

Team-Teaching in Tertiary Level English Writing Classes in Vietnam

A Case Study on the Students' and the Teachers' Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

ESL team teaching (TT) often occurs between native English-speaker (NES) teachers and non-native English-speaker (NNES) teachers in nursery schools and secondary schools in some countries such as Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Nigeria as a way of bringing authentic language input to EFL classrooms and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning English. Up to now, no research on TT in Vietnam's context has been found. This paper reports on a case study on TT of 3 Vietnamese English teachers teaching a tertiary level English writing class, and its aim is to discover both the students' and the teachers' attitudes towards TT using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research designs and a reflective teaching approach. The main findings are: (1) TT in English writing classes was valued by the students who got many benefits from it; and by the team teachers who had a chance to avoid academic isolation and to strengthen the students' belief in the teaching team; and (2) most other Vietnamese English teachers, though acknowledging the benefits of TT, were unwilling to apply TT in their English writing classes due to certain

hindrances (e.g., inferiority complex, lack of time and commitment, and fear of challenges and judgment). Thus, TT should be implemented on a voluntary basis for the sake of professional development.

KEYWORDS

team teaching, reflective teaching, teachers' attitudes, students' attitudes, teaching techniques, transition words



Team Teaching 1 - An English class with a native English speaker at UEF



Team Teaching 2 - A team-taught writing class at UEF

Almost 30% (32 out of 115) of the senior students received low scores (i.e., 40 or below out of 100 points) on cohesion on the final English writing exam in the first semester of the academic year 2012-2013 at University of Economics and Finance (UEF), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. In order to boost their English writing skills, particularly the use of transition words, known as connectors, the school offered a free extra 10-week English writing course—one and a half hours each week—in the second semester. The students with low English writing scores on cohesion were encouraged to enroll in this free course.

In order to increase the effectiveness of this extra writing course, the school had to consider the teacher-student ratio. Students previously complained that they had few chances to discuss their writing with the English-writing teacher in class due to a big class size, ranging from 25 to 30 students per class. For this reason, the TT mode was chosen to conduct this extra English writing course in order to lower the teacher-student ratio when more than 2 teachers taught the same English writing class. In this way, the students would have more chances to meet with the English writing teachers in person to discuss their writing.

On the occasion of this extra English writing course, the study reported in this paper was conducted to discover to what extent TT could help solve the students' immediate problem with the use of transition words and reveal other aspects of TT (e.g., the complexities and strategies to implement TT at tertiary level in general, particularly in Vietnam). Since the course lasted 10 weeks only, an experimental study could not be conducted to see the effects of TT on Vietnamese students' use of transition words. The study mainly focused on the students' and teachers' attitudes towards TT—a topic not much studied and reported in the literature.

TEAM TEACHING (TT)

Definition of Team Teaching

Team teaching (TT), known in the American educational system since the 1950s due to a shortage of teachers and a national concern for improvements in scientific and technical education (Amstrong, 1977), has been seen

as an “extraordinary resilient innovation” (p. 65). In TT—sometimes called “pair teaching” (Richards & Farrell, 2005)—2 teachers are equal partners working together, sharing the same class and responsibility, and dividing instruction between them (Benoit, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005), co-planning and evaluating the teaching performance together. Thus, TT can be seen as a form of collaboration and partnership among team teachers (Carley III, 2012; Stewart, 2005). The number of teachers in TT can be 2 or more assigned to the same students at the same time in a particular subject or a combination of subjects (Johnson & Lobb, 1959, cited in Armstrong, 1977; Johnston & Madejski, 1990). Buckley (2000) gives the definition of TT as follows: “Team teaching involves a group of instructors working purposefully, regularly, and cooperatively to help a group of students learn” (p. 4).

TT can happen between native English-speaker (NES) teachers (e.g., American or British) and non-native English-speaker (NNES) teachers or local English teachers (e.g., Japanese, Taiwanese) (Benoit, 2001; Fujimoto-Adamson, 2004; Johannes, 2012; Tsai, 2007), between teachers of similar age and skills or different skills and ideologies, between one older teacher and one younger (Carley III, 2012), between an expert teacher and a novice teacher (Wallace, 1991), between advanced or proficient teacher and less advanced or proficient teacher, and between fluent, untrained native speaker teacher and experienced non-native speaker teacher (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

The main purposes of TT are to create opportunities for team teachers with different backgrounds and expertise to complement each other and obtain maximum efficiency in their common language teaching mission (Jang, Nguyen, & Yang, 2011), develop students’ communicative competence, promote internationalization, and foster cultural exchange when a native English speaker teacher team teaches with a non-native English teachers (Hasegawa, 2008; Johannes, 2012; Sturman, 1992).

Team Teaching in Cross-Cultural and Interdisciplinary Contexts

Over the past decades, TT has been applied in some Asian countries such as Japan (Jang et al., 2011; Stewart, 2005), Nigeria (Kamai & Badaki, 2011),

Taiwan (Tsai, 2007), and Hong Kong (Benoit, 2001). TT can also occur in interdisciplinary context: courses are team-taught by one specialist in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and one content specialist in humanities or social sciences, as seen in Stewart's (2005) study in Japan. In Vietnam's context, TT is popularly seen in English classes in many private kindergarten or nursery schools, in international secondary schools, and in some public junior high schools for gifted students. In all these educational levels, a native English speaker teacher team teaches with a Vietnamese English assistant teacher usually known as a teaching assistant. So far, no studies on TT between Vietnamese English teachers at varied levels, particularly tertiary level, have been reported in the literature. This is the gap the present study aims to bridge.

Roles of Team Teachers

In TT, team teachers have to work in harmony by sharing particular roles (e.g., giving instruction and direction, taking initiative, adapting or curtailing activity) at particular times in particular contexts. It is not desirable that one teacher addresses the class while the other stands idly by. Benoit (2001) displays team-teachers' roles as follows: Teacher A (leader) is in charge of explaining an activity and giving students instruction while Teacher B (supporter) is circulating amongst the students, evaluating their understanding of the instruction, keeping them on task and answering their queries. Teacher B can write the instruction given by Teacher A on the board for visual reinforcement and evaluates Teacher A's instruction, thinking of something to be added for clarity of the instruction. Eye contact with each other is needed to make sure that everything is going smoothly. Below are different classifications of teacher roles:

Cunningham (1960) suggests 4 general organizational patterns in team teaching:

<i>Team leader type</i>	One of the 2 is the team leader, a high status than the other(s).
<i>Associate type</i>	No one is the team leader, and leadership may emerge as a result of interactions among individuals and given situations.

