

**CO-TEACHING ENGLISH AND SOFT SKILLS IN COVID AND POST COVID TIMES:
AN IMPACT STUDY**

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Abstract:

Covid -19 pandemic has affected educational institutions across the world including Higher Education. The Teaching-Learning process in student centric classroom took the brunt of lockdowns when physical classroom shifted to online mode on various platforms like Zoom, Webex, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Webinarjam, YouTube Live, etc. Teachers practicing Student centric methods utilized various strategies and tools to engage students as in a physical classroom despite certain challenges. This paper presents the 'Co-Teaching' strategy that was implemented in Vivekananda Government Degree College (VGDC), Vidyanagar by the teachers of department of English and their observations in teaching English and Soft skills in both online and offline mode. The aim of this paper is to highlight the experience of teachers while engaging in practicum the co-teaching methodology; their learnings in handling the classroom both offline and online; present the co-teaching model with core components and strategies that helped in articulating the classrooms along with its limitations. The paper concludes in reflecting upon the strategy, understanding the experiences, outcomes of co-teaching and recommendations that support the future teachers in implementing the co-teaching methodology.

Key Words: Co-Teaching, Team teaching, Online, Offline teaching, Soft Skills, Collaborative Teaching Learning, Online Classroom,

Introduction

Degree Online Services, Telangana (DOST), a unified admission system for UG admissions in GDCs of Telangana has resulted in increase in admissions and growth in classroom strength. Teachers had to cope with handling large classrooms and impart teaching effectively. They found it difficult to organise, plan and execute lessons to students and cater to their other academic needs as well. It was a herculean task balancing teaching and maintaining discipline in the classrooms, especially with students having exposure to new gadgets that often are major distraction in the classroom. In such a scenario Co-teaching seems to be one of the solutions that educational Institutions can use to help build better relationships with students. Co-teaching or team teaching helps teachers divide their responsibilities, creates a focused environment, reduces stress by sharing expertise, workload and facilitates better student-teacher relationship. Students overcome inhibitions in approaching teachers to clear their doubts and seek help in comprehending the concepts imparted to them.

What is Co-teaching?

'Co-teaching' is an educational method where two or more teachers work together and plan a classroom, make assessments on a group of students. In other words, it is the team work of two or more teachers to control the class and conduct instruction together that is practiced in institutes of higher education across the world. This technique helps teachers to bring out the best in them in terms of expertise in subject, optimum usage of teaching aids, classroom strategies and exposes the students to different styles of teaching. It enhances the overall teaching-learning process, outcomes and enables teachers to share equal responsibility and accountability to their classroom, syllabus, and curriculum related activities. It also helps the teachers to reach out to all the students and forge a stronger relationship between teacher and student.

Some definitions of 'Co-Teaching':

Co-teaching is defined as: "When two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space" (Cook and Friend, 1995)

Co-Teaching is defined as "two teachers (teacher candidate and cooperating teacher) working together with groups of students; sharing the planning, organization, delivery, and assessment of instruction, as well as the physical space". (Bacharach, Heck & Dank, 2004).

It “is the division of labour between educators to plan, organize, instruct and make assessments on the same group of students, generally in a common classroom, and often with a strong focus on those teaching as a team complementing one another's particular skills or other strengths”. (Mofield, Emily L.20 December 2019).

It is best presented in the following visual by Murwaski & Dieker 2013.

WHAT IS CO-TEACHING?

*Co-teaching is a service delivery option where
2 or more educators*



a group of students with diverse needs in the same general
education classroom. (Murwaski & Dieker 2013)

Why Co-teaching?

Research studies on team teaching show that the use of co-teaching/team teaching techniques in higher education enhances the teacher's ability to teach better and complement each other's strengths. The teachers will be able to use wider instruction techniques and tools to better student learning.

Co-teaching improves the student teacher ratio and offers shared responsibility and flexibility in the classroom. It encourages teachers to come up with new ideas so as to make the class more lively and interesting. Besides, Co-teaching makes the classroom more active and allows students to involve in the classroom activity as they tend to be under more than two watchful eyes. The students and teachers tend to develop a bonding which in turn improves the classroom environment and helps teachers address students' doubts during the sessions.

