2017

Participant Perspectives and Critical Reflections on Language Teacher Education by Distance

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Abstract: Language teaching is a profession which is international in character. Language teachers often work and study in foreign countries, and distance education has become very important in the education of language teachers. Drawing on two international surveys, this paper explores language teacher education by distance from the perspective of students (i.e. trainee or practicing language teachers) and teacher-educators in such distance programs. There are significant educational advantages for language teachers who choose to study by distance, and e-learning technologies have enhanced these benefits. This paper also includes an in-depth analysis of the qualitative survey responses from two individual students, highlighting an individualized perspective on the data that complements the 'collective' analysis, and provides additional insights into how student experiences of such programs can vary widely, and how such disparities may be addressed.

Introduction

Language teaching is, by its nature, an international and inter-cultural profession. Language teachers, whether teaching in second-language (SL) or foreign-language (FL) environments, have the job of educating students to communicate with others of a different cultural and linguistic background. As a result, many language teachers spend at least part of their education and/or career in one or more foreign countries.

This feature of the language teaching profession has contributed to a relatively high uptake of distance education in this field. Teacher education more broadly is, historically, one of the main disciplines in which tertiary distance education has become popular (Robinson & Latchem, 2003), so it is not surprising that distance programs in Applied Linguistics / TESOL are both numerous (over 120 internationally according to a survey of Hall & Knox, 2009a) and widespread (with both programs and learners located around the world).

With the emergence of personal computers, the internet, and ubiquitous video, language teacher education by distance (LTED) has become an even more important phenomenon in language education, yet it remains relatively under-researched (Hall & Knox, 2009b). Further, it sometimes suffers from a 'deficit' syndrome, whereby distance learning is seen as 'naturally' inferior to face-to-face learning (Hall & Knox, 2009a; Hall & Knox, 2009b). However, developments in technology have transformed face-to-face learning, to the point where practices common in (and first developed for) distance education (e.g. recording of lectures, 'stand-alone' course materials, online discussions) are now commonplace in so-called face-to-face learning, and the distinction between distance and face-to-face is much less clear than it once was (Hall & Knox, 2009a, p. 65).

This paper draws on data collected in two international surveys: one of LTED providers, and one of LTED learners (who are themselves language teachers). The focus of

the paper is two-fold. The first is to look at the advantages of studying Applied Linguistics / TESOL by distance as identified by program providers and students of such programs. This focus on advantages is a deliberate choice, intended to respond to the 'deficit' view of distance learning discussed above. The second is to focus in more detail on the survey responses of two LTED learners (both experienced language teachers), in order to give a perspective on the data which (re-)personalizes the survey respondents, and provides a personalized perspective on both the advantages and the disadvantages of language teacher education by distance. This approach gives recognition to the situated identity of individual learners in such programs as a complement to the more 'collective' approach to the data in the first part of the paper (cf. van Lier, 2000, p. 248).

The following section gives a brief overview of the literature in LTED, and some of the key issues explored. Following that, the two surveys are discussed. Then, responses to a survey item (common to both questionnaires) on the advantages of language teacher education by distance are analysed. After that, Appraisal theory from Systemic Functional Linguistics is reviewed, and the responses of two learners to the learner survey are analysed employing tools from Appraisal theory. Finally, implications of the current paper are considered.

Distance Education and Language Teacher Education

Language teacher education by distance (LTED) is an area of language education involving many professionals both as trainers and trainees all over the world (see following section). A number of edited volumes are dedicated in part or whole to LTED (England, 2012; Henrichsen, 2001; Holmberg, Shelley & White, 2005), and others give some description of programs and coverage of issues in LTED before the internet, many of which remain relevant today (Howard & McGrath, 1995; Richards & Roe, 1994). Beyond these volumes, however, there are relatively few published papers on LTED in comparison to the plentiful and well-established literature on language teacher education more broadly (e.g. Bartels, 2005; Burns & Richards, 2009; Crandall, 2000; Freeman & Cornwell, 1993; Johnson, 2000; Richards, 1998; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Richards & Nunan, 1990; Wright, 2010). Most of the 'mainstream' language teacher education literature gives little or no consideration at all to distance education.

The literature on LTED identifies a range of issues faced by trainers and trainees alike. Some argue, for instance, that teaching practice cannot be effectively taught by distance (Haworth & Parker, 1995; McGrath, 1995). This is no doubt related to a widely-held perception that LTED programs are less rigorous than their face-to-face counterparts (e.g. Hall & Knox, 2009b; Mood, 1995; Nunan, 2002). Other issues identified include isolation for both learners (e.g. Salleh, 2002) and teachers (Hall & Knox, 2009a), communication difficulties, including technical problems (e.g. Hirvela, 2006), and time demands (e.g. Kouritzin, 2002).

Despite the issues raised in the literature, many papers (including those cited immediately above) also cite benefits of studying by distance, including learner autonomy and independence (e.g. Arnold & Ducate, 2006), situated learning (e.g. Roe, 1994), and the development of online learner communities (e.g. Biesenbach-Lucas, 2003).

However, the majority of the studies in this area focus on a single program, or even a single class in a single program. This paper takes a much broader perspective. It draws on the perspectives of teacher educators and administrators from 23 institutions in 7 different countries, and 137 students (living in 32 different countries) in three TESOL / Applied Linguistics programs in three different countries.

The Surveys

This study draws on data from two surveys. In the first survey, conducted in 2007, 138 teachers and administrators in 116 institutions providing LTED programs were contacted and invited to complete an online questionnaire. As mentioned above, the invitation attracted responses from 24 individuals from 23 institutions located in 7 different countries (plus one located in an additional 5 separate countries). The respondents offered varying combinations of programs through the range of certificate, diploma, bachelor, master, and doctoral qualifications. Five institutions had 1-5 teaching staff teaching by distance, two had over 30, and the remainder had a number somewhere between these two extremes. Similarly, three programs had between 1-15 students studying by distance at the time of the survey, six had over 200, and the remainder had a number somewhere between these extremes. The findings have been reported in more detail elsewhere (Hall & Knox, 2009a), but even this snapshot of a relatively small sample of providers shows the diversity in the student body studying in, and the programs offering, LTED internationally.

