Completing edTPA

TESOL Candidate Performance and Reflection

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edTPA is a pre-service assessment process designed to determine if a new teacher is ready for the job. edTPA is part of a national movement towards the use of performance assessments in teacher education. As of 2014, 41 states (a) require a state-approved performance assessment like edTPA for program completion or for state licensure and/or state program accreditation/review, (b) are taking steps towards implementation, or (c) are participating in edTPA. edTPA is offered in 27 different assessment areas, including English as an Additional Language (EAL) (edTPA, 2015). Although a great deal has been written about edTPA, including the response of some teacher candidates to the assessment, little has been written about EAL, including the response of ESOL teacher candidates to the test. This is cause for concern as TESOL has become increasingly important to P-12 education. By 2025, one in four students in the US will be initially classified as an English learner, and qualified teachers will be needed to serve them (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010, p. 3). Given the importance of ESOL teacher candidates to the future of education in the US, teacher educators must know how these candidates perform on the test and why. The present study seeks to provide some of that knowledge.

Scholars have addressed various aspects of teacher performance assessment (TPA). Darling-Hammond (2012) has written about the need

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for such assessment. Several scholars have discussed the benefits of TPA for future teachers, especially in terms of reflective practice (Margolis & Doring, 2013; Sawchuck, 2013; Wightman, 2013). Au (2013) wonders if the positive aspect of the edTPA can survive corporate education reform initiatives. Other scholars have focused on TPA's impact on multicultural education (Liu & Milman, 2013) or seen the test as preparation for action research (Jagla, 2013). Specific to TESOL, Fenner, Baecher, and Micek (2013, March) describe the development of the TESOL-specific edTPA handbook, while Baecher and Micek (2014, March) discuss preparing TESOL candidates for the edTPA. As a teacher educator in a state participating in edTPA, the author sought to add to the discussion of edTPA's relevance to TESOL.

In addition to the above scholarship, there have been a few studies of candidate response to edTPA (Okhremtchouk, Seiki, Gilliland, Ateh, Wallace, & Kato, 2009; Pecheone & Chung, 2006; Selvester, Summers, & Williams, 2006). Pecheone and Chung (2006) examined results of a statewide implementation of the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) during two pilot years, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. Pecheone and Chung describe the PACT's assessment design and scoring system, summarize the results of validity/reliability studies conducted during those years, and describe ways in which teacher education programs have used evidence from the PACT "to evaluate program effectiveness, to refine their programs, and to improve the preparation of beginning teachers" (p. 24).

The PACT assessments or teaching events (TEs) "use multiple sources of data (teacher plans, teacher artifacts, student work samples, video clips of teaching, and personal reflections and commentaries) that are placed into four categories of teaching: planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection (PIAR). The PACT project, Pecheone and Chung explain, focuses on two assessment strategies: "(a) the formative development of prospective teachers through embedded signature assessments that occur throughout teacher preparation and (b) a summative assessment of teaching knowledge and skills during student teaching (the TE)" (p. 24). The TEs are subject-specific assessments that are integrated across the four PIAR tasks.

For 2002-2003, Pecheone and Chung found that teacher candidates in most subject areas scored "higher on the planning and instruction categories and . . . lower on the assessment and reflection categories" (p. 25). For 2003-2004, the authors found that candidates scored "significantly higher on the planning rubrics than on the other tasks and significantly lower on the academic language task" (p. 25). After each year of piloting and scoring, these results were distributed to each

credential program in the consortium. Responses to a survey of program directors and teacher educators across the consortium campuses indicate that many participating campuses noted "candidates' weaker performances on the assessment and reflection tasks of the TE and made efforts to provide more support and guidance [for] completing the TE in these categories" (p. 28).

In the first-year pilot study, 527 candidates completed and submitted a short survey, which was included in the TE handbook. Pecheone and Chung found that candidates "were more likely to report that the TE assessed important aspects of their teaching knowledge and skill when they felt better supported and better prepared for completing the TE" (p. 32). Pecheone and Chung provide further detail:

> Of those who felt well supported, nearly 70% believed the TE assessed important aspects of their teaching knowledge and skill; of those who felt well prepared by course work and student teaching placements, approximately 85% believed the TE assessed important aspects of their teaching knowledge and skill. (p. 32)

These survey results, in Pecheone and Chung's view, indicate the TE's "beneficial learning consequences" and suggest that "students who receive targeted support in their development of the TE view their experience more positively and report that the process of constructing their TE strengthened their teaching" (p. 32). These results also have important implications for teacher education programs: "The more support provided to candidates by program faculty, supervisors, and master teachers, the more likely candidates are to have positive learning experiences and, by extension, stronger performances on the TE" (p. 32).

