Preservice Teachers' Performance and Confidence in Their Readiness to Teach: An Exploratory Study

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The purpose of this exploratory study was to compare the performance and confidence of preservice teachers in their readiness to teach, as determined by the edTPA and a candidate survey, respectively. Descriptive analyses of the data reflected higher confidence scores and increased variability within those scores. While this suggests there was more uncertainty in how they perceived their readiness to teach, the confidence exhibited by the candidates at the end of their student teaching experiences generally exceeded how they actually performed on the edTPA. The major implication is that, while it may be good that preservice teachers feel ready and confident to enter the classroom, this may be an overestimation of their performance once the realities of the profession are upon them.

Introduction

The U.S. educational system has seen many reforms and initiatives implemented throughout years of debate about the quality of public education and P-12 student learning outcomes. However, these reforms and initiatives have not delivered on their promises (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2013; Klassen et al., 2011; Laurillard, 2002; McGough et al., 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011; Wiliam, 2011). Subsequently, teacher preparation in the United States has been impacted by this debate, and programs have been challenged on their quality, effectiveness, and outcomes, resulting in policy changes impacting how teachers are prepared (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019).

Since the No Child Left Behind Act required the use of content tests to measure candidates' knowledge, there has been a focus on learning outcomes based on standards (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019), and teacher preparation programs are under pressure to adopt high-stakes performance assessments, such as edTPA, to answer the call for increased accountability. In fact, many states have moved to the use of these assessments as a licensure requirement for P-12 educators (Baecher et al., 2017; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019; Kissau et al., 2017). McGough et al. (2018) purported that accountability systems created by the political arena suggest that teacher educators would not focus on continuous improvement unless they were forced by legislation, citing

edTPA, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards, and the Higher Education Act as recent examples. In addition, there is a movement to develop alternatives to traditional teacher preparation programs resulting in the growth of for-profit organizations and universities, suggesting that traditional teacher preparation programs are of low quality. This places a great responsibility on the teacher preparation program to ensure candidates are prepared and reach expected learning outcomes on these high-stakes accountability assessments (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019).

Literature Review

Preservice Teachers' Performance in Their Readiness to Teach

The edTPA is an assessment for preservice teachers to evaluate their readiness to enter the profession and has been adopted by many states as a consequential licensure assessment. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE, 2019) showed educator preparation programs (EPPs) in as many as 41 states and the District of Columbia integrating edTPA at some implementation level. Because edTPA is used for both candidate licensure in many states and as a quality indicator for accrediting bodies, such as CAEP, edTPA performance outcomes are important to candidates, teacher preparation programs, and the states in which those programs reside (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019). The three teaching tasks of the edTPA (i.e., planning, instruction, and assessment) assess how well a teacher candidate teaches lessons within a specific content area to a group of diverse learners.

The edTPA goes beyond being just a preservice assessment to really defining the teaching profession (Sato, 2014; Wheatley, 2005). In 1987, the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) established its five core propositions to describe what teachers should know and be able to do. They maintain that teachers (1) are committed to students and their learning, (2) know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students, (3) are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, (4) think systematically about their practice and learn from experience, and (5) are members of learning communities (NBPTS, 1991, p. 2). The NBPTS established these standards to define the work of accomplished teachers and create a framework for teachers aspiring to achieve National Board Certification.

The edTPA reflects the five core NBPTS propositions but also is closely aligned with Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards. InTASC standards describe effective strategies that are reflective of today's learning needs. The edTPA's close alignment with NBPTS and InTASC standards reflects the emphasis on providing a performance assessment that addresses the established high standards of the teaching profession and compels preservice teachers to reflect on experiences in authentic situations that require them to have a command on their subject-specific content and to create learning goals around that content (Sato, 2014).

The edTPA can provide authentic learning opportunities for teacher candidates which should be incorporated throughout the EPP (Baecher et al., 2017; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016; Kissau et al., 2017). These authentic learning opportunities can be increased by thoughtful, high quality field placements with cooperating teachers who model best practices, educating the cooperating teachers, increasing candidate personal motivation, and helping candidates connect to prior learning (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Kissau et al., 2017). There are several components in the edTPA that provide

opportunities for candidate learning, such as the lesson planning in task one, the video recording of engaged learning in task two, student learning assessments in task three, and the written commentaries in all three tasks.

