

Exploring the Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency of EFL Learners

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Over the past few decades co-teaching has attracted due attention for enhancing learning process in educational systems. Drawing on the concept of 'parallel model', the present study attempted to examine the extent to which this approach can affect general language proficiency of EFL learners. To this end, through a quasi-experimental study, a group of 32 second-grade students studying English in junior high school were assigned into a Control Group (CG) and an Experimental Group (EG) according to their pre-test performance. Parallel teaching by co-instructors was implanted in EG context, while for the CG the instruction was delivered by a single teacher. The results of the post-test administration revealed that difference in instruction approaches did not result in a significant difference in the subjects' performance. Further investigation made it clear that before any attempt in its implementation, learners need to be educated and culturally prepared to benefit from such an approach.

Key Words: co-teaching, co-teaching models, parallel teaching, general language proficiency

1 Introduction

Effective language teaching and learning depends, to a large extent, on applying appropriate teaching methodology. In the current and relatively most prevalent traditional models of teaching, one teacher is responsible for supervising and implementing all tasks of lessons over a specific, pre-determined time. The plan of the teaching process, its practice, and the expected evaluation are carried out by the same teacher. In such situations, as Aliakbari and Mansoori Nejad (2010) declare, teaching is not critically reflected on by anyone except the lead teacher of the classroom. The arrival

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Mohammad Aliakbari and Abdonour Bazayr

of new strategies of teaching, issues of motivation, the satisfaction of students and academic needs and other factors contributing to successful teaching activities all are looking forward into the creative genius of a single teacher. The seemingly difficulty of addressing all these elements simultaneously by a single pedagogue appeals for a new alternative in the administration and instruction of our classes.

The increasing number of diverse student populations in schools also highlights the need for effective service delivery models to accommodate these students. One promising practice that is being utilized and becoming more commonplace in schools is co-teaching (Reinhiller, 1996).

There exists a variety of realizations for co-teaching. Cook and Friend (1995), for example, state that co-teaching is “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space” (p. 14). To take it one step further, Wenzlaff, et al. (2002) agree that co-teaching presupposes “two or more individuals who come together in a collaborative relationship for the purpose of shared work...for the outcome of achieving what none could have done alone” (p. 14). Similarly, Bauwens and Hourcade (1995) consider co-teaching as “a restructuring of teaching procedures in which two or more educators possessing distinct sets of skills work in a coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in an integrated educational setting” (p. 46). Bacharach, Heck, and Dank (2003) considered co-teaching as two teachers working together with groups of learners and sharing the planning, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction, as well as the physical space.

In an effective co-teaching classroom, a positive, collegial relationship between the two teachers is essential and often takes time and effort to develop. Both educators should assume full responsibility for the education of all students in the classroom, including planning, presentation, classroom management, and evaluation. This can be nurtured by clear expectations from administrators, fostered through the mutual exploration of individual and partnership belief systems, and cultivated through time for reflection. What we can imply from the diversity of co-teaching models is that the basic premise of these models, as Gately (2005) holds, is “two are better than one” (p. 36).

In practice, however, successful co-teaching is not easily attainable. Cook & Friend (1998) addressed lack of professional preparation, poorly defined roles, lack of clear expectations and frustrations with implementation issues. Hohenbrink et al (1997) considered backgrounds and personalities as barriers to implement co-teaching. They hold that possessing different kind of personalities and cultural backgrounds, co-teachers might face conflicting process in dealing with each others' interests. Still, continued ownership struggles are considered as a potential issue on the way (Wood, 1998). And, as Quarcoo (2005) maintains, some more factors may influence the

Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

relationship between the roles of co-teachers. For such and other possible reasons, the idea of co-teaching has not been fully incorporated in the current education systems as a fixed and stable method for teaching second or foreign languages and other sciences.

Taking into account the above hurdles and difficulties, the present study attempts to investigate the practicality of co-teaching in general and parallel model in particular in improving and enhancing the general English proficiency of Iranian EFL learners.

