

Lecturers' and Leaders' Perceptions about Co-Teaching: A Case of Limkokwing University, Botswana

Authors Details:

⁽¹⁾**Bogosi Monyamane**-Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Botswana

⁽²⁾**Lindiwe Monyamane**-Botswana Open University, Botswana

Abstract

This paper investigated the challenges which the lecturers and leaders at Limkokwing University faced when using co-teaching in their classrooms. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from 50 participants based in 6 faculties at the Botswana campus. Data were analyzed using pie charts and graphs to interpret the views of lecturers and Heads of departments about co-teaching. The results obtained revealed that the lecturers at Limkokwing University lacked the necessary skills required for the implementation of co-teaching and that they are not well versed with co-teaching models. It is also evident that there are no co-teaching frameworks that are being implemented by the faculties under study to support co-teaching usage. In addition, lecturers did not have adequate teaching and learning resources for co-teaching implementation.

Keywords: Co -Teaching, Challenges, Teaching and Learning Resources, Lecturer Collaboration, Perceptions, Co-Teaching Models, Professional Training.

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the notion behind this research, it is essential to understand what co-teaching is. What then is co-teaching? According to Peery (2017), in a co-teaching relationship, general lecturer partners with a specialist in a certain subject area such as inclusive education in order to deliver some lessons to the students. In co-teaching therefore, teams work together to attain a common goal in their shared classrooms. In this way, students' at all academic levels benefit from different teaching styles that co-teaching makes possible (Gillespie, David, Israel & Alexander, 2008). Moreover, co-teaching allows intensive and individualized instruction in general education as it promotes inclusive education. In this respect, students have the opportunity to acquire more knowledge and understanding from the lecturers who practice co-teaching. On the other hand, students with special needs also have better chances to continue learning as their lecturers benefit from collaborating with their core-workers and thus, acquire diverse strategies and skills from each other (Thomas, 1997).

In Botswana's Millennium Development Goals (2010), it is highlighted that schools in Botswana are rapidly transitioning from traditional classrooms of the ratio of 1 lecturer: 1 class to co-teaching approaches. This evolution has been motivated by the Ministry of Education which has specific guidelines for designing new schools and reforms to promote co-teaching in government schools (Botswana Millennium Development Goals, 2010). As such, school leaders and lecturers at Limkokwing University in particular, should promote co-teaching strategies in their classrooms for effectiveness in learning.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was inspired by the challenges faced by lecturers and leaders at Limkokwing University from 6 faculties, including: The Faculty of; Creative Multimedia; Design and innovation; Communication; Information and Communication Technology; Architecture and the Business faculty.

In Limkokwing University, there have always been short comings of classroom sharing in the context of co-teaching. As such, the students have forwarded some complaints about the confusion caused by the lecturers and tutors when they teach the same subjects at the same time. For instance, they indicated that the lecturers tend to differ when they present some certain concepts to learners. Consequently, projects which are produced by students are criticized differently by these two parties as lecturers often set different expectations for the students and expect them to comply.

The approach of lecturer collaboration was meant to increase knowledge sharing in order to maximize students' academic performance. However, this has negatively affected the performance of students and

escalated some frustrations amongst learners. Clays (2019) presents the following challenges that are attributed to co-teaching;

- In co-teaching each lecturer wants to dominate in the classroom.
- The students tend to be confused when there are two lecturers in the same lesson.
- The co-lecturers don't have enough time to plan together.
- Lecturers develop some frustrations and resentment towards each other during the co-teaching process.

Clays (2019) further points out that, when there are two lecturers in the classroom, students are most often confused and fail to understand which lecturer is in charge, and whom to trust and listen to. This therefore means that, instead of bringing lecturers together for the attainment of improved shared knowledge and the skills, co-teaching makes the classroom uncomfortable for both lecturers and the learners themselves (Clays, 2019)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges faced by lecturers and leaders at Limkokwing University, Botswana campus, in order to provide solutions that support the effective implementation of co-teaching models so as to improve the students' academic performance in Limkokwing University.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are lecturers' and leaders' perceptions about co-teaching?
2. What are the challenges faced by lecturers when co-teaching?
3. What best co-teaching models are best suited for Limkokwing University lecturers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Friend and Cook (2010), co-teaching happens when two or more lecturers take shared responsibility for a class of students in the same learning space. This normally means that lecturers should share the teaching and learning resources to address the subject and activities of the day. Since the evolution of co-teaching in the 1960s, co-teaching strategies have developed and have since been identified to being beneficial in improving students' academic performance as well as supporting inclusive education (Peery, 2017). Friend and Cook (2010) further provide the commonly known co-teaching strategies which include; Alternate teaching; Station teaching; Parallel teaching; One teach, one observe; One teach, one assist; Team teaching as well as Complementary and supportive co-teaching.

