ABSTRACT

LUNSFORD, AMANDA R. Examining the Benefits and Barriers of edTPA on Agricultural Education Students at North Carolina State University. (Under the direction of Dr. Wendy Warner).

As an effect of educational reform, evaluation for pre-service teachers has shifted from multiple-choice tests to teacher performance assessments. Performance assessments serve as an authentic measure of teacher skill. edTPA, a recent performance assessment, has been implemented at North Carolina State University. The purpose of this study was to gain insight on the perceptions of agricultural education student teachers completing the edTPA during their student teaching experiences in order to improve the university’s teacher licensure program. This was a mixed methods study with an emphasis on basic qualitative research. Questionnaires and focus groups were conducted and analyze in order to examine the benefits and barriers of edTPA on the student teaching experience.

This study found that the major challenges of edTPA for pre-service teachers were the issues of time and academic language of edTPA. However, pre-service teachers learned the importance of planning and preparation, and thought edTPA was a good assessment and reflection tool. edTPA was also found to be beneficial for future teaching practices as well as potential for earning National Board certification. This study will not only provide insight and improvement for the teacher licensure program at North Carolina State University, but for licensure programs across the country implementing edTPA.
Examining the Benefits and Barriers of edTPA on Agricultural Education Students at North Carolina State University

by
Amanda R. Lunsford

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APPROVED BY:

_______________________________
Wendy Warner
Committee Chair

_______________________________
Travis Park

_______________________________
Jim Flowers
BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Lunsford is originally from California, but now lives in Raleigh, North Carolina. After moving to Raleigh in high school and becoming involved in FFA, she began to develop a passion for agriculture. After graduating from high school, Amanda attended North Carolina State University majoring in Animal Science with aspirations to become a veterinarian. However, after graduation she decided to shift her path to agricultural education. Amanda graduated Magna Cum Laude with her Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science and was accepted into the Agricultural and Extension Education graduate program at NC State.

Amanda began her Masters of Science program in January 2013 and also enrolled in the LEAP program (Licensure in Education for Agricultural Professionals) to get her teaching certification. She will graduate from North Carolina State University in May 2015.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Education reform has been a hotly debated topic for decades, especially in regards to the preparation of effective and well-qualified teachers. Darling-Hammond (2012) noted the most effective tool to improve teacher quality lies in teacher evaluation. To accurately assess the preparation of pre-service candidates, “reliable and valid assessments must be used that pay close attention to context, process, and reflection, factors that traditional evaluations of teaching either ignore or undervalue” (Bunch et al, 2009, p. 104).

The National Council on Teacher Quality has questioned the ability of traditional teacher education programs to produce well-prepared and effective teachers to enter the classroom (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2011). With the ever-increasing demands on teacher preparation programs to contribute to overall teacher quality, concerns have been raised. For the past 25 years, every report on teacher preparation has addressed the need for deeper and more-sustained opportunities for teacher candidates to learn and practice teaching in schools or real-world settings (American Federation of Teachers, 2012). Whittaker and Nelson (2013) stated the end goal of any quality teacher preparation program is to ensure teacher candidates can effectively plan, teach, and assess students’ needs.

The National Research Council (2001) argues initial licensure tests do not provide adequate information to distinguish between moderately qualified and highly qualified teacher candidates nor are they designed to test all of the competencies relevant to beginning practice. Teachers who have experienced the power of performance assessments continually insist this approach to evaluation is most useful to them (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Teacher performance assessments not only prove to be a valid measure of student teacher
competency, but also an approach for evaluating and improving teacher preparation programs (Pecheone & Chung, 2006).

In the age of high-stakes assessment, teacher performance assessments, such as PACT and edTPA, are necessary for the purpose of accountability and to ensure students are taught by highly effective teachers. Although edTPA is currently being piloted and therefore considered a low-stakes assessment, it is critical to examine the experiences of student teachers during the process of completing the edTPA. As well, it is also important to explore the benefits and barriers of the assessment as described by the student teachers. It is predicted that by 2018 the edTPA will be required in the North Carolina (M. Maher, personal communication, October 2, 2014). This means all teacher education students in North Carolina seeking licensure will have to earn a passing score on the edTPA along with successful completion of student teaching and other course-related assignments. Even though edTPA will be required, student input is important in order to continue to improve the licensure program. Universities and institutions can use the information regarding the benefits and barriers to edTPA to strengthen their teacher licensure programs and provide the necessary sources of support for student teachers to successfully complete edTPA. The increasing influence of the edTPA on the teacher certification process makes it an important area for research. Currently there is a lack of agricultural education research examining the use of teacher performance assessments.

Although there have been repeated calls for stringent accountability measures to guarantee teacher education graduates entering the workforce were deemed “quality”, the most common forms of assessment have been certification exams. The Praxis Series tests are
currently used in almost all states, including the US Virgin Islands and Guam, for determining which teacher education candidates are qualified to obtain licensure for teaching. These tests are composed of reading, writing, and mathematics sections in the form of essays and multiple-choice questions that evaluate core academic skills for educators (Education Testing Service, 2014). The Praxis II tests individuals on subject-specific content, but is also in the form of essay and multiple-choice questions. Haertel (1991) argued multiple-choice tests and generic classroom observations do not yield valid and comprehensive measures of the knowledge base of teaching. Darling-Hammond (2012) further supported this by stating for decades, teachers’ scores on traditional paper-and-pencil tests of basic skills and subject matter, like the Praxis, “haven’t been significantly related to classroom effectiveness” (p. 10).

In a survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (2012), new teachers reported on-the-job learning was more helpful than their formal training. They also reported their training was a “failure to prepare them for the challenges of teaching in the ‘real world’” (p. 7) and there was a significant gap between preparation and the reality of teaching in the classroom. Darling-Hammond (2006) argued that when compared to traditional teacher tests, authentic assessments, such as teacher performance assessments, offer more valid measures of teaching knowledge and skill due to their ability to provide more information regarding candidate abilities.

Consequently, teacher preparation programs have tried to move away from strict reliance on the more traditional means of determining competent teachers to offer more ‘real world’ teaching assessments that efficiently evaluate teacher performance. Many teacher licensure programs are developing assessment tools for measuring their pre-service teacher candidates’
abilities as well as their own success as teacher educators in adding to those abilities (Darling-Hammond, 2006). A current trend in teacher preparation programs across the country is the implementation of a teacher performance assessment to serve as an authentic measure of teacher skill. Darling-Hammond (2012) stated the teacher performance assessment experience is deemed high-stakes and is just like solo teaching when compared to “typical” student teaching which is more about rehearsal of teaching practices rather than assessment of teacher readiness.

Teacher performance assessments were first introduced in the 1980’s at Stanford University by Professor Lee Shulman (Haertel, 1991). Chung (2008) stated teacher performance assessments (TPAs) have become more appealing and beneficial to teacher education programs for their “innovative ways of assessing knowledge and skills” (p. 7). According to Oluwatayo and Adebule (2012), TPAs are an exercise designed to expose student teachers to the practical aspect of the teaching profession and enable them to put into practice knowledge and skill acquired during classroom interactions with their classroom instructors.

The American Federation of Teachers (2012) recommended teaching must have a universal assessment process for entry that includes a comprehensive teacher performance assessment. More specifically, teacher performance assessments structure beginning teachers’ activities by having them engage in particular modes of teaching practice that are consistent with more advanced teaching, such as analyzing student work and assessing one’s own teaching practice (Chung, 2005). The Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) was developed to “examine the planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection
skills of student teachers against professional standards of practice” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 121). Teacher performance assessments, and specifically PACT, build on efforts by the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards along with other organizations to develop performance assessments for use with beginning teachers (Pecheone & Chung, 2006).

**Background of edTPA**

The edTPA has emerged within the past few years as an innovative Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA). The edTPA was created and developed through a partnership between Stanford University faculty and staff at the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014). Developers of edTPA drew from 25 years of experience of developing performance-based assessments of teaching including National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and PACT (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014). The edTPA is a subject-specific assessment that includes versions in 27 different teaching fields, including agricultural education. The goals of edTPA are to improve student outcomes and strengthen the information base guiding improvement, accreditation, and evaluation of teacher preparation programs (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014). Additionally, the edTPA is designed to be used in combination with other measures as a requirement for licensure and to professional development for teachers across the career continuum (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014).
The edTPA uses three tasks to evaluate teacher preparedness that involve reviewing candidates’ planning, videotapes of instruction, assessment and commentary (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Teachers’ ability to develop academic language is also examined during assessment, which reflects new Common Core standards (Darling-Hammond, 2012). The edTPA gathers evidence of teacher candidates’ work in planning, instruction, and assessment to help predict teacher quality. More specifically, the edTPA for agricultural education is comprised of three tasks and has fifteen rubrics used for evaluation of these tasks. Task One involves planning, which includes the following: planning for agricultural-related understandings; planning to support varied student learning needs; using knowledge of students to inform teaching and learning; identifying and supporting language demands; and planning assessments to monitor and support student learning. Task Two involves instruction, and includes the use of video clip(s) for evaluating the following: learning environment, engaging students in learning; deepening student learning; subject-specific pedagogy; and analyzing teaching effectiveness. Task Three evaluates assessment and includes the following: analysis of student learning; providing feedback to guide learning; student use of feedback; using assessment to inform instruction; and analysis of student learning (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2013).

The edTPA is the first standards-based assessment to become available to teacher preparation programs across the country. Currently, 606 teacher preparation programs in 33 states and the District of Columbia are participating in edTPA (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014). This means that at least at least one teacher preparation program is exploring or trying out edTPA (American Association of Colleges for
Teacher Education, 2014). More specifically, seven states currently have an edTPA policy in place, while the remaining are either taking steps towards implementation or participating in edTPA (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014). States with an edTPA policy in place have statewide policies requiring the completion of a state-approved performance assessment as part of program requirements or for state licensure and/or, state program accreditation (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014). While North Carolina does not have a state policy in place specific to the use of the edTPA, ten institutions are currently participating in edTPA, (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014). The edTPA was introduced in North Carolina in 2010 as a “grassroots engagement of faculty and programs initiated by UNC-Chapel Hill, East Carolina, and Winston Salem State deans” (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, 2014, p. 9).

