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Consequential World Language edTPA: Outcomes, Successes, and Challenges

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This project examines ISU world language teacher candidates' learning outcomes on edTPA, a high-stakes, content-specific portfolio assessment used since September 2015 by the State of Illinois to inform K-12 teacher licensure decisions and by ISU teacher education programs as a graduation requirement. This study investigates the 21 ISU world language teacher candidates' edTPA performance since it became consequential for ISU graduation and teacher licensure, reporting means and standard deviations for the 13 World Language edTPA rubrics and composite scores. Implications for the ISU world language teacher education program and ideas for improving candidate performance are explored.

Keywords: teacher licensure, performance assessment, edTPA, world languages, program improvement

edTPA, a content-specific portfolio assessment of new teacher readiness, has been implemented in 782 Educator Preparation Programs in 40 states and the District of Columbia (American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, n. d.), sometimes less than gladly. Of those states, 18 use edTPA scores for teacher licensure or are preparing to use

them to inform decisions related to teacher education in the next few years (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, SCALE, 2017a). In September 2015, edTPA scores became consequential for K-12 teacher licensure in the State of Illinois and graduation from a teacher education program at Illinois State University (ISU). Prior to fall 2015, teacher candidates in ISU teacher education programs completed edTPA with funds from the Provost's office, but a pass score had not been set and teacher candidates did not have consequences for not "passing" the assessment. Initially, Illinois world language teacher candidates needed to earn 31 (of the 65 possible) points to earn a teaching license. In September 2017, however, the necessary score to pass edTPA rose to 33 and it will rise again to 35 in September 2018 and to 37 in September 2019.

Teacher preparation programs across campus and the United States have spent time and energy integrating the high-stakes portfolio assessment into coursework and clinical experiences. This study is an effort by the ISU Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures teacher education program to understand French, German, and Spanish teacher candidates' performance on the World Language edTPA since fall 2015. It also seeks to determine how effective the teacher education program's previous efforts have been in improving teacher candidates' scores, how those scores compare to national averages, and to chart a path forward for the program and teacher candidates, given Illinois' scheduled increases to edTPA scores required for licensure.

Literature review

Constant educational reform and accountability has permeated the K-12 educational context and is making its way to the postsecondary level. Before teacher candidates can assume responsibilities for their own classroom and earn a teaching license, their basic skills, potential criminal backgrounds, knowledge of content that they will teach, and teaching abilities are all assessed. In addition, some state legislatures require teacher candidates to demonstrate an impact on student learning. Although not generally named in the legislation, edTPA conceptualizes effective teaching as a cycle of planning (intended teaching), instruction (enacted teaching) and assessment (impact of teaching on student learning) (SCALE, 2017b). As an extensive portfolio submitted for scoring outside of the local context, edTPA is one way of measuring content-specific teaching skills, with individual consequences for teacher candidates and collective consequences for the teacher education programs that prepare them. This literature review will provide a brief history of edTPA development and use, criticisms of the assessment, and other scholarship of teaching and learning studies, including a previous study carried out in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures.

With the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) as a basis, the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity created edTPA for nationwide use in programmatic and state decisions about new teacher readiness across 27 different content areas (Sato, 2014). Intended as a national common performance assessment to be administered across institutions and scored reliably (Sato, 2014), edTPA is considered a more robust assessment of teacher candidate abilities than earlier assessments of teacher knowledge, performance, and ultimately, effectiveness (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016). Au (2013) called it "leagues better than any pencil-and-paper test could be" (p. 22). As it is a teacher *performance* assessment, as opposed to predominantly multiple-choice assessments frequently used to evaluate teacher knowledge (e.g., state content exams, Praxis II World Language Pedagogy test), it is usually completed during student teaching.

Teacher education programs generally carry out a number of assessments of teacher candidate performance, although most are local and program-specific. edTPA, on the other hand, is a nationally-standardized test of teacher abilities and has potential to be useful more widely and promote positive changes to the entire teaching profession. In-house assessments of teacher effectiveness can be useful (Peck, Singer, Gabella, Sloan, & Lin, 2014), but a common teacher performance assessment that is administered across institutions and states and scored reliably by experts in teaching was SCALE's intention (Sato, 2014). It is argued that external reviewers, independent of given local contexts, can promote teaching to a higher level of professionalization, similar to that of physicians, architects, and accountants

(Darling-Hammond, 2010). This standardization can also prompt a shared vocabulary for teacher development (Peck, et al, 2014), including a more “common and concrete language of practice” (p. 22), and allow the profession to achieve “deeper levels of communication, collaboration, and coherence, both within and across programs of teacher education” (p. 23).

