

Exploring the Status of Co-training as a professional development tool (Omani English Teacher-trainers' Perspectives)

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Abstract

This study investigates the status of co-training as a tool for the PD of English teacher-trainers (TTs) in Oman. Since these TTs adopt this tool even though they have received no training on it, it is significant to explore their knowledge and practice to explore if there are any discrepancies in their performance. An open-ended questionnaire is used to collect data. Fourteen (14) English TTs from 9 governorates responded to the questionnaire. Their responses were analysed, categorised and presented. The findings revealed both, performance discrepancies and the causes of these discrepancies. The study showed some weakness in the practice and orientation of co-training as a tool for PD among the participants.

The findings revealed that there is a fluctuation in the value that TTs place on co-training and its implementation. These also highlighted different practices of co-training reflecting a lack of understanding of how to implement it. Moreover, some inappropriate practices were identified which put the adoption of this collaborative tool at risk.

The findings showed that these discrepancies existed because of a lack of knowledge, inappropriate practices and negative perceptions towards co-training. Participants' suggestions for better future practices of co-training highlighted the strong need to improve the situation by clarifying the ambiguity and setting out conditions to follow. This study recommended constructing a co-training model and involving TTs in a training programme to raise their knowledge of co-training and foster their perception of it as a tool for their PD.

Keywords: Teacher-trainer, Professional development, Collaborative Professional development, Co-training, Team-teaching

1. Introduction

Acknowledging the importance of adopting professional development (PD) tools to survive and grow professionally in demanding professions such as teacher training, in-service Omani English teacher-trainers (hereafter TTs) seek the opportunities to reap the maximum benefits from being involved in different PD activities. There are various strategies and techniques to sustain TTs' PD. Beside tools that focus on enhancing intellectual comprehension and experiential awareness, there are chances for collaborative development highlighted in the literature on PD (for example, see Edge, 2005). Such collaborative activities give opportunities for TTs to review thoughts and practices with peers and develop knowledge, skills and attitudes (hereafter KSA) of training. Co-training, the focus of this paper, is one of these tools for PD that Omani English TTs have been using in training. However, they have received no training on it. Although adopting it means that they recognise the value of this cooperative tool, they may not be reaping the best of its implementation.

Co-training, where two or more TTs work together to plan, deliver and evaluate training sessions for the purpose of supporting each other to improve professionally, is seen as an effective strategy by many (for example, see Baguley, 2014; Pohl, Szesztay & Wright, 2016).

Co-training is similar to team teaching and is a PD tool that can help individual practitioners learn from their practice as well as from colleagues if implemented wisely. Although team-teaching is widely investigated in educational literature, only few reported practices are there on co-trainers' method of co-training.

Recognising the significance of co-training in enhancing TTs' knowledge and skills and acknowledging the fact that these Omani English TTs have received no training on this topic, this paper aims to investigate Omani English TTs' knowledge and practice of co-training in order to explore if there are any performance gaps in adopting co-training as a PD tool and to explore the causes of performance gaps. The study focuses on articulating English TTs' perception of co-training as a PD tool and their actual practice of it. The significance of this study lies in reaching a clear view of how Omani English TTs' perceive co-training and what they know about it, and what adopting this tool to them entails. This is the first step in identifying how to promote the knowledge and practice of co-training within these TTs. Thus, We seek to understand English TTs' perspectives on the following:

- The purposes TTs have for being involved in co-training
- The procedures they follow in adopting co-training
- TTs' attitudes towards co-training as a PD tool
- Positive or negative events the TTs have experienced through co-training practices
- TTs' suggestions for better future practices of co-training

1.1. Co-training

The idea of co-training emerges from the team-teaching approach, which is widely investigated in the literature. Thus, we use co-training and team-teaching interchangeably. This section presents a summary of the concept, the conditions, the benefits, the challenges, the procedures and the approaches of co-training.

Co-training for TTs' PD is done through the maximum participation of TTs in all the stages of training (planning, delivery and evaluation) for the purpose of learning from peers. Co-training as a PD strategy for TTs is an approach that involves two or more TTs in the process of training and requires willingness and enthusiasm to work collaboratively and pedagogically in all the stages of training the same group of trainees (Wang, 2010; Hooda & Sharma, 2017).

This raises the issue of the importance of mutual understanding and “joint responsibility” (Hooda & Sharma, 2017, p.1909).

The success of adopting any PD tool depends greatly on having enough knowledge about it. This includes understanding its philosophy, benefits, challenges, appropriate procedures to follow, etc. This applies to the co-training strategy as a PD tool. Silo (2011), for example, argues that prior to establishing a team-teaching relationship, teachers should know “the meaning of co-teaching” (p.33). Friendship and equality are among the main factors of co-training partners’ satisfaction. Both TTs should have equal opportunities to negotiate “what they should teach and how they should teach in the classroom” (Rao & Chen, 2019, p.12). Moreover, in order to make the experience succeed, partners should also use each other’s strengths and consider disagreement as a sign of learning (Blythe & Sweet, 2004).

During the application, mission clarity is crucial (Killingsworth & Xue (2015). Partners should feel secure, and their professional images, especially in front of their trainees, should be safe. This can be done if the mission is clear and the roles inside their training rooms are predetermined. Mutual respect and trust are key factors for the success of such collaborative work.