Preservice Teachers' Confidence in Their Readiness to Teach

According to Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory, self-efficacy is developed through the combination of four major sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Individuals tend to view their own personal performances as reliable (Schunk, 1996); therefore, after repeated successful personal performance accomplishments, individuals begin to view themselves as efficacious, while repeated personal failures will do the opposite. Schunk (1987) believed that once self-efficacy is built in an individual for a given performance, occasional failures will not negatively impact self-efficacy. Secondary to personal accomplishments, observing others perform similar tasks allows individuals to compare their own performances and make judgments about themselves that leads to adjustment or confirmation. Watching others persevere through a stressful or difficult activity without experiencing unfavorable consequences can confirm to the individual that they can do the same (Bandura, 1977; 1993). Based on the self-efficacy literature reviewed, it is expected that those candidates successfully completing the edTPA should report higher self-confidence in the skills and abilities assessed by the edTPA.

Other studies conducted specifically on performance-based assessments of preservice teaching candidates found candidate surveys conducted *prior* to the assessment reflected disproportionately higher self-confidence in candidates than the performance scores they later received. For instance, Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) examined preservice teachers' self-confidence levels before completing the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT), which was the Californian predecessor of edTPA, and then later compared those levels to the scores they received on PACT. The results showed an overall gap between the self-confidence rating of the preservice teachers and their actual PACT scores. On average, their surveys reflected more self-confidence in completing PACT than the performance scores they actually received. Further study of this phenomenon and replication of findings concerning other performance-based assessments and contexts are warranted.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of preservice teachers' results on a performative assessment in their teacher preparation program with their confidence in their readiness to teach. The edTPA was implemented at the EPP in this study as a state requirement for teacher licensure. Due to the high-stakes nature of the assessment, it is critical to examine the experiences of teacher candidates leading up to and during the process of its completion. The following research question guided this study: In an EPP where edTPA is used as a performance-based assessment, are there relationships between the edTPA scores and corresponding candidate survey responses measuring their performance and confidence, respectively, in various teaching tasks?

Method

Participants

Participants included preservice teachers from a public EPP in the southeastern United States from five

consecutive academic semesters (i.e., 15 in Spring 2014; 18 in Fall 2014; 30 in Spring 2015; 19 in Fall 2015; and 19 in Spring 2016) who took both the edTPA and candidate survey. Their gender, race, and level (i.e., undergraduate v. graduate) are shown, along with how they favor to the national population of edTPA completers in 2016 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Sample v. the National Population

Demographic	Sample Frequency	Sample Percentage	National Frequency	National Percentage
Gender				
Female	87	86.1	20,990	76.8
Male	14	13.9	6,073	22.2
Not Provided			256	1.0
Race				
White	88	87.1	20,595	75.4
Black	8	7.9	1,619	5.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	1	1.0	1,177	4.3
American Indian	1	1.0	91	0.3
Hispanic	4	4.0	1,957	7.2
Other	3	3.0	1,880	6.9
Level				
Undergraduate	87	86.1	24,753	90.6
Graduate	14	13.9	2,566	9.4
Total	101	100	27,319	100

Note. $n = 101$. Because participants may identify with more than one race (e.g., White and Hispanic), the data for race exceeded the total percentage.

The convenience sample comprised undergraduate and graduate students whose ages ranged from 21 to 61 ($M = 30.1$, $SD = 8.9$) at the time the survey was taken. In addition to the gender, race, age, level, and semester of assessment, data about their licensure area and employment status were collected. The sample was fairly representative of the national population of edTPA completers in 2016 (SCALE, 2017). Because the sample was demographically similar to the national population, the potential generalizability of any findings is improved, with further replication in future studies recommended.

Instruments

edTPA. According to SCALE (2018), the edTPA is a performance-based assessment designed with input from experts in the field of education. There are 27 subject-specific edTPA handbooks in order to address the unique nature of each teaching field. Participants gather and submit artifacts such as lesson plans, instructional materials and assessments, teaching videos, student work samples, and commentaries for the three tasks, i.e., planning, instruction, and assessment. According to Whittaker et al. (2018), the edTPA commentary is an

especially important component for EPPs to promote a growth mindset with their teacher candidates. Threaded throughout all three tasks are academic language and the use of research and/or theory to justify teaching decisions. While the edTPA was developed as a summative assessment of teaching performance, its developers also purport its use as a formative assessment for EPPs to provide feedback to their candidates (Teske, 2018).

Candidates submit their completed edTPA portfolio to Pearson Evaluation Systems who employs trained scorers with teaching expertise and qualifications in a particular subject-area and grade-level. During scoring, the identity of the candidate, the EPP, and the P-12 school are anonymous. The assessments in this study consist of 15 scoring rubrics which score the participant from one, which is the lowest score, to five, which is the highest score possible on each rubric, making the total scores range from 15 to 75. Scoring a three on a rubric would tend to mean that the teacher candidate is a proficient novice and ready to begin teaching (SCALE, 2018).