Many concerns among teacher educators and teacher candidates, including its lack of alignment with best practices in language teaching (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016; Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2017), have been raised about edTPA. The assessment’s \$300 cost, the investment of time during student teaching, and the need for sufficiently high scores for graduation and/or licensure make teacher candidates uneasy. The extensive time necessary to prepare teacher candidates for edTPA, along with the assessment’s potential be used to evaluate teacher education programs, trouble teacher educators. In 2017 over 40,000 teacher candidates submitted edTPA portfolios for official evaluation by Pearson, a multinational company, at a cost of \$300 each. In that year, teacher candidates throughout the nation spent more than \$12 million on edTPA, adding to the financial burden of postsecondary education. If teacher candidates do not earn a sufficient score for licensure and/or graduation, they may resubmit one or two tasks for a second attempt at a cost of \$100 per task. Croft, Robbins, and Stenhouse (2013) argue that edTPA exemplifies how the *testing industrial complex* serves to promote “excessive high-stakes testing; false political narratives about improving education; and transfer of curricular and financial governance from individual to local, local to state, and state to national/private entities” (p. 73).

Previous Scholarship of Teaching and Learning have explored edTPA, with mixed levels of depth. Thomas and Sondergeld (2015), for example, examined the efficacy of a classroom-based intervention on teacher candidate feedback to K-12 students, as evidenced on the Language Arts edTPA assessment task. Bogard, Sableski, Arnold, and Bowman’s (2017) acknowledged edTPA’s role in assessing teacher candidates’ development of the content literacy necessary to teach. And Caukin and Brinthaupt (2017) considered teacher candidates’ perceived usefulness of various curriculum components in developing teacher candidates’ philosophy of teaching statements, finding that edTPA was the least useful among all components.

And edTPA can provide evidence for various accountability measures at the program, institutional, state, and federal levels, with scores frequently used to promote curricular changes to teacher education programs and content modifications for methods courses that prepare teacher candidates. Combining World Language edTPA score datasets, Hildebrandt and Swanson (2014) explored performance trends in their programs at ISU and Georgia State University on the World Language edTPA, which focuses specifically on students’ communicative proficiency development in meaningful cultural context(s) (SCALE, 2017b). World language teacher candidates in those programs were found to excel on the planning task of the edTPA ($M = 3.64$), aided by the large amount of lesson planning practice they engaged in before student teaching (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2014). They struggled most with the assessment task ($M = 3.04$) as they rarely got a chance to practice feedback techniques until the student teaching semester, and instruction was in the middle ($M = 3.33$). The mean for total scores on the assessment in that study was 43.12, which is six points above the new edTPA cut score of 37 to be implemented in 2019.

Using those results, the two universities’ world language teacher education programs made curricular changes in an attempt to help teacher candidates succeed on edTPA, particularly on the assessment task. Over the last several years, the entire ISU world language teacher education program has been redesigned to sharpen the focus on communicative proficiency development in meaningful cultural context(s), as demanded by the World Language edTPA. Scores on that assessment have also been used as evidence for the program having met four of the six Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation standards for preparing world language teachers (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. n. d.) to which the ISU program is accountable. In particular, the program has emphasized even more backwards design, a teaching approach that encourages teachers first to establish measurable learning objectives, then to create assessments to determine whether those objectives have been met, and finally to develop in-class activities to

develop students' abilities to meet the objectives (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The increased focus on backwards design has inspired additional time spent during coursework on writing effective objectives and student learning outcomes (Gronlund, 2004). Additionally, the program has better integrated contemporary best practices in world language teaching into the hands-on teaching experience carried out at Unity Community Center. These core practices include using the target language for learning, designing communicative activities, teaching grammar as a concept and using it in context, using authentic cultural resources, planning with backward design, and providing appropriate feedback (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2015).

Methods

This study investigates ISU world language teacher candidates' performance on the World Language edTPA since it became consequential in Illinois for teacher licensure and at ISU for exit from teacher education.

Setting

edTPA has been implemented in the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures department's teacher education program since 2013, when the program participated in a pilot study with other ISU teacher education programs. The department's Coordinator of Teacher Education, also the author of this study, was one of the writers of the *World Language edTPA Assessment Handbook* in 2012, with guidance provided by SCALE personnel. She is the department's only faculty member concerned with K-12 teacher education and teaches the methods classes taken by world language teacher candidates the fall before they anticipate student teaching. One three-credit class focuses on how languages are learned and the other puts those concepts into practice through a semester-long civic engagement project carried out at Unity Community Center in Normal. (More information about experiences at the center can be found in Hildebrandt, 2014.) Teacher candidates enroll in the two classes concurrently. Students in the second course complete a mini-edTPA assignment based on their lesson taught to Unity's K-5th grade youth and feedback is provided by the methods instructor, both on the lesson taught as well as on the written mini-edTPA.