<i>Master teacher – beginning teacher</i>	Team teaching fosters acculturation of new staff members to the school.
<i>Coordinate team type</i>	Teachers teaching the same curriculum to different groups of students share planning

Robinson and Schaible (1995) display a table of team teaching modes, some of which could be used together in the classroom at any given time.

TT models	Explanation
<i>Traditional</i>	Teachers with similar educational backgrounds share the instruction of content and skills with all students.
<i>Intercultural</i>	Teachers with different cultural backgrounds share the instruction of content and skills with all students.
<i>Supportive</i>	One teacher provides instruction with regards to content while the other supports skill building.
<i>Monitoring</i>	One teacher provides all the instruction while the other monitors students' understanding and behavior.
<i>Collaborative</i>	Teachers discuss ideas in front of students. Course is designed to promote collaborative learning.
<i>Parallel instruction</i>	Students are divided into 2 groups. Each teacher provides instruction separately.
<i>Differentiated instruction</i>	Students are divided into groups based on their needs. Each teacher provides instruction separately.

Roles of team-teachers vary by a particular form of team-teaching. For example, a local English teacher provides L1 translation only while the English native-speaker teacher provides English input in the classroom (Benoit, 2001).

Benefits of TT Reported in the Previous Studies

The previous studies show that TT has varied benefits for both team teachers and students. First, it increases learners' motivation (Miyazato, 2001) and provides a lower teacher-student ratio when the class is divided into groups attended to and interacted with by each teacher (Benoit, 2001). In terms of instruction, TT brings individual interaction and individualized instruction because of the provision of learning environments with closer personal contact between teachers and learners (Armstrong, 1977; Richards

& Farrell, 2005). In particular, TT increases teachers' physical proximity to a greater number of students and to keep a greater number of students more engaged in the lesson more of the time (Benoit, 2001). Second, TT results in learner achievements and improvements in their English (Armstrong, 1977; Johannes, 2012; Bailey et al., 1992; Burke, 2009; Kamai & Badaki, 2011; Kamai & Badaki, 2012; Sturman, 1992; Tajino & Walker, 1998). TT can also provide students with varied language input (Sturman, 1992; Stewart, 2005) and authentic English input (Tsai, 2007) because students can have opportunities to "hear two different models of language" and "experience two different styles of teaching" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 161).

On the part of team teachers, TT is good for promoting collegiality (Armstrong, 1977; Kamai & Badaki, 2012; Nunan, 1992; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Tsai, 2007). Team teachers can learn about their fellow teachers or colleagues by identifying their strengths and weaknesses while setting objectives, making plans, implementing lessons, and appraising (Tsai, 2007). In so doing, team teachers could have an opportunity to teach aspects of English language they know best and to solve language challenges of students (Kamai & Badaki, 2012). This results in "combined expertise" (Richards & Farrell, 2005) of team teachers, leading to a "stronger lesson" (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 160). Within this context, creativity could be spurred because team teachers know that they teach not only for their colleagues but also for their learners (Armstrong, 1977; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Team teachers can get inspiration and constructive feedback from their teaching partners (Benoit, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005), which leads to a good relationship among fellow teachers (Johannes, 2012) and teacher-development or professional development opportunities (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Stewart, 2005; Tsai, 2007).

Challenges in Team Teaching

There are many challenges in TT and differences in team teachers' approaches and beliefs and human nature (Carley III, 2012). According to Carley III (2012), TT has not proven to be an effective teaching tool compared to the traditional teaching mode with one teacher due to conflicts

between team teachers. However, according to Sileo (2011), these difficulties can be overcome by team teachers having an opportunity to address issues including personal pride of teachers, academic position within the learning environment, age, and cultural differences between team teachers. Other researchers (Sturman, 1992; Kamai & Badaki, 2012) also have a positive view of TT, though the efficacy of TT is still being evaluated. In addition, although there are potential and actual problems faced by individual teachers, TT is seen as an effective method of teaching ESL students, and the majority of teachers and students support this teaching mode.

Methods in Research on Team Teaching

As remarked by Stewart (2005), “the published research on team teaching is heavily slanted toward descriptive studies” (Methodology, para. 2). Particularly, a qualitative research design as seen in Miyazato’s (2001), Holliday’s (1994) and Stewart’s (2005) study utilizes interviews; Hycner (1985) conducted a small-scale study; other studies like Tsai’s (2007) employed classroom observation, questionnaire, and interviews. A quantitative research design in the studies on TT which utilizes questionnaire can be found in large-scale studies by Gorsuch (2002), Scholefield (1996), and Sturman (1992); a quasi-experimental design can be found in Kamai and Badaki’s (2012) study. Each research design has its own strengths and weaknesses: while qualitative studies do not seek generalizability (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2004), quantitative ones give only a surface look at TT; thus some studies utilize a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations to obtain an in-depth view of each team teacher (Johannes, 2012).

Regarding the sample in the studies utilizing the qualitative research design, a case study conducted by Tsai (2007) investigated 3 pairs of team teachers; another qualitative study by Stewart (2005) involved 14 interdisciplinary team teachers. Concerning the nationalities of team teachers, as found in the literature, some studies (Sturman, 1992; Miyazato, 2001; Johannes, 2012; Fujimoto-Adamson, 2004) focus on TT between local English teachers and native English speaker teachers while some on local

teachers as found in studies by Carley III (2012), Gorsuch (2002), Scholefield (1996), and Miyazato (2001).

The research questions on TT in previous studies focus on asking team teachers to express their thoughts on what they do, why they do it, challenges or obstacles in TT, and in what way TT influences the quality of teaching and learning English (Stewart, 2005), on interaction inside the classroom, the factors or elements that facilitate or hinder the implementation of TT at particular levels of education, and the extent to which TT contributes to professional development and teacher development (Tsai, 2007).

