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Inusah Salifu

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Exploring Coteaching as a Trend in Higher Education

Inusah Salifu

University of Ghana

ABSTRACT

This qualitative inquiry used the multiple case study and phenomenological designs to explore coteaching experiences of teachers in higher educational institutions. The research utilized the modal purposive and accidental sampling techniques to select five groups of coteachers from five Ghanaian universities. Data obtained via in-depth group interviews and classroom observations were analyzed using content and thematic approaches. The research revealed that the teachers were motivated to accept coteaching responsibility because of the belief that it was an effective practice that met students' academic needs, and this notion influenced their engagement in coteaching practices described as team teaching and parallel teaching. A low level of commitment was, however, the main challenge confronting the coteachers. The research mainly recommended the use of the two coteaching models for global higher education but suggested that coteachers should have compatible teaching philosophies to perhaps make them more committed to working with one another.

KEYWORDS

Collaborative teaching; coteaching; distributed leadership theory; Ghana; higher education; instructional practice; qualitative study

Introduction

Coteaching has grown in popularity in contemporary higher education, perhaps due to the general quest to use effective approaches to make students get the best out of classroom interactions. Multiple perspectives have explained coteaching as the practice of putting together two or more teachers in a single classroom to be in charge of students' learning success including instructional planning and execution as well as evaluations of learning success (Morelock et al. 2017; Beninghof 2012; Wendy and Wendy 2017; Wilson and Blednick 2011). In Stein's (2017) view, coteaching is not just a classroom assignment, which makes only one teacher assume absolute ownership of instructional delivery, but a teaching experience, which enjoins two or more teachers to bear the same level of responsibility and accountability for handling students. In this research, I contextualize coteaching as a teaching practice that requires two or more teachers to be responsible for the teaching and assessment of a group of students with the same instructional needs.

My resolve to spell coteaching without the hyphen after the prefix "co" is to differentiate it from the version spelt with the hyphen after the prefix "co" which is applicable to general basic education and special needs education (Colette and Sonya 2015). As an

instructional approach, coteaching emphasizes collaborative teaching such as coplanning, copractice, and coreflection which require teachers to plan together, teach together, and evaluate lessons together. All these are done aiming to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education, to boost classroom reflection, and to improve teachers' depth of knowledge in what they teach (Colette and Sonya 2015).

An engagement with the local literature on Ghanaian education has revealed that through research, much knowledge has been generated about coteaching in regular basic education and in special needs education, but the same cannot be said about higher education. On higher education, although many studies have been conducted, the foci have tended to only be on teacher motivation and learners' interests (e.g., Biney 2018), and on teaching reflections (e.g., Salifu, Worlanyo, and Kuyini 2017) neglecting coteaching. However, my insider personal experiences and information gathered from some teacher-colleagues in most higher educational institutions in Ghana have indicated that heads of academic units decide on whether or not coteaching arrangements are necessary for a given semester and for which courses, and also which of the coteaching models are to be used. This development makes the practice of

coteaching in the Ghanaian higher education context appear driven by local policies rather than by instructor-choice yet it is gaining popularity among many teachers. What could account for this situation is unclear in the extant literature. Apparently, the following questions remain unaddressed: Why is coteaching becoming a common practice in Ghanaian higher education? Could it be as a result of teaching for convenience? Could it be for the sake of mentoring early career teachers by experienced teachers? How is coteaching even practiced at that level of education in the country? Is the practice similar to or different from what pertains in regular basic education and special needs education? Are there any challenges encountered by coteachers in Ghanaian higher educational institutions, and how do the challenges compare to those prevalent in regular and special needs education contexts?

The questions above suggest that there is paucity of information in the literature, thus, creating a gap that does not help educational researchers and practitioners alike understand and be abreast of the nature of coteaching as an innovative practice in Ghanaian higher education. Meanwhile, a body of global literature, such as Kaplan (2012), Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2013), Fattig and Taylor (2008), and Stein (2016), has suggested that coteaching has several advantages including sharing of expertise yet its implementation could be challenging. My pre-occupation in this research, therefore, was to use a Ghanaian context as a case study to explore the nature of coteaching in higher education in a broader sense. In my view, this research is not only timely, but a unique effort to extend and expand the global literature on current trends in higher education teaching. As Fitzmaurice (2010) has argued, “there is a huge and helpful literature on methods and techniques in teaching in higher education. However, there is much less on the experience of being a teacher in higher education and dealing with the realities of practice” (46).

