



Co-teaching and inclusion: a qualitative review of the research literature

Codocencia e inclusión: una revisión cualitativa de la literatura científica

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Abstract

The present study examines co-teaching as a key methodological innovation for achieving inclusive education. This collaborative practice (encompassing co-planning, co-instruction, and co-assessment) is regarded as an effective approach to addressing classroom diversity and enhancing educational quality. Numerous empirical investigations have explored this topic, primarily from a qualitative standpoint, which makes an in-depth review of qualitative research on co-teaching conducted between 2020 and 2025 both timely and relevant. The PRISMA methodology was followed, and systematic searches were carried out in the Web of Science and Scopus databases. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, twelve studies from various countries were selected for analysis. Findings indicate that co-teaching fosters teacher collaboration, improves the efficiency of certain learning processes, promotes positive attitudes, and strengthens teachers' self-efficacy self-confidence. For students, it enhances participation, inclusion, and sense of belonging, particularly among those with special educational needs. It is concluded that co-teaching represents an effective pedagogical strategy for advancing inclusive education, provided that it is grounded in joint planning, role equity, and the availability of dedicated training and collaboration spaces for teachers.

Keywords: co-teaching, inclusion, students, qualitative analysis, literature, PRISMA.

Resumen

El presente trabajo analiza la codocencia como innovación metodológica esencial para el logro de una educación inclusiva. Esta práctica, basada en la colaboración docente a través de la coplanificación, coenseñanza y coevaluación, se considera una estrategia eficaz para atender la diversidad en las aulas y mejorar la calidad educativa. Numerosos estudios empíricos han abordado esta cuestión, principalmente desde una perspectiva cualitativa, por lo que una revisión en profundidad de los estudios empíricos cualitativos publicados sobre codocencia en el periodo comprendido entre 2020 y 2025 es procedente. Se siguió la metodología PRISMA y se efectuaron búsquedas en las bases de datos Web of Science y Scopus. Tras aplicar los criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron 12 estudios procedentes de distintos países. Los resultados muestran que la codocencia favorece la colaboración docente, la eficiencia de ciertos procesos de aprendizaje, la formación de actitudes positivas y el desarrollo de la autoeficacia docente. En el alumnado, se evidencia una mejora en la participación, la inclusión y el sentido de pertenencia, especialmente en quienes presentan necesidades educativas especiales. Se concluye que la codocencia constituye una estrategia pedagógica eficaz para promover la educación inclusiva, siempre que se base en la planificación conjunta, la equidad de roles y la existencia de formación y espacios de colaboración docente.

Palabras clave: codocencia, inclusión, estudiantes, análisis cualitativo, literatura, PRISMA.

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1. Introduction

To achieve the critical goal of inclusive education, there is a methodological innovation that most current authors consider fundamental: co-teaching (Barron et al., 2022; Castro-Zubizarreta et al., 2017; Iacono et al., 2023; Veteska et al., 2022).

Co-teaching should be understood as a form of teacher collaboration that extends beyond classroom activities to encompass the co-planning and co-assessment of teaching-learning processes (Barron and Friend, 2025; Fenty et al., 2012; Gardesten, 2023). The growing diversity in general education classrooms has led to co-teaching practices being established as an optimal way to address individual needs and to integrate the work of different professionals within the same setting, such as general education and special education teachers (Abellán-Rubio et al., 2021; Sundqvist et al., 2023; Weiss and Lloyd, 2002). Likewise, elementary and secondary schools have increased their utilization of co-teaching in recent years (Helding-Vembye et al., 2024; Wherfel et al., 2022), confirming that this form of teacher collaboration serves as an effective instructional strategy for meeting the needs of all students (Hang and Rabren, 2009; Subban et al., 2023). Consequently, its potential to promote collaborative educational practices and improve outcomes for both teachers and students has been widely demonstrated (Austin, 2001; Weinberg et al., 2020).

Some authors emphasize that co-teaching should not be understood merely as a methodological strategy, but rather as a transformation of the educational institution's culture, organizational structure, and policies. It requires rethinking how teaching responsibilities are distributed, as well as how instructional dynamics, roles, and pedagogical leadership are conceived (McTigue et al., 2023; Rönn-Liljenfeldt, 2024). Furthermore, co-teaching has evolved from an approach focused strictly on supporting students with greater needs within the regular classroom to a holistic paradigm, wherein teachers not only work together, students and teachers also collaborate to enhance learning for the entire group (Sharma, 2025).