The second survey was of current and former LTED students. It was conducted in 2010, and invited students of three university programs (one each in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to complete an online questionnaire, and attracted 137 responses. Respondents represented 27 nationalities living in 32 different countries at the time of the survey. Respondents spoke 16 different languages as L1, and 40 additional languages (with only 11 of the 137 speaking no second language). All but 15 of the respondents taught English. Five had 30+ years' teaching experience, twenty-nine had 20-29 years' experience, sixty had 10-19 years' experience, and forty had less than 10 years' experience (two did not respond to this item). Like the institutional survey, the student survey showed that the student body in LTED programs is very diverse. While these data were collected a number of years ago, there is no comparable data set regarding language teacher education by distance that has been published, or that is in existence to the knowledge of the author. Further, they key issues raised by the quantitative and qualitative analyses presented below remain highly relevant to language teacher education by distance today (see discussion in sections 4 and 6).

The survey of students used a number of items from the earlier institutional survey to allow for comparison and collation of data. This paper reports on responses to one item common to both surveys, asking about the advantages of LTED for learners. The relevant item from each survey is shown in Figure 1.
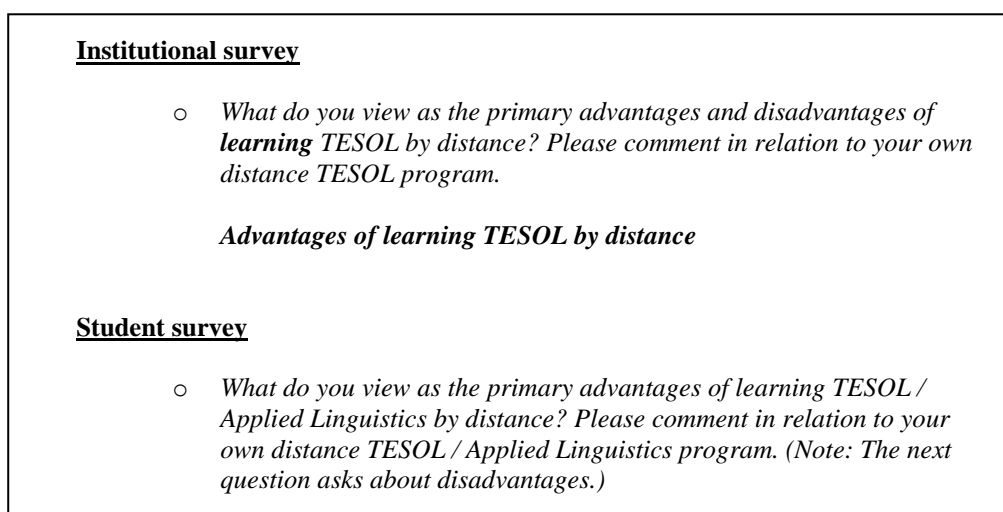

Institutional survey

     o   *What do you view as the primary advantages and disadvantages of **learning** TESOL by distance? Please comment in relation to your own distance TESOL program.*

         Advantages of learning TESOL by distance

Student survey

     o   *What do you view as the primary advantages of learning TESOL / Applied Linguistics by distance? Please comment in relation to your own distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics program. (Note: The next question asks about disadvantages.)*

Figure 1: Comparison of relevant survey items

For the purposes of the current paper, responses from the items in Figure 1 were collated, and then analysed in an iterative process of examining the responses, and categorising them according to common themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This part of the analysis is reported in the following section.

In addition, responses from two individual respondents (explained below) to the student survey were examined in greater depth as follows. First, all survey responses from these two individuals to items that required a qualitative response were collected. Only such items that had a response from both respondents were used. This gave 14 responses from each respondent. Each set of responses resembles a dialogue between the respondent, and the researchers, mediated by the survey instrument (see Appendix). This view of the data reflects the experience of those completing the survey, and provides a perspective on these survey data comparable with research interview data (see discussion below).

Recalling that this second part of the analysis was taken in order to supplement the more 'collective' approach to the survey data from all respondents, the two sets of student responses were selected because they were of comparable length, and because one respondent was mostly positive, and the other mostly negative, thus allowing a close examination of contrasting perspectives. These sets of responses were analysed using tools from Appraisal theory from Systemic Functional Linguistics (see section 5 below).

Advantages of Language Teacher Education by Distance (LTED)

The categories that emerged from a qualitative analysis of the responses are listed in Table 1, together with the number (and percentage) of responses in which these themes/categories appeared.

The first noticeable trend in these figures is the relative consistency in the percentage of institutional respondents and student respondents that identified each issue, with the possible exceptions of:
- *Interaction / Medium*
- *Learner responsibility*
- *Quality*
- *Professional relevance*.
  Of 13 issues identified in the analysis, eight were identified by both groups:
- *Flexibility / Location / Accessibility / Availability*
- *Situated learning*
- *Learner control*
- *Diversity of student cohort*
- *Financial issues for students*
- *Interaction / Medium*
- *Learner responsibility*
- *Employability*.
  Four were identified by a small percentage of students and not by institutional respondents:
- *Quality*
- *Professional relevance*
- *Stimulation / Currency*
- *Security*.
  One was identified by a single institutional respondent:
- *Curriculum sequence*.

Though the number of institutional respondents is small, and these data do not lend themselves to statistical analysis, the relative consistency in issues identified by the two groups (providers and students) and the percentage of each group identifying them suggests that the two groups see many of the same factors as beneficial to distance learners in these programs, and suggests a degree of commonality of experience and perspective of LTED between academics/administrators with institutional responsibility for LTED programs, and students of those programs.