Selvester, Summers, and Williams (2006) conducted a case study to investigate the effects of a standards-based teacher performance assessment (TPA) on the candidates who took it and on the teacher education faculty. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used. The study was conducted on the campus of a rural state university in Northern California. The participants were fifth-year pre-service teaching credential candidates (n=151) and education faculty (n=16) in a graduate teacher preparation program.

A pilot TPA was given to all credential candidates in both single- and multiple-subject programs (n=165) in the last semester of their five-year teacher preparation program, in the spring of 2003. In the fall of that year, the TPA was given again, a follow-up questionnaire was given to candidates, and a focus group was conducted with faculty. In the spring of 2004, the TPA was administered, and the following fall, the faculty was given a questionnaire.

The faculty rated the candidates highest in learning about their students, analyzing their lesson plans, and reflecting on their teaching. Candidates scored lower in reflecting on their previous student teaching experience, establishing a democratic environment, and teaching the lesson. Faculty indicated that scoring the TPA affected "their curriculum, their teaching, and their supervision" (p. 30). They also indicated that the TPA "revealed systematic strengths and areas for improvement" in their program (p. 30). Analysis of the post-assessment survey and the focus group follow-up revealed two themes: candidates consistently said "that the work of reflection in the assessment was redundant and that they needed more support in doing the TPA from their supervisors, [from] their cooperating teachers, and to a lesser degree, from their professors" (p. 28).

There were "costs and benefits" for both credential candidates and faculty, the authors state, in implementing a TPA. The majority of candidates indicated that the TPA was beneficial: in general, the process of getting to know individual students, planning for their needs, assessing their growth, and analyzing their own teaching was "a valuable step" in their development as teachers. Their comments, however, also revealed the cost of, and a "pervasive discontent" with, the requirement to reflect at every stage of the process (p. 31).

Okhremtchouk, Seiki, Gilliland, Ateh, Wallace, and Kato (2009) studied how the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) affected the personal and professional lives of pre-service teachers (PSTs). The study was conducted in AY 2006-2007 on a campus of the University of California where PACT had been piloted for several years. Because the instrument used in their research employed open-ended questions, Okhremtchouk et al. argue that the PSTs "had the freedom to express their opinions and share their thoughts" (p. 45). Although the tenor of the PST comments was negative, Okhremtchouk et al. sensed that these individuals "might also be gaining from the experience" (p. 46). Okhremtchouk et al. saw a self-reported, open-ended survey as "the most equitable means" of getting feedback from as many PSTs as possible in the amount of time available (pp. 46-47).

The questionnaire that Okhremtchouk et al. developed consisted of "three open-ended free-response items with seven (also open-ended) sub-items, constructed in an unstructured item format survey," through which participants had "complete freedom of response" (p. 47). The survey asked candidates how PACT impacted their teaching, coursework, instruction practices, classroom management, and personal time. The effects of PACT on the lives of PSTs provided the basis for three major themes that Okhremtchouk et al. identified: PACT preparation is time

consuming, PACT helped PSTs learn about their teaching, and the significance of support: implications for teacher educators.

Although a great deal has been written about edTPA, including the response of some teacher candidates to the assessment, little has been written about the EAL test, including the response of teacher candidates to it. The latter constitutes an important demographic as the number of English learners in the US continues to grow as does the need for qualified ESOL instructors. How do TESOL candidates do on the EAL, how do they react to completing it, and what do they make of their performance? The present study was conducted to answer these questions.

