edTPA Relevance: Voices From Teacher Education Program Graduates

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It is important to examine the perceived relevance of edTPA, a nationally recognized summative performance assessment of teacher education program graduates, after those graduates enter the teaching profession. This study collected and analyzed responses from educator preparation program completers who passed edTPA as a licensure requirement and have subsequent experience as classroom teachers. Responses were gathered in relation to skills utilized in daily teaching practices and evaluation of the skills reflected in the scoring rubrics of edTPA. Retrospective experiences confirm that the skills required by the edTPA assessment do have relevance to the teaching profession and daily classroom practices.

edTPA was established in the fall of 2013 as the first nationally available, subject-specific, standards-based performance assessment for teacher readiness; it was developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE, n.d., *About edTPA*). Since then, 20 states have adopted performance assessment policies that include edTPA for state licensure, and 1 state is taking steps toward implementation; in total, there are "931 Educator Preparation Programs in 41 states and the District of Columbia participating in edTPA" (AACTE, n.d., *State Policy*). The performance-based assessment requires teacher candidates to "demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to help all students learn in real classrooms. edTPA is intended to be used as a summative assessment given at the end of a educator preparation program for teacher licensure or certification and to support state and national program accreditation" (AACTE, n.d., *About edTPA*). The edTPA portfolio must contain artifacts that include a series of lesson plans, video clips of teaching, and student work samples with assessment feedback. It also requires commentaries in which candidates analyze their teaching and student learning and reflect on how to improve student outcomes by improving teaching plans and strategies.

Because edTPA is relatively new and required for licensure in only 20 states, there is a lack of feedback from teachers who have been required to pass the assessment prior to beginning their teaching careers. While several research studies have gathered first-hand information from candidates who have gone through the process of completing the high-stakes assessment (AACTE, n.d., *Voices*; Hefner & Souter, 2018; Lin, 2015; Meuwissen et al., 2015), these opinions were gathered at the end of the edTPA submission semester. Given that the process of completing the edTPA portfolio is time-consuming for candidates to prepare during an already intensive semester of their student teaching internship, their opinions are provided during an emotional time of completing their culminating requirements and when they are not yet fully licensed, practicing classroom teachers. Therefore, their views of the assessment are only applicable in relation to the perceived relevance of and for pre-service teachers. What is missing is the perceived relevance determined by experienced classroom teachers who completed edTPA as a

component of their licensure; the results presented in this study fill this gap.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze responses from educator preparation program completers who passed edTPA as a licensure requirement and had subsequent experience as classroom teachers. The intent was to collect survey data that evaluates the retrospective edTPA experiences of reflective practitioners during the induction phase of their careers. Responses were gathered in relation to skills utilized in daily teaching practices and the evaluation of the skills reflected in the scoring rubrics of the edTPA assessment in order to determine the relevance of edTPA to the teaching profession.

Method

Data was collected through an anonymous Qualtrics survey that contained a variety of multiple choice, Likert-scale rankings, and open-ended response opportunities. A link to the survey was sent to graduates who completed their secondary education teacher preparation program at an accredited state university and who were required to pass the edTPA assessment for state licensure. The link was sent by the secondary education program coordinator to each graduate, in an effort to generate a higher response rate than that of a general bulk email. Participation was voluntary, and participants were not required to respond to every survey item. The survey itself contained three sections: the background section included demographic information and self-assessment of classroom teaching skills, the second section focused on edTPA, and the third section focused on university-specific feedback and program requirements. For the purposes of this study, responses were examined from the first two sections only.

Participants

The survey was provided to all those who had graduated between September 2015, when edTPA became required by the state, and summer 2017. The survey was offered at the end of fall semester 2017 in order to allow the most recent graduates at least one semester of classroom teaching after earning their educator's license. There were 129 secondary education graduates who were emailed a link to the survey. Of those who were sent the survey invitation, 54 responses were submitted, for a return rate of 42%. This is comparable to expected institutional student survey response rates of 43% (Porter & Umbach, 2006).

In order to adhere to the intent of this study, survey results were filtered to include only those who had passed the edTPA assessment and were employed as classroom teachers. The participant group therefore includes 38 respondents who passed edTPA on their first attempt and who were employed as classroom teachers at the time they completed the survey.

