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## **One Course, Two Approaches: Unpacking International Teaching Assistant Educators' Diverging Ideologies**

Roger William Anderson  
*Central State University, USA*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Educators of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) have been overlooked, erroneously. As teacher educators, their work is exponentially important to North American universities. A multiple case study examined three ITA Educators' ideologies, involving data from two interviews -one being a stimulated recall using classroom observations fieldnotes, syllabi, assignments, and feedback left on students' work. Through qualitative content analysis, two incompatible ideologies were found being implemented in sections of one class: one orienting learners to undergraduate classrooms, and the other towards passing mandatory language testing. Cynicism was found to characterize two instructors' pedagogies. Findings highlight the ethical complexities of language teaching and assessment. ITA training programs must address foundational issues and examine how ITA Educators are supported. This novel study provides a baseline for future work on ITA Educators, and contributes to literature on language teachers' ideologies. Future work should elucidate how ITA Educators' identities and external ideologies impact ITAs' learning trajectories.*

**Keywords:** international teaching assistant, ITA, ITA Educator, ideology, university

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International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) across North American campuses often enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses to facilitate their teaching of undergraduates. Although ITAs remain under-studied (Gorsuch, 2016, p. 276), even more so are ITA Educators. In fact, ITA Educators and their impact on ITAs' learning have been left off the research agenda entirely (Gorsuch, 2016). Given how critical institutional support is to ITAs' success (Bista, 2023), understanding ITA Educators' perspectives is of practical and theoretical importance. This need

is urgent because of the staggering numbers of international students in U.S. institutions (Institute for International Education, 2019) and Canadian ones (Kim, S. & Kutoba, 2012). This multi-case study examined the ideologies of three ITA Educators teaching sections of one ITA training class at a major U.S. university. Qualitative content analysis examined the transcribed data of two rounds of interviews, the second of which made use of observation notes and course artefacts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

ITA education/ training falls within the interstices of conventional ESL categories. Most ITAs arrive in North American universities as higher intermediate learners (Gorsuch & Munoz, 2014, p. 615). As such, and because ITA training targets speech used for classrooms, some scholars view ITAs as students of English for Academic Purposes (Myles & Cheng, 2003), or more generally, English for Specific Purposes (Papajohn, Alsberg, & Willenbrough, 2002). Others view ITA training as *sui generis*, not primarily concerned with language-learning, but with improving communicative skills for instructional purposes (Hoekje, B. & Williams, 1994). Discipline-specific discourse and practices have been identified as the most crucial components (Gorsuch, 2006), often done through micro-lessons (Alsberg, 2002). Despite variation, the singular framework for ITA Training is that ITAs must develop language, teaching, and culture, and appreciate the relationship between them (Gorsuch, 2016, p. 276).

Language educators' importance to language learning cannot be minimized (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p.22). ITA Educators specifically face a unique dilemma: they cannot be experts in the technical knowledge, language, and field-specific pedagogies of all ITAs departments (Hoekje, Barbara & Williams, 1992). Moreover, ITA Educators cannot simply inculcate ITAs into the pedagogies of the language classroom (Byrd & Constantinides, 1988). Because ITA Educators are teachers educators, their work is exponentially important to institutions (Gorsuch, 2016, p. 288). Yet ITA Educators and their impact has been left off the ITA research agenda (Gorsuch, 2016) and unrecognized in the teacher educator literature (Ping, Schellings, & Beijaard, 2018). The singular study that examined ITA Educators is Gorsuch (2012)'s survey of 10 ITA Educators and three ITA program administrators. It explored their theories on teaching, which were parsed into program, domain, and local teacher theories. Yet the study's usefulness remains constrained by the following three methodological shortcomings.

First, the study used separate protocols for educators and administrators but analyzed data together. This is problematic because ITA Educators are evaluated by program administrators (Brown, 2007, p. 158). In other words the two occupy distinct positions *vis-à-vis* ITA Training. Secondly, the dataset included data from a single round of interviews which were analyzed separately from the collected syllabi, textbooks, and course packets. As such, interviews were disconnected from actual student work, feedback thereof, or classroom observations. Reliance

solely on narratives introduces survey bias, or providing answers that boost one's own image, and self-deception bias, or how answering how one would ideally like to behave -rather than how they actually behave (Wagner, 2010, p. 35). These issues undermine the study's claims of uncovering instructors' "action-oriented conceptions... specific to a particular teaching situation" (Gorsuch, 2012, p. 435). Finally, the study only hinted at how the research was shaped by the researcher's deep commitments to ITA training -like their co-authoring an ITA textbook (Gorsuch, 2012, p. 441). Qualitative researcher, "need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Given these limitations, findings should be viewed as a catalogue of decontextualized theories about ITA teaching not rooted in actual classroom practices or products.

