities for self-reflection (Benninghof, 2012). Coteachers also provide one another with valuable feedback and share expertise with the intention of improving professionally. Murawski (2006: 29) declares that, “two teachers in one room allows for experimentation with new teaching methodologies”. At the same time, conducting hands-on activities is easier and

there is more flexibility to test situations (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). Besides, working together can result in personal friendships, and hence increase both morale and student performance (Weiss & Brigham, 2000).

More motivation

According to Murawski (2003), educators who had experienced coteaching, expressed to have more energy and creativity, they had more fun while teaching and learned to trust their peers. Bauwens et al. (1989), through a survey done to special and general education teachers in co-taught classrooms, found out that both groups reported an increased satisfaction as well as a higher teaching and learning potential.

2.5. Drawbacks of coteaching

“Naturally, any time there are benefits to an educational initiative, there are always going to be some barriers as well; nothing comes of value easily.” (Murawski, 2009: 28). The author explains that the different barriers to coteaching are shortly mentioned, because most of them can be slightly solved or at least diminished. Blendick & Wilson (2011: 11), add that researchers, administrators and coteachers are sometimes reluctant to start coteaching programmes because they rely “on a positive working relationship between two teachers, require high levels of teaching expertise, demand knowledge of both curriculum and remediation, and require time and effort for adequate planning”.

According to Blendick & Wilson (2011) and Murawski (2009) the most commonly identified barriers in the literature on coteaching are the following:

- Lack of training or professional development, which leads many teachers to have a negative experience with coteaching.
- Personality or philosophical clashes, that not only affect the teachers’ relationship, but also the students, who get the negative vibes and lower their performance.
- Insufficient time for teachers to co-plan units and lessons.
- Reluctance to lose control, meaning that some teachers are not willing to share the instruction of their classroom, which adds to the fact that adopting to a new teaching approach might take some time to adapt.
- Limited resources -they can be either human or material.
- Scheduling issues and difficulty of distributing the quantity of teachers and students.

- Inappropriate ratios of students with and without special needs in a classroom.
- Lack of administrative support or poor pairing of teachers by administrators (administration bodies are those who promote new initiatives, partnerships and resources and are responsible for inclusive practices such as coteaching).

3. Research questions

Coteaching is an emergent and widely used teaching initiative used to meet the needs of all students in inclusive classrooms across the globe. While coteaching has been studied extensively in some respects and there are studies focusing on how certified teachers perceive coteaching, little research has been conducted on student-teachers' perceptions. Moreover, "despite the widespread implementation of the practice, little is known about how teachers are prepared to use co-teaching." (Chitiyo, J. & Brinda, W., 2018: 38).

The aim of this research project is to explore the perceptions of English student-teachers at a Catalan university who experienced the implementation of coteaching during their internship, and in addition, to collect their opinions on what training should be offered in order to be able to carry out coteaching. To collect the data a questionnaire was created (See Appendix 1). Useful information can be provided to researchers and future student-teachers and especially to university departments of the MUFPS on how to structure and develop the instruction of coteaching for future teachers.

To be able to find out more about coteaching perceptions among student teachers the following research questions are suggested.

RQ 1. What are the perceptions of English student-teachers towards coteaching?

RQ1.1. What are, according to student-teachers, the benefits and drawbacks of coteaching in the English classroom?

RQ1.2. What are the feelings student-teachers experienced when coteaching?

RQ1.3. What training do student-teachers think should be offered to ensure teacher preparedness to implement coteaching?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 28 student-teachers from the MUFPS in the English branch from a Catalan university. Owing to the nature of the group under study, the majority of the participants (82,14 %) were female and the rest (17,86%) were male. Regarding their level of education, all of the student-teachers had a bachelor's degree at least and their previous field of studies was English philology (39,29%), Translation and Interpreting (28,57%) and others (32,14%), for example journalism, speech language pathology and sciences. All of the participants had work experience in teaching, but just a couple of them had implemented coteaching before. The survey was sent to 28 student-teachers, but only 22 complete answers were received. The other 6 made an attempt to answer the survey, but skipped almost all the questions, if not all of them.