Types of Co-teaching:

'Models of co-teaching identified by Friend and Cook (1996)':

- 1. One Teach, One Observe:** Two teachers decide the content matter to be taught and share the responsibility. If one teaches the other will observe.
- 2. One Teach, One Assist:** One teacher will teach while the other teacher manages the discipline in the class. This helps teachers to control students who tend to disturb the class and stay focused.
- 3. Station Teaching:** Two or more teacher set up instructional stations through which they guide the students group wise in different manner.
- 4. Parallel Teaching:** The teachers divide the class into two groups and both the teachers teach the same lesson to the two groups at the same time.
- 5. Supplemental Teaching:** The class will be divided into two groups (one small/ the other big group) and the two teachers decide what to teach to the smaller group, while the other teacher will involve the larger group in an activity.
- 6. Team teaching:** Two or more teachers will deliver instruction in turns. If one teacher handles pre- teaching lesson content the other handles the main content and the third teacher will evaluate the learning activities and so on.

Co-teaching is not a new concept, but the pandemic has forced many of the teachers to look for and put into practice one of the best suited models to facilitate their instruction by expanding their expertise in technological skills and stretching comfort levels as many now teach students who are in physical classroom and on online screens. Thus, Co-teaching can be an effective and innovative method that ensures student engagement in teaching learning process utilising the experience, proficiency of two or more teachers who work in collaboration while being in the same space.

The surge in corona virus cases has affected all the educational institutions across the world, leading to near or total closure of schools and colleges. To continue Higher education undergraduate courses during lockdown period of the COVID Pandemic situation in India, the Universities and Government instructed the colleges to shift 'teaching/ learning' to online mode. This sudden transition of instruction from face to face teaching to online mode baffled both teachers and students. Lack of internet facilities and non-exposure to online classes jeopardised the process of teaching/ learning. The educational Institutions have tried different methodologies during the lockdown to continue their teaching. One such method was to upload recorded classes in YouTube so that students could watch them at their convenience. The other method being live online classes using online platforms like Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft teams, etc.

The faculty of department of English, VGDC, also adopted the online live class methodology through Zoom App during the lockdown period. Initially it was hard for the teachers to handle large classes and manage behavioural challenges from students during online live sessions. The faculty found it difficult to engage student's attention throughout the session and control their behaviour on screen due to the anonymity feature (esp. in zoom class). In fact, the online teaching has posed challenges to teachers and students at the undergraduate level in an unprecedented manner. Each teacher had to find innovative ways to continue to engage teaching/ learning process in an environment of physical separation, social distancing, uncertainty and emotional anxiety. As a potential tool to meet these challenges of online teaching, the faculty of department of English at VGDC decided to use co-teaching strategy to handle the online classes and make teaching/learning (online) effective by implementing team teaching technique.

Co-teaching technique in English class at VGDC:

Department of English of VGDC has three teachers and all of them joined the English class, and each teacher selected a component of their expertise in the selected unit to be taught every day and handled the class in three sections for a specified time span and instructed the lesson effectively. In fact, Co-teaching methodology provided a platform for teachers and students to share their ideas and get involved in the classroom activities. It also helped the faculty to complement and support co-teacher's strategies, encouraged them to plan their lesson in a way that kept the students' attention to ensure their involvement during the online sessions. Co-teaching allowed the faculty members to bring their own experiences to the board and motivated the teacher to come up with innovative teaching plans to make online classes interesting.

Co-planning was especially evident in cases where we, the teachers, as a team engaged in shifting practices around our own instruction, either with a new subject preparation or integrating new strategies in response to larger initiatives. The three faculty members distributed the class in three sections, if one started a unit with 'pre activity' session, the other teacher would do the main text of the unit and third teacher would handle the ICT tools by exposing the students to the videos/ TED talks or PPTs related to the unit to be taught. Likewise for units related to Grammar and Vocabulary, one teacher introduced the concept, one explained with examples, and another took the students through textual exercises through quiz in chat box. Similarly for Soft skills, one teacher starts with an anecdote/story/a situation and leads the class towards the topic, another teacher elaborates on the soft skill and other recaps it with main points. A PPT with all sections is prepared by the teachers collaboratively. At any given point of time the students feel the presence of three teachers. Thus, the co-teaching methodology helped the faculty members in handling the curriculum with a new lens and more flexibility, allowing all the members to co-construct material/ ppts /videos in a more equitable manner.

