



**Elementary School and Pre-service Teachers Learning and Teaching Together Immersed
in an English Community of Practice**

Case Study

Anderson Martínez Palacio

Cristian Cuervo Quiroz

Juan Pablo Pérez Giraldo

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Thesis, Research and Practicum Advisor

Ms. Sandra Milena Echeverri Delgado, Mg in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Universidad de Antioquia

School of Languages

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Dedication

Anderson

To my mother, who with endless love, patience, and wisdom has gently guided me along this journey.

Juan

To my dogs, Sachi and Negro, who have been my quiet companions through every season, steady and loyal as the mountains. I hope you know how much you mean to me.

Cristian

To myself, as a reminder that I can achieve anything I set my mind to.

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Abstract

This study explores the collaborative learning dynamics between elementary school teachers and pre-service teachers in an English community of practice. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered from research journals, interviews, lesson plan reflections, and a focus group to examine teachers' beliefs and practices, co-teaching benefits and challenges, and the impact of communities of practice on professional development. Findings reveal that while elementary teachers face challenges with their language proficiency, like fear of mispronouncing words in English, they actively use technological and contextualized resources to enhance learning. Co-teaching enables elementary teachers to learn new English teaching strategies and methods from pre-service teachers, while pre-service teachers gain classroom management skills from the elementary teachers. The community of practice fosters professional growth through active learning. This research highlights the potential benefit and challenges of communities of practice and co-teaching models for elementary school teachers and pre-service teachers to support their professional growth and improve elementary teachers' confidence teaching English offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers.

Key words: co-teaching, community of practice, professional development, collaborative learning, teacher`s beliefs and practices

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Resumen

Este estudio explora las dinámicas de aprendizaje colaborativo entre maestros de primaria y docentes en formación en una comunidad de práctica de inglés. Utilizando un enfoque de estudio de caso cualitativo, se recopilieron datos a partir de diarios de investigación, entrevistas, reflexiones sobre planes de clase y un grupo focal para examinar las creencias y prácticas de los docentes, los beneficios y desafíos de la co-enseñanza, y el impacto de las comunidades de práctica en el desarrollo profesional. Los hallazgos revelan que, aunque los maestros de primaria enfrentan desafíos con su desempeño en inglés, como el miedo a no pronunciar palabras en inglés de manera correcta, usan activamente recursos tecnológicos y materiales contextualizados para mejorar el aprendizaje. La co-enseñanza permite a los maestros de primaria aprender nuevos métodos y estrategias de enseñanza del inglés de los docentes en formación, mientras que los docentes en formación adquieren habilidades de manejo de aula de los maestros de primaria. La comunidad de práctica fomenta el crecimiento profesional a través del aprendizaje activo. Esta investigación destaca los beneficios y desafíos potenciales de las comunidades de práctica y los modelos de co-enseñanza para apoyar el desarrollo profesional de los maestros de primaria y los docentes en formación, aumentando la confianza de los maestros de primaria dando clase de inglés y ofreciendo valiosos aportes para educadores y formuladores de políticas.

Palabras clave: co-enseñanza, comunidad de práctica, desarrollo profesional, aprendizaje colaborativo, creencias y prácticas docentes

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Introduction

English teaching in primary education in Colombia faces significant challenges due to the lack of specific training for teachers to deliver this subject, as highlighted by Cadavid (2022). In response to this issue, collaborative strategies such as communities of practice have emerged to enhance pedagogical practices and strengthen teachers' professional development. These initiatives not only allow teachers to share knowledge and experiences but also promote meaningful peer learning.

This research focuses on the case of the English Community at the Alfonso López Educational Institution in Medellín, Colombia, a community of practice established in 2019 to foster collaboration among teachers in English instruction, addressing the institution's needs and realities. The case examines how three elementary school teachers, and three pre-service teachers collaborated within this established community. Through co-teaching, joint lesson planning, and shared reflections, the study explores how these educators face the challenges of teaching English, exchange knowledge, and engage in their professional growth. Additionally, the study investigates the exchange of learning and experiences during the community meetings, which also involved other teachers from the institution. This analysis helps understand how the community promotes collaborative learning and contributes to teachers' professional development by integrating diverse perspectives and strategies in a collective space for reflection and mutual support.

This study demonstrates how teacher education programs can play a fundamental role in strengthening collaboration between schools and universities by creating opportunities that integrate pre-service teachers with in-service teachers and academic advisors. In this way, this collaboration transforms schools and universities into strategic partners, working together to address educational challenges and improve teaching and learning processes.

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Context Description

The Alfonso López School, located in the Castilla neighborhood of Medellín, is a public school with approximately 500 students. The origin of the Institution is the product of the merger of three schools, Cardenal Crisanto Luque and Escuela Especial Alfonso López which are two sites next to each other, and the school that at that time was called Escuela Especial Kennedy, located 2 blocks from these sites in the same neighborhood. Currently, the entire institution is temporarily housed in the facilities of Escuela Municipal Kennedy, as the other two sites are undergoing renovations. Two of these schools were intended for children with learning differences, for this reason, according to the school manual, the institution was born as an educational establishment with strong roots in inclusive education. This allowed the Alfonso López school to be positioned as one of the educational establishments in the city of Medellín that educates the most children and young people with special educational needs, fostering a respectful learning environment in its institutional culture.

The school's mission statement emphasizes its commitment to promoting inclusive education and providing comprehensive education to children and young people by acquiring knowledge both epistemologically and ethically. Its vision reiterates their aim to be a leading institution in inclusive education. Unfortunately, their current infrastructure is not suitable for individuals with motor disabilities, which, in practical terms, limits their full inclusivity.

Furthermore, the school's pedagogical foundation revolves around the education of individuals with strong moral values and essential skills enabling them to access knowledge, culture, higher education, and the workforce. Their motto, "We educate competent citizens based on respect and recognition of diversity," underscores their commitment to these values.

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The current English area plan for elementary school is the result of a common construction made by the teachers in an English community of the institution. It is organized into three terms for the school year, with specific objectives for each one of them. The weekly hourly intensity of the English area is set at 2 hours. Regarding the contents of the courses, these are organized around a thematic axis based on the "*Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje*" (DBA) and the "*Estándares Básicos de Competencias de Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés*". Based on the "*Ministerio de Educación Nacional*" (MEN) (2016), the DBA reflects the progressive development of communicative competence in English and provide examples to illustrate and explain the skills in terms of communication achievable by students in each grade. Additionally, the format for the area plan includes the competencies, the area components, the listening, reading, and writing standards, problem-solving questions, performance indicators divided into "*saber/conocer*", "*saber hacer*" and "*saber ser*" and the evidence of learning for each term.

Teachers play a significant role in the institution. They believe in collaborative work and supporting each other. They are creative, and risky and can infuse curiosity and experimentation into their teaching methods. Also, co-constructing knowledge together is highly valued by them. That is why they took the initiative of knitting a community of practice for all teachers in charge of the English Class. They called it The English Community.

The English Community started in the year 2019 when one of the English high school teachers, started working on her master's thesis project related to the teachers' professional development. She noticed that language policies and reforms promoted by the government did not promote a systematic, ongoing, and cohesive approach to professional development for public school teachers (Lloreda, 2019). Then, the English Community was established as a strategy to engage school teachers in learning and teaching processes based on institutional needs and

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realities. Hence, The English Community grew from being a thesis project to becoming an institutional project that has been active throughout the last five years. Although the teacher that started this project was absent from the institution for approximately two years, the community continued addressing its different purposes.

The English Community was originally created to assist elementary teachers with their English classes, supported by high school English teachers. However, throughout the development of the community sessions, it has become a space for both high school and elementary teachers to share their experiences in teaching English and learn from each other. Teachers have been able to help each other with lesson planning, material sharing, co-teaching, and organizing school-wide activities for various celebrations.

Based on institutional needs and their contextualized practices, The English Community has defined four lines of work. The first area, referred to as Teacher's Meetings, aims to organize sessions where teachers can share what they have done in their classes and what they are planning to do in the following weeks; The second area, Teaching Materials, involves teachers sharing resources that could be useful for their colleagues' lesson planning through digital platforms like Teams and Google Drive. A folder on Drive is organized by topics and grade level for easy access; The third line, Teacher's Support, focuses on fostering collaboration among teachers, where, for example, high school English teachers may assist elementary school teachers by co-teaching lessons; finally, in Activities at School area, teachers reunite at the beginning of the school year to plan community-building activities for the school. The activities planned range from celebrations such as Valentin's Day to events like talent shows or English day, according to the decisions made during the meetings. These activities are planned at the beginning of the school year to ensure the teachers give this information to the administrators, allowing a space in the school calendar.