4.2. Data collection

The data was collected using an online questionnaire. It was created with an online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, in April 2020 and it was distributed to 28 English student-teachers from the Teacher Education Master's Degree via email in March 2020 through that same tool. The respondents received a brief text with indications including the topic of the survey, the approximate time needed to complete it and they were given the opportunity to use English when filling the form as well as Catalan and Spanish. That was suggested because the two later languages are the mother tongues of the majority of the respondents and it has been proved that a foreign language might mean a barrier when expressing thoughts and emotions. Therefore, since the aim of the questionnaire was to obtain developed and well formulated answers on the topic of coteaching, the respondents could freely express themselves in the language they chose.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) consisted on 14 questions in total. The first three were related to the respondents' background (gender, year of birth and previous field of studies). From the other 11 questions, 6 of them focused on student-teachers' rational perceptions. Participants were asked about potential benefits and drawbacks of coteaching in the English classroom, the training and instruction on coteaching offered in their Masters, the three most important conditions for effective coteaching and a brief definition of this teaching modality. The other 5 concentrated on student-teachers' emotional perceptions: they were asked about their feelings when experiencing coteaching during their internship and whether they would

like to do coteaching in the future when they become fully certified teachers and why. Most of the questions in the survey were open-ended because, even though this type of questions has the risk of being left unanswered, the objective was for each respondent to answer unrestrictedly about their knowledge, experience and feelings on coteaching.

4.3. Methodological approach

As I decided to use SurveyMonkey for my questionnaire, the data was automatically stored in the online tool. Because of the structure and the nature of my survey, the method chosen to analyse the data was a thematic analysis, a method of analysing qualitative data. The approach I used for the qualitative analysis was a deductive approach, as I already had a theoretical framework that was a guide for me. Afterwards I created the questions thinking of the information I would like to obtain from the respondents.

Once all the results were in, I firstly analysed the common themes, words and patterns that appeared repeatedly. Secondly, I coded the data. The tool I used made my work smoother because it contains an option that classifies the most repeated words and expressions. After that, I ordered the different questions into the pre-planned themes (some of them were slightly modified if needed) and I made sure that the themes represented the data accurately. To finish, I started writing the analysis of the data.

5. Analysis

The first four sections of this chapter focus on the questions that were written in the questionnaire with the objective of gathering English student-teachers' rational perceptions towards coteaching. The last three sections were created with the aim of collecting student-teachers' emotional perceptions.

5.1. Definition of coteaching

The respondents were asked to define coteaching briefly in the last question of the survey. The question was placed there on purpose, in order for student-teachers to reflect on coteaching throughout all the questionnaire and to, by the end, be able to provide a short and meaningful definition of what coteaching means to them. Many participants wrote a simple and clear definition, saying that coteaching is collaboration between two or more teachers in the same classroom, as illustrated in Example 1 by Student-Teacher 7 (ST 7) and Example 2 by Student-Teacher 10.

- (1) "Coteaching means working together with another teaching professional in the same classroom" (ST 7 female).
- (2) "Coteaching is not teaching alone, but with another (or more than 2) teacher at the same time" (ST 10 female).

Some participants were more specific and added to the definition of coteaching being collaboration, the support and helped shared between teachers. Additionally, many answers focused on coteaching offering an opportunity to reach all the students in the classroom and adapting to different coteaching modalities, materials and resources according to the students' needs. That is to say, the increase of social inclusion and equity in the classroom. Example 3 by Student-Teacher 17 and Example 4 by Student-Teacher 21 comprise both the support and the inclusion mentioned above.

- (3) "Coteaching means being able to assist the different students in a classroom and to provide them with higher support and help throughout their learning process" (ST 17 female).
- (4) "Coteaching consists in sharing the experience of helping students to learn, using as many tools as there are available, to make the learning diverse and intersectional" (ST 21 female).

Some more aspects referenced in the definitions of coteaching, but by only a few student-teachers were innovation, role modeling and all the necessary work that is done outside the classroom: establishing clear roles for each teacher, co-planning, determining common objectives and co-assessing. Student-Teacher 16 in Example 5 and Student-Teacher 4 in Example 6 offer rich definitions that include most of the above-mentioned features.

- (5) “Coteaching means innovation and coherence. If we want our students to work and learn collaboratively, it seems only natural and logic that we act as an example by doing the same” (ST 16 male).
- (6) “To me coteaching is building a safe space and a teaching environment with the help of another teacher, so both can explore more options and open more doors to the students, thanks to the different ideas and opinions that may be proposed and shared” (ST 4 female).

In essence, student-teachers defined coteaching to be collaboration between two or more teachers in the same classroom who support one another and who have common objectives and varied resources to attend every single pupil.

5.2. Benefits of coteaching

Student-teachers were asked to mention the benefits of coteaching in the English classroom according to their knowledge and experience. The respondents’ perceptions were similar to the ones discussed in the theoretical framework where different authors are compared (see chapter 2.4). Benefits of coteaching can be analysed from the teachers’ perspective and from the students’ perspective, and although many aspects have an impact on both groups, student-teachers gave answers that allow to analyse both perspectives separately.