The success of Co-teaching methodology during online classes encouraged us to continue with the Co-teaching strategy that could serve to create a fruitful space for 'faculty professional development' training given to teachers of TSRW. The faculty members divided the training topics, course material as per the area of their expertise for the two-week orientation programme held online in similar manner as mentioned earlier and successfully completed the training to newly recruited teachers of Telangana Social and Tribal Welfare Residential Degree Colleges. The Co-teaching methodology adopted for imparting training to teachers online thus, enabled the newly recruited teachers to learn the strategy by observing the live example presented by the trainers and the feedback received mentioned that the training programme helped them improve their teaching skills,

reflect upon their competencies, recognise their area of expertise and form a team for co-teaching at their institutes.

The Post-covid offline teaching has made it evident that teaching will no more remain the same, be it online or offline. In fact, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic increase in usage of various ICT tools by the teachers to hold student's attention and keep them engaged in an online class. Studies have proven that more experiential formats can provide an effective alternative or supplement the existing professional development programs in higher education. Post-covid, educators have been forced to rethink on experimenting different formats in teaching/ learning in higher education. One such format is the co-teaching strategies that can create a productive and creative space for teacher's professional development that will help them build teaching and reflective competencies. Keeping this in mind the faculty of English (VGDC) have continued the co-teaching methodology in offline classes during post-covid times.

Impact of Co-teaching

Our experience as team teaching or co teaching has brought in fruitful results during our online sessions. As teachers working closely with our colleagues gave us a wide range of exposure. We could learn from each other and consequently improve our presentation skills and teaching practices. While preparing the lesson plans, ppt's and video lessons we have come up with innovative methodologies that cater to the needs of variety of students and consequently involve the students in the activities. The students on the other hand showed great interest in the class as they were exposed to a variety of teaching techniques by the three of us. The first teacher started the lesson with brain storming questions and interesting anecdotes followed by the other teacher, who captivated the students' attention with her vocabulary and pronunciation and the third teacher brought in different videos related to the unit being taught. Thus, the continuous effort of the teachers kept the student engaged throughout the session giving little or no scope for distractions. The online strength which was very negligible in the beginning has drastically increased and students participated in the discussions during the sessions.

Besides, students being benefited from co-teaching, the newly recruited teachers of TSRW during their training for professional development appreciated the new methodology of teaching technique. The response was overwhelming and positive. In the feedback the teachers said that they had the opportunity to learn a variety of techniques for each unit. They said they learnt from one teacher how to introduce a topic, while the other teacher helped them improve their pronunciation skills and vocabulary and the third teacher helped them to make the best use of ICT tools. All this was possible for us only through co-teaching/ team teaching.

Benefits of Co-teaching /team teaching:

- The teachers are not over stressed as they share the ideas, methodologies and effective techniques on the same platform and cater to the needs of variety of students.
- Workload feels less and shared with co-teaching and syllabus is covered within the time frame planned.
- Teachers get to know each student as they have more time to observe the students and in turn improve students' morale and performance.
- Students are exposed to a variety of techniques, different styles.
- Student's proximity with the teachers helps them clear their doubts and have better understanding of the knowledge imparted to them.
- Co-teaching increases the student teacher ratio and students feel the presence of more than one teacher in the class and are alert.

Limitations of co-teaching/team teaching:

- Many teachers do not come forward to team teaching as they feel insecure about their teaching styles while sharing with the other teacher.
- Team teaching/co-teaching is time consuming as it requires meticulous planning to the minute.
- Students may fail to switch to different styles of teaching in one class.
- Technical glitches and managing time can be a serious problem.
- The timetable doesn't allow teachers to club classes, more so with General English as all the teachers have classes of different courses at the same time.

- Physical space of a classroom might not be conducive to accommodate a strength of two sections.

Conclusion:

The results of implementing co-teaching /team teaching demonstrate that it is beneficial to the students as well as teachers. Team teaching seems to be one of the many solutions for the large classrooms of twenty first century. Though team teaching is not a new methodology, it has gained its momentum and today more and more teachers are opting for this kind of teaching methodology as it caters to the needs of variety of students and helps teachers to strive towards better teaching learning outcomes. Team teaching can be improvised by giving training to teachers in co-planning lessons for online and offline.

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