2 An Overview of Collaborative and Co-teaching Models

Watkins and Caffarella (1999) identified four working-style variations: parallel teaching, serial teaching, co-teaching, and co-facilitation. This typology is much similar to the descriptions of various approaches to co-teaching in K-12 public schools in the USA (e.g., Friend & Cook, 2002; Villa et al., 2008). These approaches include (a) collaborative consultation, where educators with particular expertise (e.g., content knowledge, disability category knowledge, pedagogy knowledge, etc.) provide advice to the other educators; (b) supportive co-teaching, where one educator takes the lead and others rotate among students to provide support; (c) parallel co-teaching, where co-teachers instruct different heterogeneous groups of students; (d) complementary co-teaching, where one educator does something to supplement or complement the instruction provided by the other educator (e.g., models note taking or paraphrases the teacher's statements); (e) team teaching, known as "one brain in two bodies", where educators are partners who share responsibility for planning, teaching, and assessing the progress of all students in the course.

In a comparatively similar position, Sandholtz (2000) identified three types of team teaching: (1) two or more teachers loosely sharing responsibilities; (2) team planning, but individual instruction; and (3) joint planning, instruction, and evaluation of learning experiences. Likewise, Morocco and Mata-Aguilar (2002) provide a different taxonomy for co-teaching structures that is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Morocco and Mata-Aguilar's Professional Co-teaching Structures (With Permission from Mata-Aguilar)

<i>Structure</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Alternate leading and supporting	One teacher provides the main instruction and the other monitors and assists; then the teachers change roles. At any one time, the lead teacher may be the content or special education teacher.

Mohammad Aliakbari and Abdonour Bazayr

Station teaching	Teachers set up tasks in different parts of the room and serve as the teacher/facilitator at different stations, each of which is relevant to the lesson. Heterogeneous groups of students may rotate among the stations.
Parallel teaching	Co-teachers plan a lesson together and then divide the class into two heterogeneous groups. They teach the same material, but may use different approaches.
Flexible grouping	Teachers divide students into subgroups based on their skill level or need for re-teaching. One group may work independently.
Alternate teaching	One teacher teaches the large group, while the other teaches or re-teaches content or skills to a small group. Teachers may regroup students and may alternate roles in teaching the large and small groups.
Team teaching	Two teachers provide instruction to the entire class. They hand off the instructional lead to one another across and within activities and may intervene during the other's conversation turn to explain or elaborate the content to students.

In another attempt to account for the possible options for such a joint performance, Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2008) presented a relatively improved typology of co-teaching models which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg's (2008) Proposed Co-teaching Strategies, (With Permission from Bacharach).

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Definition/Application</i>
One Teach, One Observe	When using one teach, one observe, one teacher has primary instructional responsibility while the other gathers specific observational information on students or the (instructing) teacher. The key to this strategy is to focus the observation – where the teacher doing the observation is observing specific behaviors.
One Teach, One Drift	One teach, one drift is an extension of one teach, one observe. One teacher has primary instructional responsibility while the other assists students with their work, monitors behaviors, or corrects assignments, often lending a voice to students or groups who would hesitate to participate.
Station Teaching	For station teaching the co-teaching pair divide the instructional content into parts. Each teacher instructs one of the groups. Groups then rotate or spend a designated amount of time at each station. Often an independent station will be used along with the teacher led stations.
Parallel Teaching	In this approach, each teacher instructs half the students. The two teachers are addressing the same instructional material. The greatest benefit to this approach is the reduction of students to teacher ratio.

Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

Supplemental Teaching	This strategy allows one teacher to work with students at their expected grade level, while the other teacher works with those students who need the information and/or materials extended or remediated.
Alternative (Differentiated) Teaching	Alternative teaching strategies provide two different approaches to teaching the same information. The learning outcome is the same for all students; however the avenue for getting there is different.
Team Teaching	Well planned, team taught lessons, exhibit an invisible flow of instruction with no prescribed division of authority. Using a team teaching strategy, both teachers are actively involved in the lesson. From a students' perspective, there is no clearly defined leader – as both teachers share the instruction, are free to interject information, and available to assist students and answer questions.

