A Comparative Study of Curricular Models in English Teacher Training in International Contexts

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We train TESOL professionals at the Master’s level
MA-TESOL/Applied Linguistics is a widely recognized degree offered in many countries for credentialing prospective English teachers
Yet, curricula of this degree vary at different institutions across different countries
Hence, we are curious about how they differ and whether they prepare prospective teachers equally effectively?
We picked three institutions, each from the UK, the US, and China “to take a look”!
Impetus of the study

- Given the same disciplinary goal of training qualified TESOL professionals, it makes sense to examine how different curricular setups achieve this goal where “different curricular setups” mean:
  - Classes students take that prepare them for the disciplinary knowledge and skills
  - Length of time students take to complete their degree program
  - The overall readiness with which students enter the teaching profession
Overarching question

- Are the curricula under the same program name equally effective in training English teachers for the kinds of English learning populations they serve given the variables across the curricula?
  - Courses/modules
  - Delivery
  - Length of time (UK: 1 year, US: 2 years, and China: 3 years)
  - Graduation requirements
Institutions under study

- MA in Applied Linguistics for TESOL, Kingston University, UK
- MA in Applied Linguistics, Grand Valley State University, US
- MA in Foreign and Applied Linguistics, Xi’an International Studies University, China
Five areas of preparedness

- **Theory of language**
  - Morphology, phonetics, phonology, grammar/syntax

- **Theory of learning**
  - Child language, L1 vs. L2 development, SLA theory, compare and contrast L1 and L2 theories

- **Pedagogy**
  - Methods & techniques, needs analysis, classroom management, education/digital technology

- **Curriculum/syllabus design**
  - Lesson planning, material selection and adaptation

- **Assessment and evaluation**
  - Test techniques, CATS, test design & evaluation, score interpretation
Data source (students)

- A questionnaire containing 22 questions addressing the five areas of study administered to MA students at the three institutions.
- Interviews conducted with students at the three institutions.
Theory of language

KU
- Grammatical rules
- Phonological rules
- Articulatory phonetics
- Morphological analysis
- Purpose of linguistics

GVSU

XISU
- Grammatical rules
- Phonological rules
- Articulatory phonetics
- Morphological analysis
- Purpose of linguistics
Initial findings

- KU and GVSU students are roughly comparable in their sentiments about their preparedness in talking about linguistic theory while XISU students are more spread out in their confidence.
- Between KU and GVSU, GVSU students appears slightly more confident than KU students.
Theory of learning

KU
- Use ed/digital technology in teaching
- Prepare and organize class
- Needs analysis
- Apply methods and techniques
- Familiar with ESL Methods and techniques

GVSU
- Compare theories of learning
- Acquisition theories
- Difference between L1 & L2
- L1 development

XISU
- Compare theories of learning
- Acquisition theories
- Difference between L1 & L2
- L1 development
Initial findings

- GVSU students show higher confidence than KU students, who in turn show higher confidence than XISU students in their knowledge of learning theories.
Pedagogy

KU

- Use ed/digital technology in teaching
- Prepare and organize class
- Needs analysis
- Apply methods and techniques
- Familiar with ESL Methods and techniques

GVSU

- Use ed/digital technology in teaching
- Prepare and organize class
- Needs analysis
- Apply methods and techniques
- Familiar with ESL Methods and techniques

XISU

- Use ed/digital technology in teaching
- Prepare and organize class
- Needs analysis
- Apply methods and techniques
- Familiar with ESL Methods and techniques
Initial findings

- KU students show higher confidence in their ability to tackle pedagogical aspects of language teaching than GVSU students, while XISU students are moderately or neutral about their ability to handle pedagogical aspects of language teaching.