The edTPA was implemented as an assessment for teacher candidates at North Carolina State University in the fall of 2013 and piloted by the first group of agricultural education student teachers in the spring of 2014. Specifically, student teachers were required to do all three edTPA tasks: prepare lesson plans and a learning segment of 3-5 hours of instruction as well as videotape the full segment. They were also required to submit two clips totaling 20 minutes of classroom instruction. Teacher candidates also examined student assessments in order to reflect on teaching for current and future practices. The scoring of the student teachers’ edTPA portfolios was completed at the local level by qualified graduate students and faculty in the Agricultural and Extension Education Department. The completion of the
edTPA counted for 17% of a teacher candidates overall grade in AEE 427 (T. Park, personal communication, March 11, 2015).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the implementation and completion of the edTPA by pre-service teachers in agricultural education. Additionally, it is important to explore the impact of edTPA on the experiences of agricultural education student teachers at North Carolina State University in order to help improve the experience for other program areas and agriculture teacher education programs around the country. The findings of this study can inform and potentially improve teacher preparation coursework and have an impact on the student teacher experience at North Carolina State University and other institutions implementing the edTPA as a measure of teacher readiness and effectiveness. The following research objectives guided this study:

1. Examine the influence of the edTPA on the student teaching experience.

2. Examine the perspectives and experiences student teachers in Agricultural Education have had related to edTPA.

3. Identify sources of support for completion of edTPA.

4. Examine student teachers’ perceived preparedness and level of difficulty for completion of edTPA.

5. Determine the overall challenges and barriers edTPA has on the teacher licensure program.

6. Determine the perceived benefits edTPA has on the student teaching experience.

7. Student teachers’ recommendations for future completion of edTPA.
Researcher Assumptions and Biases

The primary focus of this study is on student teachers in agricultural education and their perspectives and experiences with edTPA. As the primary instrument, the researcher should discuss any biases of this study. Therefore, it is important to note that the principal researcher is a graduate student in agricultural education and will also be student teaching and earning a teaching credential. The researcher has also spent time and experience in agricultural education classrooms with instructors and has been exposed to forms of teacher assessments. This research study was developed due to the researchers’ own experiences and interest in this particular area of education.

Limitations

Along with researcher biases and assumptions, it is important to present the limitations of this study. Although this is a census sample, meaning everyone in the population was selected, the population for this study was small and from one institution’s teacher licensure program. Therefore this sample is not meant to serve as a representation of all teacher licensure programs implementing or practicing edTPA. It is also important to note that two student teachers of this study did not complete the student teaching experience, but contributed data during the focus groups and questionnaires.

Summary

The main goal of education reform is the importance of having quality teachers in our school systems. With this comes the requirement to improve teacher preparation programs in order to meet the needs of producing effective, quality teachers. The measures that have been
in place for producing “quality” teachers were through traditional forms of evaluation, such as pencil-and-paper tests and student observations. However, this has been noted to be an ineffective form of assessment as it does not take into account real world classroom teaching experiences. The development of teacher performance assessments create an opportunity for pre-service teachers to be evaluated on their performance based on evidence of work through portfolios that include planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection. With edTPA developing into a high-stakes performance assessment in the near future, it is critical to evaluate current implementation on agricultural education teacher preparation programs in order to determine barriers and benefits, as well as improvements for North Carolina State University’s agricultural education program and other programs across the county.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of agriculture student teachers’ during the implementation and completion of the edTPA. Due to the recent development and implementation of the edTPA, there is little research on the benefits and barriers to this specific performance assessment. This chapter will discuss the theoretical framework conducted for this study as well as a review of related literature. The literature review will discuss an overview of performance assessments as well as experiences with teacher performance assessments within the past few decades. The challenges, barriers, and benefits of teacher performance assessments will also be discussed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework informing this research study is based on the Practice-Based Theory (Ball & Cohen, 1999) and the Theory of Reflective Practitioner (Schön, 1983). Both of these theories are pertinent to the research as they provide a foundation for the importance of learning from and reflecting on teaching practice.

Practice-Based Theory

The idea in which performance based assessments can serve as an effective approach to evaluating quality teachers can be grounded in professional learning theories such as Ball and Cohen’s (1999) theory of learning in and from practice. Ball and Cohen’s (1999) research on practice-based theory in professional education discusses learning in practice and from practice. The theory proposes that teachers are able to learn subject matter, knowledge of children, learning, and pedagogy; however the use of this knowledge to teach depends on
a different type of knowledge that cannot be learned prior to the teaching experience or outside of practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999). They separate learning in and from practice into two parts,

In order to prepare people who were truly able to use knowledge to learn in and from practice, professional education would emphasize questions, investigations, analysis, and criticism. Crucial questions about teaching and learning would be one part of the frame of such work, and evidence of professional work—teaching and learning—would be another part. (p. 13)

Ball and Cohen (1999) further discussed providing evidence of professional work by using strategic documentation of practice including copies of students’ work, videotapes of classroom lessons, curriculum materials, and teachers’ notes. They stressed, “using such things could locate the curriculum of teacher education ‘in practice,’ for they could focus professional learning in materials taken from real classrooms that present salient problems of practice” (p. 14). Along with learning in and from practice comes reflection upon these practices, as described in Schön’s theory of reflection in action.

Theory of Reflective Practitioner

Schön’s (1983) theory of reflection in action discusses that through reflection upon individual practice, one can evaluate their practices and experiences in order to “make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness” (p. 61). According to this theory, the practitioner would reflect in and on their actions and make necessary changes based on their own experiences in their area of practice. In professional education, in order to promote effective learning, teachers must be able to assess and evaluate their teaching practices by reflecting upon each situation and then make necessary adjustments. Shulman (1987) further describes pedagogical reasoning and action,
Reflection is what a teacher does when he or she looks back at the teaching and learning that has occurred, and reconstructs, reenacts, and/or recaptures the events, the emotions, and the accomplishments. It is that set of processes through which a professional learns from experience. (p. 19)

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) developed model standards for beginning teacher licensing, assessment, and development composed of 10 principles. Principle 9 reinforces the importance of reflective practice and states, “The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally” (INTASC, 1992, p. 31). One of the identified dispositions specific to this principle is teachers are committed to reflection, assessment, and learning as a continuous process (INTASC, 1992). This disposition ties in both learning in and from practice as well as reflecting upon practice from experiences.

Darling-Hammond (2006) supported reflective practices in her research regarding the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) and stated the PACT is “grounded in a view of teachers as reflective practitioners and strategic decision makers who understand the processes of learning and development” (p. 121).

Ball and Cohen’s (1999) theory of learning in and from practice demonstrates learning to teach is developed through practice in the profession, and therefore teachers learn how to teach through practice in the classroom rather than prior learning outside the classroom. Following learning in and from practice comes reflection in action identified by Schön’s (1987). Reflection in action demonstrates assessment and evaluation of one’s practice in order to make changes or improvements. In the case of teaching, teachers must be able to
reflect upon their teaching practices and make necessary adjustments. Learning in and from practice, as well as reflection in action is a continuous process throughout a profession and particularly in education. Learning, assessment, and reflection are all encompassed in performance assessments, which are developed to provide quality educators.

Learning in and from practice is very closely related to teacher preparation, demonstrated by the student teaching experience. Pre-service teachers learn to teach by observing other teachers as well as teaching in front of a classroom. Pre-service teachers develop their own methods of practice while learning from their own reflection of experiences.

Literature Review

An Overview of Performance Assessments

Historically, teachers have had little control over the licensure tests they are evaluated on (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Most commonly, state teaching standards use evaluation means of traditional pencil-and-paper licensure tests typically focusing on basic skills such as subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. This approach has been criticized for “oversimplifying” teaching (Guaglianone, Payne, Kinsey, & Chiero, 2009). Tellez (2003) stated that educational reform, in the present era, is accountability. Consequently, there is a need for an alternative form of assessment and accountability in order to produce quality teachers. Cavalluzzo (2004) argued “those emphasizing instructional practices point to the need for improvements in the quality and alignment of pre-service programs and in-service professional development, with state and national standards for K-12 course content and
pedagogy” (p. 5). With reform and need for an alternative form of assessment to ensure quality teachers, Valli and Rennert-Ariev (2002) noted a shift from course-based to performance-based teacher education.

Darling-Hammond (2012) described performance-based assessments, based on common statewide standards for teaching, as a key component of an effective teaching program. Teacher performance assessments (TPAs) were first developed at Stanford University in the 1980’s and initially called the Teacher Assessment Project, which was led by Professor Lee S. Shulman (Haertel, 1991). Following the Teacher Assessment Project, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) continued work with TPAs determined that the assessments developed were “likely to rely on videotapes of the examinee’s own classroom performance, portfolios documenting classroom teaching, or both; written examinations requiring extended responses; and assessment center exercises” (Haertel, p. 17). Darling-Hammond (2012) explained that beginning in 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) developed benchmarks for how accomplished teachers could “enact the kind of learning envisioned by student learning standards” (p. 10). The NBPTS continued to play an important role in the development of TPAs, which was evident because these performance assessments closely mirror National Board Certification assessment. Those applying for National Board Certification are required to prepare a portfolio that includes classroom-based entries combined with a Document Accomplishment Entry that describes work with families, and participation in the professional community (Cavalluzzo, 2004).
The Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) was developed as an alternative performance assessment in 2003 by a group of pre-service teacher preparation programs throughout the state (Chung, 2008). Since high-stakes assessments promote instruction and learning, “[California] programs opted to create and pilot their own performance assessment that was designed to be an authentic representation of teaching and to also reflect their programs values and goals” (Chung, 2008, p. 8). The teacher performance assessment created by the PACT consortium was modeled after two different portfolios, the NBPTS’ portfolio as well as the portfolio used in the licensure of beginning teacher in Connecticut (Darling-Hammond, 2006). PACT is a subject-specific portfolio of teaching, referred to as teaching events, with a standardized set of integrated tasks asking teachers to document their planning, teaching, assessing, and reflecting around a series of lessons on a topic of their own choice (Chung, 2008). Pecheone and Chung (2006) determined through their research on PACT that performance assessments could be used in teacher education as a useful, valid measure of teacher performance and competence. Teacher performance assessments, including PACT, can also serve as a way to evaluate and improve the quality of teacher credential programs at universities and other institutions (Pecheone & Chung, 2006).

Teacher performance assessments have begun to appeal to teacher education programs across the country due to their potential to promote teacher learning and reflective teaching (Chung, 2008). More specifically, the teaching event required in PACT “prompts teachers to examine and reflect a complete cycle of teaching from planning a learning segment to evaluating student learning and devising changes in future practice, thereby enhancing their opportunities to reevaluate and revise their teaching practice” (Chung, 2008,
This further relates to the edTPA, which involves planning, teaching, and assessing, and in turn allows student teachers to learn and reflect on current and future practices.