Regarding the advantages for coteachers, almost every student-teacher considered smaller student ratios to be one of the greatest benefits of coteaching, since having half of the students in the classroom lightens the workload of teachers. Educators share the instruction with a peer and thus, are able to reach all students. In addition, they mentioned that classroom management becomes a lot smoother. That benefit is sustained by Wilson & Blednick (2011), who confirm that students behave better when they have two or more teachers in the classroom and that the adaptation of materials, the use of varied learning strategies and the fulfilment of the curriculum are more feasible. The third most recurrent benefit for coteachers among the participant’s answers was the help and back-up given to one another and the opportunity of learning from their peers.

Student-Teacher 3 provided an answer to the survey that describes the possibility of paying attention to every student's needs and the chance to learn from their teacher peers shown in Example 7.

- (7) "Sharing the delivery of the content with a peer is a great opportunity to reach all students while learning from another teacher. Furthermore, teachers can be an example of collaborative work for the students" (ST 3 female).

She adds the benefit of teachers being role models, which is linked to the literature by Kohler-Evans (2006, cited in Friend et al., 2010) that indicates that strong and parity-based partnerships are key for the students' success. In short, students take notice of the teachers' way of behaving inside the classroom and the way they relate with their professional partners, and act following their example.

The opportunity of professional growth and development during coteaching also appeared. While coteachers learn from and with their peers by giving each other feedback on their performances, the participants put special emphasis on the possibility of testing new strategies and teaching methodologies that would not be possible with one only teacher. Student-Teacher 16 refers to it in Example 8:

- (8) "Coteaching fosters inclusive and collaborative learning contexts. It also enables new in-class instructional strategies and practices, and teachers are given the opportunity to learn from and with other teachers" (ST 16 male).

The benefits that students experienced thanks to coteaching are related to those of coteachers. Smaller ratios lead to a more personalized attention. Consequently, their opportunities to interact directly with the teacher as well as with other peers increase and they are provided with immediate feedback and diverse types of assessment by the teachers. Another result of the individual attention is higher self-esteem and motivation, improvement of social and personal skills and thus, a more successful learning and academic results. In short, every student's needs, ways of learning, abilities and interests are taken into account. In other words, diversity inside the classroom is taken care of to create an inclusive educational context. Student-Teacher 15 explains it with the following words in Example 9:

- (9) "There are plenty of benefits, but in my opinion the main one is that thanks to coteaching there are more opportunities for those students whose level is different. I mean, there is the chance of one teacher being with the higher-level

students and the other with the lower level ones. It is basically a resource to attend diversity” (ST 15 female).

In conclusion, the most mentioned advantages for coteachers according to the participants in the survey are the possibility of adaptation to every students’ personal needs, easier classroom management, the constant support from a peer and the room for innovation and new strategies. For those concerning students, individualized attention, opportunities for interaction and improvement of academic, personal and social skills summarize the most repeated perspectives. The data gathered for this question shows that *collaboration* and *inclusion* are two of the most used words among all answers. These two words suggest that the greatest benefit of coteaching both for teachers and students, according to student-teachers, is the possibility of collaborative work among teachers as well students that leads to inclusion in education.

5.3. Drawbacks of coteaching

While benefits have a clear impact on both teachers and students, drawbacks mainly affect educators. The respondents of the questionnaire were asked about the potential drawbacks of coteaching in the English classroom and their answers can be classified in five main categories, most of them covered by the authors present in the theoretical framework (see chapter 2.5): poor coordination and personal relationship, reluctance to share the classroom, time-consumption, financial issues and little or no instruction received.

Firstly, student-teachers considered that coteaching fails when there is not a good personal relationship between teachers, which is key for creating a successful working environment. The risk of one professional acting as the main teacher and the other one being the subordinate might also result in clashes. Therefore, a partnership based on equity should be established since the begging. Student-teachers also included the reluctance of some teachers to share their classroom to be a problem. As Murawski (2009) explains, it is hard to give up control when teachers are used to being alone in their class. They are in in charge of their students, caseload, schedule or content and they do not wish to share it with another individual. Student-teachers reckon that it might be due to the fear of being judged by another peer. The third category is time-consumption: teachers are not willing to spend more time co-planning and co-assessing with their peer. However, having sufficient time to plan is “the number one factor for ensuring success or, in other words, the number one barrier to success when it is absent.” (Murawski, 2009: 29). The answer from Student-Teacher 14 shown in Example 10 is a representation of

the above-mentioned and most recurrent disadvantages on coteaching according to student-teachers:

- (10) “Teachers must be well coordinated, otherwise it is easy that both talk at the same time and the classroom becomes even noisier than usual. Also, if they overlap while speaking and interrupt each other, it can be chaotic and hard for the students to understand. The roles must be very well set. Some teachers may find it easier to just manage the class on their own. Lesson planning should be done together and it may take longer to agree. It takes much longer to plan classes and roles and share feedback together. Also, I suppose that you need to get on well, because if there are personal problems between teachers it can be very upsetting and affect negatively all the subjects involved in coteaching” (ST 14 female).