Co-training is one type of teamwork that aims at facilitating the learning of TTs by helping them explore their strengths and weaknesses and providing them with chances to learn from each other. Fitzgerald and Theilheimer’s (2013) study showed that teamwork activities provide opportunities to learn from partners and enhance team entitativity. Previous studies have also shown how team-teaching promotes personal skills. For instance, Garran, Aymer, Gelman and Miller (2015) found that professors who pursue team-teaching often develop certain skills such as “communicating, understanding, negotiating, and accepting one another’s styles” (p.810). It also enhances the “skills of synthesis, analysis and evaluation” (Morris, 2016, p.46).

In addition, co-training can add to the training repertoire, enhance knowledge and develop skills and provide chances to evaluate practices and outcomes (for example, see Montgomery & Akerson, 2019; Tsybulsky, 2019; Chen & Cheng, 2014; Wang, 2010; Scherer & Sardone, 2013).

Moreover, co-training encourages innovativeness, and this is because of the healthy working atmosphere it provides, which gives space for “change and creativity” and which supports “risk-taking” to apply new strategies in training (Killingsworth and Xue, 2015, p.11).

This kind of risk-taking emerges due to mutual trust, respect and frank communication (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013, p.103). All of these benefits and much more make co-training an essential focus when PD is considered.

Although co-training has been shown to be an effective PD tool for TTs, it is not without any challenges. Some TTs cannot risk being humiliated in front of colleagues. Although this may reflect a misconception of team teaching for these teachers, different studies that reflect on teachers' experience of team teaching do report several challenges teachers go through.

The findings of Jang's (2006) study, for instance, showed a gap between the learned theories about team teaching and the actual practice. It also showed that some teachers who had never experienced team teaching were 'fossilised' in solo teaching. According to Sileo (2011), those solo teachers may find it difficult to share the "responsibility for instructional decisions" (p.35). In addition, participants in the study of Roe and Chen (2019) stated that lack of mutual understanding is one of the main factors that limit their use of this tool. Other studies show that emotions between partners are reasons behind the success or the failure of team teaching (for example, see Tsybulsky, 2019). Unclarity in role distribution can also make the experience challenging (Roe & Chen, 2019; Tsai, 2009).

The procedure of co-training involves at least three different stages; the planning stage, the delivery stage and the evaluation stage. Tsybulsky (2019) raises the importance of having a prior stage to these, which is "the organisational stage" which refers to team foundation (p.251). This raises the importance of finding the right partner to work with. During the planning stage, co-trainers refer to setting up the co-training, which involves mutual understanding of the training content, aims and procedures to follow and clear distribution of roles among TTs. The second is the performance stage (delivery stage), in which co-trainers follow the plan and use the predetermined procedures. The last stage is the evaluation stage, where co-trainers evaluate their work for better future practices. All of these stages are important, and each can add a lot to the learning of practitioners in co-training (e.g., Tsybulsky, 2019). Although the literature presents lots of approaches to team-teaching, many of these differ in names but are similar in the way they are applied. Of the most frequently used approaches of team-teaching are the ones presented by Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain and Shamberger (2010). The following presents these approaches:

1. One teach, one assist

In this model, both teachers are present, but one takes a clear responsibility in the classroom while the other is actively moving among the students and assisting them when necessary.

2. One teach, one observe

One teacher teaches the students, and the other is observing and collecting data. The observation is planned and serves a predetermined goal. This can have different focuses such as focus on a specific group, teacher-students interaction, students-students interaction and so on.

3. Station teaching

The class is divided into two or three groups representing the stages of the lesson. Each teacher is teaching one of the elements of the lesson, and the other is teaching another element. The third group represents independent work. The learners rotate from one group to another. This works when all the sequences are possible.

4. Parallel teaching

The class is divided into two groups. Each partner is responsible for teaching the same materials to one group at the same time. The purpose is to foster instructional differentiation and increase student interaction and participation.

5. Alternative teaching

In alternative teaching, one teacher leads the group with the majority of students, and the other is responsible for teaching a smaller group. The purpose can be for pre-teaching, remediation, enrichment, assessment or other purposes.

6. Teaming

In this model, both teachers present harmoniously at the same time for the same class. In this model, teachers' lectures represent opposing views in a planned debate, illustrating different options of solving problems etc.

This overview of co-training highlights the importance of having good knowledge of all the aspects discussed (the concept, the conditions, the benefits, the challenges, the procedures and the approaches of co-training) in order to be able to implement it successfully.

Thus, to explore Omani English TTs' knowledge and practices of co-training and whether there are any performance gaps in implementing this tool by these TTs, it is crucial to focus on these issues.

1.2. The Study

A great endeavour is undertaken, and a huge budget is allocated by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Oman to equip TTs in the field with the necessary KSA to carry out their everyday tasks and cultivate positive attitudes towards their profession (MoE 2017). Wilson (2000) argues that "to achieve quality education depends in turn on selecting, training and managing teacher educators so that they can plan and deliver teacher training which will produce skilled teachers" (p.39). Similarly, in Oman, procedures to select TTs are given due care and attention and the preparation of TTs to their jobs is done through involving them in one-week induction programme. The selection of TTs' in MoE in Oman follows certain criteria, including years of experience in teaching, annual appraisal reports, knowledge of the MoE policies etc. Nominees to the TT's job must go through a process of selection that involves exams and interviews.