Method

Participants

Participants were four student teachers in an MATESOL program in a large Midwestern city. The program offers an optional teaching license, which all the candidates were pursuing. All the candidates were female; their ages ranged from 24 to 45 and averaged 35. One of them, Hope (like all names, a pseudonym), was born in the US; the others—Sunny, Amanda, and Sippa—were born in Korea, Brazil, and Morocco, respectively. Hope was a native speaker of English; Sunny, Amanda, and Sippa were native speakers of Portuguese, Korean, and Arabic as well as French, respectively. Although the percentage of non-native English speakers (NNESs) in this class, 75%, was high, their presence in student teaching was not: since 2007, NNESs have accounted for just over 20% of the students registered for the course.

The English language proficiency (ELP) of the non-native speakers of English was high: Sunny had scored 110 (out of a possible 120) points on the TOEFL Internet-Based Test (iBT), Amanda had scored 97 on the iBT, and Sippa had graduated from a US Research I institution with a 3.968 undergraduate grade point average (GPA). All four candidates were excellent students: their final program GPAs ranged from 3.778 to 3.976 and averaged 3.921.

Materials and Procedures

After edTPA scores were reported, they were analyzed for what they indicated about candidates' performance on the test. Total scores were tabulated and averaged, as were rubric scores and task scores. In addition, total scores for TESOL were compared with those for the other fields tested that semester. Those fields (with the number of students) were as follows: Adolescent/Young Adult (AYA) Language Arts (2), AYA Mathematics (6), AYA Social Studies (2), Early Childhood (10), Middle

Childhood (MC) Math (4), MC Social Studies (1), Special Education (11), and Visual Arts (1). Including TESOL, a total of 41 students completed edTPA that semester.

At the end of the seminar associated with student teaching, candidates were surveyed about their experience of edTPA. They were given a questionnaire with six questions about the assessment, including the value they found in completing the portfolio, the easiest and most difficult aspects of the portfolio, and recommendations for future students and future teachers. The author chose these questions so that the present candidates might reflect productively on edTPA and so that he might better prepare future candidates for the assessment. With these goals in mind, he adapted Okhremtchouk et al.'s approach and administered a questionnaire with six "open-ended free-response items . . . in an unstructured item format survey, in which the participants had complete freedom of response" (p. 47). Candidates completed the survey during class time. Their responses were collated and analyzed by two experienced teacher educators. Finally, after the test and questionnaire results were analyzed, candidates were asked to participate in interviews about their performance on edTPA, their responses to the questionnaire, and the relationship between the two.

Results and Discussion

edTPA Scores

As Table 1 shows, edTPA total scores ranged from 37 to 47 and averaged 43. All candidates but one, Hope, exceeded the institutional cut score, which was 38 at the time. Hope had failed to upload her video successfully and received no points on Rubrics 6-10 (Task 2) and Rubric 11 (Task 3); she averaged 4.1 on the other rubrics. If she had scored on those rubrics as she had on the rest of the test, both her total score and the average total score would have been higher. This fact should be borne in mind as the other results are considered.

Table 1
edTPA Total Scores

Student	*Score*
1	42
2	37
3	47
4	46
Average	43

In addition to total scores, candidates received scores on each of 15 different rubrics. As Table 2 shows, the average candidate score for all rubrics ranged from 2.8 to 4.1 and averaged 3.17. From these rubric scores, averages were calculated for task scores. As Table 3 shows, candidates' average task scores were highest on Task 1, Planning (3.40), second highest on Task 3, Assessment (3.10), and lowest on Task 2, Instruction (3.00).

As Table 4 shows, TESOL tied with MC Social Studies for the third highest average total score, 43, among the nine fields. AYA Math had the highest average total score, 48.58. If Hope had averaged 4.1 on all her rubrics, TESOL would have had the highest average total score, 49.2.

These results are important because they show not only how ESOL teacher candidates do on edTPA but also how they do in relation to candidates in other fields.

Table 2
Average Rubric Scores

Task	*Rubric*	*Average Score*
1. Planning	1	3.25
	2	3.75
	3	3.50
	4	2.75
	5	3.75
2. Instruction	6	3.33
	7	3.00
	8	3.00
	9	2.67
	10	3.00
3. Assessment	11	3.00
	12	3.25
	13	2.75
	14	3.00
	15	3.50
Average of All Rubrics		3.17

Table 3
Average Task Scores

Task	*Average Score*
1. Planning	3.40
2. Instruction	3.00
3. Assessment	3.10

Questionnaire

Responses to Question 1, "What value did you find in doing the portfolio?," fell into three broad categories:

