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Shared Loads, Shared Growth: Co-Teaching Responses to Large-Class Challenges in EFL

Cargas compartidas, crecimiento compartido: Respuestas de coenseñanza a los desafíos de las clases numerosas en inglés como lengua extranjera

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ABSTRACT
This reflective article explores how co-teaching can support EFL instructors in managing large university classes under demanding schedules within an ecological classroom framework. In the Ecuadorian higher education context, students must achieve a B1 level of the CEFR to graduate. However, English is often excluded from the core curriculum, leaving institutional language centers to fill this gap. Against this backdrop, we, two EFL instructors, documented our professional practices during one semester marked by heavy workloads, rotating timetables, and groups averaging 28 students. Adopting a reflective inquiry approach, we collected data through shared journals, weekly debriefs, and anecdotal classroom records. The analysis of these sources was thematic, concentrating on persistent challenges and adaptive strategies. Our reflections are framed by three theoretical perspectives: classroom ecology, co-teaching models, and reflective practice and teacher cognition. Findings highlight six key areas. First, classroom participation in large groups required adaptations such as small-group structures and rotational tasks. Second, co-planning and resource sharing reduced stress, saved preparation time, and enriched lesson design. Third, mutual support proved essential in sustaining emotional resilience, preventing isolation, and strengthening reflective practice. Finally, viewing the classroom through an ecological lens revealed the interconnected nature of institutional policies, teaching conditions, and teacher well-being. We conclude that co-teaching practices should not be regarded as optional strategies but as essential components of teacher resilience and instructional quality in higher education. Institutions should formally recognize and foster such collaboration by providing structural support, time for joint planning, and opportunities for professional dialogue.

Keywords: co-teaching, classroom ecology, reflective practice, EFL in higher education, classroom management

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RESUMEN
Este artículo reflexivo examina cómo la coenseñanza apoya a los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en la gestión de clases universitarias numerosas y horarios exigentes, dentro de un marco ecológico del aula. En la educación superior ecuatoriana, los estudiantes deben alcanzar un nivel B1 del MCER para graduarse, aunque el inglés suele quedar fuera del currículo oficial, lo que desplaza esta responsabilidad a los centros de idiomas. En este contexto, dos docentes de EFL documentamos nuestras prácticas durante un semestre con cargas laborales intensas, horarios rotativos y grupos de 28 estudiantes en promedio. Adoptamos un enfoque de indagación reflexiva mediante diarios compartidos, reuniones semanales y registros de aula, analizados temáticamente para identificar retos y estrategias adaptativas. Los hallazgos destacan ajustes para favorecer la participación en grupos grandes, la coplanificación como medio para reducir el estrés y enriquecer las lecciones, y el apoyo mutuo para sostener la resiliencia emocional y la práctica reflexiva. Observar el aula desde una perspectiva ecológica evidenció la interconexión entre políticas institucionales, condiciones de enseñanza y bienestar docente. Concluimos que la coenseñanza no debe considerarse una estrategia opcional, sino un componente esencial de la resiliencia y la calidad pedagógica en la educación superior, y que las instituciones deberían respaldarla mediante apoyo estructural, tiempo de planificación conjunta y espacios de diálogo profesional.

Palabras clave: coenseñanza, ecología del aula, práctica reflexiva, EFL en educación superior, gestión del aula

Introduction

Studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Ecuadorian universities is framed by the *Reglamento de Régimen Académico* issued by the Council of Higher Education (CES). Article 31 of this regulation specifies that foreign language learning may or may not be embedded in the degree curriculum; however, higher education institutions must ensure students achieve sufficient proficiency to meet graduation requirements. Specifically, students must demonstrate competency in a second or foreign language, commonly at a B1 level of the CEFR, before registering for their final academic period (Consejo de Educación Superior [CES], 2017).

In practice, although English proficiency remains mandatory, English courses have been removed from the formal curricular structure of all degree programs, except those in which English is part of their curriculum, for example, tourism, hospitality, gastronomy, and English pedagogy degrees. This creates a paradox: students must achieve proficiency, yet they are often expected to study English outside their regular course schedule in their majors, despite their limited spare time. To address this, public universities offer free EFL courses for enrolled students. Thus, this is the case at our institution, which offers free EFL courses for enrolled students, contributing both to their academic development and their fulfillment of graduation requirements.