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For this research project, we aimed to involve teachers who were interested in improving their English teaching practices, as well as engaging in the different lines of work of the English community. That is why we selected three primary school teachers who expressed their interest in participating. The idea of working together with them was not only limited to the English community and its activities, but also to explore their experiences, thoughts and opinions regarding English and its teaching. Also, through cooperative work and reciprocal learning, we hoped to enhance pedagogical practices more enriching for both teachers and researchers.

Bearing this in mind, we were introduced to three primary school teachers. Carla is currently the director of 3rd grade, which has 38 students. She has been teaching for 20 years and has worked at the I.E. Alfonso Lopez for the past 8 years. Carla holds a degree in Special Education and a master's in education with a focus on vulnerable populations. Although she does not feel fully confident in her English level, despite having taken some English courses, she was the first primary teacher to welcome English practicum students into her classroom. She used to receive help from her sister, who is proficient in English, to help with lesson planning. Carla is an active participant in the English community, organizing meetings with other elementary teachers to foster collaboration.

Victoria is the director of 5th grade 1, a class with 28 students. She has been teaching at the I.E. Alfonso Lopez for 10 years. Victoria holds a degree in Primary Basic Education and Community Promotion from Universidad Santo Tomás, a specialization in information technology management and a master's degree in information technology administration from Universidad de Santander. One of Victoria's main concerns is pronunciation, a challenge commonly faced by primary school teachers. She also seeks virtual repositories with materials for her classes or creates her own when necessary to contextualize the content. Although, she faces difficulty

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contextualizing vocabulary through readings, videos, and games, she notes that her students are receptive to English and eager to participate. She finds that audiovisual tools like videos, stories, songs, flashcards, and games enhance the students' engagement.

Elisa is an experienced educator with 35 years of teaching experience. She is currently the director of 2nd grade, a class of approximately 40 students, and has spent the last decade teaching at I.E. Alfonso Lopez. Elisa holds a degree in Re-educational Pedagogy from Universidad Católica Luis Amigó and a specialization in Personalized Pedagogy from Universidad Católica de Manizales. Despite her extensive experience, Elisa feels insecure about teaching English, particularly regarding pronunciation. This has led her to avoid having English practicum students in her classroom due to discomfort with being observed. However, she is hopeful that new projects and initiatives will help her improve her planning and delivery of English lessons.

Justification

Primary school teachers in Colombia face different challenges, one of them is the responsibility of teaching their students different subjects as varied as natural sciences, social sciences, mathematics or English. This is even when they do not have the preparation or knowledge necessary to teach all these subjects integrally to their students. As explained by Cadavid (2022) who notes how: “teachers in public primary schools are teaching English because the law imposed it, but [...] primary teachers do not have the necessary preparation to face this task since they hold undergraduate or graduate degrees in areas other than foreign language teaching” (p. 2). In addition, they are required to teach students across different grades, each with varying levels of literacy and specific developmental needs, resulting in a significant workload that makes their labor even more challenging.

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A clear solution to address this issue would be to hire English teachers in charge of teaching classes in the primary school grades, as highlighted by Clavijo (2016): "Putting in place a strong educational initiative for public schools would require hiring good number of English teachers who are professionally qualified to teach in the elementary grades" (P. 7). However, due to administrative and financial challenges, implementing a strategy like this seems improbable. National policies such as the National English Program (2015-2025) do not establish clear measures that explain how to meet the demands of primary school teachers, concentrating their attention only on the needs of secondary and middle school sectors, leading these teachers to resort to other strategies such as collaborative work through communities of practice or professional development in specific areas, which have emerged as valid alternatives to address problems in various contexts, as well as improve the skills and knowledge of the teachers. (Al-Mahdi & Al-Wadi, 2015; Wenger 1998).

However, research on Teachers' Professional development in Colombia, has overlooked the role of collaborative work and communities of practice. Most of the published articles on the topic focused primarily on programs designed to teach English (Sanchez & Chavarro, 2017; Coronado et al. 2022; McDougald & Pissarello, 2020), or to teach a specific innovation in materials, curriculum design or new teaching methods (Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Núñez & Téllez 2015; Novozhenina & López, 2018; Vergara et al. 2009). There are just a few articles about different professional development alternatives such as peer-coaching, study groups, and communities of teachers (Castañeda, 2017; Cárdenas, 2016; Sierra, 2007; Torres & Monguí, 2008; Castro & Martinez, 2016; Sierra, 2007). Most of these research studies have been conducted with English teachers and just a few of them have been considering elementary school teachers (Torres & Monguí, 2008; Coronado et al. 2022). The published articles focus on the creation of these

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communities of practice (Cárdenas, 2016; Sierra, 2007; Torres & Monguí, 2008; Castro & Martinez, 2016; Sierra, 2007), while none of them are working on an already existing community nor are they focused on the benefits of both pre-service and in-service elementary teachers participating in the community.

In the light of this context, this research proposal will be conducted at Alfonso López school, a public institution in Medellín where the "English Community" project has previously been implemented and overseen by the school's teachers. This initiative encourages collaboration among elementary and high school teachers, aiming to enhance their teaching practices in the English classroom. Given this background, it is appropriate to introduce a project that can further support this existing community of educators, fostering the continuation of collaborative work through Co-teaching. Additionally, this project will delve into areas such as the influence of teachers' beliefs on their practices in the English class. Although establishing these communities and planning interventions is a challenging task, it is crucial for educators' professional development. Friend and Cook (2017) remarked on the importance of creating a culture of collaboration in schools, stating, "Of all the complex tasks facing educators today, none is as demanding or as critical as creating a school culture of collaboration because it is a foundation of collaboration that enables all the other work of educators to be successful" (p. 5).

Thus, aligned with the principles of Teachers Professional Development, namely collaborative work and communities of practice, this research proposal intends to explore how co-teaching strategy can foster collaboration among pre-service and in-service teachers within an English community at a public school in Medellín. It aims to respond to the following research question: How do elementary school teachers and pre-service teachers knit and learn together immersed in an English community of practice through co-teaching?

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Theoretical Framework

With the aim of supporting how elementary teachers and pre-service teachers knit their knowledge and learn together within an English community of practice through co-teaching, this study is grounded in five theoretical principles : (1) the sociocultural perspective on teachers learning together (2) the concept of teachers' professional development, (3) the theory of communities of practice, (4) the pedagogical approach of co-teaching, and (5) the role of teacher's beliefs in shaping educational practices. This exploration seeks to shed light on the dynamics of collaborative learning and its implications for teacher development.

The sociocultural perspective on teachers learning together

Teachers are constantly interacting with colleagues, students, parents, and administrators. Vygotsky's fundamental theory of the social genesis of higher psychological functions emphasizes that these interactions, mediated by people, concepts, and shared experiences, serve as the foundation for an individual's cognitive development (Johnson & Golombek, 2020).

According to Johnson & Golombek (2020) "Teacher educators must create locally appropriate professional development opportunities, practices, and resources that are socially, culturally, historically, and institutionally situated in and responsive to teachers', students', and community needs." (p. 120) This implies that professional development must consider the specific context in which teachers operate and must include collaboration among peers. Reuniting with other teachers and interacting with them facilitates professional learning through mutual support, shared experiences, and problem-solving. Through this approach, teachers can have better tools to respond to the challenges in schools.

It becomes evident that creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate is crucial for professional development. By participating in communities of practice, teachers participate in a

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space of learning where their interactions contribute to both individual and collective growth. In this way, teachers' professional development can become a collective process, based on thinking together, talking with each other, and learning by interacting with other teachers.

Teachers' professional development

Girvan et al (2016) define professional development as an intellectual as well as a personal endeavor for educators, requiring not only experimentation with new and different approaches to teaching, but also emotional support when one's convictions are questioned.