Research Questions and Purposes of the Present Study

The literature review above sheds light on the central research question the present study aims to answer: What are the students' and the teachers' attitudes towards team teaching in English writing classes at tertiary level in Vietnam? Answering this question helps (i) identify Vietnamese students' and teachers' attitudes towards TT and (ii) inform Vietnamese English teachers, who might have never had a chance to team teach before, of TT, its complexities and techniques, and (iii) help them see to what extent it could be applied in their own teaching context.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Research Location

Three Vietnamese English teachers (one 41-year-old male and two 57-year-old females), who had team taught once before, voluntarily took part in the research at University of Economics and Finance (UEF), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. As suggested by Richards and Farrell (2005), "administrators should actively team-teach to better understand the commitment involved" (p. 169). Thus, one of the team teachers was Head of the English Department; one was the researcher teacher (the author of this paper). The study also involved 15 voluntary senior non-English major students enrolling in the extra 10-week English writing course (one and a half hours per week) and 9 voluntary Vietnamese English teachers teaching at this school.

Research Design and Context of the Classroom

The study followed a reflective approach, one in which data about teaching (e.g., teachers' and students' attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching and learning practices) are collected for critical reflection (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Richards' (1991) critical reflection process, which the present study utilizes, consists of 3 phases: (1) observation of oneself or others; (2) recollection of the event through protocols like written descriptions of an event, a video or audio recording of an event, or a coding system; and (3) review and response to the event by delving further into the event with questions. Since the extra course was very short (only 10 weeks), the students mainly learned how to use transition words as presented in a Table of Connectors (See Appendix A) by Folse, Solomon, and Clabeaux (2010). The reflective approach was accompanied by a combination of quantitative and qualitative research design (in which descriptive statistical data were presented, students' writing documents were analyzed, and interviews with the teachers and the students were conducted). (See the description of source of the data below.)

Team Teaching Research Framework

The English writing course followed the team teaching research framework as follows:

STAGES	STEPS
Pre-teaching (A planning phase)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Analyzing strengths and abilities of the team-teachers and assigning roles: The researcher-teacher was leader teacher giving instruction, while the other 2 were supporters utilizing the black board and circulating the class. Sometimes 1 of the 2 supporters could take turn being a leader teacher;Carrying out the syllabus and lesson, planning and setting goals for the course by the team teachers; andChecking the students' previous English final exam writing papers by the 2 team teachers (the researcher-teacher and another one).

Post-teaching (A reflecting phase)	After the 10-week course, the students took the final English writing test as a requirement for course completion. Then, their English writing papers were checked by the same 2 team teachers based on the agreed criteria to see to what extent their use of transition words improved after the intervention of TT; and The team teachers reflected on their TT, self-evaluating their performance by writing down the experience they had got over the team-taught class and their opinions on TT.
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Roles Agreed on by the Team Teachers in a Typical Class Session

The study followed a combination of team leader type and associate type as mentioned in Cunningham’s (1960) classification and a combination of the supportive, monitoring, collaborative models as categorized by Robinson and Schaible (1995). Below is a typical class session in which the roles of the team teachers are specified:

First, the leader teacher showed how a transition word was used by providing a statement in Vietnamese and explaining how ideas were connected by a Vietnamese transition word. For example, the leader teacher said, ‘Mặc dù tôi không phải là kiến trúc sư, nhưng tôi có thể đọc bản vẽ thiết kế được (Although I am not an architect, I can read the plan). If the Vietnamese statement was translated into English word by word, the translated statement would be, “Although I am not an architect, but I can read the plan”. The reason why the example was first given in the mother tongue was to make sure that the students could understand the reasoning behind the use of transition words. It means that the students were given 1) comprehensible input (an essential component in second language acquisition introduced by Krashen in 1985) and 2) scaffolding (another aspect in second language acquisition first introduced by Wood et al. in 1976 and discussed in Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development). Then, the students were given 2 to 3 minutes to write down different English equivalent translations using the equivalent English connectors (In this case, *mặc dù* is equivalent to *though* or *although*). This task aimed to train the students how to reason and think in English. During this time, the 3 team teachers circulated around the whole class in order to give the students support if requested.

When the time was up, the whole class was invited to read their own translations out. Some students would give the equivalent translation as “Although I am not an architect, but I can read the plan” or “In spite of/ Despite not being an architect, but I can read the plan.” Then, the students’ provided translated statements were assessed by the leader teacher. The leader teacher would explain to the whole class that the students’ translated statements indicated that they translated the Vietnamese statement into English word for word: In Vietnamese, 2 contrasting connectors can be used in the single statement; the students also applied this rule when translating the statement into English, making their English equivalent translation wrong in English since in English, only one connector can be used in a sentence showing the sense of contrast. Then, the leader teachers refined their translation by giving a suggested translated version like “Although I am not an architect, I can read the plan” or “In spite of/ Despite not being an architect, I can read the plan” and explained to them the differences in using the contrasting connectors in Vietnamese and in English and the differences in reasoning when using contrasting connectors in both Vietnamese and English.

After the model had been provided, the leader teacher asked the whole class to produce their own statements using English contrasting connectors. Another 2 to 3 minutes were given to them. While the students were doing this task, the 3 team teachers were circulating among the whole class, giving support to the students if requested.

After 2 to 3 minutes, the 3 team teachers circulated around the class and provided conferencing to any student or groups of students who was/ were done with their written English statements. The team teachers switched the circulated places so that all the students would have the opportunities to work with all the team teachers. During this time, the parallel and differentiated instruction TT models could be applied here. In order to facilitate the students’ reasoning, the conferencing session was conducted in Vietnamese (also for the purpose of scaffolding).

After the conferencing time was up, the leader teacher stood in front of the class, asking the whole class to orally provide their own statements or

examples using the contrasting connectors. The leader teacher assessed and refined the provided statements. While the leader teacher was leading the activity, the other 2 were observing the class and may spontaneously interject a comment. According to Bailey et al. (1992), an observer can sort out the problem more easily than the partner leading the activity and concentrating on the teaching and can restate and clarify something just said by the leader teacher that is probably not fully understood by the students. The supportive, monitoring, and collaborative roles of the team teachers were seen at this moment.