Learning from this pioneering work, the present study examined (exclusively) ITA Educators' ideologies they brought into an ITA training class. Two interviews were conducted, and the second used stimulated recall techniques that incorporated classroom observations, assignments, and feedback left on students' actual work. Findings are discussed only following an explication of the researcher's privileged position in relation to the research. What results is an empirically rigorous, highly-contextualized study of ITA Educators' ideologies that provides an "audit trail".

### **Instructors' Ideologies**

For language learners, Norton & Darvin (2015) saw investment in language-learning as the interplay between ideologies, identities, and capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Yet according to the Douglas Fir Group (2016), "ideologies influence the access, investment, and agency into a new language that learners may or may not (be able or willing to) exert" (DFG, 2016, p. 34). Moreover, pedagogues recognize that, "Adults learning English bring with them their own ideologies of language, how it should be used and what it looks like, as well as how it is learned in a classroom... the same can be said about the instructors" (Mori, 2014, p. 167). Therefore, the importance of ITA Educators' ideologies is clear. Definitions of ideology vary, yet the most grounded one defines ideology as, "materially mediated ideational phenomena" (Bloomart, 2005, p. 164). This definition guided the study. Its broadness allows it to encompass the concept of language ideology, just as intended by Darvin & Norton (2015)'s model (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 43).

Expanding our view beyond the limited work on ITA Educators (Gorsuch, 2012), adjacent literature is informative. Because ITA Training has developed into a specialized focus within North American institutions, it is logical to concentrate on empirical studies focusing on ideologies of university-level ESL instructors reported within North American-based journals in the past decade. Burton (2019) explored five ESL instructors in a Canadian university, examining their views on translanguaging pedagogies. Coming from a position of advocacy,

the researchers found that instructors viewed translanguaging as slowing students' English learning and as the language systems being independent rather than complimentary (Burton & Rajendram, 2019, p. 39-40). Related, Kim's (2022) case study of two transnational teacher educators revealed monolingualism remains a dominant force in ESL (Kim, H. K. & Cho, 2022). Finally, a discourse analytic study was conducted in one ESL program for adult refugees, examining materials and teachers' explanations thereof. It found that seemingly neutral course goals were orienting learners towards minimum-wage employment, thereby serving a neoliberal agenda (Warriner, 2016). Widening our lens to recent K-12 ESL instructors' ideologies, ideologies external to the classroom were found to impact teachers' work. This includes unclear bilingual policies and ideologies embedded in standardized testing (Malsbary & Appelgate, 2016) and a societal climate hostile to immigrants (Dávila & Linares, 2020). Together, these studies demonstrate how ideologies -linguistic, economic, or social- influence ESL educators and the learning opportunities they create.

To explore ITA Educators' ideologies, the present study sought to answer: "What are the ideologies of ITA Educators?"

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) called for "robust and detailed case studies documenting the activities of people on the periphery of linguistic communities of practice and how they gain or are denied (full) participation in these communities" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 155). As an established methodology in Applied Linguistics research (Duff, 2008), a case study design avails a contextualized exploration of ITA Educators' ideologies. A case study is an, "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" in which the case, a single entity, can be a person, a program, a policy, etc. (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). This present study defined a case as a single ITA Educator. As for depth, case studies report *thick description*, or the "complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Choosing to involve multiple cases enhances the validity of a study (Merriam, 2009, p. 50). Furthermore, multicase studies make exceptional contributions to theory-development by comparing and exploring, not discarding, unique cases (Duff, 2008, p. 45). These aspects confirmed the appropriateness of the method for the investigation.

### **Research Context**

#### ***"Paw Paw State University" ("PPSU")***

PPSU (pseudonym) is a large research university in the U.S. Midwest. The total enrolment of all students was 66,444 in 2017, comprising 6,412 international students at all levels, or 8% of all students. These figures aligned with national trends regarding international students: the largest nationalities were Chinese then Indian, and around fifty percent of all international students studied STEM

fields (Institute for International Education, 2019). For universities, welcoming international students is lucrative: over one million international students' enrollments added \$39 billion to the U.S. economy in 2016-2017 (Institute of International Education, 2021).