Despite the institutional requirement for students to achieve a B1 level of English, the removal of English courses from the core curriculum has created a misalignment between policy expectations and students' actual learning conditions. This situation places considerable pressure on EFL instructors, who must teach large, heterogeneous classes under rotating schedules and limited instructional hours. However, little is known about how teachers navigate these constraints in real practice, particularly through collaborative approaches, and, of course, there is a lack of empirical contributions of co-teaching in Ecuadorian EFL contexts. To address this gap, this article examines how co-teaching and collaboration support teachers' instructional, emotional, and organizational needs in this context. Therefore, the guiding research question is, "How does co-teaching support teachers in managing large EFL classes under demanding schedules within an ecological classroom framework?"

As EFL instructors at a public university in southern Ecuador, we have each taught for over a decade. During those years, there have been different schedules from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00

p.m., from Monday to Friday, on campus (except during the pandemic), and the official course for students has had various names; however, the objective remained the same. During the most recent semester (March-August 2025), the EFL program introduced four distinct delivery modalities: Monday to Thursday, two hours/day (8 hours, on campus); Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, two hours/day (6 hours, on campus); Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, two hours/day (6 hours, on campus), including a hybrid option with two virtual sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays and one on-campus session on Saturdays.

Within this structure, each of us teaches four courses per semester, with an average of 28 students per group, and the dynamic was based on the second and third modalities. Managing large groups requires creativity and resilience, highlighting the need for teacher support. So, this reflective article explores how we as EFL teachers have responded to these challenges through collaboration and co-teaching practices.

We combine theory with experience to offer strategies and encouragement to teachers in similar contexts. Our contribution aligns with emerging literature that highlights the role of reflective practice and peer collaboration in sustaining teacher resilience and improving instructional quality. For example, studies have demonstrated that peer-supported reflection and collaborative planning improve teachers' adaptive expertise and confidence in intricate EFL environments (Asenjo & Yancovic-Allen, 2024). Taken together, these insights position our reflection within ongoing debates about teacher collaboration, classroom ecology, and the importance of collegial support in higher education. By documenting our collaborative strategies, we hope to encourage institutions and fellow educators to view collegiality not as optional but as an essential tool for teaching under challenging conditions.

We frame our reflection with three interconnected theoretical perspectives. The first one is classroom ecology, which sees the classroom as a living system that is shaped by the interactions between students, teachers, materials, and institutional structures (Tudor, 2001; Van Lier, 2004). Co-teaching models and teacher collaboration entail collective planning and the allocation of responsibilities, which can improve instructional efficacy in large classes (Friend et al., 2010; Murawski & Lochner, 2011). Finally, reflective practice and teacher cognition emphasize how teachers' beliefs, experiences, and reflective thinking guide pedagogical decisions and professional growth (Farrell, 2015; Schön, 1983).

Theoretical framework

Classroom ecology

The notion of classroom ecology, introduced by Tudor (2001) and further developed by Van Lier (2004), conceptualizes the classroom as a dynamic and interconnected system rather than a neutral physical space. From this perspective, teaching and learning occur within a living ecosystem shaped by students, teachers, materials, institutional structures, and socio-emotional conditions. Each component interacts with and influences the others, meaning that pedagogical challenges cannot be interpreted in isolation. This lens is particularly relevant in large EFL classes, where class size, limited hours, and institutional demands intersect with learners' needs and teachers' emotional realities, creating constantly shifting conditions that shape instruction.

Contemporary EFL research has applied this ecological thinking to diverse contexts. Wu (2021) describes the classroom as an evolving ecology that requires harmony between pedagogy, authentic materials, and learners' psychological needs to foster participation and autonomy. Similarly, Rozimela et al. (2025) argue that ecological awareness helps teachers interpret how classroom elements, students' abilities, materials, time, and space interact in

large groups. For these authors, reflective practice and co-teaching are not external techniques but strategies that emerge within ecological tensions to address learner diversity and complex classroom dynamics. Additional studies reinforce the importance of the physical and emotional environment. Zhang (2024) shows that layout, seating, and class size influence engagement. Likewise, Abbas (2025) emphasizes the relational nature of classroom ecology, arguing that collaboration, joint planning, and reflective practice are key to maintaining ecological balance in large EFL classes. Taken together, these perspectives frame our teaching context as an ecosystem in which structural constraints and interpersonal interactions continuously shape possibilities for learning and collaboration.