The length of time the participants had been teaching ranges from one semester to more than two years: 11 participants had been employed as a classroom teacher for one semester, 1 for two semesters, 10 for three semesters, 3 for four semesters, and 13 for longer than two years. The participating teachers also span the spectrum of secondary grade levels: 11 participants were teaching students at the middle school level, and 32 participants were teaching high school.

All 38 participants graduated from an educator preparation program during which they earned their initial certification. Undergraduate students earned their bachelor's degree with secondary certification in English or history through a traditional program (10 participants) and in math or science through the UTeach curriculum (5 participants); graduate students earned their Master of Arts in Teaching

degree with secondary certification as either traditional education students (12 participants) or as provisionally certified teachers (11 participants) in the area of business, English, history, math, or science. Across both graduate and undergraduate groups, certification areas included biology (7 participants), broad field science (3 participants), business (5 participants), economics (1 participant), English (9 participants), history (9 participants), mathematics (3 participants), and political science (1 participant).

Based on the demographic survey, the 38 participants in this study represent the variety of secondary education preparation programs and subject areas of expertise, and they represent a range of teaching experience as related to grade level and length of time in the profession.

Results

Ranked Survey Response Data and Analysis

The first section of the survey consisted of background information and required participants to self-assess their confidence in being able to effectively perform skills associated with being an effective classroom teacher. Rankings were tallied through Likert responses ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). Participants were asked about their skills ranging from content knowledge and classroom management to teaching abilities, meeting the diverse needs of students, and parent communications. Specific skills that are addressed by the evaluation rubrics of edTPA were included as baseline data. These skill areas are Planning: edTPA Task 1, Rubrics 1-5; Instructing: edTPA Task 2, Rubrics 6-10; and Assessing: edTPA Task 3, Rubrics 11-15. Participants' self-assessments in these three areas are displayed in Figure 1. Only three scores fell below the neutral range; almost all of the 38 teachers scored themselves high in each of the three areas. Figure 1 shows that these participating induction-level teachers maintain high confidence levels in their ability to plan and carry out instructional activities and assess their students' performance; their responses show a bell curve skewed toward the higher end of the scale, across the "Neutral," "High," and "Very High" rankings.