A study by Kohler-Evans (2006) conclude that this practice exerts a positive impact on the performance of the entire group and improves the quality of education for the students. Other findings

reflecting the positive impact of co-teaching include improved social inclusion of students, particularly those with special educational needs (Bates et al., 2015; Strogilos et al., 2020, 2023; Szumski et al., 2025), increased participation among these students, a subsequent improvement in academic performance (Helding-Vembye et al., 2024; Walsh, 2011), and greater school satisfaction among the students (King-Sears et al., 2021).

In addition to the benefits yielded for students, numerous studies focus on the impact of co-teaching on the participating teachers. Inquiries such as those by Colson et al. (2021), Johnson et al. (2020), and Ricci et al. (2021) conclude that co-teaching increases teachers' sense of self-efficacy. For their part, Kolleck et al. (2021) highlight how relationships between co-teaching pairs grow closer and stronger.

However, empirical results are sometimes unclear. For example, Losinski et al. (2019) note in their review that, in many cases, the effectiveness of co-teaching is not examined in depth in comparison with alternative teaching methodologies, which may introduce bias. In fact, when Kursch and Veteška (2021) outline the advantages and disadvantages of co-teaching, they emphasize description rather than rigorous empirical comparison with other teaching methods, which prevents the definitive assertion that co-teaching is superior to alternative methodologies. Likewise, various studies highlight drawbacks associated with the practice of co-teaching, such as a lack of shared planning time or the extra effort involved in this approach, according to some teachers (Kursch and Veteška, 2021; Stark, 2015). However, these drawbacks are not inherent to co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice but are instead related to contextual factors that influence the overall success of its implementation.

At this point, the need to determine the actual benefits of co-teaching for improving the implementation of inclusive education becomes clear. This issue must be addressed from a qualitative perspective, as the depth of the benefits across different domains and the variability of actors and indicators from distinct viewpoints warrant such an approach; a purely quantitative perspective cannot fully capture the complex underlying system operating at the intersection of inclusion and co-teaching.

With the aim of understanding the benefits of co-teaching for inclusive teaching cultures and

practices, this study proposes a systematic review to compile the main advances in this field based on qualitative empirical research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Search Strategy

To conduct this review, we followed the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Page et al., 2021), widely known as the PRISMA methodology. To select relevant studies, comprehensive searches were conducted in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, as they are currently recognized as the most comprehensive and widely recognized databases in the academic field (Sánchez-Cabrero, 2024). The search was executed using the following keyword combinations in both English and Spanish: co-teaching, team teaching, joint planning, benefits, advantages, evaluation, test, and measure. To optimize the identification of potential articles for inclusion in this review, a structured search strategy was developed, deploying a combination of Boolean operators adapted to the specific syntax requirements of each consulted database. The Search terms were formulated as follows, specifying the core topics of co-teaching, team-teaching, co-taught, or co-planning: (“co-teaching” OR “team-teaching” OR “co-taught” OR “co-planning”) AND (“benefits” OR “advantages”) AND (“qualitative”).