The two last categories, administrative support and the amount of instruction received to implement coteaching were just mentioned by a couple of the respondents. However, they are important to highlight, because according to Wilson & Blednick (2011) and Murawski (2009) they are some of the main barriers to coteaching. The administrative function that two student-teachers see as a barrier to coteaching can be explained in 5 steps. Administrators are responsible for (1) providing teachers with professional development, such as new educational initiatives; (2) for determining partnerships between coteachers; (3) for distributing resources among the school and staff; (4) for creating the schedule; (5) for enabling teachers to act freely and try out new things; and (6) for finding time for educators to plan, share and collaborate. When administrators do not follow these steps or do the minimum effort and support the teachers in name only, all the people involved in the teaching and learning process suffer the consequences (Murawski, 2009).

5.4. Conditions for effective coteaching

Student-teachers were asked what they considered the three most important conditions for effective coteaching are. Three main categories can be established from the answers they provided: a solid partnership and commitment, organisation before and during the implementation of coteaching and reflection towards improvement after it.

Firstly, 20 respondents out of 22 said that a good relationship with their partner or partners was key for effective coteaching. They considered respect, constant communication as well as active listening and coordination to be the basis of a good relationship. That is to say, the professional marriage Kohler-Evans (2006, cited in Friend et al., 2010) refers to. According to

the author and the student-teachers' answers, it is truly important that the teachers' partnership is founded on equity in order for coteaching to be effective. Some words such as *commitment*, *involvement* and *compromise* were also frequent in the participants' answers to talk about the teachers' partnerships and to explain the importance of being a coteacher not because you are obliged to, but because you are motivated and willing to be part of a coteaching team.

Secondly, 9 of the participants highlighted the need for organisation so that coteaching is effective. On the one hand, they referred to all the planification previous to the implementation of coteaching: co-planning the lessons and the teaching units to be sure of what is going to be instructed, establishing the teachers' roles and creating common goals and objectives, so that teachers are on the same page. On the other hand, they mentioned a clear structure inside the classroom: teachers following the agreed roles, the distribution of instruction divided between educators, acting according to the lessons and objectives that had been planned and the constant assessment of students. The definition on coteaching by Murawski (2003), which affirms that coteaching is not only two teachers sharing the same classroom, but also co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing a group of students with diverse needs, reinforces the perceptions of student-teachers. Furthermore, 4 students added that one trait that teachers should have inside the classroom to coteach successfully is flexibility. Lessons can take another direction of the planning established or the students' needs might require a change on the instruction. Therefore, flexibility and having no fear of improvising become fundamental to continue with the learning process.

Thirdly, the participants exposed that the work after and outside the classroom is also essential for effective coteaching. More concretely, the need to analyse one self's and the students' performance, to reflect on what worked well and on the problems encountered, and to exchange opinions with their peers. Besides, student-teachers defend the requirement of giving their coteachers feedback, always from a non-judgemental perspective. These actions will let professionals change and modify the aspects that did not work in the co-taught classroom, maintain the ones that did and, in short, improve and grow professionally in the coteaching approach.

Some other conditions for effective coteaching that appeared less frequently in the participants' answers were patience, training on coteaching and time management. One student also included full technology proficiency.

5.5. Training on coteaching

According to Pancsofar & Petroff (2016, cited in Duran, & Miquel, 2019), training for teachers in the initial stages of their careers -and also throughout their career- has to be considered, because it helps to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of the implementation of coteaching and its transformation into a sustainable strategy in schools. There are authors who have created resources and materials to help implement coteaching (Friend et al., 2010; Murawski & Dieker, 2004) and following their research offered, Duran, D., & Miquel, E. (2019) state that there are three topics that should always be present in coteaching training programmes. These are having support in

- (a) planning for coteaching before the beginning of the sessions (that is, organizing areas to coordinate work during the course; assessing the students' and class's needs and the appropriate support, agreeing on each teacher's role, and consulting guidelines which will help to advance the joint work;
- (b) implementing coteaching for a period of time (allowing coteachers to collect data on the process of working together, on how students learn and on the fulfilment of the initial objectives);
- (c) and the assessment of the whole coteaching process (analysing the data to be able to continue and improve the interaction between educators and the structure of organized classwork).