When no questions about the use of a particular type of connector were asked by the students, and when the team teachers were sure that the students had mastered the use of a particular connector, another connector that majority of students had a problem with would be studied. By this time, the team teachers would switch the role: another team teacher would be the leader teacher while the other 2 would be the supporter teachers.

After several types of connectors had been studied, the whole class would do exercises to practice the use of those connectors. This way of instruction followed an inductive teaching method in which practice came first and students formulated the rules on their own, and then they did exercises afterwards to help them master the rules or the use of connectors. The whole lessons of connectors followed in this way throughout the extra writing course.

Sources of Data

The data for the study (collected in the second semester from February to June 2013) came from the following sources: document analysis, interviews, and classroom observations. Specifically, the data are the following:

- i. 15 students' English writings and their questionnaire (See Appendix B) administered immediately after the course;
- ii. The 3 team teachers' reflections on their teaching practice with guided questions (See Appendix C) made after the course as well as the answers to the questionnaires (See Appendix D) of 9 teachers who did not teach the team-taught class in the study; and

- iii. Four volunteer (out of 15) students' individual 20-to-30-minute interviews conducted after the course (The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for later content analysis) to delve further into their retrospective reflection on the TT mode (The questions for the semi-structured interviews, gleaned from the students' answers in the students' questionnaires, were checked by the 3 team teachers for clarity before they were used).

Data analysis

First, the students' final English writing exam papers taken after the TT classes were analyzed to find out what transition words they used and how they used them; then, the student questionnaire was analyzed to produce descriptive statistics. Second, the 3 team teachers' reflections on their own team teaching practice were analyzed and interpreted using the content analysis method to uncover common themes. The questionnaire answered by the other 9 voluntary Vietnamese English teachers was also analyzed. Third, 4 voluntary students' individual semi-structured interviews of 20 to 30 minutes were transcribed, and the content analysis method was also used to process the data. In brief, the data from the student interview transcriptions, the student questionnaire, the teacher questionnaire, and the teachers' reflections were analyzed and coded according to 2 main themes: the students' and the teachers' attitudes. The students' use of transition words after the intervention of TT, though not the focus of the study, was also analyzed to see to what extent the TT mode affected the students' use of transition words.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Team teachers' Reflections

In accordance with the reflective approach, the team teachers reflected on their teaching practice. Thus, this section displays their team teaching experience.

The first issue is about mutual trust and respect in TT. In the team-taught class, as reflected by all, more or less professional knowledge, expertise, and perspectives were displayed and all were, to some extent, afraid of

expressing opinions as well as professional knowledge as greater or lesser than the teaching partners'. This finding is similar to that in Stewart's (2005) study, in which one team teacher admitted that team teaching made her scared and that it was a very frightening experience for her. However, this feeling could be overcome by mutual trust and respect among the team teachers and by their developing an open, non-aggressive communication style for the sake of achieving the set goals of teaching, as remarked by Stewart (2005).

The second important factor is open-mindedness and flexibility. It was agreed that a team teacher needed to be open to his/her co-teachers' different opinions, and even though the roles of each team teacher had been clearly assigned, the team teachers could help his/ her teaching partner to solve ad-hoc problems or unexpected issues in class. One teacher said:

Sometimes I was suddenly asked by another team teacher, and because of being asked without notice, I could not find a sound answer to that immediate question. To cope with this situation, I think that I should say something even though not directly relevant to the question. I think that keeping silent then would cause the students to mistrust the teaching team, which might lead to a slow-moving and boring class.

Thus, in an unexpected situation (e.g., team teachers were consulted by their teaching partners in front of the students), it was required of the team teachers to have confidence to find a suitable way of solving an ad-hoc problem so as to strengthen the students' belief in the teaching team. According to one teacher in Richards and Farrell's (2005) study, team teachers must be ready to improvise—a technique that team teachers need to learn and a technique that leads to confidence, creativity, and flexibility in teaching. In addition, discussion, negotiation, and consultation among the team teachers in front of the students would cause confusion among the latter since they would probably not know who to follow, especially when there were differing ideas among the team teachers. Thus, one important technique is that the leader teacher should summarize and finalize the discussed points so that all the team teachers could reach a consensus. If not, the students would be confused when hearing discussions in front of them. According to Stewart

(2005), if bad feelings or tension exist among team teachers, the students would sense it right away and the team teachers should not make students see that the partnership among the team teachers is in conflict. The situation in the present study shows that it is important that teachers need to recognize and accept that all teachers have strengths and weaknesses and be able to acknowledge that, so that they can hand over a question which is not in their area of strength to another teacher—this causes no confusion for learners; learners also know that all teachers do not know everything and have the greatest respect for those teachers who can acknowledge this.

Other teaching technique as found in Tsai's (2007) study is that team teachers could learn from each other are techniques in delivering content, presenting language structures, checking students' understanding, managing the class, and dealing with conflicting ideas among team teachers. The lack of these teaching techniques would make team teaching impossible. For example, in Tsai's (2007) study, one pair of team teachers decided that their team teaching experience was a failure just because they had a problem in communicating with each other.

The third factor is the background the team teachers come from. All acknowledged that one of the reasons why this team got along well with one another in class is a shared educational background: 2 teachers were trained in the same post graduate program in Australia, and therefore had the same teaching principles and philosophy and the same values; the researcher-teacher had been one of these teacher's undergraduate student; thus the same teaching values and principles were shared. As a result, all were keen to learn from each other and to be involved in collaborative language teaching—a characteristic of TT as mentioned by Nunan (1992) . This finding is consistent with a case reported in Richards and Farrell's (2005) study that a teacher was amazed at the harmony in working with another teacher with the same teaching style. It can be seen that TT can be facilitated by good interpersonal contact among team teachers.