It is commonly understood that co-teaching strategies require lecturers' mutual understanding of how they are going to facilitate their classrooms (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson & McCulle, 2012). Moreover, the lecturers should share the same belief and approach when they teach students from different backgrounds. In essence, the co-teaching team should be aware of the co-teaching principles in order for them to work effectively and efficiently (Nevin, 2008). Amid the benefits of co-teaching, they have been some challenges presented, such as; 1. The trust of collaboration between the teams or lecturers. 2. The impact of variation in beliefs and teaching approaches. 3. The limited time for collaborative lesson planning and; 4. A lack of quality specialized learning to support the transition to a more and effective co-teaching collaborative environment (Fullan, 2007).

The challenges which is presented by co-teaching have constrained the full effects of co-teaching and this has resulted in negative experiences for both the lecturers and students. Jonathan (2018) indicated that co-teaching presents the opportunity for collaborations amongst lecturers so that they work, plan and solve problems together, thereby promoting knowledge sharing. Furthermore, Anderson and Speck (1998) assert that, conversations between the teams which are engaged in co-teaching promote effective decision making and alleviate the complexities presented by the co-teaching processes.

Montgomery (2019) further emphasizes on the importance of robust relations amongst co-teaching teams which are fostered towards the realization of the full benefits of co-teaching. However, some studies have pointed out that lecturer collaboration creates delays to the teaching preparations more so that lecturers

spend some time planning, evaluating, and sharing views and information on their classes (Chitiyo, 2017). On the other hand, various researches have pinned collaboration to be key at improving education systems (Fullan, Cuttress & Kilcher, 2011). Nevertheless, without a planned process to develop effective co-teaching collaboration in schools, the benefits of co-teaching may not be experienced (Cook, et al, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a questionnaire survey and open-ended interviews to investigate the perceptions of lecturers and the school leaders who have been involved in co-teaching. The use of surveys and interviews provided a great opportunity for the researcher to understand the experiences of the participants by actively engaging them for more insight or responses (McLeod, 2018). Purposive sampling was used to select 46 lecturers and 4 heads of departments who have been teaching different subjects from the six faculties; Creative Multimedia; Design and innovation; Communication; Information and Communication Technology; and Business and Faculty of Architecture. 46 lecturer participants were given questionnaires to fill and return while 4 Heads of Departments were interviewed to examine the rationale of co-teaching and the conditions for effective co-teaching, relationships, and the advice for lecturers.

The data from the open-ended responses and Likert scale survey questions were presented in graphs and pie charts for data analysis. Comparative analysis of the surveys from lecturers and the interview data from Heads of Departments enabled the data to be cross checked for themes.

FINDINGS

The co-teaching elements, which include; Building strong foundations through shared understanding; Systems and structures to support co-teaching; and Supporting staff to transition to co-teaching are discussed as follows;

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS THROUGH SHARED UNDERSTANDING

The Heads of Departments and lecturers in this study emphasized the importance of robust shared values, beliefs and understanding amongst lecturers which they said fostered towards creating positive and effective co-teaching environments at Limkokwing University. The significance of shared values and beliefs has also been highlighted by Miravet and García (2012). They indicated that the motivation about and the impact of co-teaching on student learning is expressed to indicate how dynamic learning environments should support lecturers in order to comprehend the co-teaching models and the importance of mutual trust, belief and understanding.

The lecturers across faculties in Limkokwing University spoke strongly about the significance of collective responsibility in every aspect of teaching and learning as well as the well-being of each learner. This is in agreement with the findings by Morales and Agger (2017) who stated that for effective co-teaching and learning, the lecturers who engage in co-teaching should work together and appreciate the inputs of the other without feeling intimidated as they ought to learn from each other.

SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT CO-TEACHING

The totality of co-teaching implementation should be driven by the school culture (Isherwood, Anderson & Erickson, 2013). The different faculties in the universities should ensure that the lecturers and students are provided with maximum support. As a result, all support systems should be availed for the effective delivery of lessons. It is therefore pertinent that, Limkokwing University management should provide adequate teaching and learning resources such as technologies, together with conducive classrooms to support the day-to-day learning activities.

In an article written by Schleicher (2017), it was highlighted that schools should not just be places where students go to acquire academic skills, but rather, students should also be assisted and trained to be able to overcome life challenges. Therefore, this means that, Limkokwing University systems should cater to students' well-being and self-regulation towards maximizing their learning pace and experience. Furthermore, the students should also be supported to move towards students-centred learning as evidenced by Kaput (2018) who stipulated that when student-centred learning is encouraged amongst university students, they tend to work hard on their own and at their learning pace as well. As such, it is relevant for the university to promote student-centred learning. On the other hand, the lecturers in Limkokwing University cited the need for the management to provide reasonable teaching and learning time in order to

establish and maintain effective systems so as to facilitate co-teaching and learning in their complex environments.