**Benefits of Teacher Performance Assessments**

*Preparation and Growth as a Teacher*

Teacher performance assessments incorporate planning, instruction, and assessment, with the intent of enhancing preparation and promoting professional development for pre-service teachers. Selvester, Summers, and Williams (2006) examined the perceptions of 151 fifth-year pre-service credential candidates completing the PACT. Quantitative data showed that out of the 151 participants, 33% (n = 50) felt the PACT had a moderate effect on their growth, knowledge, abilities, and skills as teachers (Selvester, Summers, & Williams, 2006). Newton (2010) who also studied PACT and teacher early career effectiveness with 14 pre-service teachers studying English Language Arts found beginning teachers’ scores on the PACT to be a strong predictor of teacher effectiveness measured by the California Standards Test. Similarly, a study by Wiechman (2013) regarding 32 student teachers in elementary education in Minnesota, found teaching candidates recognized an improvement in reflective practice, more effective lesson planning, and improved assessment practices to facilitate student learning. In a study by Pecheone and Chung (2006) 590 participants from 13 PACT programs, 60% of participants felt they had learned important skills through the completion of the PACT Teaching Event, such as reflection and assessment of student learning. Okhremtchouk, Newell, and Rosa’s (2013) year long study focused on 20 pre-service teachers in English and Social Science, found PACT to be beneficial to design a unit and
differentiate instruction. One participant reported, “one thing that I found most useful is the intense reflection that you have to do for PACT. I now constantly reflect on my lessons and how they can be tweaked to better fit my students needs” (Okhremtchouk et al., 2013, p. 14). The special education and regular education student teachers (N = 3) of Sharp’s (2010) qualitative study made an effort to address individual student learning needs through the use of differentiated instruction.

Teacher performance assessments not only aid pre-service teachers’ reflection in planning and teaching practice, but also serve as a beneficial assessment for professional preparation. Guaglianone, Payne, Kinsey, and Chiero’s (2009) comparative study of the challenges and benefits resulting from the implementation of the teacher performance assessment across 22 California State University campuses found candidates felt the TPA “crystallized everything they had learned from their program” (p. 145) and would serve as a beneficial experience for professional preparation. The theme of professional preparation is further supported by Chung’s (2008) study regarding PACT, which concluded this performance assessment had important implications for pre-service teacher education reform and suggests performance assessments can “be useful learning tools to strengthen the professional preparation of new teachers in ways that lead to more learner-centered, assessment-driven teaching” (p. 23).

Darling-Hammond (2012) tied in the many benefits of teacher performance assessments and incorporates edTPA in the following statement:

Along with the National Board certification portfolio, [edTPA] set of assessments can be used not only for personnel decision making over a teacher’s career, but also for guiding teacher development and for evaluating
and improving teacher education, mentoring, and professional development programs. This could greatly improve teacher effectiveness by allowing them to experience assessments that are truly educative and by improving the quality of teachers’ preparation for and induction into the classroom. (p. 12)

**Reflection**

One of the major skills that performance assessments stimulate is reflection. Darling-Hammond (2006) highlighted the important role teacher performance assessments play in promoting critical reflection amongst teachers. Okhremtchouk, Newell, and Rosa (2013) conducted a study on PACT with pre-service teachers and found it “evident that the PACT assessment has a positive impact on the reflective component of practical preparation and quality lesson planning” (p. 14). To also support this finding, one participant specifically stated, “My PACT lessons were some of my best lessons”, while another reported, “[PACT] improved my lesson plans. I felt like I reflected a little more on what I was teaching and how I was teaching” (Okhremtchouk et al., p. 13-14). In a similar study by Van Es and Conroy (2009) on examining PACT completion by 80 pre-service mathematics teachers, they found the higher scoring candidates noticed differences or inconsistencies in their planning and teaching on the dimension of their reflection, while lower scoring candidates did not. Furthermore with reflection upon planning, Van Es and Conroy (2009) determined “habits of reflection influence the extent to which future teachers notice particular aspects of the learning environment and how they reason about what they see” (p. 97). Participants also stated the PACT preparation process reinforced thinking about assessment in a meaningful way and encouraged careful planning (Okhremtchouk, Seiki, Gilliland, Ateh, Wallace, & Kato, 2009). In Wiechman’s (2013) study, participants reported that despite TPA challenges, “[TPA] gave them the opportunity to see themselves in a classroom setting, to recognize
what was going on around them, and to learn from observation and reflection so that their cycle of planning, teaching, and assessing might continually improve” (p. 88). Furthermore, Pecheone and Chung (2006) reported the PACT improved teacher candidates’ ability to reflect on their teaching.

Critical Examination of Instruction

Sandholtz and Shea (2011) state that in contrast to traditional forms of evaluation, a significant benefit to performance assessments is the incorporation of evidence from teaching practice. Brantley-Dias (2008) conducted a study with 8 middle and high school science student teachers to understand how teachers learned to teach, specifically looking at the role of digital video and how it served as a productive tool in teacher candidates’ process of learning to teach. The study identified three types of reflection: technical, contextual, and critical, with technical as the most commonly used form of reflection (Brantley-Dias, 2008). The study identified all participants in the study “made technical reflections that were primarily directed towards skills of teaching,” (p. 16) proving that videotaping served as the primary form of reflection when compared to contextual and critical forms of reflection (Brantley-Dias, 2008). Similarly, overall findings of a study by Harford and MacRuairc (2008) regarding 20 pre-service teachers in a variety of subject disciplines, suggested “students’ engagement with the peer-videoing process helped them to develop their reflective skills, which in turn had an impact on their classroom practice, thus bridging to a significant degree the gap between reflection and practice” (p. 1887-1888). Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) provided additional support when reporting teacher candidates found the PACT was helpful in their student teaching practices by allowing them to learn about their teaching, specifically
in the use of video-taping and watching themselves teach, which aided in reflection of teaching practices. The positive impact of the use of video recordings on the development of reflective skills is further explained through Harford and MacRuairc’s study (2008),

As the year progressed, and students became more reflective, they critically engaged with particular aspects of their practice at a deeper level. They began to consider the impact of their practice on the pupils in their classrooms and this indicated a move away from earlier focus on their own activity towards a greater awareness of the impact of their actions on pupil activity and response (p. 1888)

To summarize the benefit of reflection through videotaping, in a review of Minnesota’s TPA, Wiechman (2013) discussed how the analysis of the teaching video allowed teaching candidates to evaluate the effective and ineffective characteristics of their teaching and reflect on how planning, instruction, or student assessment could change in future practice.

**Challenges with Teacher Performance Assessments**

There is much evidence that teacher performance assessments deliver a more effective measure of evaluation when compared to traditional forms of pre-service teacher evaluations, however it is important to note the challenges faced with implementing such assessments.

*Redundancy of TPA Prompts*

In a PACT study conducted with 73 pre-service teachers from four different teaching credential program areas, one of the major themes surrounding implementation of PACT included the “redundancy of reflection prompts” (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009, p. 53). Findings from another study, by Selvester, Summers, and Williams (2006), additionally supported the challenge of TPA repetitiveness and found 52% of credential candidates were
frustrated with redundancy. In regards to the TPA tasks, one candidate reported, “the TPA was extremely repetitive! Reflect, analyze, reflect, analyze, reflect, analyze for 20 plus pages” (Selvester, Summers, & Williams, 2006, p. 29).

Lack of Clarity

In addition to redundancy, two studies found teacher performance assessment prompts were “unclear” and that it was difficult to determine what was being asked of the prompts. Several responses in Okhremtchouk, Newell, and Rosa’s (2013) study on PACT indicated the scoring rubrics were unclear. Participants from Selvester, Summers, and Williams (2006) requested clear directions and more examples.

Time Commitment and Stress

Another challenge with teacher performance assessments was the time consumption and stress during completion. Participants in Okhremtchouk et al.’s study (2009) reported PACT was not helpful in their student teaching practices due to the leading factors of “time” consumption and “stress” (p. 49). Along with this, 94% of students stated the PACT affected their personal time and life in a significantly negative way (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009). Additional research by De Lay and Warner (2013) recognized the substantial time investment needed for completion of a performance assessment.

Balance with Other Responsibilities/Expectations

During the completion of the PACT, teacher candidates recognized a detrimental effect on their planning and delivery of non-PACT lessons, as well as challenges to daily classroom management, decrease in time to meet with resident teachers, and decrease in the quality of
work submitted for other courses not related to PACT (Okhremtchouk et al., 2013). With daily classroom management, one participant reported, “[PACT] completely took over my life. I felt I had little time to focus on teaching, which is the focus of the program” (Okhremtchouk et al., 2013, p. 11). Furthermore, decrease in the quality of work submitted for other courses not related to PACT was evident in one participant’s statement, “[w]ork produced for PACT as well as other courses was sub-par, In essence, I did things to get them done,” (p. 12) demonstrating it was difficult for students to submit quality work due to balancing time between PACT and other courses (Okhremtchouk et al., 2013).

*External Support for TPA*

Wiechman (2013) inquired as to the perceived level of support provided to teacher candidates by their college in helping to better understand the scope of the TPA and with technical assistance. Most of the teacher candidates reported receiving sufficient or partial from their college in understanding the expectations of TPA and completing the technical aspects of TPA. Open-ended comments collected by Wiechman (2013) found the teacher candidates felt they could be better supported by setting staggered deadlines for submission of the various tasks, additional training on video formatting and editing, and trying to minimize redundancies between the requirements of the TPA and other required assignments. Additionally, teacher candidates expressed the need to provide an improved orientation and clarify the purpose of completing the TPA (Wiechman, 2013).

Implementation of teaching performance assessments may also pose a challenge with providing adequate oversight and management of many related responsibilities as evident in Guaglione et al.’s (2009) study, which examined the perceptions of California State
University administrators and the challenges and benefits resulting from the implementation of the teacher performance assessment across California State University campuses. Supporting this, pre-service teachers in another study on TPAs requested “closer fieldwork supervision during the task” and “suggested they would have been more successful or found the task more enriching had they been able to work more closely on the TPA with their supervisors and their cooperating teachers” (Selvester, Summers, & Williams, 2006, p. 29-30). Wiechman (2013) also reported when participants were asked about support received from their cooperating teachers, about a quarter of participants (24%) responded they “could have used more help” (p. 38). Cooperating teachers also reported they had difficulty understanding what their responsibilities were and “did not receive enough information and reported candidates who simply took on the responsibility of completing the assessment themselves” (Wiechman, 2013, p. 87). Okhremtchouk, Newell, and Rosa (2013) found more support was needed in advising and modeling. Teacher candidates reported they would have liked the opportunity to examine more models during face-to-face class sessions, as well as good examples modeling the different components of PACT (Okhremtchouk et al., 2013).