According to Al-Mahdi & Al-Wadi (2015), there are multiple proposals to what teachers' professional development looks like. Some may include: First, Observation/Assessment, teachers get observed and then get feedback from other teachers; second, training, teachers receive in the forms of workshops or seminars instructions that they are expected to apply in their contexts; third, study groups, teachers form big groups inside their school context to solve problems and fulfill student's needs; fourth, inquiry / action research, teachers get involved in research to solve problems inside their school asking questions and getting reflective; fifth, mentoring, expert teachers aid a less experienced teacher working together to allow the less experienced teacher to learn from the more experienced one; sixth, Involvement in development / improvement, teachers work together to design curriculum or to improve or solve an issue in their context.

Aligned with these models, communities of practice would fit as one of the methods to improve teachers' professional development.

Communities of practice

Etienne Wenger is known for first formulating the concept of a community of practice in collaboration with Jane Lave in 1991, presenting it in their work *Situated Learning: Legitimate*

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Peripheral Participation. In 1998, Wenger further refined this concept in his book *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, defining it as a group of individuals united by a common interest or passion, who engage in regular interaction to improve their skills and knowledge. Wenger emphasizes that communities of practice are not limited to a specific field or topic of study but can cover a wide range of areas and sectors. For this research, situated in an educational context involving teachers and pre-service teachers, this understanding is complemented by the definition provided by Bedoya et al., (2018), who describe communities of practice as “a group of teachers who, motivated by the shared interest in improving their professional practices, interact virtually or in person to seek and build knowledge” (p. 123).

Wenger (1998) outlines three dimensions for the development of a community of practice: mutual commitment, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Mutual commitment refers to the exchange of knowledge among members of the community. Joint enterprise involves shared objectives and needs, while the shared repertoire encompasses the “routines, words, tools, ways of doing, symbols, or concepts that the community of practice has produced or adopted during its existence, which have become part of its practice” (Sanz, 2005, as cited in Bedoya et al., 2018, p. 124). In this research context, mutual commitment is understood as the exchange of knowledge between pre-service and primary school teachers; joint enterprise refers to the needs expressed by primary teachers and the goals set to address them; and the shared repertoire includes the strategies, tools, routines, and teaching methodologies that emerge from collaborative work, leading to the development of new educational practices through interaction and mutual collaboration.

The community of practice at I.E. Alfonso Lopez has created a space for pre-service teachers to work alongside their community based on the line of work called Teacher’s Support,

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implementing co-teaching as a means for both pre-service and in-service teacher professional development.

Co-teaching

Given the principles underpinning the English Community and the focus of this study, co-teaching, where pre-service and elementary school teachers work together as equals, emerges as an appropriate approach for fostering the professional development of both groups.

Co-teaching occurs when more than one educator collaborates to deliver comprehensive instruction to a diverse group of students, typically in the same physical space (Friend & Cook, 2017). As Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2013) discuss, co-teaching also involves shared responsibilities such as lesson planning, instructional differentiation, and monitoring student progress.

There are several proposed models of co-teaching, but for this research, we focus on the four approaches outlined by Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2013). The first is Supported Co-Teaching, where one teacher leads the lesson while the other observes and assists individual students as needed. The second is Parallel Co-Teaching, in which both teachers instruct the class, but divide it into smaller groups to better track student progress. The third is Complementary Co-Teaching, where both teachers collaborate to enhance each other's instruction. Lastly, Team Co-Teaching involves both teachers delivering lessons together, with each seen as an equal partner in the teaching process.

One of the key benefits of co-teaching is that it fosters stronger communication between teachers and students while allowing educators to learn from each other's teaching philosophies and practices (Williams & Ditch, 2019). Additionally, as highlighted by Khasawneh (2023), co-teaching provides significant benefits for those involved, particularly pre-service teachers.

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Participating in cooperative learning activities like co-teaching helps them gain a better understanding of co-teaching models, improves their pedagogical skills, and increases their confidence in working with students from diverse backgrounds.

A crucial aspect of successful co-teaching is ensuring that both teachers share common beliefs about teaching. This alignment is essential for reaching agreements that benefit the class.

Teachers' beliefs

As Dos Santos (2019) defines it, teachers' beliefs encompass the outlook and conception of teachers' positions, roles, and strategies within the context of teaching and learning. It refers to the actions and decisions that are taken by the teacher in the classroom and that have an impact on the learning and teaching process. Teachers' views on methods and approaches to foreign language teaching have a significant influence on their classroom management, curriculum design, and instructional planning (Dos Santos, 2018).

Based on Pajares' classification (1992, as cited in Gao, 2014), teachers' beliefs are categorized into implicit and explicit ones. Explicit beliefs refer to those that teachers can express or articulate. These are the convictions, principles, or attitudes that teachers are aware of and can communicate verbally. Implicit beliefs, on the other hand, are not conscious and are not easily verbalized or expressed explicitly. To understand them, it is crucial to observe a teacher's behavior, decision-making, and responses in teaching situations.

Johnson and Golombek (2020) stated that what teachers do in the classrooms reflects their perception of their role as educators and, therefore, their own teaching identity. In the same token, they explain that it is important to understand the complete historical and cultural context of both pre-service and in-service teachers. This includes recognizing their unique knowledge, identity, and the aspects that shape their perception of themselves and their teaching practices.

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Research Question

How do elementary school teachers and pre-service teachers knit and learn together immersed in an English community of practice through co-teaching?

Objectives

General Objective

To explore how elementary teachers and pre-service teachers knit and learn together immersed in an English community of practice through co-teaching

Specific Objectives

- To identify elementary school teachers' practices and beliefs about English teaching.
- To unravel the gains and challenges of pre-service teachers when teaching and planning together with elementary school teachers
- To determine the benefits and challenges of co-teaching for the professional development of elementary school teachers
- To describe the new knitting when sharing knowledge and experiences about teaching English among preservice and in-service teachers in a community of practice

Method

This research follows a qualitative case study research methodology. Qualitative research according to Hatch (2023) aims to comprehend the world from the viewpoint of its inhabitants. This perspective takes it for granted that people behave in the world according to their perceptions of the realities around them rather than some alleged objective reality. Qualitative research aims

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to represent the viewpoints that performers in particular social contexts utilize to guide their behavior.

There are multiple approaches to qualitative research, one of which is the case study. A case study involves an in-depth examination of a specific subject without seeking to generalize. This subject could be related to an individual, a team, an organization, a nation, an event, or a particular moment in time (Thomas, 2016). In this research project, the case was focused on the exploration of the experience of elementary teachers and pre-service teachers learning and teaching together immersed in an English community of practice. Our aim was to investigate the new forms of interaction emerging within our educational community and the English class, and the processes through which we co-construct new knowledge. We participated in the four lines of the community designated by them as teachers' meetings, teaching materials, teachers' support, and activities at school. As a teachers' support participation, we implemented a co-teaching strategy with the three elementary teachers, mentioned in the context section. To contribute to teaching materials line, we created a blog to share resources. Teachers' meetings were held as main event of the English community, and we had the possibility to organize reunions to exchange strategies and experiences for teaching English with elementary teachers. Finally, we participated and organized activities at school in English, such as the spelling bee, the English week, and the Christmas concert, among others.

Data collection instruments and analysis

Using a qualitative case study methodology, this research aims to describe the experiences of the preservice and in-service teachers collaborating, as well as identify the elementary school teachers' practices and beliefs about English teaching; To achieve this, the data was gathered from four different sources: first, research journals to reflect on the class performances; second, two

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interviews with teachers, one before and one after the implementation and interventions in classes to learn about their experiences; third, lesson plans' reflections to examine the class planning together with the cooperating teachers; and fourth, a focus group interview to listen to the teachers group's perspectives and learnings from the different English community activities. By integrating the information from the four sources, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of how the work together with the primary school teachers impacted the classes, seeking to improve the English language instruction and practices.

The implementation of the data collection instruments for this research was intended to start in January 2024 and extended until September 2024. Before that, we asked the teachers involved to sign a consent form to make sure they agreed to take part in the study and the data collection. This chronogram allowed a broad period to gather the necessary information while leaving enough space to carefully analyze and understand the information obtained.

To conduct the data analysis, we used the Atlas.ti software. We uploaded the four data sources, which included journals, two interviews, planning sessions, and a focus group interview from each of the three researchers. Once all the information was uploaded to Atlas.ti, we read and analyzed the data. After careful review, we identified common themes, defined preliminary categories, and classified the most relevant information based on these categories. Finally, we observed recurrences across data from different sources, leading us to identify key findings.

