



Students' perceptions of coteaching in the EFL classroom at a public
language school for adults in Catalonia

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Abstract

Over the last decades, there has been a general tendency towards an inclusive model of education that guarantees the same learning opportunities to all students regardless of their learning barriers or disabilities. It is in this context that coteaching emerges. Coteaching (or co-teaching) consists of at least two teachers who share instruction in the classroom with the objective of addressing the special needs of all students. Apart from sharing the same physical space, coteachers share responsibility for planning the lessons, creating teaching materials and assessing students. This study aims at assessing a group of EFL students' perceptions of coteaching at a public language school for adults (EOI) in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. In this sense, students' perceptions are essential to maintain and improve teaching practices that benefit the students' learning.

Keywords: coteaching, public language school (EOI), inclusive education, students' perceptions, English as a foreign language

Resum

Durant les últimes dècades, hi ha hagut un esforç per apropar l'educació cap a un model inclusiu que garanteixi la igualtat d'oportunitats d'aprendre per a tots els alumnes independentment de les seves barreres d'aprenentatge o les seves discapacitats. És en aquest context que sorgeix la docència compartida, que consisteix en dos o més professors que treballen junts a l'aula amb l'objectiu d'adreçar les necessitats especials dels estudiants. A banda de compartir aquest espai físic, els professors que treballen mitjançant la docència compartida també s'encarreguen de la planificació de les sessions, la creació de materials i l'avaluació dels estudiants de manera conjunta. Aquest treball té com a objectiu principal avaluar les percepcions sobre docència compartida d'un grup d'estudiants d'anglès com a llengua estrangera d'una Escola Oficial d'Idiomes (EOI) de l'àrea metropolitana de Barcelona. En aquest sentit, les percepcions dels estudiants són imprescindibles per tal de mantenir i millorar pràctiques docents que beneficiïn l'aprenentatge dels alumnes.

Paraules clau: docència compartida, Escola Oficial d'Idiomes (EOI), educació inclusiva, percepcions dels estudiants, ensenyament de l'anglès com a llengua estrangera

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades, there has been a general tendency towards inclusive schooling which requires the need for cooperative work among teachers (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). Inclusive education refers to an instructional model that guarantees the access to education in regular schools to all students regardless of their special needs, learning barriers or disabilities (Navarro-Mateu et al., 2020). In fact, many countries around the world acknowledge education to be a universal right and have agreed that they will "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 (UNESCO, 2015).

Classrooms in primary, secondary and post-obligatory education are inevitably heterogeneous and diverse. Thus, it is crucial that teachers work cooperatively in an effort to meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and special needs, who had traditionally been subjects of school segregation and discrimination (Navarro-Mateu et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the student-teacher ratios tend to be high at all levels of education and providing students with individualised support is not always feasible. It is in that context that the concept of coteaching (or co-teaching) emerged in the 1960s.

Initially, coteaching referred to the type of collaboration that took place "between a general education teacher and a special education teacher working together to meet the needs of a *diverse* [emphasis added] group of students" (Friend, 2008, as quoted in Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018, p. 38). As Chitiyo and Brinda point out, this type of collaboration concerns "teachers partnering in designing and delivering instruction, planning classroom management, and administering student assessments" (2018, p. 39). Consequently, coteaching emerges as a response to "the broad diversity of learners with respect to their abilities, age, culture, language and other forms of human differences" (Navarro, Gesa, &

Sampson, 2016, as cited in Chitiyo and Brinda, 2018, p. 39). In other words, coteaching acknowledges the heterogeneous and diverse realities that coexist inside the classrooms and aims at addressing learning barriers in order to guarantee equality among students in terms of learning opportunities. A broader overview of coteaching will be provided in the following section of this article.

The present study aims at evaluating the effectiveness of coteaching practices carried out at a public language school for adults (from now on referred as *EOI*¹ *Llobregat*, a fictional name used for ethical reasons in this article) in a working-class neighbourhood in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. To be more precise, this study will focus on the perceptions of two groups of students who have been in a cotaught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom for the first time at that school. In this case, coteaching practices have been implemented by two student-teachers under the supervision of the main teacher of the two groups. The coteaching modality that coteachers resorted to was the *One Teach, One Assist* modality, which will be presented in the following section.

This paper will explore the feelings, attitudes and beliefs of students who were in a cotaught classroom for approximately ten weeks with the aim of evaluating to what extent the coteaching modality that was implemented was effective and to determine what improvements should be made in order to ensure potential coteaching practices that are beneficial for all students. As King-Sears, Brawand, and Johnson (2019) suggest, acquiring feedback from students can provide valuable information to coteachers, which can then be used to improve the learning experience of students as well as to maintain effective classroom practices.

¹ The acronym *EOI* stands for *Escola Oficial d'Idiomes*, which is a type of public school specialised in modern languages in Spain.

2. State of the art

2.1. A brief overview of coteaching

The origins of coteaching can be traced back to the 1960s in the United States and England, when two teachers shared responsibility for the same classroom as a recommended way to reorganise secondary schools (Friend & Cook, 1995). Many English and American schools in the 1970s adopted what is known as team teaching, which is a variation of coteaching, even though it is not considered as such. Team teaching consists of at least two educators who organise instruction and plan lessons collaboratively, but who teach in different classrooms. However, coteaching demands that at least two teachers share the same space simultaneously (Friend & Cook, 1995).

By the 1980s, the need for special educators who would meet the special needs of students in general education classrooms propitiated the necessary conditions for coteaching to emerge as it is known today (Friend & Cook, 1995). In fact, coteaching is closely related to inclusive practices. Cotaught lessons were initially implemented by a general education teacher, who was in charge of delivering the content of the lesson and managing the classroom, and a special education teacher, who ensured that all students had access to the content by providing personalised support to those students with special needs or learning barriers (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018).

Many definitions of coteaching have been provided since this concept first appeared, but the one which has been most widely accepted is the one provided by Cook and Friend: "[coteaching consists of] two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space" (Friend & Cook, 1995). According to Friend and Cook (1995), this definition includes four key components that need

to be briefly discussed in this paper in order to have a complete understanding of what coteaching is.