Figure 1

*Participants' Self-Assessment of Skill Areas Evaluated by edTPA*
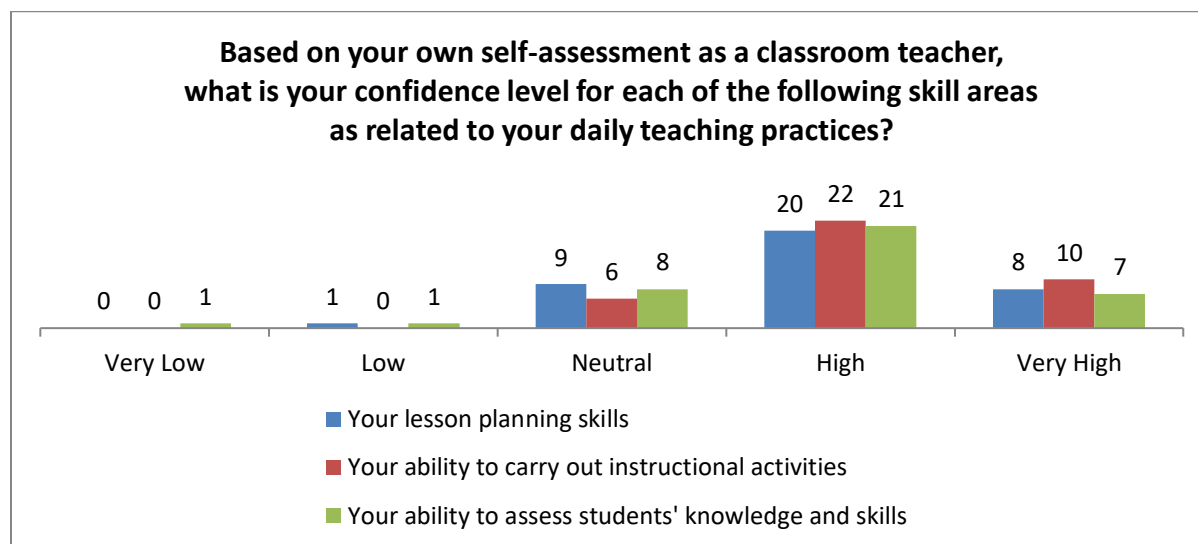
In the second section of the survey, participants were asked to evaluate the significance of specific skills evaluated by edTPA in relation to their daily classroom teaching practices. Again, the rankings were tallied through Likert responses ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). These survey questions were worded to align as closely as possible to the evaluation rubrics of edTPA. Skills addressed in the survey included the following: Sequencing lessons to scaffold learning (edTPA Rubrics 1, 2, and 3); Building and supporting students' academic language development (edTPA Rubrics 4 and 14); Engaging students in learning (edTPA Rubric 7); Deepening students'
understanding of content (edTPA Rubric 8); Analyzing your own teaching effectiveness (edTPA Rubrics 10 and 11); Providing feedback to guide students' learning (edTPA Rubrics 12 and 13); and Using assessment results to inform your next instructional steps (edTPA Rubrics 5 and 15). When asked about the alignment of edTPA to these teaching skills, most participants ranked their significance as high or very high. Of the 38 participants, 35 chose to respond to this set of items. The distribution of rankings relating to the significance of these skills evaluated through the edTPA assessment is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Significance of Skills Assessed by edTPA in Participants' Teaching Practices
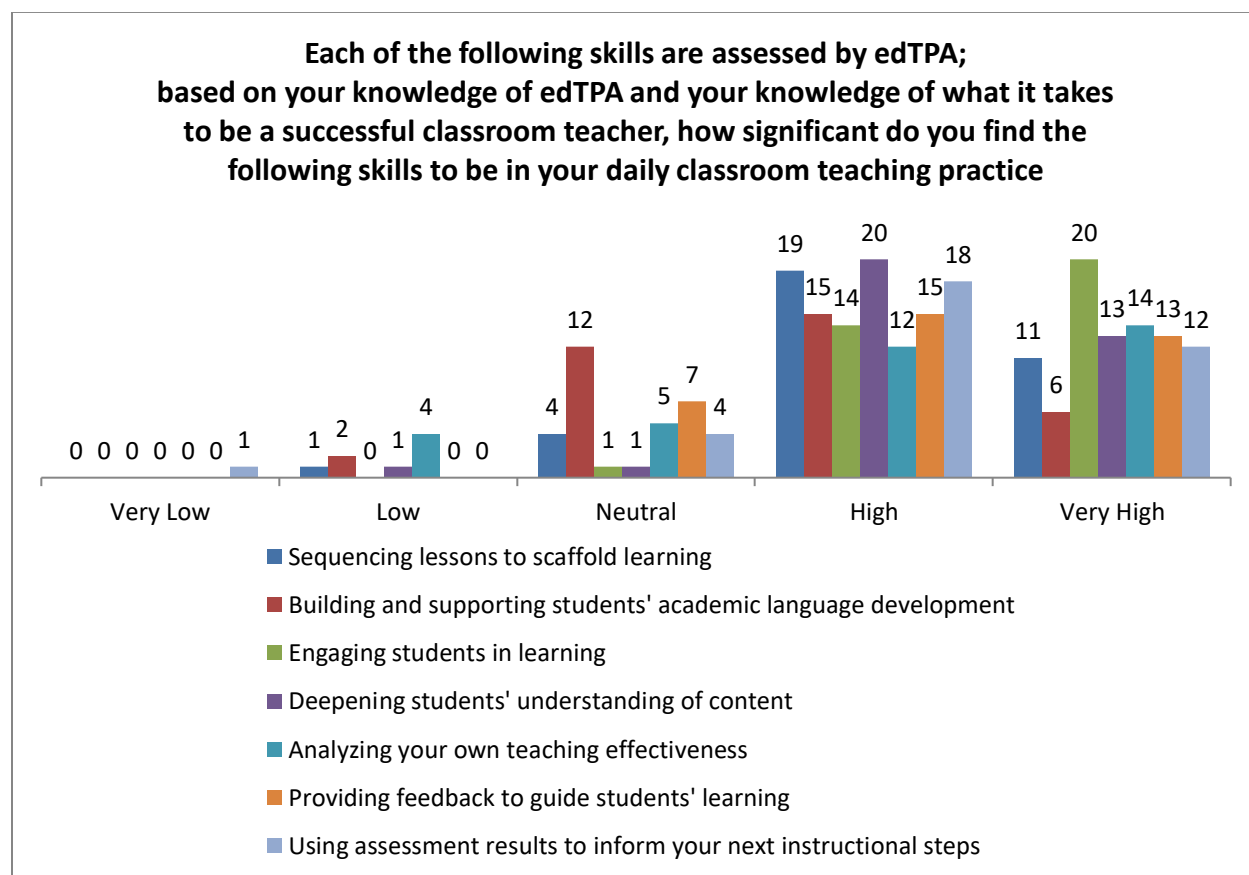
The teacher education program of this study is producing teachers who, during the
induction phase of their careers, self-report professional competence. This is not