Candidate survey. In addition to demographic questions, participants responded to 17 items that asked their level of confidence in various teaching abilities at the end of their student teaching, which was after the completion of the edTPA but prior to the reporting of its scores. Each of these items was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 = not confident at all, 3 = neutral, and 5 = extremely confident. Participants were also allowed to provide additional information that could elaborate on their scaled responses.

The teaching tasks were operationalized by three eponymous scales: planning, instruction, and assessment. Cronbach's alphas for these scales ranged from .92 to .96 and were all considered to be internally consistent (i.e., ≥ .60; Netemeyer et al., 2003). The items in the survey used to measure confidence in these three areas corresponded to respective rubrics on the edTPA and were checked for content validity by two content experts.

Prior to examining any relationship between the edTPA and candidate survey, a series of Spearman correlations was performed between all of the scales for the edTPA and the survey, separately, in order to test the assumption that they correlated with each other.

As can be seen in Table 2, a meaningful pattern of correlations was observed among the three teaching scales for both the edTPA and candidate survey. The relationships between performance and confidence (edTPA v. survey) overall (ρ = .125) and in planning (ρ = .178), instruction (ρ = .089), and assessment (ρ = .056), were all not

Table 2

Sample Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations Associated with the Teaching Scales on the edTPA and Candidate Survey

	edTPA					Survey				
	1.	2.	3.	*M*	*SD*	1.	2.	3.	*M*	*SD*
1. Planning	1.00			3.20	.50	1.00			3.30	1.06
2. Instruction	.38*	1.00		2.99	.46	.92*	1.00		3.46	1.26
3. Assessment	.41*	.45*	1.00	2.94	.59	.89*	.88*	1.00	3.37	1.09

Note. n = 101; *correlations were statistically significant (p < .01).

statistically significant, $p > .05$, for these 101 participants.

Results

To address how the edTPA compared to the candidate survey, i.e., whether students' readiness to teach aligned well with the confidence they reported in their readiness, descriptive statistics were calculated for each rubric on the edTPA and its corresponding item on the survey (see Table 3).

A series of Spearman correlations was also conducted between each rubric on

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Sample's edTPA Scores and Survey Responses

	edTPA			Survey		
	M	*m*	*SD*	*M*	*m*	*SD*
1. Planning for Subject Specific Understanding	3.312	3	.616	3.337	4	1.478
2. Planning to Support Varied Student Learning Needs	3.203	3	.769	3.327	4	1.184
3. Connecting with Research and Theory	3.381	3	.656	3.282	4	1.141
4a. Identifying Language Demands	3.069	3	.660	3.158	3	1.007
4b. Supporting Language Demands	3.059	3	.661	3.204	4	1.201
5. Planning Assessments to Monitor and Support Learning	3.183	3	.770	3.495	5	1.346
7. Engaging Students in Learning	3.134	3	.524	3.535	5	1.480
8. Deepening Students Learning	3.015	3	.684	3.396	5	1.304
9. Specific Pedagogy: Using Representations	2.980	3	.685	3.465	5	1.331
10. Analyzing Teaching Effectiveness	2.847	3	.681	3.426	4	1.219
11a. Summarizing Data Based on Standards	2.995	3	.811	3.317	3	1.157
11b. Analyzing Patterns of Student Learning	2.985	3	.817	3.485	4	1.180
12a. Providing Standards-Based Feedback	3.084	3	.791	3.406	4	1.258
12b. Providing Learning-Improvement Feedback	3.084	3	.791	3.455	4	1.323
13. Student Use of Feedback	2.663	3	.749	3.366	4	1.181
14. Analyzing Students' Language Use	2.723	3	.698	3.149	4	1.117
15. Using Assessment to Inform Instruction	3.020	3	.682	3.446	5	1.323

Note. $n = 101$; m = mode.

the edTPA and its corresponding item on the survey but showed no statistically significant relationships after correcting for the experimentwise error rate.

To test for differences in correlations over time, a series of comparisons of correlation coefficients was conducted by semester based on a procedure set forth by Fisher (1921). This tested whether any correlations between performance and confidence in planning, instruction, and assessment, as measured by the edTPA and candidate survey, respectively, were not different for any two semesters. These correlations are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlations by Semester

	Spring 2014	Fall 2014	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016
Planning	.315	.158	.059	.066	-.024
Instruction	.171	.006	.072	-.088	-.049
Assessment	.227	.339	.186	-.014	-.063

Note. $N = 101$; all differences in correlations were not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

Examining the overall changes in correlations suggests that the differences in how students performed with respect to planning, instruction, and assessment and their perceptions of those performances may have diverged over time, but further scrutiny with a larger sample is warranted to detect any small differences across time.

