



**A Flexible Professional Development Program for International Instructors and its
Suitability for a Brazilian Context**

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Abstract

International instructors are an asset to a university when they are adequately prepared, linguistically and culturally, to teach in the new environment. For decades, international graduate students have been employed as teaching assistants in research universities in the United States. To ensure effective communication in the classrooms and labs, many universities have established programs that provide training to international teaching assistants (ITAs) in the English language, pedagogy, and local university culture. One such program is Texas A&M University's English Language Proficiency program housed within the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE-ELP). Time-tested best practices from the field of ITA training have been implemented, as well as innovations. The result is a model of professional development for international instructors that leverages existing resources to provide flexible, individualized training at a fraction of the cost to the trainee. While measuring the effectiveness of individualized training is challenging, data (in the form of survey responses from trainees as well as improved test scores compared to a control group) indicate that the CTE-ELP program is effective. There are remarkable similarities between the environment in U.S. universities and that in Brazilian universities: both are desirable destinations for international scholars, including those fleeing political or economic upheaval. These scholars bring content knowledge and a willingness to accept labor-intensive teaching assignments without tenure, but they face the challenge of teaching in another language and



culture. For example, Spanish speakers from Venezuela hired by Brazilian public universities as *professores horistas* -- non-tenured temporary faculty paid by the hour -- must teach in Portuguese. Moreover, educational systems (and students' expectations of their instructors' behavior) vary from one country to another. However, little or no formal preparation for international instructors is currently provided at Brazilian public universities. If the Texas A&M University (TAMU) model were to be adopted in the Brazilian context, international instructors would be better equipped with the language and cultural knowledge necessary to be effective instructors, ultimately benefiting not only international instructors but their Brazilian students as well. The need is acute, given the unprecedented number of Venezuelan migrants in Brazil and the shortage of Brazilian faculty members holding advanced degrees. This article discusses the benefits and feasibility of establishing such a program.

Key words: International teaching assistant, teacher education, ESL, ESP, faculty development, Brazil

Introduction

International Teaching Assistant (ITA) programs in the United States

Graduate students are routinely employed part-time as teaching assistants (TAs) by large research universities in the United States (Chiang, 2009; Gorsuch, 2012). In doing so, universities are able to keep the costs of tuition down for undergraduates. Instead of hiring more faculty members at a higher pay grade, and giving financial aid in the form of grants to international students who are prohibited from working off campus by visa regulations, universities offer teaching assistantships to international graduate students. Open Doors reported that in the year 2016-2017, 15% of international students were funded primarily by U.S. universities (Institute of International Education, 2017); it is reasonable to assume that some of those funds were connected to a teaching position. A total of 391,124 international graduate students were enrolled nationwide, and of them, according to TAMU's International Student Services, 4,431 were enrolled at TAMU in the spring semester of 2016 (International Student Services, 2017).

The Fall 2017 report "Who's Teaching Whom" from TAMU's Data and Research Services shows that 7.3% of undergraduate credit hours are taught by TAs leading lectures and labs (p. 6). This number does not include credit hours led by professors (41.7%), who may employ TAs as assistants. Another 25.6% of credit hours are taught by instructors,



professional staff non-faculty, and TAs from non-organized courses. Given that international student enrollment is higher than domestic student enrollment in some graduate programs, it is not unusual for international TAs to be tapped for teaching assignments.

The number of international instructors including faculty members, adjunct teachers, and international teaching assistants in the U.S. has increased dramatically in recent decades. For example, there were about 74,200 foreign-born faculty members in 1998, but this number reached 126,123 in 2007 (Institute of International Education, 2008; Marvasti, 2005; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). This number will continue to increase due to the rising presence of international doctoral students in the U.S. (Kim, Wolf-Wendel & Twombly, 2011). However, due in part to their inadequate language skills in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, and listening (Gorsuch, 2003), international instructors have been perceived less positively than native English-speaking instructors.

Concerns that ITAs are not sufficiently proficient in English have led to laws being passed in approximately half of the states in the United States (Amory & Suhadolc, 2017), requiring that ITAs demonstrate oral proficiency in order to serve as instructors, and in some states requiring that the university provide a program that fosters oral proficiency in ITAs. Texas is one such state. In fact, its law applies beyond ITAs to instructors of all ranks whose primary language is not English. The law reads, in part,

The governing board of each institution of higher education shall establish a program or a short course the purpose of which is to:

- (1) assist faculty members whose primary language is not English to become proficient in the use of English; and
- (2) ensure that courses offered for credit at the institution are taught in the English language and that all faculty members are proficient in the use of the English language, as determined by a satisfactory grade on the "Test of Spoken English" of the Educational Testing Service or a similar test approved by the board. (Sec. 51.917)

ITA programs can be found in dozens of U.S. universities. A directory is maintained by the International Teaching Assistant Interest Section within the professional association Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL); at the time of publication, 68 were listed (ITA-IS, 2018). As an example of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction, their curricular objectives typically include:

- pronunciation,
- functional vocabulary for instructional interactions,



- the educational culture,
- student-centered pedagogy, and
- oral presentation skills.

