

The Limitations of Performance-based Assessment: Disparities in Teacher Diversity

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Efforts made by educator preparation programs (EPPs) utilize teacher performance assessments (TPAs) that include formative and summative assessments that evaluate teacher candidates' professional growth and performance. The educative teacher performance assessment (edTPA) has replaced the local TPAs to become a national performance-based evaluation that standardizes training as a summative score. EPPs that focus too heavily on the edTPA may be distracted from realizing the importance of fostering First Generation College Students (FGCS) and low socioeconomic status (SES) teacher candidates to a higher, more competent self-efficacy through effective feedback, experiences, and exemplar.

Keywords: First Generation College Students (FGCS), socioeconomic status (SES), edTPA, self-efficacy

Teacher Performance Assessments

According to the New Teacher Project (2014), teacher preparation programs are a performance-based profession that seldom permits teachers to acquire all the necessary skills through practice. The report emphasized that “too many new teachers struggle to teach their students because they lack the basic skills to do so” (p. 10). In fact, Chavez (2007) states that inadequate research has been conducted on how cultural groups learn as adults (p. 275). The cultural learners' self-efficacy comprises of individual and direct experiences that cognitively, affectively, and motivationally accomplish the basic skills they need as a teacher (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002). One specific finding reveals a significant inadequacy that needs to be addressed by educator preparation programs (EPP): *Allowing candidates the opportunities to practice authentic implementation of instructional skills increases self-efficacy and a positive attitude.*

To further understand a teacher candidate's self-efficacy, EPPs need to

acknowledge the individualistic cultural structures that support the teacher candidate's self-efficacy and autonomy. The opportunity for candidates to pursue their professions with the emotional readiness and belief that they can perform a task while gaining an understanding of their individuality is essential to their self-efficacy (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990, Pintrich et al., 1991). However, according to Greenblatt (2016), teacher candidates indicate that the standardized edTPA is a stressor in the P-12 classroom experience because of differing district requirements and pressures (p.53). Dean of the School of Education, Harriet Fayne (as cited by Greenblatt, 2016) states that “edTPA requirements take up too much space during a one-semester student teaching experience, leaving little room for anything else” (p. 53). If students 'valuable time centers on meeting the performance-based assessment, the edTPA requirements then this psychological burden may impact their individuality as educators (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009).

A performance-based assessment is usually a capstone requirement of an EPP and improves licensure testing through a

systematic collection of evidence. Societal trepidations for teacher quality and their education have compelled policymakers to hold EPPs accountable for teacher-candidates' effectiveness (Crowe, 2011). Federal legislation requires comprehensive testing in the United States to measure the accountability of EPPs accurately. The United States Department of Education (USDOE) recommends regulations that mandate EPPs to report various performance measures, including the learning outcomes for teacher candidate graduates (Federal Register 2014-28218, 2014). Additionally, the Council for the Accreditation of

Educator Preparation (CAEP), a national accrediting body for EPPs, requires each to demonstrate their teacher candidates' impact on student learning and classroom instruction. Some states and school districts further their requirements by employing multiple measures that include value-added modeling, classroom observations, and evaluation ratings to assess teacher performance.

Prior to states implementing the edTPA, the teacher performance assessments (TPAs) were evaluations that provided unique opportunities to establish guidelines for professional skill development in prospective teachers (Berry et al., 2008). TPAs should not confine and narrow the teacher candidates' training but should, instead, promote a commitment to purposeful pedagogical strategies and methodologies that strengthen teacher learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

The current focus is a more regulated, subject-specific, high-stakes performance assessment. TPAs by local EPPs to assess their teacher candidates could provide a common language and expectations for specific knowledge and skills (Peck et al., 2014). The EPP could use locally-scored

TPAs to identify strengths and weaknesses that lead to modifications of their program. However, many EPPs no longer use a local TPA to assess teacher candidates but instead rely on the limited feedback data from the edTPA scorers. According to Bastian et al. (2016), EPPs benefit from timely data to identify areas of teaching effectiveness. Still, if the edTPA does not provide that data, then the delayed value-added scores are not beneficial to specific teaching practices that can identify the program's strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, teacher candidates must conceptualize and extrapolate certain teaching practices in ways that do not necessarily enhance their professional development (Bernard et al., 2019).

The nationwide implementation of edTPA is an example of a TPA that has become the obligatory path influencing who enters the profession as a licensed educator (Petchauer et al., 2018). The national edTPA, with many desirable attributes, does not, unfortunately, appear to allow for the same data-driven decision-making process at the EPP level as it requires of teacher candidates on Task 3, Rubric 15 (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2019).