First of all, the definition provided by Friend and Cook (1995) demands at least *two professionals*, which means that both of them need to be entitled to deliver instruction. Also, instruction needs to be *substantial*, which is why the two professionals who are responsible for the classroom need to be to a certain extent knowledgeable about the subject. Furthermore, this definition also takes the issue of diversity into consideration, since it mentions *a diverse group of students*. As it has been noted, school classrooms tend to be heterogeneous and diverse and teachers need to ensure that all kinds of students have access to education. Finally, the definition provided by Friend and Cook remarks that coteaching takes place in *a single physical space*. That excludes coordinate instruction or team teaching, which is a recommended practice, but cannot be considered a coteaching modality since the two teachers involved do not share the same physical space when teaching (Friend & Cook, 1995).

With regard to coteaching modalities, Friend et al. (2010) point out at six coteaching modalities which are widely accepted today: *One teach, one observe*. In this modality one coteacher is in charge of the whole lesson, whereas the other one observes and collects data that is often used for academic purposes; *Station teaching*. The classroom is divided into at least three groups and students rotate; *Alternative teaching*. Most students spend time with one coteacher whereas the other one is in charge of a smaller group of students needing more support; *Parallel teaching*. The class is divided into two halves and both coteachers deliver the same content; *Teaming*. Two coteachers delivering instruction while debating and presenting different perspectives; and *One Teach, One Assist*. One coteacher leads the instruction while the other one circulates around the classroom offering individual assistance to students.

2.2. Benefits and drawbacks of coteaching

Many potential benefits of coteaching have been observed by researchers. First of all, it promotes the inclusion of students with disabilities or special needs and reduces the stigma of such students (Boyle, Scriven, Durnin & Downes, 2011, as noted in Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). Also, students with and without disabilities receive more individualised support according to their needs throughout their learning processes (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). When it comes to classroom management, the presence of at least two teachers ensures fewer classroom disruptions and, as a result of this, more content is covered (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010, as noted in Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). Additionally, coteaching improves the relationships among teachers who work collaboratively, which is essential in order to achieve an agreeable work atmosphere at the school (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). In that sense, coteaching should not be merely seen as an approach which encourages students to work cooperatively and which allows them to obtain more support from their instructors, but as an opportunity for teachers to build knowledge by working together as well (McDuffie, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2009; Pratt, 2014, as noted in Duran & Miquel, 2019). As Friend and Cook (1995) underscore in their definition of coteaching, coteachers are involved in the planning and assessment process of the lessons too, which requires them to spend a great deal of time together and to actively discuss matters that involve the students' learning (Duran & Miquel, 2019).

A study conducted in the United States evaluated a group of undergraduate students' perceptions of coteaching in a basic communication course (Harter & Jacobi, 2018). The study concluded that coteaching contributed to their learning processes very positively due to several reasons. In the first place, being taught by two professors had provided students with exposure to different points of view and teaching styles. Because each professor had a different teaching style, most students claimed that they had a more complete learning

experience. Secondly, students noted that they felt more supported and more encouraged to participate and interact with each other, which led to an increase in their communication skills (Harter & Jacobi, 2018). Finally, some students reported that coteaching was a fresh and exciting modality in that it broke from the routine of traditional teaching, which is sometimes perceived as repetitive and monotonous (Harter & Jacobi, 2018).

According to the same study by Harter and Jacobi (2018), the coteaching modality presented some drawbacks from the point of view of students. Although most of the students who participated in the research had positive attitudes towards coteaching, some of them claimed that it was confusing and overwhelming to follow both teachers at the same time (Harter & Jacobi, 2018). Other students expressed their preference for the traditional classroom and argued that being taught by just one instructor was less chaotic and more comfortable (Harter & Jacobi, 2018).

2.3. The *One Teach, One Assist* coteaching modality

Both students and coteachers can benefit from the *One Teach, One Assist* modality. On the one hand, it allows educators to observe and monitor students more closely from both an academic and a social point of view (Shumway et al., 2011). In addition, the coteacher who is responsible for providing individual assistance may collect data which can be used for conducting research and rethink coteaching practices in the future (Shumway et al., 2011). On the other hand, this modality is particularly advantageous for introverted learners. Instead of addressing their coteachers out loud, struggling students might obtain assistance by silently signaling one of them (Shumway et al., 2011).

As Escobar Urmeneta (2020) notes, this coteaching modality is particularly useful in lab-work or other hazardous environments that require the close supervision of educators. In that connection, Escobar Urmeneta (2020) discusses a variety of coteaching that had not been

presented by Friend et al. (2010): *Co-supporting learning*. This learning approach involves "students work[ing] on their own, either individually or in pairs or small groups" (Escobar Urmeneta, 2020, p. 44). *Co-supporting learning* resembles the *One Teach, One Assist* approach because the role of coteachers also consists of circulating around the classroom while providing assistance to students, clarifying doubts, giving advice and offering emotional support (Escobar Urmeneta, 2020). It differs from the *One Teach, One Assist* modality in that it is mainly a student-centered approach. For that reason, it has been widely implemented in project- or enquiry-based learning, in which students are expected to work autonomously (Escobar Urmeneta, 2020).

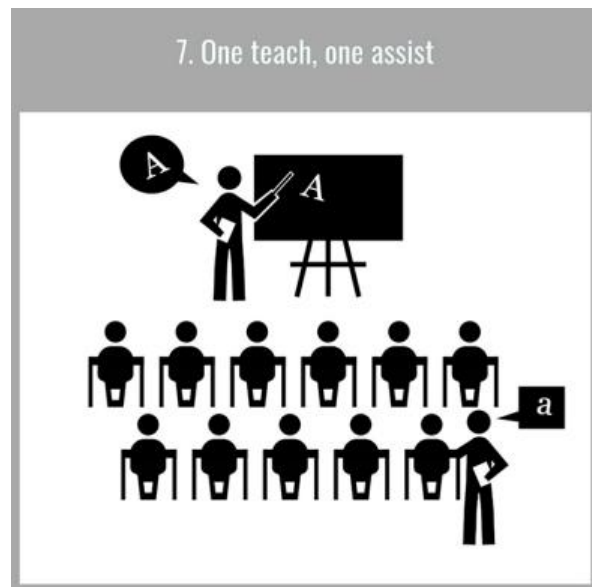


Figure 1. 'One Teach, One Assist' modality (Escobar Urmeneta, 2020).