Future Challenges to the Implementation and Completion of TPA

Wiechman (2013) found student teachers, “were confused about the overall purpose of the assessment and viewed completing it as more a ‘hoop to jump through’ than an activity to help them engage in professional improvement” (p. 87). Redundancy of prompts, time consumption and stress, and lack of understanding and management of university supervisors and cooperating teachers all pose as challenges for implementing a teacher performance assessment in an educational program.
Summary

This chapter discussed the theoretical frameworks of Schön’s reflective practitioner as well as learning in and from practice. We examined how evaluations for teacher education programs have shifted from course-based to performance-based and the foundation on which teacher performance assessments were developed. TPAs were modeled primarily after the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and incorporate the use of portfolios for evidence in planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection. Some of the major challenges of performance assessment implementation were redundancy of prompts, time consumption and stress. However, even though challenges were determined, the PACT performance assessment made a positive impact on pre-service teachers, specifically in the area of reflection and self-learning regarding teaching practices. Many also reported that performance assessments would improve professional preparation and success in the future.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation and completion of the edTPA by pre-service teachers in agricultural education. Additionally, it was important to explore the impact of edTPA on the experiences of agricultural education student teachers at North Carolina State University in order to help improve the experience for other program areas and agriculture teacher education programs around the country. The findings of this study can inform and potentially improve teacher preparation coursework and have an impact on the student teacher experience at North Carolina State University and other institutions implementing the edTPA as a measure of teacher readiness and effectiveness. It is important to note the researcher remained non-biased throughout the process of this study. Although the researcher was a graduate student in Agricultural Education, her student teaching experience had not yet been completed during the time of the study nor did the researcher have to complete the edTPA. This chapter will discuss the research design, the population of the study, instrumentation, methods of data collection, and data analysis, as well as trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

This study used mixed methods with an emphasis on basic qualitative research to examine student teachers’ experiences and perspectives regarding the edTPA. Creswell (2014) simply defined mixed methods research as “combining or integrating qualitative and quantitative research and data” (p. 14). A mixed methods approach was most appropriate in this study because, “the researcher bases the inquiry on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either
quantitative or qualitative data alone” (Creswell, 2014, p. 19). Qualitative research examines phenomena without a quantitative or measurable value, such as an individuals’ experiences, feelings, or emotions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Major qualities of basic qualitative research include how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). As a result, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). This study’s design used the epistemological approach of constructivism. Morgan (2014) defined the constructivist approach of “assuming that everyone has unique experiences and beliefs, and it posits that no reality exists outside of those perceptions” (p. 38). Merriam (2009) stated that “[r]esearchers do not ‘find’ knowledge, they construct it’” (p. 8-9). The constructivism approach was used for this study design because the goal of the research is to construct meaning and understanding given perspectives and experiences of student teachers in agricultural education.

**Sample Selection**

This study was conducted using a census sample. Participants of this study included sixteen undergraduate students at North Carolina State University working towards an undergraduate degree in Agricultural Education. Participating students were completing their student teaching experience during the semester in which the edTPA was being piloted. There were no restrictions based on participant’s background, gender, race, or years of prior teaching experience. Student teachers were all enrolled in a seminar course, AEE490, taken in their final semester. It was instructed to the student teachers by their AEE490 course
instructors the edTPA would count as a percentage of their final grade and was a high-stakes assessment, meaning a passing score on the edTPA was required to pass the course.

At the beginning of the study, the accessible population was sixteen participants, $N = 16$. This population was used for the midterm questionnaire ($n = 16$) and first focus group ($n = 15$) in March. There were only 15 participants in the first focus group because one participant was absent due to illness. It is important to note that the population changed throughout the course of the study due to two participant not completing the edTPA, therefore at the end of the study, the population decreased by two ($N = 14$). The participant absent from the first focus group was not one of the participants that did not complete the student teaching experience. This population was used for the final questionnaire ($n = 14$) and second focus group ($n = 14$) in April. The response rate for the second questionnaire was 93% ($n = 13$). Figure 1 illustrates the changes of the population throughout the course of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm (March)</td>
<td>$n = 16$</td>
<td>$n = 15$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N = 16$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final (April)</td>
<td>$n = 13$</td>
<td>$n = 14$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N = 14$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. *Population throughout the course of the study.*

**Data Collection Methods**

Multiple methods were used in order to collect data for this study. This study used Creswell’s mixed methods approach by beginning with quantitative methods, and then
qualitative methods with open-ended focus group interviews to collect detailed views from participants to help explain the initial quantitative questionnaire (Creswell, 2014).

Participants completed two questionnaires and participated in focus groups at two student teacher seminars, one held in March and the other in April. The March seminar was held at the midterm, right after student teachers submitted the edTPA, while the April seminar was held at the final, during the end of the student teaching experience.

Focus Groups

According to Morgan (1988), focus groups combine elements of individual interviews and participant observation in groups, which are the two principal means of collecting qualitative data. Since the design of the current study was of a constructivism perspective, data obtained from a focus group is constructed within the interaction of the group, making it appropriate for the data collection procedure (Merriam, 2009). Focus groups also “provide insight into attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants” (Krueger, 1994, p. 19). One of the main objectives of this study was to examine the student teachers’ perceptions of edTPA.

Prior to the first focus group, the primary researcher met with three other members of the research committee to discuss the facilitation of focus groups and the questions to be used. The guiding questions for the focus groups were agreed upon by the researcher and committee members as well as approved by the Institutional Review Board prior to the date of the first focus group in March. Dooley (2007) states most qualitative researchers are guided by a set of basic questions and issues to explore, but deviations may occur in order to capture nuances and emerging trends not previously determined. Krueger (1988) also notes
through open-ended questions in a focus group, participants are able to choose the manner in which they respond. The focus group guideline consisted of open-ended questions regarding students’ experiences with edTPA in order to gain as much insight as possible.

Focus groups are typically composed of six to ten participants per group (Merriam, 2009; Krueger, 1994). With that recommendation for number of participants in a group, the participants were divided equally between two groups. Each group of seven to eight student teachers were then assigned to two instructors. Since the university supervisors (Instructor A and Instructor B) were included as co-leaders of the focus groups, the student teachers were divided as followed: Student teachers who had Instructor A as a university supervisor were in the focus group led by Instructor B and co-facilitated by a graduate colleague appointed by the researcher. Similarly, student teachers that had Instructor B as a university supervisor were in the focus group led by Instructor A and the primary researcher. Once students were in their designated focus groups, they were asked to sign a consent form to ensure confidentiality of information for both the researcher and participants. They were also asked to develop a pseudonym to conceal their identity for the purpose of confidentiality. The focus groups were conducted in the classrooms that the seminar course was held in on North Carolina State University campus to adhere to qualitative research’s naturalistic approach. An audio recording device was used to record the duration of the focus groups and field notes were taken throughout the course of the focus groups.

Krueger (1994) states focus groups are conducted in series in order to detect trends and patterns across groups. As such two focus groups were held. The first focus group (FG1) was held in March briefly after participating student teachers had submitted their completed
edTPA. FG1 was split into two smaller focus groups facilitated by Instructor A and Instructor B. The second focus group (FG2) was held in April, a month after student teachers completed edTPA, during their final student teaching seminar. Again, they were divided into two smaller focus groups, however, participants who were in FG1 with Instructor A were now with Instructor B. Similarly, participants who were in Instructor B’s group during FG1 were with Instructor A during FG2. This procedure ensured the primary researcher the opportunity to speak with and observe all participants of the study.

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were administered over the course of this study. The questionnaires were developed using previous research and survey instruments developed by Chung (2005, 2008). Specifically, the questionnaires were based upon the “Teacher Candidate Questionnaires” in Chung’s (2005) dissertation on student teacher candidates at “Dewey University” piloting PACT. Student teachers accessed the midterm questionnaire (MQ) online via Google Forms and completed the questions one day prior to the first focus group (FG1). Participants were asked questions regarding their understanding of edTPA, information about their edTPA experience, and inquiry regarding edTPA tasks, resources, and any challenges that may have presented during their experience (see Appendix A for survey questions). Types of questions ranged from Likert-type questions to open-ended questions. The purpose of this initial questionnaire was to gather and analyze data for the focus group discussion. The responses of the questionnaire were then analyzed to determine any common themes, which informed the focus group discussion.
The final questionnaire (FQ) was completed online by student teachers via Google Forms prior to the final focus group (FG2). This questionnaire focused on the overall reflective experience of edTPA. Student teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire individually and answer questions based on their experience of edTPA and describe the effects on the remainder of their student teaching experience. Types of questions in this questionnaire were strictly limited to Likert-type questions (See Appendix B).

**Documents**

The last method used was data collection through documents. This type of data provides information that cannot be observed (Dooley, 2007). Documents used in this study were generated by the edTPA course instructors, which included edTPA teaching events and rubrics. Documents can provide first hand accounts of how student teachers view edTPA teaching events and the amount of work required. Coding was applied to all documents in order to maintain organization of the audit trail.

**Data Analysis**

For the purpose of this study, data analysis was done through the process of analyzing data collected through focus group interviews, questionnaires, and related documents. Merriam (2009) described the overall process of data analysis begins by identifying segments in the data sets that are responsive to identified research questions. After transcriptions were created from focus group recordings, coding was the first step to analyzing the data. Shorthand designations for this study were designated as followed: pieces of data were given
a letter followed by a number, following the recommendation of Merriam (2009). For example, focus group transcriptions were coded as FG1 and FG2.