Afterwards, a one-week induction programme is run for new TTs. This is done by attending workshops delivered by different trainers on issues related to teacher training such as needs analysis, soft skills in training, evaluating training, etc. After this induction programme, TTs are urged to seek opportunities for their own PD in order to enhance their KSA and produce quality training.

Oman consists of eleven governorates. Except for two governorates that have no English TTs, the number of English TTs in each of the other Governorates ranges from one to four. The training experience of these TTs ranges between one to fifteen years. The huge responsibilities of TTs in Oman are represented in organising, designing and delivering beneficial training from which trainee teachers acknowledge the learning and value the benefits of training. In addition, TTs' have to coordinate with the supervision department and schools' administrations in order to undertake school visits to reach a clear vision of training needs and evaluate training impacts.

Not all successful teachers can make successful TTs, and this is because shifting to teacher training requires far more KSA, and those TTs who cannot go beyond the boundaries of teaching may not survive (e.g. Beaven, 2004; Murray & Male, 2005; Wright & Bolithio 2007). TTs in Oman acknowledge the necessity of enhancing their knowledge and skills of training, which can be clearly seen through their adoption of different activities such as peer observation,

group discussion, and involvement in co-training with colleagues. In making these moves, they realise the gains of using the chances to “work out of isolation” and “generate ideas” with peers (Loeser,2014, p.3). However, implementing a collaborative tool such as co-training, which they have not received formal training on, can indicate that at best, they may not be fully gaining the advantages of teamwork and at worst, this can lead to unfavourable consequences which result in failing to pursue these opportunities in the future. For this reason, it is crucial to build a clear vision of the status of such a powerful PD tool within Omani English TTs, as a first step to determine the kind of support these trainers need for better future practices in adopting collaborative tools in general and co-training in particular.

This study attempts to identify TTs’ knowledge and practices of co-training as a PD tool. By doing this, concerns in implementing co-training by the TTs can be identified. The following are the research questions that this study attempts to answer:

Q1. Are there any performance gaps in implementing co-training by Omani English TTs? If yes, what are these?

Q2. What are the causes of these performance gaps in implementing co-training as a tool for TTs’ PD?

Q3. What do Omani English TTs suggest for improving their practice of co-training?

Based on the finding of this study, recommendations for better future practices of co-training as a PD tool in this context are proposed. The steps followed can uncover what TTs know and already do as a first step for anyone interested in promoting this form of collaborative PD.

2. Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach in which we used an open-ended questionnaire to explore in-depth the situation of co-training with a group of English TTs in Oman. This study targets Omani English TTs (English TTs responsible for training in-service English teachers in different governorates of Oman).

To explore the perception and practice of co-training by the targeted group, an open-ended questionnaire was designed. Surveys are used for the purpose of “describing the nature of existing conditions or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared,

or determining the relationships that exist between specific events" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p.334).

The instrument was divided into four sections, namely: current practice, attitudes, experience and suggestions for future practices. Each consists of a number of open-ended questions following Cohen et al. (2018) to allow "important but unanticipated issues to be raised" (p. 273).

The initial design of the questionnaire was peer-reviewed with four colleagues (2TTs and 2 English Supervisors). After that, the first version of the instrument was sent to four experts for content validation. Minor amendments were suggested, such as dividing the instruments into sections according to the purpose of the investigation to make the analysis easier. In addition, there was a suggestion to rephrase the last question to ask for clear information. Based on the feedback received, the last version of the instrument was prepared (see appendix 1 for the validated version of the instrument).

After validating the instrument, the questionnaire was sent through e-mails to all English TTs in all governorates of Oman (17 TTs). The e-mail explained the purpose of the study and participants' involvement and ensured the confidentiality of their responses. 14 English TTs from 10 different governorates responded to the questionnaire.

The received responses were then prepared for data analysis. All responses to a certain question were cut and pasted under the corresponding question, and a different colour was used for each response to the same question. While themes were mainly based on the questions, different categories under each theme were identified, numbered, and supported with quotations of participants' answers. Auditing was done with a critical friend to verify the accuracy of the analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis from the survey gave clear indications of both the nature of the performance gaps (research question1) and the causes of these gaps (research question 2). The data is presented by summarising findings in tables, and illustrating results with quotes from the responses to the survey. This is done by, first, presenting the performance gaps (current practices) and the causes of these gaps (attitudes and previous experiences). In addition, TTs' suggestions for better future practices are summarised (research question 3).

3.1. Findings related to performance gaps RQ1

The data analysis related to the participants' current practice of co-training, which is represented by their answers to the questions in section 1, (A. Frequency) (B. Motives) and (C. procedures followed in implementing co-training), show the performance gaps in adopting co-training as a tool for TTs' PD. Here, the findings for each of these questions are presented and discussed.