1. Improving teaching skills, both general and specific (three candidates)

2. Applying what was learned in the university classroom to teaching (two candidates)

3. Reflecting on teaching (two candidates)

As an example of Category 1, Sunny wrote that completing edTPA helped her "think of what the lessons will achieve in advance, develop a habit of planning lessons, [and] keep track of the essential learning objectives." As an example of Category 2, Sunny also wrote, "Revisit what I learned in class and put [it] in realistic perspective." As an example of Category 3, Hope said, "The portfolio was valuable because I was able to . . . reflect on my teaching." These results confirm, contradict, and extend previous research into candidates' experience of, and reaction to, edTPA.

The value cited by the most candidates, improving teaching skills, both general and specific, confirms both (a) Pecheone and Chung's (2006) finding that a majority (60%) of PSTs learned "important skills" in their preparation of the PACT assessment portfolio (p. 43) and (b) Okhremtchouk et al.'s (2009) finding that the PACT process contributed to participants' development as teachers (p. 55). On the other hand, the value cited by half the candidates (two), applying what was learned in the university classroom, is a new one: it was not found in previous studies.

Another value cited by half the candidates, reflecting on teaching, is both contradicted and supported by previous findings. On the one hand, it flies in the face of Selvester, Summers, and Williams (2006), whose

Table 4
edTPA Average Total Scores by Field

Score	*Field*
48.58	AYA Math
44.05	Early Childhood
43.00	MC Social Studies
43.00	TESOL
40.00	Visual Arts
39.82	Special Education
38.50	AYA Social Studies
37.50	AYA Language Arts
35.75	MC Math

participants found reflection to be "redundant" (p. 28). On the other hand, this finding supports Sawchuck's (2013) and Wightman's (2013) findings. To indicate that new teachers use reflection regularly, Sawchuck offers the story of a new teacher who had taken the edTPA as an undergraduate. "The reflection process they forced us to do is something I see myself doing daily," she said. "It's just not written out" (p. 1). Wightman (2013) warns that "the depth and volume of written reflection required" by the edTPA may not currently be part of teacher education and asserts that it will be critical to include such reflection, "focusing on what good teaching looks like, throughout our students' experiences" (p. 76). Wightman goes on to discuss the significance of the edTPA for Ohio's Resident Educator program (REP). The four-year REP calls for a summative assessment during Years 3 and/or 4. This assessment, the Resident Educator Summative Assessment (RESA), is being designed by a partnership that includes the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE). Given that SCALE, which developed the edTPA, is designing RESA, Wightman concludes that the assessment will, to some extent, "mirror" the edTPA. It is critical, then, that teacher educators prepare current as well as future students "to fully understand the concepts and requirements associated with the edTPA, so that they may successfully complete their residency program" (p. 76). Wightman appears prophetic: of the 300 or so teachers who have failed RESA, none have taken edTPA (T. Zigler, personal communication, May 25, 2016).

There was more agreement among candidates in their response to Question 2, "What were the easiest aspects of doing the portfolio?" All four candidates indicated, one way or another, that describing the context for learning was easiest. Two candidates wrote "[the] context for learning," and one wrote "Nothing—maybe context for learning." It is not surprising that candidates found "Context" the easiest part of the assessment: that part of Task 1 requires them to provide information about the context in which they are teaching. More specifically, it asks them about the school where they are teaching, the class featured in the assessment, and the students featured in the assessment. The information is straightforward and relatively easy to obtain. This is a new finding as no previous research has addressed this question.

Answers to Question 3, "What were the most difficult aspects of doing the portfolio?," varied. Amanda and Sippa said that the commentaries were most difficult, Hope had difficulty completing the video "with little to no support" from her cooperating teacher, and Sunny had difficulty "understanding questions." The fact that half the candidates had difficulty with the commentaries is not surprising: edTPA requires up to 25 single-spaced pages of commentary, including prompts. Sunny's dif-

ficulty understanding questions may indicate an area in which TESOL candidates, to the extent that they are non-native English speakers, may differ from other student teachers with regard to edTPA: they may need help understanding what the assessment says and what it asks for.