surprising, as "students with high grade point averages and self-ratings of academic ability are more likely to respond to surveys in college" (Porter & Umbach, 2006, p. 232). It is evident in Figure 1 that they are confident in their teaching skills related to planning, teaching, and assessment, the three skill areas assessed by edTPA. Further, they note that the specific skills of the edTPA rubrics have a high to very high significance in their daily teaching practices, as graphed in Figure 2. Results indicate that the most significant practices evaluated by edTPA relate to sequencing lessons to scaffold learning, engaging students in learning, deepening students' understanding of content, and using

assessment results to inform instruction. Each of these top-ranked skill areas are classroom-focused and span the three tasks of the edTPA assessment.

In addition to evaluating the significance of individual skills assessed by the edTPA rubrics, the 35 respondents also ranked how strongly they believe that edTPA, overall, is a good measure of classroom readiness for pre-service teachers. Unlike their evaluations of individual teacher skills, the respondents provided a more even distribution of their Likert responses ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). This distribution approximates a standard bell curve and is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Participants' Views of edTPA as a Good Measure of Classroom Readiness
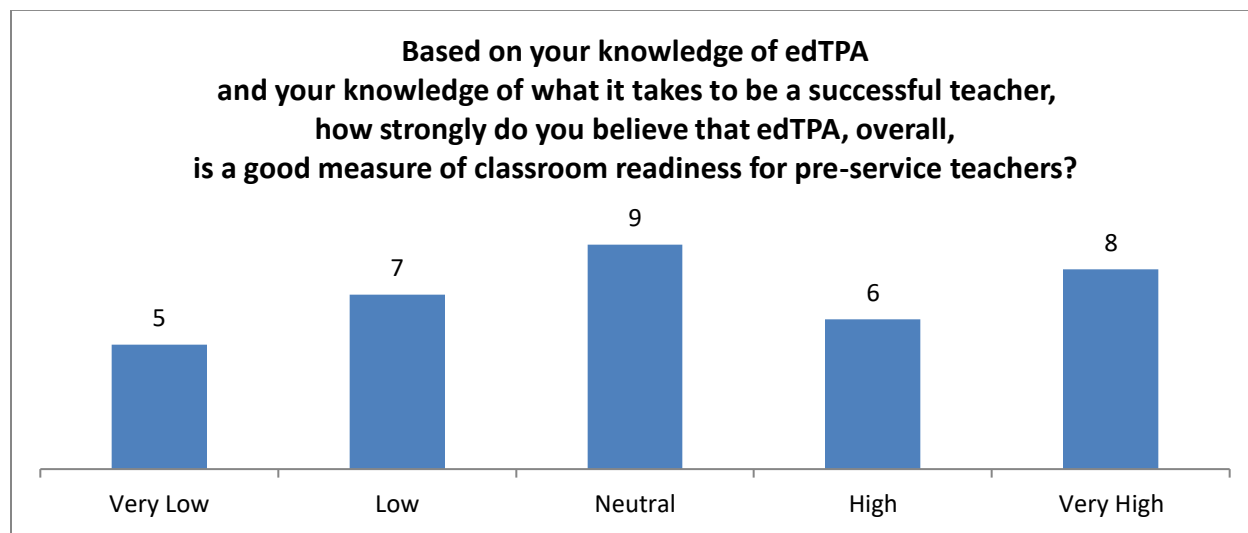
When participants were asked about the overall measure of edTPA for determining the classroom readiness of pre-service teachers, their responses do not indicate such high rankings. Instead, their responses as graphed in Figure 3 show very little variance across the ranked levels, with the greatest number of participants scoring the assessment at the "Neutral" level. Therefore, although participants believe that the skills assessed by edTPA are valuable skills in their

profession, they do not find the edTPA instrument itself to be as valuable. Qualitative data collected from the survey question with an open-ended response is therefore needed to enhance the quantitative data shown in Figure 3.

