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Amplifying special education student voices: exploring co-teaching practices in inclusive settings

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of 10 high school students in co-taught inclusive classrooms and examined how co-teaching practices influence academic engagement and emotional well-being. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, student reflections were collected and analyzed to gain insight into their perceptions of the co-teaching model. Five key themes emerged: i) immediate academic support enhances understanding, ii) emotional safety and inclusion foster confidence, iii) co-teaching improves classroom organization and instructional flow, iv) inconsistent co-teacher presence causes frustration, and v) students desire autonomy alongside support. Findings indicate that while students generally view co-teaching positively, its effectiveness depends on consistent teacher collaboration and responsive support tailored to individual needs. This study contributes a student-centered perspective to inclusive education and underscores the importance of strengthening collaborative practices and stable co-teaching partnerships to optimize educational outcomes for all learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has increasingly become a global priority, aiming to ensure that all students, regardless of ability, have equitable access to learning opportunities. International organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasize that inclusive practices are not only a matter of equity but also essential for improving educational quality and social cohesion worldwide [1], [2]. Within this framework, co-teaching has emerged as one of the most widely implemented instructional models for supporting students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Originating in the 1980s alongside broader special education reforms, co-teaching involves a general education teacher, and a special education teacher working collaboratively to deliver instruction in a shared setting [3], [4]. This approach emphasizes the least restrictive environment, providing individualized support while simultaneously promoting academic and social inclusion for students with diverse learning needs [5].

Research on co-teaching has steadily expanded, with many studies documenting positive outcomes related to teacher collaboration and student achievement. For example, Tzivinikou [6] explored collaborative practices between general and special education teachers, highlighting their role in effective instructional delivery. Similarly, Robinson [7] identified improved academic outcomes in co-taught classrooms, while

Mitchell and Sutherland [8] stressed the importance of evidence-based instructional strategies. Collectively, this body of work has helped to establish co-teaching as a promising model for inclusive practice.

However, much of the existing research has concentrated on the perspectives of teachers or on quantifiable student outcomes, with limited attention to the lived experiences of students themselves [9], [10]. This gap is particularly important because students' day-to-day interactions with teaching practices, classroom environments, and peer dynamics are crucial indicators of how co-teaching actually functions in practice. While Cooley [11] confirmed that teacher collaboration and the use of evidence-based strategies are predictors of co-teaching success, such evaluations risk overlooking how students perceive, interpret, and experience these classroom arrangements.

A phenomenological approach provides an essential means of addressing this gap. By focusing on students' subjective experiences, phenomenology foregrounds the emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions of schooling that may remain invisible in quantitative analyses [12], [13]. Exploring these perspectives can yield valuable insights into how co-teaching influences not only academic achievement but also engagement, self-perception, and a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Although prior studies such as Spradlin [14] demonstrate that teachers often evaluate co-teaching positively, student perspectives remain underrepresented and frequently unvoiced. Anderson [15] further underscores that phenomenological inquiry can illuminate how co-teaching shapes students' identities, mental well-being, and inclusion. Without these voices, evaluations of co-teaching risk being partial and incomplete.

This study therefore seeks to address this critical gap by conducting a phenomenological exploration of students' experiences in co-taught environments. Focusing on students with special needs, the research examines their perceptions of instructional delivery, classroom dynamics, and teacher collaboration. By centering student narratives, this study aims to identify practices that enhance co-teaching effectiveness and to contribute to a more holistic understanding of inclusive education from the perspective of those who experience it firsthand.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

The study employed a qualitative method by utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This inquiry method was used to explore the lived experiences of special education students and to acquire deeper understanding on how they make meaning of these experiences related to their educational journey. For detailed analysis, this study used the procedural guidelines formulated by Alase [16] and Noon [17], which highlights close engagement with participants' subjective accounts.

IPA, originated in phenomenological philosophy, focuses on interpreting and making sense of how individuals experience and understand their world [18]. Unlike with other qualitative approaches that may need to have theoretical frameworks or rigid procedures, IPA gives importance in an in-depth interpretative engagement, requiring researchers to bracket prior assumptions or experiences and focus on the participants' perspective. The interpretation should be grounded on the responses of the participants and not on a personal viewpoint. This method allows one to have a rich, nuanced understanding of participants lived realities. By adopting IPA, this study sought not to generate new theory (as in grounded theory) nor to focus on isolated cases (as in case study research), but to attentively listen to and interpret the meanings that special education students attribute to their experiences within the educational context.