What does the literature say about coteaching?

Classifications of coteaching

A greater part of the literature I have reviewed (e.g., Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen 2009; Burns and Mintzberg 2019; Cook and Friend 2004; Stein 2017) has spelt coteaching with a hyphen in-between “co” and “teaching” and has explained it as a practice which involves a number of approaches including one teach, one observe; one teacher, one drift; station

teaching; parallel teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching. I will briefly explain each of the approaches and its educational context in the ensuing paragraphs.

The “one teach, one observe” coteaching is a pair teaching model practiced in special needs education, general basic education as well as higher education contexts. It requires one teacher to instruct, whereas another observes learners to find weaknesses (Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen 2009; Cook and Friend 2004). In special needs education and general basic education, the role of the observer–teacher in this approach is to provide feedback on which aspects of the instructional content have been most effective for learners and which aspects have not. The essence of the feedback is to enable the teacher–instructor to continually modify the content delivery to suit varying needs of students (Gately and Gately 2001; Stein 2017). In higher education, however, the observer–teacher is often a mentee who observes the instructor who teaches as an experienced person from whom the mentee understudies (Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg 2008; Lester and Evans 2009; Lock et al. 2016). In this case, the instructor determines what is to be observed (Lock et al. 2016). It has been criticized as being likely to lead to controversies if the teacher whose lesson is being observed is not tolerant of divergent views (Stein 2017).

The second coteaching approach for my review is the “one teach, one drift” model which is similar to the “one teach, one observe” model commonly practiced across the three levels of education (i.e., special needs education, general basic education, and higher education). The difference, however, is that this approach requires the second teacher to go round students to provide support for those in need. In such a situation, the second teacher may be a colleague or teaching assistant (Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen 2009; Gately and Gately 2001). A major criticism against this approach is that the second teacher who goes round to help students may distract the students’ attention to and concentration on the lesson being taught.

The “station teaching” is a common practice in special needs education, particularly the unit that caters for children with intellectual disability. The approach requires the instructional content to be divided into smaller units so that each instructor would handle one. Students are then grouped to be taught in turns by each teacher (Stein 2017; Beninghof 2012). In using the approach in general basic education, each teacher who teaches content to one group is supposed

to replicate the instruction to the other group (Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen 2009). In higher education, Lock et al. (2016) have explained that the station teaching model requires teachers to go beyond repeating the same instructional content to another group by creating a third station where students work independently. In Kaplan's (2012) view, this approach enables teachers to offer support to students based on their expertise. Critics have, however, argued that replicating in equal measure what is taught in one class in another is an arduous task (Kaplan 2012).

The "parallel teaching" approach is a common practice in general basic education and higher education. It enjoins teachers to put students into groups so that each teacher handles a group (Kaplan 2012; Lock et al. 2016). The teachers teach their assigned groups at the same time and cover the same instructional content. In higher education, in particular, Exeter et al. (2010) and Mulryan-Kyne (2010) have reported that the past decade has witnessed rapid growth in student population in most parts of the world, especially Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. This development has made the issue of large class size teaching inevitable in those countries, the effect of which leads to less effective teaching and learning. Given this circumstance, the parallel teaching arrangement could be used by teachers to create instructional differentiation aimed at improving student engagement (Lock et al. 2016). The approach, however, is not feasible where classrooms are insufficient (Kaplan 2012).

The "alternate teaching" approach requires one teacher to be in charge of a bigger group while another is in charge of a smaller group to give them additional special support (Kaplan 2012). This approach can be practiced across the three different levels of education but it is more common with special needs education because of the necessity to plan and execute complementary instructional programs aimed at meeting the unique needs of learners (Beninghof 2012). In higher education, the alternative coteaching approach allows teachers to enrich and provide additional assistance to the group with a small number of students (Harvey, Coulson, and McMaugh 2016; Lock et al. 2016). Its disadvantage is that a conflict situation may arise regarding which of the two teachers should handle the bigger class because it is obviously more difficult to teach a bigger class than a smaller one (Kaplan 2012). It is also difficult to practice it without enough classrooms (Beninghof 2012).