This study used the constant comparative method for primary data analysis. Merriam stated the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Dooley (2007) also described the constant comparative method as when “the interest is in the discovery of regularities and the patterns or connections between and among these regularities” (p. 37). After pieces of data were coded for identification, they were then further broken down into different pieces of information using color coordination. To analyze the questionnaires, the researcher began with the midterm questionnaire, MQ, and color-coded each different piece of data from the student teachers free responses. From there, the focus group transcript, FG1, endured the same process, and so on with the final questionnaire, FQ, and FG2. Different pieces of data from focus group interviews, questionnaires, and documents were color-coded based on similar content. Each different color represented a different word, concept, or idea. These individual pieces of color-coded data were selected and constantly compared with each of the other transcripts, questionnaires and documents until patterns emerged. Stewart and Shamdasani’s (1990) cut-and-paste technique was used which included color-coding to mark different topics within the text and later “cut” out and sorted so relevant material was organized together. This allowed the researcher to analyze each group of data to determine common themes. Once patterns were apparent, these were categorized and developed into themes, also described by Dooley (2007) as “a provisional code or name” (p. 37). Coding, constant comparison, cut-and-paste, and data display allowed meanings to be drawn from the
data collected. This process was continuously performed throughout the course of data
collection and analysis to develop final themes.

Aside from constant comparison, coding, and the cut-and-paste technique, the
quantitative data received from the midterm questionnaire was analyzed by using means and
percentages of responses generated from Google Forms.

**Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research studies, four principles of trustworthiness are applied, known
as: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985;
Dooley, 2007).

To ensure credibility, the design of the study included the use of multiple methods of
data collection, or triangulation. Triangulation using multiple sources of data means
comparing and crosschecking data collected through interviews, observations, and other
forms of data (Merriam 2009). Dooley (2007) stated multiple methods of data collection
include interviews, focus groups, observations, and other measures such as documents and
archival data. This study used questionnaires, focus group interviews, and documents as
methods of collecting data. Another strategy used to achieve credibility was through peer
debriefing. Merriam (2009) describes peer debriefing as a process in which the researcher’s
peers read and comment on the findings. Peer debriefs occurred multiple times throughout
the semester between the primary researcher and the academic advisor.

To achieve transferability, a small census sample was used. Sixteen student teachers
in Agricultural Education were chosen who were currently in the student teaching seminar
course, AEE 490, at North Carolina State University. There were no restrictions based on
teacher candidates’ gender, race, or years of any previous teaching experience. Teacher candidates were completing their student teaching experience at a number of different schools across the state. Rich, thick description was also used to describe all elements of this study.

To ensure dependability and confirmability, an audit trail and journal were kept to illustrate the findings and conclusions drawn from this study. Focus group interview transcripts, included the date, time, and length of occurrence. All relative documents were coded and filed in order of analysis. Researcher biases were also noted in order to explain all preeminent biases the researcher may have had before conducting the study. A journal was constantly maintained throughout the course of the study in order to eliminate any bias and keep record of any changes and decisions made regarding the study. Although member checking did not occur, consistency of participants’ comments and responses during the course of the study aided in trustworthiness.

Summary

This chapter discussed the mixed methods and basic qualitative research design study. This study was conducted using a census of undergraduates at North Carolina State University majoring in Agricultural Education. Participants in this study were enrolled in AEE490 and completing their student teaching experience. A multi-method use of data collection, known as triangulation, included focus group interviews, questionnaires, and document. Content analysis was primarily used to analyze data and develop themes based on students’ perceptions and experiences related to edTPA. Trustworthiness of this study was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study was a census study consisting of all of the 2014 spring semester student teachers in Agricultural Education at North Carolina State University \((N = 16)\). Focus group interviews and questionnaires were the primary form of data collection in this study. The constant comparative method was used to analyze data. Coding and the cut-and-paste technique were additionally used for data analysis. Trustworthiness was achieved through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Characteristics of Population

The participants were in their final year of their undergraduate coursework to earn a Bachelors degree in Agricultural Education. During the semester the research was conducted, the participants were completing their student teaching experience in order to obtain teaching licensure. All participating students were enrolled in AEE490, Seminar in Agricultural and Extension Education. The average age of participants was 22 years old. Of the population, 31% of participants were male \((n = 5)\), while 69% were female \((n = 11)\). Participants completed their student teaching experience at high schools across the state of North Carolina. Courses taught during student teaching included: animal science, horticulture, agricultural mechanics, and agricultural issues and awareness. Topics that participants selected for the edTPA included electricity, animal breeds and terminology, nutrients, parts of a flower, photosynthesis, global agriculture awareness, cattle traits, meat, propagation, carpentry, floral design, and plant anatomy.
Findings

From the analysis of the focus group interviews and questionnaires, multiple themes emerged including challenges, barriers, and perceived benefits of the student teachers’ edTPA experience. In order to protect the confidentiality of participants, students were each asked to create their own pseudonyms. To distinguish between focus group interviews and online questionnaires, the following codes were designed: FG1 for the first focus group and FG2 for the second, MQ (n = 16) for the midterm questionnaire in March and FQ (n = 13) for the final questionnaire in April. The following matrix in Figure 2 illustrates the data sources in relation to the findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Midterm Questionnaire (March)</th>
<th>Focus Group 1 (March)</th>
<th>Final Questionnaire (April)</th>
<th>Focus Group 2 (April)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obj.1: Influence of edTPA on student teaching experience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obj. 2: Perspectives and experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obj. 3: Sources of support for completion of edTPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obj. 4: Perceived preparedness and level of difficulty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obj. 5: Overall challenges and barriers of edTPA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obj. 6: Perceived benefits of edTPA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obj. 7: Student teachers’ recommendations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Findings in relation to data sources.
Findings Related to Objective 1: Examine the influence of the edTPA on the student teaching experience.

The first objective of this study was to examine the influences of the edTPA on the student teaching experience. Participants were asked to complete a midterm questionnaire following their submission of the edTPA, regarding their understanding of edTPA, information about their edTPA experience, and inquiry regarding edTPA tasks, resources, and any challenges that may have emerged during their experience. The midterm questionnaire had both Likert-type questions and open-ended responses. Students were asked to describe their understanding of the overall edTPA process on a scale of one to five, with one being low understanding of edTPA and five being high understanding of edTPA. The mean response was 3.5 indicating participants had a moderate understanding of edTPA (MQ). Participants were also asked how many total hours were invested in edTPA. The total hours invested ranged from 8 to 72 hours with 35 hours and 25 minutes being the average time (MQ). In order to gauge students’ confidence level, specific to earning a passing score on the edTPA, participants were asked to predict their final score on the assessment. Scores were set by the student teaching coordinator where an edTPA score of a 35 or above was equivalent to an ‘A+’, a score of 30-35 represented an ‘A’, a score of 27-29 represented a ‘B’, while a 26 or below represented a ‘C’ grade or lower. Almost a quarter of participants felt they would make a score below a 26 on edTPA meaning they did not feel that they would pass or make an adequate score.

On the midterm questionnaire given in March, participants were asked to identify through open-ended responses, the greatest challenge of edTPA. Approximately 44% (n = 7)
of participants responded that timing and planning were the greatest challenges. This included both timing with edTPA completion, time management, and planning preparation. Participants began student teaching in mid to late January when high schools transitioned to a new semester and the edTPA was given a due date of March 5th, giving participants about five weeks to complete the edTPA. One student reported,

“The greatest challenge was the timing. I don’t feel like the timing of the requirements matched up with curriculum plans. It was difficult keeping my students focused when I was jumping around the curriculum. The curriculum outline and blueprint were both created for a reason…” (MQ)

In regards to other challenges of the edTPA, 25% (n = 4) of participants responded the complexity and language of edTPA was confusing (MQ). Some of the written responses of the open-ended questions on the midterm questionnaire included, “Reading the prompts, the language was very complicated and it was hard for me to understand what they were asking”, “Learning what the edTPA was and trying to understand the instructions in the edTPA handbook”, “document is so confusing that it seems as if it were written by nuclear scientists that are English language learners”, and “the wording of some of the questions were poor and repetitive”.

Additional responses identified in the midterm questionnaire pertained to the assessment and the video portion of edTPA. The challenges identified included Task 3, the assessment and assessment commentary, as the greatest challenges of edTPA, while others responded that video recording was their greatest challenge.

Aside from identifying participants’ greatest challenges of edTPA, they were asked through another open-ended response, what one thing they learned from the edTPA
experience. Approximately 47% \( (n = 7) \) of participants responded that through the edTPA experience, they had learned the importance of preparedness and planning. One student teacher stated, “From my edTPA and student teaching experience I learned if nothing else to be prepared. Preparation in your first few years teaching is key” (MQ). Another participant responded, “Planning is the key to success” (MQ). Others reported on making better lesson plans, managing paperwork, and that planning and being prepared for class helps things flow smoothly. Four of the participants discussed how the edTPA experience helped improve their assessment and reflection of their own teaching practices. Responses included, “edTPA allowed me to assess my teaching in a structured way,” “I learned how to appropriately plan and reflect on the evaluations of assessments. It taught me what I needed to improve on in my teaching,” “The edTPA assessment process, although intensively meticulous, allowed me to further develop my thought processes as an educator,” and “Reflecting upon my teaching” (MQ). One participant responded the edTPA would be beneficial for the future by saying edTPA was a “great simulation of the work and requirements needed to complete a large project like earning your national boards” (MQ). Two participants responded that the one thing they learned from the edTPA experience was the “big picture of teaching” (MQ). Another responded, “One thing I learned from the experience of edTPA was learning what all is behind the job of being a teacher” (MQ).

Participants were given a final questionnaire \( (n = 13) \) at the end of their student teaching experience in April and asked to reflect on their experience with edTPA post completion. When asked about the process of constructing edTPA, 77% \( (n = 10) \) expressed they had learned important skills through the process of constructing edTPA and 69% \( (n = 9) \)
indicated the completion of the performance assessment encouraged reflection on instructional decisions. Additionally, 54% (n = 7) felt the process of constructing edTPA helped to improve their knowledge of learners. However, 84% (n = 11) of participants either agreed or strongly agreed the edTPA took too much time and work to complete. Similarly, 69% (n = 9) of participants either agreed or strongly agreed the edTPA tasks did not adequately capture essential aspects of their teaching practices. The participants were divided as to the influence of the edTPA lesson planning, knowledge of learners, use of assessment, implementation of instruction, and contribution to future teaching practice. Table 1 shows the influence of the edTPA on different aspects of the student teaching experience.

Table 1

*Influences of edTPA on the Student Teaching Experience (N = 13).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (n)</th>
<th>Agree (n)</th>
<th>Disagree (n)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>edTPA tasks did <strong>not</strong> capture essential aspects of my teaching practices adequately.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edTPA took too much time and work to complete.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped me to reflect more carefully on my instructional decisions.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned important skills through the process of constructing edTPA.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped to improve my lesson planning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edTPA tasks were <strong>not</strong> relevant to teaching.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped to improve my knowledge of learners.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped to improve my assessment of student learning progress.</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>6</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My teacher credentialing program prepared me in ways that allowed me to be successful on edTPA.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edTPA will be useful for my teaching practice.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped me to improve my implementation of instruction.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings Related to Objective 2: Examine the perspectives and experiences student teachers in Agricultural Education have had related to edTPA.