Nevertheless, this modality entails some challenges for coteachers. Preparation and coordination beforehand are essential as students might be distracted when one coteacher circulates around the classroom (Shumway et al., 2011). Also, it is highly recommendable that coteachers alternate their roles and balance instruction and assistance throughout the lesson so as not to lead students to believe that one of the coteachers is the "real teacher"

while the other one is merely an assistant (Shumway et al., 2011). As a result of this, some students may misinterpret the coteachers' roles and expect one-to-one assistance from the coteacher who is in charge of offering individual support (Shumway et al., 2011). When planning lessons according to the *One Teach, One Assist* approach, these matters need to be taken into consideration.

A study that assessed students' perceptions with respect to five coteaching modalities concluded that *One Teach, One Assist* was the least preferred and less effective coteaching modality (Brown et al., 2017). Because other modalities such as *Parallel Teaching* and *Station Teaching* reduce the teacher-student ratio, the feeling of self-confidence among students increases in a more significant way than it happens when the *One Teach, One Assist* modality is implemented. In this sense, the findings of this study coincide with previous research that indicated that the *One Teach, One Assist* modality was ineffective when it comes to boosting the students' self-confidence (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007, as noted in Brown et al., 2017).

2.4. Coteaching in the Catalan context

As Escobar Urmeneta notes in her article, coteaching and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are closely related. CLIL refers to an educational approach that deals with learning and teaching both content and language simultaneously (Escobar Urmeneta, 2020). Lessons that are taught according to the CLIL approach do not necessarily need to be taught by two teachers, but that may be the case. Assuming the role of both content and language expert may be extremely challenging and may have a negative effect on the teaching quality (Escobar Urmeneta, 2020). Ideally, CLIL lessons should count on the expertise of both a language and a content expert. In this case, the content expert would deliver the content of the lesson and manage the classroom, while the language expert would be responsible for modeling the students' language.

Coteaching practices may be introduced in schools by means of two different approaches. In some cases, it might be a bottom-up initiative. In other words, two or more teachers may want to teach collaboratively and make a proposal to the school management team. In other cases, it might be a top-down approach and it is the school management team who decides whether coteaching in CLIL should be implemented at the school (Escobar Urmeneta, 2020). Although there has been a growing tendency to adopting coteaching in schools in Catalonia, its implementation does not always succeed because of several reasons. Escobar Urmeneta (2020) suggests that the top-down approach somehow forces teachers to work collaboratively and, by doing so, the willingness to implement coteaching practices in CLIL does not always come naturally. For that reason, it is recommendable that the two teachers who are going to work together are willing to do so if the school wants to implement coteaching in CLIL successfully.

Duran and Miquel (2019) underline other obstacles which might prevent schools from implementing coteaching practices in their classrooms. They underscore the lack of understanding of the benefits that coteaching might offer and the individualistic approach that predominates among teachers, which might lead them to feeling judged by their colleagues when sharing the same instructional space (Duran & Miquel, 2019). Moreover, and in line with the ideas noted by Escobar Urmeneta (2020), educators might not count on the support of the teaching institution. For these reasons, it is highly advisable that student-teachers and in-service teachers undergo some training on coteaching throughout their careers (Duran & Miquel, 2019).

3. Research questions

As King-Sears, Brawand and Johnson (2019) note in their article, students' perceptions of coteaching are utterly important in order to evaluate the effect of coteaching

practices that have been implemented. Not only is feedback from students valuable when it comes to assessing what kind of effect a particular coteaching modality has on the students' learning, but also to achieve a better teacher preparedness. As a matter of fact, teacher preparedness constitutes "one of the essential factors required for the success of co-teaching and other school-based practices" (Chitiyo & May, 2017; Cook & Friend, 1998, as noted in Chitiyo and Brinda, 2018).

By examining the literature that has been written about coteaching and analysing the data collected from the students, this study aims at providing an answer to the following research questions:

RQ1 Is coteaching a successful strategy according to the perceptions of EOI students?

RQ1.1. What are the students' feelings in relation to being cotaught?

RQ1.2. What are the students' perceptions on coteaching in relation to the personalised support they obtain?

RQ1.2.1. In which ways does support through coteaching help them in their learning process?

RQ1.3. According to the students' perceptions, do cotaught lessons run more smoothly or do they present some breakdowns not observable in standard lessons?

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

Participants in this study were a sample of 35 students of English as a foreign language at EOI Llobregat. All of them were enrolled at a course that corresponded to the B1

level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)². The majority of participants (n=23, 65,7%) were female, whereas the rest of them (n=12, 34,3%) were male. 17 participants were enrolled in one of the groups, while 18 of them belonged to the other group.

When it comes to the age of participants, the majority of them (n=14, 40%) were aged between 31 and 40 years old, followed by a group of participants aged between 41 and 50 years old (n=11, 31,4%). The rest of participants were aged between 16 and 20 (n=3, 8,6%), between 21 and 30 (n=4, 11,4%) and between 51 and 60 (n=3, 8,6%).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

<i>Demographic item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender		
Male	12	66
Female	23	34
Total	35	100
Age		
16-20	3	9
21-30	4	11
31-40	14	40
41-50	11	31
51-60	3	9

4.2. Pedagogical action

As part of their teaching training, student-teachers were required to design a teaching unit and to implement it collaboratively under the supervision of a main teacher (see Cuadrado, D. & Díaz, C., 2021). As it has been noted, the coteaching modality that was chosen was the *One Teach, One Assist* modality. This modality allowed student-

² The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) describes the proficiency level of foreign language learners according to six different levels that range from A1 to C2.

teachers to experience what being responsible for a traditional³ class is while ensuring individual assistance to all students. Coteaching is not an extended practice at EOIs in Catalonia and the choice of this coteaching modality accounts for the resemblances that it shares with the traditional classroom⁴ as this is the most likely scenario student-teachers might be faced with throughout their teaching careers.

For the most part, each coteacher had the main role in one of the groups (i.e. delivering direct instruction). However, they alternated their roles occasionally as each group of students presented different characteristics that were worth experiencing from the perspective of both main teacher and teacher assistant. Because of that, being able to assume both teaching roles in the two groups allowed student-teachers to have a more complete teaching experience as well as to expose students to two different teaching styles. The main teacher, who mentored the two student-teachers, also offered scaffolding and support to the students.