2.2 Study Selection Criteria

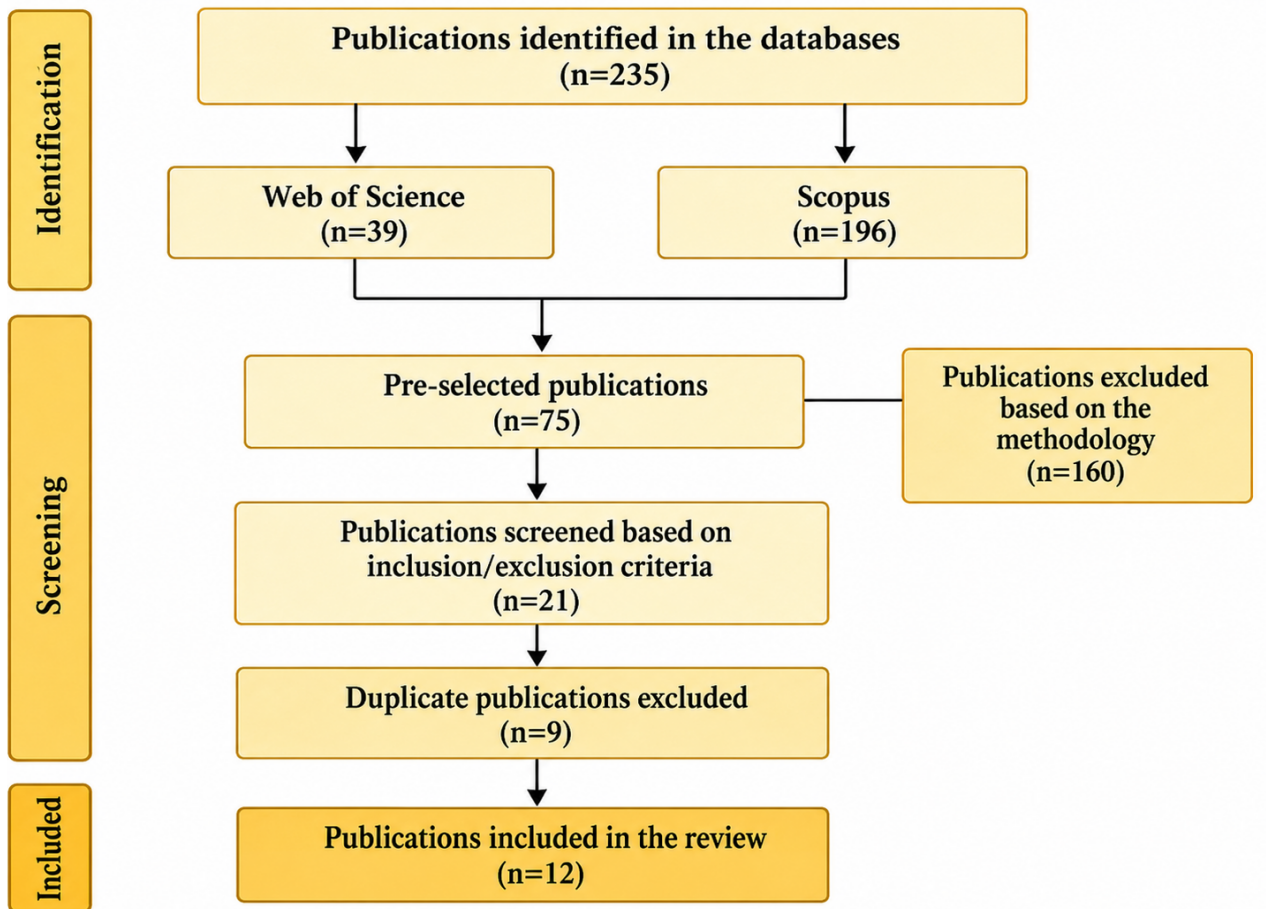
The following inclusion criteria were established for studies to be selected for this review: (a) they must have been published within the last 5 years (2020–2025), (b) they must be written in either Spanish or English, (c) they must employ a qualita-

tive methodology to evaluate the benefits of co-teaching, and (d) they must specifically analyze the subsequent benefits for student inclusion. Conversely, the following documents were excluded from the selection process: (a) those that did not consist of peer-reviewed scientific articles (such as book chapters, conference papers, and presentations), and (b) those whose methodology deviated from qualitative research specifically designed to evaluate the benefits of co-teaching.

2.3 Study Selection Process

The studies identified through the initial search were screened by reviewing their titles, abstracts, and methodologies against the established inclusion criteria. This process was carried out independently by four reviewers, who resolved any differences through consensus discussions or, when agreement could not be reached, by consulting external researchers. The database search in Web of Science yielded 39 results, 30 of which met the topical search criteria. Twenty-seven articles were pre-selected after a methodological review confirmed their qualitative nature, and nine studies that fully met all inclusion and exclusion criteria were ultimately included. Simultaneously, a total of 196 articles were retrieved from the Scopus database, from which 45 were initially pre-selected. After verifying the inclusion criteria, 12 articles were selected; however, nine of these were identified as duplicates and removed, resulting in three final inclusions from this source. Consequently, a final total of 12 articles met all inclusion criteria and were synthesized in this review. Figure 1 displays the flowchart illustrating the selection process, including the specific number of studies included and excluded during each phase of the systematic review.