"Team teaching" is also practiced across all the three levels of education. The approach refers to a teaching arrangement in which a group of well-organized teachers come together to teach a particular class (Kerridge, Kyle, and Marks-Maran 2009; Letterman and Dugan 2004; Lock et al. 2018). The teachers share responsibilities and collaborate effectively to achieve a common goal. According to Lock et al., this approach used in higher education allows teachers to teach at different times the same instructional content to a group of students. It also makes provision for the expression of divergent views as well as two processes of problem-solving. The practice of this approach in higher education and general basic education contexts has been criticized as being wasteful because it is possible to get one qualified teacher to perform the task instead of recruiting many teachers to do so (Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen 2009).

General benefits and challenges of coteaching

According to Ferguson, Desjarlais, and Meyer (2000), Kelly (2018), and Lock et al. (2016), coteaching is important for the following reasons: creating opportunities for teachers to interact with students to address unique weaknesses, bringing together many teachers with different areas of expertise to teach one classroom to allow multiple intelligences to be incorporated into the classroom, and creating equal roles in the classroom with a view to ensuring different knowledge sharing. Other reasons provided by the authors include: making lessons stronger and more creative because teachers share the planning process of delivery with one another, creating opportunities for teachers to support one another; complementing one another's strengths and weaknesses by dividing the workload in the classroom, and focusing more on student learning as they are exposed to different instructional styles.

Despite the advantages enumerated above, coteaching may be disservice to learners if instructors do not have compatible values in terms of teaching styles, principles, and learning expectations from students (Murawski and Dieker 2004; Jarvis and Kariuki 2017). Coteaching may also be an ineffective practice of teaching if the collaborating instructors do not have the same level of commitment and also have no mutual trust for each other (Kliegl and Weaver 2013). As a consequence, differences in teaching values and commitment may mar the spirit of

cooperation which is supposed to be a driving force in coteaching.

Summarizing the literature and locating the gap

The literature has revealed that there is scholarly information on the distinction between coteaching and coteaching. Information is also available on the variations or models of coteaching as well as the benefits and challenges of the practice. Of particular concern, however, is the fact that the literature on the practice in higher education seems to concentrate on some geographical contexts (e.g., Lock et al. 2016, 2018 in Canada; Kelly 2018 in Australia; Jarvis and Kariuki 2017 in Japan) other than Ghana, causing a dearth of knowledge on how the practice also exists in the country's higher educational institutions. Consequently, it is not clear how the coteaching approaches/models discussed in the literature are used to effectively promote instructional delivery at that level of education, and this is the gap my research intends to fill.

Theoretical framework: coteaching as a distributed leadership practice

The theoretical framework for this research is based on the distributed leadership theory (DLT) espoused by Bolden (2011), Gronn (2002), Hallinger and Heck (2009), Harris (2003, 2013), Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009), and Spillane (2006). These authors have explained the DLT as a theoretical and analytical approach through which scholars seek to understand the nature of leadership as it occurs among people working together in organizations with complex structures.

The Distributed Leadership theoretical framework emerged in the early part of the year 2000 through the contributions of anthropology, sociology, and psychology (Bolden 2011; Gronn 2002; Harris 2013). In the literature, several terminologies have been used to refer to DLT, some of which include: dispersed leadership, collective leadership, distributive leadership, shared leadership, co-leadership, collaborative leadership, and emergent leadership. The fact that multiplicity of words has been thought of as concepts related to DLT suggests that there are as many and varied conceptual understandings of the theory as there are scholars in the field of educational leadership (Hallinger and Heck 2009; Spillane 2006).

I chose to apply the Distributed Leadership theoretical framework to this research because of my aim to explore how coteaching at the higher level of education

could lead to a collaborative teaching rather than a cooperative teaching. Collaborative teaching is one which requires teachers to distribute responsibilities but works together as a team of professionals with different expertise to achieve desirable learning outcomes for students instead of mere cooperating with one another to create convenience and pleasure (Bolden 2011). Cooperative teaching among instructors has been perceived as a loose, ineffective, and weak means of ensuring school improvement (Harris 2013).