A. Frequency

Table (1) below shows the responses to the Q1.A., which asks: *How often do you co-train?*

Table (1). Frequency

Themes	No. of respondents
Most of the time	4
Not much	8
Only once	2

From table (1) above, it seems that there are differences in the frequency of co-training used by survey respondents. This appears to be related to different training circumstances. The TTs who said most of the time are two female TTs who worked in the same place and were appointed simultaneously, and two TTs who used co-training as a mentoring strategy where the more experienced TT helps the new TTs improve professionally. The new TT commented that "*most of our training courses were co-trained*" because it was not optional as the more experienced TTs in the region insisted on this. One situation also shows that a TT worked alone in her region, and she had to invite others from the supervision department or TTs from other regions to co-train with her. Therefore, her practice of co-training is limited. However, most trainers (8) indicated that co-training is not done much.

B. Motives

Table (2) below shows the responses to the Q1.B., which asks: *Why, if ever, use co-training?* Key themes emerging from the data analysis are summarised in the table below.

Table (2). Motives

The Motive	No. of respondents
Pragmatic Reasons	10
To grow Professionally	7

To support new TTs	6
To enhance trainees' learning	5
To work out of isolation	3

Pragmatic Reasons

When discussing reasons for being involved in co-training, an emphasis is given to a variety of pragmatic issues by many trainers (71%). One TT states that “*this may happen because of limited programmes, so we give equal opportunities for trainers*”. Other see the importance of co-training occurs “*when taking part in a session or a course the amount of pressure will be less than training the whole session or course*” which agrees with the TT who stated that “*co-training helps to reduce the pressure on the trainer*”. Another TT explained that “*co-training needs less effort and less time preparing and training*” and that it is “*lessening the load of work because training is divided between two*” and as another said: “*we also divide the parts of the session during delivery, so I can take rest in between and have time to prepare myself for my parts*” and that “*there are assignments to be checked and reports to be written, so all these kinds of stuff can be shared between the trainers which means less pressure*”. In general, this shows that the TTs see the importance of getting involved in co-training to reduce their workload and overcome the pressure of heavy training days.

To grow professionally

TTs also highlighted the benefits of co-training in supporting them professionally, something mentioned by (50%) of trainers. Some respondents reported practicing co-training to “*learn from each other*” and “*to support each other*”. Others indicated that it is “*good to see others and be seen by others*” and “*share experiences*”. One TT invited colleagues to co-train when she felt that she does not have “*sufficient knowledge in a subject*”.

Seeing training from another perspective is another benefit of getting involved in co-training because, as was stated by one trainer, “*It gives the trainer another view to the training session*”.

To support new TTs

Just under half of the respondents, six TTs (42%), who completed the questionnaire, indicated that co-training helps in supporting new TTs.

For example, as one TT stated, “*it is beneficial for new English teacher trainers to be co-training with an expert teacher trainer*”. One of the novices TTs mentioned that she uses co-training “*because I am a new trainer*”. They acknowledged the benefits that can be gained by training them to learn “*the strategies and techniques of training*” and discuss and reflect on their practices.

Trainees' learning

Five of the respondents also mentioned that co-training provides a better training experience for trainees. For example, one TT mentioned that through the implementations of co-training, “*we give options to trainees to learn from different perspectives*” and “*to change the training mode*”. A TT stated that they also see that it “*adds to the effectiveness of training programs and workshops*”, a TT stated.

Dealing with Isolation

Three TTs also see that co-training can help them work out of isolation by being involved with others and sharing some responsibilities. In one circumstance where the TT was the only English TT in her region, she mentioned that she asked English specialists from other departments such as supervision to train with her, so she did not work alone. The idea of sharing the responsibilities of delivering new courses with others was seen as a way to raise confidence in training. For example, one TT stated that “*due to this mutual preparation, I feel more confident about the session*”.

C. Procedures Followed

Exploring the how of co-training is also important to understand the actual performance of co-training and the way TTs pursue this method. This includes stages of co-training and TTs' roles at the delivery stage. The survey includes a question to identify the TTs' procedures in implementing co-training. To gather information about this, question 1C asked: Summarise the procedures that you usually follow when using co-training. Table (3) below illustrates the findings.

Table (3). Procedures

	Based on the survey data	No. of Respondents
Procedures of Co-training	Distribution of parts – co-plan – deliver the parts assign without interference from the other trainer – (no mention of evaluation stage)	8

	Follow the three stages (planning, delivery and evaluation)	5
	Divide the session into two halves; each is responsible for his/her part.	1

TTs reported on both, the stages they follow and the roles they play in the training rooms. Although (5) TTs mentioned that they follow the three stages (planning, delivery and evaluation), (8) TTs indicated that they plan together, decide on the training materials and distribute the missions each one of them is responsible for doing. Afterwards each is responsible for delivering their part in the training room. It seems that the evaluation stage is not considered as one of the main stages as these TTs did not mention it.

In addition, TTs are using different procedures as one TT raised the point, “*sometimes we follow different procedures*”. One way is that “*each trainer will have one topic for a slot, and the other trainer will be like an assistant*”, and the other is “*when one trainer is responsible for one programme, but he/ she gives the opportunity to the other trainers to join and support them in training*”.

Some TTs divided the session into two halves, where one is responsible for delivering the first half of the session, and the other co-trainer is responsible for delivering the second half. A respondent said “*I took half of the session and the second half my expert teacher train*”. This means the TTs divide the sessions based on their duration, so in the sessions that last for four hours, for instance, each trainer trains for two continuous hours.