Villa, Thousand, & Nevin (2010) highlight the importance of not only offering training on coteaching to those participating in it, but also to principals and school administration bodies. In addition, the importance of future teachers having opportunities to practice collaborative work is essential for them to be prepared to coteach.

The previous literature on coteaching training has been summarized to introduce the following question in the survey for student-teachers. The participants were asked whether enough input on how to conduct coteaching in a secondary school or in an official language school (EOI) was provided in the MUFPS either in the Common Module or the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) module. It is important to take into account that the MUFPS does not provide theoretical formal training for student-teachers during the Masters, but provides it in a practical way during their internship. Student-teachers learn to coteach with the "learning by doing" philosophy. They do their internship with another peer and thus, have to manage to implement coteaching in the classroom.

From 22 answers collected on the question, 31,82% of student-teachers considered the input on coteaching to be enough during the Masters, 9,09% were not sure and the other 59,09%, being the majority, answered that the instruction received on coteaching was not enough and, as a consequence, their preparedness on coteaching was quite poor.

Duran, D. & Miquel E. (2019) explain that different studies (e.g. Baeta & Simons, 2014; Guise et al., 2017) insist on the need to investigate teaching models that link theory and practice, by focusing on one particular aspect, field experiences. Traditionally, teaching practice has been based on student-teachers observing lessons before they start teaching on their own. However, different universities, mainly in America, have been offering for over a decade, opportunities for student-teachers to coteach since the beginning with another student-teacher or their school mentor. At the beginning of the school year all student-teachers and mentors from schools participating in field experience receive some hours of training. They are provided with information on how to carry out coteaching satisfactorily.

Nevin, Thousand, & Villa (2009) strengthen the need of offering student-teachers opportunities to practice because they enrich teacher education programmes. Real experiences allow student-teachers to get to know coteaching in the first person and it provides them with a model that they can follow in their future professional career.

In this chapter, some literature on coteaching training has been analysed and the training provided in the MUFPS has been discussed. Having seen that according to most of the student-teachers the amount of coteaching training was insufficient, the following question was suggested: “How many hours or lessons of instruction on coteaching should be introduced in the TEFL Module in order to equip student-teachers with basic coteaching skills for their internship?”. There were 5 possible answers to choose from:

- 0 hours. Coteaching should not be part of the TEFL Module
- 1 or 2 lessons (2h15' to 4h 30')
- 3 or 4 lessons (6h 45' to 9h)
- 4 lessons (more than 9h)
- Not sure

Among the multiple-choice answers 0 hours was not chosen by any respondent, 1 or 2 lessons was chosen by 40,91% of the respondents, 3 or 4 lessons by 50%, and more than 4 lessons was only selected by two student-teachers (9,09%).

To put it briefly, more than 90% of student-teachers from the English branch studying the MUFPS -in spite of having received a practical instruction on coteaching by experiencing it in their internship-, affirmed that not enough input on how to conduct coteaching successfully was delivered. Besides, more than 40% of these student-teachers answered that 1 or 2 lessons during the Masters should be dedicated to training on coteaching, and 50% of the student-teachers said that the training should be offered in 3 or 4 lessons. That suggests that a minimum of 2 hours and 15 minutes should be devoted on learning the basics of the coteaching strategy. The data suggest that, although practical training and real experiences are fundamental for teacher preparedness (Nevin, Thousand, & Villa, 2009), some previous theoretical input is useful to get familiarized with important information of coteaching practices.

5.6. Feelings towards the implementation of coteaching

To find out more about student-teachers' views when coteaching and the reasons why they said enough training was not given, the participants were asked to write about their feelings when implementing coteaching without previous formal training. The data shows that almost all students had a positive experience. Despite the fact that a majority of student-teachers believe that some previous training would have been helpful, they expressed to have handled the implementation of coteaching in different ways.

5.6.1. Successes of coteaching in the English classroom

To the question on how they managed to coteach in the English classroom and what the best part was, the feeling of support and help from peers was the most recurrent. Most student-teachers declared that their experience was satisfying mainly because they complemented each other successfully. They were able to share responsibilities and to be in charge of what they knew best, to combine ideas and different points of view and to create together. Being able to discuss the successes and the failures in the co-taught classrooms was also one of the most positive outcomes for student-teachers, because this way further improvement was possible. The third most mentioned positive part of coteaching was seeing how all students got personalized attention and the resources needed according to their learning needs, something that would not have been possible with one only teacher. Student-Teacher 7 in Example 11 illustrates most of the best parts of coteaching in the English classroom shared by many student-teachers.