2.2. Research participants

In alignment with the phenomenological approach, this study employed purposive sampling to select participants who had directly experienced the phenomenon under investigation—that is, students with special needs receiving instruction within a co-teaching environment. This approach ensured the inclusion of individuals capable of providing rich, meaningful insights relevant to the study's objectives [19]. The final sample comprised ten high school students from a mid-sized suburban public high school in the southwestern United States, each holding an active individualized education program (IEP) and enrolled in one or more co-taught classes. Participants were selected based on i) a documented special educational need, ii) current placement in a co-teaching classroom, and iii) voluntary consent to participate. The group included students from grades 10 (20%), 11 (50%), and 12 (30%), with four females (40%) and six males (60%). Academic support areas primarily included English and math (70%), while a smaller proportion received math support only (30%). This detailed distribution, presented in Table 1, provides a transparent overview of participant characteristics while maintaining confidentiality; specific disability categories are not disclosed in accordance with the family educational rights and privacy act (FERPA). The shared context of receiving specialized support in co-taught classrooms provided a coherent foundation for identifying common themes in their lived experiences.

Each participant engaged in a semi-structured, individual interview exploring their experiences in co-taught classrooms, perceptions of teacher collaboration, and the impact of co-teaching on their academic confidence and participation. Informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians, and student assent was secured prior to participation. To protect confidentiality, participants were assigned unique codes (A-J), and all personally identifiable information was removed from transcripts and reports in accordance with FERPA guidelines.

Table 1. Participant characteristics, academic support areas, and summary percentages

Participants code	Grade level	Gender	Academic support areas
A	12	F	English and math
B	12	F	English and math
C	11	M	English and math
D	11	M	Math
E	11	F	Math
F	11	M	English and math
G	12	F	English and math
H	11	M	English and math
I	10	M	English and math
J	10	M	Math
Summary by %	%	%	%
	Grade 10: 20%	Male: 60%	English only: 0%
	Grade 11: 50%	Female: 40%	Math only: 30%
	Grade 12: 30%		Both: 70%

2.3. Research procedure

After receiving formal approval from the school principal and assistant principal, the research process began with obtaining informed consent. Participants and their guardians were fully briefed on the study's purpose, scope, and ethical standards, and written consent was secured. To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms (e.g., Student A, B, and C) were used in place of real names.

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted during students' free periods to minimize disruption to their academic schedules. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, allowing participants sufficient time to elaborate on their experiences. In addition, two focus group discussions (FGDs), each including 3-4 students, were conducted to encourage interactive discussion and comparison of shared experiences. The combination of individual interviews and FGDs facilitated rich data collection and allowed the researcher to observe emerging patterns across multiple participants. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached—that is, when no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews and FGDs. With participants' permission, all interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded using a secure mobile device. Recordings were transcribed verbatim, and audio files were deleted after transcription to ensure data privacy.

The semi-structured format allowed follow-up and clarifying questions, exploring both expected and emergent themes. Guiding questions focused on students' perceptions of teacher collaboration, classroom dynamics, instructional support, and emotional well-being. The interview protocol was pilot-tested with two students meeting the inclusion criteria but not included in the final sample; feedback from the pilot helped refine question wording, order, and the researcher's probing techniques to enhance clarity and elicit richer responses.

2.4. Instrumentation and data analysis

This study did not seek to develop a new theory but aimed to uncover the deeper meanings within special education students' lived experiences in a co-teaching setup [20]. Guided by the framework of IPA, the primary focus was to explore how students interpret and make sense of their daily academic and social interactions within co-taught classrooms.