Presented below is an overview of the five data collection instruments that were employed in this research:

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Research journals

Research journals consisted of a series of entries that were made weekly after each English class through the entire research period. The purpose of these journals was to describe the events and reflections in the classroom. For that, these entries documented both positive and negative aspects of the teaching experiences, describing also the dynamics of the collaboration between preservice and in-service teachers in the classroom and the reception by the students. The entries focused on what worked well, the challenges faced, the things that needed to be improved, or the reflection by the teachers on their practices. This provided insights into the day-to-day occurrences, contributing to monitoring the advances of the overall objectives of the research, and including an understanding of the collaborative teaching practices.

Interviews with the cooperating teachers before and after interventions

The interviews with the cooperating teachers before the interventions had the purpose of gaining knowledge on the teachers' perceptions and beliefs about teaching English and learning the language itself, understanding the teacher's relationship with the English community, learning about their expectations regarding the project, and identifying their specific needs in the classroom. By conducting these interviews, we aimed to gather valuable information from the teachers' voices, providing an integral understanding of their attitudes, beliefs, and requirements before the implementation of interventions in the English language classes and the school.

A second interview conducted at the end of the research had the purpose of examining the teachers' perceptions and beliefs once the interventions were implemented. It aimed at exploring how their attitudes and practices changed after the implementation of the different strategies presented in this research proposal in the English classes and the English community, and determining how this experience was beneficial or challenging for them.

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Lesson plans' reflections

Reflections on lesson plans were designed to offer valuable insights into the experiences of planning and implementing lessons in collaboration with cooperating teachers. Their purpose was to present this experience through the lens of the pre-service teachers, providing an illustrative account of the events in this process.

Focus group Interview

A focus group interview at the end of the interventions aimed to collect the perceptions, experiences, and new knowledge acquired by the teachers through the different activities that involved their participation in the English community of practice. By sharing experiences and knowledge about teaching English, teachers described, how this exchange had influenced their pedagogical practices and the joint construction of new educational perspectives.

Plan of interventions

The following table presents an outline of the interventions conducted during the research project, specifying the actions taken, their respective dates or frequency, and the methods of data collection.

Community of Practice Lines	Interventions	Dates/ Frequency	Data collection techniques
Teacher's Meetings	Participation in the community of practice meetings to explore their perceptions, needs and plan future activities at school and in the classrooms	During the whole school year (1 meeting per month)	Focus group interview
Teacher's Support	Planning, designing and implementing lessons with the cooperating teachers.	During the whole school year (Every week)	Research journal and lesson plans' reflections

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Teaching Materials	Creation of a Blog to classify and organize different teaching materials such as: worksheets, webpages, videos, flashcards, posters, databases etc.	During the whole school year (Every week)	Focus group interview
Activities at School	Planning and support of English school activities such as English day, spelling bee and important celebrations.	During the whole school year (When planned according to the school calendar)	Interviews to cooperating teachers

Results

This study aimed to explore how elementary school teachers and pre-service teachers collaborate and learn together within an English community of practice through co-teaching. The data analysis revealed that, despite some challenges, the co-teaching process fostered professional development and mutual learning. Specifically, the findings highlight the explicit and implicit beliefs about English teaching, the benefits and challenges of co-teaching for both groups, and the role of the English community in supporting reflective practice and collaborative growth. In the following paragraphs, we present evidence to illustrate how these dynamics contributed to achieving the study's objectives.

Explicit and Implicit Beliefs About English Teaching

This category explores the teachers' beliefs about English language teaching, categorized as explicit and implicit according to Pajares' classification (1992, as cited in Gao, 2014). Explicit beliefs are those that teachers could explicitly mention, such as their fear of mispronouncing words in English and their reliance on technological resources to contextualize English meaningfully. Teachers expressed concerns about pronunciation, often feeling unprepared to teach it, which affects their confidence in the classroom. In contrast, they used engaging technological

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tools like songs, videos, and flashcards to create interactive and dynamic learning environments. Implicit beliefs, on the other hand, are not easily verbalized but they are manifested in teachers' behaviors and decision-making in teaching contexts. Evidence from interviews, co-planning reflections, and journals revealed how teachers adapted their pedagogical approaches to align with their beliefs. For instance, they often incorporated local contexts and relevant vocabulary to enhance student engagement and comprehension. This interaction between explicit and implicit beliefs significantly shaped their teaching practices.

Fear of mispronouncing words in English

Fear about pronunciation when teaching English was one of the main worries teachers expressed in their interviews. While they generally held a positive attitude towards the language, pronunciation consistently emerged as one of the most challenging aspects. This fear about pronunciation was evident in the following excerpt, where Elisa shared, “a mí me fascina el inglés, pero sí me parece más difícil la pronunciación (...) cómo voy a enfrentarme yo a un grupo a enseñarle una pronunciación que ni siquiera yo la sé, de pronto a enseñarles errores” (First interview with Elisa, March 8th, 2024) This fear was also evident when they worked with the practicum students as it is illustrated by the following excerpts:

Yo creo que era como más el temor de... ¡Ay no! Anderson me va a poner a pronunciar, como que, bueno, pero realmente no sucedió, ¿cierto? (Second interview with Victoria, August 27th 2024) (...) ustedes ahí que son los expertos en el área, da como susto el yo pronunciar. (Second interview with Carla, August 27th, 2024)

These excerpts reflected a concern about pronunciation because elementary school teachers are not prepared to teach English. Despite the lack of preparation, they are required to teach the

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subject for two hours a week as mandated by the school's curriculum. Furthermore, they recognized practicum students as the authority in the area which made them feel afraid of being judged and making mistakes. This is consistent with the findings of Olaya-Mesa and Mora (2023) in their study *Elementary Teachers' Conceptions towards the Incorporation of English in Their Teaching Practices*, which highlight that many elementary school teachers in Colombia often express frustration and a lack of expertise in incorporating English into their practices since English has become a mandatory subject based on the Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (2004).

Use of technological resources to contextualize English meaningfully

Data suggested that elementary school teachers relied on engaging technological resources such as songs, flashcards and videos to teach English. They also emphasized the relevance of interactive activities to promote students' participation. These resources were mentioned by the teachers as shown in the following responses:

arrancamos con una canción, o arrancamos con una imagen, entonces ellos ahí me muestran qué saben de lo que vamos a trabajar. De ahí un video con el vocabulario, y de ahí una ficha para poner en práctica el vocabulario(...) Siempre busco canciones, entonces canciones sobre los colores, las escucho, si veo que me permite como que ellos se muevan, que puedan ir poniendo algo, pues que sea más de participar. (First interview with Carla, March 8th, 2024) ¿Cómo lo trabajo yo? con fichas, con vídeos(...) una estrategia muy buena que ustedes están trabajando es esos juegos(...) pero uno siempre trabajaba así como lo más básico, jueguitos, fichas (First interview with Elisa, March 8th, 2024) (...) solamente contamos con el televisor y el computador. (...) ahí tenés el juego, tenés la diapositiva si querés, tenés la ficha interactiva si buscamos una ficha donde ellos puedan también interactuar. (First interview with Victoria, March 8th, 2024)

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These responses reflected how despite having limited training on English, these elementary teachers lean on songs, flashcards, videos and technology to create a more dynamic classroom environment. At the same time, it gives them confidence on how language is used in context based on these resources. For example, songs and videos were used to practice pronunciation; flashcards to introduce new vocabulary or grammatical structures, and to learn new topics or content about different themes. This aligns with Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero (2021) observation that teachers are aware of their lack of adequate training to teach English, so they seek new ways to fulfill that gap. Therefore, turning to technology is another strategy they employ to provide contextualized English in a meaningful way that makes them feel confident.

Adaptation of Pedagogical Beliefs to Teaching Practices: Interactive and Contextualized Activities

Although direct observation in the classroom was not a constant throughout the research, the data obtained from conversations, co-planning reflections, and journals revealed valuable information about the teaching practices of the teachers. This allowed us to see how these teachers adapted their beliefs to their lessons. In response to a question in the first interview about the most relevant teaching approaches they used, one of the teachers answered:

Presentar como la agenda que vamos a hacer. Y luego, pues, empezamos con un video que ilustre como el tema que estamos viendo y ya posteriormente hacemos un vocabulario, el vocabulario lo repetimos y ya pasamos como a la actividad de aplicación y para ellos es como mucho más fácil. (First interview with Victoria, March 8th, 2024)

In the same way, a journal reflection we wrote about a lesson plan design highlighted the importance of contextualized materials for one of the teachers: “Carla also sent me some pictures from places in the Alfonso Lopez for this activity. Since she wanted to teach some specific places

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of the neighborhood in English like church, soccer field, butchery, skating field.” (Cristian lesson plan journal entry 9, May 22nd, 2024).