Higher academia's inability to analyze and modify instruction based on the externally scored edTPA data precludes the opportunity to modify and adapt instruction based on a diverse group of students with diverse learning needs. It is a disservice for an EPP not to recognize the importance of their diverse teacher candidates in the P-12 classroom learning community. Chavez (2007) states that FGS and low SES students are resilient learners while students of color are personal and reflective learners. Even though the integrated collegiate classrooms are evident, the edTPA limits the efforts to modify or reflect on improving the learning and success rates of underrepresented and disenfranchised student populations (Chavez, 2007).

The Partiality of edTPA: First-Generation Students & Socioeconomics

First-Generation College Students (FGCS) struggle with the necessary financial and academic support to successfully pursue a college degree. According to Banks-Santilli (2014), “one in six college freshman at American universities are FGCS” (p. 2). The rising cost of higher education for diverse FGCS makes it challenging to earn a four-year degree. Banks-Santilli (2014) validated this point by maintaining that “many first-generation college students remain disadvantaged” in higher education. FGCS often require developmental coursework and tend to have lower grade point averages than their peers with college-educated parents (Huerta et al., 2012). As the population of FGCS and SES increases, “they are entering an academic, cultural environment that often has unspoken rules and a variety of cultural norms” (Irlbeck, et al, 2014, p. 155). Unfortunately an absence of support to transition, results in a lack of confidence in their abilities to be academically competitive and successful results in low college graduation rates.

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses income and educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class (American Psychological Association, 2017). Policies created for equity in education are attempts to produce fairness in education. The concern with equity in education is dependent on funding and resources. Impacts from disparities can persist in post-secondary education and beyond. The lack of funding can limit teacher candidates’ success with any required TPA. The equity issue reveals itself as all EPP teacher candidates are the same, even when there are insufficient support and funding. Equitable practices tend to

ameliorate disadvantages from background differences and place emphasis on the promotion of privilege. Evidence indicates that the cost edTPA fees to pay for support workshops, and edTPA coordinators can prohibit individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds from entering the profession (Greenblatt, 2016). Comparing available supporting resources between an elite university’s EPP and a typical state university’s EPP reveals a sharp dichotomy in financial support.

Comparing two universities’ socioeconomic status and EPP requirements demonstrates the concerns with implementing the standardized edTPA nationwide. For example, University A, a prestigious, private west coast university, has an acceptance rate of 4%. University B, a smaller mid-southern public university, has an acceptance rate of 83%. University A does not have an ACT score requirement; however, a student making an ACT score below 33 will struggle to get accepted. University B requires an ACT score of at least a 20 or higher for admission. The median family income from University A is \$167,500, and 66% arrive from the top 20 percent of the student population. University B has approximately 2.2% of its students from families considered to be of low socioeconomic status.

Conversely, a student’s median family income at University B is \$61,900, and only 16% are from the top 20 percent of the student population. Additionally, University B’s student population consists of about 36% first-generation college students (FGCS) whereas, University A’s student population consists of only 6% FGCS. Importantly, FGCS are less likely to have the academic preparation and resources available compared to higher SES students (Cho et al., 2001). FGCS have lower median household income and more unmet financial

needs compared to those with college-educated parents.

The academic impact of TPAs can be a costly investment requiring more money and time for FGCS and lower SES teacher candidates. Delpit (as cited in Barmore, 2016), a professor of education at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU), stated that teacher candidates struggle to pay for teacher certification exams. Adding more financial strain becomes a barrier to diversifying the education profession (Barmore, 2016). Delpit (as cited in Barmore, 2016) continues, “There can be cultural bias if the background and sensitivity of those scoring the exams are different.” Based on her experience at Stanford with one of the forerunners of edTPA, scorers looked for specific traits or behaviors “that ran counter to what good teachers of African-American students typically looked for” (Barmore, 2016).

Further complicating the challenges placed on FGCS and low SES students is the fact that the internally scoring of the TPA has been replaced by external edTPA scorers. To avoid local biases in assessment, a possible unintended consequence in the edTPA process is that it may not consistently connect course assignments with field placements. The goal of the edTPA is to provide a quantitative assessment of teacher candidate’s performance based on a portfolio of lesson plans, students’ work samples, a recorded classroom instruction video, and commentaries. The concern with unbiased EPP attempts is the absence of helpful feedback to build a teacher candidate’s confidence to improve instructional strategy use in the classroom.

Furthermore, EPP faculty can modify specific feedback that motivates teacher candidates to be self-regulating learners (Shuy, 2010). The edTPA does not provide a clear indicator of how teacher candidates’ self-efficacy to implement

pedagogical methodologies is measured confidently. In the research findings that follow, gaps between what the teacher candidate “knows” about the edTPA tasks and “actual implementation” of those tasks during the field experience are apparent.