For co-teaching to be effective at all levels, lecturers should maintain effective student-centred learning by taking some time to study and know their students. Fissette (2010) confirmed that teachers who access students' thoughts and feelings could enhance students' learning experiences. Basically, the lecturers should have some information about each of their students so that they know who they are dealing with. This would ultimately allow them to establish a working and trustful relationships with their students.

The findings of this study also revealed that each faculty has its own ways of doing things with regard to co-teaching. However, while some faculties paired lecturers to teach the same subject for the same class, others used the lecturer and tutor approach, where the main lecturer would give a lecture while the tutor does the demonstrations. In this context, it was clear that lecturers needed to gain the necessary skills and attitudes in order to implement co-teaching efficiently. In a study conducted by Mangope and Mukhopadhyay (2015), the irregularities in professional development were identified. Their study indicated that the participants never received any professional training and development from their schools. This therefore created a gap in the skills needed for inclusivity and co-teaching. For this study, the participants also emphasized the need for more time to be set for discussions on co-teaching collaborations.

SUPPORTING STAFF TO TRANSIT TO CO-TEACHING

The study results further revealed that none of the lecturers in Limkokwing University has continuously engaged in professional development as a way to transit to co-teaching. This has been indicated in a study by Mangope and Mukhopadhyay (2015) who stated that university lecturers in their study complained about the lack of continual professional development as one of the causes of their limited knowledge and skills in co-teaching. Some lecturers in this study indicated that even though, they did not follow nor apply any known model of the co-teaching skills before, they learnt some of them while on the job. Despite that the lecturers surveyed had teaching qualifications, some were not aware of the co-teaching principles. This then indicated that they never gained any training on co-teaching.

Most of the lecturers therefore, suggested the need for continual professional training about co-teaching, particularly in the dynamic environment that they teach in. A further inquiry with lecturers revealed that, they did not use any specific co-teaching strategies they could readily identify with co-teaching other than the traditional lectures and tutorials. Moreover, a study by Iloanya (2014) indicated that lecturers who have worked autonomously before, struggle to communicate and collaborate effectively in a co-teaching environment.

Mizell (2010) highlighted on the importance of professional training and stressed that lecturers should be engaged in professional conversations on factors that most positively impact on improving the learning outcomes rather than simply meeting to consider administrative issues. As such, the management of Limkokwing University should implement the suggestions which have been recommended by the lecturers in order to enhance collaborations and the culture of the learning environment as that has great potential in assisting the lecturers in improving the learning outcomes and co-teaching in general (Iloanya, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In order to meet students' learning needs, the lecturers must be fully equipped and supported for the smooth transition to co-teaching. The leaders in Limkokwing University therefore should address the rationale for the transition, and challenge the lecturers' beliefs about the value of collaborative teaching and learning. It is worth noting that the value of continual professional learning and development cannot be underestimated. As a result, lecturers must have adequate knowledge and skills to meet diverse students' needs through enhanced collaborative approaches (Nordstrom, 2007). This could be achieved through effective communication and interpersonal skills in order to work effectively with others.

Furthermore, the lecturers also need to develop their capability in using systems and technologies to facilitate collaborative practices such as co-teaching (Valcárcel, ABasilotta & López, 2014). Moreover, leaders in tertiary learning institutions should provide training to the lecturers in order to equip them with all the necessary skills required for effective co-teaching and collaboration. Besides, there are significant benefits for the students and staff when the lecturers work collectively and collaboratively within learning environments. This is consistent with findings by Lang and Page (2010) who pointed out that, for effective

teaching and learning to occur during co-teaching, lecturers ought to work collaboratively amongst themselves so that learners are fully equipped with the knowledge that they are transferring to them during teaching and learning process. This could be effectively accomplished if leaders in Limkokwing University provides sufficient teaching and learning resources to support co-teaching in the various faculties of the institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were suggested based on the findings of this study;

- Lecturer should be provided with continual professional training and development on co-teaching.
- Lecturers should establish good working relationships for effective co-teaching collaborations.
- Lecturers at Limkokwing University should employ collaborative teaching approaches such as: Supportive Co-teaching, Parallel Co-teaching, and Team Teaching in order to maximize students' performance.
- Departmental Heads should support lecturers and students by ensuring that resources are adequate for both teaching and learning.

The following were suggested for further future research:

- To conduct a mixed methods research on the use of co-teaching amongst lectures in all the universities in Botswana,
- To evaluate how learners in tertiary schools in Botswana view the implementation of co-teaching.
- To establish the relationship between co-teaching and learners' academic performance in public secondary schools in Gaborone and surrounding areas.

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