Figure 1. Flowchart of studies included and excluded in the study selection process



2.4 Description of the included studies

Of the 12 selected studies, 10 were published in English. The geographic distribution of the countries where these investigations were conducted spans multiple continents. Specifically, three studies were carried out in the Americas, all of which took place within the United States. Of the eight studies

conducted in Europe, two were performed in Spain, two in Germany, two in Finland, and two in Norway. Finally, one study was conducted in Asia, specifically in Thailand.

3. Results

The table below provides a detailed description of the studies reviewed and their main results.

Table 1. *Studies Included in the Review*

Authors	Design	Sample	Measurement	Variables Included	Analysis of data
Forsman (2025)	A narrative study on the impact of co-teaching on students whose native language differs from the language of instruction at school.	Four teachers (three generalists and one support teacher). They co-teach with the same specialized language support professional.	Seven interviews based on two questions over the course of two academic years.	Benefits for students. Teacher professional development.	Based on the field data, "word images" were constructed that represented four narrative themes: daring to share, broadening experience, refining roles, and increasing well-being.
Gourvennec (2021)	Six case studies on the impact of teachers' beliefs in the classroom on the success of co-teaching.	Six teachers (students with varying levels of literacy).	Individual interviews centered on three general questions: The teaching of literacy and the roles of students and teachers; co-teaching and any other applicable guidelines based on the specific conditions of the <i>Two Teachers</i> program; and teachers' reactions to the class' reading development.	The consequences of teachers' beliefs (regarding students, teachers, activities, and context) toward students and toward themselves	Data collection through individual interviews and content analysis using an inductive categorical approach.
Gutiérrez-Moniño and Braña-Blanco (2024)	Action research on a shared teaching experience	Three teachers (1 AL, 1 PT, and a mentor) in a 2nd-grade elementary classroom with a student with special educational needs	29 observation journals written by the PT during all co-teaching sessions over the course of an academic year	Co-teaching strategies. Classroom life. Learning strategies of the student with SEN. Beliefs and relationships between the homeroom teacher and the PT.	Inductive and qualitative content analysis of the journals.
Jortveit and Kovač (2022)	Interviews with general and special education teachers about their successful collaborative practices.	Eight teachers from different educational levels (purposive sampling of teachers who had previously demonstrated effective collaboration between general and special education teachers).	Semi-structured interviews conducted in pairs (special education teacher alongside general education teacher), with interaction between them.	Nature of the collaboration. Knowledge exchange. Discussions about educational values. Examples of collaboration. Strategies for teacher consensus. Division of roles in collaboration.	Inductive content analysis, categorized into several phases of analysis.

Authors	Design	Sample	Measurement	Variables Included	Analysis of data
Jurkowski et al. (2020)	A qualitative study involving interviews with high school teachers regarding their perspectives on the implementation of co-teaching.	33 secondary school teachers (17 general education and 16 special education), from 25 schools.	<i>Ad hoc</i> , semi-structured individual interviews regarding their ideas about best practices in implementing co-teaching as well as their individual experiences with co-teaching.	Definition and organization of teacher collaboration. Goals and expectations of co-teaching. Conditions and resources for effective collaboration.	Collection of qualitative interviews and content analysis using a categorical system (deductive and inductive) tested on a sample and validated with external professionals.
López-Vélez and Galarraga (2024)	A qualitative study featuring interviews with teachers who engage in co-teaching regarding its impact on student inclusion.	41 teachers and 18 teaching assistants from different educational levels are involved in co-teaching experiences. They are from 20 schools offering early childhood education, elementary school, secondary school, and vocational training across eight autonomous communities.	<i>Ad hoc</i> , semi-structured individual interviews on the impact of co-teaching on students, particularly on learning, inclusion, and a sense of belonging (among both general students and those with special educational needs).	Learning outcomes. Inclusion and sense of belonging. Benefits for students.	Collection of qualitative interviews and content analysis using an inductive categorical approach, cross-referenced with the scientific literature.
Maghfiroh et al. (2025)	Qualitative research analyzing the benefits of co-teaching for professional development among both student teachers and school teachers.	Two English teachers and two student teachers at the school.	Data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The observations and interviews were conducted with student teachers and the lead teachers in the practicum program.	The benefits of the co-teaching model for teachers. The implementation was carried out during co-teaching. The benefits of co-teaching are for the professional development of both lead teachers and pre-service teachers.	Based on observations The analysis was based on observations and interviews. The process follows three phases: 1) data reduction, 2) data presentation, and 3) data verification. Two sources of information were used as a triangulation tool to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected in the study.