Another compelling reason for the use of the Distributed Leadership theoretical framework in this research was my intention to understand and analyze coteaching from the perspectives of activity theory and cognition. As a distributed cognition and activity theory, the framework enables educational researchers to focus on how teachers, as instructional leaders with diverse expertise, may team up to coteach for the benefit of learners. The notion of distributed cognition and activity-based relationship therefore means that teaching is a "concerted action" (Bolden 2011, 252) requiring teachers to share teaching loads according to their specializations with each bringing to bear on students' learning achievements their experiences and knowledge of curriculum contents (Bolden 2011; Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss 2009; Spillane 2006).

Coteaching in distributed leadership theorization requires a shared and collective leadership practice that is anchored on educational change and improvement (Bolden 2011). As have been noted by Hallinger and Heck (2009) and Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009), a growing body of research evidence has increasingly revealed that in the DLT, coteaching positively affects learning outcomes just as learning outcomes in turn also affects educational development. The Distributed Leadership theoretical framework for this research therefore argues that creating opportunities within the Ghanaian higher education system which allow teachers to coteach and work interdependently may lead to a collective achievement of desirable learning outcomes.

Methods

Locating the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research from a distributed leadership theoretical perspective

This research explored the motivations and nature of coteaching as a pedagogical practice in Ghanaian higher education, and how it may result in a collaborative instructional environment rather than in a cooperative one (see the third paragraph of

Theoretical Framework section). Achieving this aim required an extraction of data regarding some human experiences which are consistent with a distributed leadership approach (DLA). The DLA aligns with “the postmodern conceptualization of the twenty-first-century learning which suggests that knowledge is no longer characterized as knowing discrete information, but is redefined as something more active, such as a series of networks, or tools, that can make things happen” (Colette and Sonya 2015, 1). A distributed leadership perspective also tries to repackage knowledge generation as a social construction based on subjective interpretations of multiple realities (Creswell 2009; Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

Approach and design

This research used the qualitative approach and relied specifically on the multiple case study and phenomenological designs to explore in-depth (Yin 2003) the reasons the practice of coteaching was becoming more visible and gaining grounds in the Ghanaian higher educational landscape. Because coteaching is a complex issue (Stein 2017), it requires detailed information from multiple sources so as to understand its prevalence in different institutions; the choice of the multiple case study design was to achieve this aim. Furthermore, my intention to also understand and unpack how coteaching worked based on institutional dynamics meant that I should consider the unique as well as the essence or common lived experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Johnson and Christensen 2008) of participants, and that made the phenomenological design also apt for the research.

Participant selection

Two sampling techniques guided the selection process of participants. The initial technique was the modal purposive sampling (Denzin and Lincoln 2011) which allowed the selection of five universities because of their status as bigger institutions of higher learning in Ghana. Being bigger, they had larger lecturer population to serve the data collection purpose of this research. I subsequently used the accidental sampling technique (Denzin and Lincoln 2011) to access and select five groups of coteachers, one from each of the universities, to partake in the research. Using the technique enabled me to visit each of the selected institutions, and to meet with some Heads of Departments through whom I got interested participants. Brief background information of each group is as found in Table 1.

Ethics

First, I obtained institutional ethical clearance from each of the university’s ethical board responsible for research. I also explained to the participants the nature of the research and got their written consent before the research began. Participation in the research was therefore voluntary and the participants had the choice to withdraw at any stage of the research. During data analysis, I coded the data anonymously intending to conceal the identities of participants and the institutions they came from

Further, I ensured rigor and trustworthiness by conducting an audit trail of the data and organizing members check. I also engaged in reflexivity, and through my reflections, I took both the insider–outsider positions prior to the commencement of the data collection. While my affiliation with one of the universities justified my insider position, my intention to, as much as possible, detach myself from the data also made my outsider stance needful. When the research report was ready I organized peer debriefing.

