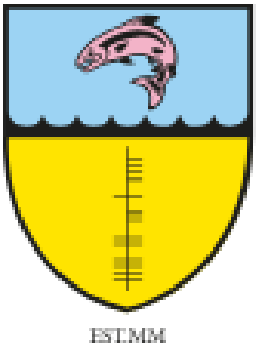
Exploring The Relationship Between Team-Teaching And An Inclusive Practice - Teacher's Perspective



HIBERNIA COLLEGE

Exploring The Relationship Between Team-Teaching And An Inclusive Practice - Teacher's Perspective

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of Professional Master of Education in Post-Primary

June 2024

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List of Acronyms

DES: Department of Education and Skills

NCSE: National Council for Special Education

SEN: Special Educational Needs

ETB: Education and Training Board

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

RSE: Relationships and Sexuality Education

SPHE: Social, Personal and Health Education

SNA: Special Needs Assistant

CPD: Continuous Professional Development

JCT: Junior Cycle Training

LCA: Leaving Certificate Applied

Abstract

This thesis investigates the intricate relationship between team-teaching and inclusive practices in post-primary education. The study explores educator's perceptions of collaborative teaching methods through a comprehensive literature review, qualitative and quantitative data collection, and thematic analysis. The sample comprises four teachers: two student teachers and two full-time teachers. Findings reveal team-teaching's potential benefits and challenges in fostering inclusivity, accentuating collaboration, tailored instruction, and support for diverse learners. The research provides insights into integrating inclusive practices within team-teaching, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective pedagogical strategies. The study's recommendations offer actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to enhance inclusive education.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Origin of the Dissertation

The genesis of this research study stems from the thesis statement, "Exploring the relationship between team-teaching and an inclusive practice", viewed through the lens of educators. The thesis statement emerged from firsthand experiences and an observable shift in the diverse needs of learners in the contemporary educational landscape. Central to the author's research is the experience of observing how collaborative teaching methods can effectively address the diverse educational needs of students. These observations illuminate the myriad challenges and opportunities of solo-teaching methodologies that prove inadequate in addressing the extensive spectrum of student needs. Consequently, this has led to an in-depth exploration that seeks to elucidate the efficacy of team-teaching in fostering inclusivity within educational frameworks, aiming to augment the existing body of knowledge and proffer practical recommendations for educators to implement in their classrooms. Data for this research will be meticulously gathered from four educators across different schools in County Cork, where student demographics are richly varied in socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities. The study participants will be confined to post-primary teachers tasked with instructing their subjects across various groups, facilitating a focused examination of team-teaching dynamics within diverse classroom milieus.

1.2 Background to the Study

As outlined by Walsh (2020), post-primary schools in Ireland have recently experienced a significant shift towards adopting team-teaching as a pedagogical method, moving away from traditional solitary teaching approaches. This shift highlights a broader recognition of the benefits of collaborative teaching methodologies, which include increased student engagement, tailored instruction, and a more inclusive educational environment (Ó Murchú & Conway, 2017). Concurrently, O'Sullivan (2011) discusses how inclusive practices have gained prominence within this evolving educational landscape, driven by a commitment to ensuring equitable educational opportunities for students of all backgrounds and abilities. The integration of inclusive practices with team-teaching reflects a comprehensive educational ethos aimed at addressing the diverse learning needs of students and fostering a culture of cooperation and support among educators (Walsh, 2020). However, the

researcher's focus lies in elucidating the teacher's perspective on this subject area. Understanding how professionals within the educational context perceive and implement these methodologies is crucial for fully grasping the impact and effectiveness of team-teaching and inclusive practices in contemporary classrooms.

Sailor, McCart, and Stahr (2014) and Hattie (2009) underscore significant deficiencies in the current literature regarding the correlation between team-teaching and inclusive practices within educational contexts. Despite the growing recognition of collaborative teaching methods and the importance of inclusivity in education, there is a scarcity of empirical research investigating how these two areas intersect.

To address this research gap, the present study aims to delve deeper into the teacher's perspective on the subject matter:

- Investigate the relationship between team-teaching and inclusive practices in post-primary schools.
- Understand how educators perceive and implement team-teaching as an inclusive pedagogical strategy.
- Identify team-teaching potential benefits and drawbacks in fostering an inclusive educational environment.

By achieving these aims, the study hopes to advance the conversation on inclusive education by providing insightful information on the potential advantages and challenges of co-teaching as an inclusive pedagogical strategy. The anticipated outcomes of this study are expected to enrich future endeavours in professional education. Additionally, it is hoped that any subsequent publications resulting from this research may also enhance the pedagogical practices of fellow teachers.

1.3 Dissertation Layout

The dissertation comprises five meticulously crafted chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in elucidating the relationship between team-teaching and inclusive practices in post-primary education. In Chapter One, the research's rationale, methodology, and structural framework are introduced, providing a robust foundation for the subsequent exploration. Chapter Two conducts an exhaustive review of relevant literature on team-teaching and inclusivity,

synthesising existing research and theoretical frameworks to contextualise the study within the broader educational landscape. Chapter Three thoroughly details the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, ensuring rigour and integrity in the research process. Chapter Four presents the main findings derived from qualitative and quantitative data analysis, offering insights into the perceived efficacy of team-teaching in fostering inclusivity among educators. Finally, Chapter Five evaluates these findings within the context of research questions and literature reviewed in Chapter Two, drawing conclusions and offering practical recommendations to inform educational practice and policy. Together, these chapters form a cohesive narrative, contributing to the advancement of knowledge and training in post-primary education.

1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has introduced the significance of researching the interconnective relationship between team-teaching and inclusive practices in post-primary education. By investigating teacher's perspectives in diverse settings, this study aims to uncover the benefits and challenges of implementing team-teaching to create inclusive educational environments. Chapter Two will build on this foundation by comprehensively reviewing existing literature on team-teaching and inclusivity, further contextualising the research and providing a deeper understanding of the topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The concept and approach of team-teaching have been consistently endorsed at policy levels, both internationally and within Ireland. Despite this endorsement, as Walsh (2020) highlights, there is a notable scarcity of focused research on its application within post-primary schools in Ireland. Ó Murchú and Conway (2017) and O'Sullivan (2011) indicate that while the adoption of team-teaching is increasingly prominent within Ireland's educational policy framework, practical support for its implementation in schools remains limited. Schools are largely responsible for transitioning from conventional, individualistic teaching methods to more collaborative practices, indicating a significant cultural shift among Irish teachers. This transition challenges the longstanding tradition of valuing the autonomy and privacy of individual teaching practices in the post-contemporary classroom.

This literature review delves into various aspects surrounding team-teaching in post-primary schools in Ireland. The review will address research trends, gaps, and systemic reviews of team-teaching, exploring the current state of its implementation and identifying areas that require further investigation. It will examine the appeal of team-teaching, discussing the benefits it offers to both students and educators. The review will also explore different models of team-teaching, analysing their prevalence and effectiveness in various educational contexts.

Furthermore, the theoretical foundations underlying team-teaching will be scrutinised, particularly focusing on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and Social Capital Theory. These theories provide valuable insights into how team-teaching can enhance collaborative learning and inclusive education. The review will also assess the impact of team-teaching on teacher learning, highlighting its role in professional development and pedagogical evolution.

The accumulated knowledge gleaned from this literature review promises to enhance our comprehension of the prevailing practices employed by educators in harnessing team-teaching within their pedagogical repertoire. Moreover, it seeks to elucidate the symbolic relationship between team- teaching and inclusive practices in the context of Irish post-primary classroom.

2.2 Trends in team-teaching: gaps & systemic review

Team-teaching has been a significant aspect of Irish education policy for over a decade, yet its practical implementation and theoretical alignment with educational change remain inconsistent and under-researched. According to the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2007), team-teaching has long been recommended, and recent studies by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2014) and DES (2017) have advocated for its inclusion alongside other collaborative activities. These recommendations highlight the systemic support for team-teaching, emphasising its potential benefits for educational practices. However, the feasibility of implementing team-teaching, where two educators co-teach in the same classroom, heavily depends on the resource allocation model for special education needs (SEN) (DES, 2019). This model underscores that approximately 15% of post-primary teachers are specifically dedicated to supporting student inclusion nationally. Bennett (2010) critically evaluates existing research and identifies significant deficiencies, or "missing links," in the alignment of team-teaching with broader theories of educational change. This misalignment suggests that current studies may not fully explore how team-teaching fits into larger educational reforms, leading to a superficial understanding of its systemic impact.