Theme / Category	Institutional responses (from a possible 24)	Student responses (from a possible 137)
Flexibility / Location / Accessibility / Availability	17 (70.8%)	96 (70.1%)
Situated learning	6 (25%)	32 (23.4%)
Learner control	5 (20.8%)	32 (23.4%)
Diversity of student cohort	3 (12.5%)	11 (8%)
Financial issues for students	2 (8.3%)	16 (11.7%)
Interaction / Medium	2 (8.3%)	4 (2.9%)
Learner responsibility	2 (8.3%)	2 (1.5%)
Employability	1 (4.2%)	5 (3.7%)
Quality	0	8 (5.8%)
Professional relevance	0	6 (4.4%)
Stimulation / Currency	0	1 (0.7%)
Security	0	1 (0.7%)
Curriculum sequence	1 (4.2%)	0

Table 1: Quantification of open-ended responses to questionnaire item on advantages of learning TESOL/Applied Linguistics by distance

Turning now to look at the categories and responses in more detail, responses quoted below are followed by a letter and number in parentheses. The 21st respondent to the institutional survey, for instance, would be identified by 'I' (for institution) and 21: thus, (I21). The fourth respondent to the student survey would be identified by 'S' (for student) and 4: thus, (S4).

Flexibility is commonly cited as an advantage of distance learning in the survey responses: there are 113 comments related to flexibility / location / accessibility / availability. A number of respondents cited 'flexibility' as an advantage in very general terms, as shown in the following responses. (N.B. Many responses to survey items consist of a single word or phrase.)

flexible (I5)
flexibility (I17)
having flexibility (S72)
flexibility (S73)
Others were more specific about what they saw as being flexible.
flexibility to take classes; fewer time constraints (I6)
Flexibility - regardless of location, most and often all program requirements can be met in the learner's own community (I14)
Flexibility in time and space to study (I19)
The flexibility it gave me to combine work and study. (S8)
The flexibility of being able to study in your own time and to be able to work and study. (S31)
Flexibility of time i.e. fitting it in around working (S34)
No driving, flexible schedule, can do when kids are sick or when I am sick. (S42)

> *Whilst studying I had two children and built a house, which isn't possible in a less flexible programme. (S67)*

Many respondents made points related to flexibility without mentioning this explicitly. These included, importantly, the ability to work while studying.

> *students can work while studying - less dislocation to normal life, (I10)*
> *Being able to study in my own time and fit this (as best as I can) around my work and family commitments. (S4)*
> *Can juggle it with full time work (S24)*
> *The primary advantage is that I could keep my job. (S44)*
> *The ability to pursue advanced academic studies without having to give up one's job. (S57)*
> *The program can be fitted around your work/home life. You can merge your studylife with your worklife. (S127)*

In relation to the importance of being able to work while studying, eighteen respondents also explicitly discussed financial issues for students, including but not restricted to working while studying.

> *Not having to take a year out of your ordinary life. I wouldn't have been able to afford it if I had had to take a year off. (S12)*
> *students are able to continue working which means that students without other means are able to participate in a program. (S17)*
> *The opportunity to continue to make a living, the money it saves me from not having to live near and attend the university (S79)*
> *You can carry on working, i.e. earning money, i.e. paying the bills and paying for your MA. (S119)*

These findings indicate that the work-study relationship might be one that is more important for LTED than for distance education in other disciplines. The international nature of the cohort of LTED, their profession, and their subject area (discussed in section 1) mean that the ability to remain in a foreign workplace has particular importance to language teachers for personal, professional, educational, and financial reasons.

In keeping with this, mobility and the ability to study in one or more chosen locations (no matter how permanent or temporary they might be) was also a commonly cited advantage of LTED.

> *students can join irrespective of their location in any part of the world (I3)*
> *Most of my students are already teaching so distance study suits their life style. (I11)*
> *A student can receive the same information on their computer without ever leaving home. They can be anywhere in the world and still take our course. (I13)*
> *able to take travelling or on remote work assignments. (S11)*
> *Able to study and work in country of residence at same time. (S56)*
> *I was able to start my studies while living in a foreign country where I wouldn't have had the option of studying such a course on campus. I could fit my study around my work and other commitments more easily than if I had to attend lectures each week on campus. (S60)*
> *The primary advantage is in the flexibility it allows. When I complete my degree, I'll have competed it over five years, having studied in four different countries. (S77)*
> *I started studying in Spain and I finished in Turkey. I could do the work when and where I wanted. (S117)*

It is clear then, that flexibility is an important advantage of LTED: flexibility in general, but also quite specific things like managing a work-study balance; combining study with family responsibilities; and also the ability to travel and to change one's country of residence. While on-campus programs can provide flexibility in terms of part-time study, the ability to travel and move overseas and continue studying in the same program is only possible with distance education, and this is an important factor for many practitioners in language education, who operate in an international profession, and an international job market.

Moving away from flexibility *per se*, a closely related factor to location is the pedagogical relation between LTED, and concurrently working. This gives rise to the nature of learning in LTED programs. Many students in LTED programs find that distance learning offers an opportunity for situated learning, and a direct, ongoing, and personal 'testing out' of theory and practice. The 38 responses on this included the following.

> *they are in the classroom every day, so everything they learn has immediate points of reference. (I10)*
> *Students can tailor the focus of practical assignments to reflect their own teaching contexts and development needs (I14)*
> *It allowed me to live in the environment which I will continue to teach in and (as I have mentioned) was still teaching in while I studied; this gave me the ability to apply first hand - and get results - the teachings and ideas I received in class. I think being detached from teaching while studying about it can be bad. (S3)*
> *Can work (teach) at the same time, so my teaching informs my study, and my study informs my teaching in a nice little positive spiral. (S71)*
> *As a learner you can use your work/personal experiences to guide you through the program. (S127)*

Like flexibility, this relation between professional practice and study is not unique to distance programs; part-time study is also possible in face-to-face programs, and provides a similar experience for those who are teaching in the locale of the institution where they are studying. What LTED offers exclusively, however, is the ability to work in locations geographically removed from the institutional locale. A teacher of Chinese in Brazil can study at a Chinese university offering LTED; a teacher of English in Oman can study at an Australian university offering LTED; a teacher of Spanish in the US can study at a Chilean university offering LTED. So, while situated learning is not exclusive to LTED, some learning experiences particularly suitable (and important) for language education practitioners are, in fact, only possible with distance learning.