These excerpts reflect how the teachers adapt their pedagogical beliefs to their practices. Victoria used an interactive approach, combining videos, vocabulary repetition and practical activities to facilitate learning. While Carla, on the other hand, contextualized her teaching by using elements from the local context to teach English vocabulary. This resonates with Dos Santos (2018), who noted that teachers' views on methods and approaches to foreign language teaching significantly influence their classroom management, curriculum design, and instructional planning. This shows how their individual beliefs shape the way they create meaningful and effective learning experiences for their students.

Benefits and Challenges of Co-Teaching for Professional Development and learning among teachers

The benefits and challenges experienced by both cooperating and pre-service teachers during the experience of co-teaching is illustrated in this section organized into two parts: benefits and challenges for both cooperating and pre-service teachers.

For cooperating teachers, co-teaching offered valuable opportunities for professional growth, including the exchange of knowledge through collaborative lesson planning and implementation. Additionally, it contributed to gaining confidence in their teaching practices. On the other hand, we, pre-service teachers, benefited from developing classroom management and teaching strategies, as well as receiving emotional support, which boosted our confidence in teaching English.

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In terms of challenges, cooperating teachers noted concerns about mispronouncing words in English and some preventions about working with pre-service teachers. Meanwhile, we faced challenges with limited time for meetings and planning.

Cooperating teacher benefits

Exchange of knowledge through Collaborative Planning and Implementation. One of the main benefits of the co-teaching process, as expressed by the cooperating teachers, was the exchange of knowledge through collaborative planning and implementation. They emphasized how co-teaching allows pre-service teachers to serve as models, enabling elementary school teachers to observe and later replicate effective strategies in their own classrooms and share them with other colleagues, as mentioned in the following reflections during the second interviews:

Juan Pablo: Bueno, profe, ¿y de pronto tú crees que tu forma de planificar y de diseñar las clases ha cambiado en algo después de esta experiencia de trabajar conjuntamente?

Elisa: Sí, claro que sí, ¿por qué? Porque anteriormente pues uno tenía una que otra estrategia, pero he podido ver que se pueden utilizar diferentes estrategias y muy variadas y más que mira que no hay necesidad de estarles hablando todo en español, sino que inclusive los niños cuando les hablas y les das instrucciones en inglés, ellos te entienden perfectamente y eso era lo que yo, pues eso a mí me impresionaba y me asombraba mucho y decía, pero ¿cómo es posible que él les habla todo en inglés y los niños le entienden todo? Entonces eso le sirve a uno también para practicarlo y hacerlo también. (Second interview with Elisa, August 8th, 2024)

Teacher Carla also highlighted how co-teaching had provided her with more tools to work with her students:

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(...) siento que tengo como más herramientas frente al hacer de los chicos, porque entonces, como yo tenía la clase tan fraccionada, entonces no, ya, ya es más fluido. Entonces, por ejemplo, tú no estabas, pero entonces llegamos, recordamos lo que habíamos hecho, empezamos a trabajar desde el texto, les presenté el texto, cada uno con su texto. Entonces, siento que la clase, no sé, es como más fluida (...) Y todos participaron, y estuve tranquila. (Second interview with Carla, August 8th, 2024).

Similarly, Victoria shared her perspective on the motivational aspect of the process:

(...) la motivación es total porque está el insumo, o sea, si tengo quien me ayude, quien me enseñe, ya eso tiene que ser la mayor motivación y cómo yo le puedo aportar a los otros desde lo poquito que he aprendido o desde mis estrategias, porque no tiene que ser que yo le vaya a trabajar el inglés a otra compañera, pero sí le puedo decir, mira, están estas y estas estrategias, he buscado estos y estos juegos o estas y estas herramientas funcionaron en la clase con Anderson. (Second interview with Victoria, August 8th, 2024)

These reflections demonstrate how the teachers valued different aspects of the experience, such as the use of English, which they observed during the lessons led by the pre-service teachers. This awareness about using English in the class to greet, present the agenda, give instructions, explain a topic, give commands, or play games impacted their perception about using the target language in the daily routines of the class. They also emphasized how exposure to new strategies expanded their understanding of possible classroom activities and materials, growing their confidence to apply these techniques in future situations, even in the absence of the pre-service teachers. This collaborative process, as mentioned by Orlander et al (2020), leads to improved teaching practices and a deeper understanding of the challenges of education by the teachers

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involved. Additionally, as seen in Victoria's excerpt, this exposure is not only valuable in the short term but also serves as a resource for future collaboration with other teachers, thus continuing the co-teaching process.

Professional Growth and Gain of Confidence. Another significant benefit of the co-teaching experience expressed by the cooperating teachers was the professional growth and gain of confidence they experienced throughout the process. Teachers expressed how during the co-teaching they were able to observe different teaching practices and learn strategies that could enhance their own methodologies as it can be seen in the following answer from Carla in the second interview:

Cristian: ¿Qué ha cambiado en tu forma de ver el inglés, de planificar, de diseñar?

Carla: Pues después de haber observado las clases del teacher Cristian y de acompañar las clases y de trabajarlas juntos, creo que la didáctica porque traen muchas propuestas para llevar el inglés a los chicos (...) ahora vemos que el mismo tema que se presentaba en una ficha, se puede trabajar desde un juego, se puede trabajar desde una canción se puede trabajar desde un cuento, entonces se hace más variado la clase (Second interview with Carla, August 8th, 2024).

Additionally, in the second interview with Elisa, she shared how working with a pre-service English teacher helped her build confidence in her teaching and overcome a fear related to her beliefs about pronunciation. She explained:

Bueno, de todas maneras, uno no cree que uno está pronunciando bien, pero como siempre se maneja como esa inseguridad, pero al entre los dos estar trabajando la clase, uno se siente como más confianza. ¿Por qué? Porque uno sabe que de pronto ahí no va a cometer uno tantos errores o no se van a cometer errores porque ya está usted que es el que sabe y

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el que está estudiando lo que es y de pronto me dio más seguridad para lo de la pronunciación. (Second interview with Elisa, August 8th, 2024).

In the same way, Victoria shared how this experience encouraged her to reflect on her own teaching and learn from the pre-service teacher as it is mentioned in the following reflection from the second interview:

Entonces, como retomando es como eso, o sea, yo no solamente tengo que mirarlo así, cuál es su proceso en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de los niños, sino que es como verme reflejada, bueno, él hace esto, yo ¿por qué no lo puedo hacer? O ¿por qué no lo puedo mejorar? Entonces, es más como desde la reflexión, de la práctica pedagógica y del aporte que yo le puedo dar al otro y del aporte que el otro me da a mí, ¿cierto? (Second interview with Victoria, August 8th, 2024).

These examples illustrate how co-teaching facilitated teachers' professional growth by introducing them to new teaching techniques and fostering the confidence to implement them independently, while also helping them overcome previous anxieties about English. It also provided a space for teachers to reflect on their own practices and identify areas for future improvement. This reflects Roth and Tobin (2005) claim that co-teaching acts as a type of professional development, where teachers can learn from each other while teaching, improving their skills and becoming more effective.

Pre-service teacher benefits

Classroom management and teaching strategies. Co-teaching in the classroom provided meaningful learning experiences not only for the elementary teachers but also for us, the pre-service teachers. These benefits covered areas such as classroom management, teaching strategies,

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and the opportunity to receive valuable feedback for future lessons. This was reflected in our Journal, as in the case of Juan Pablo, who in the next reflection highlighted classroom management as one of the areas where he experienced significant growth and support from his cooperating teacher.