Friend and Cook (2004) introduce six approaches to co-teaching: 1) One Teach, One Observe; 2) One Teach, One Drift; 3) Parallel Teaching; 4) Station Teaching; 5) Alternative Teaching; and 6) Team Teaching. They maintain that in parallel teaching, co-teachers are both teaching the same information, but they divide the class group and conduct the lesson simultaneously. Student learning would be greatly facilitated if they just have more supervision by the teacher or more opportunity to respond. They continue that the model can be used:

- (1) When a lower adult-student ratio is needed to improve instructional efficiency;
- (2) To foster student participation in discussions; and
- (3) For activities such as drill and practice, re-teaching, and test review (p. 18).

They also elaborate on other key features of Parallel teaching as:

- More students would have a chance to share their alternative ending to the story if they are split into two groups.
- If each teacher took a group of students and presented environmental issues-one from the point of view of business and industry and one from the point of view of environmentalists-the class could later have a spiritedly discussion on the topic.
- Student use of the science materials could be more closely monitored if the group is divided in half.
- This approach gives each teacher an active-but separate-instructional role in the classroom.
- Any topic with multiple dimensions can be presented using this approach if the groups are then brought back together for discussion.

- Students can be strategically placed in the two groups (p. 18).

However, Buckley (2000) cautions that there is no universal approach to team teaching. That is, we can categorize different possible types of team teaching by imagining a continuum of collaboration. According to Perry and Stewart (2005), “at the low-collaboration end are courses planned by a group of faculty and later taught individually by members of the group. They might plan the general content of these related courses, but would teach and evaluate the courses separately; they would not observe each other’s classes. At the highest level of collaboration are courses that are co-planned, co-taught and evaluated by a pair or group of teachers. These courses are self-contained with instructors working simultaneously in the classroom. In other words, all aspects of the course, including instructional time, are collaborative. Teachers trade off lead and supporting teaching roles as they orchestrate instruction. It is likely that most team-taught courses fall somewhere between these extremes.” (p. 564). In the literature, documentation of team teaching can be found in single courses (see Davis, 1995); across a program (e.g. Katsura and Matsune, 1994; Rosenkjar, 2002); and institution-wide (see Stewart et al., 2002).

3 Review of the Related Literature

A persistent theme of school reform literature over the past decades has been the need for teachers to shift from working as isolated practitioners to working as colleagues (Morocco and Aguilar, 2002). Teachers need to coordinate different kinds of expertise if students are to learn rigorous academic content that reflects curriculum reforms and higher standards (Morocco & Solomon, 1999). Accounting for such hopes and expectations, co-teaching seems to be of particular interest to schools that aspire to become exemplary in providing all students the academic support they need to be successful.

The impact of co-teaching structures on students’ academic learning and achievement has received due attention in educational research, (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Cook & Friend, 1995; Nowacek & Blanton, 1996; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Dieker, 2001; Fennick, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Zigmond & Magiera, 2001; Kluth & Straut, 2003; Chaison, Yearwood, & Olsen, 2006; Roy, 2006; Wilson, 2006; Zigmond, 2006; Scribner et al. 2007; Scruggs et al., 2007; Simmons & Magiera, 2007; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2008; Aliakbari & Mansoori Nejad, 2010). Such research studies, however, manifested varying results.

Nowacek and Blanton (1996) in a quasi-experimental study analyzed the impact of a collaboratively taught methods course on the attitudes and knowledge of the students in pre-service teacher education programs.

Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

Responses to a videotaped vignette of a student with disabilities were collected from 27 pre-service teachers (17 in elementary education and 10 in special education) in the co-taught methods course (the experimental group) and 12 pre-service teachers in the course taught by a single instructor (the control group). Although there was no significant difference on the attitude scale, there were qualitative differences in the nature of responses to the videotaped vignette. Those in the experimental group emphasized lesson planning and instructional processes while those in the control group emphasized classroom management and instructional materials. There were no differences between the two groups in terms of identifying student characteristics (strengths and weaknesses); in fact, both groups emphasized weaknesses.