Going beyond situated learning, learner control over the learning process was also a factor in 37 of the responses. For many, the ability of the student to work at their own pace, and to control when they studied was mentioned.

> *Students get to digest material and work at their own pace as opposed to an intensive course where too much is thrown at them in a short period of time, much of which isn't retained. (I1)*
> *Flexibility in terms of time and location. Schedules can be arranged to suit the learner. Learners can be self-paced and self-motivated and many are. (I24)*
> *Engagement with the programme is at the students' convenience (i.e. no waiting around outside faculty/staff offices) (S13)*
> *I am able to work at my pace and in the time that I can allocate to my studies. (S29)*
> *You can make your own plan about how you put your study into your career (S80)*
> *I could go at my own pace and delve into things as I pleased. (S99)*

Some respondents also said that students could decide how much, and even what they study.

I can work on what I want, when I want (S51)

You can work at your own pace and at times and places convenient for you. ...
You decide what to study, how much and when. (S119)

This shift in power from teacher to learner is a significant difference in the roles of teacher and learner in distance and face-to-face modes. In face-to-face learning, the lesson rarely begins until the teacher enters the room. In LTED, it is the learner, not the teacher, who must initiate the learning experiences and set their own timetable and agenda for getting things done (within the framework and guidance of the course).

Thus, being a distance learner is a qualitatively different experience from being a face-to-face learner - the pedagogic process is different. For this reason, distance and face-to-face programs differ not only in *how* learning happens, but also inevitably in *what* is learned. A small number of respondents (4 in total) commented on this, identifying the added responsibility on the learner to initiate and control learning activities as an important advantage of LTED.

the student has to do everything so more is learned (I9)

The amount of information presented in both formats is about equal, but I would
guess that the amount of processing of that information is greater in the distance
courses. It's not possible to just show up. (I16)

it forces you to be self-disciplined and adventurous (in your reading and study
directions) These are great skills. You 'own' the study experience so when you
succeed it is far more personal and means so much more. (S84)

The fact that you learn for yourself. You develop a passion for asking questions
and then applying them to other theory, testing them out. I learnt a lot about
myself and discovered a lot I didn't know. I don't think I would have done this in
a purely theoretical environment. (S109)

Also on the processes of learning in LTED, the diverse nature of the student cohort in classes who study by distance is a factor identified by 14 respondents. While face-to-face programs often have diverse cohorts, who may be teaching in different contexts (e.g. primary versus tertiary), the diversity of *current* professional and cultural contexts found among student cohorts is a feature of LTED that cannot be replicated in face-to-face programs.

contact (in our case) with students located on five continents worldwide with
many and varied experiences in TESOL (these are shared in our discussion
fora). (I5)

Because the topic is TESOL, the decentralization of the students gives me the
opportunity to interact with classmates who are teaching all across the globe.
This brings richness and depth to learning how to teach EFL/ESL. It helps me
learn how to teach to students from a wide range of cultures and it better
prepares me to teach in new locations in the future. (S55)

My favourite: Having classmates who are all over the WORLD. It is just
wonderful to hear about everyone's experiences. (S103)

I also benefited from the expertise of all of my classmates around the world
doing a variety of different jobs in TESOL. Getting their different cultural
perspectives as well as insights into what we were studying helped to increase
my understanding. (S123)

This advantage of LTED is a relatively recent one. Before the advent of the internet, interaction in LTED programs was primarily one-to-one (between individual learner and teacher), mediated by course notes, assignments, and assessment feedback. But technology-mediated learning communities are now the norm rather than the exception in LTED, and

while face-to-face and blended programs can use the same technology, they cannot offer the same potential for diversity as distance programs.

The final category to be discussed here (and related to the preceding category) is the nature of interaction in distance learning, and how it is mediated. Six respondents raised this issue as an advantage of LTED.

Opportunity for in-depth discussion not often available in traditional classroom instruction. (I20)

It opened my eyes to the striking similarities of experiences of teachers in so many different countries and contexts. It can be liberating to realize that answers for Japan might come from Malawi or Bahrain, for example - or vice versa. The experience was/is very McLuhanesque, particularly in the early 2000s, before the tidal wave of social media came down upon us all! (And yes, I love using Facebook, and Twitter, as well as the Moodle platform here at my own school. I suspect my [study] experiences had a good deal to do with all of that.) (S69)

Pedagogically, this raises important issues, as language teaching by distance becomes more common and more important (see Kozar, 2012, 2014; C. White 2003, 2006). If increasing numbers of language teachers are teaching by distance, there is a strong argument that they should have some experience also of learning by distance (Shelley et al., 2013).

In conclusion, flexibility, and the ability to work while studying are important advantages of LTED, and that these are widely recognised by students and program providers. In addition, the roles of learners and teachers, and the high degree of learner responsibility are also important advantages of LTED. These factors were 'in play' before the advent of the internet and the world wide web, which have facilitated faster and more diverse social interaction for distance students and teachers.

The diversity of the learner cohort and the interaction between them are advantages that were not features of distance programs for most (or all) of the 20th century. These are particularly important factors for (trainee) language teachers due to the nature of their profession, as discussed above. With the geographically dispersed nature of many LTED cohorts, the affordances of technology-mediated interaction provide advantages not found in face-to-face instruction, and also provide the means by which teacher-educators can model new kinds of teaching for their students (i.e. language teachers) who are increasingly likely to go on to teach language by distance.

The factors identified above remain as current advantages of LTED, even though there have been technological advances in areas such as live streaming tools and video conferencing (possible at the time of the surveys but not widely available) since these data were collected. Issues such as flexibility, learner responsibility, student diversity, and gaining experience in learning in technologically-mediated contexts are integral to the educational experience of distance learners and teacher-educators, and are also definitive factors in differentiating LTED programs from their face-to-face counterparts.