It's worth mentioning that this group is made up of 40 children, a size I thought would pose significant challenges. However, my cooperating teacher has been significantly helpful in managing student behavior. She assists me with class organization and makes sure that the topics are effectively communicated by circulating around the classroom to support students. It has been a positive experience working with her. (Juan Pablo's Journal entry 2, March 1st, 2024)

Similarly, Cristian gained valuable insights into teaching strategies through his experiences in the classroom. He reflected on how his cooperating teacher's approach to engaging students with music influenced his own practice. In one of his reflections, he wrote:

For this class I introduced them to a song I want them to learn throughout the rest of the classes we will have this period. The idea of this activity is for them to learn the song and that way the pronunciation of what they would do for the final video presentation would be easier for them. There were some who were not impressed with the song and highlighted that the movements were childish and embarrassing but as the activity went on, Carla started moving according to the video. This allowed me to understand that I should be doing it too. (Cristian's Journal entry 3, March 13th 2024).

In a similar way, Anderson found his cooperating teacher's feedback helpful for his development as a teacher. After working together in the classroom, he reflected on the challenges

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he faced with students constantly asking questions during lessons. About this he mentioned that: “The real challenge was that students were constantly coming up to me asking me what the words meant and having to answer so many questions.” (Anderson’s Journal entry 3, March 15th, 2024)

After class, Professor Victoria suggested a practical approach to address this issue:

Once the class ended, Professor Victoria recommended that to avoid this, what I could do was first work on a vocabulary list so that the students had it recorded directly in their notebook, and once they had it, continue with an activity in which they make use of that list, something that can help greatly reduce the number of questions from students. (Anderson’s Journal entry 3, March 15th, 2024).

These reflections allow us to see the numerous and diverse learnings that we pre-service teachers gained through the collaboration with the cooperating teachers in the classroom. Each of us highlighted how co-teaching and the support from our teacher not only enhanced our classroom management skills but also provided practical strategies to enrich our teaching and better address our students' needs. This experience reflects Khasawneh (2023) view that co-teaching provides valuable advantages, especially for pre-service teachers. Engaging in collaborative learning experiences such as co-teaching enhances their teaching skills and boosts their confidence when interacting with students.

Emotional Support and Confidence Building through Co-Teaching. *The emotional support provided by elementary teachers helped reduce stress and boost confidence. This is evident in Juan Pablo's journal, where he described a moment during an activity when students struggled to understand the instructions and began asking many questions. In response, the teacher, Elisa, assisted him, helping to overcome the stressful classroom situation:*

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(...) This part of the class was a bit overwhelming for me because I had to respond to more than 100 student questions. Despite this, one positive aspect was that when Teacher Elisa saw me getting a little stressed with the students' questions, she decided to help me answer them as well. She organized the students to come up one by one and explained the activity in her own words. (Juan Pablo's Journal entry 4, March 15th)

Similarly, Cristian highlighted in his co-planning reflection how receiving positive feedback from the elementary teacher boosted his confidence “Having the approval of the in-service teacher is so satisfying. Whenever she likes my ideas for activities, I feel like my way of doing things is right.” (Cristian’s co-planning reflection entry 1, May 8th, 2024)

This emotional support significantly contributed to our professional growth since it helped us manage professional challenges without feeling like we were alone in the process, it also reduced our anxiety when we felt validated by the cooperating teachers. This finding aligns with Roth and Tobin (2005) assertion that collaboration among educators fosters mutual support through celebrating strengths and offering feedback. This supportive environment helps reduce stress, build confidence, and maintain motivation, contributing to teachers' professional growth.

Cooperating teacher challenges

Pronunciation concerns and preventions for working with a pre-service teacher. The main challenge for the elementary school teachers during the co-teaching process was the way they perceived their English pronunciation. This insecurity affected their confidence in leading the classroom and delivering lessons while collaborating with the pre-service teacher. This issue was highlighted by teacher Victoria, who, during the second interview expressed:

Anderson: ¿cuáles fueron los mayores desafíos que enfrentaste al co-enseñar en inglés y cómo los manejaste?

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Victoria: (...) entonces yo creo que desafío y será pues permanente porque uno no tiene una pronunciación muy fluida, entonces yo creo que ese es como el principal desafío (Second interview with Victoria, August 8th, 2024)

Similarly, teacher Elisa mentioned that having a pre-service teacher in the classroom made her feel more self-conscious and nervous. She explained that her concerns about pronunciation could be noticed by the pre-service teacher, which made her more aware of her own language limitations and less confident during lessons.

Elisa: uno como que solo se tiene como más confianza, en cambio uno con la otra persona, uno siempre se siente como un poquito más cohibido, porque uno es como el temor, estaré pronunciando bien o no estaré pronunciando bien, eso, pero mi mayor desafío es eso, la pronunciación. (Second interview with Elisa, August 8th, 2024)

In addition to these experiences, teacher Carla also shared similar feelings regarding the presence of a pre-service teacher in the classroom. Like Elisa, she expressed that her concerns about pronunciation affected her ability to feel comfortable and authentic while teaching.

Cristian: *Y enfrentaste algún desafío relacionado con la pronunciación, o sea, cuando te di la pronunciación, ¿sentías miedo o no sentías miedo?*

Carla: Inicialmente sí, sí, incluso la primera que, fue la que tú me observaste, juepucha, me iba como, y sentí que no fui tan, tan yo (Second interview with Carla, August 8th, 2024)

The interviews with the cooperating teachers revealed common challenges they encountered during co-teaching, as all three expressed concerns about their pronunciation, which affected their confidence in the classroom. They noted that the presence of pre-service teachers increased their self-consciousness regarding their language skills, ultimately impacting their

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teaching dynamics. These insights highlight the significant role that pronunciation plays in shaping the self-esteem and effectiveness of the cooperating teachers. This is explained by Olaya-Mesa and Mora (2023), who noted that elementary school teachers' lack of confidence in the classroom is related to their awareness of not having enough training to teach English.

Pre-service teachers' challenges

Limited time for meetings and planning. One of the main challenges identified in the co-teaching process was the significant amount of time required for effective collaboration. Co-teaching, along with essential dynamics such as joint lesson planning outside the classroom, presented difficulties not only for the elementary school teachers but also for us as pre-service teachers. This became evident in our reflections, where we often mentioned the challenge of coordinating schedules and finding time to plan effectively. As Anderson noted, "I think one of the biggest challenges is finding time to meet with the professor to discuss how we would teach during the term" (First Co-planning reflection, February 22nd, 2024).

The issue of limited time for co-planning was a recurring challenge. As Juan Pablo highlighted in his reflection, the lack of time often made it difficult to properly discuss the plans for the lessons:

Although we had initially planned to use half an hour for this second-term planning meeting, the time we had was much shorter, around 15 minutes, so we did not have time to discuss many of the activities we had planned (...) we have constantly faced challenges in finding meeting times due to the teacher's various responsibilities, which do not always allow her to allocate time for these meetings" (Juan Pablo's second Co-planning reflection, May 13th, 2024).

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These same feelings were expressed by Anderson, who, during the conversation in the second interview with teacher Victoria, he mentioned the challenges he faced in finding time in his schedules: “algunas veces la comunidad de inglés demanda tiempo, ajustar horarios, entonces obviamente uno entiende que un reto muy grande es sacar precisamente ese tiempo y la energía para hacer todas esas cosas”. (First interview with Victoria, March 8th, 2024).

The reflections of the pre-service teachers emphasized a common struggle with time management during the co-teaching process. They identified the significant time commitment required for effective collaboration, which included shared responsibilities like lesson planning, as a major challenge. This issue is consistent with Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2013) understanding that co-teaching involves not only teaching together but also working collaboratively on planning and preparation. Both Anderson and Juan Pablo expressed how the difficulty of finding suitable times for meetings and discussions often clashed with their existing schedules, making it hard to plan lessons thoroughly. This struggle reflects the broader challenges faced in co-teaching environments, where balancing multiple responsibilities can impact the overall effectiveness of collaboration.

The English Community: Fostering Professional Development and Learning Among Teachers

As mentioned in the research objectives, this study aims to explore the process of knowledge and experience-sharing when teaching English. To achieve this, we actively participated in and facilitated different activities within the English community. An analysis of the focus group interview shows the dynamics of the English community, including the reflections not only from the cooperating teachers and the pre-service teachers but from all the teachers involved in the English meetings at the school, including Yolanda, the creator of this community who

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returned to the institution after a two-year license. It highlights how this collaborative environment fostered collaborative professional growth and how the use of games played a key role in motivating teachers and building their confidence. Additionally, this section explores the challenges encountered during these meetings and offers insights for building an effective community of practice.