Tools and data collection

Semi-structured open-ended interviews as well as classroom observations were the means of data collection in this research. I conducted the interviews first and followed them up with the observations. The interviews were in-depth and I conducted them via direct face-to-face individual and group contacts. I used both interview techniques because while I thought the individual interviews were likely to make the participants speak freely and to critique one another, the group interviews were also important to enable them to share their coteaching experiences. Examples of major questions on the interview schedules are:

1. What is your understanding of coteaching?
2. How have you and your colleague shared your teaching loads?
3. Do you get the cooperation you anticipate from your colleague?
4. How is your relationship like?
5. Do you see your students enjoying any instructional benefits from your coteaching arrangement? If yes, why? If no, why?
6. How useful are learning management systems or any form of technological/ICT support in your coteaching?
7. Are there any challenges you encounter in coteaching? If yes, could you describe the nature of the challenges

Table 1. Profile of cases.

Case	Participant	Gender	Average age	Qualification/ specialization	Cotaught course	Course objective	Coteaching model used	Coteaching experience
#C1	P1 P2	M M	35	PhD in Educational Guidance and Counseling	Educational Guidance and Counseling	To prepare students to be expert educational counselors in future	Team teaching	The participants had been teaching together for the past four years in the first university but whereas P1 had a previous experience, P2 had not. In the university, the practice was a little over 20 years and had become more common
#C2	P1 P2 P3 P4	F F F M	39	PhD in Sociology	Industrial Sociology	To equip students with skills needed to be effective industrial sociologists in the future	Team teaching	The participants had been working together as a team for two years in the second university but it was their first coteaching experience. The university, however, had encouraged the practice for the past nine years and it had grown since its introduction
#C3	P1 P2 P3	M M F	34	PhD in Human Resource Management	International Human Resource Management and Business Ethics	To enable students acquire skills of human resource management in diverse cultural environments	Parallel teaching	The participants had three years' experience of working together in the third university but whereas P2 and P3 had previous experiences, P1 had not. In the university, the practice had been there for the past 17 years and had grown in popularity
#C4	P1 P2 P3 P4 P5 P6	M F M M M F	42	PhD in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)	Communication Skills in English	To enable students learn how to communicate effectively in the English Language	Parallel teaching	The participants' experience in the current parallel teaching arrangement was five years in the fourth university but they all had prior experiences teaching with other colleagues. In the university, the practice had been there for the past almost 30 years and had become more common across academic units
#C5	P1 P2	M M	40	PhD in Development Studies	Research Methods	To enable students conduct research with minimum supervision	Parallel teaching	The participants had three years' experience in their current coteaching arrangement in the fifth university. They both had previous coteaching experiences. In the university, the practice had existed close to 15 years and had been introduced in almost all academic units

In framing the questions, the authoritative views of scholars with specific interests in coteaching served as a guide (see Literature Review section). The interviews were in-depth and took between 35 and 45 min to complete.

In the case of the observations, I observed thrice each of the participants' cotaught class for 45 min and made memos of my personal reflections of events. I

repeated the same activities with them as a coteaching group in their respective universities planning and debriefing together. The data I obtained from the observations complemented and shed light on those I got earlier from the interviews. I conducted the interviews and observations myself because I thought doing so would make the data collections more effective than commissioning others for the purpose.

Analysis

After transcription, I analyzed the data inductively making use of coding, categorization, and thematization based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Creswell 2009; Yin 2003). I began the analysis by initially coding the data anonymously using C1 for Case 1; C2 for Case 2; C3 for Case 3; C4 for Case 4; and C5 for Case 5. I also carefully examined the content of the data, constantly compared patterns of concepts as they occurred and organized the report in themes. For the memos of the observed lessons, I interpreted exchanges, gestures, mimes, reactions, collaborative techniques, and delivery styles. The unit of analysis for field data was based on constructs of the distributed leadership theoretical framework such as coplanning, copractice, and coreflection requiring teachers to plan together, teach together, and evaluate lessons together.

Results and discussion

Three main themes emerged from the data analysis as: coteaching motivations, distributed leadership practices, and coteaching hiccups. The themes as well as the following codes will guide the results presentation and discussion in this section: C1 for Case 1; C2 for Case 2; C3 for Case 3; C4 for Case 4; and C5 for Case 5.

