

Co-teaching to improve teachers' attitudes and practices towards inclusion

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Rationale

Inclusive education is both a challenge and an opportunity for educational transformation. Achieving classrooms where all students can actively participate and progress in their learning requires rethinking teaching practices and moving towards collaborative and flexible models (Ainscow, 2016; Anthoula et al., 2020). In this sense, co-teaching becomes a strategy with great potential to improve teaching effectiveness and promote more equitable learning environments (Duran & Miquel, 2019). Several international studies have highlighted the benefits of co-teaching, especially in terms of attention to diversity, teacher professionalization and improved educational response (Jurkowski et al., 2023; King-Sears et al., 2021; Strogilos et al., 2023). However, it remains necessary to continue researching the impact it has on teachers' attitudes and practices towards inclusion, especially in the knowledge it can provide about student diversity and their educational needs (Rytivaara et al., 2023).

Method

This paper presents a study framed within Design-Based Research, an approach that seeks to generate knowledge from contextualized educational interventions, establishing bridges between theory and practice (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). The study was carried out within a professional development process in which 50 preschool, primary and secondary education schools took part organized in pairs. For several weeks (academic year 2024-25), these pairs jointly planned and implemented co-teaching practices in their classrooms, with the aim of improving the response to diversity and promoting inclusive learning environments. A sample of 100 students also took part in the study as informants.

A mixed-methods design is used, combining quantitative and qualitative instruments. On the quantitative side, for the teachers, standardized scales in pretest-posttest format have been applied: the Inclusive Practices Scale (Sharma et al., 2021) and the Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016), as well as an ad hoc questionnaire of expectations and assessment of co-teaching. For the students, the Questionnaire of Perception and Evaluation of Co-Teaching was used. On the qualitative side, documents prepared by teachers (planning, process and final assessment reports), open questions from the student perception questionnaire and in-depth interviews with a selection of teaching pairs have been collected.

Results

The preliminary results point to an improvement in teachers' perception of their ability to address diversity in the classroom. The pretest-posttest questionnaires show positive changes in attitudes towards inclusion and in confidence in their own practices. Qualitative evidence reinforces this trend, highlighting that co-teaching has facilitated a better analysis of the reality of the classroom, a clearer communication of the contents and the development of more realistic action plans. Positive perceptions of students are also collected, who express greater safety and participation, as well as suggestions for making activities more accessible. Finally, the process has allowed the identification of improvement areas for future implementations: saving weekly time slots for teaching coordination, incorporating student self-assessments and a clearer definition of roles between teachers.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence of how co-teaching can act as a catalyst for the development of sustainable and contextualized inclusive practices, contributing to improving teaching effectiveness and building fairer and more participatory classrooms.