Co-teaching models and teacher collaboration

Co-teaching originally emerged in special education as a response to classroom diversity and the need for equitable instruction. It has since grown into a more general teaching model that is used in many different kinds of schools. Friend et al. (2010) conceptualize co-teaching as a collaborative partnership grounded in shared responsibility, coordinated planning, and professional parity. Murawski and Lochner (2011) likewise emphasize that co-teaching enhances instructional effectiveness by combining teachers' strengths and distributing tasks, thereby reducing the limitations of working alone. These principles remain relevant even when collaboration occurs outside a shared classroom, where co-planning and reflection are essential to managing multiple large groups.

Research in EFL contexts highlights the benefits of these collaborative processes. Maghfiroh et al. (2025) demonstrated that co-teaching improved teacher professionalism, facilitated the exchange of pedagogical knowledge, and alleviated workload by distributing responsibilities. Yeganehpour and Zarfsaz (2020) found that learners taught through co-teaching outperformed those receiving traditional instruction, partly because shared philosophies and coordinated planning led to more effective writing instruction. Similarly, Boland et al. (2019) demonstrated that co-taught groups achieved higher literacy scores due to enriched input and reduced student-teacher ratios. In addition to its educational aspect, co-teaching also encourages reflective practices. Havadar (2024) argues that reflective thinking allows teachers to synthesize experiential knowledge, while Yu (2025) shows that co-reflection strengthens self-efficacy and nurtures positive professional identities. These findings underscore that co-teaching is not only an instructional tool but also a mechanism for emotional support and shared problem-solving, especially in demanding contexts such as large EFL classes.

Reflective practice and teacher cognition

Reflective practice, rooted in Dewey's (1933) conception of systematic inquiry, has long been recognized as a foundational element of professional growth. Schön (1983) distinguished between reflection-in-action, responding to challenges while teaching, and reflection-on-action, analyzing decisions after the lesson. Building on these ideas, Núñez and Téllez (2015) argue that effective teachers integrate both forms of reflection to refine their pedagogical decisions. Day (1993) expands this perspective by emphasizing the role of dialogue and discourse, suggesting that reflective growth emerges from discussion, reconstruction, and collaborative interpretation. In language teacher education, Farrell (2015) positions reflective practice as a means of examining beliefs, principles, and classroom actions, enabling teachers to make their pedagogy more intentional, learner-centered, and context-responsive.

Empirical research reinforces these theoretical claims. Studies indicate that reflective practice enhances teachers' self-efficacy (Dang et al., 2025), supports ongoing professional development (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Wahyuni, 2023), and improves classroom environments by fostering more effective instructional strategies (Kheirzadeh & Sistani, 2018). Parallel to reflective practice, teacher cognition research examines the beliefs, knowledge, and mental processes that shape instructional behavior. Borg's work (2003, 2015) established cognition as central to language teaching, showing that teachers' beliefs and prior experiences heavily influence how they interpret curricular expectations and adapt their practices. More recent studies (Peng, 2024) confirm that teacher cognition is dynamic and influenced by contextual realities. In this sense, reflective practice and teacher cognition intersect closely: reflection makes cognition visible, enabling teachers to revise assumptions and align practices with the ecological needs of their classroom context.

Taken together, the ecological perspective, co-teaching models, and reflective practice form a unified framework that illuminates the experiences described in this article. Classroom ecology helps explain why challenges in large classes emerge from the interplay of physical, institutional, and relational factors. Co-teaching illustrates how collaboration becomes an adaptive response that redistributes workload and enhances instructional quality within those ecological constraints. Reflective practice, in turn, makes it possible to interpret these experiences, refine pedagogical choices, and sustain teacher well-being. Through this integrated lens, the authors' experiences are understood not as isolated events but as interconnected processes through which teachers navigate, reshape, and support their practice in large EFL classes.

Methodology

Type of inquiry and analytical approach

This study follows a reflective inquiry approach, grounded in our experiences as EFL teachers in a university context. Reflective inquiry, as noted by Farrell (2015), enables educators to systematically revisit and analyze their professional practices, thereby generating new understandings. We adopted collaborative narrative reflection (Johnson & Golombek, 2016), which positions teachers' stories and experiences as legitimate and valuable sources. As colleagues with more than ten years of experience teaching EFL at the tertiary level and five years of working together, we used both our own ideas and those of others. This closeness facilitated a dialogic process in which we not only shared classroom stories but also co-constructed interpretations and strategies (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

In this context, to ensure analytical rigor, we followed a systematic yet flexible thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, both authors independently conducted open coding of the journal entries, online conversations, and teaching notes, identifying meaningful units related to teaching challenges, emotions, strategies, and collaboration. We then compared codes to check for convergence and refine interpretations, following principles of investigator triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached, and related codes were grouped into broader categories. To enhance trustworthiness, we incorporated peer-debriefing sessions; weekly conversations in which we revisited coded excerpts to confirm that emerging themes accurately represented our experiences. Finally, themes were reviewed against the full dataset to ensure coherence, representativeness, and alignment with the ecological and co-teaching perspectives guiding the study. Throughout this process, we positioned ourselves as both participants and analysts (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014), acknowledging that our dual roles shaped the meaning-making process.