Individual Perspectives

The data presented to this point provide us with a useful perspective on the responses of teacher educators and distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics students to a question on the advantages of language teacher education by distance. Such categorisation is informative, but it is also possible to interrogate the survey data in a different way. Qualitative survey responses are construed linguistically, and we can apply linguistic theory in order to go

beyond categorisation, and gain insights from the perspectives of individuals who have completed a survey.

Thus, data from surveys can be examined from a collective perspective (as done in the previous section), or from an individual perspective, viewing each individual's responses as a dialogue with the researchers, mediated by the survey instrument. Such dialogues have some features of spoken language (e.g. turn-taking in question-and-answer pairings; elliptical responses to some questions), and some features of written language (e.g. visual rather than aural channel; some extended responses that are much more 'written' in nature; listing in some cases; a lack of back-channel signals). The Appendix presents the data from two respondents in this fashion, and we can see similarities between these 'survey dialogues' and the discourse of research interviews. This is not a claim that these two speech events are the same - in fact they are distinct in important ways. Rather, the claim here is that, as data-generating instruments, qualitative surveys require critical consideration, as do the data they generate.

In recent years, the data from research interviews and their analysis have come under scrutiny in Applied Linguistics. Interviews are coming to be seen not as research instruments which provide 'knowledge' or 'facts' about a situation, but as socially constructed sites of interaction in their own right, which generate data that require careful and critical analysis, including a consideration of the context of the interview and the interaction therein (Edley & Litosseliti, 2010; Richards, 2003; Talmy & Richards, 2011). The data generated by qualitative surveys deserve similar consideration. By viewing the survey data in this study from the perspective of the individual, *in addition to* viewing it from a collective perspective, we can gain a better understanding of individuals' perspectives and experiences of language teacher by education, and the type and extent of the differences between them.

Appraisal theory in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin & White, 2005; Bednarek, 2007) examines evaluation in language, and the ways in which speakers orient themselves (and their audiences) to interactants and topics (Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal theory has been used to study a variety of social exchanges, including media discourse (e.g. Bednarek, 2006; P. White, 2003), academic writing and disciplinary discourses (e.g. Coffin, 2006; Hood, 2010), casual conversation (e.g. Eggins & Slade, 1997); and political discourse (e.g. Eley & Adendorff, 2011; Miller, 2004).

Attitude type	Example from survey responses	Comment
explicit Affect	I _miss_ the camraderie/ interaction of onsite study	'miss' denotes a feeling of dissatisfaction
implicit Affect	it would be nice to see pictures of my ... tutors	'would be nice to see' implies desire - an expression of emotion
explicit Judgement	_unable_ to communicate in English	'unable' denotes a lack of ability or social capacity; the target of Judgement here is other students
implicit Judgement	self study tasks guided by the teacher	the implication is that the teacher is doing a 'good' or the 'right' thing by guiding students
explicit Appreciation	_useless_ surveys	'useless' is an explicitly negative term evaluating 'surveys' here
implicit Appreciation	The study materials were all delivered directly to my door. No need for library visits.	the implication is that the LTED course (the target of Appraisal here) is convenient and/or accessible, but there is no explicit lexical item indicating this

Table 2: Examples of Attitude from the survey responses

This paper employs one aspect of Appraisal theory - **Attitude** - to examine the survey responses of two students of the same LTED program. Attitude explores the linguistic means by which speakers/writers express positive and negative attitudes in their talk, and is sub-divided into expressions of emotion, or **Affect** (e.g. *happy*, *like*, *anger*); expressions of social value/morality, or **Judgement** (e.g. *corrupt*, *steal*, *virtue*); and expressions of aesthetic value, or **Appreciation** (e.g. *melodic*, *beautify*, *imbalance*). Attitude can be stated explicitly, where there is evaluation in a lexical item (as in the examples above); or implicitly. For instance, the following examples show positive implicit Appreciation of research (example A) and negative implicit Judgement of a person (example B).

A: *Her research led to the development of a drug that kills the virus.*

B: *He killed three children.*

Table 2 shows survey responses exemplifying each category of Attitude.

A final note on Appraisal analysis. It is possible for a single instance of language to evaluate more than one target. To illustrate, the following instance of language has two expressions of Attitude:

feedback on course assignments was usually received weeks or months after the course was finished.

This is at once an implicit negative Appreciation of the feedback itself as an object (i.e. late, and therefore of little value), and also an implicit negative Judgement of the person/people responsible for providing it (i.e. not acting in a way that could be expected of a teacher).

In the analysis of the survey responses, Affect has been indicated by the use of grey highlight, Judgement by the use of **bold font**, and Appreciation by the use of underlining. Instances of 'double' Appraisal (as discussed above) are double-coded visually.

Two Learners' Responses: Attitude

The two anonymous respondents both studied the same LTED program. Their genders were not specified, and the female possessive pronoun is used for both. They are given the pseudonyms 'Sam' and 'Cal'.

Sam's first language is English. Sam also speaks a second language, and had 12 years of teaching experience at the time of the survey. She was living and working in an Asian country at the time of the survey.

Cal's first language is also English, and she speaks two second languages. Cal had six years of teaching experience at the time of the survey. She was living and working in a different Asian country at the time of the survey.

Sam	Cal
-	• self-study tasks **guided by the teacher** • some reflective practice in <u>applying theory to current teaching</u> • **open to being contacted*** • **quick response*** • **consistent & regular contact with Ss*** • **able to encourage further reflection*** • **offering guidance*** • **Allows for flexibility*** * features of a 'good' teacher, not necessarily of the teaching experienced in the program

Table 3: Positive Attitude towards teachers and teaching

Both respondents made evaluations of teachers and teaching on their LTED program in their responses. Table 3 shows that Sam's survey responses included no positive Attitude towards teachers and teaching. Cal's responses included positive implicit Appreciation of reflective practice, and positive implicit Judgement of teachers. One of the survey items asked about the quality of a 'good distance teacher', and many of Cal's positive Judgements were in response to this item, and so are not Appraisal of teachers/teaching she has experienced, but of distance teachers/teaching in general. In contrast, Sam made no positive Appraisal of distance teachers or teaching, even generically.