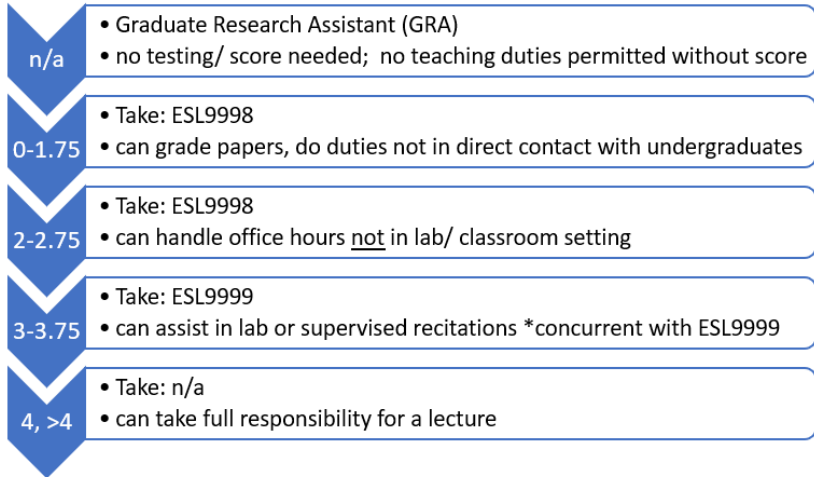
### ***History of PPSU's Oral English Program (OEP)***

PPSU's OEP was established in 1986 after state law required universities to implement mechanisms to ensure that ITAs' spoken English was intelligible for undergraduate learners (General Assembly of the State of Ohio, 1986). According to one veteran PPSU professor, "[The program] was in the vanguard of the ITA movement as that movement developed. Its longtime director, ... (was) one of the founders of the ITA Interest Section in the TESOL organization and was one of the movement's leaders" (P\*\*\*\*\*, 2020). From 1986-2006, the program had one director, one assistant director, one office assistant, and five full time course coordinators (M\*\*\*\*\*, 2020). During this period, "(the program) had a stable staff of long-serving instructors and a well-developed program and pedagogy based on a set of core beliefs and principles" (P\*\*\*\*\*, 2020). Between 2006-2009, department leadership was consolidated from three roles into one. Between 2010-2020 further consolidation brought instructor lay-offs and the creation of an assessment coordinator position. By 2016, additional reorganization combined the positions of OEP and composition curriculum coordinators. The person serving as coordinator at that time lamented, "administrative changes and restructuring over the years have resulted in a shift in OEP courses from student-centered to assessment-centered. Assessment now drives (the program)" (M\*\*\*\*\*, 2020).

### ***University language policies for ITAs***

All international students applying to PPSU take TOEFL exams. Once admitted, international graduate students who will serve their departments (Chemistry, Art, Music, etc.) in instructional positions ("ITAs") are required to take oral proficiency assessments.

PPSU's OEP offers the I-Teach Test and VA-Teach Test (together, "OEP Testing"). Both last 12 minutes and assess ITAs' spoken English when explaining field-specific concepts. These concepts were selected in consultation with departments. ITAs receive notification of their concepts 2-3 days before testing. Both tests assess ITAs' pronunciation clarity, rate of speech, elaboration skills, audience awareness, and communicative initiative. The differences between the two tests are that students take the I-Teach Test before a semester's start and the VA-Teach Test, at its end. The former prohibits test-takers from using visual aids (PPT, chalkboard), but the latter (VA) allows visual aids. Scores on the I-Teach Test determine ITAs' eligibility for departmental roles and need for ESL coursework. See Image 1 for scores and related roles available. Upon completing ESL 9998/9, ITAs earned the right to re-test at the semester's end. ITAs not obtaining their desired score on either test were required to enroll in further coursework to maintain their eligibility to continue in their departmental roles.



**Figure 1: Positions available to ITAs based on OEP Testing, adapted from PPSU’s website, 2019**

### **“ESL9999”**

ESL9999 is a pass/fail course. Learners’ final grade is considered failing if below 70% or if four absences are exceeded. Both Pre-Service ITAs (graders, lab preparers, research fellows) and In-Service ITAs (lab-/recitation- leaders) took ESL9999 together. Course goals develop ITAs’ pronunciation and self-monitoring skills, familiarity with U.S. university culture, and communicative skills needed in managing classrooms. In Autumn 2018, five sections of the course were offered, each with twelve students maximum.

### **Participants**

Four instructors were teaching all sections of ESL9999 that PPSU offered in Autumn 2018, one of whom was the researcher (who did not participate in the research). The remaining three were full-time employees during that semester. They gave written informed-consent to participate voluntarily in this study and were not compensated for participating.

#### ***Mr. Kurt, First-time ITA Educator***

In his twenties, Mr. Kurt was teaching at PPSU and teaching ESL9999 for the first time. Teaching three composition classes and one ESL9999, he was also completing training in rating OEP assessments. Mr. Kurt concurrently taught ESL nights and weekends at a local community college. For personal enrichment, Mr. Kurt was enrolled in PPSU’s Chinese literature class and a Yoga class.