The second objective was to examine the perspectives and experiences student teachers have had related to edTPA. Initially students were asked about their general thoughts and experience overall regarding edTPA. The first thoughts that came to mind from participants included, “confusion”, “overwhelming”, “cringe”, and “hectic” (FG1, FG2). One student said edTPA was a “foggy cloud the entire time” (FG2). Another participant expressed she felt like she was getting her national board certification (FG1). Colin stated, “I felt like I was burnt out before I even started” (FG1).

When asked about their self-efficacy and confidence as a teacher on a scale of 1 to 10 during edTPA, with one being low self-efficacy and 10 being high self-efficacy, multiple participants reported low levels of under 5. One participant specifically reported, “Nerves about video-taping brought my confidence down” (FG1). Colin noted, “I felt like there was anxiety surrounding [edTPA], like we didn’t know what we were getting into” (FG1).

Theme 1: edTPA Does Not Adequately Capture the Student Teaching Experience

A subtheme identified aside from initial comments regarding edTPA was student teachers felt edTPA did not adequately encompass all aspects of agricultural education. Participants in
FG1 described edTPA as very content specific. Colin quoted that when it comes to agricultural education, “I feel like it’s not like your every day classroom” (FG1). One participant noted, “it feels like we were only tested on a few specific things that aren’t really that important in the grand scheme of things” (FG1). Another participant went into further explanation of how edTPA did not adequately capture her student teaching experience,

“I think for other education majors, edTPA is more cookie cutter and fits them better. But edTPA didn’t know I was at school Monday’s and Thursday’s until 9 pm doing officer meetings and parliamentary procedure practice. And edTPA didn’t know about the fruit sale we had. There are just so many things agriculture education does that edTPA didn’t address. It was very content specific, but we do so much more.” (FG1)

Findings Related to Objective 3: Identify sources of support for completion of edTPA.

The third objective was to examine the sources of support for the completion of edTPA. The researcher identified the following sources of support as the following: agriculture rubrics, materials from AEE490 seminar course, edTPA Agriculture Handbook, edTPA “Making Good Choices”, e-mails from one of the AEE490 course instructor, the university supervisors, peers, and the College of Education workshops. On the midterm questionnaire, participants were asked to identify how helpful each of the following resources were in regards to support on the edTPA. Mean scores identify e-mails from the student teaching coordinator as the most helpful resource, followed by peers as the next helpful resource. Approximately 56% (n = 9) identified their university supervisors as helpful. When asked to identify the least helpful source of support, 69% of participants (n = 11) recognized the College of Education workshops. Participants were divided as to the
helpfulness of agriculture rubrics, materials from AEE490, edTPA Agriculture Handbook, and edTPA “Making Good Choices” when it came to helpfulness, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Support</th>
<th>Very Helpful (n)</th>
<th>Helpful (n)</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful (n)</th>
<th>Little Help (n)</th>
<th>Not Helpful (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching coordinator’s e-mails</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edTPA Agriculture Handbook</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edTPA agriculture rubrics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials from student teaching seminar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edTPA Making Good Choices</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Education workshops</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary researcher included information about cooperating teachers in the final questionnaire after receiving information from the first focus group. On the final questionnaire, participants were given the statement, “My cooperating teacher provided helpful support as I completed edTPA,” to which 61% (n = 8) responded either strongly agree or agree. This question was separate from the table above, which were responses from the midterm questionnaire.

Findings Related to Objective 4: Examine student teachers’ perceived preparedness and perceived level of difficulty for completion of edTPA.

The fourth objective of this study was to determine the perceived preparedness and perceived level of difficulty for completion of edTPA. On the final questionnaire, most
participants’ felt moderately prepared to very well prepared on all areas of teaching. Only one participant responded they did not feel well prepared in regards to planning that builds students’ conceptual understanding, relevant skills, and problem-solving strategies. Another participant responded they did not feel well prepared with identifying and supporting language demands associated with key agricultural learning tasks. Table 3 represents how prepared participants felt about the following tasks. Each number next to the following statements represents the rubric number it corresponds to.

Table 3

*Student Teachers’ Perceived Preparedness (N = 13).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>edTPA Rubric (rubric 01-14, Planning, Instruction, Assessment)</th>
<th>Very Well Prepared (n)</th>
<th>Moderately Well Prepared (n)</th>
<th>Somewhat Well Prepared (n)</th>
<th>Not Well Prepared (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>06. Demonstrate a positive learning environment that supports students’ engagement in learning.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07. Actively engage students in developing agricultural-related conceptual understanding, skills, and problem-solving strategies.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. Use a variety of assessments (i.e. observations, portfolios, tests, performance tasks).</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. Use representations to support students’ ability to understand agricultural concepts and procedures.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Assign work that helps students use their higher-order thinking skills to think critically and solve problems.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. Use knowledge of your students to justify instructional plans.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08. Use instructional strategies that promote active student learning.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01. Planning that build students’ conceptual understanding, relevant skills, and problem-solving strategies.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>10. Evaluate and change teaching practice to meet students’ varied learning needs.</th>
<th>11. Analyze evidence of student learning.</th>
<th>04. Identify and support language demands associated with a key agricultural learning task.</th>
<th>02. Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.</th>
<th>12. Give productive feedback to students to guide their learning.</th>
<th>13. Provide feedback and opportunities for focus students and guide their future learning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 10</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2 9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 8</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were asked to rank the edTPA components according to their level of difficulty ranging from very difficult to very easy (see Figure 3). Student teachers identified 

*Task 1 Context for Learning* as the least difficult task of edTPA. They identified *Task 3 Assessment Commentary* as the most difficult task of edTPA.
Participants also indicated which task or component they felt needed additional explanation or assistance. Almost half (46%) responded planning and planning commentary, 31% responded Task 3 overall, 15% responded all tasks and commentaries, and 8% responded videoing (MQ).
Findings Related to Objective 5: Determine the overall challenges and barriers edTPA has on the teacher licensure program.

The fifth objective of this study was to determine any challenges and overall barriers edTPA as expressed by participants. Two major themes emerged as the most challenging during the course of student teachers’ edTPA experience.

Theme 1: Early Timing of the Due Date for edTPA was Challenging for Student Teachers

Timing of the edTPA was a major concern for participants during their student teaching experience. The university began a new semester at least three weeks prior to public high schools. One participant noted, “for the first three weeks we are there, we aren’t teaching since they are finishing up their semester” (FG1). Other students in FG1 also expressed the issue with semester timing. One participant responded, “I found it hard that it was due so early. One, because it was due at the beginning of our teaching so we were getting use to everything anyways,” while another followed by saying, “Timing was terrible. I was frustrated with the video, not comfortable with my teaching yet, and not enough time to implement everything” (FG1). Similarly, another participant responded, “Seems like edTPA is better suited for those teaching in the fall due to time trade off” (FG1).

A subtheme that emerged from the timing of edTPA was the issue of timing in course sequence and course content. Aside from the general timing of edTPA at the beginning of the university semester and the early due date, participants expressed the timing affected the topic selected for their learning segment. Many student teachers felt it was challenging to choose higher order thinking topics that edTPA required so early in the semester. In reference to course content, simply stated by Alice, “Because of timing, it was out of
sequence” (FG1). Many students felt it was difficult choosing a topic due to semester timing. One student expressed, “I had a hard time picking a topic because it was so early in the semester that we should be teaching basics like FFA, SAE, and stuff like that before getting into our topic” (FG1). Another student stated, “It’s difficult having to pick higher level thinking like what [edTPA] wanted without having to put any of the lower level stuff in there because all my kids had never had any animal science before” (FG1). Alejandro responded by saying, “I couldn’t jump too far into my animal science curriculum, because I hadn’t got that base knowledge and terminology that I would be using throughout the curriculum” (FG1). Tristan also supported this and responded, “That’s going to be our biggest hurdle, um, trying to fit in something that has higher order thinking that you didn’t have to wait until the end of the semester to build that base knowledge up to” (FG1). To summarize, one student stated that in regards to edTPA requirements, it was “[s]trange having to get kids to the level you want to see, but not having the time to do it” (FG1).

**Theme 2: Incorporating Academic Language into both Agricultural Education Instruction and the edTPA Portfolio was Challenging**

Another major barrier to edTPA was the academic language included in both the handbook and scoring rubric, and the terminology expected in the written narratives prepared by the participants. Alejandro stated, “[edTPA] seemed to have been written by nuclear engineers, it could have been much simpler written” (FG1). Similar to Alejandro’s statement, Alice said, “I would have liked more clear explanations than just a number and some really detailed, fancy words” (FG1). Many students felt edTPA was testing them on how well they could perform with reading and writing, as clearly expressed by one student,
“I felt like I was being tested on how well I could read and write because some of those prompts I had to look up the words. I didn’t feel that I could do my best when I didn’t understand what it was asking me.” (FG1)

Other students felt their work was repetitive due to the repetitive nature of the prompts, adding to the complexity of edTPA (FG1, FG2). Tristan stated, “[edTPA] was too much information- instruction overload. Between the handbook, rubrics, commentary prompts, it was almost like, ok, which one do I need to pay more attention to?” (FG1).

When asked how they would have liked additional help on edTPA, many participants expressed a desire for additional help in understanding the edTPA language. Participants wanted to have more examples, a more simplified version of the rubrics, and a more thorough explanation of the prompts.

Theme 3: Lack of Cooperating Teacher Support in Completing the edTPA

A third theme that emerged was the lack of support provided by cooperating teachers (CT) during the edTPA experience. This was mainly due to the fact that CTs were not aware or knowledgeable of edTPA. When asked during FG1 what advice could be given to students in future semesters, Alice responded, “CT assistance. How can the university support our CTs and give them a little snapshot of this process. Providing support for CTs and progress monitoring. I wish mine knew more about what I had to do” (FG1).

Another student recommended, “should give CTs a heads up in the fall so they are prepared and aware. Prepare the CTs for it. Mine was like, I don’t know if I ever want to have a student teacher again after this” (FG2). One participant noted the added assistance provided by a CT who had navigated the process for national board certification, “My CT was national board certified, so that helped me out a lot. If I needed help on something, she
would know exactly what they wanted. She made the biggest difference in my edTPA experience.” (FG2)

Findings Related to Objective 6: Examine Student Teachers’ Perceptions of the Perceived Benefits of the edTPA

Although there were many challenges of edTPA expressed by student teacher participants, such as timing and academic language, there were also many benefits perceived by participants.