In contrast to the data in Table 3 where there are no instances of Attitude from Sam, the data in Table 4 show that she used both implicit negative Judgement of teachers (e.g. *you are told to read a book and write an assignment once you are finished* - which sets out behaviour that is at odds with the expectations of what is 'proper' teaching) and negative Appreciation of the act of teaching as an object of Appraisal in its own right (e.g. *good distance teaching is not possible*). Sam also uses one instance of implicit negative Affect, illustrating dissatisfaction with staff interaction / communication: *Regular and on-time [communication/ interaction with staff] would be enough*.

Sam	Cal
• **little feedback** • **feedback on course assignments was <u>usually received weeks or months after the course was finished</u>** • good distance teaching is <u>not possible</u> • **you are told to read a book and write an assignment once you are finished** • **Regular and on-time [communication/interaction with staff] would be enough** • <u>irrelevant and unrealistic</u> forums • doing <u>useless</u> surveys • **try raising IELTS requirements**	• it would be nice to see pictures of my tutors

Table 4: Negative Attitude towards teachers and teaching

In contrast to Sam, Cal had only one instance of negative Attitude regarding teachers and teaching in the program, and that was implicit negative Affect (*it would be nice to see pictures of my ... tutors*). This instance, construed in emotional terms, could have been construed as a negative Judgement of the teachers or program administrators (e.g. *they should provide pictures so students can see who is teaching them*), or as negative Appreciation of the program (e.g. *discussions are impersonal and colourless because you can't see who you are communicating with*). Similarly, Sam's evaluations *could* have been expressed as Affect. The point here is that the expression of Attitude, as with all other aspects of language, offers choices to a speaker, and such choices, as they cumulate across a piece of discourse, show patterns that go beyond a simple identification of 'positive' or 'negative' evaluation.

Thus, there are two patterns of Attitude we can observe to this point. The first is the most obvious: that Sam is more negative than Cal. The second, emerging pattern is that Cal tends to use Judgement and Appreciation to express positive Attitude, and Affect to express negative Attitude.

Table 5 shows that neither respondent expressed positive Attitude to their fellow students, though Cal did positively appraise distance students generically. This remains consistent with the first pattern identified above: a lack of positive Attitude in Sam's responses.

Sam	Cal
-	• **Organised*** • **self-motivated*** • **in contact with tutor and other Ss*** • willingness to ask questions* * features of a 'good' student, not necessarily of the other students encountered in the program

Table 5: Positive Attitude towards other students

Table 6 shows that Sam's negative Attitude towards other students is expressed exclusively as Judgement (e.g. *too busy*; *would not gain entry to my lower-intermediate class*), whereas Cal's negative Attitude towards other students is expressed exclusively as Affect (e.g. *I miss the camaraderie [sic] ...*).

Sam	Cal
• **too busy** • **unable to communicate in English** • **try raising IELTS requirements** for learners • fellow-learners who **would not gain entry to my lower-intermediate class**	• I miss the camaraderie/interaction of onsite study • it would be nice to see pictures of my fellow Ss

Table 6: Negative Attitude towards other students

Both Sam and Cal used mostly Appreciation in evaluating positive aspects of their LTED program, and 'studying by distance' in general (Table 7). Both also used Judgement to indirectly appraise the program positively (e.g. *better career prospects* is a positive Judgement by Cal of herself, yet this is also an indirect positive appraisal of the program which has provided those prospects). Neither use Affect. Of note in this table is the instance which comes from Sam's response to the item on disadvantages of studying by distance:

> *there is no access to campus life. Which could be viewed as an advantage of course.*

Sam	Cal
• Convenience • the best • **[improves] employability** • The study materials were all delivered directly to my door • No need for library visits • no access to campus life	• I could work and study concurrently • Good mix of theory & practical application • can specialise in language program management • no thesis • **Increased knowledge & expertise** • **better career prospects** • **tasks guided by the teacher** • set readings ... of related journals/articles • applying theory to current teaching • Clearly set out tasks and objectives • realistic and achievable pacing & nature of tasks • clear lines of support and guidance • Being able to study in my own time and fit this (as best as I can) around my work and family commitments

	• email is a <u>great</u> way to keep in contact with tutors • Online discussions can be <u>effective</u> ... and <u>beneficial</u> • <u>provided an opportunity for me that would otherwise not be possible</u>

Table 7: Positive Attitude towards the distance program / studying by distance

This has been analysed as an instance of both positive and negative Appreciation, since Sam presents it first as a disadvantage, but then states that it could also be an advantage. This instance is discussed further below. Of note also is the relative volume of positive Attitude, with Cal again having many more instances of positive evaluation than Sam.

The negative Attitude towards the distance program / studying by distance (Table 8) shows a similar pattern to the negative Attitude in Tables 4 and 6, with Sam using mostly negative Judgement of the actions of the institution (e.g. *money is simply exchanged for a piece of paper*) and negative Appreciation of distance learning as an object of evaluation (e.g. *nearly impossible to create the kind of academic discourse that constitutes a real learning experience online*), and some Affect (e.g. *fellow-learners ... did not endear me to the distance learning system*); whereas Cal used Affect (e.g. *Difficult to 'benchmark' myself in terms of understanding and progressing as expected with the materials (i.e Am I getting this? Am I on the right track?)*) with a single exception.

To summarize the findings of this part of the analysis, Appraisal patterns include the following. First, there is predominantly negative Attitude expressed by Sam, and predominantly positive Attitude from Cal. Second, the negative Attitude from Sam is mostly expressed as Judgement of others involved in her LTED program (teachers, the institution, other students). Third, the negative Attitude from Cal is mostly expressed as Affect - i.e. expressed as an emotional response on the part of Cal.