Working as an assistant is one of the roles of the second TT during training, as mentioned by the TTs. Other TTs also mentioned that they play the role of an observer “*I mean one trainer train, and the other is in the room to observe*”. Moreover, a TT mentioned that they used the time while the other trainer was training to “*relax*” or prepare for their next turn.

Performance gaps identified

From the results above, it seems that there is some weakness in the practice and orientation of co-training as a tool for PD among the participants in my study. Although TTs can see the benefits of working collaboratively through adopting the co-training approach,

the findings show a lack of frequency in using co-training, poor practices and some misunderstandings. The perception of co-training as a tool for solving pragmatic issues is dominant, which may drag at least some TTs away from seeing it as a PD tool that can add a lot to their knowledge and skills of training. As a result of such misleading perception, TTs may follow co-training for the purpose of minimising the workload of individual co-trainers and leaving the learning opportunities aside.

As can be seen from the results, while many trainers mention professional reasons as a motive to undertake co-training, it is also widely used to reduce the workload pressure. For many trainers, this may be the main reason, which may explain why many trainers did not mention the evaluation stage in their co-training procedures. In addition, the roles that the TTs play in the training rooms are mere of an observer or an assistant. Although these can be of tremendous benefits if they are linked to clear objectives, these two roles include far more duties than the one mentioned by the trainers. More significantly, there are other roles that TTs can play as co-trainers in the training room which are not mentioned. It seems that the two approaches used by these TTs are merely one-train, one-assist or one-train, one-observe.

Furthermore, TTs are not reaping the best of this collaborative PD tool. Co-training in many cases is used as a peer-observation strategy. Although a lot can be learnt through peer-observation, co-training can provide more comprehensive learning opportunities in all of its three stages. The next section reports on the results, which can help explain the causes of the performance gap identified.

3.2. Findings related to the causes of the performance gaps RQ2

The data analysis related to the participants' attitudes towards co-training and their previous experiences of it, which are represented by their answers to the questions in section 2 (A. and B.) for attitudes, and in section 3 (A, B and C.) for previous experience, indicate the causes of the performance gaps in adopting co-training as a tool for TTs' PD. Here, the findings for each of these questions are presented and discussed.

A. Attitudes

The following two questions attempt to explore the attitudes of TTs towards the use of co-training:

2.A. Explain your feelings towards using co-training.

2.B. If you have one course to deliver next semester and you have the choice to deliver it using either solo-training or co-training, which way will you choose? Why?

Table (4). Attitudes

	Category	No. of responses
Feelings towards co-training	Comfortable to use co-training	6
	Involvement depends on conditions	8
Solo Vs. Co-training	Would go for solo-training	6
	Would go for co-training	4
	Co-training if the course is new	8

All respondents reported liking the idea of co-training. Although 6 respondents (42%) of the participants mentioned that they feel comfortable applying it, above half of the participants highlight several considerations that they see to limit their involvement in co-training. For example, one TT mentioned previous experiences as influencing her decision, saying: “*personally from previous experiences, I do feel more comfortable training solo rather than co-train*”. This was echoed by a number of other trainers. More details of the sorts of previous experience seen as impacting on TT perception of co-training are discussed in section (B) below. In addition, some TTs feel that having different personalities may affect the flow of co-training, “*we have different personalities and preferences which is likely to affect the harmony and flow of the training with the trainee*”, one TT reported.

TTs also mentioned some other important conditions for them to be involved in co-training and for co-training to be successful. Having committed and cooperative colleagues, having a clear plan to follow and aiming at developing the trainers’ skills are among these conditions. For instance, a TT reflected that “*I like co-training in limited situations, where I think I am going to improve my skills rather than doing a job*” and “*when the issues are clear from the beginning and when we have cooperative co-trainers*”, added another. This indicates that the application of co-training for PD is not always the case and that the normal implementation of it is to achieve the mission of training. The responses to the second question clarified the situation even further. When asked if they have one workshop to train and they can either deliver it through solo-training or co-training, 8 respondents (57%) of the TTs seem to agree to do it as co-training only if the workshop is new.

This is, as they indicated, to better understand the content of the course and to receive administrative support from the other trainer. However, (6) participants prefer to do it solo-training. A TT stated, "*If I had trained the course before, I prefer to do solo training because by this I can control the rhythm of the course and sustain the harmony of the training atmosphere. On the other hand, if it's a new experience for me, then I will choose co-training to be guided and supported by a co-trainer*". This shows a lack of confidence in the idea of co-training in sustaining the harmony of training and in the ability of co-trainers to control the training sessions' rhythm in delivering training together.

Other TTs prefer to do new courses through solo-training as well, even if it requires more effort as they claim. One TT said that "*I will do it solo because it makes me more comfortable and in more control of the course and how it goes. Although, it will increase the burden of the planning and the training hours*".

The conditions mentioned by the respondents are among the conditions for successful implementations of co-training. However, mentioning these here indicates that co-training was practiced without taking these conditions into account. In addition, there are many other conditions for co-trainers to consider when planning to apply co-training, which were not mentioned by these respondents. This indicates that TTs have limited knowledge of co-training and its conditions. This explains the reasons for the limited co-training approaches used and the limited roles TTs play in the training room mentioned earlier. Moreover, there is a misunderstanding of the co-training approach in this vision as it requires more effort and more time for planning compared to solo-training.