Mr. Kurt earned a BA (French, Japanese minor) from PPSU and an MA in TESL elsewhere. Mr. Kurt worked as a substitute teacher in K-12 schools and

teaching immigrants /refugees through a local non-profit organization. These jobs provided unstable employment, yet reportedly developed his flexibility and exposure to new student populations. Similarly, Mr. Kurt enjoyed university teaching but was wary of chronic instability. Consequently, Mr. Kurt's could not predict his next five years. He was also involved in a long-term relationship with an international graduate student who would soon be graduating, with whom he had discussed moving to Asia.

**Mr. Sam, veteran ITA Educator**

Mr. Sam's employment in PPSU spanned decades, having taught composition and Oral English courses. Mr. Sam's design of ESL9999 and materials provided the template for all instructors but Mr. Cameron, who designed a unique section. Through his graduate education, Mr. Sam studied at least five Romance/ Semitic languages. Teaching at PPSU, he described himself as "the sole survivor" of departmental staffing changes of recent years. Mr. Sam reported that despite being of retirement age, he was unable to retire and hoped to remain employed at PPSU during the next five years. Besides ESL9999, Mr. Sam was teaching two sections of ESL 9998 and rating spoken English/ composition assessments.

**Mr. Cameron, "Streamlined" ITA Educator**

In his late thirties, Mr. Cameron was in his third-year teaching at PPSU, his second-year teaching ESL9999, and had taught within Intensive English Programs at three prior universities. He had earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in TESL/ Applied Linguistics, and had diverse teaching experiences in the USA, Europe, and Central America. Teaching one section of ESL9999, Mr. Cameron was teaching two other OEP courses and rating testing.

Mr. Cameron described himself as "a failed language learner", having studied three world languages yet lacking advanced proficiencies. He felt these failed studies enabled him to understand his ITAs' struggles. As a student, Mr. Cameron had a Japanese professor whom he could not understand, an experience which informed his work in ESL9999. Looking forward, Mr. Cameron desired to be a "real professor", but not in linguistics. Negative employment practices towards instructors informed his negativity to linguistics. Despite feeling proficient at his work, ESL teaching was reportedly not his true passion.

**Data Collection**

The study was part of larger dissertation research on ITA education, approved by PPSU's Institutional Review Board, the body legally mandated of every U.S. research institute to administer research.

Data collected to examine ITA Educators' ideologies involved two rounds of audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the three instructors separately. Interviews utilized an interview protocol based on two of the three aspects of Darvin & Norton (2015)'s model of investment: ideology and capital. The first interview occurred at the semester's start. The second occurred towards its end and utilized stimulated recall (Gass & Mackey, 2000), in which interviewees were asked to explain aspects of course syllabi, collected

assignments and feedback they had left, and field notes from two unrecorded classroom observations [eighty-minutes each]. Observation is empirically valid, “when it is subject to the checks and balances in producing trustworthy results” (Merriam, 2009, p. 118). The stimulated recall allowed for such verification of my classroom observations, which focused on classroom practices. Similar verification occurred regarding classroom assignments and feedback. Assignments and feedback were collected from six volunteering ITAs enrolled in sections of ESL9999, who were unevenly distributed across instructors. The average number of assignments collected from them is reported by instructor in Table 1 with the full dataset. ITAs’ participation in the larger project was similarly voluntary and blinded from their instructor and their departments.

This variety of data sources avails the *thick description* expected of case studies, and affords the study validity. According to Casanave (2010), case study research attains validity by embedding researchers in the field for extended time periods, varying their data sources, gaining participants’ feedback, and comparing cases (Casanave, 2010, p. 73).

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Example**

Misters...	Kurt	Cameron	Sam
Interviews’ duration (hours)	3.25	3.5	3.75
Observations (number, hours)	2, 2	2, 2	4, 2.6
Average number of assignments collected (across ITA participants enrolled in his section)	11	8	36

### Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and observation notes were typed. Data was then uploaded into Transana Professional 3.32c, a software facilitating qualitative analysis. First, data identification must, “divide text data into analytically meaningful and easily locatable segments” (Reid, 1992, p. 126). The boundaries of data points were set as moments in the transcripts when conversation moved from one idea to another. Next, qualitative content analysis, which prioritizes the communication of meanings, was done by coding raw data, and constructing categories of interest (Merriam, 2009, p. 205). Categories were formed inductively after open coding the data, then data was sorted, requiring categories to be refined. Nearing the saturation point, when no new understandings are developing, this induction switches to deductive processes, in which tentative categories are tested by the data contained within it. Finally, categories’ names come from the participants, researcher, and/or literature (Merriam, 2009, p. 182-3).