Data sources

1. Reflective journals: written after classes or weekly. These captured immediate reactions, emotions, and classroom observations (Farrell, 2015).
2. Weekly debriefs and spontaneous conversations, in person and via WhatsApp, enabling real-time co-analysis.
3. Teaching classroom records: lesson plans, activities, and short notes on what worked or did not in large groups.

These sources documented the evolution of our strategies, emotions, and professional insights throughout the semester.

Ethical considerations

This reflective inquiry did not involve collecting personal or identifiable student data. All observations were derived from our teaching journals, lesson notes, and professional reflections. In line with institutional guidelines for reflective practitioner research, no consent forms were required because students were not participants. Our focus remained on our teaching processes, ensuring that student privacy and confidentiality were fully protected.

Key findings and reflections

Managing classroom participation in large groups

At the beginning of the academic term, working with large groups of more than 28 learners was not a new experience; however, managing four groups simultaneously represented a significant challenge. A recurring difficulty was that more proficient students participated frequently, while lower-proficiency students avoided participation and often went unnoticed. This pattern became particularly evident in productive skills such as speaking and writing. Once students began an activity, monitoring performance was challenging: it was impossible to listen to all students or review every written task, and feedback reached only those whom the teacher could observe. This imbalance created frustration, as it became clear that providing individualized support under such conditions was not feasible.

The challenge intensified as the syllabus progressed. When students had to discuss personal experiences related to accidents, monitoring each pair in a class of 28 proved unrealistic. Although instructions were clear and examples provided, several quieter or less confident students produced only minimal responses, and some resorted to Spanish. Time constraints prevented addressing these language gaps in the moment, and participation remained dominated by the most proficient learners. As a result, the activity did not fully achieve its communicative goals.

After the class, reflective practice became essential for addressing these issues. Through reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983), we recognized that pair work created too many simultaneous interactions to monitor effectively. We redesigned the task for future classes by creating small groups with assigned roles (interviewer, interviewee, note-taker, and reporter). This adjustment reduced the number of interactions and aligned with Zhang's (2024) argument that supportive classroom structures help foster student engagement. Discussing the reflection collaboratively also highlighted that students participate more actively when learning environments promote comfort and psychological safety (Wu, 2021).

Analytically, this experience shows that large-class participation challenges are ecological in nature: they arise from interrelated physical, instructional, and emotional factors (Van Lier, 2004). Our adjustment to small-group roles demonstrates how reflective practice and ecological awareness (Rozimela et al., 2025) can transform a seemingly simple activity into one more inclusive and manageable in large classes.

Rotational participation and group work

A second challenge concerned the limited opportunities for students to receive individualized practice and feedback during writing tasks. Whole-class writing instruction was insufficient for students who needed more structured support, prompting us to shift toward collaborative group work with rotational systems. By assigning specific roles, students interacted more actively with content, and quieter learners participated without the pressure of performing in front of the entire class. This approach aligned with the ecological need to distribute participation and maximize learner contributions in large classes (Zhang, 2024).

During a lesson on descriptive paragraphs, groups of four students rotated through the writing process while keeping their roles. This structure ensured that every learner contributed to each stage of writing. However, our observations revealed that lower-proficiency students acting as organizers struggled without additional scaffolding. Through reflective practice (Núñez & Téllez, 2015), we revised the approach by incorporating vocabulary banks and role-specific checklists, enabling students to fulfill their roles more confidently. This cycle of planning, observing, adjusting, and improving mirrors the dynamic and adaptive nature of classroom ecology (Kheirzadeh & Sistani, 2018).

Collaboration between colleagues strengthened this process. Both teachers designed tasks together (Friend et al., 2010), modeled roles, and later compared results across groups (Yu, 2025). Notably, our collaboration provided dual insights: while one group required vocabulary support, another struggled with text organization. Sharing reflections enriched our instructional decisions and ultimately enhanced activity effectiveness. Co-teaching literature often focuses on simultaneous classroom instruction, but our experience adds value by showing that co-planning and post-lesson reflection can also yield meaningful pedagogical improvements in large EFL contexts (Havadar, 2024).