These Appraisal patterns are part of Sam's and Cal's discursive re-presentation (representation) of their personal experience of the same LTED program. We can see patterns of consistent linguistic choices in their respective survey responses that go beyond the choice of 'positive, neutral or negative', to a selection of the *targets* of Attitude (e.g. others, or self), and the *type* of Attitude (Affect, Judgement, or Appreciation). Thus, Sam construes negative experiences of the LTED program mostly in terms of faults in the teaching staff and other students involved in the program (Judgement) and to a lesser extent faults in the program itself (Appreciation), whereas Cal construes negative experiences of the program in terms of her emotional response (Affect).

We can speculate, with a fair degree of certainty, that Sam and Cal had quite different experiences of their LTED program. We can conclude unequivocally that they have re-construed their experience differently in their survey responses.

Surveys take a 'broad sweep', and the sheer volume of data they generate means that the first kind of analysis reported in this paper will inevitably be more common than the more in-depth, individualised analysis provided in this section. Nonetheless, taking an individualised perspective on at least part of the data has provided a perspective that would otherwise be lost.

As a teacher educator, I am happier reading the comments of Cal than I am reading those of Sam. Yet Sam is a student of the same program as Cal, and their perspectives are equally valid. Teacher educators have a responsibility to reach all our students, and the overwhelmingly negative experience of an individual student can be lost in data analysis which focuses on the collective.

In this case, there appears to be some justification for arguing that Sam was likely to be dissatisfied regardless of the program, and the mode of study, despite the likelihood that poor and/or slow feedback contributed to her negative experience. Part of this justification would be the range of targets of negative Attitude in her responses, which include not only fellow students, teaching staff, the particular LTED program, and distance learning in general, but also campus life (presumably from previous studies) which is not an aspect of distance learning.

Sam	Cal
• **little or no actual 'teaching'** • **little feedback** • **feedback on course assignments was <u>usually received weeks or months after the course was finished</u>** • **you are told to read a book and write an assignment once you are finished** • **[a good distance learner means] Paying tuition on time** • Difficult to answer [question about 'good distance program'] without being snide • <u>nearly impossible to create the kind of academic discourse that constitutes a real learning experience online</u> • <u>impossible to have free and open academic discussion and exchange of views</u> • <u>no access to campus life</u> • <u>little or no communication among myself and other distance learners</u> • <u>irrelevant and unrealistic forums</u> ... there is not much point • **dehumanisation** • **separation of education** from the university process • **money is simply exchanged for a piece of paper**. Which pretty much sums up my experience • fellow-learners who **would not gain entry to my lower-intermediate class** did not endear me to the distance learning system	• Difficult to 'benchmark' myself in terms of understanding and progressing as expected with the materials (i.e Am I getting this? Am I on the right track?) • I miss that interpersonal interaction in studying • lonely • I miss the camraderie/interaction of onsite study • [LMS] has some <u>limitations</u> that I find annoying • I'd love to see some real-time online discussions too • I'd love to watch online lectures • It would be nice to see pictures of my fellow Ss and tutors - I think it would add a more social, personal touch

Table 8: Negative Attitude towards the distance program / studying by distance

Yet Cal also has negative responses to the LTED program, and the targets of her negative Attitude are also informative, including factors such as a lack of visual contact with teachers and other learners, and of provision of lectures by video. Such issues go to social contact and the emotional well-being of students both individually and as a group, and it may be that responding to the factors negatively appraised by Cal would also provide students like Sam with a better orientation to their program, and with a more positive and productive learning experience.

Individual engagement with distance learners where possible (email, telephone/Skype); high levels of teacher involvement in online discussions and other interactive fora; provision of accessible online 'spaces' for convenient learner-learner interaction; and/or the use of visual engagement (inclusion of photographs of

teachers/learners, video of lectures or other communication) where appropriate are some of the strategies that can be employed by teachers and curriculum designers to address these issues. However, isolated strategies are unlikely to be sufficient, and the social element of learning should be considered in all aspects of the curriculum. Indeed, the social aspect of LTED, including the importance of finding ways to engage positively with learners and provide a rewarding social and educational experience, remains a fundamental issue for distance programs, where the relationship between teachers and learners is mediated not by face-to-face interaction, but by technologies such as the printed word, the computer screen, and the video camera.

Conclusions

This paper set out to achieve two aims. The first was to document advantages of language teacher education by distance (LTED). The second was to take an individualised perspective on survey data, treating (by necessity, a small number of) respondents as individuals and examining the discourse of their responses in detail.

Addressing the first aim, the findings show that LTED provides the global community of language teachers with opportunities for flexibility in learning, for situated learning, for learner responsibility, for diversity in the student cohort, and for preparation for teaching language by distance, and that these opportunities do not exist to the same extent or in the same way in face-to-face programs.

Addressing the second aim, the findings show that one student, Sam, consistently evaluates aspects of her LTED program negatively, and construes this negative appraisal in terms of negative Judgement of other actors, and negative Appreciation of various elements of the program and distance education more broadly. In contrast, another student, Cal, is mostly positive, and her negative responses are construed almost exclusively in emotional terms as Affect, giving rise to the tentative conclusion that greater attention to interpersonal aspects of distance learning in the design of that particular LTED program may have led to a more positive educational experience for both Cal and Sam. The tools of Appraisal theory provide one approach to interrogate the data; other methods of discourse analysis will provide other valuable insights into similar data.

In conclusion, language teacher education by distance represents a widespread and important set of social practices within the broad field of language education. Students in LTED programs reap a number of advantages not available in face-to-face programs, but as always, this is balanced against other advantages for students who study in face-to-face programs. For (prospective) language teachers who are inclined to distance study, the international nature of our community and our profession make language teacher education by distance a valuable educational experience, and, like face-to-face programs, a choice which offers considerable educational benefits. For teacher educators in LTED, employing the affordances of technology to bridge the interpersonal gap may improve the learning experiences, and future teaching practices of students like Sam and Cal.