Validity matters during each stage of research (Kvale, 1996, p. 237). Findings are reported with an “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), being tabulations of supporting data. Only reported are findings supported by at least 3 data, which emerged as a logical threshold. Only occasionally findings supported by fewer were reported, but are so identified. Data types were interview, observation, or assignment. If the finding, “Mr. Louie saw teaching as hard”, resulted from four interview data and one observational data, “(int:4, obs:1)” would accompany the finding. Qualitative content analysis requires that findings be woven into interpretations (Merriam, 2009, p. 189). Analysis, and subsequent interpretations, are always mediated by the researchers’ positionalities.

### ***Researcher Positionality***

I conducted this research as a full-time doctoral student, and near full-time lecturer of ESL and French /Arabic at PPSU. For ESL, I did not rate OEP Tests since new policies limited rating to only full-time instructors, but I had trained and rated previously. At the time of data collection, I had been teaching ITAs for four years, and had received some initial training my first semester from Mr. Sam, whose approach and course design I adopted. The day before Autumn 2018 semester began, I provided novice Mr. Kurt some training in ESL9999, having learned he would teach the course/ ITAs for the first time.

At the time of data collection, ESL9999 instructors were largely independent and self-directed. Semi-regular OEP staff meetings were held only during my first and fourth years of teaching ESL9999. Between those years, Mr. Cameron began teaching ESL9999, (followed by Mr. Kurt in Autumn 2018). Only through this research did I get to know them. Required by my dissertation committee to keep a journal meant to surface my biases, I wrote 270 pages over a thirteen-month period. My reflections on the research blended with reflections on teaching ITAs, French, Arabic, and managing my responsibilities. A separate study of this journaling is forthcoming. Reviewing it, my position was one of opposition to a test-centric teaching of this course, but more so to students receiving two distinctly different experiences in the same course. Yet as a doctoral student and a non-full time ITA educator, I reported feeling that administrative decisions were not mine to make. My detailed knowledge of ESL9999 afforded me a deeper perspective into instructor’s ideologies. No negative impact on the research or the participants resulted that I am aware. I remain grateful to the ITAs and their instructors for their participation in this study and hope that positivity results from its dissemination.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Example (N = 158)** (10 Pts of Space Above, 5 Pts of Space Below Caption, Title Case, 10 pt font)

Construct	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Transformational	1.25	5.00	3.56	.78
Transactional	1.33	4.67	2.97	.77

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation. No internal table lines; just for header and final line. 5 pts of space above and 10 pts of space below Note.

## RESULTS

### Two Distinct Versions of ESL9999

Unexpectedly, two different approaches were discovered being implemented in ESL9999. Most sections oriented the learning towards the undergraduate classroom, while one section explicitly oriented the learning towards OEP Testing. Subsequently, the skills being targeted also diverged, as will be discussed. When asked about my observations that two different versions were operating, Mr. Sam explained:

*I absolutely am not teaching towards the VA-TEACH Test and I've argued against the notion of teaching towards the VA-TEACH Test. OK so yes, some. If they are doing what they should be doing in their classrooms they're going to do well on the VA-TEACH Test. Our... the purpose of our program is not for people to pass tests. It's for them to teach in the classroom. You know it's not about a test it's about them actually functioning productively in their departments as TA's and functioning as instructors at PPSU. The test is just an artifact of sorts... (Int. 2)*

Conversely, Mr. Cameron responded to my question thusly:

*RA: The impact of the VA-TEACH Test on you as an instructor, on what you do as an instructor, on your sections of 5050. How, what is it, I mean?*

*Mr. C: It rules the course. It's the final test. It's everything that I'm teaching towards. So it's, it's the final determiner of everything that I do in the class, like, learning goals-wise. So I feel that the VA-TEACH Test is a very good test, its validity is high. It tests what it sets out to test- whether the student is ready (from the language perspective) to teach in the classroom or not, in an undergraduate American university, you know. So I think it's a very accurate way. So I'm teaching to the test but I think it's because it's a very good test, it's a very valid test. (Int.1)*

Finally, Mr. Kurt's views sat between these two poles. Reflecting on his first semester teaching ITAs and ESL9999, Mr. Kurt reported:

*Yeah the microteachings I liked a lot too. And I think that while we are somewhat teaching to a test, I don't know what percentage people are*

*teaching to the test or how much we should be, but I think the microteachings are definitely necessary and effective whether we're gearing them towards teaching the test or not. I think that I would perhaps next semester teach this... implement more microteachings. (Int. 2)*

In all sections, students' passing was based on attendance and grades, yet assignments were graded on completion in most sections, but in one section, a points system was used.

### ***Subsequent Ideological Divergences***

Instructors' salient ideologies regarding ESL9999, language learning, and ITAs clustered around the two different course orientations (test-centric/ classroom-centric). These ideologies individually could stand alone but given the discovery of two approaches, they were interpreted as aligning with one or the other. Notwithstanding, this study refrains from assigning causality between these overarching ideologies and their related ideologies. What follows are major divergences in instructors' ideologies.