Participants

Following Institutional Review Board approval, the 21 ISU world language student teachers agreed to participate in the study. Participants represent the total number of program completers across the five semesters between fall 2015 and fall 2017. Participants were seeking degrees in Spanish ($n = 19$) and French ($n = 2$) teacher education. Six participants (29%) are male and 15 (71%) are female. Six participants are heritage speakers of Spanish, meaning that Spanish was spoken in their homes at least part of the time. The other 15 participants are Caucasian and only spoke English at home. Two participants initially did not earn a score necessary for ISU graduation or Illinois teacher licensure and resubmitted their portfolio after modifying at least one edTPA task. Therefore, the 21 participants elicited 23 total scores. World language teacher education programs are notoriously small and edTPA is so new that a data set of 23 is rather robust.

Instrument

Thirteen five-point Likert scale rubrics within the tasks of Planning (Rubrics 1, 2, 3 and 4), Instruction (Rubrics 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9), and Assessment (Rubrics 10, 11, 12 and 13) compose the World Language edTPA portfolio. Along with three extensive commentaries explaining their pedagogical decision-making processes, all teacher candidates submit the following artifacts for evaluation: lesson plans, assessments and evaluation criteria, instructional materials, student work samples with feedback, and a 15-minute video recording. Current or retired K-12 faculty or administrators, teacher education faculty, or university supervisor are employed by Pearson to score the portfolios (Pearson Technology, 2018). World Languages edTPA scores can range from zero to 65 total points, with each of the 13 rubrics scored from 1 to 5. According to SCALE's (2013) field tests,

- Level 1 represents the low end of the scoring spectrum, representing the knowledge and skills of a struggling candidate who is not ready to teach;
- Level 2 represents the knowledge and skills of a candidate who is possibly ready to teach;
- Level 3 represents the knowledge and skills of a candidate who is ready to teach;
- Level 4 represents a candidate with a solid foundation of knowledge and skills for a beginning teacher;
- Level 5 represents the advanced skills and abilities of a candidate very well qualified and ready to teach. (p. 12)

Teacher candidates compile their official edTPA portfolio during their final field placement (e.g., student teaching) for external scoring at a cost of \$300.

Procedures and Data Analysis

Participants submitted their edTPA portfolios for official evaluation by trained Pearson evaluators via a LiveText, a web-based assessment interface for academia. Participants' scores were analyzed using Excel 15.27. Means and standard deviations for each of the 13 rubrics, each of the three tasks, and total scores were calculated.

Results

Over 90 percent of ISU world language teacher candidates (19 of the 21 participants) passed edTPA with a sufficient score on the first attempt for ISU graduation and Illinois teacher licensure at the time of their graduation. The remaining two participants (9.5 percent) passed edTPA on the second attempt after resubmitting one or more tasks for evaluation, increasing their scores by six and nine points. The composite score mean was 38.13 ($SD = 5.32$) of the 65 points possible, as seen in Table 1, and those scores ranged from 27 to 46 points. Participants performed best on the assessment task, with a mean of 3.04 ($SD = .69$). Their planning performance closely followed ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .62$), and their performance on the instruction task was the lowest ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .76$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for results of the modified Fennema-Sherman Mathematics Attitude Survey.

Means and standard deviations for each of the 13 World Language edTPA rubrics and composite scores.

	M	SD
Planning	3.02	.62
• Planning for Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language (Rubric 1)	3.17	.78
• Planning to Support Varied Student Learning Needs (Rubric 2)	2.89	.60
• Using Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching and Learning (Rubric 3)	3.02	.49
• Planning Assessments to Monitor and Support Students' Development of Communicative Proficiency (Rubric 4)	3.00	.60
Instruction	2.76	.76
• Learning Environment (Rubric 5)	3.13	.34
• Engaging Students (Rubric 6)	2.98	.68
• Deepening Student Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language (Rubric 7)	2.83	.78

• Subject-Specific Pedagogy (Rubric 8)	2.26	.96
• Analyzing Teaching Effectiveness (Rubric 9)	2.59	.65
Assessment	3.04	.69
• Analysis of Student Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language (Rubric 10)	3.02	.78
• Providing Feedback to Guide Student Development of Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language (Rubric 11)	3.15	.73
• Student Use of Feedback (Rubric 12)	3.04	.64
• Using Assessment to Inform Instruction (Rubric 13)	2.96	.64
Composite scores	38.13	5.32

As for the individual rubrics, participants performed best on Rubric 1 - Planning for Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .78$) from the planning task, followed by Rubric 11 - Providing Feedback to Guide Student Development of Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .73$) from assessment, and Rubric 5 - Learning Environment ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .34$) from instruction.