- (11) "We could focus on helping different students, we were able to listen to every team of the class, the difficulties they encountered and we were able to support them. Also, when instructing, coteacher(s) complemented one another to clarify

concepts to assure the students' understanding. The best part of it was the support between teachers and the possibility to decide and argue what was the best option (we had different points of view and different solutions that alone you may not encounter) when there were difficult situations (for example, disruptive students)" (ST 7 female).

5.6.2. Problems of coteaching in the English classroom

The participants also needed to comment on the problems encountered in the English classroom when coteaching and their strategies to solve them.

The lack of planning and organisation appeared frequently. Not having established clear roles for each coteacher led to chaotic lessons and teachers overlapping one another. The student-teachers that faced these problems tried to reflect on them after the first sessions and to improve them during for the following lessons in their internship. Proper communication and planning before each lesson helped them overcome these obstacles.

One student-teacher mentioned the lack of coordination and common plan with their peer. In that case, solving the problem itself was not possible. However, the student-teacher explains that she managed to share the coteaching experience by adapting and being flexible. She struggled because her partner was reluctant to cooperate and to agree on common performance and objectives.

Other problems written by the respondents were time management and little training. Nevertheless student-teachers considered these minors problems because they did not stop them from implementing and managing coteaching inside the English classroom.

5.6.3 Overall feelings

After having briefly outlined the successes and problems of English student-teachers from a Catalan university, their feelings towards implementing coteaching in their internship without previous formal training and the "learning by doing" approach are hereunder presented.

In the first place, most student-teachers confessed to have based their coteaching mainly on improvisation, intuition and common sense. Secondly, mutual understanding with their peers and good communication were effective strategies for the implementation of coteaching.

The results obtained based on student-teachers' feelings can be divided in two groups: student-teachers with positive feelings towards the experience and a few that had a quite unfavourable time with coteaching. Here below Example 12 by Student-Teacher 14 and Example 13 by

Student-Teacher 16 who expressed that, although they are aware that not enough training was provided, they had an enriching experience with coteaching.

(12) “I felt great because my peers were amazing, but it is true that we lacked practise. We realized that we needed to set the roles very clearly, otherwise we would overlap while speaking. Also, it was not simple to decide what type of coteaching was better for each lesson. We were only given some theory on the types of coteaching, but we definitely needed more information on practical aspects and training” (ST 14 female).

(13) “In a way, it is a good to do so, because you have to rely much more in your partner student-teacher. Nevertheless, a little more formation in different modalities of coteaching would be appreciated in order to be able to enrich the sessions designed” (ST 16 male).

Two student-teachers had the opportunity to work collaboratively with experienced teachers. They enjoyed the experience and felt absolutely confident, mainly because of their peers’ expertise. Student-teacher 10 shared her opinion in Example 14.

(14) “I really liked it as I could do it with an experienced teacher in the field. I felt coordinated with her and complemented. We both did great and were a powerful team!” (ST 10 female).

Many other student-teachers, that also describe coteaching as a favourable experience for their professional future and their growth and development as educators, mentioned the power of collaborative work. Working jointly with one or more teachers offers chances to practice mutual understanding, reaching agreements, creating by combining different points of view and opinions and makes motivation increase. To finish, some student-teachers felt that coteaching is a rewarding experience, because they saw how every student received the support they deserved and thus, an effective and successful learning environment was usually present in the classroom.

The students that had a hard time with coteaching, related it to a lack of coordination between partners and the unwillingness of some of them to work cooperatively with their peer. In short, all students that had a negative experience was due to the absence of strong partnerships based on equity. Student-Teacher 20 explains their experience in Example 15.

(15) “I didn't feel comfortable since the entire experience has been quite harsh. The main problems were related to the coordination of the class with my peer.

Without a common plan, it is very difficult to be efficient. I was successful because I have the ability to adapt to any situation without hesitation” (ST 15 female).

5.7. Coteaching in the future

By the end of the survey, a question suggested to student-teachers was whether they would like to coteach in the future when they become fully certified teachers. After experiencing it during their internships in secondary schools, they could probably reflect on how this teaching approach was carried out and how they felt while implementing it. Therefore, a justification to their answers was also requested. From 22 answers, 19 student-teachers (86,36%) responded that they would like to do coteaching in the future. None of them rejected the idea of coteaching in the schools where they will work and only 3 student-teachers (13,64%) were unsure about it.