In a comprehensive study of inclusion in 18 elementary and 7 middle schools, Walther-Thomas (1997) found that the lower student-teacher ratio that resulted from the presence of co-teachers in normal-sized classrooms led to strong academic progress and enhanced student self-confidence. In a meta-analysis of six co-teaching studies, Murawski and Swanson (2001) found that co-teaching was a moderately effective procedure for influencing student outcomes and that it had the greatest impact on achievement in the areas of reading and language arts.

Hadley et al. (2000) in an experimental study on the effect of co-teaching on students' achievement illustrated that students who were co-taught made significantly greater gains than those received the traditional classroom instruction. Conderman and McCarty (2003) described their use of learning centers, a parallel co-teaching approach, in an education course. They believed that their implementation of learning centers allowed previously disengaged students to become more engaged in the content of the course. Because the learning centers were modeling different ways to teach the same subject, students were able to learn by direct experience how they might implement a differentiated instruction technique.

Co-teaching seems to influence areas other than students' learning and achievement as well. Dahlberg and Hoover (2003), for instance, in a study on "The Effects of Co-teaching on K6 Student Discipline and Attendance" found that (1) there is a positive trend between student tardies and co-teaching, and (2) co-teaching impacts the number and the location of discipline incidents in grades K6; students in co-taught settings had fewer behavioral issues in school, and had overall fewer referrals per student.

Although the beneficiary effect of co-teaching has been supported by some studies, there are voices that cast doubt on the usefulness of co-teaching models. For instance, Magiera and Zigmond (2005) concluded that the efficiency of co-teaching for enhancing the students' proficiency is vague. Similarly, Aliakbari and Mansoori Nejad (2010) in a quasi-experimental study investigating the effect of a co-teaching model on improving EFL learners' grammatical proficiency found that compared to traditional

approach, co-teaching instruction was not effective in making a difference in learners' proficiency. In other words, no significant difference was found between the performance of the experimental and the control groups.

Some researchers doing qualitative studies (e.g. Vasquez-Montilla, Spillman, Elliott, & McGonney, 2007) concluded that, with respect to planning, satisfaction and team interactions, the respondents were much more tolerant of the ambiguities and unknown results of their collaborative efforts. In the area of teaching effectiveness, faculty agreed to a level of discomfort and lack of confidence in the results on their students. These results led the researchers to conclude that more research is needed to determine the impact of co-teaching on learners' achievement in an Iranian context as an EFL environment.

4 Statement of the Problem

Although much has been written about the usefulness and efficiency of co-teaching, it seems that relatively little attention has been paid to its application in different situations, especially in EFL contexts. In Iran, for example, because of the focused educational system where almost all educational decisions are dictated from the Ministry of Education, implementing co-teaching models and investigating their impacts on different aspects of language knowledge seem to face serious hurdles and obscurities. The present study, therefore, aimed to investigate the practicality and efficiency of co-teaching models in public schools in Iran as an EFL context. More specifically, attempt was made to clarify whether Parallel Teaching model, among others, can improve EFL students' general language proficiency more than traditional single-teaching instruction. Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to find answer for the following questions:

- 1) Does a "parallel teaching" approach have an influential effect on improving general language proficiency of EFL learners in the given context?
- 2) How do students and co-teachers evaluate co-teaching experience in their class?

5 Method

5.1 Participants

The study was conducted in a junior high school in the district of Salehabad situated in the southeast of Ilam, Iran. There was a group of 32 second-grade students studying English with the prior experience of learning English for about one and a half years. They were all male and thirteen to fourteen years

Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

old. The study also took advantage of two male English teachers (the teacher-researcher and his colleague) both aged thirty nine. The teacher-researcher had MA degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and the co-instructor was a BA graduate in English Translation. They had gained a good experience in teaching English in EFL contexts for about twenty years.

5.2 Material

The main material used in the present study was the general instructional textbook. The textbook was the English book published in Iran and used in all EFL classrooms in junior high schools across the country. It is developed by Beerjandi and Soheily and published by the Company of Press and Publishing Iranian Educational Books [Beerjandi, P. & Soheily, A., 2009. *“Right Path to English”*. Tehran: Company of Press and Publishing Iranian Educational Books]. The textbook contains ten lessons. Each lesson includes a dialogue, some patterns depicting grammatical points, new vocabulary items, read aloud (pronunciation) section, and a reading comprehension passage.