The gaps identified by Bennett (2010) highlight the need for more comprehensive research to understand the broader implications of team-teaching. While team-teaching initiatives aim to enhance learning experiences and foster inclusive practices, prevailing research often fails to integrate these initiatives with established educational change frameworks. Consequently, studies may neglect to explore how team-teaching contributes to broader educational reform or transformation processes. This oversight limits the potential impact of team-teaching on educational systems and practices. Sailor, McCart, and Stahr (2014) note the need for in-depth research examining the relationship between team-teaching and inclusive practices. Despite the growing recognition of inclusive education, which ensures fair access to quality education for all students, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding how team-teaching supports these practices. The recognition of inclusive education's importance necessitates a thorough examination of collaborative teaching methodologies and their effectiveness in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, addressing these research gaps is essential for understanding the true potential of team-teaching in fostering inclusive educational environments.

Dieker and Murawski (2013) argue that team-teaching, through collaboration and individualised instruction, can significantly benefit inclusive education by addressing diverse student needs. In team-teaching environments, educators collaborate to design and deliver instruction tailored to each student's needs, developing personalised learning plans, providing additional support and accommodations, and implementing instructional strategies that cater to diverse learning preferences. This collaborative approach allows educators to draw upon their collective expertise and resources, ensuring all students have access to necessary support and accommodations for academic success. However, Mastropieri and Scruggs (2010) identify a lack of comprehensive studies evaluating the outcomes of team-teaching in inclusive settings, such as academic performance, social integration, and self-confidence. This gap in empirical research indicates a need for more robust studies to validate the benefits of team-teaching in inclusive education settings.

The practical challenges of team-teaching further underscore the necessity for detailed investigation. Research by Stumpf, Husman, and Dalton (2011) and Stachowski, Petz, and Lueth (2016) reveals that disparities in workload distribution can arise in team-teaching settings. These imbalances, which may result from differences in teaching expertise, availability, or personal dynamics between team teachers, highlight a critical issue: one teacher may assume a disproportionate share of instructional responsibilities while the other contributes minimally. This imbalance can lead to frustration or resentment within the team and potentially undermine the efficacy of team-teaching efforts, adversely affecting the overall learning environment for students. Addressing these practical challenges requires a nuanced understanding of team dynamics and the development of strategies to ensure equitable workload distribution among team teachers. By conducting comprehensive research that examines both the benefits and challenges of team-teaching, educators and policymakers can develop more effective approaches to implement this collaborative teaching model, ultimately enhancing its impact on inclusive education. Thus, a deeper investigation into team-teaching's practical and theoretical dimensions is paramount for realising its full potential in educational settings.

2.3 The appeal of team-teaching

The appeal of team-teaching lies in its alignment with UNESCO's conceptualisation of inclusion, as noted by Bauwens and Hourcade (1997) and supported by UNESCO (2005).

Researchers emphasise the myriad benefits that collaborative methodologies such as team-teaching offer to students in diverse classroom environments, highlighting its role in creating dynamic and supportive educational settings. O'Leary, O'Leary, and Heavin (2018) further underscore the significance of pedagogical approaches in determining the effectiveness of team-teaching. Their study reveals that educators who employ student-centered and interactive teaching methods, such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, or project-based learning, witness greater improvements in student learning outcomes. These pedagogical strategies foster active engagement, critical thinking, and deeper understanding among students, thereby enhancing the efficacy of team-teaching.

Cook and Friend (2014) shed light on the supportive networks cultivated through team-teaching, offering educators valuable emotional sustenance and aiding them in overcoming pedagogical challenges, thus enriching their overall well-being and resilience. Through synergistic engagement with colleagues, educators can leverage each other's strengths to effectively address the diverse needs of students and cultivate an inclusive and engaging learning environment. Additionally, Kurz, Elliott, and Wehby (2016) discuss how team-teaching fosters professional development through peer observation, feedback, and reflection, contributing to continuous improvements in teaching methodologies. The collaborative nature of team-teaching nurtures camaraderie and mutual accountability among educators, fostering a supportive and unified school culture, as outlined by Snyder and Pijanowski (2019).

Boscardin and Polloway's (2016) meta-synthesis of qualitative research on co-teaching in inclusive classrooms provides insights into various aspects of team-teaching, including its impact on classroom management. Despite variations in specific findings across studies in the meta-synthesis, the overarching theme suggests that team-teaching positively influences classroom management in inclusive settings. The collaborative nature of team-teaching allows educators to share the responsibility of managing the classroom effectively, establishing clear expectations, routines, and behavior management strategies tailored to diverse student needs. Furthermore, having multiple educators in the classroom enables thorough supervision and support for students, reducing disruptions and improving behaviour outcomes. Boscardin and Polloway (2016) also stress the importance of fostering positive teacher-student relationships through team-teaching, creating a supportive and inclusive

learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and engaged. This positive classroom climate enhances behaviour management, as students are more motivated to participate in learning activities and adhere to classroom expectations.

2.4 Models of team-teaching

Researchers have identified six models of team-teaching: Interactive Teaching (Classic Team-teaching), Complementary Instruction (Supportive), Station Teaching, Parallel Instruction, Alternative (Split) Teaching, and One Teach, One Assist (Friend & Cook, 2003; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin & Williams, 2000). Notably, the "One Teach, One Assist" model emerges as the most prevalent in the literature, particularly in the USA. Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) conducted a review of thirty-two qualitative studies, finding that 72% of these studies identified "One Teach, One Assist" as the primary team-teaching model, especially common in post-primary education settings. This prevalence is partly attributed to the emphasis on collaboration between general education and special education teachers, a dynamic less commonly observed in the Irish educational landscape.

Contrary to the dominance of the "One Teach, One Assist" model, Friend and Cook (2016) propose the prominence of the "Station Teaching" approach. In this model, educators divide instructional responsibilities and rotate between different teaching stations within the classroom, offering diverse learning experiences tailored to student's needs and interests. Each station presents a unique activity or lesson, ranging from direct instruction to small group activities or hands-on learning experiences. Teachers effectively manage student progress by rotating between stations providing targeted support and feedback as necessary. This approach fosters student autonomy and independence, allowing them to self-select activities and engage in peer collaboration.

Another notable model discussed by Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2008) is "Parallel Teaching," where educators concurrently teach the same material, providing students with diverse viewpoints and increased participation opportunities. This model allows for smaller group sizes, facilitating more individualised attention and interaction. Additionally, the "Alternative Teaching" model, as outlined by Murawski and Dieker (2014), involves one instructor delivering lessons to the entire class while the other works with a smaller group of students, ensuring tailored instruction without disrupting the main lesson. These diverse models offer

educators flexibility in adapting their teaching approaches to meet the varied needs of students and promote inclusive learning environments.

2.5 Impact of team-teaching on teacher learning

The impact of team-teaching on the pedagogical development of educators, both senior practitioners and student teachers, is extensively explored by Beck and Kosnik (2006), who underline its profound role as a catalyst for inclusive practices. They highlight how immersion in collaborative instructional endeavours alongside experienced mentors within team-teaching environments provides student teachers with invaluable opportunities to learn various instructional methodologies, refine classroom management skills, and effectively cater to diverse learner needs.

Furthermore, team-teaching facilitates the shaping of professional identity and teaching philosophy for student teachers through interactions with mentor teachers and peers (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Collaborative planning, co-teaching experiences, and reflective discussions enable student teachers to refine instructional techniques, adapt to diverse learning environments, and deepen their understanding of educational theories and evidence-based strategies (Reilly, 2017). Additionally, team-teaching instills a lifelong learning mindset in student teachers, prompting them to continually seek growth, innovation, and enhancement in their teaching practices (Hollingsworth, 2016).

Nielsen, Wray, and Strand (2018) offer profound insights into the educational journey of student teachers engaged in a co-teaching model within a secondary teacher education program. Utilising qualitative methodologies such as interviews and observations, they delve into the enriching experiences of student teachers working alongside seasoned mentor educators. Co-teaching provides these burgeoning educators with unparalleled learning opportunities, fostering their pedagogical prowess through close collaboration with mentors. Despite challenges such as role ambiguity and time constraints, structured support and clear communication within team-teaching frameworks significantly optimise the efficacy of co-teaching experiences, as underscored by the research.