Coping with teaching load and scheduling

An additional challenge was the demanding timetable: teaching four groups across alternating schedules meant working six days a week, with sessions starting at 7:00 a.m. and ending late in the evening. This fragmented workload blurred the line between personal and professional life, generating exhaustion and stress. The heavy emphasis on in-class writing further intensified the burden, as the volume of writing required continual grading. At times, the strain overshadowed the rewarding aspects of teaching.

Reflective practice became an essential tool for recognizing patterns of fatigue and reassessing unsustainable routines. One realization was that grading every writing product individually was ecologically unbalanced. In response, we implemented a peer-review system based on detailed rubrics. After proper training, students evaluated each other's work, turning the assessment into a learning experience while reducing our grading load. Although not perfect, this adaptation aligned with Farrell's (2015) argument that reflective practice supports professional growth and sustainability.

Co-teaching collaboration also served as emotional and practical support. Although we were not co-teaching in the same classroom, we regularly compared lesson outcomes and shared strategies for managing time and workload (Yeganehpour & Zarfsaz, 2020). These exchanges helped refine practices and reduced feelings of isolation. Although co-teaching research frequently emphasizes shared classroom presence, our case demonstrates that collaborative reflection and joint planning can also enhance teacher well-being and instructional quality.

Co-planning and resource sharing

A key outcome of our collaboration was the development of systematic co-planning and resource sharing. This went beyond exchanging materials; it involved sharing insights about students' needs, adapting activities, and co-constructing solutions. For instance, when a colleague noticed limitations in an individual speaking task, the other revised it to integrate more student interaction. One author contributed creative materials, such as dolls' clothing for role-play, which made lessons more engaging. These exchanges exemplify how ecological systems thrive when resources and expertise are shared (Tudor, 2001).

Our collaboration also addressed challenges related to heterogeneous proficiency levels. Some advanced learners resisted group work, preferring to work individually. We reframed collaboration as a real-world communicative skill, noting that professionals regularly interact with colleagues of varying abilities and personalities. This interpretation echoes ecological principles (Van Lier, 2004), which emphasize that classroom dynamics reflect broader social realities. Connecting authenticity to group work helped students reframe collaboration more positively. In this sense, our experience expands co-teaching literature by demonstrating how shared planning and distributed expertise improve instruction even without co-present teachers (Murawski & Lochner, 2011).

Co-planning also extended to assessment. One author provided feedback on the other's assessment instruments, allowing for refinement and improving their effectiveness. Besides, ready-to-print versions of quizzes were prepared and shared in order to reduce planning time. These exchanges illustrate ecological interdependence: institutional demands, workload, and student needs were addressed collaboratively, producing a more balanced and sustainable teaching environment.

Mutual support and emotional resilience

Teaching under sustained pressure highlighted the importance of emotional resilience and mutual support. By mid-semester, the combination of long hours, heavy grading, and additional responsibilities led to moments of exhaustion and self-doubt. However, acknowledging the shared nature of these challenges provided relief and reframed the pressures as systemic rather than personal.

Our long-standing professional relationship provided a foundation of trust and open communication. Regular end-of-week check-ins allowed us to ensure consistent pacing, clarify upcoming units, and share insights about student progress. Small gestures—messages celebrating successful lessons, humor on difficult days, or meeting over coffee—contributed to emotional balance and motivation.

These experiences echo Borg's (2015) notion that teacher cognition is shaped by social interaction and reflection and Farrell's (2015) view that reflective dialogue strengthens

professional identity. In our case, mutual support became a mechanism for maintaining resilience within a demanding ecological system.

Ecological insights

Taking a broader view, our classroom experiences revealed that challenges and solutions unfolded as interconnected elements. Large class sizes, rotating schedules, and institutional demands are intertwined with emotions, materials, and collaborative practices. For example, weekend teaching shaped our time management and emotional resources, influencing planning and instructional decisions. At the same time, the way students interacted with each other and the way they taught each other were always changing.

In line with ecological perspectives (Tudor, 2001; Van Lier, 2004), our reflections show that solutions emerged systemically rather than individually. Co-planning reduced workload while improving lesson quality, mutual support strengthened professional resilience, and minor pedagogical adjustments influenced engagement and collaboration. Echoing ecological research (Abbas, 2025; Wu, 2021; Zhang, 2024), our case demonstrates that sustaining teaching in large EFL classes requires understanding the classroom as a living ecosystem in which institutional, social, and emotional factors converge.