As for the teaching unit that was implemented, it consisted of 9 hours of class that occupied five sessions of two hours and fifteen minutes each. The first two sessions combined some activities that belonged to the student-teachers' teaching unit and some activities in which the main teacher had the lead role. The reason for this was to relieve some initial pressure on the student-teachers, who did not have previous teaching experience.

The teaching unit dealt with oral and written interviews as well as with the future of the Earth, from environmental issues to alternative diets (for more, see Cuadrado, D. & Díaz, C., 2021). By the end of the teaching unit, students needed to record an oral

³ The term 'traditional' is used here to refer to a class taught by only one instructor.

⁴ *One Teach, One Assist* resembles traditional classrooms in that instruction is delivered by only one coteacher and it does not require that students necessarily split or rotate as it is the case in *Parallel Teaching* or *Station Teaching*.

interview that they had previously prepared with the aid of all the activities that were carried out previously, including a script that they wrote before recording the interview. Once the lessons that occupied the teaching unit concluded, student-teachers continued implementing coteaching practices under the supervision of the main teacher. This time, the content that was covered was selected by the main teacher, although student-teachers were required to prepare their own teaching materials.

Furthermore, because three coteachers were in charge of the lessons, there was a bigger emphasis on providing students with exhaustive feedback so that they could obtain richer learning outcomes. Assessment criteria and activities were often discussed by the three coteachers, who consequently spent a great deal of time working collaboratively.

4.3. Instrumentation and data collection

Data were collected by means of a survey on Google Forms that was developed by one coresearcher and supervised by two other coresearchers (see Appendix). The survey consisted of four parts and participants were told that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. For that reason, they were encouraged to be as honest as possible when answering questions. Participants were also told that the data collected would be used for academic purposes only. Furthermore, the survey was written in Catalan, and participants were encouraged to use Catalan or Spanish to answer open-ended questions since the use of their L1 would probably allow them to be more accurate and to feel more comfortable. The answers from students that are quoted in the following section of this article are an English translation.

The first part of the survey collected demographic information about the participants: in this case, only gender and age. Also, because the survey was answered by students in two

different groups in which coteachers had had different roles in the classroom, participants were asked to indicate the group they were enrolled in. The other three parts of the survey were divided into three categories: feelings and attitudes; lesson organisation and classroom management; and teacher support. The survey combined qualitative and quantitative questions. One compulsory open-ended question was included regarding the category of feelings and attitudes. Three questions were presented on a five point Likert-type scale in which 1 meant *strongly disagree* and 5 meant *strongly agree*. In the five other questions participants needed to choose one or more options and in some cases they could even type their own answer. In addition to this, the survey included a final section in which participants could expand on any of their previous answers or could express any opinion about the fact of being cotaught.

Table 2. Data corpus

Data set	Type of data	Instrument	Participants	Total number of words
Data set A	Quantitative data	Multiple choice questionnaire	35	8 items
Data set B	Textual	Open-ended question	35	572 words
Data set C	Quantitative data	Likert scale questionnaire	35	3 items
Data set D	Textual	Optional open-ended question	16	532 words

5. Results

This section aims at analysing the results of the survey and it is divided into three different subsections that correspond to the three different levels of students' perceptions that the survey included. When discussing coteaching practices, coresearchers will be referred as coteachers 1 and 2 from now on.

5.1. Students' feelings and attitudes

The first question that referred to students' feelings and attitudes with regard to coteaching was question 4. In this case, participants were presented with four options. In order not to lead students to a biased opinion about coteaching, two options with a positive connotation (*motivated* and *more active/eager to participate*) and two options with a negative connotation (*overwhelmed* and *confused*) were chosen for this question. Furthermore, participants were offered the possibility of adding their own answer in case none of the suggested adjectives suited their perceptions. This question was followed by an open-ended question in which students needed to briefly account for their choice.

The majority of participants claimed to feel motivated (n=15, 43%) and more active or eager to participate (n=20, 57%) when being cotaught. Five participants acknowledged feeling both motivated and more active and eager to participate. It is worth noting that one of these participants had also felt confused at some point in the cotaught lessons. In the open-ended question, the participant argued the following:

I felt motivated because, having three teachers in the classroom, I found it easier to clarify doubts without slowing down the pace of the lesson. However, I felt confused when teachers had different answers for the same question because that might lead to more doubts.

The other participant who had chosen the adjective *confused* argued that he preferred the idea of beginning and finishing the academic year with the same instructor. Nevertheless, a participant who claimed to feel motivated acknowledged that being taught according to different teaching styles made the learning process more enjoyable. In other words, something that might lead some students to confusion might be the source of motivation for others. As Lightbown and Spada (2013) point out, foreign language learners present individual differences with regard to the acquisition of the L2. These are called learning styles and are defined as "an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills" (Reid, 1995, as noted in Lightbown and Spada, 2013).