2.6 Theoretical foundations

Informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which outlines the role of the environmental context in shaping individual learning experiences, one can discern profound implications for

inclusive approaches (Moll, 2002, p. 265). Vygotsky's theory underscores the significance of social interaction and collaboration in learning, advocating for its implementation in team-teaching to enrich the learning environment with diverse perspectives and expertise. Through scaffolding learning experiences, where more knowledgeable individuals support those with less experience, team-teaching fosters a zone of proximal development for all students. Moreover, Vygotsky's theory aligns with inclusive education principles, providing equal opportunities for students regardless of abilities or backgrounds.

Social Capital Theory, as elucidated by Cote and Healy (2001, p.41), serves as a conceptual bridge between macro-level educational policies and micro-level implementations within classrooms, offering a prism to scrutinise teacher actions and interactions within team-teaching scenarios. Operating within a meso-level paradigm, it magnifies the interplay among educators within classrooms and educational institutions. This approach resonates with Mercer's discourse on learning, which explores the symbiotic interplay of external influences and internal dynamics shaping the educational journey.

Putnam (2000) expands upon Social Capital Theory, positing that robust social networks and interpersonal bonds within educational settings foster collective benefits, notably evident in educational outcomes. Within team-teaching and inclusive education, this theory suggests that collaborative pedagogical practices and inclusive learning environments cultivate strong social networks and interpersonal bonds among students and educators, enhancing educational achievements holistically. Team-teaching facilitates the exchange of intellectual capital and pedagogical acumen among teaching cohorts, fostering resilient professional networks that support collaborative problem-solving and pedagogical innovation. Similarly, inclusive education promotes diverse social networks among students, fostering mutual understanding, empathy, and cooperative learning endeavours.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review offers a comprehensive examination of team-teaching as a pedagogical approach within post-primary schools in Ireland, aiming to foster inclusive practices and optimise student learning experiences. Through an exploration of trends, appeal, models, impacts on teacher learning, and theoretical foundations, several key insights have been unearthed.

Team-teaching holds promise for promoting inclusive education; however, challenges such as resource allocation, workload distribution, and role ambiguity persist. Despite policy endorsements and theoretical underpinnings, translating these ideals into practical implementations remains complex.

The diverse models of team-teaching provide educators with flexibility in adapting instructional approaches to meet diverse student needs. Nonetheless, questions arise regarding the most effective models for promoting inclusivity, particularly within the Irish educational context.

Moreover, the impact of team-teaching on teacher learning underscores its role in fostering pedagogical growth and professional development. Yet, there is a pressing need for further research to explore teacher's perceptions of co-teaching and its effectiveness in fostering inclusivity in post-primary classrooms.

As this literature review concludes, critical questions emerge, shaping future research directions and informing educational practices. Is there a correlation between team-teaching and inclusive practice? How do teachers perceive the impact of co-teaching on fostering inclusivity in post-primary classrooms? What are the most effective models of team-teaching for promoting inclusive practices in post-primary schools in Ireland?

Addressing these questions will not only contribute to the existing body of literature but also provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders striving to create inclusive learning environments. By interrogating the intersections of team-teaching, inclusivity, and educational practices, future research endeavors hold the potential to drive meaningful improvements in post-primary education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study exploits a qualitative research framework to explore the relationship between team-teaching and inclusive practices in the Education and Training Board (ETB) and Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) educational settings. By examining educator's experiences and perspectives, it aims to contribute to the literature on inclusive education. The chapter provides a detailed overview of the research design, data collection methodologies, and data analysis techniques, offering a comprehensive understanding of the study's procedural aspects. Participant demographics are discussed to highlight the characteristics of the individuals involved. Ethical considerations are carefully addressed to ensure the study's trustworthiness and credibility. Through this comprehensive approach, the research seeks to provide meaningful insights into how team-teaching can foster inclusive educational practices.

3.2 Research Design

The small-scale case study was conducted in two secondary schools, one affiliated with the ETB and the other designated as a DEIS school. The participants included qualified post-primary teachers from both schools, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in perspectives and experiences. Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) outline that purposive sampling involves selecting interviewees based on distinctive characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question. This method warrants that the sample includes individuals who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse data. This study adopts a qualitative research design supplemented by a small quantitative component. The decision to employ qualitative methods aligns with an interpretive paradigm, emphasising an in-depth exploration of human experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. By utilising semi-structured interviews, this approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the participant's perspectives within the context of the research topic. This interpretive paradigm accentuates symbolic interactionism and aims to uncover the underlying perspectives driving empirical observations and individual actions based on these perspectives. It also seeks to identify patterns that emerge through the interaction of various perspectives and actions over time (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 21).

The qualitative methodology was chosen over quantitative approaches due to its suitability for capturing rich, contextual data that allows for nuanced interpretation. As Creswell (2013) contends, qualitative methods are especially effective for examining complex phenomena and uncovering the underlying meanings embedded within participant's experiences. By engaging in semi-structured interviews, the researcher can delve deeper into the intricacies of the subject matter, capturing not only what participants said but also how they understood and interpreted their own experiences. Additionally, a small quantitative component was integrated into the research design through the interview process. This mixed-methods approach, informed by a pragmatist stance, aimed to triangulate the data, enhancing the comprehensiveness and validity of the findings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). By incorporating quantitative questions within the semi-structured interviews, the study sought to complement the qualitative insights with numerical data, providing a more holistic understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.3 Research instruments

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. This tool was designed to facilitate in-depth discussions with participants while allowing flexibility to explore emergent topics. The semi-structured format combines predefined questions with the freedom to probe further based on participant's responses, enabling the collection of rich, detailed data (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide was developed through a rigorous process, beginning with a review of relevant literature outlined in Chapter 2 to identify key themes and issues pertinent to the research topic. This informed the creation of a set of initial questions aimed at exploring these areas comprehensively. The questions were open-ended to encourage participants to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Patton, 2015). The interview guide included a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions. The qualitative questions focused on participant's experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, while the quantitative questions aimed to gather specific, measurable data to complement the qualitative insights. This mixed-methods approach provided a more holistic view of the research phenomenon, aligning with the pragmatic stance adopted in this study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

3.4 Procedure

To investigate the perspectives of teachers with varying levels of experience, a convenience sampling method was employed to select the interviewees. Convenience sampling, as highlighted by Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), involves selecting participants based on their availability and willingness to participate, making it an effective method for exploratory studies where in-depth insights are sought.

Four participants were selected for the interviews. This cohort included two student teachers, providing a lens into the experiences of those new to the teaching profession. Two experienced teachers with over five years of experience offering insights from seasoned professionals who have taught at both the junior and senior cycles. Such a selection aimed to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives within the educational landscape. The interviews were conducted across two different schools to ensure a varied contextual background. The first school, designated as a DEIS institution, has an enrolment of over 951 students and employs approximately 80 teachers. The DEIS designation indicates a focus on addressing educational disadvantages and providing a unique setting for the study. The second school, part of an ETB, serves around 600 students and has a staff of 75. This school represents a different operational structure and demographic, adding further depth to the research.

Participants were initially contacted via email. This communication included an introduction to the study, its objectives, and its significance. Prospective participants were provided with detailed background information to ensure they were fully informed about the nature and scope of the research. Additionally, consent forms were presented, ensuring ethical standards were maintained as per the guidelines suggested by Creswell (2018). These forms outlined the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of the data collected, and the use of recording devices during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in person within the respective schools to facilitate a comfortable and familiar environment for the participants. Utilising a recording device allowed for the accurate capture of responses, ensuring that the data collected was both reliable and comprehensive (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). The recordings were subsequently transcribed for analysis, adhering to the transcription guidelines recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). By integrating these procedures, the study aimed to obtain rich, qualitative data reflecting the diverse experiences and insights of teachers at different stages of their careers within varied educational settings.

3.5 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the feasibility and reliability of the research instruments, enhancing the study's robustness and validity (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). The primary purpose was to test and refine the semi-structured interview guide and integrate quantitative questions. Kim (2011) argues that this initial phase was designed to enhance the clarity of questions and identify logistical issues before the main study. The pilot study involved two participants, providing valid feedback on the interview protocol. Notes from these interviews were reviewed to identify ambiguities and difficulties, leading to refinements in the interview questions and adjustments to the quantitative components for ease of response. The sequence of questions was also improved for better flow. This iterative process ensured that the research instruments were fit for purpose, suggesting they were appropriately tailored to address the research questions effectively. This illustrates how pilot studies are central to refining research tools and enhancing data quality, contributing significantly to the study's overall rigour and credibility (Turner, 2010).