Authors	Design	Sample	Measurement	Variables Included	Analysis of data
Muehlbacher et al. (2022)	An exploratory qualitative study using semi-structured in-depth interviews	The sample consisted of 30 teachers: twelve taught German, nine taught a first foreign language, and the remaining eight taught mathematics.	<i>Ad hoc</i> teacher journals after nine weeks of co-teaching	Internal regulation of emotions in specific situations. Internal regulation of negative emotions. Internal regulation of positive emotions. Inauthentic presentation (pretending, masking). Co-regulation of positive and negative emotions. Shared regulation of positive and negative emotions.	The interviews were coded using a refined coding scheme based on the concepts of internal emotional regulation (self-regulation), co-regulation, and shared regulation. Subsequently, a structured qualitative content analysis was conducted using MAXQDA.
Qualls et al. (2025)	A qualitative case study analyzing the relationship between what the literature says about co-teaching (a collaborative practice) and actual classroom practice (general education teachers teach while special education teachers provide support).	Two pairs of teachers who co-teach: one math teacher, one English language and literature teacher, and two special education teachers.	Data collected through observations and individual semi-structured interviews.	Factors influencing co-teaching and the results of the interaction between these factors. The essential elements for successful co-teaching.	Thematic analysis Categorical system Data triangulation
Rytivaara et al. (2023)	Post hoc qualitative study using interviews and teacher journals on student learning in the context of co-teaching after nine weeks	Five teams of co-teachers (two teachers per team)	<i>Ad hoc</i> interviews addressing three research questions.	Teachers' knowledge of their students. Focus of teachers' observations. Learning outcomes. Grade level. Students' prior knowledge. Number of co-taught lessons per week.	Collection of qualitative interviews and teacher journals addressing three research questions, with in-depth analysis triangulation by two researchers following nine weeks of co-teaching.

Authors	Design	Sample	Measurement	Variables Included	Analysis of data
Stelitano et al. (2020)	A qualitative case study conducted at two high schools. The study analyzes school organization with a focus on inclusion, devoting a significant portion to co-teaching.	All staff at the two schools were invited to participate at various levels over a two-year period (47 professionals in total): nine special education teachers, 15 general education teachers, ten members of the administrative team, nine guidance counselors, and four support staff.	Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, along with additional interviews and classroom observations of nine key individuals (special education teachers who teach in general, natural classroom settings). Surveys of professional interaction networks were also conducted to explore routines and other informal interactions among teachers. Finally, school documents (schedules, teaching materials, photographs of classroom materials, etc.) were analyzed.	Counseling Model and Its Implementation. Co-teaching model and implementation. Impact of school designs on inclusion.	Data collection and analysis in three phases: formal design (transcript coding), practice (triangulation of interviews, observations, and network surveys), and implications for student support (analysis of observations and linking them to the rest of the data).
Weiss et al. (2020)	An exploratory qualitative study, conducted as a case study, of the three-element co-teaching model in a high school.	Six teachers (three general education teachers and three special education teachers). They form three teams/pairs of co-teachers at one school, specifically: pairs of general education and special education teachers in English, mathematics, and social sciences.	Classroom observations (71 in total), observer field notes, and joint semi-structured interviews with the participating teaching pairs.	Current practice (knowledge and standard practices). Implementation of the model (training in the model and changes in teaching practices). Factors related to implementation (classroom organization and student performance).	The study follows a multiple-case design with three co-teaching teams. The process consists of three phases: (1) observations and recordings of initial practice, (2) training and application of the three-element model with feedback from the researcher, and (3) joint planning of individualized supports for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Regarding the participants, all articles analyze teachers' perspectives. Only the study by Stelitano et al. (2020) included other educational professionals, such as members of the administrative team or guidance counselors.

Among the variables included regarding co-teaching practices and their relationship to educational inclusion, the following stand out: teachers' beliefs about students, teachers' attitudes toward co-teaching, benefits for teachers' professional development, and benefits for the learning and inclusion of students with special educational needs.