B. Previous experience of co-training

One of the important issues to explore is participants' views in terms of most useful and least useful in conducting co-training from their experience. It is also crucial to identify the appropriateness of the application of this method through identifying positive and negative incidents participants went through.

Most Useful

3. A. From your experience, what is the most useful/important part of co-training?

Table (5) Most useful about co-training

	Theme	No. of Respondents
Most Useful	Support from peer (Sharing experiences, cooperation during training, Confirmation of good practice, encouragement)	7
	All Stages	4
	Planning Stage	4
	Evaluation Stage	1
	Sharing Admin Workload	4
	Providing effective training	2

It seems that participants can see the importance of the collaborative work found in practicing co-training. 7 respondents see that the usefulness of implementing co-training is in receiving peer support. This is seen in sharing experience “*sharing experiences and watching trainees' responses*”, cooperation during training “*instead of one doing the whole training, one trains, and one assist*”, confirmation of good practice “*when one of us confirm what the other has said and support it with evidence*”, and in encouraging each other “*Having somebody else on the stage you are on could have a lot of positive effects*”.

There is also an agreement among some TTs (4) that all the stages of co-training are important without identifying what exactly is essential in these. However, some TTs see the importance in a particular stage of co-training. Four participants see the importance of the planning stage and mutual preparation. For example, a TT mentioned that she feels “*the mutual preparation is the most important phase*”, and this is because the success of the delivery stage depends on it. One respondent sees the importance in the evaluation stage “*the reflection phase is the most crucial part since it investigates and questions the practice*”. Other TTs see that co-training is important in solving administrative issues, as reported by 4 respondents. For instance, a TT mentioned that the best part is when “*someone can substitute you if something wrong happens*”. This is related to the delivery stage. In addition, 2 respondents see that being involved in co-training improves the effectiveness of training provided to teachers.

The table shows that only 4 respondents (28.5%) of the trainers consider that all the stages of co-training are useful, and the rest of the respondents consider different issues as the most useful. This may indicate that a big percentage of trainers cannot see the importance of every stage in co-training, indicating a lack of knowledge about each stage's learning opportunities to facilitate their professional growth.

Considerations from previous practices

3. B. From your experience, what is the least useful/important part of co-training?

Participants have expressed their opinions when asked about the least useful/important part of co-training by reflecting on their previous experiences. Although some TTs stated that there is nothing unfruitful in applying co-training, other TTs answered this question by voicing their concerns about certain issues during the implementations of the method. The following table shows the results based on the survey data.

Table (6). Considerations

	Based on the survey data	No. of Responses
Considerations	Requires sufficient organisation	3
	Time management issues	3
	Having less control over training	2
	Risk of disagreement between trainers	2
	Receiving inconsiderate feedback	2
	One-train, One- observe does not fulfil my needs	1

The importance of the organisation of the co-training procedure is one of the considerations of implementing co-training. A TT raised the issue of overall organisation “*When it is not organised, it could be a chaotic experience*”, and another doubted the practicality of specific processes such as “*shifting trainer from one activity to another*”. In addition, the concern is about having “*Overlapping tasks*”. Overlapping tasks here mean exploring in action that both TTs have prepared similar tasks.

This might occur due to the insufficient planning stage where they divide the responsibilities, and then each is responsible for preparing their part, which leaves the other trainer not aware of what their partner is preparing to deliver.

Time management issues were also raised by 3 respondents as a critical consideration. Where one TT sees that “*it takes time to plan*”, another TT raises the issue that “*co-training is not preferable because you have limited time to finish your training programmes*”.

Two TTs are concerned with having less control over training in comparison with solo-training. For instance, one TT raised the issue of having “*less control over the whole process and flexibility to think on your feet and change the plan because this may confuse your colleague*”. Moreover, two TTs claimed that disagreements between TTs could be an obstacle. One TT stated that “*some trainers might have some conflict among each other*” and that “*there are things to avoid like inappropriate interference*”. One TT also mentioned that the expectations of the other trainers to follow what they see as appropriate is not accepted because “*I can't be a copy of others*”.

TTs are concerned about the type of feedback and how it is stated during the evaluation stage, as mentioned by two trainers. The problem is receiving “*inconsiderate feedback and ineffective guidance*” from the partner and when “*discussing the weaknesses of each other's rather than ways of developing their sessions*”. Furthermore, highlighting the least important part of co-training, “*for me it is observing my colleague training, I can observe them other time and do observe them while training*”, one TT stated. This is a critique of the approach they are using in co-training, which is one-train, one-observe.

It seems that having experienced these issues in co-training, TTs seem to reflect their concerns about different issues in implementing it and suggest avoiding harmful incidents in future practice. Such inappropriate practices occur due to a lack of knowledge of the co-training approach and its philosophy which also results in reducing confidence to apply co-training.

Reporting on inappropriate practices

The survey also includes questions to explore further the events of inappropriate practices that TTs experienced while applying co-training. To gather information about this, question 3C asked:

3. C. Based on your experience with using co-training:

-Recall an embarrassing situation that you caused to your colleague during a co-training session. What was it? How did the other person react? How do you feel about it?

-Describe an embarrassing situation that your colleague did to you during a co-training session. What was it? How did you react? How do you feel about it?