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Acknowledgements

Appendix: Relevant survey responses from Sam and Cal with Appraisal analysis

Key:
Affect   - (emotion)
Judgement   - (social / moral value)
Appreciation   - (aesthetic value)
[LMS]   - the name of the Learning Management System has been removed to preserve anonymity
[university]   - the name of the university has been removed to preserve anonymity
[country]   - the location of the university and the country of residence of the respondents have been removed to preserve anonymity

Survey questions and responses	
Sam	**Cal**
Why did you choose to study by distance?	
Convenience, unimpressed with campus life	It meant that I could work and study concurrently - **I have a family to support** so stopping work would not be financially viable at this time.
Why did you choose this particular program?	
[university] was recommended to me as the best in [country]	Good mix of theory & practical application; can specialise in language program management; no thesis
What do you see as the major benefits you will receive / have received from completing / this program?	
employability in [country of residence]	**Increased knowledge & expertise** for myself and my organisation; **better career prospects**
How did you find out about this program?	
Coworkers in the field	Via a work colleague
How is / was the course 'taught' in your distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics program? How is 'distance teaching' done? (Please consider aspects of the curriculum such as teachers, technology, readings, materials, and assessment.)	

My general impression was that there was **little or no actual 'teaching'** Course requirements were fulfilled by assignments written after course material was read. I recall **little feedback** during the course and **feedback on course assignments was <u>usually received weeks or months after the course was finished</u>**.	Reading of course notes split into modules, with self-study tasks **guided by the teacher**, and several discussion boards. Involves set readings and sourcing of <u>related</u> journals/articles; some reflective practice in <u>applying theory to current teaching</u>.
What are the qualities of a good distance teacher?	
This is a difficult question to answer. Personally, I believe that good distance teaching is <u>not possible</u>. Essentially **you are told to read a book and write an assignment once you are finished**.	Presents themselves as being **open to being contacted** no matter how **trivial** the question may be; **quick response**; **consistent & regular contact with Ss** on the course via blackboard &/or email; **able to encourage further reflection** via comparing & contrasting Ss offerings and by throwing questions back at them (e.g. in personal work or in keeping a discussion's momentum); **offering guidance** on further areas of study/reading. **Allows for flexibility** (within reason) for meeting task/assignment due dates.
What are the qualities of a good distance learner?	
Paying tuition on time	**Organised, self-motivated, in contact with tutor and other Ss** on the unit on a regular basis; willingness to ask questions if not sure they're on the right track.
What are the features of a good distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics program?	
Difficult to answer without being snide. It's <u>nearly impossible to create</u> the kind of academic discourse that constitutes <u>a real learning experience</u> online.	<u>Clearly set out</u> tasks and objectives; <u>realistic and achievable</u> pacing & nature of tasks; <u>clear lines of support and guidance</u>.
What do you view as the primary advantages of learning TESOL / Applied Linguistics by distance? Please comment in relation to your own distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics program.	
<u>The study materials were all delivered directly to my door</u>. <u>No need for library visits</u>.	<u>Being able to study in my own time and fit this</u> (as best as I can) around my work and family commitments.
What do you view as the primary disadvantages of learning TESOL / Applied Linguistics by distance? Please comment in relation to your own distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics program.	
It's <u>impossible to have free and open academic discussion and exchange of views</u>. / / Also, there is <u>no access to campus life</u>. Which could be viewed as <u>an advantage</u> of course.	Difficult to 'benchmark' myself in terms of understanding and progressing as expected with the materials (i.e Am I getting this? Am I on the right track?) - this would happen naturally in a group from lectures, f2f contact with fellow Ss and in tutorials as I would ask & hear Qs from others in clarifying etc. I miss that interpersonal interaction in studying - distance learning can seem a little lonely sometimes, I miss the camraderie/interaction of onsite study.
What do you see as the most important and/or the most effective mode(s) of communication/interaction between teaching staff and distance learners? Please comment in relation to the use of technology in your own distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics program.	

Regular and on-time. That would be enough.	For personal communication email is a great way to keep in contact with tutors. Online discussions can be effective for S-S communication and beneficial if the flow is managed correctly by the tutor. But [LMS] has some limitations that I find annoying (i.e. have to prep a text, then paste it into [LMS]).
What do you see as the most important and/or the most effective mode(s) of communication/interaction among distance learners? Please comment in relation to the use of technology in your own distance TESOL / Applied Linguistics program.	
I recall little or no communication among myself and other distance learners. With other learners being either **too busy** to contribute to irrelevant and unrealistic forums, or being **unable to communicate in English**, there is not much point	Some kind of web-based discussion forum is the most effective for group discussion; with the option of 1-1 contact if necessary (i.e. personal S email address). I'd love to see some real-time online discussions too but this may not be practical given different people in different time zones.
What developments do you expect to see in distance education of TESOL teachers, and what developments would you like to see?	
I see **further dehumanisation**, **further separation of education** from the university process, further slide down the path to the point where **money is simply exchanged for a piece of paper**. Which pretty much sums up my experience.	I'd love to watch online lectures in addition to my course notes (to help with the 'benchmarking' issue I mentioned earlier - also presentation notes from the lectures to be posted on [LMS]). It would be nice to see pictures of my fellow Ss and tutors - I think it would add a more social, personal touch to the interactions, but equally I respect that others might like that anonymity.
Please add any other comments you feel are relevant.	
Instead of doing useless surveys you could **try raising IELTS requirements** for learners. Trying to have an online 'discussion' with fellow-learners who **would not gain entry to my lower-intermediate class** did not endear me to the distance learning system	Distance learning has provided an opportunity for me that would otherwise not be possible due to my current life situation: **I cannot afford to take a year out from work** and courses offered in my area of [country of residence] are of inferior quality (although much, much cheaper!!) or do not suit my needs. I am able to study part-time, one module per semester, which is the maximum I can cope with at present given my work & family situation (1 young toddler & currently 8 months pregnant).