Coteaching motivations

Coteaching motivations in the context of this research refer to the underlying reasons for the practice of coteaching among higher education teachers. Two sub-themes that came up under this main theme are cognition and compatibility.

Cognition

An inductive analysis of data evinced that the participants were generally influenced by the decision to coteach because of the understanding of the practice as cognition which enabled teachers to "... support one another in classroom activities for the improvement of good practices in teaching" (a participant in C1); "... plan, deliver and assess a course with one another" (a participant in C2); "... share teaching load of a particular course among themselves" (a participant in C3); "... teach students in most cases divided groups, but with the same syllabus (a participant in C4)"; "... teach the same course to the same level of students in different groups in the same semester" (a participant in C5).

Cognition from a distributive theoretical perspective argues that teaching should be a concerted action (Bolden 2011). The notion of concerted action defines teachers as instructional leaders whose collective responsibility is to share teaching loads based on their specializations so that each will bring to bear on students' learning achievements his or her experience and knowledge of curriculum contents (Bolden 2011; Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss 2009; Spillane 2006).

Compatibility

Compatibility, as used in this research, refers to the teachers' decision to coteach because of the fact that they had common teaching aspirations, goals, philosophies, and values which enabled them to collaborate without conflicts. Demonstrating this motivation, a participant in C1 indicated that she and her colleagues mutually agreed to teach courses together because "... we see one another as friends with similar teaching styles". In C2, a participant shared a similar experience when she said

... we have a very good relationship. In deed our partnership is working very well. We make sure we take collective decisions. For instance, we all plan together the assignments to be given to students and set examination questions together.

In C3, a participant was also of the view that "... we generally cooperated well". In C4, an interviewee's experience was not very different as he also said "... we have always agreed on some modalities every now and then. On the whole, we have learnt from each other especially in recent times". It appears the gender difference among the participants was not a prominent issue in their coteaching experiences as exemplified in a participant's claim that "... despite my being the only female among other male coteachers, we relate very well as brothers and a sister based on common teaching principles. After all, we all have the same teaching goal to achieve".

All the participants also indicated that their coteaching schedules worked well because of cordial relationships. These cordial relationships enabled them to address students' academic needs. For example, they engaged in the following professional activities to assist students achieve academic goals:

We availed ourselves to them (students) during and after lectures and appealed to them to call on any of us for further clarification on any academic difficulties encountered in their learning... (a participant in C1)

... we co-instruct them on many things but when it comes to giving tailored assistance, my colleagues and

I have always relied on our individual differences in determining who attends to a particular need. (a participant in C2)

... we make sure we teach strictly according to the course outline. We also create a good atmosphere for students to share their academic related challenges with us and we make sure we address the challenges promptly. (a participant in C3)

... what we seek to do is to teach them to understand the concept and pass their exams. However, we emphasize a practical application of concepts to students' daily lives as they work with others. (a participant in C4)

... well some of us are the students' course advisers through which we guide and counsel them regarding their studies even outside the classroom. We share experiences with them and give stories of people who have gone through difficult student lives and yet become successful. This means that we also guide our students to plan and review their personal lives beyond the academic boundary. (a participant in C5).

The DLT emphasizes unity of purpose as a key requirement for a successful teamwork without which teachers may only cooperate and pretend to harmonize just for the sake of convenience (Hallinger and Heck 2009). From a distributed Leadership theoretical stance, teaching should be collaborative to allow teachers to work together as a team of professionals with different expertise to achieve desirable learning outcomes for students instead of the teachers just cooperating with one another to create convenience and pleasure (Bolden 2011). It is also averred that cooperative teaching is ineffective and does not ensure school improvement (Harris 2013).

Coteaching as a distributed leadership practice

Coteaching from a distributed leadership theoretical perspective requires teachers to be instructional leaders whose collective responsibility is to bring about a positive educational change (Bolden 2011). The results I obtained from the interviews and classroom observations have suggested that the nature of coteaching practices the participants pursued to demonstrate instructional leadership are, as the literature describes, parallel teaching and team teaching.

An interviewee in C1 told me

the teaching loads are shared between two of us by the Head of Department who takes into cognizance our areas of specialization and research interests. ... Because we teach the same group, we're able to bring together our expertise to bear on our teaching using what is called the problem-solving approach.