Describing different embarrassing incidents during the implementation of co-training, TTs touch on the wound of the impracticality of using this method for the PD of practitioners. Respondents described training incidents that showed the extent to which the idea of co-training is not crystal clear among Omani TTs and that there is a danger of diminishing the good professional relationship between partners.

Each of these stories indicated a different inappropriate practice, despite the extent of the other trainer's reaction. These are categorised into unacceptable in-sessional T-T interactions, diverging from the plan, responding to unexpected circumstances, insufficient organisation and responding to technical failures, as shown in table (7) below.

Table (7) Inappropriate Practices

	Based on the survey data		No. of Respondents
Inappropriate Practices	In-sessional T-T interaction	Disagreement in front of trainees	3
		Not accepting other's contributions in his/her part	3
		Inappropriate reaction to the other trainer's mistakes	2
	Divergent from the plan	Unplanned Contributions	2
		Changing the procedures without informing the other trainer	3
		Delivering/continuing with the other trainer's parts	2

		Using more time than allocated during the planning stage	1
	Unexpected circumstances	Leaving the room and the other trainer have full responsibility.	1
	Insufficient Organisation	Exploring parts that are not assigned to either of the trainers	1
	Technical Failure	Spoiling an interesting activity because of technical failure	1

Disagreement between the two TTs during training is one shape of an in-sessional T-T interaction challenge, especially if this is not a planned strategy to raise trainees' awareness of a particular issue. One TT commented, "*I personally disagreed with him, so later on, I commented and added to his part, but he didn't like it*". In addition, not accepting the other trainer's contributions to the session is another issue of in-sessional T-T interaction. "*I thought that as we were co-training, I can contribute to the discussion at any time, so I joined in with my opinion. Yet, I felt that my contribution wasn't welcomed. Therefore, I felt disappointed*", one trainer reported. It seems that in-sessional T-T interaction can go beyond that to cause threats to the TTs' professional image through inappropriate responses to the other trainer's mistakes. One TT said, "*I skipped one step to another*" and the way the other trainer reacted "*showed them that I am not performing properly*". In addition, one TT said, "*when I do co-training, my co-trainer interferes in some situations which cause me embarrassment in front of my trainees, and therefore affect my image as a trainer*".

The second form of inappropriate practices of co-training was reported to be divergent from the prearranged plan. This occurred when suddenly changing the procedures of the training session "*I led the training in my way not as what we had planned ... My colleague was waiting for doing the same steps on the plan, but I changed*". In a second situation, divergent from the plan, took another dimension when one trainer continued training the parts of the second trainer "*my colleague did her part, and she continued to mine*".

A respondent also mentioned the situation where a trainer spent more time on their part than prearranged, which negatively affected the flow of training “*my Colleague could not manage his/her time properly took more time in his part than he/she than we planned which made me change my part because I couldn't finish my activity*”.

The third reported form of inappropriate practice is dealing with unexpected circumstances during training. A trainer reported to have a strong reason to leave the training room, putting the whole responsibility on the second trainer “*... and I was late for my part, then my colleague had to carry on with my part, and he/she was not well prepared...*”.

Furthermore, inappropriate practices occurred due to insufficient preparation that was experienced in not distributing the roles properly. A TT reported, “*it was a 15-minute task. So when it came on the PP show, we both paused*”, which made them cancel the task. In addition, technical challenges can sometimes cause difficult experiences. An example of this is when one respondent reported, “*I was supposed to help with the slideshow, and I clicked on the screen before I should, which spoiled the activity*”.

The causes of information gaps can be clearly seen from this analysis. This can be seen through unclear conditions of co-training and a lack of knowledge of appropriate practices such as procedures to follow and roles of TTs. It seems that previous negative experiences of co-training had also affected the perceptions of some TTs on co-training and lowered their confidence in implementing it. This could be one cause of the inconsistency in pursuing co-training by TTs.

3.3. Findings related to the suggestions for better practice RQ3

Understanding participants' views and previous practices and experiences, it is not unexpected to see that many TTs prefer solo-training rather than seeking to get involved in such a powerful team learning tool at the workplace. It is important to mention here that participants are broadly in favour of co-training, and therefore their perspectives on how to support the delivery of co-training in the future is a worthwhile issue to investigate.

In addition, acknowledging that these TTs are knowledgeable and can suggest ways to refine co-training practices, the last question in the survey asks for this.

4. A. What can be done to support the delivery of co-training in the future?

Table (8). Suggestions for future practices

	Theme	Based on the survey data	No. of Respondents
Suggestions to support the use of co-training in future	Co-training Philosophy	Explore further the co-training method – learn about the procedures -explore the principles of effective co-training (do/s and don't/s) – learn how to use each other's strengths.	8
	Co-training Approaches	Learn about models of co-training available in the literature	2
		Compare models in the literature to our actual practices	1
	Contextualising co-training	Establish a suitable way for our practice	7

Responses to the last question shed light on the importance of understanding the philosophy of co-training, comparing current practices with available models in the literature, and determining what the suitable procedures are. Eight (8) respondents highlighted the importance of understanding the philosophy of co-training. A TT, for instance, stated: “*I think we need to work first in exploring this type of practice in the field. There are different models in training and co-training. We need to learn about them, reflect on our own practice, and compare it with these models and other experiences. Then, we need to finalise the professional knowledge of such practice, and then we need to use it in our practice with reflection on the experience*”.