The fourth reflection is about professional development. One teacher said that TT helped her to be more confident in teaching advanced academic writing when her thinking and reasoning were refined by both the team

teachers and the students. It helped her know how to acknowledge the students' ideas, to accept their ideas, and to help them refine their ideas and reasoning. She added that TT helped her avoid academic isolation—a situation in which one keeps what he/she learns for himself/herself—by sharing what she knew with the team teachers so as to refine her understanding and to discover deeper dimensions of knowledge. This finding confirms Johnston and Madejski's (1990) and Stewart's (2005) remark that TT helps break the isolation of the individual teacher which is seen in a solo-taught class. This finding is consistent with the finding in Tsai's (2007) study that team teachers as sources of professional development complemented each other to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

The last reflection is that TT is suitable not only for teaching reading as reported in Richards and Farrell's (2005) study but also for writing as shown in the present study. In the team-taught writing class, as remarked by the students, they had opportunities to learn from different teachers who shared varied ways of writing and expressing ideas. On the part of the team teachers, it was realized that TT lessened work load and work pressure owing to support from partners: while one teacher was giving an instruction or explaining a way of writing, the other teacher(s) observed and thought of other better ways to give instruction or examples to demonstrate a particular point. This finding is consistent with Amrstrong's (1977) and Kamai and Badaki's (2012) remarks. TT in writing also brought another benefit concerning assessing students' writing: the team teachers had time to discuss and analyze the students' writing so as to reach a more objective and practical way of assessment.

Students' Feedback on TT

The statistics show that most students (80%) agreed that the team-taught writing class was effective and suitable for their existing English level, while 1/3 said that the effectiveness was at satisfactory level; none of them said that the team-taught class was not effective. Regarding what the students achieved, 73.3% said that they knew how to make arguments using transition words; 2/3 of the students felt more confident about using transition words

because they understood the lessons and knew how to make arguments using transition words. Their detailed feedback is as follows:

First, they had more opportunities to practice using transition words with guidance from the team-teachers in one-on-one conferencing sessions, knew how to use them through their peers' writing displayed on the board, and had more opportunities to discuss with the team teachers on a one-on-one basis to help them produce longer sentences. One student recollected:

In a team-taught class with 2 or 3 teachers, I have many opportunities to consult the teachers when my writing is ready. . . In a regular English writing class of up to 20 students or more, there is only one teacher in class. If my friend is consulting the teacher, I have to wait and keep silent, and if all of us ask the teacher, there will be a waste of class time. So we just go online to find the answers to our own questions but we know that most of the time we cannot find the correct answers and we are not sure whether the answers we have found are right or wrong. Thus learning English writing with 3 teachers in a class helps me a lot when I have questions and when I need my grammar to be corrected or checked.

The student's remark above once again confirms the benefit of individualized instruction provided in a team-taught class. This is consistent with Benoit's (2001) remark that TT provides a lower teacher-student ratio which motivates language learners and, as seen in this study, motivates the students to approach the writing teachers for consultation. It is for these benefits that the students prefer this team-taught English writing class to a regular English writing class with a traditional 1 teacher-1 class ratio.

Aside from the use of transition words, as remarked by 80% of the students, the teachers had more time to read students' writing and help them with their other linguistic components such as grammar and vocabulary on an individual basis. As a result, the students felt that their needs and problems with language generally were attended to and solved. More importantly, their reasoning improved as a result of individual discussions about their own writing with the team-teachers.

Next, 2 out of the 4 interviewed students agreed that TT was very interesting in the sense that the team teachers discussed and found the best way to

give instruction and explain a particular point. One reported that she was a little confused when seeing the team teachers discuss in front of the class and she did not know who to follow. Another interviewed student initially had the same response, but she added that though confused a little at first, she got the point when the leader teacher summarized what was being discussed and offered the final solution. The technique of giving a summary of what was being discussed in order to remove the students' confusion was a challenge the team teachers faced (Carley III, 2012); this technique should be employed to resolve the possible conflicts among the team teachers.

Finally, all the students agreed that the team-taught class was fun because the team teachers illustrated the examples of use of transition words by telling fun anecdotes, leading to a reduction of pressure even though there were 3 teachers teaching at the same time. In theory, students could experience more pressure when being under the surveillance of more than one teacher. In practice, however, when the teaching practice of the team teachers was in harmony and when they knew how to give instruction and explain lessons with fun stories, students would feel comfortable and learn. This is one more technique—a key to the success of TT—the team teachers applied while team teaching.

Students' Use of Transition Words

The students' use of transition words shown in the final English writing exam papers shows the following: (1) The scores for transition words of 7 out of 15 papers (46.66%) were still below average; (2) the scores of 4 other papers (26.66%) remained almost the same as their previous average scores in the previous semester; and (3) only 4 papers (26.66%) showed improvement in the use of transition words: the writers used more transition words and their use was varied and proper; for example, while they consistently used “for example” when giving illustrations in the previous writing papers, they used “for instance” aside from “for example” after the course; in addition, one student used “in addition” aside from “besides.”

One student explained her low writing score as follows:

In the team-taught class, I learned a lot and understood the ways to use transition words; however, I did not review the lessons at home, which resulted in my low writing scores.

Another interviewed student said:

I was just able to use transition words when I had ideas to follow up my arguments. I mean if I have ideas to follow up the previous ideas, I would use transition words to link ideas together. Due to lack of vocabulary, I could not generate ideas. Consequently, I did not use transition words though I knew how to use them.

The above remark indicates that the main reason that the student failed to use transition words is lack of vocabulary and ideas. This indicates that the use of transition words first requires students to have enough language input (i.e., vocabulary and ideas). Language input can be provided through reading passages given to them earlier (before the lesson of transition words).

While the majority (66.7%) felt more confident about using transition words after the course, 33.3% did not due to the following reasons: (1) Their English proficiency was generally not as high as expected to understand what the teachers explained; in consequence, they did not figure out how to use transition words in particular structures; (2) they could not generate enough supporting ideas; (3) their vocabulary was limited; and (4) they could not understand the writing prompts due to lack of vocabulary. Despite the aforementioned statistics, all of them would like to attend the next team-taught writing class and suggested that more team-taught writing sessions per week be offered. The subjects in the studies by Bailey et al. (1992), Burke (2009), Johannes (2012), Sturman (1992), and Tajino and Walker (1998) also prefer team-taught classes.

The above statistics indicate that the use of transition words to make reasoning first requires students to have certain level of English proficiency in terms of lexicon and grammar. Next, they lacked supporting ideas, which means that they failed to generate ideas. This picture reveals that the students

had not mastered brainstorming skills. As a consequence, they failed to use transition words due to lack of ideas.