5.3 Instruments

Two tests were developed and exploited for the purpose of the study: a pre-test that served as a general knowledge proficiency test determining the homogeneity of the students in the control and experimental group. It was developed based on the materials covered during the past one and a half years of instruction (see 5.4); and an achievement test which served as a post-test to point out the possible impact of parallel and single instructor teaching on the general English proficiency of the experimental and the control group. Both the pre-test and the post-test were in multiple-choice format.

5.4 Procedure

A quasi-excremental design was exploited for the purpose of the study. The subjects, then, were divided into two homogeneous groups of sixteen based on their performance on the pre-test. To this end, the scores were ranked from the highest to the lowest; the odd scores were assigned to one group and the even ones to the other. One group played the role of the Control Group (CG), whereas the other group served as the Experimental Group (EG). For the Control Group, the teacher-researcher employing the most prevalent traditional single-teaching method taught the materials including dialogue, vocabulary, grammar points, pronunciation, and reading comprehension passage. For the EG, the co-teachers (the researcher-teacher and his colleague), implementing Parallel Model, taught the materials over a period of two months. In this stage, each co-teacher taught his own group with his

own teaching method, the same material in the same classroom setting simultaneously. The co-instructors didn't change their roles, positions, and groups during the instructions as suggested by the model. Finally, an achievement tests, based on the materials covered during the experimental phase was developed to evaluate the students' general knowledge of English. This test played the role of the posttest to point out the possible impact of co-teaching (Parallel Model) on the students' general English proficiency.

The study was conducted in 16 sessions on Wednesdays and Thursdays and each session took about 70 minutes. For the CG, the class sessions were held on Wednesdays, while these sessions were held on Thursdays for the EG. Both educators assumed full responsibility for the planning and presentation of materials, classroom management, developing the test items, and evaluation. As for the second research question and to collect participants' and co-instructor's attitude and evaluation of the treatment, an open-ended questionnaire and a semi structured interview were planned.

6 Results

In order to find out whether the treatment has been influential and beneficial in improving the subjects' general proficiency, first, the raw scores obtained in the pre-test and post-test exams were analyzed descriptively, and then inferential statistics were employed to find out whether differences, if any, were statistically significant.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Subjects' Performance on the Pre-test

Group	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Control G	16	55	52.50	16.88	285.15
Experimental G	16	50	52.18	16.25	264.06

In order to see whether or not the difference between the groups was statistically significant, a t-test was computed, the result of which is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Independent Samples Test on Learners' Language Proficiency Prior to the Treatment

t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
0.54	31	.312	5.775	.957

*P < 0.05

Since the t-observed ($t=0.54$) is smaller than the t-critical ($t= 2.042$), it can be claimed that there is no significant difference between the control and

Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

experimental groups with regard to their language proficiency. In other words, the two groups (CG and EG) were homogeneous in their general knowledge of English before the treatment.

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics including the calculation of Mean, Standard deviation, Variance, and Range for both sets of scores in the post-test.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the Subjects' Performance on the Post-test

Group	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Control Group	16	47.5	68.08	14.15	200.41
Experimental Group	16	50.00	65.93	14.71	216.56

Comparing the CG's and EG's performance on the post-test made it clear that, though to a small degree, the two groups performed differently. However, as noted earlier, the main purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of 'Parallel teaching' on general English proficiency of the Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, in order to find out whether the difference between the performance of the subjects was statistically significant, the inferential statistics of Independent Samples Test procedure was run to compare the CG's and EG's mean scores on the post-test. The result is given in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of Independent Samples Test on Subjects' Performance on the Post-test

t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
0.428	31	2.150	5.026	.672

*P < 0.05

Data presented in Table 6 indicate that since the value of *t*-observed (.428) is not larger than the critical value of *t* (2.042) at 31 degree of freedom, the difference between the subjects' performance on the tests is not significant at P<0.05 level, and consequently the null hypothesis for no significant difference between the two groups on the post-test is supported. Thus, it can safely be argued that the difference in instruction methodology has not influenced the learners' general language proficiency and that parallel teaching did not lead to better outcome than the traditional teaching.