- However, GVSU students seem more familiar with the use of educational technology than the students at the other two institutions.
Curriculum/syllabus design

KU
- strongly disagree
- disagree
- neutral
- agree
- strongly agree

GVSU
- strongly disagree
- disagree
- neutral
- agree
- strongly agree

XISU
- strongly disagree
- disagree
- neutral
- agree
- strongly agree

- know to adapt, redact, revise materials
- know to select books & materials
- know how to design lesson plans

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- know how to design lesson plans
Initial findings

- There is no clear difference among KU, GVSU, and XISU students in their confident in curriculum/syllabus design, although some XISU students chose “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to express their lack of confidence/ability in this regard.
Assessment

KU

GVSU

XISU

know how to interpret test scores

can evaluate CATs

can design standardized or non-s tests

familiar with CATs

familiar with test techniques
Initial findings

- GVSU students are slightly more confident than KU students in the area of language assessment and evaluation.
- By contrast, XISU students show this area of knowledge and skill as being the weakest among the three institutions.
Overall readiness to enter profession

**KU**

- **Overall readiness to enter profession**

- Strongly disagree: 0
- Disagree: 1
- Neutral: 3
- Agree: 5
- Strongly agree: 6

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**GVSU**

- **Overall readiness to enter profession**

- Strongly disagree: 0
- Disagree: 1
- Neutral: 3
- Agree: 5
- Strongly agree: 6

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**XISU**

- **Overall readiness to enter profession**

- Strongly disagree: 0
- Disagree: 1
- Neutral: 3
- Agree: 5
- Strongly agree: 6
Initial findings

- XISU students are least sure if they are ready to enter their chosen profession (mostly teaching).

- KU and GVSU students are moderately confident in their readiness to enter their chosen profession (again, mostly teaching).
Data source (instructors)

- A 10-item questionnaire on curricular coverage and expectations for students administered to program instructors at two institutions (Kingston University and Xi’an International Studies University).

- Interviews conducted with program instructors at three institutions.
Requirements for class completion

KU

GVSU

XISU

Exams
Presentations
Writing assignments
Lesson planning
Portfolios of finished work
Other

Exams
Presentations
Writing assignments
Lesson planning
Portfolios of finished work
Other

Exams
Presentations
Writing assignments
Lesson planning
Portfolios of finished work
Other

always
often
Occasionally
Rarely
None
Initial findings

- XISU instructors use more exams as a way to gauge student learning outcomes of their classes than both KU and GVSU instructors.
- Both GVSU and XISU instructors use more class presentations as a means of gauging student learning while KU instructors use less by comparison.
- Caveat: there are more instructors (7) in XISU’s MA program than GVSU instructors (5) and KU instructors (4).
- KU instructors use a lot more lesson planning than GVSU (none) and XISU (some).
Initial findings

- GVSU instructors believe their classes are overall pretty rigorous while KU instructors’ rating of their class rigor is more relaxed, whereas XISU instructors are somewhere in the middle: moderate to fair level of rigor.

- Caveat: The rigor indexes do not apply to identical classes as each program has its own specific class lineup, although the overall impression of rigor, regardless of class, is still useful to know.
Class delivery

KU

GVSU

XISU

- Field research & data collection
- Workshop & student presentation
- Guided group work
- Student-led discussion
- Lecture & discussion
Initial findings

• Most striking is the fact that XISU instructors use “class lecture & discussion” as their predominant means of delivering content.
• KU instructors use more “student-led discussions” than GVSU (small amount) and XISU instructors (none).
• Both KU and GVSU use “guided group work” while XISU instructors use less.
Practicum

- Practicum—anything instructional activity (simulated or authentic) that students conduct in order to gain experience in teaching during degree program

  Kingston University: 22 hours

  Grand Valley State University: 45 hours

  Xi’an International Studies University: 68 hours
Exit requirements

Kingston University: Thesis/dissertation, capstone projects, portfolio assessment, exams

Grand Valley State University: Thesis, capstone projects

Xi’an International Studies U: Thesis only
Student interviews

- Motivation and career goals?
- How challenging are class requirements and workload?
- Most intellectually stimulating subject?
- Most practical class?
- Most beneficial knowledge and skills learned?
- Gained necessary teaching skills for the real world?
- Gained necessary research skills for the real world?
- Confident in entering the work force?
Instructor interviews

- How challenging are class requirements and workload?
- Most intellectually stimulating subject taught?
- Most practical class students should take?
- Most beneficial knowledge and skills students must have?
- Your graduates prepared to teach in real world?
- Your graduates have gained necessary research skills?
- Your graduates have the right qualifications enter the work force?
- Your graduates confident in entering the work force?
Observations and conclusions

- Three MA degree programs at three institutions with three different student populations studying three different curriculums

- How do they do?