What we do in this regard is to group the students and give them project work assignments in the form of case studies in which both of us have made inputs ... each student defends his or her role in the assignments. This approach improves their thinking and analytical skills.

Expressing a similar experience, a C2 interviewee also said

About six of us coteach a core course to the first year Bachelor of Arts Degree. We share the courses according to our strengths and areas of specialization. ... We allow our students to freely share their views with us. ... through that they gain from our individual knowledge of the instructional content.

Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen (2009) and Letterman and Dugan (2004) have averred that a teaching arrangement where a group of well-organized teachers come together to teach a particular class at different time schedules is team teaching.

In C3, a participant related that "... the class is normally divided into two and each of us teach the same topics at the same time". A C4 participant also expressed a comparable experience when one of them recounted that

the year group we teach together is divided into smaller groups because the number is so large ... we are then assigned to each group to teach simultaneously because our course is given only one particular time slot on the general time table. All of us teach the same content because the students belong to the same year group.

In C5, a participant's description of his coteaching practice is that

... each of us (the coteachers) prepares power points and shares with others. We then use the shared material for teaching different groups of the same level of students concurrently. ... Dividing the students into smaller groups helps us to ease congestion with its attendant noise making in the classrooms ... classroom control is effective for us using this approach.

Kaplan (2012) has described this kind of coteaching arrangement as parallel teaching.

Besides the interviews, I also observed the teachers' coteaching lessons. An important teaching disposition I noted during the in-class observations was the integration of technology in the participants' classroom deliveries. A practice which featured prominently in some of the teachers' lessons was the use of the Sakai Learning Management Systems (LMS) to facilitate classroom interactions. Some of the facilities of the Sakai LMS the teachers used in teaching included

“Resources” for storing lecture slides, “Syllabus” for putting details of course outlines, “Forum” and “Chatroom” for interacting with students on instructional content, “Assignments” and “Quizzes” for assessing learning outcomes and “Gradebook” for documenting and publishing students’ results. Most of the teachers also used e-learning tools such as blogs, podcasting, emails, dropbox, WhatsApp, Moodle, Webpages, YouTube, and smart boards in their instructional deliveries. The teachers in C5, for example, used virtual classroom in her parallel teaching schedules with colleagues. Owing to these observations, I wanted to know the motive behind the teachers’ keen interest in the use of technology to deliver lessons. The following excerpts were the responses I got for the enquiry: “...It (technology used in teaching) offers me a challenge to learn new management systems and technology or ICT applications to my instructional delivery...” (a participant in C1); “... the use of technology is keeping the teaching relationship between me and my coteachers very productive as we are able to have access to one another easily without the need for physical presence” (a participant in C2); “... through the SAKAI learning tool, we plan series of activities to students such as assignments, fora and tests together...” (a participant in C3); “... we use technology because it is very helpful in our teaching collaboration. We, for instance, use the internet platform technical assistance” (a participant in C4); “I will say that the use of technology or ICT support has been useful. My colleagues and I use emails, dropbox, and WhatsApp mostly to share information on the courses we teach” (a participant in C5).

Coteaching hiccups

Coteaching hiccups, in the context of this research, are the challenges confronting coteachers in the Ghanaian higher education context. Available literature (e.g., Murawski and Dieker 2004; Kliegl and Weaver 2013) has posited that despite all the positives about coteaching, it may be deviled with challenges such as the lack of commitment emanating from incompatible values. One of the aims of this research was to understand this claim within the context of Ghanaian higher education. The results have revealed that although the participants claimed they had an opportunity to learn from one another, a low level of commitment exhibited by some of their colleagues frustrated their coteaching efforts. Expressing a disappointment, a participant in C1 said:

Yes, it’s not all rosy; there are challenges! The most worrying challenge is the lack of seriousness on the part of the so-called senior colleagues who think the early career faculty should shoulder alone the teaching responsibility meant for the group.

The experience of C2 participants was comparable as one of them also claimed:

...the only thing I see as a challenge is that sometimes we do not finish at the same time the topics we teach different groups of students who are at the same level; this situation puts pressure on some of us since we can only set exam questions that cover only the extent of coverage they have made.