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen as the primary method for analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research that allows for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nowell et al. (2017) suggest that this approach is particularly suitable for this research as it provides a flexible yet systematic way to manage rich and complex data. One of the main advantages of thematic analysis is its flexibility. It can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks. It can accommodate both inductive and deductive approaches to data coding and theme development. This flexibility is beneficial for this study, allowing the researcher to explore the data in depth and identify emergent themes without being constrained by a rigid analytical framework. Moreover, thematic analysis is particularly effective for research that seeks to understand participant's experiences, perceptions, and motivations (Clarke & Braun, 2013). It enables the interpretation of data in a manner that captures the richness and complexity of participant's responses and is particularly complementary for qualitative research focused on generating detailed and nuanced insights.

3.7 Limitations

Despite the precise design and execution of this research endeavour, several limitations necessitate acknowledgement to understand the study's scope and implications comprehensively. Firstly, while the sample size was purposefully selected to ensure the depth and richness of data, it remains relatively small, comprising educators from only two distinct educational settings. Creswell (2008) suggests that this limited sample may restrict the generalisability of the findings, as team-teaching practices can vary significantly across different educational contexts and settings. Therefore, caution should be exercised in extrapolating the study's results to broader populations without considering contextual factors that may influence the implementation and effectiveness of team-teaching initiatives.

Additionally, (Merriam 1998) underscores the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias or social desirability bias, wherein participants may provide responses that they perceive as favourable or socially acceptable. Despite efforts to mitigate these biases through careful data collection and analysis techniques, it is deemed essential to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of self-reported information and its potential impact on the validity and reliability of the study findings. By addressing these concerns, the study enhances its rigour and trustworthiness. Reflexivity, or the ongoing critical reflection on the research process and the researchers' roles, further supports the credibility of the findings. This comprehensive approach illustrates how pilot studies are central to refining research tools and enhancing data quality, thereby contributing significantly to the study's overall rigour and credibility (Turner, 2010).

Furthermore, the duration of the study may not have allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the longitudinal effects of team-teaching on inclusive practices. While the research provides valuable insights into educator’s perspectives at a specific time, longitudinal studies spanning extended periods would be necessary to assess team-teaching initiative's sustainability and long-term impacts on inclusive education outcomes (Bell, 2010). Future research endeavours could address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples, incorporating multiple data collection methods, such as observations or document analysis, and extending the duration of the study to capture longitudinal changes and trends in team-teaching practices and their effects on inclusive education.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethical framework guiding this research underscores the profound impact of education on both individual lives and society. This recognition is echoed in the foreword to the Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association (2001), which emphasises the responsibility of researchers to conduct studies that uphold the principles of integrity, respect, and benevolence. Anderson's (2006) ethical framework provides further guidance by highlighting the importance of assessing the worthiness of research endeavours and ensuring that participants are fully informed to make voluntary decisions about their involvement (p. 670). These ethical principles served as the cornerstone of the present study, shaping every stage of its design, implementation, and dissemination.

To ensure adherence to the highest ethical standards, the researcher diligently completed and submitted an ethics application form to Hibernia College's esteemed Ethics Committee. This step was essential in obtaining formal approval for the research project and ensuring its alignment with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). By seeking approval from the Ethics Committee, the researcher demonstrated a commitment to upholding ethical integrity and safeguarding the welfare of participants throughout the research process.

Before engaging potential participants, explicit written consent and endorsement from the school Principal were obtained, underscoring the voluntary nature of participation in the study. Participants were provided with comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, methodologies, and potential risks, ensuring they could make informed decisions about their involvement. Emphasis was placed on strict confidentiality measures, assuring participants that their personal information would be handled with the utmost care and confidentiality. Additionally, participants were assured of their autonomy to withdraw from the study without facing any adverse consequences. To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, stringent measures will be taken in data handling. Personal identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms ensured participant anonymity. Data was securely stored and accessed only by authorised personnel for the study's designated purposes. These protocols aimed to maintain participant confidentiality and privacy, aligning with ethical research principles that underpin responsible research conduct.

3.9 Conclusion

This study investigated team-teaching's impact on inclusive practices in secondary education through qualitative research. Four participants, including students and experienced teachers, were selected via convenience sampling. Semi-structured interviews in two educational settings yielded rich data. However, limitations such as small sample size and reliance on self-reported data hindered generalisation. Future research should prioritise larger samples and diverse data collection methods for validity. The thematic analysis uncovered central themes, and integrating quantitative elements provided a comprehensive understanding. Adherence to ethical standards ensured participant confidentiality. Findings stressed contextual factors in team-teaching and advocated for tailored professional development. The ensuing chapter will unveil the outcomes of data collection and the subsequent analysis, shedding light on the rich insights gleaned from the research process.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from qualitative and quantitative analysis of interviews conducted with educators, focusing on the themes surrounding team-teaching and its impact on creating an inclusive educational environment. By exploring teacher's perspectives and experiences, this chapter elucidates the complexities, challenges, and opportunities inherent in implementing team-teaching as a collaborative instructional approach to promote inclusivity within diverse classroom settings. Data was collected via 4 semi-structured interviews. The interview question transcripts can be found in Appendix A of this study. See Appendix D for more details on interviewees. All participants keenly discerned a promising opportunity for student advancement.

4.2 Collaborative Instructional Approach

Question: In your experience, how do you define team-teaching?

Interviewees highlighted team-teaching as a collaborative endeavour to enhance and develop the quality of instruction by providing support to students. One interviewee emphasised the collaborative nature of team-teaching, stating, "Team-teaching is when two educators come together to ensure that the level of teaching is to a higher standard" A similar view from Interviewee two, who described team-teaching as "Where two teachers work in conjunction to get the best out of all students within the classroom". These sentiments underscore the shared commitment of educators to leverage their collective expertise and resources in facilitating student learning.

Building on these insights within the context of collaborative instructional approaches, the exploration of team-teaching unveils a concerted effort among educators to elevate the educational experience for students. Interview responses elucidate the fundamental essence of team-teaching as a joint enterprise aimed at refining the calibre of instruction while providing comprehensive support to learners. Interviewees articulate a unified vision of team-teaching, wherein the fusion of pedagogical strengths and resources from multiple educators fosters an enriched learning environment. Through their perspectives, the narrative addresses the collective dedication of educators to synergise their expertise, ultimately steering towards the cultivation of optimal learning outcomes for all students.

4.3 Inclusivity as a Core Principle

Question: What does an inclusive environment mean to you in the context of education?

Inclusivity emerged as a fundamental principle underlying the implementation of team-teaching. Educators accentuated the significance of creating an environment where all students feel valued, respected, and supported. Interviewee one articulated this sentiment: "An inclusive environment would ensure that you are utilising different methodologies and creating resources that students with no matter what kind of learning style will be able to utilise them." This statement highlights the commitment of educators to cater to diverse student needs and ensure equitable learning opportunities for students. Interviewee 2 had a similar opinion, stating, "Where both students and teachers feel valued, heard, and respected in the classroom regardless of their race or identity" In striving for inclusivity in education, it is indispensable to embrace diversity, ensure accessibility, and employ flexible teaching methods. By fostering respect, empathy, and collaboration, educators can create a classroom environment where every student feels valued, respected, and supported.

Another respondent's view was that "All students incorporated into the class as much as possible and catered for with appropriate differentiation." This perspective underscores the significance of "Appropriate differentiation," emphasising the tailored approach to instruction that addresses the diverse needs of students. Differentiation is paramount in allowing students access to the curriculum and engage with the material at a high or low-order level, promoting equity and maximising each student's potential for success.

The research question "How do teachers perceive the impact of co-teaching on fostering inclusivity in post-primary classrooms?" is addressed here, as educators overwhelmingly view team-teaching as a means to create a more inclusive environment by employing diverse methodologies and differentiation to meet the needs of all students. Their perspectives underscore the commitment to ensuring that every student feels valued and supported through the collaborative efforts of co-teaching.

4.4 Contextual Considerations

Question: Will you share any specific instances or examples where you observed a positive impact on inclusivity because of team-teaching?