One TT claimed that there is a need to explore “*the principles of effective co-training*”, to understand “*do/s and don't/s*” and to “*understand the reasons behind co-training as well as the procedure of co-training*” in order for TTs “*to greatly reap the benefits of effective co-training*” and “*without falling in any embarrassing situations*”. In addition, TTs see that there is a need to use each other's strengths in order to learn and enhance their skills and knowledge of training and see what benefits TTs can gain from being involved in the process of co-training.

However, it seems that some TTs have already explored the topic and come to realise that “*there are not many readings about this, so we can do case studies/ research and publish them for new trainers to benefit from, and co-training could be part of new trainers’ assignments*”.

We believe these professionals have tried to apply this method of PD in an uninformed way, and each team applies co-training in the way they feel is appropriate and not necessarily on how it should be. In many cases, this has resulted in inadequate practices. Branch (2009) identifies three main categories of such performance discrepancy: limited resources, lack of motivation and lack of knowledge and skills. For the situation of the Omani TTs, these discrepancies appeared clearly through this study. Since there are not many studies in the literature that articulate co-training (most studies are done on team-teaching), there is no co-training model to follow, and TTs have received no training on the co-training method, this raised the significance of establishing a solid foundation for the co-training method in the Omani context by constructing a model to follow and providing appropriate training on how to implement it.

4. Implications

As stated earlier, the purpose of uncovering performance gaps in adopting co-training as a PD tool is to identify how to best support TTs with co-training. Different sorts of implications can be drawn from the findings. The performance gaps identified are related to four main causes, which are lack of knowledge of co-training, inappropriate practices, lack of confidence and holding negative perceptions towards co-training. We believe that the main reason for this is the lack of knowledge which resulted in inappropriate practices and finally led to having negative perceptions about this cooperative PD tool. This is not unexpected in a situation where practitioners have received no training on what, why, and how of implementing such a tool. As a result, a variety of perceptions and practices were identified, a lot of which cannot be considered proper.

This implies a strong need to design a training programme that can fulfil the needs of TTs on this subject. The training programme should consider the knowledge of co-training in terms of its concept, conditions, benefits, procedures, expected challenges and approaches to use in a training event. Modelling co-training is also important for TTs to see examples of how possible this tool can be adopted.

Therefore, the design of the training programme should be based on innovative training design principles and consider a loop-input where two trainers deliver the programme about co-training through modelling co-training approaches.

Designing the training programme, all TTs must be enrolled in this. Opportunities should be allowed to explore trainee-TTs' previous experiences, knowledge and so on, and new knowledge should be presented and discussed thoroughly, leaving space for discussion and further clarifications.

Finally, the process followed in this study is one that others could apply to ensure that what they do to support trainers can effectively meet their needs. The idea of involving TTs in a training programme that focuses on this cooperative PD tool can be done to raise the knowledge and perceptions of educators about other tools of PD.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study attempted to identify Omani English TTs' knowledge and practices of co-training as a PD tool to explore concerns in the current implementation of co-training. The results of the analysis from the survey gave clear indications of performance gaps in adopting co-training and the causes of these gaps. In addition, respondents provided suggestions for improving the future practice of this collaborative PD tool.

The findings showed that there is a fluctuation in the value that TTs place on co-training and its implementation. The results also highlighted different practices of co-training reflecting a lack of understanding of how to implement it. Moreover, some inappropriate practices were identified which put the adoption of this collaborative tool at risk. Participants' suggestions for better future practices of co-training emphasised the strong need to improve the situation by clarifying the ambiguity and setting out conditions to follow.

Based on the findings, this study recommends the following:

- It is important to construct a clear co-training model that is tailor-made for the training situations that can help TTs grow professionally. This can be developed through the literature review on team-teaching, TTs' role-competencies and TTs' PD. By constructing this model, TTs can recognise the value of this tool in their PD.

- It is crucial to design a training programme that aims to raise TTs' knowledge and foster their perceptions of co-training as a PD tool. All TTs should be invited to attend this programme.
- It is also crucial that the policy-makers consider that these TTs, too, need to be trained to use any collaborative PD tool in order to be able to implement it effectively.
- Acknowledging the importance of co-training, this tool should be embedded in any induction programme provided to TTs in the future.

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Appendix 1

1. *Current practice*

- A. How often do you co-train?
- B. Why, if ever, use co-training?
- C. Summarise the procedures that you usually follow when using co-training.

2. *Attitudes*

- A. Explain your feelings towards using co-training.
- B. If you have one course to deliver next semester and you have the choice to deliver it using either solo training or co-training, which way will you choose? Why?

3. *Experience*

- A. From your experience, what is the most useful/important part of co-training?
- B. From your experience, what is the least useful/important part of co-training?
- C. Based on your experience with using co-training:
 - Recall an embarrassing situation that you caused to your colleague during a co-training session. What was it? How did the other person react? How do you feel about it?
 - Describe an embarrassing situation that your colleague did to you during a co-training session. What was it? How did you react? How do you feel about it?
 - Explain a situation where your colleague made you feel proud of yourself during a co-training session. What is it? (e.g. praising you in front of trainees, etc.)

4. *Future practice of Co-training*

- A. What can be done to support the delivery of co-training in the future?

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