**Import of OEP Testing to ITAs' funding.** Novice instructor Mr. Kurt viewed OEP Testing as determinative of ITAs' funding (int:3). Mr. Sam viewed their score as impacting their level of compensation but viewed skeptically departments' tying test scores to ITAs' funding (int:1). Conversely, Mr. Cameron not only viewed ITAs' funding as depending their test scores, but he actively promoted this view within his ESL9999, including a "threat" statement on his syllabus and explicating to ITAs that their funding depended upon OEP Testing (int:7).

**ITAs' orientation towards ESL9999.** Mr. Sam believed ITAs valued ESL9999 and reported that any disengagement from the class would happen due to being overwhelmed by departmental work, not being disinterested (int:4). Novice Mr. Kurt initially perceived his learners as having negative attitudes towards being in ESL9999, having an "I'm stuck here" mentality, and being only concerned with testing (int:5). By the end of the semester, he perceived that approximately half of his students were enjoying the course, with a few genuinely interested in improving their teaching (int:2). Mr. Cameron however viewed ITAs as caring only about testing, seeing teaching as a burden (int:7). According to Mr. Cameron, if an ITA learner's funding not tied to their test scores, "they couldn't give a sh\*t" (Int. 1). Such a view is connected to his view that language-learning is "extrinsically motivated" (int:5).

**View of ITA learners within PPSU.** Mr. Sam kept in mind the undergraduate students served / to be served by his ITAs (int:7). Doing so was necessary because the identity of an ITA's interlocuter impacts the ITA's communication with them (int:11), given that intelligibility is complex (int:6, obs:1). Mr. Sam reported that in years past, the department involved real undergraduate students in ITA training, which he and departments greatly valued and felt nostalgic for (int:5). Mr. Sam saw departments as having duties and obligations to train ITAs, so ITAs' success was not the sole responsibility of ITA Educators (int:5).

Mr. Kurt was also concerned for his ITAs' performance in their classrooms. He wanted his ITAs to appear approachable to undergraduates (int:10, obs: 2). He also desired for their speech to be intelligible (int:3, obs:1), but not necessarily to a native speaker level: "I really want to teach my students that it's okay that you have an international style of speaking English" (Int. 1). Mr. Kurt also valued his ITAs developing pedagogical and cultural knowledge over pronunciation work (int:13, obs:1). What's more, the skills that Mr. Kurt wanted them to develop were the same as those he hoped to develop in his own teaching (int:9). Differently, Mr. Cameron's pedagogy was laser-focused on the VA-Teach Test. As such, he wasn't interest in whether an ITA was concurrently teaching undergraduates (int:1).

**Fluency development.** Novice Mr. Kurt believed his ITAs already spoke English fluently (int:1), just as veteran Mr. Sam prioritized accuracy over fluency (int:1). Conversely, Mr. Cameron believed ITAs need fluency development (int:3, obs:5). He described other sections of ESL9999 as being lecture-based or teacher-fronted, in contradistinction to his "experiential" workshop format (int:4).

**Teaching pronunciation.** Mr. Kurt saw pronunciation teaching as "technical" (int:12), preferring to teach teaching skills (int:13, obs:1). When teaching pronunciation, he felt his ITAs became disinterested, as did he – even feeling that he was belittling them (int:7). Nonetheless he viewed teaching segmentals as important (int:5, obs:2). He posited, "I'm a writing teacher...not a pronunciation guy" (Int. 1) and had previous experiences in writing/ editing (int:3) and was concurrently teaching ESL writing (int:6, obs:1).

Mr. Sam reported to value developing his ITAs' prosody (int:4), and segmentals (int:3, obs: 2). Feedback he left on ITAs' Key Terms, Microteachings, Dictation Quizzes, and diagnostic passage assignments was exclusively focused on segmentals and prosody using IPA symbols. No comments were provided on cultural, reflective, or observational assignments. He prioritized segmentals, saying: "That's the first thing. If you can't understand what they're saying you don't know if their grammar is accurate" (Int. 2).

Mr. Cameron valued "fixing" pronunciation "errors" (int:10, obs:2), which is done through having ITAs watch their recordings, meeting in tutorials, then reviewing feedback sheet, which he had marked up with IPA symbols. Within their microteachings, he was "diagnosing" their errors. Believing that segmental errors cannot be "fixed"- within one semester (int:3). He explained his use of these

terms as indexing an alternative understanding of the terms that he shared with his ITAs, rather than, “trying to attack their language skills” (Int. 2).

**Pedagogical / Cultural Knowledge Beyond Lecturing.** Veteran Mr. Sam valued the teaching cultural knowledge (int:5), and the importance of knowing and accommodating one’s audience (int:11). He oriented learners to teaching real classrooms (int:5), and even reported to have re-ordered material to better serve ITAs who concurrently taught undergrads (Int. 1).