2.4.1. Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument was an open-ended, semi-structured interview designed to capture rich, detailed accounts of participants lived experiences within co-taught classrooms. This format was selected to provide flexibility, enabling the interviewer to probe participants' responses and encourage elaboration, while still maintaining focus on key topics. The interview protocol was developed based on the principles of IPA, which emphasizes understanding how individuals make sense of their personal experiences. Guiding questions targeted students' perceptions of teacher collaboration, classroom dynamics, instructional support, and emotional well-being within the co-teaching environment. The main interview questions included:

"Can you describe your experience in a classroom where two teachers work together? How do the teachers support you when you have difficulty with your schoolwork? How does having two teachers in the classroom affect your confidence and participation?"

To establish the instrument's validity and relevance, the interview questions underwent a pilot test involving two students who met the study's inclusion criteria but were not part of the final sample. Feedback from this pilot phase led to refinements in question wording and order to improve clarity, reduce ambiguity, and better align questions with the study's aims. The pilot also helped the researcher practice effective probing techniques to elicit deeper, more meaningful responses.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the use of follow-up and clarifying questions, facilitating exploration of emerging themes or unexpected insights during the conversation. This approach ensured comprehensive coverage of relevant topics while respecting each participant's unique perspective and communication style.

2.4.2. Bracketing (epoche)

In alignment with phenomenological research practices, the researcher engaged in epoche, or bracketing, to minimize personal bias and maintain objectivity. As described by Dörfler and Stierand [21] bracketing involves the researcher consciously setting aside prior assumptions and personal experiences to approach the phenomenon with a fresh perspective. Pilarska [22] supports this process as a systematic procedure that enables the researcher to examine participants' experiences authentically. Prior to data collection and analysis, the researcher documented their own beliefs and experiences related to co-teaching and special education to reduce their influence during interpretation.

2.4.3. Triangulation of data

Data triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by integrating multiple sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of student experiences. Individual interviews provided first-hand accounts of students' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of co-teaching, serving as the primary lens for interpreting their lived experiences. FGDs offered an interactive setting in which students could compare and contrast their experiences, confirming recurring themes and revealing variations among participants. Field notes from classroom observations captured contextual factors, teacher-student interactions, and non-verbal behaviors that informed the interpretation of students' accounts. Additionally, informal discussions with co-teachers offered further perspectives on student engagement and learning behaviors; in some cases, their observations aligned with students' self-reports, while in others they highlighted discrepancies that prompted deeper reflection and more nuanced interpretation. Through triangulating these multiple sources, the researcher was able to validate emerging themes, identify areas of convergence and divergence across perspectives, and strengthen the overall trustworthiness of the study.

2.4.4. Data analysis

Data analysis followed the IPA framework, which emphasizes a detailed, idiographic examination of individual cases before identifying cross-case patterns. Each transcript was read multiple times, with significant phrases, emotional cues, and initial reflections annotated in the margins. Reflective memos were then written to capture emerging meanings and interpretive insights related to co-teaching, inclusion, and student support. Through concentrated coding, similar concepts or emotional responses were grouped together to identify recurring ideas such as "clarity of instruction", "feeling supported", and "confusion about roles". These codes were subsequently synthesized into broader themes that encapsulated the shared essence of participants' experiences, with themes continuously refined and validated against the original transcripts. This rigorous, multi-layered approach ensured the depth, richness, and validity of the findings derived from students lived experiences in co-teaching classrooms.

2.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the principal of the participating high school. Informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participants, and assent was obtained from the students themselves. Clear explanations were provided regarding the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality safeguards, and the intended use of the data. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

To ensure compliance with the FERPA, all personally identifiable information has been removed or anonymized. Participant data are reported only in aggregated or coded form to protect student privacy. These procedures were implemented to uphold the highest ethical standards and safeguard the rights and welfare of all participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section offers a comprehensive interpretation of the study's findings, integrating participants' reflections with supporting literature. The results are categorized into five key themes that emerged from the data, each highlighting significant aspects of students' experiences in co-teaching environments. For clarity and ease of understanding, the themes are presented in table format and further elaborated through detailed discussions that connect student voices to existing research.