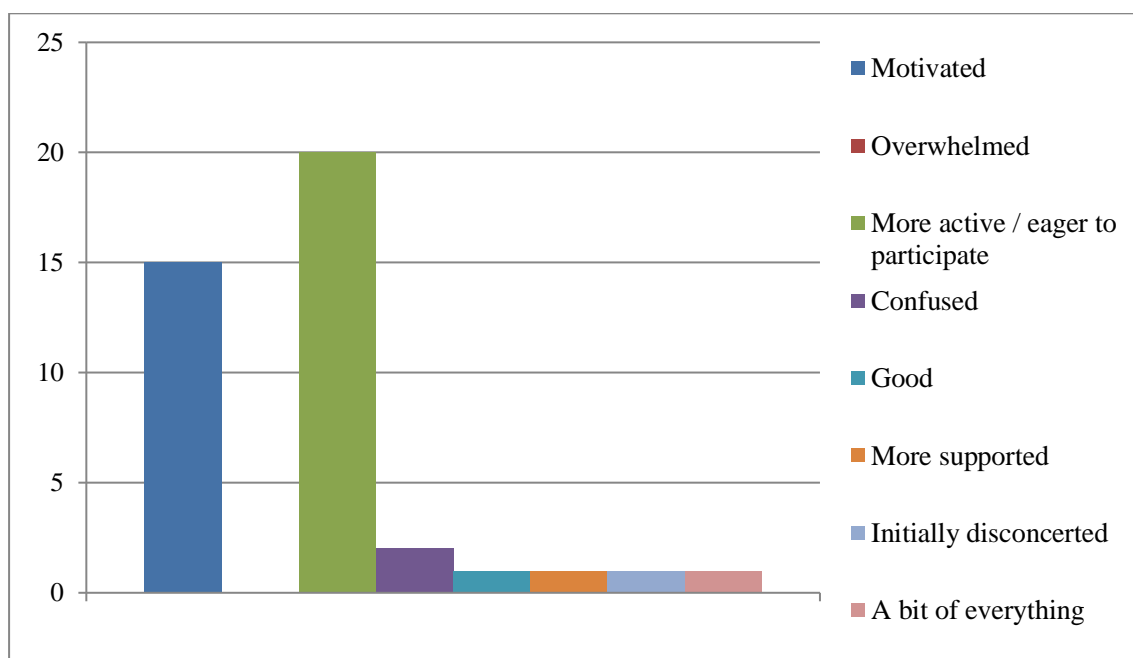


Figure 2. Students' feelings in the cotaught classroom.

No participant in this study chose the adjective *overwhelmed* in question four. However, answers in the open-ended question suggest that students might have experienced feelings of confusion or stress at some point. The participant who claimed to feel *initially disconcerted* also wrote: "There was something new every day. I felt overwhelmed only if

they [the coteachers] wanted to answer a question at the same time. At the end of the day they [the coteachers] are part of the class too". It can be inferred from this answer that the presence of three coteachers in the classroom might have been confusing in that it was something that students might have experienced for the first time.

In that sense, one participant claimed to feel *a bit of everything*, which might refer to both the positive and the negative sides of coteaching. The same participant wrote that all changes need to be processed and that it was difficult to understand the coteachers' roles in the beginning. Although this student appeared to be rather skeptical about coteaching in the first place, his overall opinion about coteaching was rather positive:

In the beginning we felt a bit disquiet or expectant about their presence [the coteachers' presence] in class, but then we started to understand it and to accept it in a progressive and natural way. The same happened with their participation and their interaction with us. Everything needs its time in order to work out and this is a clear example of that. I'm very happy that I had three teachers in class and that I got feedback from them whenever it was possible.

Generally speaking, the students' answers show that their feelings and attitudes in relation to being cotaught are rather positive. In the compulsory open-ended question of the survey, a total of 9 participants positively highlighted the fact that they had more opportunities to clarify doubts or ask questions. In that connection, one participant argued the following about being cotaught: "It's easier to ask questions when you have doubts about something and it's more *discreet* [emphasis added]". It should be interesting to note that some learners might feel self-distrustful or afraid of making mistakes when using the L2 in front of the whole class. For that reason, coteaching generates the necessary conditions to reduce the students' pressure and anxiety levels.

Questions 9 and 10 in the survey aimed at assessing how students felt towards their learning progress. These two questions were reformulated in a way that replicates part of the study conducted by Brown et al. (2017), in which the experience of both teachers and students in a cotaught classroom was evaluated. One of items that was evaluated by Brown et al. (2017) and that was taken into consideration for the present study was the students' self-confidence with regard to their learning.

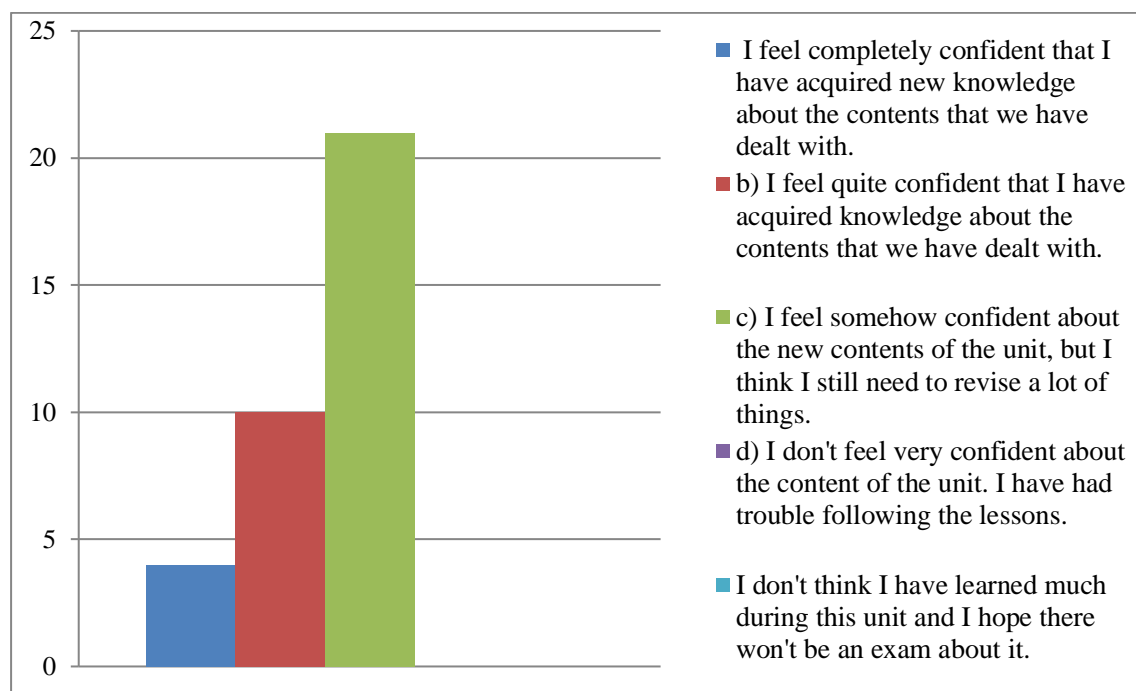


Figure 3. Students' perceptions with regard to their learning outcomes in the cotaught classroom. Adapted from a case study by Brown et al. (2017).