Theme 1: Reflection on Teaching was Enhanced via the edTPA

Many student teachers felt the assessment was a good reflection tool that helped with the identification of teaching strengths and weaknesses. The researcher asked students to evaluate their self-efficacy on a scale of 1 to 10 before and after their edTPA experience. Colin expressed, “I thought I was teaching at a 6 or 7, but after looking at the prompts for the self-reflection, edTPA did show me a lot of what I wasn’t doing, so more like a 3 or 4” (FG1). Another student expanded on Colin’s comment by noting, “yeah, it did do a good job of showing me, oh I need to ask more questions, so it was a good reflection tool” (FG1).

When asked by the researcher, what was one thing to take away from edTPA to take back into teaching practice, one student noted, “I think it helped a lot on reflection, looking at what I did and what I could do better next time” (FG1).

Apart from edTPA as an overall reflection tool, a subtheme that emerged was many participants viewed the video component to be the most beneficial contributor to reflection. One student stated, “I think I’ll videotape myself every semester over the years and see how I improve” (FG2). In regards to the video portion, Cathy responded “Looking back at it, I think
that the videos were good because I learned a lot from watching my video and seeing myself teach because, I mean, you don’t realize you’re doing stuff in the classroom” (FG2). Tristan also expressed the video portion was beneficial, “I felt like that was one of the key parts of the video- to see how we gave feedback and actually witness that instead of us writing about it, like it gives you a better evidence of that skill” (FG1). Similarly, Evelyn supported the video portion of edTPA as beneficial and responded, “I think that, no matter what the format is, student teachers and teachers should always have to film themselves and look at themselves- like that was actually my favorite part” (FG1).

In fact, when asked if students could change one thing about edTPA, a couple participants replied they would have liked more visual evidence. One student expressed, “I would have liked a little more video evidence so it wouldn’t rely on how well you can type” (FG2). Both Tristan and Alejandro stated,

“If I were to change one thing about the edTPA, I would maybe have more visual evidence and not so much of the commentary with prompts, because I feel like people that can be great teachers, maybe can’t write it out as well, and that seemed to be the bulk of the assessment, was how well I can write and explain what I did, and not necessarily how well I did what I did.” (FG1)

“I feel like submitting more visual evidence, more evidence of the hands on activities, more evidence of the hands on assessment I gave rather than limiting those to three caveat pages. I feel like that’s a better assessment of how I’m performing in the classroom rather than can I research some theories, can I put it all on paper. I think visual evidence is where we should be graded at, rather than what we could say we did.” (FG1)

*Theme 2: edTPA Served as a Quality Assessment of Teaching Practice*

Another theme that emerged as a benefit was the edTPA served as a good assessment of participants’ own teaching practices. This was surprising since most students responded
that assessment was the most difficult or challenging task of edTPA. Mark noted, “[a]side from the confusing language, [edTPA] does accomplish what we learned and it is a good assessment, it’s just poorly put together” (FG1). Tristan and Lyza Jane both expressed,

“I really felt like edTPA was a great assessment tool because it does incorporate so many, um, areas. It’s got a section that can evaluate how well you plan, how well you work, how well you assess your students with physical or academic challenges. I felt like it did a good job of assessing our rapport.” (FG1)

“I felt it is a good assessment of our teaching, not only with what we can do in the classroom, but how we prepare for teaching and the way that we evaluate students. I know that I can give a much better assessment now since I’ve completed edTPA.” (FG2)

Theme 3: Student Teachers felt Confident of Future Teaching Success as a Result of Successful edTPA Completion

One major benefit of edTPA was increased overall preparation and confidence for future teaching practice. Mark noted, “the overall picture of [edTPA] encompassed everything we have learned, from planning to implementing instruction, evaluating and assessment, so it was a good summary” (FG2). Another student followed by saying, “I feel more confident, it all brought what I learned in the past two years together” (FG2).

Other than the benefits of reflection and assessment, many participants felt that overall edTPA would assist future teaching practices, specifically in getting a teaching job and potential national board certification. Many participants expressed that edTPA will be helpful with future jobs as a teacher. One participant expressed, “I used my lesson plans and materials, assessments, in my portfolio,” while another participant responded, “Lessons to take for the future, for example, in interviews and future teaching” (FG2). To further support edTPA as beneficial for future jobs as a teacher, one participant reported, “Employers might
think we are better qualified for a job. If they see something with such extent and reflection, it might look better. Helps in the long run, seeing everything you’re expected to do and look at” (FG2).

Students also expressed that the edTPA experience was a good precursor to the National Board Certification. One student stated, “I think [edTPA] will help me complete the national board” (FG2). Another student further emphasized this, “It definitely got you talking about or practicing how to write about education and being in a professional literacy manner about what you did and everything like that because it definitely mirrors the national boards” (FG2).

Findings Related to Objective 7: Student Teachers’ recommendations for Future Completion of edTPA

At the end of each focus group, participants were asked if they had any advice or recommendations for future student teachers completing edTPA. A common theme that emerged was participants would like to be introduced to the edTPA earlier in their teacher preparation coursework. One participant suggested, “do we start it as a freshman or do we just learn about it. Learning more step by step about it. Lead into it, but don’t actually do it” (FG2). Another student followed this comment by saying, “That’s what I envision, so by the time you actually have to complete it, it’s like second nature” (FG2). Others suggested edTPA be a multi-year project. Alejandro mentioned in FG1, “have it be a two-year project,” while another student stated,

“A lot of the components of edTPA incorporate things we have been doing as a freshman… the biggest thing I would say that would help me would be to kind of adapt it like a senior project you had to do in high school, kind of start it as a freshman.” (FG1)
Summary

This study examined 2014 spring semester student teachers in agricultural education. From the analysis of focus group interviews and surveys, multiple themes emerged that identified challenges, barriers, and perceived benefits of the student teachers’ edTPA experience.

Overall, edTPA was described as overwhelming, confusing, and challenging by a majority of participants. The findings indicated that edTPA did not fully encompass the agricultural education student teaching experience in its entirety. Main sources of support for edTPA included the university supervisors and peers, while the College of Education workshops were deemed least helpful. In relation to the participants’ perceived preparedness and perceived level of difficulty for completion of edTPA, participants’ felt moderately to very well prepared for teaching. Participants also noted Task 1, Planning, of edTPA as the least difficult and Task 3, Assessment and Assessment Commentary, as being the most difficult. Many participants identified timing and language as major challenges or barriers of the edTPA experience. Similarly, participants determined edTPA as a beneficial reflection and assessment tool of their teaching practices. It was recommended by participants to provide earlier exposure of edTPA.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore implementation and completion of a performance assessment on the student teaching experience of pre-service agriculture teachers at North Carolina State University. The results of this study will provide valuable insight to other teacher education programs at NC State and to agricultural education programs across the country. The research objectives that guided this study were as follows:

1. Examine the influence of the edTPA on the student teaching experience.
2. Examine the perspectives and experiences student teachers in Agricultural Education have had related to edTPA.
3. Identify sources of support for completion of edTPA.
4. Examine student teachers’ perceived preparedness and level of difficulty for completion of edTPA.
5. Determine the overall challenges and barriers edTPA has on the teacher licensure program.
6. Determine the perceived benefits edTPA has on the student teaching experience.
7. Student teachers’ recommendations for future completion of edTPA.

Summary of Methodology

This study used a mixed method design with an emphasis on basic qualitative research to examine agricultural education student teachers’ experience and perspectives regarding edTPA. The population used for this study included all student teachers in
agricultural education enrolled in AEE490, which is the student teaching seminar course at North Carolina State University ($N = 16$). The primary researcher used two focus group interviews, two questionnaires, and documents relating to edTPA to collect data. Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method and coding. Trustworthiness was obtained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. It was important to note the limitations of this research, which included a small sample size specific to one institution, therefore findings are not widely transferable. However, these findings provide valuable insight into the adoption and implementation of the edTPA.

**Conclusions**

**Conclusions Based on Objective 1**

While completion of the edTPA materials produced stress among student teachers, the process of reflection and documentation improved their performance as student teachers. This is supported by Schön’s theory of reflection in action that promotes teacher learning as well as Shulman’s description for pedagogical reasoning and action in regards to reflection in education (Schön, 1983; Shulman, 1987). A few participants mentioned as a whole, edTPA encompassed the “big picture” of teaching and everything that goes into the job of being a teacher (MQ).

**Conclusions Based on Objective 2**

One of the main concerns participants had was the edTPA did not adequately capture their student teaching experiences in the agricultural education classroom. Students did not
realize that edTPA is not designed to evaluate other components of agricultural education, such as FFA and SAE.

Conclusions Based on Objective 3

In regards to sources of support for the edTPA, people most familiar with the agricultural education program were the greatest source of support for completion of their edTPA documents, including peers, the student teacher coordinator, and university supervisors. There was an evident disconnect between what students expected for support and what student teacher coordinators were able to provide. While some cooperating teachers provided much support to student teachers while completing the edTPA, other cooperating teachers were unclear of their role and expectations with the edTPA. This was verified in Selvester, Summers, and Williams’ (2006) study, which participants recommended working more closely on the TPA with their supervisors and cooperating teachers in order to be more successful with TPA tasks.

Conclusions Based on Objective 4

Although Task 3, Assessment and Assessment Commentary were deemed most difficult, a majority of participants felt overall well prepared to become a full-time teacher.

Conclusions Based on Objective 5

Timing and language of edTPA were the two overall greatest challenges expressed by participants. Another challenge that emerged was the lack of support by cooperating teachers. This was consistent with Okhremtchouk et al’s (2009) study reporting time consumption and stress as a major challenges of PACT.
Conclusions Based on Objective 6

Assessment and reflection of teaching practices were the major perceived benefits of the edTPA followed by preparedness for future teaching jobs and career opportunities. A prior study by Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) also determined that PACT was helpful in their student teaching practices, specifically in watching themselves teach through videotaping, which aided in reflection of teaching practices. Guaglianone (2009) and Chung (2008) both found that teacher performance assessments would serve as a beneficial experience for professional preparation.

Conclusions Based on Objective 7

Stress and time consumption led student teachers to recommend the introduction of the edTPA earlier in their teacher preparation coursework or have the edTPA be a multi-year project.