The efficacy of team-teaching in promoting inclusivity was found to be contingent upon the specific needs and dynamics of the classroom. Participants from ETB schools voiced the utility of team-teaching primarily for enhancing classroom management and instructional efficiency. This approach allows educators to divide responsibilities effectively, ensuring smoother transitions between activities and providing more personalised attention to students. Conversely, in DEIS schools, team-teaching was predominantly viewed as essential for meeting the diverse academic and socio-emotional needs of students. Educators in DEIS schools highlighted its role in providing targeted support and interventions, catering to students facing socio-economic challenges or learning difficulties. This correlation underscores the importance of aligning team-teaching strategies with specific school demographics and educational goals.

Educators recognised the magnitude of tailoring team-teaching approaches to address the unique characteristics of each classroom environment. As Interviewee 1 noted, 'Team-teaching may not necessarily enhance engagement or inclusivity in every classroom setting. However, it can significantly strengthen inclusivity in contexts where it is deemed essential. One participant provided an illustrative example of employing both a female and male teacher to co-teach Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), ensuring a fully inclusive lesson. This strategy ensured that students received a more balanced and inclusive perspective on sensitive topics. Another participant highlighted a case in a senior cycle accounting class where the presence of a second teacher facilitated support for students opting for the ordinary level paper, thereby enhancing inclusivity. The examples illustrate the nuanced approach required to promote inclusivity through collaborative instructional methods, aligning with the overarching theme of understanding the contextual considerations inherent in team-teaching. Based on the interview information we can ascertain that team-teaching model: one teach one assist is the predominately used and most effective mode of implementation of team-teaching.

4.5 Challenges and Opportunities

Question: What challenges, if any, have you encountered in implementing team-teaching?

Team-teaching has emerged as a prominent instructional strategy to leverage multiple educator's collective expertise to enhance student learning outcomes. However, this

approach presents a unique constellation of challenges and opportunities, as articulated by educators actively engaged in the field of team-teaching. Figure 1 elucidates the foremost challenges of team-teaching as identified by educational professionals.

One of the most significant challenges highlighted by the interviewees is the issue of time constraints. Participants voiced concerns about the difficulty of finding mutually available time slots for collaborative planning and preparation. Since team-teaching planning does not feature in their contract hours, scheduling coordination becomes a formidable hurdle. This lack of dedicated time for collaborative efforts was a major impediment to effective team-teaching. For example, Interviewee 2 noted, "We often find ourselves rushing through planning sessions because our schedules rarely align, which compromises the quality of our collaboration."

A recurring challenge that became prevalent when conducting the interviews was the interviewee's implementation as secondary teachers in subjects in which they lacked strong content knowledge. This issue is particularly acute in teaching mathematics, where the high standards required of the teacher for the Leaving Certificate have changed significantly in recent years due to curriculum updates. One interviewee mentioned the struggle to achieve learning outcomes: "Teaching maths at this level without a strong background makes it hard to meet the new curriculum standards." This sentiment underscores the need for professional development to bridge gaps in subject-specific knowledge within collaborative teaching systems. Additionally, this challenge highlights a broader systemic issue: the mismatch between teacher qualifications and subject-specific demands. It raises a pertinent question: should a teacher engage in team-teaching a subject without the requisite qualifications? The findings underscore the need for systemic changes in professional development to ensure teachers are well-prepared for team-teaching across various subjects.

Trust issues also emerged as a significant barrier to effective team-teaching. Two student teachers expressed their feelings of being marginalised and untrusted to lead lessons. This lack of trust can create an environment where less experienced teachers feel undervalued and ineffective. One student teacher described feeling "obsolete in the classroom," highlighting the detrimental impact of not being trusted to contribute fully to the teaching process. Interviewee 4 specifically noted the complexities of navigating role dynamics between teachers, which can lead to feelings of marginalisation, especially when one teacher is a

student teacher. Compounding these trust issues is the resistance to change among educators, particularly senior teachers who may be reluctant to adapt to new teaching methods. This resistance can hamper the smooth implementation of team-teaching initiatives. One teacher noted the "resistance sometimes encountered by senior teachers," which can impede collaborative efforts. Additionally, issues such as "double jobbing" and the perception that team-teaching is an additional burden further contribute to this resistance. The reluctance of senior teachers to fully embrace the team-teaching process exacerbates the feelings of obsolescence among student teachers, thereby undermining the potential effectiveness of team-teaching as a collaborative educational approach.

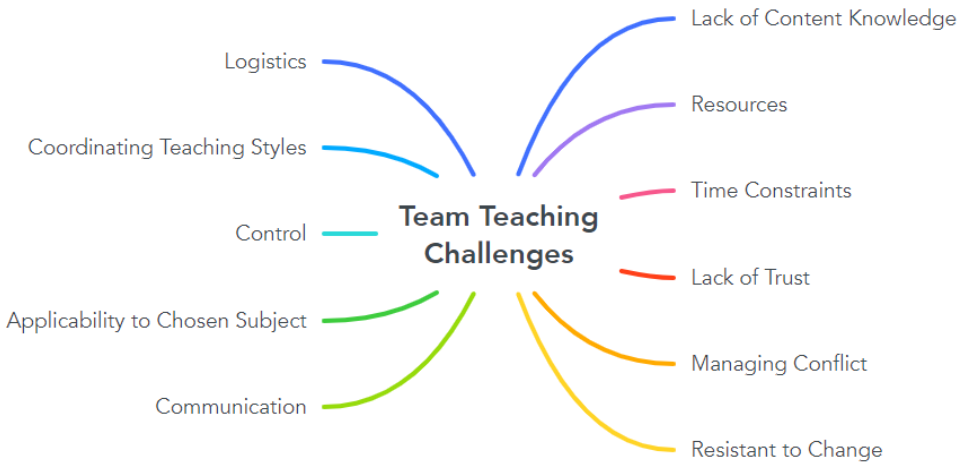

Figure 1:Team-teaching Challenges

Figure 2 illustrates the opportunities identified by teachers for team-teaching.

On the flip side, have you identified any opportunities or strategies within team-teaching that contribute to a more inclusive educational setting?

All educators that were interviewed recognised the immense potential of team-teaching to enhance and develop student engagement, empowerment and overall student success. When asked on a scale of 0 to 5, how much correlation they perceive between team-teaching and creating an inclusive environment, 3 out 4 educators selected 4 on a scale which was deemed high correlation. The research question regarding the correlation between team-teaching and inclusive practice is directly addressed here, where educators overwhelmingly

indicated a high correlation between the two, reflecting their strong belief in the positive impact of team-teaching on fostering an inclusive educational environment.

One notable example discussed is the innovative practice of covertly splitting the class into groups based on learning abilities, providing tailored support without stigmatisation. This approach mirrors the inclusive principles of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support model while maintaining the integrity of the classroom community. To illustrate, Interviewee 3 stated, "By grouping students discreetly, we ensure that each student receives the help they need without feeling singled out, significantly boosting their confidence and participation.

Additionally, all participants suggested the role of team-teaching in improving classroom management among large groups of students. For example, in a DEIS school, LCA (Leaving Certificate Applied) students reacted positively to being provided with two teachers in one lesson, as it allowed them to ask more questions and receive individualised attention. This dual-teacher setup enhances student's learning experiences by catering to their immediate needs and queries, thereby promoting a more interactive and supportive learning environment.

Another significant advantage of team-teaching is the opportunity it provides for teachers to observe students in diverse classroom settings, gaining insights into their motivations and attitudes towards specific subjects. For instance, one teacher described how he would team-teach students in a math class and also teach them in a business class, offering a broader perspective on their learning behaviours and preferences.

Furthermore, team- teaching meets the needs of different learning styles more effectively. By having multiple educators in the classroom, students benefit from varied instructional methods and perspectives, which can help address diverse learning preferences and enhance overall comprehension. This multifaceted approach ensures that visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners all receive the support students need.

Figure 2: Opportunities within Team-teaching

4.6 Importance of training and continuous professional development

Question: What kind of professional development or training have you undergone to enhance your team-teaching and inclusivity skills?