The other rubrics with mean scores of 3 or above were Rubric 3 - Using Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching and Learning ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .49$) and Rubric 4 - Planning Assessments to Monitor and Support Students' Development of Communicative Proficiency ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .60$) from the planning task and Rubric 10 - Analysis of Student Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .78$) and Rubric 12 - Student Use of Feedback ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .64$) from assessment.

Participants performed less well on Rubric 8 - Subject-Specific Pedagogy ($M = 2.26$, $SD = .96$), Rubric 9 - Analyzing Teaching Effectiveness ($M = 2.59$, $SD = .65$), and Rubric 7 - Deepening Student Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .78$) from the instruction task. Performance on Rubric 2 - Planning to Support Varied Student Learning Needs ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .60$) from planning, Rubric 6 - Engaging Students ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .68$) from instruction, and Rubric 13 - Using Assessment to Inform Instruction ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .64$) from assessment also fell below a mean score of 3.

Discussion

This study was carried out to help the ISU world language teacher education program understand teacher candidates' performance on edTPA after substantial programmatic changes undertaken over the last five years. These changes were made in order to integrate the exigencies of edTPA into ISU's world language pedagogy courses and the student teaching semester, as has been done in other teacher education programs across campus, throughout the state of Illinois, and across the nation. This study investigated edTPA performance data to provide a bird's eye view of one teacher education program's successes and challenges with the high-stakes assessment, thereby making public the teaching and learning of ISU students. This discussion will address how data from this study compared to earlier data when edTPA was not required for Illinois teacher licensure or ISU graduation. It will also explore future steps in the methods classroom, as informed by this programmatic data, in the areas of planning, instruction, and assessment. It will close by comparing the findings from this study to national World Language edTPA data and look toward the future when required scores for passing edTPA will rise.

An examination of ISU world language teacher candidates' composite scores on the World Language edTPA since fall 2015 shows that, as a group, they have generally been successful on the assessment, allowing them to graduate from ISU and earn a teaching license in the state of Illinois. Despite the curricular changes described in the literature review and prompted by Hildebrandt and Swanson's (2014) germinal study, however, ISU world language teacher candidates' edTPA scores did not generally increase once edTPA became consequential. In fact, composite score means dropped by nearly five points, the planning mean by .62, and the instruction mean by .57. Data show that participants overall possessed "the knowledge and skills of a candidate who is ready to teach" (SCALE, 2013, p. 12) on the planning and assessment tasks, with mean scores of above three points (3.02 and 3.04 respectively). In the instruction task, however, they fall short of meeting that criteria by almost a quarter of a point. The assessment task mean score remained the same from the previous study to the current study. Overall, mean scores on 11 of the 13 rubrics in this study dropped, ranging from .04 points on Rubric 11 to .79 points on Rubric 8. Eight of those 11 rubrics' mean scores dropped by a half a point or more.

The planning task had the second highest mean among the tasks, just two one-hundredths of a point below the assessment task, and participants demonstrated competence on three of the four planning rubrics. Of particular interest is the lower score on Rubric 2 (Planning to Support Varied Student Learning Needs), which falls a bit below the threshold of being ready to teach. Future ISU world language classes will address this deficit by focusing even more on differentiation of instruction and curricular supports that can be incorporated into lessons. Those efforts, it is hoped, will not only help future teacher candidates in the program be better able to meet the requirements of edTPA; rather, those and all proposed curricular changes are intended to better meet the learning needs of K-12 students in student teaching placements and subsequent settings as they teaching languages in public schools across the state.