3.1. Results

Five primary findings emerged from the analysis of student reflections on co-teaching classrooms: i) immediate academic support enhances student understanding, ii) emotional safety and inclusion foster student confidence, iii) co-teaching improves classroom organization and instructional flow, iv) inconsistent co-teacher presence leads to student frustration, and v) students desire autonomy and support on their own terms. A summary of all themes, representative quotes, and supporting literature is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of themes, representative quotes, and supporting literature

No.	Theme	Representative quote	Supporting literature
1	Immediate academic support enhances student understanding	"…there's always someone there to help me. The extra help makes the lessons clearer…" [B]	Co-teaching facilitates differentiated instruction, rapid intervention, and narrowed achievement gaps [23]–[25]. Collaborative planning between general and special education teachers ensures instruction is consistent, responsive, and adapted to diverse learner needs [26], [27].
2	Emotional safety and inclusion foster student confidence	"…if I ever feel upset or anxious, I can talk to one of them… That support helps me focus better…" [A]	Co-teaching creates a more supportive environment for hesitant students to participate, reflecting the core principles of inclusive education and fostering a sense of belonging that encourages engagement [28]–[30]. The classroom environment was further enhanced by flexible seating, clear movement pathways, assistive technology, and multi-format instructional materials [31]. Students also benefited from the ability to receive targeted interventions outside the general classroom without disrupting lesson flow [32].
3	Co-teaching improves classroom organization and instructional flow	"…teachers work as a team, so no student's question goes unanswered, and the class moves along faster…" [I]	Co-teaching enhanced classroom management and instructional delivery by providing an additional layer of support for logistical and pedagogical tasks. Students reported smoother lesson flow, timely distribution of materials, and faster responses to questions [33], [34]. Improved engagement was observed as students participated more actively [35].
4	Inconsistent co-teacher presence leads to student frustration	"…sometimes they're there, and some days they're not… that makes it tough to keep up…" [E]	Dependable co-teacher involvement is essential to sustain progress [36], [37]. Inconsistent co-teacher presence also places excessive pressure on the lead teacher, who may be forced to manage instruction and support alone, weakening the collaborative dynamic essential to co-teaching's success [38].
5	Students desire autonomy and support on their own terms	"…I get distracted when someone constantly checks my work… I want to be left alone unless I ask…" [H]	Excessive or unsolicited help was sometimes perceived as distracting or patronizing [39], [40]. Co-teaching practices should respect student preferences while maintaining effective instructional support [41].

3.1.1. Theme 1: immediate academic support enhances student understanding

Students consistently emphasized the value of having two teachers available to provide real-time help. Unlike previous classrooms where they felt stuck, co-teaching offered "immediate help" that made lessons clearer and less frustrating. One student shared, *"…there's always someone there to help me. The extra help makes the lessons clearer…"* [B], while another noted, *"…teachers work as a team, so no question goes unanswered…"* [I]. This support increased students' confidence in their academic abilities, allowing them to ask questions freely and receive explanations tailored to their needs: *"…I can ask questions anytime, and teachers explain until I get it…"* [C]. Co-teaching was perceived as a crucial scaffold for understanding lessons and keeping pace with the class.

3.1.2. Theme 2: emotional safety and inclusion foster student confidence

Co-teaching also created a sense of emotional support and belonging. Students described how an additional adult made it easier to express feelings and manage stress. One explained, *"…if I ever feel upset or anxious, I can talk to one of them… That support helps me focus better…"* [A]. Students reported feeling more included in the classroom community: *"…I feel included… learning together… not being singled out or*

left behind," [G]. This inclusive environment helped reduce social anxiety and reinforced students' confidence and willingness to participate.

3.1.3. Theme 3: co-teaching improves classroom organization and instructional flow

Students valued how co-teaching contributed to a more organized and efficient classroom. Collaborative teaching strategies helped avoid confusion and delays: *"…when the main teacher is explaining a lesson, the other one helps… it feels more organized and less stressful…"* [A]. The division of roles allowed teachers to provide differentiated instruction and keep all students on track: *"…teachers work as a team, so no student's question goes unanswered, and the class moves along faster…"* [I]. Two teachers improved clarity of instruction and the overall learning environment.

3.1.4. Theme 4: inconsistent co-teacher presence leads to student frustration

Students reported negative experiences when co-teachers were inconsistently present. The absence of the co-teacher often led to feeling stuck or overlooked*: "…when the co-teacher isn't available, I get stuck and sometimes just give up…"* [D]. Some students noted that co-teachers could be stretched too thin: *"…co-teachers try to help all students, but sometimes they spread themselves too thin…"* [G]. This inconsistency led to frustration, reduced engagement, and feelings of being unsupported, particularly for students relying on extra guidance.