Open-Ended Survey Response Data and Analysis

The edTPA section of the survey included one open-ended question with a text

box in which participants could construct their responses to "Please comment on your perception of the value and relevance of edTPA as aligned with your daily classroom teaching practices and/or as a measure of beginning teacher readiness." Of the 38 participants, 25 responded. The responses were reviewed and coded according to primary theme or intention.

Many students used the open-ended response opportunity to voice complaints about the edTPA process or its implementation, neither of which was open for suggestions to change. The 12 respondents who focused on edTPA as unnecessary, time-consuming, and stressful were off-topic and therefore missed the intent of the survey question. These are the voices that very likely gave a more neutral spread to the ranking of edTPA as a good measure of classroom readiness for pre-service teachers, as graphed in Figure 3. While their responses raise valid concerns about the assessment instrument, they do not contain meaningful content that relates to the purpose of this study: to determine the perceived relevance of edTPA to the teaching profession. This response data and subsequent analysis, therefore, is limited to the remaining response themes.

edTPA Is Difficult

There were two respondents who expressed the opinion that the assessment was overly difficult; conversely, one respondent noted that its level of difficulty is appropriate. Their comments are quoted below:

- "edTPA does not accurately reflect what a real-world teacher experiences. It was redundant and overly-complicated."
- "edTPA included required skills and interpretation of educational and instructional skills beyond those of a beginning teacher."

- "edTPA is not easy, but it shouldn't be easy. It requires teacher candidates to be fully prepared, so they will have the skills necessary to take over a class successfully from day one. I would not want someone who cannot pass edTPA to be in the classroom. The classroom environment is too demanding to accept lesser candidates."

Voices of induction-level teachers who completed edTPA for certification indicate that the assessment is complicated and assesses skills beyond those at the career-entry level. However, candidates are not required to earn a top score; the rubrics allow for excellence, but state cut scores do not require it. There is a recommended cut-score band ranging from a total score of 35-42 points out of a possible 75 (SCALE, 2017). Even at this cut score range, edTPA is not easy. This is best affirmed by the teacher who voiced that edTPA should not be easy, that "the classroom environment is too demanding" for "someone who cannot pass edTPA." This insight attests that the difficulty level of edTPA is appropriate for the level of difficulty experienced by classroom teachers as they carry out the demands of their profession.

edTPA Is Aligned With Teaching Skills and Knowledge

There were five respondents who expressed this opinion; representative samples of these comments are quoted below:

- "The planning that has to go into my lessons directly aligns with edTPA."
- "edTPA was a helpful in teaching practical thinking skills that are used every day in the classroom. Although I do not go into the same depth when writing out my lesson plans, I still use the same thought process from the edTPA program to assess my

students' needs and meet them on a day to day basis."

- "I do feel that it assessed skills and knowledge that is required on a daily basis in the classroom. It was a very relevant assessment of necessary skills for any teacher."
- "edTPA requires potential teachers to incorporate teaching practices that create a solid foundation to build on."

Voices of induction-level teachers who completed edTPA for certification reinforce the quantitative results provided in Figure 2. The relevance of edTPA to the teaching profession is shown through voices that state it "directly aligns" with daily classroom teaching practices, and that it is "an accurate measure" of daily classroom teaching skills for induction-level teachers. This is noted best by the teacher who voiced that the assessment requires teacher candidates "to incorporate teaching practices that create a solid foundation to build" their careers in the field of education. This insight attests to the relevance of edTPA as it aligns to daily classroom teaching practices and as a measure of readiness for beginning teachers. It provides accountability to those entering the profession.

edTPA Is a Valuable Tool for Reflection

The three respondents who expressed this opinion are quoted below:

- "edTPA required me to be accountable as a new teacher it allowed me to learn my strengths and weaknesses."
- "More than anything else, edTPA helped me to think through my teaching process and the worth of my lessons and assessments."
- "Having went through the process of edTPA helps me to plan more engaging, intentional lessons for my students; I am constantly asking myself, 'How is this relevant? Will

this benefit my students? How will this prepare them to be successful?'"