One reason that might account for the students' learning outcomes might be whether the content covered in the lessons was of interest for them. In order to observe whether there is a relation between the students learning outcomes and their personal interest in the topic, students needed to answer a question with respect to their engagement in the lessons. The majority of students ($n=23$, 66%) claimed that it was easy to follow the lessons and to put all their attention to them because the topic was of their interest, while the rest of them ($n=12$, 34%) stated that most of the activities done were of their interest, but not all of them. It can

be observed that the majority of participants showed great levels of engagement. On the contrary, very few participants felt completely self-confident when it comes to their learning outcomes even if the topic of the lessons had interested them and they had been engaged in the lessons. Thus, it might seem that there is no relation between the students' engagement and their learning outcomes.

Two reasons might account for the students' low level of self-confidence. On the one hand, it should be remarked that two coteachers were student-teachers and therefore, it was their first experience with this type of teaching approach. In that sense, there is always room for better teacher preparedness. Also, students might have been used to more traditional teaching styles. On the other hand, it has been observable that students are very self-demanding, which might lead them to a subjective perception of their learning outcomes.

5.2. Lesson organisation and classroom management

In spite of the fact that some participants claimed that the presence of three coteachers in the classroom had initially been somehow confusing, they agreed that coteachers were well-coordinated in general terms. In a Likert-type scale in which participants were asked whether they felt that coteachers were well-coordinated and organised, the majority of participants (n=18, 51%) opted for number 5 (= *strongly agree*), followed by thirteen participants who opted for number 4, and only four participants who chose 3.

In the open-ended question, one participant acknowledged that the classroom was under more control when the three coteachers were in charge of the lesson. The same participant added that "students don't talk so much". In the EFL classroom, students present differences regarding their proficiency levels and learning paces and it might be the case that some students complete their tasks earlier than their classmates. When this happens, students might start having conversations in their L1. Nevertheless, the presence of three coteachers

ensures that fast finishers are busy with an extra task while the rest of students continue working.

The teaching approach that predominates in Catalan schools is the task-based language teaching approach (TBLT) in which students need to use authentic language to perform a task which is usually related to real life, like obtaining a driver's license (Lightbown and Spada, 2013). As Lightbown and Spada point out, this instructional approach "places the emphasis on interaction, conversation, and language use, rather than on learning about the language" (2013, p. 124). In a teaching unit designed according to the TBLT approach, all the activities are thought to lead learners to the completion of a final task. In this case, students needed to prepare and record an interview in which two students would play the role of journalist and environmental expert respectively. In a Likert-type scale in which students needed to consider whether all the activities were meaningful and useful for the preparation and completion of their final tasks, 16 participants chose number 5 (= *strongly agree*), 16 participants chose option 4 and only 3 participants chose option 3. Thus, according to the perceptions of students, the selection of activities was meaningful in that it led them to the production of a final task.

Even though participants agreed that coteachers were generally well-coordinated and organised, some of them noticed individual differences among coteachers when delivering instruction. For example, one participant argued the following: "I think Coteacher 1 explained things in a more interactive way [...] whereas Coteacher 2 explained things more slowly". In that connection, another participant mentioned that Coteacher 1 had "a more complete way of teaching". In the study that was conducted by Brown et al. (2017), participants had been asked whether they had perceived coteachers as equals. This question was not included in the survey that was used for the present study. Although both coteachers

had prepared the lessons collaboratively and were responsible for the assessment criteria, students perceived individual differences when coteachers adopted the lead role. In the same way that students have their preferred learning styles, also instructors have their own teaching styles.

5.3. Teacher support

As it has been mentioned in the introductory section, teacher-student ratios are usually high at all levels of education. For that reason, students do not always obtain the individual support that they need from their instructors.

In question 6, participants evaluated to what extent they thought they had received a more personal support from their instructors by means of a Likert-type scale. The majority of students (n=22, 63%) chose option 5 in the scale (= *totally agree*) and the rest of them (n=13, 37%) chose option 4. Generally speaking, participants agreed that they had obtained more individual support when three coteachers were in charge of the lesson. In the open-ended question, one participant argued the following:

Sometimes you don't ask questions or you don't ask for help because you think the teacher is responsible for so many students and he or she can't pay attention to all of them individually. You think that there's probably another student who needs more attention than you, so you just to revise things on your own later at home. Having three teachers in the classroom, you feel free to ask whatever you need and you feel more self-confident about your learning process. That makes you eager to come back the next day.

As this participant highlights, the presence of more than one instructor in the classroom increases their learning opportunities. Also, students acknowledge the different proficiency

levels that students have in the same group and are aware of the fact that only one instructor might struggle with providing all students with individual support. Another participant also mentions the fact that students in the same classroom might have different proficiency levels and therefore, might not need the same support:

It's always good to have some extra support when there are a lot of students in the classroom. It becomes much more personal and it helps to balance the different proficiency levels that there are in the classroom. Not all students need the same support and the teacher can't always pay attention to just one student. It has been a pleasant experience.

The following question asked students to reflect upon the linguistic and non-linguistic areas in which they had obtained more personal support in the cotaught classroom. The three language dimensions in which students perceived that they had obtained more support were pronunciation (n= 30, 86%), vocabulary (n=23, 57%) and grammar (n=20, 66%), followed by oral comprehension (n=17, 49%), writing (n=10, 29%), reading comprehension (n=6, 17%), use of digital tools in the classroom (n=1, 3%) and other areas (n=1, 3%).

It is worth noting that many of the tasks that students needed to complete required them to interact with each other. A word that in fact appeared repeatedly in the open-ended questions was *interaction*. While they were talking, coteachers would approach them and provide them with some scaffolding and feedback. Because students were talking, the feedback that they obtained from their instructors was most of the times concerned with pronunciation or the correction of some grammar mistake. Also, coteachers helped students with the scaffolding of some words that students did not know in the L2. For that reason, students might have felt more supported when it comes to grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.