Collaborative Professional Growth and Reflective Practice

One of the main benefits highlighted by the teachers from the English Meetings was a deeper understanding of their teaching practices, which inspired professional growth and a fresh approach to teaching English. The teachers emphasized how participating in the English community meetings allowed them to observe different teaching practices and learn strategies that enhanced their methodologies. As Carla noted during the focus group:

“Para mí las teacher meetings fueron muy importantes para nuestro quehacer docente, ¿cierto? Siento que es un espacio que se necesita en la institución porque a las profes de primaria nos dan un área de inglés para la que no fuimos preparadas. Quien lo haga por, pues, por preparación personal, pues no sé, o meta personal, bien, pero nosotros no fuimos formadas para ello. Entonces siento que las instituciones tienen que tener ese espacio donde uno pueda conversar desde la pedagogía, la didáctica y desde esta área en específico.”

(Focus Group Interview, August 30th, 2024).

Denise also emphasized how technology affected their teaching and the importance of staying updated with current educational trends:

“Bueno, yo creo que hay algo, pues hay una realidad, y es que ahorita estamos permeados por la tecnología, por los medios de comunicación, ¿cierto? Y eso es algo que quiero resaltar porque todo lo que nos han traído ha tenido que ver con toda esta actualidad,

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¿cierto? Entonces con las páginas que podemos trabajar, con toda la información que podemos bajar de internet, con todo el uso que podemos hacer de ella y relacionándola pues como con toda esa nueva era, por así decirlo (...) es muy rico uno untarse y aprender de todas estas cosas nuevas que donde las ve uno, ahí en el inicio donde ustedes están, en la universidad, al lado de ese compañero que está súper joven, que encontró algo nuevo, que cacharreó algo nuevo” (Focus Group, August 30th, 2024).

She also expressed that the meetings with the English Community encouraged her to look for learning opportunities, referring to a course for primary teachers offered by the University of Antioquia, which led her to decide to sign up, stating:

“Nos han generado como provocación, creo que no solamente a mí, sino como esa provocación y ese deseo de profundizar más y aprender un poquito más de inglés. Pues, digo un poquito más porque de pronto no podemos ahora incursionar en un curso completo. Por ejemplo, ese que nos ofrecieron en el correo con los practicantes, creo que yo me inscribí (...) porque eso me lo generó las comunidades.” (Focus Group, August 30th, 2024).

These statements illustrate the necessity for spaces such as an English Community in educational institutions where teachers can engage in discussions related to pedagogy and didactics, especially in subjects where they feel underprepared. They highlight how the English Meetings facilitated professional growth by exposing teachers to new teaching techniques and fostering a collaborative environment where they could reflect on their practices, particularly in relation to integrating modern technologies into their lessons. Richit et al. (2024) support this idea by noting that the dynamics of collaboration such as planning, observing, and reflecting on lessons are crucial for personal and professional growth. Finally, the meetings not only provided an

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opportunity for discussing teaching strategies but also encouraged teachers to participate in learning experiences that allow them to enhance their practices.

Value of use of games and active learning for teachers

The use of play-based activities and games in the Teachers' Meetings were effective to create an engaging environment for interaction and learning among teachers. The teacher Denise expressed her appreciation for these activities in the focus group:

“me ha encantado cuando nos ponen a jugar. O sea, para mí se ha convertido como en un espacio como un ratico, no solo de aprendizaje, sino también de conocernos, de interactuar entre nosotras, de eso que ustedes hacen con nosotras, también poder llevarlo al aula, esa gamificación, esa forma de aprender jugando. Y eso me ha parecido muy interesante, que nos pongan a cantar, que nos pongan a tener que buscar quién es la que viajó, quién es la más alta, quién es la que cocina (...) eso me gustó mucho. (Focus Group, August 30th, 2024)

These activities not only fostered a sense of community, but also led to teachers to reflected on how they could adapt these strategies in their classrooms, not limited to English classes, as illustrated by the comments of Carla and Denise

Carla: Ustedes nos trajeron esa herramienta específica, y lo mejor fue que primero la trabajamos nosotros, entonces uno la trabajó, la experimentó, la disfrutó, y uno ya sabe, ah, sí, esto para mi grupo, ah, esto así, esto así, entonces siento que ese fue como la ganancia más importante en el proceso. (Focus Group, August 30th, 2024)

Denise: (...) también lo mencioné más o menos ahora y es que todas esas actividades que ustedes nos permitieron hacer a través del juego, todas adaptadas, las podemos llevar al aula, ¿cierto? Pues yo, por ejemplo, en mi grupo no puedo poner a mis niños un karaoke

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en inglés en este momento, porque no todos leen de forma fluida y el karaoke lo requiere.

Pero sí, les puedo poner un karaoke en español, de una canción sencilla y trabajar a partir de ello, muchas cosas (Focus Group, August 30th, 2024).

These reflections show how teachers enjoyed the use of games in the meetings. This is significant because for communities of practice to be effective, teachers need to feel invested in them, especially when they can often come off the expense of their free time. The teachers felt like they were not only learning the content of our sessions, but they were also learning new things about each other through the games presented, at the same time, they were reflecting on how they could use these strategies in their own groups.

This was a valuable gain, since as scholars such as Wenger (1998) emphasizes that communities of practice are spaces in which people do not learn only through the content but also through social interaction that promotes teachers' reflection and encourage them to modify their teaching strategies and adjust them into their specific contexts. In this sense, the use of games becomes a valuable resource for communities of practice, as it fosters dynamic social interactions that can stimulate deeper engagement, creativity, and collaboration.

Challenges of a Community of Practice

Time constraints posed a significant challenge to the effective functioning of the English community. Teachers involved in the community often struggled with administrative staff to find spaces within the official work hours for the activities of the English Community. During an interview, when asked for details on how the English community works, Carla emphasized this challenge by stating:

la comunidad de inglés es un espacio que nos hemos ganado con mucho esfuerzo. Porque es un espacio que no es dentro de la jornada laboral, ¿cierto? Entonces, algunas veces

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hemos logrado que las directivas lo metan dentro de, pero no es. Y menos ahora las directivas de este momento no comulgan con el hecho de desescolarizar o no. O sea, el horario de los niños es sagrado (Second interview with Carla, august 8th, 2024).

Denise shares a similar concern regarding the limited time available for the English community meetings. To the question, do you consider the duration of the Teachers' Meetings was enough to cover all topics in a proper way? Denise answered:

Nunca será suficiente, y es real, pero yo sé que estamos trabajando con lo que tenemos, pues, y con lo que nos permiten, tanto lo que le permiten a ustedes como a nosotros la institución, y yo creo que en algún momento lo dije en una comunidad, que bueno que fuera un espacio más amplio, es que realmente esa hora se nos reduce a 50 minutos, a 45 minutos por X o Y razón, y es demasiado poquito, entonces, pero como no queremos y no podemos afectar la jornada de los estudiantes sabemos que es difícil (...) pero no es suficiente, o sea, hace falta más tiempo. (Focus Group, August 30th, 2024).

Evidence highlighted how time and space was not enough to dedicate to meeting the community's goals. Carla pointed out that the directives staff did not consider the relevance of the English Community space for the professional development of their participants. That is the reason teachers of the community have to defend and ask for spaces inside the work schedule to be considered. However, as Denise noticed, the time that is given is too short, which limits the outcomes that can be achieved in these meetings.

This time constraint reflects a bigger challenge identified by Wegner (1998) in his work on communities of practice. He explained that time is a crucial factor for the successful functioning of these communities. Without sufficient time for interaction, reflection and collaboration, the potential for professional growth is limited. If directives do not take these spaces as important for

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the professional development of their teachers and give them a proper place, this is going to affect the long-term success of the community despite the teacher's commitment to it.