Methods classes taken by ISU world language teacher candidates emphasize the importance of the learning environment (Rubric 5) on teaching and learning by focusing on Universal Design for Instruction, an approach to teaching that attempts to remove barriers to student learning (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). This focus enabled teacher candidates to earn one of the highest scores on that rubric, but gains made were diminished by lower scores on the remaining instruction rubrics. Additionally, Subject-Specific Pedagogy (Rubric 8) from the same task had the lowest of all means and may have offset some of the collective success with Rubric 5. It should also be noted that rubric 8 had the highest standard deviation of all 13 rubrics, indicating increased variability in scores by nearly a whole point on a 5-point scale. The other two rubrics (Rubric 6 Engaging Students and Rubric 9 Analyzing Teacher Effectiveness) also fell below a mean score of 3, indicating a lack of readiness to teach. These data have prompted changes in the methods coursework to cover more fully these instructional criteria. In particular, integrating connections to other content areas (as measured by Rubric 8) and engaging learners in activities that allow them to more opportunities to communicate with one another (as measured by Rubrics 6 and 7) will be addressed more fully. In the methods classes, teacher candidates will be also engaged in a more in-depth examination and application of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (ACTFL, 2015), the guiding standards for K-16 world language teaching.

Participants in the present study were found to perform best on the assessment task, whereas teacher candidates struggled most with task 3 prior to edTPA's consequential use (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2014). Several of the curricular changes described in the literature review, such as an emphasis on backwards design and feedback strategies, focused on the assessment task after the earlier study found assessment to be the most challenging task. That focus on assessing student learning paid off with the increase in some assessment task Rubrics 12 (Student Use of Feedback) and 13 (Using Assessment to Inform Instruction), by .33 and .06 respectively, but means for the other two rubrics from the assessment task showed decreases of .36 and .04. Additional focus on objective-setting and performance assessments of student proficiency will be undertaken.

ISU world language teacher candidates performed above national means on composite scores and the instruction and assessment tasks (SCALE, 2017c). They performed slightly below the national means on the planning task. On 12 of the

13 World Language edTPA rubrics, participants performed as well or better than national means. Although it is disappointing to see these drops in composite scores, task, and rubric means from the previous study (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2014), these findings are not unique as national trends from 2014 to 2016 show the same pattern of decreased composite scores, means on each task, and means on most rubrics (SCALE 2015, 2016, 2017). As the number of teacher candidates who took the WL edTPA increased from 416 in 2014 to 655 in 2016, the composite mean scores for the whole assessment declined 4.1 points from 40.0 in 2014 to 35.9 in 2016, or just over 10% (SCALE 2015, 2017). Further, the means for all tasks decreased, as was found in the present study. As an example, the means for Rubric 8 (Subject-Specific Pedagogy) in the Instruction task across the country dropped from 2.4 to 1.9 over the course of those three years (SCALE 2015, 2016, 2017). It seems that the ISU world language teacher education program is in good company.

Despite edTPA's potential positive influence on teacher education programs, limitless improvement of scores is not possible or sustainable since student teachers' most important task during their final clinical placement (i.e., student teaching) should be actual teaching. As mentioned earlier, the cut score to pass the World Language edTPA in the state of Illinois will increase from its current passing score of 33 to 37 by fall of 2019. This study shows the current edTPA composite score mean as 38, just one point above the score necessary in about a year. While higher scores on edTPA would be desirable, there must be a balance with the other tasks of student teaching. edTPA is one small part of a much bigger picture of the teacher education program evaluation landscape. With that said, edTPA has high stakes for both individual teacher candidates and teacher education programs as a whole, so increased attention will be paid in the methods class to the topics addressed in the lowest scoring rubrics. To not do so would be professionally irresponsible.

Limitations

As with any study, the current study has limitations in design and of generalizability. Although this data set is robust by world language teacher education program standards, it includes a rather small number of participants. Of course, the purpose of this study is to investigate the performance of one program's teacher candidates and is not intended to be generalized to other world language programs or programs of other content areas. However, edTPA is only one assessment among many that teacher candidates take and, therefore, only provides one lens by which to view teacher candidate success in a program.

Future directions

These data have answered the question of how ISU's world language teacher candidates performed on edTPA since it was required in September 2015. The general decline of both ISU and national World Language edTPA scores prompts questions for further investigation, particularly as Illinois cut scores increase in the upcoming years. Some questions will be difficult to answer given the lack of transparency of edTPA portfolio assessment, but they are critical nonetheless. To begin, as the number of teacher candidates have increased over the years, has the number of evaluators increased? How are these evaluators trained and are they well versed in communicative language teaching, which is the focus of world language methods classes? Are their teaching philosophies informed by contemporary best language teaching practices? As the diversity of test-takers increase, how will edTPA scores be influenced? Does explicit writing instruction in the area of critical academic reflection positively influence edTPA scores? With time, it is hoped that these and many other questions about world language teacher candidate performance and World Language edTPA portfolio evaluation will be answered.

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