As a result of commitment deficits, some of the teaching partners of the participants of this research even engaged in tardiness and absenteeism, thus frustrating the effectiveness of coteaching. In C3, a participant expressed this concern indicating that:

...most often the students taught by my colleagues join my class unofficially and make the class very large and difficult to control. One time I discovered some students in my class that way and when I asked the reason behind their behavior, they told me their lecturers were often absent and only sent teaching assistants to take charge of their classes.

Another commitment issue revealed in this research has to do with selective teaching by some coteachers. Selective teaching is the habit of teachers choosing to teach preferred areas of the syllabus leaving out important but perceived difficult areas to teach. A C4 participant’s report on this issue was that their coteaching colleagues “... only teach areas they are comfortable with and would like to set exam questions to cover but neglect all stubborn areas”. It appears the experience of C5 participants was not very different as one of them asserted that:

I teach the course Public Policy Management with another colleague to level 100 Bachelor of Science students. Last semester, because the class was large, we divided it into two so that we would handle one each. However, because the class was homogeneous, we had to come together to set the same exam paper for the students. I was surprised my colleague told me to abandon some of the questions I had set because his students wouldn’t be able to answer them...

The results of this research have affirmed the usefulness of the parallel teaching and team teaching models explicated by earlier researchers such as Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen (2009), Kaplan (2012), Kerridge, Kyle, and Marks-Maran (2009), Lock et al. (2016), and Lock et al. (2018). Lock et al. (2016), for instance, have argued that the use of the parallel model of coteaching in higher education is

advantageous as it allows teachers to improve student participation while creating instructional differentiation. However, Kaplan's assertion that the parallel model was not feasible in a situation of inadequate classrooms was not consistent with the context of this research because the institutions where the participants cotaught had enough classrooms for the purpose of coteaching. Also, Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen's (2009) argument that the team teaching model was wasteful did not receive an affirmation in this research because the participants did not cite it as one of the issues confronting coteaching in Ghanaian higher educational institutions.

Put together, the results have shown that the teachers cotaught because they were influenced by the belief that effective teaching in contemporary higher education was best pursued when teachers with diverse expertise collaborated to meet students' academic needs, and this notion inspired the teachers' engagement in those coteaching practices described as parallel teaching and team teaching. Nonetheless, the coteachers were not pleased with a low level of commitment exhibited by some of their colleagues.

Drawing on the results, it is obvious that coteaching is a useful instructional practice in higher education. As done by the teacher-participants of this research, higher education teachers in other parts of the world, including OECD countries noted by the literature (see Exeter et al. 2010; Mulryan-Kyne 2010) as having been grappling with huge student population, may also use the parallel teaching model to resolve the issue of large class size teaching, especially in undergraduate core courses that usually record huge student numbers. This could be done by creating differentiated classrooms that allow for a greater student participation in instructional activities. The team-teaching model could also be used to encourage problem-solving among students, and to give them varied learning experiences as they interact with teachers with diverse expertise on the same instructional content. That said, it is worthy of note that the issue of compatibility is a necessary consideration when assigning instructors to coteach. This is because the results have shown that differences in teaching aspirations, goals, philosophies, and values lead to apathy and low commitment thereby creating conflicts that frustrate coteaching efforts.

Conclusion

In this research, I sought to unravel coteaching motivations as well as the specific coteaching practices

being pursued by higher education teachers, and the challenges being encountered in the practices but with a specific focus on five higher educational institutions in Ghana. I have discussed the results by situating the data within the DLT as well as other forms of extant literature including empirical studies. Overall, the research makes an original contribution to the body of literature on coteaching because of the use of the DLT as a lens for examining the data. The research also fills the gap in the literature on reasons the practice of coteaching is becoming more visible and gaining grounds in higher education, especially in Ghana (see Table 1). It further addresses the important questions about the nature of and challenges in coteaching practices in many higher educational institutions. It is, however, limited in capacity to generalize findings because of its nature as a qualitative case study. Future research may therefore prefer the mixed method approach to offset the inherent weaknesses associated with using only the qualitative approach or the quantitative approach.

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