The Incongruence of edTPA Scores, Diversity, and Self-efficacy

Based on Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007) research, FGCS have significantly lower self-efficacy than non-first generation students. Other research studies indicate that FGCS experience more challenges that impact their academic performance (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). Finnegan (2013) revealed that rigorous teacher evaluation systems could either enhance or impair teacher candidates’ self-efficacy. When an external assessment dominates candidates’ efforts, lower teacher self-efficacy leads to a possible cycle of failure for both students and teachers (Ninkovic & Floric, 2018). A teacher candidate’s self-confidence improved their proficiency in implementing effective instructional strategies when provided the opportunity to engage actively with students (Demirtas, 2018).

Short (2019) centered on the congruence between external assessments and a candidate’s self-efficacy to implement the edTPA tasks during the student teaching experience successfully. Twenty out of 188 teacher candidates’ responses indicated a lack of preparation and practical training in implementing specific edTPA tasks during field experiences. The candidates who acknowledged deficiencies in applying particular course training strategies explained that implementing these strategies could help their instruction during field experiences. Unfortunately, these deficiencies negatively impact the teacher candidate’s perseverance and dedication to

interconnect with their professional self-efficacy (Bosso, 2017).

If EPPs cannot rely on evidence from locally scored TPA, then the validity of predicting teacher candidates' self-efficacy to perform as classroom teachers is incomplete (Admiraal et al., 2011). Failure to receive specific and detailed critiques from edTPA results dissuades candidates' adopting practices that support practical teaching experiences (Bernard et al., 2019). The restrictive, controlled conditions under which student teachers complete their edTPA could diminish candidates' self-efficacy and stymie enthusiasm when EPP course content learned cannot be meaningful and creatively implemented in the classroom (Mahler et al., 2017).

Performance-based assessment: The necessity for program modification

In an education policy paper, Bernard et al. (2019) stated that EPPs dedicate a generous portion of their courses to accommodate students' preparation for edTPA tasks. College faculty expressed concerns with the inability to provide "teachable moments" in the classroom because of the edTPA's time-consuming tasks (Bernard et al., 2019). An example of one of those "teachable moments" involves faculty modeling the edTPA Task 3, Rubric 15 by modifying their instruction based on formative assessments. Critical reflection may facilitate the process of making implicit beliefs explicit, allowing for these individuals to develop, reflect, and enhance their classroom practices (Wlodarsky & Walters, 2006). Multiple candidate success measures at different points in teacher training programs could help faculty pinpoint a candidate's strengths and weaknesses to provide specific interventions that improve knowledge and skills (Evans et

al., 2016). However, with insufficient edTPA feedback provided on the candidates' report, faculty in EPPs have no guide for curriculum modifications. Evans et al. (2016) suggested the edTPA should provide data that EPPs can correlate with deficiencies that can make training program improvements. Peck et al. (2014) indicated that an understanding of such edTPA data would help EPPs concentrate on multiple levels of teacher preparation and instructional modifications by faculty.

The opportunity to utilize detailed TPA data can guide critical examinations of its reliability and validity as well. While the edTPA is one tool for assessing candidate readiness, combining results with other forms of assessment is suggested for program improvement. Tadesse et al. (2018) emphasized that teacher candidates must implement various theoretical concepts they had learned; otherwise, they will only be theorists at the end of the program. The disconnect between the expertise of professionals who personally know and interact with the student teachers is minimized by the edTPA.

Conclusion

The higher academia pursuit for FGCS and lower SES students is an ongoing effort to overcome academic struggles, lower grades, and lack of financial support (Banks-Santilli, 2007). EPPs oversight of FGCS and lower SES teacher candidate struggles because of the high-stakes performance assessment, such as the edTPA, have increased demands for more resources supporting the edTPA while decreasing teacher candidate support. Resources that facilitate the learning process for a highly diverse group presents extensive challenges (Alfred, 2002). If the EPP focuses solely on a standardized, summative assessment instead of researching how cultural groups

learn as adults, there will be continued gaps of diverse teacher candidates in the P-12 classrooms (Chavez, 2007). The standardized edTPA may have unintentionally regulated the teacher candidates' diversity to perform "good teacher" practices based on the traditional middle to upper-middle-class backgrounds. Even if a diverse teacher candidate has a high sense of self-efficacy, it does not equate confidence on a given task, such as teaching (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, the concern is that FGCS and lower SES teacher candidates may already be at a disadvantage to meet the edTPA requirements that negatively impact their self-efficacy.

If the EPP accepts the edTPA as a legitimate assessment of teacher readiness, it cannot take precedence over so much of the learning process that we forget to serve a greater good – our candidates....” (Donovan & Cannon, 2018). EPPs tend to emphasize the edTPA, while research-based instruction from professional teacher educators receives lower priority. Attick and Boyles' (2016) argued that edTPA had homogenized teacher education as a “teacher preparation experience reduced to a marketplace activity, and teacher candidates become consumers seeking payment for their work in the form of a grade and a teaching certificate” (p. 7). EPPS must acknowledge the inequity of the edTPA on the FGCS and low SES teacher candidates as one they cannot afford.

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