The fact that half the candidates found commentary to be the most difficult aspect of edTPA is not surprising given what Pecheone and Chung (2006) found: candidates scored lower on assessment and reflection than on planning and instruction. Selvester, Summers, and Williams (2006) had more mixed results: they found that candidates scored lower in reflecting on their previous student teaching experience but higher in reflecting on their (current) teaching. The preponderance of evidence suggests that teacher educators should spend more time helping candidates to develop reflective skills. Hope's response about video echoes the desire of previous candidates for support from supervisors, cooperating teachers, and professors that is stated in Selvester, Summers, and Williams (p. 28) and implied in Pecheone and Chung (p. 32). Hope's comment indicates that teacher educators should be prepared to help candidates not just with the test's products but also with its processes (e.g., videotaping).

Responses to Question 4, "What recommendations do you have for future students?," varied somewhat. Three candidates recommended strategies such as starting early, reading through the assessment in advance, and working on it daily. One of those candidates, Sunny, also cited the importance of content knowledge: "Know what good lessons need to include," she said, as well as the "SIOP model and more." In a recommendation more for teachers than students, Sippa wrote, "The university must provide sample [edTPA] tasks."

Most of the responses to Question 4, recommendations for future students, were process oriented ("Start early," "Read through [everything] in advance," etc.), but one was content based ("Know what good lessons need to include"; "SIOP model and more"). These results indicate that teacher educators must not only help candidates to understand, and work their way through, the edTPA but also make sure that candidates have the necessary content knowledge for teaching generally ("good lessons") and for TESOL specifically (SIOP).

Candidates in the program typically complete a research project after student teaching, and Hope recommended that future students connect these elements. "Try and make edTPA and research go together," she said. Interestingly, Jagla (2013) thinks the edTPA has that potential. Preparing candidates for edTPA "is really teaching them to do action research," she says, and we should approach the edTPA "as a gateway to becoming reflective practitioners." Through the test, she explains,

candidates, "are trained to collect valuable data and analyze them in worthwhile ways," fundamental aspects of conducting research.

Answers to Question 5, "What recommendations do you have for future teachers?," suggest that two students misunderstood the question. Although the question sought recommendations for future teachers of the course (i.e., university faculty/supervisors), two candidates answered with recommendations for future student teachers like themselves. One student, Hope, did have recommendations for future teachers of the course—four, in fact: provide help with pre-writing, time for candidates to work together, examples (of responses), and handbooks at the end of fall semester. (Student teaching takes place in the spring.) One student had no recommendations in this category.

One student's answer to Question 5 and another student's answer to Question 4 indicate that students wanted more help with edTPA from the university. This finding confirms what others have found or suggested. Selvester, Summers, and Williams (2006) found that candidates need more support from their supervisors, cooperating teachers, and professors (p. 28). Pecheone and Chung (2006) found that the more candidates are supported, the more they learn and the better they perform (p. 32). Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) identified "the significance of support received or not received" as one of three major themes (p. 55). Many of the students' ideas are addressed by Baecher and Micek (2014), who make 10 suggestions for supporting TESOL candidates.

Interview

After the test scores and questionnaire responses were collated and analyzed, the author asked the candidates by e-mail if they would participate in an interview about their performance on edTPA and their responses to the questionnaire. Only one candidate, Hope, responded to the request. Hope was asked about her performance on edTPA and about her commentaries. Hope's average rubric scores were highest on Task 1, Planning (4.4), and lowest on Task 3, Assessment (3.75 plus one E). (She received all Es for Task 2, Instruction.) When asked to explain the variation in those scores, she gave two main reasons. First, she said, it's a lot easier to plan instruction than to do it and evaluate it. Second, the assessment task was "not so easy": it involved many steps and lots of commentary. Then she was asked to explain her commentaries—both their quantity and their quality. After writing six pages of commentary for Task 1 and nine for Task 2, Hope wrote 10 more pages for Task 3. (All numbers were the maximum allowed.) Asked how she had managed to write 40% of the commentary after completing two of the three tasks, Hope replied that, on the one hand, she was simply following directions