The justifications given are connected both to the benefits of coteaching and their feelings towards this teaching strategy. On the one hand, they would like to do coteaching because of the direct positive impact it has on teachers: smaller student ratios that lighten the workload and allow to focus individually on each student; easier and more controlled classroom management, improved instruction and innovative options, opportunities for personal and professional growth, higher motivation and constant support and feedback from an equal. On the other hand, they justify their willingness to implement coteaching in the future because of the amount of benefits it has for students: each student profits from a personalized support and the consequent adaptation of materials according to their learning needs and interests; their performance improves academically and socially because they have more opportunities for interaction; and motivation and higher self-esteem rise as a consequence of embracing diversity and promoting an inclusive learning space. Additionally, since most of them declared to have had an enriching and rewarding experience with coteaching, they would like to coteach when they become fully certified teachers.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this Master's Dissertation was to delve into coteaching, an innovative teaching approach that has emerged over the last few years to promote an inclusive education. The main focus of the research though, was placed on student-teachers' perceptions towards coteaching. According to Chitiyo & Brinda (2018), in spite of the widespread implementation and the extensive literature on coteaching, little research has been conducted on student-teachers' perceptions towards coteaching and their preparedness to implement this teaching strategy when they become fully certified teachers. As a student-teacher myself, I believed that student-teachers should have a say when talking about the training that should be offered to become successful coteachers in the future and their views on coteaching.

At the beginning of the dissertation a theoretical framework was presented and afterwards a survey was created in order to be able to answer the different research questions suggested. The questionnaire was distributed to 28 student-teachers from the English branch at a Catalan university and once the answers were received, a thematic analysis was conducted to study the content of the answers. Based on the data collected, I have been able to answer pretty successfully the research questions posed at the beginning.

The data gathered in the question on benefits of coteaching suggests that student-teachers experienced many benefits both for them and for the students when implementing coteaching in the English classroom. Regarding the advantages for coteachers, four main categories were established: the possibility of reaching all the students in the classroom and adapting to their learning styles and needs; smoother and better controlled classroom management; opportunities for innovating and trying out new teaching strategies; and the constant help and support of their peer coteacher that allowed improvement and professional growth. The benefits of coteaching concerning students that student-teachers mentioned were: individualized attention, opportunities for interaction and improvement of academic, personal and social skills. A closer look at the data indicates that the most repeated words when speaking about how beneficial coteaching is, were *collaboration* and *inclusion*. These two words reinforce the concept by Wilson & Blednick (2011), who say that among all the advantages that coteaching brings, the main one is collaborative work both for students and teachers leading to an inclusive educational context where diversity is embraced.

Regarding the barriers to coteaching, student-teachers affirmed that they mainly affect teachers. The drawbacks mentioned were the lack of a good and equity-based partnership between

teachers; the reluctance of some teachers to replace individual teaching for collaborative work; and the extra time that co-planning and co-assessing requires. Additionally, the lack of administrative support and the insufficient instruction received were outlined.

In short, the student-teachers' views on coteaching were similar to the ones sustained by the researchers on coteaching (Friend & Cook; Murawski; Wilson & Blednick; and Dieker) discussed in the theoretical framework. The respondents of the survey, in spite of having identified some drawbacks in the co-taught English classroom, reported mainly positive views such as an increased teaching and learning potential, and a higher satisfaction and motivation inside the classroom due to the implementation of coteaching.

One other aim of the research was to find out student-teachers' views on the coteaching training offered during their Masters. Based on the data obtained, it is obvious that they believe that the university failed to provide theoretical training on coteaching as a part of their Masters. Even though student-teachers were given the chance to learn coteaching in practice during their internship, many students (59,09%) still considered the instruction on how to conduct coteaching in a secondary school provided in the MUFPS, to be insufficient. Therefore, a question on the quantity of training that should be offered was suggested. More than 40% of student-teachers thought that 1 or 2 lessons would be enough and 50% of the students said that the training should be of 3 or 4 lessons at least. In other words, a minimum of 4 hours and 30 minutes should be devoted on learning the basics of coteaching. Briefly said, student-teachers managed to implement coteaching during their internship. Nevertheless, they declare that some previous theoretical input before starting the practical training would be useful to get familiarized with the fundamental information of coteaching practices.

Another objective of the research was to explore students-teachers' views from an emotional perspective. They were asked about their feelings during the implementation of coteaching. The data shows that almost all students confessed to have had a positive experience. Their main successes were complementing one another with their peer coteachers, sharing responsibilities and combining ideas and points of view to create together. In addition, effective communication and mutual understanding became key for a successful coteaching. All in all, these successes let student-teachers improve as future educators and increased their satisfaction. They had an enriching and rewarding experience thanks to the power of collaborative work.