Other Teachers' Opinions on TT

In order to know how other teachers viewed TT, a questionnaire was administered to Vietnamese English teachers teaching English at the university. Nine out of 14 Vietnamese English teachers voluntarily participated in the study by answering the questionnaire. Five teachers had not team taught before, and the other 4 had for from one month to six months. Out of these 4 teachers, 3 said that they were not ready for team teaching English writing, though they acknowledged the benefits of TT. Of the other 5, 3 were ready if assigned to team teach and 2 did not make any decision, uncertain whether they were ready for TT. It means that less than 1/3 (4 out of 15) of the participant teachers liked TT and were ready for this teaching mode.

The benefits of TT acknowledged by the teachers are the following: (1) Students have more opportunities to consult writing teachers and practice writing more; individual students are attended to and feel less bored; students would have more support in class; (2) teachers would feel more relaxed when the work load is shared; (3) they do not have to spend as much time for lesson planning as in teaching alone; (4) more importantly, they could learn interesting things and creative teaching practice from each other to professionally develop themselves; (5) their lesson planning would be commented on by team teachers so that their future teaching practice would be better; (6) they have more time for students; and finally, (7) the assessing process would be objective and not as burdened in traditional English writing classes with only one teacher.

Aside from the acknowledged benefits, there are varied reasons hindering the teachers' readiness for TT, and most hindering factors on the teachers' part are as follows: (1) The teachers are afraid that TT would cause students confusion; (2) Teachers are afraid of working not in perfect harmony with one another (the best way to avoid this is to voluntarily let the other team teacher lead the class); (3) they have other commitments to their family, to other schools, etc., so they could not schedule their time table for TT, and

they do not want to spend time planning lessons with other teachers before the class, discussing and evaluating with other teachers after the lesson; (4) They worry that TT would cost double or even triple since the school has to pay 2 or 3 teachers teaching one class at the same time; and (5) teachers still feel comfortable teaching alone; they would have a constant feeling of unease or of inhibition due to having a feeling of being compared to other teachers or judged by students, other teachers, and even administrators.

As presented above, both the students and the team teachers in the study had positive attitudes to TT, and the Head of the English Department acknowledged these benefits of TT. However, the biggest obstacle to the implementation of TT, according to her, is the teachers' psychological attitudes: most of them are afraid to team teach because of inferiority complex and of inability to catch up with their team teachers. Another obstacle is about economic benefits: the school has to pay double or even triple for a team-taught class while its effectiveness cannot be seen immediately; students' English language proficiency improvement could be reached long after the course when they have much more time practicing what they have learned in a team-taught writing class. The third one, though not as essential as the first 2, is that most teachers are afraid to face new challenges; they do not want their safe teaching routine to be disrupted by TT—a teaching mode that is quite new and challenging to them. Due to these obstacles, she adds, TT could be implemented on a voluntary basis: The department encourages the Vietnamese English teachers to voluntarily team teach with other teachers without pay for the sake of professional faculty development. Her observation to some extent matches Richards and Farrell's (2015) remark that TT is not for all teachers.

CONCLUSION

The present case study investigated the practice of team teaching of 3 Vietnamese English teachers in an English writing class at University of Economics and Finance (UEF) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, which focused on the use of English connectors (transition words). Aside from the 3 team teachers, there were another 9 Vietnamese English teachers who volun-

tarily answered the questionnaire and 15 voluntary students taking the extra English writing class with the hope to improve their use of English connectors. The study followed a qualitative and quantitative research design in order to discover the teachers' and students' attitudes towards this teaching mode and the effects of this teaching mode on the use of English connectors. The conclusions of the study are summarized below:

First, the teaching styles employed in the team teaching mode are team leader type, associate type and a combination of the supportive, monitoring, and collaborative models. Second, TT in English writing classes was valued by 1/3 of the participant teachers, including the team teachers in the study who realized that TT helped professionally develop themselves: they learned how to cope with ad-hoc situations in class, how to be flexible and creative in teaching, how to avoid academic isolation, how to be confident in teaching advanced English writing, and how to strengthen students' belief in the teaching team by spontaneously applying teaching techniques (e.g., improvising, providing immediate answers to other team teachers' questions even though their answers are not much relevant, summarizing instruction, and telling fun anecdotes). In addition, they also admitted that TT helped develop collegial relationships among team teachers.

However, about 2/3 of the teachers who answered the questionnaire, though acknowledging the benefits of TT, seemed hesitant about applying this teaching mode in their own English writing classes due to varied reasons (e.g., fears of causing students confusion, of not working in harmony with other teachers, of being judged and compared to other teachers, of new challenges in TT, and of more cost for the school; inferiority complex; and other commitments to fulfill). Most of the reasons came from the teachers' part rather than from the students'. In regard to teachers' attitudes to TT, the study triggers a question of whether the universal observation that most teachers support TT is always true, particularly in a country like Vietnam. In other words, TT seems not to be appropriate for all teachers. It is required of those who are interested in TT to have certain characteristics, especially extrovert ones such as willingness to learn from others, to show their own values in front of others and to overcome inferiority complex.

Like 1/3 of the participant teachers who supported TT, all the students in the team-taught class who got many benefits from TT in the English writing class had positive attitudes toward TT because they had more writing practice in class, more student-teacher interaction owing to a low teacher-student ratio, more individualized instruction, more chances to approach writing teachers and learn more from them, and more opportunities to learn reasoning and for grammar correction. However, some students felt confused in the team-taught class when more than 2 teachers gave instruction in the same class.

Next, successful application of TT depends on other factors such as mutual trust and respect amongst team teachers, teachers' open-mindedness and flexibility, tolerance of differences, teachers' techniques of improvisation in the team-taught class, teachers' confidence in showing their expertise and professional knowledge in public and in sharing their knowledge with the team teachers in front of the students, team teachers' same academic backgrounds, spirit of collaboration among team teachers, and teaching techniques (e.g., ways of dealing with conflicting ideas among the team teachers, and telling anecdotes in class to help students reduce the feeling of surveillance when there are more than 2 team teachers in the same class). The successful implementation of TT also depends on the students' cooperation and responsibility for their own learning: they should review the lesson instructed in class to help them master what had been taught in the team-taught class.