The resulting findings are presented below, grouped around the main themes addressed.

3.1 Co-teaching and Teachers' Attitudes

Several studies underscore the critical importance of teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward co-teaching. Gourvennec (2021) examined how teachers' beliefs regarding students, colleagues, pedagogical activities, resources, and the educational context influenced their practice, revealing that the interviewed educators held widely varying views on these dimensions. Co-teaching requires teachers to collaborate in a highly coordinated manner, sharing instructional approaches, classroom organization methods, activity prioritization, and student engagement strategies. Consequently, the effectiveness of co-teaching depends heavily on the teaching team's capacity to align their goals and strategies, leverage individual professional strengths, and constructively manage potential differences in their pedagogical perceptions and understanding.

For their part, Gutiérrez-Moniño and Braga-Blanco (2024) highlight the success of a co-teaching initiative carried out by two elementary school teachers—one a specialist in Therapeutic Pedagogy (TP) and the other a general classroom teacher—within an action-research framework, attributing its success to the collaborative efforts of both professionals. Although it was their first time working together, and despite initial anxieties regarding the pedagogical innovation involved in implementing co-teaching, their professional relationship was built on mutual trust, shared understanding, clearly defined roles, and the joint development and design of classroom materials and activities. As a result, stu-

dents' perceptions reflected equality and the absolute absence of a hierarchy between the two instructors.

3.2 Professional Development and Teacher Collaboration

Other studies explore how co-teaching influences professional growth and collaboration among teachers. Jortveit and Kovač (2022), for instance, assert that teachers who are open to aligning their practices and building more integrated professional identities possess greater resources to successfully develop co-teaching experiences. Furthermore, consistent with this perspective, Muehlbacher et al. (2022) address the impact of co-teaching on emotional regulation in their qualitative study, clearly observing a marked improvement in such regulation and in the management of negative emotions, which subsequently led to enhanced individual and team performance.

When relationships between co-teachers are characterized by reciprocity and knowledge transfer, these professionals perceive their colleagues as more trustworthy, which significantly strengthens collaboration. To this end, it appears essential to ensure optimal working conditions that facilitate productive instructional collaboration. Stelitano et al. (2020) analyze structural mechanisms to achieve this, such as ensuring the multi-year stability of co-teaching pairs by the administrative team and providing dedicated time for co-planning while allocating staff resources to cover those sessions. Implementing measures of this kind requires systemic changes that fundamentally alter school culture and organizational structures (López-Vélez and Galarraga, 2024).

The qualitative study by Rytivaara et al. (2023), meanwhile, concludes that teacher collaboration in developing students' knowledge yields a deeper and more rapid understanding of the students, thereby enabling teachers to adapt their instruction to students' individual needs sooner and more effectively.

In turn, Maghfiroh et al. (2025) conclude that co-teaching helps student teachers—namely, university students in initial teacher training—to more effectively integrate specific subject-matter knowledge while concurrently improving their skills in planning, classroom management, and conflict resolution. Thus, it can be concluded that co-teaching is

not only beneficial for experienced teachers but also provides significant support for novice educators.

In this regard, Jurkowski et al. (2020) point out that teaching collaboration should not be restricted solely to professionals within the school itself but rather requires multiprofessional cooperation both within the school environment and with external experts. This broader collaboration is essential for developing a shared understanding and a common sense of responsibility within the framework of inclusive education.

3.3 The Effectiveness of Co-Teaching for Student Learning and Inclusion

A key topic in recent research is the role of co-teaching in inclusive education. Studies corroborate the relationship between co-teaching and inclusion, finding that effective teacher collaboration is grounded in an instructional model aligned with the fundamental principles of inclusive education and the recognition of diversity (Jortveit and Kovač, 2022). Some studies directly assess the impact of co-teaching on student learning outcomes. Specifically, Forsman (2025) examines how co-teaching benefits students who speak a language other than the school's primary language of instruction. The research indicates that the simultaneous presence of two teachers in the classroom makes it possible to adapt instruction to different levels of language proficiency, providing both individualized support and opportunities for interaction among students.