Interviewees 1 and 4, student teachers, highlighted their lack of formal training in team-teaching. Instead, they embraced a 'Learn-by-doing' approach, emphasising the hands-on nature of their experience. Educators expressed how immersing themselves in the collaborative process, acquiring skills and insights through active participation in the classroom. Their testimony emphasises the transformative power of experiential learning, wherein educators glean insights and hone skills through active engagement in collaborative practices within the contemporary classroom. Nonetheless, the remaining two participants have undergone continuous professional development in areas such as "inclusive education, supporting students with SEN, classroom management and team-teaching approaches".

Comprehensive training and collaborative planning were deemed essential for successfully implementing team-teaching. Educators emphasised the need for support and resources to develop effective collaboration and communication strategies, align teaching approaches, and address diverse student needs. Interviewee 1 advocated for comprehensive training, stating, "Before implementing team-teaching, I think it is very important that all teachers are upskilled to understand the need for team-teaching." This extract highlights the importance of continuous professional development to equip educators with the tools and strategies for effective team-teaching.

4.7 Measurement of Success

Question: How do you measure the success or effectiveness of team-teaching in creating an inclusive environment?

The entirety of the respondent cohort outlined that measuring the success or effectiveness of team-teaching in fostering inclusivity involves a blend of observation and reflective practice. Educators rely heavily on their ability to observe student behaviour, interactions, and engagement levels within the classroom. Through keen observation, teachers gauge the impact of team-teaching on fostering inclusivity.

Interviewee 3 underscored "The importance of attentiveness to subtle cues indicating heightened student confidence when implementing team-teaching strategies". Notably, as discussed by another educator, these cues encompass a spectrum of behaviours. These behaviours include students voluntarily offering answers, actively engaging in discussions, or displaying a readiness to assume leadership roles during group activities. Such indicators serve as tangible gauges of the inclusive environment they strive to cultivate. Moreover, teachers outlined how to assess student engagement levels as a key metric of inclusivity: "By observing student's focus, participation, and enthusiasm for learning, I can gauge the effectiveness of team-teaching in fostering an environment where every student feels valued and supported in their learning journey".

Reflective practice furthermore plays a pivotal role in evaluating the success of team-teaching in creating an inclusive environment. Through regular reflection sessions, educators critically analyse their teaching practices, collaborative dynamics with co-teachers, and the impact on student learning outcomes. This introspective process allows educators to identify areas of strength, areas for improvement, and potential adjustments needed to enhance inclusivity within the contemporary classroom.

4.8 Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted nature of team-teaching and its role in promoting inclusivity within the educational environment. The study's findings indicate the need for policy frameworks that recognise and incentivise collaborative teaching models. These steps involve allocating resources for professional development tailored to team-teaching, ensuring equitable access to training opportunities for educators, and integrating

team-teaching principles into teacher certification and accreditation processes. Three prominent themes emerged through a comprehensive analysis of data originating from a small-scale case study. Firstly, educators overwhelmingly perceived team-teaching as a catalyst for enhancing inclusion, underscoring its positive impact on fostering a more supportive and equitable learning environment. Secondly, the data underscored the manifold values of team-teaching, as perceived by teachers, extending beyond students to encompass enriching outcomes for educators. Lastly, the inquiry underlined several drawbacks inherent in team-teaching, with time constraints identified as a primary impediment, compounded by a perceived lack of adequate training in this domain. These findings, encapsulating both the merits and challenges associated with team-teaching, serve as a foundation for further exploration and discussion in Chapter 5. In this chapter, they will be contrasted and compared with the existing research literature to offer a nuanced understanding of its implications and potential avenues for refinement.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher conducts a rigorous critical analysis of the empirical insights presented in Chapter 4, exploring the significant implications of team-teaching on fostering inclusivity within educational settings. Based on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, the researcher highlights several themes related to the central research question: What are the perceptions and practices of post-primary teachers regarding the implementation and effectiveness of team-teaching to foster inclusivity in contemporary classrooms? By juxtaposing these empirical findings with existing scholarly literature, the author aims to elucidate a nuanced understanding of the multilayered dimensions of team-teaching, including its dynamics, benefits, and challenges. Additionally, the chapter discusses the connections between this study and previous research in the field, offering recommendations based on the findings and their potential impact on future practices in the implementation of team-teaching within post-primary education. This analysis underscores the significance of collaborative teaching strategies in promoting inclusive education, providing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers.

5.2 Collaborative Instructional Approach

The findings highlight that team-teaching is widely perceived as a collaborative endeavour to enhance instruction quality and support students. This perception aligns with existing literature from Friend et al. (2010) and Murawski & Dieker (2008), which underscores the potential of team-teaching to leverage the diverse skills and knowledge of multiple educators, thereby enriching the learning experience for students. The perspectives of interviewees in this study resonate with the concept of co-teaching defined by Bauwens and Hourcade (1995), where co-teachers share responsibilities for planning, instructing, and assessing a group of students. The study participants emphasised the joint effort to refine instructional quality and provide comprehensive support. interviewee 1 stated, "Team-teaching is when two educators come together to ensure that the level of teaching is to a higher standard." Interviewee 4 described co-teaching as "Where two teachers work in conjunction to get the best out of all students within the classroom." These insights echo the collaborative nature highlighted by Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007), who suggested that co-teaching enhances instructional effectiveness and student outcomes. While the positive aspects of collaborative

instructional approaches are well-documented, it is essential to address potential pitfalls. Research by Keefe and Moore (2004) indicates that without clear role definitions and mutual respect, team-teaching can lead to power struggles and ineffective instruction. The findings from our study suggest that effective team-teaching requires shared vision and goals among co-teachers, aligning with the work of Friend and Cook (2013), who advocate for clear and consistent communication to ensure that all team members are on the same page regarding instructional objectives and student expectations. Additionally, Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2013) discuss how establishing a collaborative culture within the school can support the sustainability of team-teaching practices.

5.3 Inclusivity as a Core Principle

Inclusivity emerged as a central theme, with educators emphasising the importance of "Creating an environment where all students feel valued, respected, and supported." This finding aligns with UNESCO's (2005) definition of inclusive education, which advocates for adapting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning needs. The significance of differentiation, as highlighted by the interviewees, aligns with Tomlinson's (2001) framework for differentiated instruction, which aims to tailor teaching to meet individual student needs. The commitment to inclusivity also resonates with Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) work, which underlines the role of inclusive pedagogy in ensuring all students can participate in the learning process. While the commitment to inclusivity is commendable, it is essential to consider the practical challenges of implementing such an approach. Research by Forlin and Lian (2008) indicates that achieving dedicated inclusivity requires significant shifts in teacher attitudes, adequate resources, and continuous professional development. The findings of this study highlight a gap between the ideal of inclusivity and the practical realities faced by educators, necessitating systemic support and resources. Moreover, the study suggests that inclusivity in team-teaching is not merely about accommodating diverse learning needs but also about fostering a sense of belonging among all students. Creating such a classroom environment involves celebrating diversity and promoting equity. As outlined by Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou (2010), inclusive education should aim to dismantle barriers to learning and participation, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

5.4 Contextual Considerations

The findings from the study revealed that the "Impact of team-teaching on inclusivity varies depending on the specific needs and dynamics of the classroom." This finding is supported by Friend and Cook's (2007) assertion that co-teaching must be adapted to fit the unique context of each educational setting. The literature review underscores the importance of contextual adaptation in team-teaching, a concept echoed by Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2013), who highlight the need for flexible co-teaching models that can be tailored to different classroom environments. The examples provided by the interviewees illustrate the practical application of this principle, demonstrating how team-teaching can be customised to meet diverse student needs. However, the variability in the effectiveness of team-teaching across different contexts underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of its implementation. Research by Hang and Rabren (2009) suggests that successful co-teaching requires careful consideration of factors such as teacher compatibility, classroom composition, and administrative support. The findings of this study indicate that a one-size-fits-all approach to team-teaching is insufficient, highlighting the need for flexible and context-sensitive strategies.

Furthermore, the study stresses that contextual considerations also involve understanding the cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of students. Culturally responsive teaching, as discussed by Gay (2010), is critical in team-teaching environments to ensure that instructional practices are relevant and respectful of students' diverse cultural contexts. This approach not only enhances inclusivity but also promotes better student engagement and learning outcomes.