The present dissertation has enabled to answer the research questions quite well. However, the results found cannot be extrapolated to other contexts. The research conducted on perceptions towards coteaching was aimed at 28 student-teachers from a Catalan university, who experienced a practical approach on coteaching during their internship. Therefore, if the study wanted to be translated to other groups of student-teachers, universities or even countries, the results would probably not match. Despite of the study's limitations, the information obtained on perceptions of students-teachers towards coteaching could be useful for specific subjects. On the one hand, for future or current student-teachers, especially in Catalonia, to get an overview of the perceptions and opinions of people who experienced a similar situation. On the other hand, to educators and the department of the Teacher Education Master's Degree to reformulate, and modify if necessary, the instruction on coteaching provided in the Masters, not only because it is a recurrent teaching strategy among schools nowadays, but also because the Catalan curriculum includes collaborative teaching among educators as an essential feature in the current educational system.

This project has been valuable and useful for my professional development. I have been able to deepen my knowledge on innovative strategies and to explore coteaching from a theoretical perspective. I have examined different authors and their literature on definitions and modalities of coteaching and also, the potential benefits and drawbacks together with studies about student-teacher preparedness to coteach. In addition, the questionnaire created to conduct a qualitative analysis about student-teachers' experiences, provided me with an opportunity to analyse and reflect on my own performance as a coteacher and a future improvement plan.

This Master's Dissertation has expanded my horizons on the importance of collaborative work. I now know for sure that I would love to coteach when I become a fully certified teacher. I have realized that converting the classroom into a space of collaboration and inclusion is fundamental for successful teaching and learning. Cooperation is a valuable learning resource for all the subjects involved in it since it leads to positive outcomes only, such as professional and personal improvement. To put it briefly, the current educational context cannot be understood without collaboration and cooperation as key aspects for the development of all the school community. As Duran & Miquel (2019: 14) communicate: "achieving collaboratively organized classrooms, where both pupils and teachers learn, means that schools can be created as institutions which learn, and thus adapt well, in a knowledgeable society."

This collaborative work has allowed the three authors of the project to state a final conclusion: our studies have shown us that coteaching raises as the future (and present) of education, not

only because of the results and evidence provided regarding its impact on students' academic performance, but also for the fact that it strongly enhances a collaborative and inclusive environment in the classroom, two values that stand as two of the keystones of the 21st century educational paradigm (Boada, Esgleyes, & Terès, 2020).

Together we have broadened our horizons on coteaching, but most importantly, we have exchanged thoughts and opinions on how we could become teachers that strive for a quality educational system.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1

Perceptions of Student-teachers towards Coteaching

Background

Dear everyone, I am asking you to answer this questionnaire from your perspective as a student-teacher. You do not need to look for information, because there isn't just one correct answer. I would appreciate if you could answer honestly and with developed ideas so that they can lead me to interesting conclusions for my Master's Dissertation.

Although the questionnaire is in English, you can answer in Catalan or Spanish if you feel more comfortable.

Your help will be deeply appreciated. Thank you!

*** 1. Gender**

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

*** 2. Year of birth**

*** 3. Previous field of studies**

- ☐ English Philology
- ☐ Translation and Interpreting
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Perceptions of Student-teachers towards Coteaching

Coteaching

*** 4. In your view, what are the benefits of coteaching in the English classroom?**

*** 5. In your view, what are the drawbacks of coteaching in the English classroom?**

* 6. In your view, does the Teacher Education Master's Degree provide with enough input on how to conduct coteaching in a secondary school or in an official language school (EOI) in either the Common Module or the TEFL module?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

* 7. In your view, how many hours or lessons of instruction on coteaching should be introduced in the TEFL Module in order to equip student-teachers with basic coteaching skills for their internship?

- ☐ 0 hours. Coteaching should not be part of the TEFL Module
- ☐ 1 or 2 lessons (2h 15' to 4h 30')
- ☐ 3 or 4 lessons (6h 45' to 9h)
- ☐ More than 4 lessons (more than 9h)
- ☐ Not sure

* 8. It is said that the best way for students to learn is "learning by doing". How did you feel about implementing coteaching in your internship without previous formal training?

* 9. How did you manage with your coteacher(s) in the English classroom? What was the best part of it?

* 10. How did you manage with your coteacher(s) in the English classroom? Did you encounter many problems? How did you try to solve them? How successful do you think you were in solving those problems?

* 11. Would you like to do coteaching in the future when you become a fully certified teacher?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

* 12. Please, justify your answer. Why? Why not? Why maybe?

* 13. In your view, what are the three most important conditions for effective coteaching?

* 14. To finish, please, explain briefly in your own words what the term 'coteaching' means to you.

Thank you for your participation.