Therefore, co-teaching increases access to the general curriculum by integrating students into the dynamics of the regular classroom and promoting more inclusive and participatory educational contexts with more personalized and effective attention. Regarding student attitudes, Rytivaara et al. (2023) observe that one of the main benefits co-teaching provides to students is a greater understanding of diversity within the classroom. Also from a qualitative perspective, López-Vélez and Galarraga (2024) demonstrate that, alongside students' learning outcomes, their sense of belonging is strengthened, which exerts a direct impact on their behavior, academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being. Gutiérrez-Moniño and Braga-Blanco (2024) conclude that co-teaching promotes greater participation among students with special education

needs within their classroom, which in turn fosters positive attitudes toward these students among their peers and enhances a sense of belonging for the entire group.

4. Current State of Research on the Benefits of Co-Teaching in Inclusion

Studies focusing on the benefits of co-teaching confirm, in alignment with prior literature reviews (Barron and Friend, 2025; Fenty et al., 2012; Gardesten, 2023; Maldonado-Díaz and Núñez-Díaz, 2023; Van Mieghem et al., 2020), that this practice extends far beyond the mere simultaneous presence of multiple adults in the classroom. Instead, it demands advance planning, sustained collaboration among participating educators, and systemic transformations in the structural dynamics of the school (López-Vélez and Galarraga, 2024; Sundqvist et al., 2023; Toikka and Tarnanen, 2022; Wu, 2022).

Regarding co-teaching modalities, the findings of this study reveal substantial diversity, although the model pairing a general education teacher with a special education teacher appears to predominate, as documented in previous reviews (Abellán-Rubio et al., 2021; Helling-Vemby et al., 2024; Wherfel et al., 2022). Even within these configurations, there is a clear commitment to role parity (Barron and Friend, 2025; Chatzigeorgiadou and Barouta, 2022), which disrupts the traditional secondary or subordinate role to which support teachers have historically been relegated. However, for co-teaching to be successful and effectively meet student needs, general education teachers must display a genuine willingness to collaborate with support professionals during lesson planning stages (De la Fuente-González et al., 2025; Qualls et al., 2025).

The analysis of teachers' perceptions of co-teaching—encompassing its benefits, satisfaction, and overall effectiveness—constitutes a recurring theme in these inquiries (Dulfer et al., 2021; Gourvennec, 2025; Gutiérrez-Moniño and Braga-Blanco, 2024; Jurkowski et al., 2020; Rytivaara et al., 2023). This emphasizes the critical need to assess these perceptual variables when generating empirical evidence on the implementation of co-teaching frameworks.

Another factor widely considered in the co-teaching literature is teachers' attitudes toward utilizing this methodology as an inclusive practice.

Gutiérrez-Moniño and Braga-Blanco (2024) describe the longitudinal evolution of a co-teaching partnership over a school year, highlighting that collaborative efforts—ranging from the co-planning and co-design of sessions and materials to the co-assessment of classroom instructional practices—are vital to achieving a successful partnership. Crucially, the co-teaching relationship thrives when the special education specialist is not perceived exclusively as a subordinate assistant, a positioning that has traditionally hindered implementation (Barron and Friend, 2025; Chatzigeorgiadou and Barouta, 2022; Haglund and Boström, 2022; Paulsrud and Nilholm, 2023; Qualls et al., 2025). Concurrently, students' attitudes toward co-teaching practices also serve as a highly relevant quality indicator (de Boer and Kuijper, 2021; Sanchez-Cabrero and Pericacho-Gómez, 2022; Shogren et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 2023).

Regarding teaching practices, the evidence indicates that co-teaching directly enhances instructional quality by fostering greater sensitivity toward individual differences (Forsman, 2025), enabling personalized support, and facilitating targeted pedagogical adaptations. This underscores the necessity of integrating co-teaching training into the university curricula of pre-service teachers (Maghfiroh et al., 2025), a recommendation consistent with previous research (Duran et al., 2020). Delving deeper into shared teaching configurations, studies demonstrate that co-teaching becomes significantly more effective when professional roles are equitable and free of hierarchy—specifically when the special education teacher is not relegated to a secondary role relative to the general education instructor, reinforcing observations made in other studies (King-Sears et al., 2020).