5.5 Challenges and Opportunities

This section examines the challenges and opportunities identified through both the interview findings and the broader literature review on team-teaching. Significant barriers such as time constraints, trust issues, and resistance to change were noted. However, there were also recognised opportunities for enhancing student engagement and providing personalised support. The challenges identified in this study are consistent with the findings of Zigmond and Magiera (2001), who reported that time constraints and interpersonal dynamics often hinder the effectiveness of co-teaching. Conversely, the opportunities for improved student outcomes align with Murawski and Swanson's (2001) meta-analysis, which found that co-teaching can positively impact student achievement when implemented effectively.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Scheduling coordination, professional development, and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration are essential components. Research by Rice and Zigmond (2000) suggests that administrative support and policy frameworks play a fundamental role in facilitating successful co-teaching. The findings of this study underscore the necessity for systemic changes to support the effective implementation of team-teaching.

Furthermore, the study underlines the value of building a supportive professional community among educators. Creating opportunities for regular team meetings, joint planning sessions, and collaborative professional development can help address time constraints and foster trust among co-teachers. This approach supports the work of Fullan (2007), who emphasises the role of professional learning communities in driving educational improvement and innovation.

5.6 Importance of Training and Continuous Professional Development

The limited training in team-teaching emerged as a significant concern among student teachers. This finding underscores the importance of professional development in equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective collaboration. The obligation for professional development is well-documented in the literature. Pugach and Blanton (2009) emphasise that effective co-teaching requires specialised training in collaborative practices, inclusive education, and subject-specific pedagogy. The findings of this study align with this perspective, highlighting the need for comprehensive training programs. While experiential learning can be valuable, it is insufficient on its own. Research by Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2004) indicates that structured professional development programs are essential to ensure teachers are well-prepared for the complexities of team-teaching. The insights from this study suggest that a combination of formal training and experiential learning is necessary to equip educators with the skills required for successful team-teaching. Professional development should encompass strategies for collaborative planning, communication, classroom management, and inclusivity. Based on the findings, educational institutions should establish comprehensive professional development programs. Programs should include collaborative workshops where educators can practice team-teaching strategies in a supportive environment, gaining feedback from peers and mentors. Regular training sessions focused on updates in educational strategies, curriculum changes, and inclusive teaching practices are also crucial. Mentorship programs, pairing experienced team-teachers with

novice educators to provide guidance, share best practices, and build confidence in collaborative settings, should be integrated. Additionally, specialised training on differentiating instruction and creating inclusive classrooms to meet diverse student needs should be provided. Moreover, establishing a network of team-teaching practitioners who can share resources, strategies, and experiences is recommended. This network can serve as a valuable support system, promoting continuous professional growth and fostering a collaborative teaching culture. Engaging in action research and reflective practice can further enhance the effectiveness of professional development programs by allowing educators to identify challenges, test solutions, and share insights.

5.7 Measurement of Success

The study addresses the significance of employing "Observation and reflective practice" as principal methodologies for evaluating the efficacy of team-teaching in cultivating an inclusive environment. These methods are consistent with existing literature that underscores the value of qualitative measures in evaluating educational outcomes (York-Barr et al., 2007). Reflective practice, as highlighted by Schön (1983), plays a crucial role in professional development by enabling educators to evaluate and enhance their teaching practices continuously. Observational techniques, as discussed by Danielson (2007), offer valuable insights into student engagement and inclusivity, helping teachers identify areas for improvement. While qualitative measures are essential, incorporating quantitative data is also vital for a comprehensive assessment. This may include analysing student performance metrics, attendance records, and feedback surveys from students and parents. Integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a holistic perspective on the impact of team-teaching on inclusivity.

To effectively measure success, it is recommended that schools implement the following strategies:

Performance Data: Analysis of student performance data to identify trends and measure the impact of team-teaching on academic outcomes.

Peer Observations: Structured peer observation sessions to provide objective insights and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Reflective Journals: Encouraging educators to maintain reflective journals to document their experiences, challenges, and successes in team-teaching.

Furthermore, schools should consider employing mixed-methods research to evaluate the impact of team-teaching comprehensively. This approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, offers a richer understanding of the effectiveness of team-teaching practices. Regular review and analysis of such data enable schools to make informed decisions regarding instructional strategies, professional development needs, and resource allocation.

5.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, while team-teaching presents both challenges and opportunities, the findings of this study underscore its potential to foster an inclusive and supportive educational environment. The study highlights the multifaceted nature of team-teaching, revealing its pivotal role in promoting inclusivity through three prominent themes: fostering a supportive and equitable learning environment, benefiting both students and educators, and navigating the challenges posed by time constraints and inadequate training. Time constraints emerged as a significant barrier, emphasising the necessity for schools to allocate dedicated planning periods for educators involved in team-teaching. Participants consistently underscored the critical need for such time, which bridges the gap between ideal team-teaching environments and the practical realities of classroom teaching. These challenges underscore the imperative for systemic support and professional development to optimise the benefits of team-teaching. Educators emphasised the importance of collaboration and support systems, which are crucial for effective implementation.

To fully harness the potential of team-teaching, educational institutions should consider the following integrated strategies:

Provide Comprehensive Training: Ensure all educators have access to professional development opportunities that equip them with the skills needed for effective team-teaching. Consider integrating sections on team-teaching into JCT (Junior Cycle Training) days to enhance collaborative instructional practices among educators.

Align Policies with Practice: Develop policies that support collaborative teaching models, including dedicated planning time and incentives for team-teaching.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of team-teaching on student outcomes, including academic performance and socio-emotional development. Additionally, studies should investigate the effectiveness of different professional development models in preparing educators for team-teaching. By addressing identified challenges, such as time constraints, and leveraging opportunities to foster collaboration among educators, schools can create a more equitable learning experience for all students. Team-teaching will have its place in the repertoire of responses that support effective learning, given its potential to enhance instructional quality and student outcomes. However, realising this potential requires intentional support and adaptation to thrive.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis embarked on an exploration of the transformative impact of team-teaching on fostering inclusivity within educational environments, employing both qualitative and quantitative analyses of educator interviews. The primary findings illuminate team-teaching as a collaborative instructional approach that profoundly enhances educational quality and inclusivity. Educators eloquently highlighted the dual benefits: improved instructional efficacy through collaborative efforts and the nurturing of inclusivity by catering to diverse student needs. Team-teaching emerged as a strategic alliance where educators synergise their expertise to empower students, thus enriching the educational experience and guiding policy and practice with insightful investigation.

A cornerstone of this research was the acknowledgement of inclusivity's central significance. Educators emphasised the imperative to cultivate environments where every student feels valued and supported, particularly resonant in diverse settings such as DEIS schools, where tailored support is paramount. In ETB schools, team-teaching notably facilitated effective classroom management, while in DEIS schools, it adeptly addressed the challenges posed by varying learning needs.

Despite these insightful findings, several limitations warrant acknowledgement. The study's scope was constrained by a modest sample size of four educators, potentially limiting broader applicability. Contextual specificity further poses challenges to generalisation, as the research was delimited to specific educational settings. Methodologically, reliance on self-reported interview data may introduce bias, and the absence of longitudinal data precluded assessment of team-teaching's enduring impact on inclusivity.

Nevertheless, this study successfully achieves its primary objective of delving into team-teaching's impact on inclusivity. The nuanced qualitative insights gleaned from educators offer a profound understanding of the complexities of implementing team-teaching in contemporary classrooms. Key challenges such as time constraints and trust deficits emerged, urging proactive measures to optimise team-teaching's effectiveness.

Building on the foundational insights of this study, several pragmatic and policy-oriented recommendations emerge to enhance the implementation of team-teaching and promote inclusivity within educational environments. Firstly, a robust commitment to continuous

professional development (CPD) is required. Friend et al. (2010) advocate for CPD programs that prioritise collaborative planning and deepen educator's subject-specific pedagogical knowledge. By investing in ongoing training, educational institutions can empower teachers to effectively collaborate and tailor their instructional strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of students. This approach not only enhances teaching efficacy but also fosters a culture of collaboration among educators, essential for sustaining inclusive practices.