Non-test centric sections of ESL9999 included discussion and activities developing ITA’s knowledge of academic culture -requiring some observational and interview assignments be completed within ITAs’ departments. These assignments were excluded from the test-centric section. This only partially accounts for the discrepancy in quantity of assignments between Mr. Sam’s sections and the others’ sections. See Table 1 for assignment quantities.

Similarly, Mr. Kurt valued cultural and pedagogical skills over teaching pronunciation-related topics (int:13, obs:1). Mr. Kurt had intimate familiarity with Chinese language, culture, and people (int:10), (who represented the majority of PPSU’s ITAs). Moreover, he was the only ITA Educator teaching undergraduate classes while concurrently teaching ESL9999 (int:6, obs: 1), and was himself enrolled in two undergraduate classes: Yoga and Chinese (int:2).

**Emotions: ITAs’ and ITA Educators’ (cynicism).** Mr. Kurt’s approach was uniquely emotion-centered (int:8, obs:3), his customizing pedagogy based on learners’ desires/ feedback (int:9). Mr. Kurt either demonstrated or reported his penchant for leniency in ESL9999 with grades and attendance policies (int:5, obs:1).

As for their own emotions, cynicism beset the two experienced instructors. Mr. Sam cynically viewed the treatment of ITAs at PPSU (int:7) and of PPSU’s ITAs’ support personnel (int:6), and towards the professoriate generally (int:5). His self-described cynicism was rooted in his employment experience (int:8). He viewed the current configuration of OEP jobs as constraining instructors’ time, which negatively impacts ITAs in ESL9999 (int:6). Similarly, Mr. Cameron’s structuring of ESL9999 as a workshop was rooted in his cynicism, which developed from his employment experiences within academia (int:6), and his cynicism towards his view of higher education generally (int:5).

Mr. Kurt, teaching ESL9999 for the first time, expressed a desire to improve his own pedagogy. He wants to know more about effective pronunciation teaching (int:3), which was “technical” (int:12). He expressed uncertainty over many pedagogical issues in ESL9999 (int:11). Mr. Kurt leveraged his newness to ESL9999 to create teachable moments for his ITAs, fellow novice/(future) instructors (int:4, obs:1). In contrast, Mr. Sam’s was nostalgic for the era when the program was more robust and conservative (int:12). For his part, Mr. Cameron took ownership and pride in his design of ESL9999 (int:10).

## DISCUSSION

Filling a gap in the literature, this study explored the ideologies of three ITA Educators teaching an ITA training course at one research university, one

semester. The study found that two distinct approaches, reflecting distinct ideologies, were observably evident in the class. Within these diverging ideologies were subcomponents, including a divergence over the import of ESL Testing to ITAs' funding, ITAs' attitudes towards the class, and their needs. Moreover, the two veteran instructors expressed cynicism rooted in their experiences working in universities, contrasted with a lack of cynicism from the novice instructor. These findings will be unpacked in succession.

All three ITA Educators were indisputably committed to the success of his respective ITAs. Yet their ideological divergence raises foundational, ethical questions about ITA training and its relation to assessment. Rather than castigating one approach or another, research into moral values in TESOL teaching, "merely (tries) to understand the values underlying their actions and decisions" (Johnston, 2003, p. 23). The divergence reflects two different value sets: one sees the ITA training class as a burden to ITAs, and the other, as a valuable resource. Test-centric sections appear ethical when recognizing that "assessment is moral because it often has serious real-world consequences for learners" (Johnston, 2003, p. 78). Yet such pedagogies assume that ITAs are the ultimate stakeholders of ITA training and passing OEP testing is the ultimate goal. Conversely, non-test-centric sections recognize undergraduate students as the ultimate stakeholders. An exclusive focus on testing would be castigated by language assessment scholars skeptical of a "powerful washback effect", or when education's goal is to increase test scores without facilitating mastery, which has been called "educationally indefensible" (Hamp-Lyons, 1998, p. 331-4). Others, skeptical of ITAs' need for training (Zocca Deroma, 2022), might disagree. Nonetheless, this study demonstrates that ITA education is saturated with ethical choices that shape the learning.

Relatedly, this study expands upon work on ITA Educator (Gorsuch, 2012) and ESL instructors' ideology broadly. The three American instructors in this study, all of whom had extensive second language learning, contrast with the two transnational instructors in Kim's (2022) study, who found ideologies of monolingualism to be powerful in ESL. Questions of multilingualism and translanguaging (Burton & Rajendram, 2019) were not salient ideologies among these ITA Educators. Remembering that ITAs become responsible for educating predominantly monolingual undergraduate (U.S.) students, economic forces within the university exert a major influence on the learning context, akin to those uncovered by Warriner's (2016) study. These forces seem to involve staffing teaching needs in departments and repeated restructuring of the Oral English Program itself.