Discussion

Studies like those by Huston (2017) and Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) found that preservice teachers reported relatively more confidence in planning, instruction, and assessment than their actual abilities in these areas. This study arrived at similar findings with what can also be considered an exploratory yet critical early step in the analysis of edTPA data. Specifically, the means, modes, and standard deviations for the scores on the candidate survey were nearly universally greater than the corresponding scores on the edTPA, thereby reflecting higher confidence scores and increased variability within those scores. While this suggests there was more uncertainty in how they perceived their readiness to teach, the confidence exhibited by the students at the end of their student teaching experiences generally exceeded how they actually performed on the edTPA.

The process of completing the portfolio is reported to increase candidates' effectiveness by helping them become more intentional (Gallant & Mayer, 2012) and improving the quality of reflection on their teaching practices (Lunsford et al., 2016). Because candidates completed the survey after the completion of the edTPA but before scores were received, their confidence levels may have been higher as a result and could explain the discrepancies between their edTPA scores and survey responses. As Wetherington (2017) found, candidates' self-efficacy in planning, instruction, and assessment had increased as a result of completing their edTPA.

The gaps between performance and confidence were more apparent for tasks concerning instruction and assessment than those for planning. On the surface, planning seems like a task that can be directly evaluated using edTPA rubrics, like the way in which instruction and assessment can be

evaluated. However, the evaluation of instruction and assessment should corroborate the evaluation of planning. If the results of the instruction and assessment tasks show evidence of student learning in the preservice teacher's classroom, then that may indicate soundness in planning. In other words, if the edTPA scores on instruction and assessment tasks are high, then it would seem to follow that scores in planning would also be high. However, the results of this study suggest otherwise from a descriptive point of view and call for further investigation of how well this evaluative modality serves its intended purpose.

Regarding the planning and instruction of preservice teachers, their confidence in those abilities compared to their actual performance is more inflated. Potential reasons for this divergence between self-reported levels of confidence and actual edTPA performance could be that preservice teachers may self-report relatively high confidence in their planning and instructional skills, but when they are faced with the classroom in real-time, the variability of student behavior can divert them from their plans and instruction. In other words, the students' learning preferences or any number of other issues may interfere with the planning and instruction of a teacher. When considering assessment, the discrepancy between performance and confidence can make sense because formal state or district-mandated assessment instruments may not fit well with the preservice teacher's natural approach to classroom assessment.

Finally, the findings in this study indicate less of an association between preservice teachers' performance and confidence in assessment (ρ = .056) compared to planning (ρ = .178) and instruction (ρ = .089). Even without statistical significance, this is worth reporting and discussing, because these preliminary findings could forebode a more substantive conclusion that preservice teachers overestimate their abilities to plan and instruct more than their abilities to assess student learning. Statistically non-significant findings may still contain cursory patterns or results that are important for adding to the understanding in the given field and part of a pragmatic approach to evaluating phenomena in the affective domain (Hewitt, 2008; Schoffner, 2009). The current study was an exploratory one whose sample was limited by the administration of the survey over the course of five semesters at one institution; nonetheless, future studies are encouraged to further examine such evident patterns.

Implications for Teacher Educators

A strategy to explore is the use of frequent feedback to student teachers, which is related to the verbal persuasion factor to moderate self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1993; Schunk, 1996). When engaging in a feedback cycle where candidates seek out, use, and generate feedback from their peers and cooperating teachers, their confidence levels and self-efficacy may become more reflective of their actual abilities (Brinkmann, 2019; Laurillard, 2002; Schunk, 1987).

Self-efficacy in teachers is most impressionable in student teaching and the early years of teaching. Knowing this, EPPs must be deliberate in designing the learning environment for their student teachers and placing them in high quality placements (Whitley et al., 2019) and possibly using survey responses as a pedagogical tool for continuous program improvement. Watching others perform is secondary only to personal accomplishments as one of Bandura's (1977) factors to developing self-efficacy. Watching their cooperating teachers can allow student teachers to compare their own performances and make judgments about themselves. This can lead to either adjustment or confirmation of self-perceptions.

At a time when teacher recruitment and retention, portfolio assessment of teacher performance, and accountability in higher education are intersecting in both the policy sphere as well as in popular media, states and teacher preparation programs are reexamining their evaluation processes (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Klassen et al., 2011, Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Studies such as this one allows EPPs yet another possible way to examine how ready their preservice teachers are to perform and how confidently prepared they think they are to do so.

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