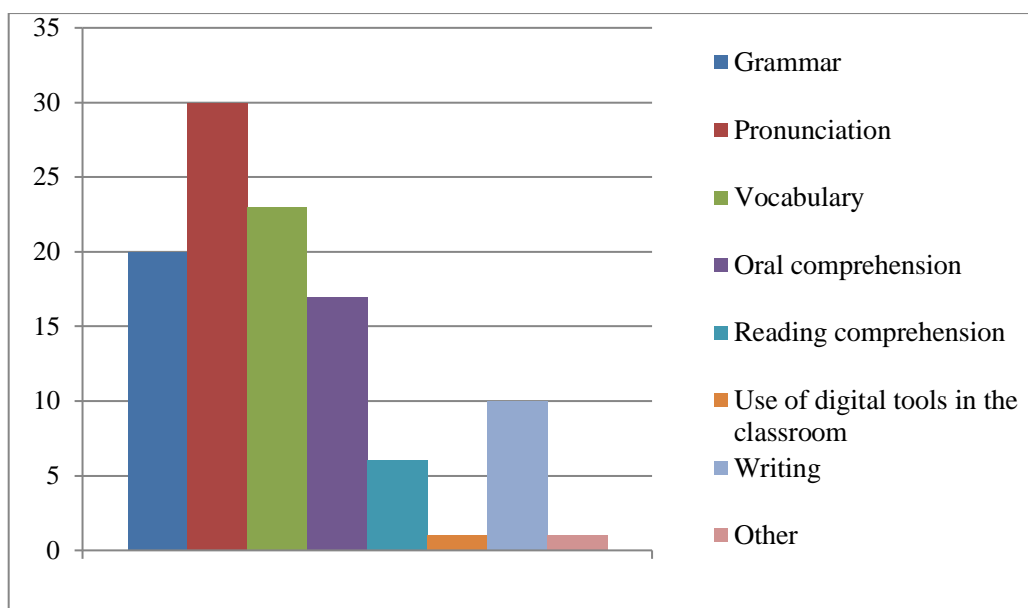


Figure 4. Linguistic and non-linguistic areas in which students felt more supported in the cotaught classroom

As far as feedback is concerned, the majority of participants (n=26, 74%) considered that they had obtained very exhaustive and useful feedback which would have a positive impact on their learning. The rest of participants (n=11, 26%) claimed that the feedback they had received from instructors had been useful most of the times, but not always. For the most part, feedback was highly valued as a learning tool.

6. Discussion

A priori, it might seem that the *One Teach, One Assist* modality is lighter than other coteaching modalities in that it does not require that both coteachers are equally active. Even though only one teacher is in charge of instruction, the findings of this study show that the support provided by the other coteacher is essential in order to guarantee that all students have access to the content of the lesson and to balance the different learning paces that students have. Previous studies have suggested that this coteaching modality is not as

effective as *Station Teaching* or *Parallel teaching* when it comes to boosting the students' self-confidence (Brown, Keeley, & Knapp, 2017). Although the present study has only explored the *One Teach, One Assist* modality, the results indicate that the support obtained offers students more learning opportunities and promotes interaction in the classroom.

The findings of the present study coincide to a large extent with the ones that Harter and Jacobi (2018) indicate in their article. In the first place, students in the cotaught classroom had valued the different teaching styles and techniques that they had obtained from both instructors very positively (Harter & Jacobi, 2018). In spite of some exceptions, participants in the present study appreciated learning from different points of view as well. Even though some students acknowledged feeling initially hesitant about being taught by more than one instructor, the study by Harter and Jacobi (2018) suggests that that might be a common reaction among students when presented with a new teaching approach. In fact, the students themselves acknowledged that familiarising with coteaching was only a matter of time. Nonetheless, as the research that has been previously conducted indicates, teacher preparedness is an essential factor to ensure good coteaching practices that guarantee successful learning outcomes (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018; Duran & Miquel, 2019; King-Sears, Brawand, & Johnson, 2019).

In addition to this, participants in the study by Harter and Jacobi (2018) remarked the fact that the extra support provided by their instructors had increased their participation in class and thus their communication skills increased too. As a matter of fact, the findings of this study also show a relation between the support obtained from instructors and the students' communication skills. The fact that coteachers spend more time with groups of students relieves some of the pressure that they may feel. As a result of this, students are more likely to feel at ease and participate (Harter & Jacobi, 2018).

Nevertheless, the present study shows some limitations which might have influenced the findings. First of all, the study counted on the participation of only 35 subjects. The results obtained from the survey, hence, cannot be extrapolated to other contexts. Furthermore, this study focused only on one coteaching modality. Even though the *One Teach, One Assist* modality was positively valued by the students, it cannot be concluded that coteaching in general is an effective approach according to the perceptions of students as no other modalities were implemented. Moreover, this study focused on post-obligatory education, a context in which the special needs that students present are mainly sensorial. In this sense, classrooms in obligatory stages of education are probably more heterogeneous in terms of special needs and learning barriers, which is why results would probably vary if the present study was replicated at a primary or secondary school. The fact that participants were not learning English as part of their compulsory education accounts for their motivation and positive attitude towards learning. As a result of this, students tend to be self-demanding, which might be one of the possible reasons why only a few participants reported feeling completely self-confident about the content covered in the cotaught classroom. In that sense, it can be argued that participants from EOI Llobregat were to some extent a homogeneous sample. As for future research, different coteaching modalities than the *One Teach, One Assist* approach might be explored.

Another limitation that this study presents is the little demographic and personal information that was obtained from participants apart from their gender and the age group they belonged to. In order to obtain a significant sample size, the survey was designed to be answered in a short period of time as participation was voluntary. In the future, it might be worth asking students about their preferred learning methods and their preferred in-class

activities so as to have a general idea of the type of learner each participant is⁵. In this case, information about their personal motivations might as well be useful. Finally, collected data were mainly quantitative and thus statistical results cannot be validated. Further research might also include personal interviews with participants.

As Harter and Jacobi (2018) suggest, conducting research that focuses on the students' perceptions is always beneficial because it encourages students to reflect upon their learning processes and their education regardless of the results obtained. As a consequence of this, self-reflection might allow students to make decisions that affect their learning in the future.

7. Conclusions

All in all, the findings of this study reveal that coteaching has a positive effect on the students' learning according to their perceptions in general terms. First of all, students highlight the fact that they feel more supported when two instructors are in charge of the lesson because of several reasons. On the one hand, they feel more comfortable about asking questions and clarifying personal doubts without slowing down the pace of the lesson. Students acknowledge that their opportunities of participating increase due to the presence of at least two instructors in the classroom, which consequently boosts their motivation and readiness towards learning.