and that, on the other, she "wrote as much as possible so the scorers would think that she knew what she was talking about." Hope's commentaries were relatively easy to read, in part because they began with topic sentences or other statements that oriented readers to the whole of her response; some of these statements repeated key words from the prompt. For example, for Task 1, Question 5.b., Explain how the design or adaptation of your planned assessments allows students with specific needs to demonstrate their development of English language proficiency within content-based instruction, Hope began her commentary with the following statement: "Because classrooms consist of individuals of differing abilities, it is important to design and adapt assessments so that all students may demonstrate their development of English language proficiency." When asked why she used this strategy, Hope gave three reasons. First, in her educational career, she had become a good writer, and she was simply applying the principles of good writing she had learned. Second, she knew that scoring edTPA was an arduous task, and she did not want to add to the scorers' work. Finally, her mother, an experienced teacher, had scored the Praxis II exam and advised her to write as she did. People had told her what to do, she said, and she listened. When asked if she had any final comments about edTPA, Hope added that the commentaries were a valuable part of the assessment: "They force you to be a good reflective teacher."

Conclusion

This study sought to determine how TESOL candidates do on edTPA, how they respond to completing it, and what they make of their performance. Results indicate that they do well, that they respond to the assessment in a variety of ways, and that they find one task, planning, easier than the others. These results confirm, contradict, and extend previous research into candidates' experience of, and reaction to, edTPA. This interpretation must take into account the fact that only four teacher candidates participated in the study and that, although all four took the exam and responded to the questionnaire about it, only one of them responded to the request for an interview.

The small number of participants is a serious limitation of the study; different results may be obtained from a larger sample. It is difficult to generalize from the sample studied to a larger population, especially given the characteristics of the candidates studied: they were all female, which is not unusual in teacher education, but they were older than typical undergraduate education majors and three-fourths of them were non-native speakers of English, which is unusual in teacher education. Nonetheless,

this research is important for two reasons: first, it is the first study of TESOL candidates' experience of, and response to, edTPA, and, second, the candidates are increasingly representative of those in the field.

These findings are important for what they say about ESOL teacher candidates' ability to succeed on edTPA, their response to completing the assessment, and what they make of their performance. Test results indicate that TESOL candidates, including non-native speakers of English, can succeed on edTPA. Questionnaire responses indicate that TESOL candidates agree on some aspects of the assessment but view others differently. Finally, interview results indicate that it is a lot easier to plan instruction than to implement and evaluate it.

The author began the study with mixed feelings about edTPA. On the one hand, he felt obligated to prepare teacher candidates for the test: it is required for program completion. On the other hand, he questioned its relevance. His program was built on national standards (TESOL, 2002), graduates of the program had been very successful finding work, and the program already assessed candidates' ability to plan, deliver, and assess instruction. Studying edTPA more closely, however, gave him a different view of the test. Its emphasis on candidates' developing students' ELP within "meaningful content-based instruction" (SCALE, 2014, p. 1) brings it up to date with current TESOL practices. Its drawing on *communicative competence* (see Brown, 2014, pp. 206-210) gives it a strong theoretical basis. Finally, its attention to the four modalities (listening, speaking reading, and writing) helps to integrate ESOL instruction. In addition, by asking candidates to use "principles from research and/or theory relevant to ELL education" to support their explanations (SCALE, 2014, p. 12), it helps candidates to integrate theory and practice. Reflection in TESOL goes back at least as far as Richards and Rodgers (1994), but edTPA requires candidates to do more than reflect: it asks them to use research to do so. The fact that edTPA is nationally scored is another strength: it gives teacher education programs another outside measure of their effectiveness. Because there have been no follow-up studies of teachers who have taken edTPA, it is difficult to say how performance on the test translates to performance in the classroom. Based on Zigler's evidence (cited earlier), however, it is clear that edTPA can prepare candidates for a summative assessment early in their teaching career.

The population of non-native speakers of English is growing in the US, and so is the need for qualified candidates to teach them. edTPA is one way to ensure that they are, indeed, "ready to teach." Results of this study show that ESOL candidates can do as well as, if not better than, candidates in other fields on edTPA. This is true of ESOL candidates who are non-native speakers of English themselves. They may struggle

with the form and/or content of the assessment, but they appear to be as capable of passing edTPA as native speakers. Does their cross-cultural and cross-linguistic experience help them on the test, or, in the case of the candidates studied, does age make a difference? Additional research should be conducted to find out. Relevant findings might be extrapolated to the preparation of non-native speakers in all fields of education.

Note

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