3.1.5. Theme 5: students desire autonomy and support on their own terms

While students appreciated support, some found too much help intrusive. Several wanted more independence: *"…when the teacher keeps helping me all the time, it feels like I'm being babied…"* [E]. Others felt distracted by constant oversight: *"…I get distracted when someone constantly checks my work… I want to be left alone unless I ask…"* [H]. These reflections suggest students desire a balance between support and autonomy, allowing them to self-regulate and request help as needed.

3.2. Discussion

Understanding how co-teaching is experienced in inclusive classrooms requires careful attention to students' perspectives, as they are directly affected by support structures and instructional models. This study explored students' experiences in co-taught classrooms and identified five key themes: i) immediate academic support enhances student understanding, ii) emotional safety and inclusion foster student confidence, iii) co-teaching improves classroom organization and instructional flow, iv) inconsistent co-teacher presence leads to student frustration, and v) students desire autonomy and support on their own terms. These findings provide insight into how differentiated instruction, emotional support, and collaborative teaching practices influence student outcomes, highlighting implications for practice, equity, and policy.

3.2.1. Theme 1: immediate academic support enhances student understanding

Participants consistently reported that the presence of a co-teacher allowed for immediate, personalized academic support, leading to deeper comprehension, improved grades, and increased confidence. This finding aligns with Cook *et al.* [23], Debasu and Yitayew [24], and Barron and Friend [25], who emphasize that co-teaching facilitates differentiated instruction, rapid intervention, and narrowed achievement gaps. Collaborative planning between general and special education teachers ensures instruction is consistent, responsive, and adapted to diverse learner needs [26], [27].

The qualitative narratives suggest that immediate support not only resolves momentary learning challenges but also contributes to sustained academic growth, as corroborated by parental reports and progress monitoring. While quantitative assessment was not included, these observations reinforce the potential of co-teaching to enhance long-term outcomes. Subtle variations emerged across gender and subject areas: female students, particularly in math-only support, emphasized emotional reassurance and reduced anxiety, while male students in English-and-math support focused on academic clarity and task completion. These contrasts underscore the need for co-teachers to balance academic scaffolding with emotional support, ensuring equitable benefits across diverse student groups.

3.2.2. Theme 2: emotional safety and inclusion foster student confidence

Beyond academic outcomes, co-teaching significantly contributed to students' emotional well-being. Students reported feeling included, seen, and supported, which enhanced their confidence and willingness to engage. Co teaching creates a more supportive environment for hesitant students to participate, reflecting the core principles of inclusive education and fostering a sense of belonging that encourages engagement [28]–[30].

The classroom environment was further enhanced by flexible seating, clear movement pathways, assistive technology, and multi-format instructional materials, consistent with Desmarais' [31] universal design for learning (UDL) framework. Students also benefited from the ability to receive targeted interventions outside the general classroom without disrupting lesson flow, consistent with Hatfield [32]. Variations were observed in preferences for independence: female students and those in math sometimes desired greater autonomy, while male students and those in both English and math valued reliable adult support. These findings highlight the need for co-teaching approaches that foster inclusion while respecting individual preferences, balancing confidence-building support with opportunities for independence.

3.2.3. Theme 3: co-teaching improves classroom organization and instructional flow

Co-teaching enhanced classroom management and instructional delivery by providing an additional layer of support for logistical and pedagogical tasks. Students reported smoother lesson flow, timely distribution of materials, and faster responses to questions, aligning with Murawski [33] and Scruggs *et al.* [34]. Improved engagement was observed as students participated more actively, consistent with Young *et al.* [35] model linking emotional safety, instructional responsiveness, and structured flow to sustained attention. These findings suggest that co-teaching promotes not only academic gains but also structured, responsive classroom environments. Maintaining clear roles, collaborative planning, and consistent co-teacher presence is crucial to sustaining these benefits.