Implications and Recommendations

Since timing and academic language were the most challenging components of edTPA, program instructors need to address academic language in instruction more thoroughly, as well as provide examples and supporting evidence so students have clear expectations of edTPA. This can be accomplished by having instructors review and dissect each prompt, the handbook, and rubrics to ensure students know what is being asked and what is required. Also, having mock edTPA prompts for students to respond to in different teacher preparation courses would provide a better understanding of the edTPA language.
After students respond to the prompts, instructors should provide detailed feedback and guidance.

Student teachers did not realize the edTPA is not designed to evaluate FFA and SAE, therefore student teacher coordinators need to provide clear expectations of what the edTPA specifically evaluates. edTPA is designed is a teacher licensure assessment that evaluates a student teachers ability to teach, while other university program courses in agricultural education will evaluate students on FFA and SAE.

The other misunderstanding student teachers had was in regards to support from cooperating teachers. Student teacher coordinators and university supervisors need to provide accurate and explicit expectations for the roles of cooperating teachers. Student teachers relied on cooperating teachers to assist them with the edTPA, yet, it this is not a responsibility of cooperating teachers. However, cooperating teachers should be informed on the requirements of the edTPA or at least be familiar with what edTPA is. In order to provide more support for student teachers in the classroom, it is important to find better ways of educating cooperating teachers about the edTPA process and requirements. Current and potential cooperating teachers could attend a workshop during the summer agricultural education conference to learn about the requirements of the edTPA. Additionally, cooperating teachers could be encouraged to complete edTPA scorer training which would allow them to gain valuable perspective on the scoring process. Cooperating teachers who are interested in earning their National Board certification could benefit from participation in a workshop and/or scorer training due to the similarities between the two assessments.
With timing, teacher education programs should consider some of the challenges associated with having an early due date, such as not being at a point in the curriculum that is conducive to higher levels of thinking. One option, suggested by Wiechman (2013), would be a staggered deadline where students can hand in different parts of the assessment during different dates prior to the final submission set by Pearson. This way students could be provided with general feedback from edTPA coordinators and have a chance to review their documents prior to the final submission.

It is necessary for the student teacher coordinator to be upfront with the amount of time it will take to complete the edTPA and encourage students to organize time to focus on edTPA. University supervisors or edTPA coordinators should stress the importance of selecting a topic before beginning edTPA. Student teachers should meet with and correspond with their cooperating teacher prior to the start of the semester and identify a topic that is appropriate for the timing and curriculum. This may require cooperating teachers to be flexible with curriculum content and pacing guides.

Many participants also recommended having earlier exposure to edTPA prior to their final year. This would be highly beneficial for pre-service teachers because it would allow them to be more prepared for everything that is expected from edTPA. One recommendation for this would be to introduce edTPA to education students during their freshman or sophomore year in their Introduction to Teaching course. It is important for students to be clearly informed that this is a required project that that requires a passing score in order to obtain their teaching license. Throughout their sophomore and junior years, it would be important to have more exposure with specific edTPA tasks as well as multiple examples of
each component. For example, at North Carolina State University, during their sophomore year, students take Introduction to Teaching Agriculture. The edTPA could be introduced during this course where students are given an overview of edTPA and the requirements. During the junior year, in the Classroom Assessment course, students could be further exposed to edTPA prompts and review the rubric and handbook specific to Task 3, Assessment and Assessment Commentary. During the fall semester prior to student teaching, students could practice the Planning prompts during the Methods of Teaching Agriculture course. This would include having students practice edTPA prompts, go over requirements, and brainstorm appropriate topics. Students will also have the opportunity to see previous examples of edTPA prompts and instructors should go over the academic language of edTPA requirements.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for further study would be to examine other agricultural education programs at other universities and institutions throughout the county to see how they have implemented edTPA. There should also be a follow up study on any current teachers that completed edTPA during their student teaching to determine if edTPA has had any influence on their current teaching practices. This would be valuable research to identify any improvements, strengths and weaknesses of edTPA in education programs. Other research could include examining performance of self-scoring within the university department versus Pearson scoring to determine if sources of support are adequate. Furthermore, teacher education programs should closely review student teacher feedback and performance on the edTPA to determine areas for improvement. A longitudinal study should also be conducted
on the current agricultural education program at NC State to continue improvements upon edTPA implementation.

Agricultural Education needs to continue support, but encourage student teachers to utilize other resources independently. One benefit of the edTPA was the development of communities of practice among student teachers via e-mail threads as well as development of a Facebook page. In regards to the development of communities of practice among student teachers, research of construction of communities of practice should continue with future student teacher groups.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

edTPA Guided Focus Group Questions

**Intro:** Who I am (graduate student, getting masters, undergrad at NCSU) and the purpose for this research.

- edTPA is here to stay, we ask that you be open and honest with your responses in order to help us for future preparation and implication of edTPA.
- The results will be used to assist future participants of edTPA as well as other instructors, not only at NC State, but also across the country. We know of several other institutions in other states (GA, IL, CA, ect.) that are piloting or using edTPA.
- There are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of views. Keep in mind that we’re just as interested in negative comments as positive comments.
- As moderators, we will guide discussion, but feel free to speak openly among each other.
- We are tape recording, but you will be asked to come up with a pseudonym to go by.
- State your name (pseudonym) and explain your topic for edTPA and how that topic was selected.

**Focus Group #1**

*Yesterday you all took a short questionnaire regarding edTPA, let’s take some time to go over and discuss some common responses.*

Tell me about your experience with edTPA.

How are you feeling now that your edTPA has been completed and submitted?

What were some of the concerns you experienced between the first seminar and the submission?

In regards to the question on which task you would like the most help on (planning, instruction, and assessment), most of you felt that **assessment** could have used additional assistance. Why? What was confusing or unclear?

Was there anything you found unclear or confusing about the planning or instruction tasks?

A majority of you responded that your **peers** were the most helpful resource during this process. In what ways were they the most helpful?

Many of you said that the edTPA was confusing and lacked adequate instruction. If you were creator of the edTPA, what are some things you would (or would not) change in order to make it more understandable to student teachers?
Now that the edTPA is over, what are some things you would have done differently, if anything?

If you were given the opportunity to meet and speak with the next group of student teachers, what are some pieces of advice you would give them?

Is there anything we have missed, or any last comments to add?

**Focus Group #2**
Brief intro and thank you to all who took the survey.

Today we are going to reflect on your experience with edTPA.

**Questions for Focus Group #2**
Looking back, what stands out in your mind about the edTPA?

What did you learned from the process about your teaching?
- probe questions for instruction, assessment, planning…

How has the edTPA influenced or informed your teaching as you’ve continued in your student teaching experience?

How could courses in teaching programs help facilitate edTPA.

Pertaining to this course, did you find the course load to be more or less difficult before March 5th, which is when edTPA was due, or after March 5th when you had more assignments and had more focus on your teaching.

What’s one thing, if anything, you could take from edTPA for future teaching practice?
Appendix B

edTPA Questionnaire

*Please take the time to fill out the following questionnaire regarding your experience with edTPA.*

On a scale of 1 to 5, please describe your understanding of the edTPA. 1 = no understanding, 5 = complete understanding (you could teach it to someone else).

Approximately how many hours total have you invested in the edTPA?

How much assistance from your cooperating teacher did you receive?

How helpful were the following resources? (not helpful, little help, somewhat helpful, helpful, very helpful)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>Little Help</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>edTPA Agriculture Handbook</td>
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<tr>
<td>edTPA “Making Good Choices” document</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture rubrics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials from AEE 490 seminar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Park’s emails</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Instructor/University Supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Education workshops</td>
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</table>

Rank the following edTPA components according to their level of difficulty. (very difficult, difficult, somewhat difficult, moderate, easy, very easy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Somewhat Difficult</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very Easy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task 1: Context for Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task 1: Lesson Plans (including Instructional Materials)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task 1: Planning Commentary</td>
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<td>Task 2: Video</td>
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<td>Task 2:</td>
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</table>
If you were to predict YOUR final edTPA score, what would you predict? The maximum possible score is 45/45. 27/45 = 80%, 30/45 = 92%
  •  < 26
  •  27-29 (B-ish)
  •  30-35 (A-ish)
  •  > 35

Reflecting on your completion of the edTPA, what one thing did you really learn from the experience? (open-ended response)

In your opinion, what was the greatest challenge of the edTPA? (open-ended response)

Which task or component would you have liked more help on? (open-ended response)

How would you have liked additional help? (open-ended response)

Please add any additional concerns you may have below. (open-ended response)
edTPA Reflective Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire regarding your experience with edTPA.

Please answer the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned important skills through the process of constructing edTPA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped to improve my lesson planning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped to improve my knowledge of learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped to improve my assessment of student learning progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped me to improve my implementation of instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The process of constructing edTPA helped me to reflect more carefully on my instructional decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>edTPA enhanced my teacher preparation experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>edTPA will be useful for my future teaching practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>edTPA took too much time and work to complete.</td>
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<tr>
<td>edTPA tasks were not relevant to teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>edTPA tasks did not capture essential aspects of my teaching practices adequately.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My teacher credentialing program prepared me in ways that allowed me to be successful on edTPA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My university supervisor provided helpful support as I completed edTPA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher provided helpful support as I completed edTPA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My peers provided helpful support as I completed edTPA.</td>
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</table>

How well prepared do you feel to do the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not well prepared</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared</th>
<th>Moderately prepared</th>
<th>Very well prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach subject matter and skills in ways that help all students in your classroom achieve high academic standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use instructional strategies that promote active student learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choose teaching strategies to meet different student needs.</td>
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</table>
Give productive feedback to students to guide their learning.

Assign work that helps students use their higher-order thinking skills to think critically and solve problems.

Use a variety of assessments (i.e. observations, portfolios, tests, performance tasks).

Planning that build students’ conceptual understanding, relevant skills, and problem-solving strategies.

Use knowledge of your students to justify instructional plans.

Identify and support language demands associated with a key agricultural learning task.

Demonstrate a positive learning environment that supports students’ engagement in learning.

Actively engage students in developing agricultural-related conceptual understanding, skills, and problem-solving strategies.

Use representations to support students’ ability to understand agricultural concepts and procedures.

Evaluate and change teaching practices to meet students’ varied learning needs.

Analyze evidence of student learning.

Provide feedback and opportunities for focus students and guide their further learning.

Overall, how well prepared do you feel to teach as a full-time teacher today?