Implications

To move from our case reflections toward broader meaning, we would like to address the research guiding question: *How does co-teaching support teachers in managing large EFL classes under demanding schedules within an ecological classroom framework?* The implications that follow interpret our experience in relation to this question, highlighting how ecological conditions, collaborative practices, and reflective processes interact to shape sustainable teaching in large-class contexts.

Promoting teacher well-being

Our reflections reveal the emotional and physical strain of heavy teaching loads, large classes, and rotating schedules, elements, or "stressors," that research identifies as major contributors to teacher burnout (Squires, Clarke, & Walker, 2023). International surveys show that more than 30% of teachers across many countries report significant stress (Agyapong et al., 2022), and systemic issues like overcrowded classrooms and insufficient institutional support exacerbate these pressures (UNESCO, 2022).

Within an ecological framework, these stressors are not isolated problems but system-level conditions that shape—and are shaped by—teachers' emotional resources, time availability, and professional interactions. Therefore, institutions must go beyond providing isolated workshops and instead focus on addressing the structural aspects of well-being. Providing equitable teaching loads, recognizing collaborative practices as legitimate academic work, and allocating dedicated time for co-planning and reflection represent necessary steps toward sustainable ecosystems of support.

Elevating collegiality

Our experience demonstrates that collegiality, expressed through co-planning, resource sharing, and emotional check-ins, is not peripheral but central to navigating large, demanding classes. Empirical studies show that teacher collaboration enhances instructional practices and

increases classroom interaction (Rui & Lo, 2023), while systematic reviews highlight that collaborative cultures foster reflective and socially mediated teaching (Şahin, 2023). From an ecological angle, collegiality becomes an essential relational resource that strengthens teachers' professional resilience and expands their pedagogical collection. Institutions can nurture this relational dimension by formalizing collaborative structures such as professional learning communities, peer-pairing systems, and structured co-planning sessions. When recognized and supported, these practices not only enhance instructional quality but also reinforce the emotional climate of teaching communities (Hord, 2004).

Rethinking support

Our findings underline that teaching contexts marked by rotating hours, institutional constraints, and limited curriculum support demand context-responsive and ecological approaches. The Teacher Resilience Model frames resilience as a dynamic balance between adversity and resources, mediated by contextual supports such as relationships, materials, and reflection (Squires et al., 2023). This systemic view is supported by resilience literature. Other resilience frameworks show how teacher well-being is deeply shaped by system and culture, not just personal traits (Whipple, 2022). In this sense, our experience reinforces that sustainable teaching in large EFL classes depends on system-level support rather than individual coping. Thus, public and private institutions are called to provide flexible planning time, peer mentorship, accessible materials, and embedded reflective opportunities tailored to local realities. By doing so, these institutions strengthen teachers' agency and contribute to healthier classroom ecologies.

Conclusion

This article is intended to address our guiding question: *How does co-teaching support teachers in managing large EFL classes under demanding schedules within an ecological classroom framework?* Through reflective inquiry into our shared experiences, we found that collaboration in co-planning, resource sharing, and mutual support was not optional but vital for sustaining teaching quality and professional well-being in complex contexts. Three central insights emerged. First, intentional co-planning and resource exchange reduced stress, saved preparation time, and enhanced lesson quality, particularly when facing institutional pressures such as rotating schedules and assessment demands. Second, collegiality provided essential emotional resilience: informal check-ins, humor, and trust transformed heavy workloads into shared challenges rather than isolating struggles. Finally, adopting an ecological perspective helped us understand how institutional policies, classroom dynamics, and teacher well-being are interdependent, shaping both instructional practices and our professional identities.

Beyond our immediate context, these insights contribute to the broader field of EFL teacher education by illustrating how co-teaching principles can operate outside traditional shared-classroom models. Our experience shows that co-teaching can take the form of distributed collaboration while still generating meaningful pedagogical and professional benefits. In this sense, our case adds to the literature by demonstrating how ecological thinking, reflective inquiry, and collegial collaboration can function as practical frameworks for teacher resilience in large-class settings. Looking forward, we argue that institutions and educators should foster teaching cultures where collaboration is intentionally built into workload structures and professional development. Further research could explore how co-teaching and ecological perspectives can be adapted across diverse EFL settings, particularly in high-pressure or resource-limited contexts. By reframing teacher support as an ecological and

collective responsibility, higher education has the potential immensely closer to environments where teachers and students not only survive but also flourish.

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