Rather than critiquing instructors' ideologies, this study documents them for further discussion. Despite economic forces, Mr. Sam's care for ITAs -beyond language testing- draws comparisons to the empathetic teaching approaches of the K-12 ESL instructors in an environment that was hostile to immigrants (Dávila & Linares, 2020). Such examples could be called ideologies of care. Conversely,

Mr. Cameron's care took a different form. Mr. Cameron's test-centric pedagogy problematized class materials', "direct relevance to ITAs" (Gorsuch, 2012, p. 452). To him, "direct relevance" meant only direct applicability on testing, and as such "direct relevance" was demonstrated to be a subjective measure. Parallels can similarly be drawn from Mr. Cameron's test-centric pedagogies and the novice ESL instructor who felt singularly responsible for her students' performance (Malsbary & Appelgate, 2016). Both cases reaffirm the view that all teaching approaches embed ideologies (Johnston, 1999, p. 557).

Finally, findings require that we pause to reflect on ITA Educators' frustrations and growing cynicism. Despite being full-time employees that semester, ESL9999 instructors' tales of job insecurity reflects the fact that more than 45% of all non-tenure-track faculty worked part-time and on less-than-annual contracts in the fall of 2017 (Almanac, 2019). This has led to a nickname for contingent faculty: "the adjunct underclass" (Childress, 2019). What is clear from this study is that cynicism is shaping the learning. Moreover, comparing the hardened perspectives of the veteran instructors with the earnestness of the one novice instructor, it also seems that developing cynicism may characterize career progression. This merits further investigation.

Like all case studies, this research did not produce generalizable knowledge, but first steps towards developing theory (Stake, 2005, p. 448). Moreover, if conducted by a different researcher, the study may have produced alternative interpretations. Additional cases at other institutions would avail additional comparison. Given the close proximity of identity to ideology (Darvin & Norton, 2015), future work should investigate ITA Educators' identities, aligned with ongoing work into language teacher identity (Varghese, Motha, Park, Reeves, & Trent, 2016). Just as studies have examined the development of ITAs' teacher identities (LoCastro & Tapper, 2006), ITA Educators deserve similar examination.

## **Implications**

Programs must decide the degree to which ITA training class should be test-focused and undergraduate classroom-focused. Programs must also decide the acceptable amount of variation across sections and flexibility granted to instructors. Moreover, there should be a shared, fact-based understanding across ITA training programs and departments about the ramifications of language testing on ITAs' funding and trajectories. Finally, programs must evaluate how they support ITA Educators. To avoid the growth of negativity among instructors, universities have a responsibility to consider the well-being of their faculty, permanent and contingent.

For research, this study demonstrated the richness that case studies offer. Broadening the focus beyond instructors' self-reporting, the study used stimulated recalling which made use of syllabi, field notes, assignments, and feedback instructors actually left students. This deepened the study's credibility and

dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Methodologically rigorous, contextualized findings resulted.

### **Conclusion**

This case study examined an overlooked population that is critical to international students: ITA Educators. Given ideology's omnipresence within language-learning (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 34), it is imperative to understand the ideologies ITA Educators bring to the learning. Unexpectedly, two incompatible ideologies were found enacted across sections of one ITA training course at one university. Also found was that each instructor experienced negative employment practices and/ or cynical views that influenced their pedagogies. Methodologically, this study was novel, using stimulated recall to incorporate classroom observations, assignments, and feedback provided to students the instructors were concurrently teaching. This allowed a deep examination of ideologies, materially-mediated ideas (Bloommaert, 2005, p. 164).

This study contributed to understanding dimensions involved in ITAs, people moving from the periphery to the center of linguistic communities, gain access to these communities (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 155). It did so by deepening our understanding of the complexities of ITA Educators' work. Findings also underscore the moral dimensions of language education and assessment. Locally, this study offers a snapshot of at specific moment, a period of rebuilding after "traumatic" reorganization of once nationally-renowned Oral English Program. The hardship the instructors experienced was not forgotten. Twenty years ago, Johnston (2003) wrote, "From all I have seen, there is still no concerted effort to improve the lot of the teachers" (Johnston, 2003, p. 138). This study begs the question how much has actually changed. It also demonstrates that those advocating for ITAs should advocate for ITA Educators.

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*Author bio*

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**Roger William Anderson**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at Central State University, USA. His major research interests lie in the area of second language acquisition, intercultural and global competence, la Francophonie, and Arabic Language Teaching. Email: [ra345802@gmail.com](mailto:ra345802@gmail.com)

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