Similarly, co-teachers identify distinct professional and personal benefits resulting from collaboration, including critical reflection on their own pedagogical practices, enhanced emotional self-regulation (Muehlbacher et al., 2022), a deeper and more rapid understanding of the students (Rytivaara et al., 2023), renewed passion for teaching, and opportunities for knowledge transfer with colleagues (Jortveit and Kovač, 2022). To maximize these benefits, it is essential for co-teachers to share congruent educational values, as co-teaching yields superior outcomes under these conditions. Furthermore, providing pre-service training alongside dedicated institutional time and spaces for joint collaboration

remains indispensable (Weiss et al., 2020). Similar professional benefits have been observed when co-teaching is applied within doctoral programs (Thielsch, 2021). Synthetically, the results demonstrate that co-teaching enhances teachers' sense of self-efficacy and solidifies professional relationships, thereby driving overall school quality (Kolleck et al., 2021; Ricci et al., 2021).

The broader effects and impact of co-teaching on student learning and inclusion represent another extensively analyzed domain within the existing literature (Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprabahan, 2016). In this systematic review, qualitative studies, such as that by Rytivaara et al., (2023), report highly positive outcomes following the implementation of co-teaching methodologies, particularly regarding improvements in academic performance. In turn, research by López-Vélez and Galarraaga (2024) shifts the focus toward the holistic impact on students, examining not only learning outcomes but also the social inclusion and overall sense of belonging of the entire student body. Along these lines, the study by Gutiérrez-Moniño and Braga-Blanco (2024) demonstrates how this methodology fosters active participation among students with special educational support needs while cultivating positive attitudes toward diversity among their peers.

Collectively, the literature review indicates that co-teaching serves as an effective tool for promoting inclusive practices, enhancing student learning, and driving teachers' professional development (Figueroa-Céspedes and Fica, 2025). Extant studies agree that its success hinges upon joint planning, role equity, and shared educational values, supported by targeted training and genuine institutional opportunities for collaboration. In short, co-teaching emerges as a powerful pedagogical strategy that simultaneously strengthens educational quality, classroom inclusion, and students' sense of belonging.

Despite the valuable insights identified, this systematic review is subject to certain limitations. On the one hand, relevant or recent studies may have been inadvertently omitted if they were not indexed within the consulted databases or if they employed alternative terminology due to the current lack of conceptual standardization surrounding co-teaching. On the other hand, the high variability across the reviewed studies—both in terms of participant demographics and specific research topics—compli-

cates the extraction of entirely uniform and comparable results. Furthermore, while this review explicitly centers on students with specific educational support needs, the consideration of cross-cutting variables, such as cultural diversity or socioeconomic contexts, remains limited within the analyzed literature, thereby restricting the conceptual scope of the notion of inclusion adopted in the primary studies.

5. Conclusions: Current Trends in Research

The current relevance of inclusive education as a solution to contemporary educational challenges has spurred a multitude of studies on the benefits and possibilities of co-teaching, effectively breaking down traditional taboos surrounding the traditional “one teacher per classroom” model. However, this remains an emerging field of research that requires substantial further inquiry to lay a solid empirical foundation for future investigations.

Furthermore, this systematic review has demonstrated that this field of study is increasingly evolving toward intervention-based designs, reflecting a growing interest within the academic community. An increasing number of researchers are deploying co-teaching as a structured educational intervention to robustly establish its benefits and derive explicit guidelines for its execution. The objective is to comprehend the specific advantages of co-teaching within distinct subject areas, as well as its direct impact on teacher self-confidence and collaborative skills, while establishing optimal implementation frameworks based on recommended advance planning time, specialized training, and prior experience, among other factors. These conclusions are particularly relevant given the existing gaps in the literature, such as professional resistance among certain educators or the institutional limitations schools face when adopting co-teaching models.

The growing prominence of co-teaching within contemporary educational research, along with its vast—though as yet not fully quantified—potential, is expected to continue expanding and consolidating. Further empirical studies are fundamentally needed to quantitatively determine its specific advantages and limitations, thereby enabling the academic and professional community to more

effectively address the emerging challenges that society poses to modern education.

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Author Declaration – CRediT Taxonomy	
Authors	Contributions
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Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence
The authors DECLARE that the preparation of the article “ <i>Co-teaching and Inclusion: A Qualitative Review of the Scientific Literature</i> ” did not involve the use of artificial intelligence (AI).