Building a Community of Practice

Building a community of practice in a public institution is more than a professional development strategy, it can also be considered a challenge. A successful community requires setting aside individual egos, addressing the school's specific needs, fostering collaboration, promoting teacher commitment, and being willing to take risks. When asked about their recommendations for creating a community of practice in other schools, the teachers shared insightful perspectives. Yolanda, one of the teachers that started this initiative in the institution, highlighted this point, stressing that personal interests must be set aside for a true community to emerge:

Toda comunidad empieza con una necesidad, o sea uno no llega a un espacio y decir voy a crear la comunidad porque amanecí pensando en que voy a crear una comunidad porque yo pienso esto, el yo se tiene que acabar antes de empezar una comunidad, los egos que manejamos tienen que acabarse (Focus Group Interview, August 30th, 2024)

Yolanda also emphasized the importance of building the community based on the teachers' genuine needs, rather than a top-down initiative. She stated:

Entonces desde esa perspectiva ya tú analizas la situación y miras dentro de tu comunidad como grupo colectivo cuál es la necesidad, entonces dependiendo de las necesidades que tú tengas así construyes comunidad, porque yo empecé con una idea de construir comunidad pensando que a las profes les quedaba difícil el inglés, pero la comunidad se construyó en el proceso (Focus Group Interview, August 30th, 2024)

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In addition, Yolanda noted how collaboration among teachers is fundamental for the values and principles of the community: “yo no decidí las líneas porque si las líneas salieron en las reuniones, en cada reunión íbamos diciendo necesito esto, necesitamos esto y a partir de todas esas reuniones construimos lo que está ahora” (Focus Group Interview, August 30th, 2024)

Carla further elaborated on the attitudes that are essential for building a community such as being able to take risks, adjusting schedules and motivating each other. She explained that the success of such a community depends on the dedication and love teachers have for the space, stating:

Crear comunidad no es fácil y más en este gremio docente en el que nos dan el tiempo exacto (...) entonces es arriesgarse, motivar mucho a los docentes, yo agradezco inmensamente la participación de las profes, porque todas las profes que están asistiendo a esa comunidad han dado de su tiempo para estar acá (...) entonces es como primero que se ame este espacio, antes de llenarnos de cosas, porque si no se respeta, se ama y se visibiliza este espacio, la comunidad no crece. (Focus Group, August 30th, 2024)

This evidence highlighted the importance of setting aside personal interests and addressing genuine needs when building a community of practice. Yolanda emphasized that a community should evolve based on collective needs of the teacher rather than being imposed. Similarly, Carla stressed the importance of motivation, risk-taking, and commitment for the success of this community. This is in line with Wenger’s (1998) theory that communities of practice succeed when members share a common interest and engage in collective learning. This aligns with the teachers’ emphasis on collaboration, risk-taking, and a shared commitment to growth.

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Discussion

The findings of this study highlight key topics related to teachers' beliefs, benefits and challenges of co-teaching and the experience of elementary school teachers working together with pre-service teachers immersed in a community of practice. These results show how despite challenges, such as a lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation, teachers demonstrate resilience by using interactive tools like songs and videos to engage students and provide contextualized learning. In addition, co-teaching emerges as a crucial element for professional growth. Both cooperating and pre-service teachers benefit from the exchange of knowledge with collaborative planning and teaching in the Community of English, fostering new strategies for the English class and enhancing classroom management. However, challenges such as pronunciation concerns and limited time for planning also reveal the complexities of working together.

In the field of education research in Colombia, studies have explored the collaboration between in-service teachers building a community of practice linking university and school (Torres & Monguí, 2008). However, there is limited exploration into how pre-service and elementary school teachers interact within an established community of practice. The focus on research for the mutual benefit of elementary school educators and pre-service teachers working together in these spaces brings valuable insights on the field of English teaching in public institutions in elementary school. Particularly, it can reflect the attitudes of elementary teachers who may have little to no preparation in teaching English while gaining confidence on using English in their classroom. Also, co-teaching allowed them to learn new strategies and to implement new resources to teach English thanks to the collaborative work in which they were directly involved during this project.

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The study also unveiled significant common beliefs shared by the three cooperating teachers, further emphasizing the aligned perspectives within the community of practice. One of the most prominent was the importance for them to use technological tools like songs, flashcards, and videos to create engaging English lessons. The three teachers shared the belief that these resources were essential to overcome gaps in their language proficiency, helping them contextualize English in a meaningful way. They also expressed their concern about pronunciation, which affects their confidence in teaching English. Despite this, they remained committed to promoting active student participation through interactive methods and improved their English skills over time, demonstrating their willingness to adapt and grow in their teaching practices, even when faced with challenges related to language proficiency.

However, one of the most surprising findings for us was the level of fear the teachers expressed regarding English pronunciation. While we anticipated some discomfort, the magnitude of this fear was unexpected. The teachers' worry about being judged, particularly by the pre-service teachers, had a significant impact on their confidence in the classroom. The teachers openly acknowledged their discomfort with pronunciation. Their fear was so profound that it influenced their overall teaching dynamics, highlighting the importance of supporting teachers in overcoming language-related insecurities and to promote programs of professional development that support elementary school teachers in the preparation to teach English, a subject they were not prepared to.

Conclusions

To conclude, we can affirm that our research purpose was successfully achieved. From the beginning, we aimed not only at bringing new teaching strategies and renewed knowledge to an English community of practice that was already established but also at learning from the

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elementary school teachers and knit new learning experiences to foster professional development. Although this community already existed, our interventions and collaborations enriched it by using co-teaching strategies that benefited both pre-service and elementary teachers involved. During this experience, elementary school teachers were provided with new repertoires of teaching techniques and pedagogical practices to teach English through a collaborative experience that allowed them to gain confidence and exchange knowledge with practicum students, providing meaningful support to their professional development. In this way, our contribution represented a meaningful step in strengthening this collaborative learning environment. Additionally, we gained valuable insights from the teachers, learning with each interaction and reflecting on our own growth as educators.

While this research provides valuable insights into communities of practice as a strategy for professional development in public institutions, there are some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, although we were working with an English community conformed by ten teachers, only three of them were able to participate in the co-teaching strategy. This limited the variety of perspectives and experiences that could be observed. Additionally, due to time constraints, we were unable to observe enough classes of the cooperating teachers to recognize their implicit teaching practices. Observing more classes could have provided broader perspectives on their classroom practices when approaching English. Lastly, due to a lack of time we were only able to implement Parallel Co-Teaching strategy in one of the classes and team-co-teaching approach in another one which limited our ability to fully explore and assess the potential benefits these types of co-teaching might offer over a longer period of time. Addressing these limitations in future research could lead to deeper insights into the benefits and challenges of co-teaching in an English community of practice.

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Nevertheless, throughout this experience in the English Community, we, Anderson, Cristian, and Juan Pablo, agreed that it was an enriching journey where we had the privilege of learning from experienced teachers who supported us and helped us feel confident in the classroom. Additionally, we always felt the encouragement and willingness of everyone at the school, from the students and teachers to the administration. This was especially meaningful, as it allowed us to participate in spaces such as English meetings, cultural activities, monthly celebrations, students' initiatives and decision-making about the English agenda in the school and to witness an active and engaged community committed to the improvement of the learning experiences of the institution.

Recommendations

After being part of this wonderful experience, we would like to offer some suggestions for engaging in or conducting research within communities of practice based on our experiences. First, as mentioned earlier, elementary teachers may have preconceptions about working with pre-service teachers or even with other colleagues due to beliefs or fears related to teaching English. Therefore, it is essential to clarify from the start that the objectives as researchers are not about evaluating or judging their language proficiency or teaching practices, but rather about collaborating and teamworking. Additionally, it is crucial that the cooperating teachers play a leading role, feeling like creators and active participants in the community, rather than seeing it as merely something initiated by the pre-service teachers.

Furthermore, it is important to listen to the teachers' voices, those who are directly involved in language teaching, to understand their needs and address them collectively with the objective of improving the teaching process and fostering professional development. In the same way, an English community of practice should not be only seen as an individual effort, but as an

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institutional initiative embraced by all teachers and supported by the University and the School to ensure its continuity.

Finally, this study highlights the potential of communities of practice as a powerful strategy for professional development within public institutions with the collaboration of universities particularly in enhancing English language teaching. Future studies should further explore this mutual collaboration, examining how joint initiatives between university pre-service programs and schools can enrich teaching practices and foster a culture of lifelong professional development.

We invite educators, researchers, and institutions to actively participate in and promote English communities of practice, recognizing them as spaces for sharing knowledge, refining teaching strategies, and supporting the professional growth of both novice and experienced teachers. By collectively embracing these communities, we can build a more cohesive, supportive, and effective approach to English education since the primary levels.

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