Team teaching practice depends not only on the teachers' and students' attitudes but also on the institution's administration and support. In the present study, some teachers showed their hesitancy about the practice of team teaching for fear that it would place a financial burden on the institution when the teaching remuneration would increase. The institution's attitudes to TT and support also affect the implementation of this teaching mode in English classes, especially English writing classes.

Finally, this present study helps researchers, teachers, and administrators in Vietnam understand the complexities of team teaching—a teaching

mode not widely applied in Vietnam at tertiary level at the time of the present study.

Implications

First, for the sake of faculty development, the department of English should organize more workshops or colloquiums periodically so that faculty members will have more opportunities to share teaching experience and get used to sharing opinions with one another in public. In so doing, they would be less afraid of expressing their opinions, showing their professional knowledge in front of others, and consulting other teachers in public. In the long run, teachers would be more open to public discussion and different perspectives coming from other teachers. They would also be encouraged to discuss with or consult other teachers to get necessary information, knowledge, and reasonable answers to the students' questions. As suggested by Tsai (2007), "team teachers need to learn, before team teaching begins, how to make their knowledge explicit and accessible to their team teaching partners in order to promote 2-way learning" (p. 280).

This means that faculty development would result in bringing more mutual trust and respect among teachers, helping them work in harmony with one another, and making them more open to different perspectives or differences in opinions and to flexibility. These elements are necessary for teachers when team teaching. When teachers still prefer to teach alone and do not like to be observed by other teachers or administrators due to lack of mutual trust or respect among teachers (for fear that their teaching performance would be compared to others'), they will be resistant to team teaching.

Another element related to faculty development is enhancement of teachers' technique of improvisation in language teaching, a technique that is trained for public speaking. The department should organize from time to time a course in public speaking in language teaching for language teachers, which would increase language teachers' confidence—a characteristic that helps them overcome inferiority complex when they engage in team teaching. These 2 ways of faculty development would reinforce the spirit of

collaboration and partnership amongst language teachers. In turn, collaboration amongst teachers helps develop language teachers professionally.

As shown in the present study, about 1/3 of the faculty members had team taught by the time of the present study, meaning that team teaching in English writing classes was not popular among Vietnamese English teachers. It is suggested, then, that professional workshops on this teaching mode be organized so that more teachers would be equipped with an additional teaching mode and apply it not only in English writing classes but also in classes of other English language skills.

While it is difficult for teachers to spend part of their tight teaching schedule attending a seminar for professional development, TT seems to be a solution that serves many beneficial outcomes for both students and teachers themselves in a way that teachers can gain hands-on experience from their teaching partners while they are team teaching. As acknowledged by Bailey et al. (1992) and Tsai (2007), TT is a source of ongoing valuable professional development and growth. Team teachers can understand strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching styles and methods, learn from each other, and make changes to one's teaching practices based on the curriculum, learner needs and the institution of the school (Steward, 2005).

Next, in order for learners' language learning process in the team teaching mode to be successful, it is required of them to collaborate with language teachers in terms of taking more responsibility for their own learning. In the present study, some students did not make improvements in their English writing after the extra English writing course due to failure to review their lesson at home as admitted by one student. Thus, language learning process is an interactional process carried out by both teachers and language learners.

As presented above, one of the reasons why some students did not improve their English use of transition words is because they lacked ideas and vocabulary to follow up the arguments. In this case, it is suggested that the students should be encouraged to read extensively to increase their lexicon and general knowledge or common sense. In other words, reading extensively helps provide students with more language input—an aspect that

is crucial in second language acquisition and language production. As shown in the present study, some students failed to generate ideas; consequently, they failed to use transition words. It means that they may not be good at brainstorming. Pedagogically, the students should review or train in brainstorming skills so that they can generate enough ideas and link them using proper transition words.

Next, some students did not improve their use of English transition words just because they did not know how to reason or make arguments. It can be inferred from this that the students might lack reasoning skills. If so, the students should learn how to make arguments. To deal with this situation, there should be some change made in the curriculum: it is necessary to include a critical thinking course or subject in the curriculum. The course can be conducted in either the mother tongue or in English. When students could make arguments and reasoning, they would use transition words fluently and correctly.

The next main implication is concerned with policy making in English language education. It is popular that in Vietnam and in other developing countries where English is seen as a foreign language, English writing class size is big, ranging from 30 students or more. Teaching a big English writing class, one teacher does not have enough time to pay attention to all students equally. He/she does not have enough time to give individual students conferencing session—a session in which students have chances to discuss their English writing with the teacher. Thus, the institution should change the language education policy ‘One English writing teacher is in charge of one class.’ Probably, the policy of ‘one class-one teacher’ is suitable for classes of other language skills like reading, listening, and speaking. For English writing class with a big size class of 30 students or more, team teaching should be applied. In Vietnam, some private universities provide English writing teachers with a teaching assistant so that the teaching assistant can team teach with the teacher: the teaching assistant can give instruction to students and give a writing conferencing session to students. In so doing, the teacher-student ratio would be reduced, increasing the effectiveness of

English writing classes. It is in the present study that the students acknowledged the effectiveness of individualized instruction through team teaching.

From the administration's point of view, the TT method could be more costly since 2 or more teachers team teach the same class and the remuneration for one teaching period will be double. This aspect is also acknowledged by Stewart (2005). However, for the long-term benefits and the effectiveness of English writing classes, the team teaching mode should be one of many to be applied in order to lower student-teacher ratio and increase teacher-student interaction in English writing classes—an aspect that is essential in the stage of giving teacher feedback in English writing classes. In Vietnam, it is being observed at some private institutions that in order to reduce the cost of team teaching mode, a student team teaches with one English writing teacher or one subject teacher. However, there could be significant ethical objections to this practice. In brief, administrative support is a critical element for the successful implementation of TT as concluded by Tsai (2007). ‘

Limitations

This case study, which was conducted in a short 10-week course, one and a half hour per week, could not encompass all the complexities of TT due to the following limitations:

First, due to the very limited number of students voluntarily enrolling in this extra English writing course (i.e., 15), an experimental study could not be conducted to see the effectiveness of the team teaching practice in an English writing class. Next, also due to this limitation, a placement test was not carried out before the study to group the students with the same level of English proficiency; therefore, all of them with varied English proficiency levels studied together in the same extra class, leading to the fact that almost 1/3 of them did not understand the lessons much in the team-taught English writing class.