The findings of the study, hence, disconfirmed the beneficiary impact of 'parallel teaching' on improving the EFL learners' general language proficiency in comparison to traditional single teaching method. To answer the second research question, the researchers investigated the possible explanation for the treatment failure. In so doing, the subjects were asked to enumerate the plausible reasons leading to failure of the experiment through

Mohammad Aliakbari and Abdonour Bazayr

an open-ended questionnaire. The given reasons for the experiment failure and its weaknesses implied by the respondents' answers are as follows:

- Co-teachers did not change their positions and roles (The learners asked for co-teachers changing their groups every other session in order to better benefit from their experiences).
- Co-teachers might enjoy the same level of language ability and experiences.
- Since the co-instructors did their job simultaneously in the same setting, it was distracting to the learners.
- The noisy atmosphere of the class resulting from simultaneous teaching caused the subjects to lose their focus of attention most of the time.
- They were not accustomed to the experience and felt shy with the presence of co-teachers.

Nevertheless, though the co-teaching model did not lead to beneficiary effect on the subjects' language proficiency, they all appreciated and received the model with open arms saying that:

- It was considered motivating for the members of the EG groups to compete positively with one another, though it did not result in better outcome.
- The more the number of the co-teachers, the less the members of each group and as a result the more opportunity for the learners to make best of their educational time.
- It can result in more effective and stable learning if instantiated in the curriculum.
- They had fun and consequently enjoyed their learning time.
- A warm, friendly atmosphere is injected to the class.

As noted earlier semi-structured individual interview with the co-instructor was conducted after parallel teaching experiences through which the interviewer took notes during and immediately after the interview. The co instructor-interviewee perceptions about the unsuccessful effects of the model on students' achievement are described below.

- Since State educational system is focused on traditional single-teaching, co-presence of instructors in the same class seems unnatural and even challenging for both students and instructors.
- Students and teachers are usually accustomed to classes attended by only one pedagogue; Compared to traditionally-

Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

held classes, presence of co-teachers culturally threatens the authority of teachers in class.

- In Iran both teachers and students are unfamiliar with co-teaching models; it takes time to be set as a bone in the educational system.

7 Discussions and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of co-teaching on general language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, in a quasi-experimental study, 'Parallel teaching' as one of the proposed models of co-teaching was implemented. Although, a great number of the previous studies have confirmed the influential impact of co-teaching in various educational contexts, the findings of this study did not seem to come in line with the results of those studies. In other words, although the subjects performed differently on the post-test, the difference was not significant at $P < 0.05$ level. Therefore, it can be concluded that Parallel teaching model in this particular situation did not lead to better results compared to traditional single-teaching instruction.

The non-significant result of the study can, however, be attributed to a number of issues. First, the participants, though, welcomed the model enthusiastically, pointed out that the presence of co-instructors in the same classroom setting created a confusing situation. This confusing context resulted from the fact that two teachers did their jobs simultaneously and consequently have been distracting to the subjects of the study. Furthermore, some participants stated that they felt shy and even depressed by the presence of the co-instructor. A further reason, according to the subjects and the co-pedagogue, could be related to the fact that co-teaching models are somehow new to the state education system in a way that participants culturally felt shocked by the innovation.

The present study was, in any way, limited in a number of ways. The participants in this study were just a small group of Iranian EFL learners who cannot be regarded as inclusive and representative sample of the whole population. The study, therefore, can be replicated in other different contexts and with other populations to arrive at a more defensible conclusion. Moreover, since this study focused on teachers relatively new to the profession of co-teaching, future studies might investigate the roles of other groups of teachers in terms of teaching experience in general and experience with co-teaching models in particular. Finally, this study was implemented in a public governmental context; similar studies can be conducted in private language institutes to achieve comparable outcomes.

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Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

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Mohammad Aliakbari and Abdonour Bazayr

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Impact of Parallel Teaching on General Language Proficiency

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