Moreover, Scruggs et al. (2007) outline the need for strategic scheduling revisions to allocate dedicated planning time for team-teaching preparation. Addressing time constraints through structured planning periods allows educators to synchronise their efforts, develop cohesive lesson plans, and effectively address logistical challenges that may arise in collaborative teaching environments. This proactive scheduling approach is crucial for optimising instructional delivery and ensuring that team-teaching initiatives translate into tangible benefits for students. In addition to CPD and scheduling adjustments, fostering supportive environments within schools is pivotal. Mentorship programs and peer networks, as highlighted by Murawski & Swanson (2001), play a crucial role in cultivating confidence and efficacy among team-teachers. By pairing experienced educators with student teachers and establishing collaborative platforms for sharing best practices, schools can create nurturing environments where educators feel supported in implementing innovative teaching strategies. This supportive environment not only bolsters professional growth but also enhances overall job satisfaction and retention rates among teachers. Collectively, these recommendations underscore the value of systemic support and strategic investment in educator development to realise the full potential of team-teaching in fostering inclusivity. By aligning policy initiatives with practical measures that empower educators and nurture collaborative practices, educational institutions can cultivate inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students.

Florian (2012) underscores the transformative potential of embedding team-teaching practices within the standard educational curriculum. This recommendation necessitates a considered approach by educational policymakers to enact policies that mandate and support collaborative teaching models across all educational levels. Jurisdictions can draw inspiration from successful international models, such as those in Finland and parts of the United States, where collaborative teaching has become integral to educational reforms. Policymakers

should consider allocating financial resources to support schools in adopting team-teaching models, ensuring adequate training and professional development for educators. Clear guidelines and frameworks should be developed to articulate the benefits of team-teaching for enhancing inclusivity and educational quality. By institutionalising these practices, educational systems can foster a culture of collaboration and innovation that empowers educators to meet the diverse needs of students effectively.

In conclusion, this study casts a luminous spotlight on team-teaching's formidable potential in nurturing inclusivity within mainstream settings. While acknowledging the complex challenges, the findings underscore the pivotal role of continuous professional development, judicious time allocation, and supportive policies in fostering effective implementation. By conscientiously addressing these key areas, educators coupled with policymakers can forge cohesive pathways towards fostering inclusive and nurturing learning environments for all students. This small-scale study provides a foundation for further exploration and underscores the need for ongoing research and practical innovation in the context of inclusive education.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. **Introduction and Background:**

Will you briefly introduce yourself and your role in the field of education?

How long have you been involved in team-teaching, and what motivated you to adopt this approach?

2. **Understanding Team-teaching:**

In your experience, how do you define team-teaching?

Will you describe a specific example or scenario where you have implemented team-teaching?

3. **Inclusive Environment:**

What does an inclusive environment mean to you in the context of education?

How do you currently foster inclusivity in your classroom or teaching environment?

4. **Correlation between Team-teaching and Inclusivity:**

On a scale of 0 to 5, how much correlation do you perceive between team-teaching and creating an inclusive environment?

0: No correlation

1: Very low correlation

2: Low correlation

3: Moderate correlation

4: High correlation

5: Very high correlation

Will you share any specific instances or examples where you observed a positive impact on inclusivity because of team-teaching?

5. **Challenges and Opportunities:**

What challenges, if any, have you encountered in implementing team-teaching, particularly in relation to promoting inclusivity?

On the flip side, have you identified any opportunities or strategies within team-teaching that contribute to a more inclusive educational setting?

6. **Collaboration and Communication:**

How do you attempt effective collaboration and communication among team members in a team-teaching set-up?

On a scale of 1 to 5, how actively do you involve students and parents in the collaborative process to enhance inclusivity?

1: Rarely

2: Occasionally

3: Sometimes

4: Often

5: Always

7. **Measuring Success:**

How do you measure the success or effectiveness of team-teaching in creating an inclusive environment?

Are there specific indicators or outcomes that you look for to assess the impact of team-teaching on inclusivity?

8. **Professional Development and Training:**

What kind of professional development or training have you undergone to enhance your team-teaching and inclusivity skills?

On a scale of 0 to 5, how would you rate the professional development or training you've undergone to enhance your team-teaching and inclusivity skills?

0: Not effective

1: Slightly effective

2: Moderately effective

3: Effective

4: Very effective

5: Completely effective

9. **Recommendations and Insights:**

Based on your experience, what recommendations would you offer to educators who are considering adopting team-teaching to promote inclusivity?

Are there any additional insights or aspects of this correlation that you think are important for researchers and educators to be aware of?

10. Closing thoughts:

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences with team-teaching and its impact on creating an inclusive educational environment?

Appendix B: Principal's Letter

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] 3rd of December 2023

Dear Principal,

As part of my Professional Masters in Post-Primary Education with Hibernia College, I am investigating the correlation between an inclusive environment and team-teaching.

The title of the research project is:

“Exploring the relationship between co-teaching practices and inclusive education in the post-primary classroom”

Classroom teachers are ley stakeholders in identifying if co-teaching has a knock-on-effect to enhance inclusivity. This letter aims to provide you with an introduction to the research project and to seek consent from you for the project to move forward to inform my future professional practice as a teacher.

With your permission, I would like to interview 5 teachers. The staff will be asked to partake in semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the aims of the project. Please find enclosed for your perusal, a copy of the information and consent forms. Any data gathering will strictly be underpinned by the school’s ethical code of conduct. No students will be interviewed.

Information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The school’s name will not appear on any research findings. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my research project and may be disseminated through professional publications.

I would appreciate your cooperation in providing access to the staff at the school over the coming weeks.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

Researcher

Appendix C: Research Information Sheet

Research Information Sheet

Researcher: [redacted]

Organisation: Hibernia College Dublin

Title of Study: Exploring the relationship between co-teaching practices and inclusive education in the post-primary classroom

Outline of research study:

This research seeks to deepen our understanding of the perceived impact of co-teaching practices on the creation of inclusive environments in post-primary classrooms. Grounded in the backdrop of inclusive education, where diversity is not just acknowledged but celebrated, the study aims to explore the perspectives of educators with co-teaching experience. As we navigate the complexities of fostering inclusivity, the research question guiding this investigation is, "How do teachers perceive the impact of co-teaching on fostering inclusivity in post-primary classrooms?" Drawing on a comprehensive literature review encompassing inclusive education principles, co-teaching models, and relevant theoretical frameworks (Friend & Cook, 2016), this study will employ a descriptive approach. Post-primary educators engaged in co-teaching will participate in semi-structured interviews and surveys, providing valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions. Through a qualitative analysis of the collected data, the research aims to uncover patterns and themes that illuminate the dynamic interplay between co-teaching practices and the cultivation of inclusive learning environments. As we embark on this research journey, it is crucial to recognise the voices of educators as integral contributors to the ongoing narrative of inclusive education.

Objective of the project:

The objectives of this research are to:

1. to examine the current landscape of inclusive education

2. to investigate co-teaching models and practices

3. to assess the perceived effectiveness of co-teaching

4. to identify challenges and barriers in co-teaching implementation

What would I need to do?

Your willingness to participate in this research endeavour is greatly appreciated. Ethical approval for this project has been granted by Hibernia College Dublin. Should you choose to engage in a brief semi-structured interview with the researcher, please be assured that any information shared about your identity or that of the school will remain both anonymous and confidential. Quotes from the interview may be included in the research publication, yet your name and the school's name will not be disclosed. The interview will be transcribed, and upon request, you will be provided with a copy of the transcript. The findings from this study will contribute to a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin and

may also be utilised in conference proceedings or academic articles. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the liberty to withdraw from the study at any point.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of the research is to complete small-scale study which forms part of the final year of the Professional Master of Education (Post-Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin. This will inform my personal teaching practice and support me as I move into a fulltime role as an educator.

Appendix D: Interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Qualification/Education Level	Subject/s	Year's experience	Team-teaching subjects
1 (student teacher)	Female	Professional Master of Post Primary Education with Hibernia College	Business & Accounting	2	Maths, Business & Accounting
2	Female	BEd (Hons) Sports Studies and Physical Education. Received AP post in 2023	Physical Education & Irish	10	Irish
3	Male	Professional Master of Education with the University of Limerick	Business & Accounting	6	RSE in SPHE & Maths
4 (Student teacher)	Male	Professional Master of Post Primary Education with Hibernia College	Business, Accounting & Digital Media Literacy	2	English & Accounting

Appendix E: Consent Form

Researcher's name: [redacted]

Organisation: Hibernia College Dublin

Title of study: Exploring the relationship between co-teaching practices and inclusive education in the post-primary classroom

Consent (to be completed by the participant)

Have you been fully informed/ read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you? Yes/No

Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No

Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No

Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential? Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report. Yes/No

Participant's name (printed)

(Signature) Date

Researcher's signature Date

[redacted]