Voices of induction-level teachers who completed edTPA for certification note that the assessment enables candidates to learn their "strengths and weaknesses" and prepares them for "evaluating themselves and for truly thinking about the worth of their lessons." As these induction-level teachers reflect on their work in their classrooms, they realize that edTPA is relevant to preparing them for their careers. This is best explained by the voice that testifies, "I am constantly asking myself, 'How is this [lesson activity] relevant? Will this benefit my students? How will this prepare them to be successful?'" Writing the commentaries required by edTPA requires this level of reflection, so preparing for edTPA has established this valuable habit of mind.

edTPA Measures Are Incomplete or Inadequate

There were seven respondents who noted that the assessment should cover more aspects of teaching responsibilities. Representative samples of their comments are quoted below:

- "The focus of edTPA is mostly on differentiation and lesson planning, but I wish more time was spent on classroom management skills."
- "The edTPA requests a large amount of documentation to demonstrate proper lesson planning design and assessment design; however, does not allow for teachers to demonstrate their skills in the classroom. The video clips segments are too short to fully judge a teacher on their effectiveness. The edTPA could be just as effective as administration observations over the course of a student teaching experience."
- "edTPA provides a great framework for planning the perfect lesson, but it does not realistically measure what a

teacher does every day in the classroom. While it may be ideal for every lesson to be as perfect as edTPA requires, it would be impossible to do this and carry out the other responsibilities that are required of the profession."

Voices of induction-level teachers who completed edTPA for certification indicate that there are other relevant teacher qualities that the edTPA rubrics and video clips do not address. These include "classroom management skills," "what is best for students to keep them engaged," and expectations of teachers beyond what can be observed in lesson plans and short video clips, especially because "a larger portion of teaching is relational." While edTPA can be a relevant assessment, it cannot be everything that goes into evaluating teacher candidates. Educator preparation programs have an important responsibility to evaluate their teacher candidates through field experiences and the accompanying daily teaching observations and coaching, which have always been required components of successful internships. While edTPA cannot replace this ongoing personal touch and individualized coaching in the supervision and evaluation of teacher candidates, it can provide a level of external, standardized performance assessment that teacher preparation programs may need for candidate and/or program evaluation.

Conclusions

Results determine that teachers in the first three years of their careers, upon reflection of their certification and teacher preparation requirements, view the skills required by the edTPA assessment as having value relevant to their profession and daily classroom practices, and they are confident in their teaching abilities.

The use of the national, performance-based edTPA assessment as an external measure of accountability has not constrained the effectiveness of an educator preparation program or the teaching quality of its graduates following the adoption of a state policy that requires a passing score on the edTPA for initial teacher certification. Because edTPA is implemented across the nation during or at the conclusion of many educator preparation programs, these findings and the use of similar surveys could be used for continuous program improvement based on candidate feedback.

Implications for Future Study

This survey was limited to completers of secondary education programs. The data results and conclusions would be strengthened by including elementary education program completers. Though the elementary group's edTPA handbook has a Task 4 with three additional scoring rubrics that their secondary counterparts do not share, their Tasks 1-3 rubrics addressed in this survey are equivalent measures of readiness.

The demographic information in the background section of the survey included responses related to race, gender, and age. This diversity in demographics was not addressed in the data presented herein. However, disaggregating the participants by these characteristics would be a valuable approach for a future analysis of this survey data.

The survey data gathered from practicing teachers about their prior experiences with edTPA and its relevance to their daily classroom teaching skills could be enhanced with a more focused, longitudinal study. It would be interesting to pair initial survey responses upon completion of the student teaching internship and edTPA with each teacher's responses to the same survey questions after one full academic year as a classroom teacher.

It may also prove relevant to collect identification information from survey respondents for the purpose of correlating their actual edTPA scores to their responses. For example, do those who earn a score that is just above the passing mark retain a more negative view about the relevance of edTPA than their counterparts who excel on the assessment? Do those who excel have a more confident view of their classroom teaching skills and therefore a more positive memory of their edTPA experience?

Currently, classroom teachers who mentor the pre-service candidates in the field and university faculty who guide candidates through their teacher preparation programs have opinions about the edTPA assessment that are outside the realm of direct experience and are therefore absent from this study. As the edTPA assessment becomes more widely implemented for licensure and/or has been used for a longer span of time, there will be a greater number of teachers, mentors, and university faculty who have experienced it and can add their perceptions of its relevance for a more extensive body of knowledge.

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