On the other hand, students consider that coteaching allows them to improve certain linguistic and non-linguistic skills. More specifically, participants in this study generally agree that the *One Observes, One Assists* modality allows them to reinforce their pronunciation skills as well as to increase their vocabulary and knowledge of grammar. Apart from feeling more supported, students consider that the feedback they obtain from their

⁵ Research in second language acquisition points out at three different types of foreign language learner according to their preferred learning style: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

coteachers tends to be more detailed as coteachers can devote more time to a group of students than they would normally do in a traditional classroom.

Apart from obtaining more personalised support, coteaching establishes an agreeable and smooth learning atmosphere in that it reduces the anxiety levels and pressure of students. Using the L2 in front of their classmates is a common cause of anxiety among foreign language learners. For that reason, working in small groups in which coteachers can address the individual students' special needs or learning barriers proves to be beneficial because it boosts the students' self-confidence and willingness to participate. Students note that having the possibility of asking questions or clarifying doubts individually or in small groups reduces the number of interruptions observable in the traditional classroom.

In addition, learners value very positively the fact that they are exposed to a variety of teaching styles or techniques, which allows them to understand the subject they are learning from different perspectives. Coteaching hence provides them with a more complete learning experience than traditional teaching.

However, not all students have favourable perceptions towards coteaching. Each student has a preferred learning style and because of that, coteaching might not always be effective in the same way. Although most students consider the different teaching styles an opportunity to learn from different viewpoints, there are some students who find it confusing when they are given different explanations or answers to the same question by different coteachers. In some cases, students might be used to more traditional approaches and thus express their preference for being instructed by just one teacher.

Even though this exploratory study has some limitations, teachers who are considering implementing the *One Teach, One Assist* modality or any other coteaching modality for the first time might benefit from it. Teaching and conducting research are two

activities often regarded as incompatible. On the one hand, it is often the case that teachers do not count on the necessary time to collect and analyse data as well as to contrast their findings with the ones obtained by other researchers. On the other hand, there is the misconception that researchers are unaware of what takes place inside classrooms at primary and secondary schools. Assuming the role of teacher as a researcher and basing teaching practices on empirical evidence is an empowering method to improve pedagogical actions. Moreover, the teacher as a researcher does not only gain knowledge from learning, but also contributes to the whole education community.

Conducting research based on classroom practices allows the teacher as a researcher to examine his pedagogical action from a different perspective, often a more objective one. Research about coteaching is still emerging, although a great deal of it focuses on the teachers' perceptions. Drawing attention to the students' perceptions provides teachers valuable information about their pedagogical actions and, more importantly, about the way students learn. Being familiar with the different learning styles that coexist in the classroom might be a springboard for the implementation of potential teaching practices based on empirical evidence.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY

1) I belong to the group...

A) English B1 16h	
B) English B1 18:30h	

2) I identify myself with the following gender:

A) Male	
B) Female	
C) Other	
D) Prefer not to say	

3) I belong to the following age group:

A) 16-20 years old	
B) 21-30 years old	
C) 31-40 years old	
D) 41-50 years old	
E) 51-60 years old	
F) More than 60 years old	

4) How did you feel with three coteachers in the classroom? Choose the adjective(s) that suit you the most.

A) Overwhelmed	
B) Motivated	
C) Confused	
D) More active / eager to participate	
Other, what?	

5) Why do you think you felt that way? Can you explain it briefly? Remember that you can do it in Catalan or Spanish. Your answer doesn't need to be very long, but the more information you provide, the more helpful it will be.

Open-ended question.

6) Do you think that you had more personalised support in the classroom? Choose from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= totally agree).

1	2	3	4	5

7) In which linguistic and non-linguistic areas do you think you had more personalised support from the teachers? You might want to choose more than one option.

A) Grammar	
B) Pronunciation	
C) Vocabulary	

D) Oral comprehension	
E) Reading comprehension	
F) Use of digital tools in the classroom	
G) Writing	
H) None of the above	
I) Other	

8) How do you feel when it comes to the feedback that you got from the student-teachers?

You might want to think about the writing and oral tasks, the feedback on your videos and the resolution of doubts in class.

A) I think they have given me very useful and exhaustive feedback that will definitely have a positive impact on my learning.	
B) The feedback that I have received from the student teachers was most of the times meaningful, but not always.	
C) I'm not sure if the feedback or support I have received from the student teachers was really useful or meaningful.	
D) The feedback that the student teachers gave me was useless most of the times.	
E) I don't think the feedback or support I have received from the student teachers will have any positive impact on my learning.	

9) Throughout our teaching unit we have dealt with different topics such as the future of our planet, environmental problems, veganism and so on. When it comes to language, we have introduced the structure *I wish + past simple/past perfect* and we have practised how to

express our opinion. Also, we have worked with both oral and written interviews. Finally, we have prepared and recorded your own interview. How do you feel about your learning?

A) I feel completely confident that I have acquired new knowledge about the contents that we have dealt with.	
B) I feel quite confident that I have acquired knowledge about the contents that we have dealt with.	
C) I feel somehow confident about the new contents of the unit, but I think I still need to revise a lot of things.	
D) I don't feel very confident about the content of the unit. I have had trouble following the lessons.	
E) I don't think I have learned much during this unit and I hope there won't be an exam about it.	

10) Which of the following statements do you feel most identified with?

A) Because of the topic we were dealing with and the activities that we did, I felt it was very easy to give my total attention to the lessons.	
B) Many of the activities proposed were of my interest, but not all of them.	
C) There were only two or three things that I found interesting or useful, so it was difficult to pay attention to the lessons.	
D) Most of the activities that we did in class were boring.	

11) Do you think that lessons were organised in a coherent and logical way and that all the activities done in class were thought to lead you to the final task (preparation and recording

of an interview in which you discussed environmental issues)? Choose from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= totally agree).

1	2	3	4	5

12) One of the two student-teachers usually had a more active role (delivering new content, giving instructions, and so on) whereas the other one provided support to students. Do you think that both of them were well-coordinated? Choose from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 5 (= *totally agree*).

1	2	3	4	5

13) In this section, you can express any other opinion in relation to having three instructors in the classroom. You can also expand on any of your previous answers.

General comments (optional).