3.2.4. Theme 4: inconsistent co-teacher presence leads to student frustration

Despite benefits, inconsistent co-teacher presence disrupted learning and reduced equitable access to support. Students expressed feelings of academic isolation, decreased motivation, and increased anxiety, particularly when the co-teacher was absent. These findings echo Clancy [36] and Derian [37], emphasizing that dependable co-teacher involvement is essential to sustain progress.

The inconsistency also increases pressure on the lead teacher, compromising collaborative benefits [38]. Equity concerns are evident, as students who rely heavily on additional support—often those with greater learning needs—experience disproportionate disadvantages. Subtle differences emerged: female students and math-only participants reported higher anxiety, while male students and English-and-math participants emphasized disruption to lesson flow. Schools can address these inequities through institutional supports, including protected co-teaching schedules, trained substitutes, and professional development on collaboration. Ensuring reliable co-teacher presence is critical to achieving equitable and inclusive classroom outcomes.

3.2.5. Theme 5: students desire autonomy and support on their own terms

Students valued support but emphasized the need for autonomy and choice in how they receive assistance. Excessive or unsolicited help was sometimes perceived as distracting or patronizing, reflecting Hardy [39] and Guay [40]. Aligning with Blanton [41], co-teaching practices should respect student preferences while maintaining effective instructional support.

Gender and subject differences appeared again: female and math-only students often preferred independent problem-solving, whereas male and English-and-math students appreciated consistent guidance. Supporting autonomy while providing tailored assistance fosters student agency, ownership, and preparation for independent learning beyond the classroom. Supporting student autonomy alongside tailored guidance fosters engagement, ownership, and independent learning, highlighting the need for flexible, student-centered co-teaching practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined students' experiences in co-taught inclusive classrooms, focusing on how co-teaching influences academic engagement and emotional well-being. Five key themes emerged: immediate academic support enhances understanding; emotional safety and inclusion foster confidence; co-teaching improves classroom organization and instructional flow; inconsistent co-teacher presence causes frustration; and students desire autonomy alongside support on their own terms. Subtle contrasts also appeared, with female students and those in math-only classes often emphasizing emotional reassurance and independence, while male students and those taking both English and math highlighted academic clarity, confidence, and reliable support. These differences underscore the need for co-teaching practices that are responsive to individual student needs and preferences. To address these needs, schools should implement protected co-teaching schedules and provide trained substitute co-teachers when one is absent to ensure reliable support. Professional development should emphasize strategies for scaffolding learning without undermining student independence, enabling a balance between autonomy and guidance. Districts can strengthen collaboration by investing in structured co-planning time and clarifying teacher roles to improve

instructional flow and classroom management, while classrooms should adopt UDL strategies to foster emotional safety and create environments where all students feel valued, supported, and engaged. These recommendations align with the mandates of the individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA), which requires students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment with appropriate support. Consistent co-teacher presence, collaborative planning, and differentiated instruction directly advance these goals by ensuring equitable access to both general and special education expertise, while also reflecting international inclusive education frameworks that emphasize belonging, participation, and individualized support. Overall, thoughtful and policy-aligned co-teaching practices that combine reliability, collaboration, and responsiveness to student autonomy can maximize benefits, address challenges, and create equitable, inclusive classrooms where diverse learners thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

This study has several limitations to consider. First, the participants were drawn from a limited number of co-taught classrooms within a specific geographic region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or populations. Second, the relatively small sample size may reduce the diversity of perspectives captured and introduce potential bias. Third, although the study incorporated student self-reports, teacher insights, and parent feedback to enrich understanding, the data primarily reflect subjective perceptions that may not fully represent the complexity of co-teaching dynamics. Additionally, the perspectives of other school personnel or external observers were not included. Researcher positionality also presents a limitation, as both investigators are special educators; while this background provided valuable insight into interpreting findings, it may also have introduced bias in framing or emphasizing particular aspects of co-teaching.

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, incorporate perspectives from additional stakeholders, and utilize objective observational measures to triangulate student perceptions. Longitudinal studies could examine how student experiences and outcomes evolve across multiple school years, while cross-school or cross-district comparisons would help assess the consistency of co-teaching practices in varied educational settings. Such approaches would strengthen the generalizability of findings and further illuminate how co-teaching can be optimized to support diverse learners.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [WASJ], upon reasonable request.

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