Second, since the study took place for a very short period of time and the sample was very small, the findings from this study might not speak for the entirety and the validity of the results of the study. Also, the teachers' and students' opinions on the team teaching practice should be taken with

caution. In other words, the findings and interpretation of the data in this study are just food for thought for Vietnamese English teachers to start thinking about this teaching mode and consider how it could be applied in their own teaching context in future.

Recommendations

The study does not aim at providing conclusive remarks on TT and making any generalizations about TT in the context of Vietnamese tertiary level English writing classes. What it hopes to achieve is to reveal certain aspects and complexities of TT to pave the way for further large scale research on TT in Vietnam.

First, it is suggested that further large scale and longitudinal, experimental research on TT in English writing classes in Vietnam's context be conducted so as to grasp further complexities of TT (i.e., to explore aspects of TT beyond the scope of this study) and the long-term effects of this teaching mode. As admitted by Tsai (2007), there is a lack of empirical research on TT.

Second, more variables, such as teacher age and cultural aspects, should be taken into account in further research on TT. Third, TT between a Vietnamese English teacher and an English native-speaker teacher seems to be a luxury practice in both public and private universities due to their limited education budget and due to a limited number of English native-speaker teachers living and working in a country like Vietnam, where English is spoken as a foreign language. So the practice of TT between 2 local voluntary Vietnamese English teachers at tertiary level is an alternative—a possible way for professional development. However, as remarked by Richards and Farrell (2005), it is on a voluntary basis that TT is more effective.

Questions for further research

The present study, though having the limitations as mentioned above, has made a contribution to the literature—that is, to reveal the teachers' and students' attitudes towards TT in English writing class in Vietnam's EFL

context. Based on the findings and the limitations of the present study, the following questions for further research are formulated:

1. Is TT more successful among team teachers coming from the same background (e.g., being trained in the same school before) than from different backgrounds?
2. In what way does the administration of the institution affect the implementation of team teaching and the effects of this teaching mode in a particular English language class?
3. What are the challenges and rewards of team teaching in Vietnam's context?
4. How does classroom management work in a team-taught English class?
5. What cultural aspects would affect the implementation of TT?

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Appendix A: Table of Connectors (Folse, Solomon, & Clabeaux, 2010)

CC: Coordinating Conjunctions (Connect independent clause)

SC: Subordinating Conjunctions (begin dependent clauses)

T: Transitions (usually preceded independent clauses)

Purpose	CS	CC	T	
Examples			For example/ instance, To illustrate,	Specifically, In particular,
Information	And		In addition, Moreover,	Furthermore, First, Next,
Comparison			Similarly, Likewise,	In the same way,
Contrast	But	While Although Besides	In contrast, However, On the other hand,	By comparison, Conversely, Instead, Nevertheless,
Refutation			On the contrary,	
Connection	Yet	Although (even) Though	Nevertheless, Even so,	Admittedly, Despite this,
Emphasis			In fact, Instead, Especially, Above all, Most importantly,	Equally importantly, Actually, For this reason, For these reasons, Obviously, Without a doubt
Clarification			In other words, In simpler words,	More simply
Reason/ Cause	So	So So that Owing to Due to	As a result, As a consequence,	Consequently, Therefore, Thus,
Time or sequence relationships		After As soon as Before, When While, Until Whenever, As	Afterwards, First, Seconds, Next, Then,	Finally, Subsequently, Meanwhile, In the meantime,
Condition		If, Even if Unless Provided that When		
Purpose		So that In order that		
Choice	Or			
Conclusion			In conclusion, In brief, In closing, In sum, In the end, To summarize, To sum up,	Because of this/ these, Finally, Certainly, Indeed, Overall, Therefore, Thus, Hence, Surely For this reason, For these reasons,

Appendix B: Student Questionnaire

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE EXTRA ENGLISH WRITING COURSE

(Your answers by no means affect your final grades. Thus your honesty in answering the questionnaire is highly appreciated.)

1. What do you think of this extra English writing course? (Put a tick)
Very effective Effective Satisfactory Not effective Not very effective
2. What are the reasons for your answer to Question No. 1?
(More than one reason is possible).
Difficulty of lessons: Manageable Not manageable
Learning atmosphere: Fun Not fun/ boring
Teachers' enthusiasm: Yes No
Suitability of teaching method: Yes No
Other reasons: _____

3. After the course, how confident are you in using transition words? (**Choose one box**)
Very confident Confident No idea Not confident Not very confident
Reasons: _____

4. Would you like to enroll in a team-taught English writing class next semester?
(choose one box only)
Yes Not decided yet No
5. *Other suggestions:* _____

Appendix C: Teacher Guided Questions for Critical Reflection

GUIDED QUESTIONS FOR THE TEACHERS' CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON TEAM TEACHING

1. What is required of team teachers in Vietnam?
2. What language skills is team teaching suitable for? And Why?
3. What do you think of the team teaching practice in the extra English writing course?
4. What advantages and disadvantages are there in team teaching?
5. What obstacles or difficulties did you encounter while team teaching the extra English writing course? And how did you cope with these?
6. What do you think of the students' behavior in the team-taught class?
7. How beneficial is team teaching for professional development?

Appendix D: Teacher Questionnaire

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE ON TEAM-TEACHING

Team teaching is a teaching method in which 2 or more than 2 teachers share the same class and instruction.

1. Have you ever applied team teaching in your own class?
Ever at _____ For how long? _____
Not ever
2. What are advantages and disadvantages of team teaching if it is applied in an English writing class in your own context?

About	Advantages	Disadvantages
Students' English language proficiency		
Teachers' psychology		
Time budget		
Remuneration		
Preparation		
Others		

3. Are you willing to apply team teaching in your own English writing class next semester?
Yes Not decided yet No
4. What needs to be done so that team teaching can be applied in your own classes?