Communicative competence, especially comprehensible speech, is widely held to be the overarching goal of these programs (Grant, 2014; Hoekje & Williams, 1992). According to Hoekje & Williams, communicative competence includes “both knowledge of linguistic rules and the ability to apply these rules to use language appropriately” (p. 246) taking into account social relationships and context. Accent-free speech is neither a realistic nor desirable goal for most learners, but comprehensible speech is. Derwing and Munro (1997) define comprehensibility as “native speakers’ perception of intelligibility... judgments on a rating scale of how difficult or easy an utterance is to understand” (p. 2).

The majority of ITA programs in the United States are course-based. That is, international graduate students who do not demonstrate oral proficiency on a high-stakes assessment are obligated to pass a semester-long course to demonstrate readiness to teach. This was the case at TAMU until Summer 2017. International graduate students used to enroll in a 15-week course (English Language Institute Oral Skills 300), at the end of which they earned a grade of B or higher (becoming eligible to teach) or C or lower (remaining ineligible to teach).

TAMU’s innovative approach to international instructor preparation

Time-tested and research-based best practices within the field of ITA training are circulated in professional associations. But there is room for innovation even in a well-established field. Necessity is the mother of invention, and the current ITA program at TAMU (opened in August 2017) exemplifies a creative alternative to the course-based program. A university mandate that the new ITA development program be *flexible and not course-based* pushed the creators toward a model that embraces open enrollment, untethered to classroom instruction. Significantly, it serves professors as well as graduate student TAs. By allowing non-teaching international graduate students to participate, it constitutes not only in-service training for current instructors, but also pre-service training for prospective instructors. Preliminary findings point to its effectiveness in building international instructors’ confidence and in enabling them to pass oral language exams.

To design the approaches, services, and learning outcomes of the new ITA language program, consultants surveyed programs at other institutions and consulted relevant literature, which issued from the fields of TESL, ITA professional associations, and even Speech-



Language Pathology, which plays a supporting role providing Foreign Accent Modification at some institutions (Schmidt & Sullivan, 2003).

Consultants gathered data about services offered by ITA programs at peer institutions. These programs are remarkably diverse in terms of their situation within universities (inside Intensive English Programs, academic departments, centers for teaching excellence, etc.) and their funding structures (tuition- or fee-based). And there is some diversity with respect to the services that they provide. But all peer ITA programs utilize a course-based approach, which is to say a course serves as the centerpiece for ITA development, and additional services are associated with it.

The top row of Table 1 displays the services within the new TAMU CTE-ELP. The rows that follow display the services within peer institutions. Note column 4: TAMU does not offer courses, while all the other programs do.

Table 1. *Services of International Teaching Assistant (ITA) programs in the US*

University	Intake Assess ment	Intake Follow -Up	Lab	Classes	Practice Groups	Conver sation Partner ships	Workshops/ Seminars	Private Consulta tions
TAMU				----	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carnegie Mellon	----	----	----		✓	----	✓	----
University of Texas (Austin)	----	----	----		----	----	----	----
University of Michigan	----	----	----	✓	----		----	
University of North Carolina (Charlotte)	----	----	----	✓	----	----	✓	----
University of California Los Angeles	----	----	----		----	----	----	----
University of Wisconsin- Madison	----	----	----		----	----	----	----
University of Florida			----		----	----	----	



University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign)	----	----	----	----	✓		
University of Illinois at Chicago	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
University of Minnesota	----	----	✓	----	----	----	----
University of California Berkley	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
University of North Carolina (Chap Hill)	----	----	----	✓	✓	----	✓

The desire to maintain flexibility while providing as many possible contact hours for participants led consultants to select an individualized approach wherein participants could, after an initial intake assessment, select the services that aligned with their needs and use those services as their schedules allowed.

Goals of TAMU's ITA program

To achieve communicative competence as an instructor, several sub-competencies are needed, such as fluency. There is a rationale for each service within the CTE-ELP; all services work towards overall communicative competence in speech. Table 2 summarizes the goals of all CTE-ELP services and some of the literature that has informed these targets.

Table 2. Rationale for each service in the CTE-ELP

To gain:	Services include:	Confirmation from the field of adult second language acquisition or speech language pathology
Fluency	Conversation partnership Private consultation	(Lazarton, 2001); (Grant, 2014)
Accurate pronunciation of	Intake follow-up Practice groups	(Gorsuch, Meyers, & Pickering, 2013); (Grant,



suprasegmentals ¹ (ex. intonation)	Pronunciation software Private consultation	2014); (Schmidt & Sullivan, 2003)
Accurate pronunciation of segments (ex. consonants)	Intake follow-up Pronunciation software Workshop Private consultation	(Schmidt A. , 1997); (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996); (Avery & Ehrlich, 2012)
Listening comprehension of accented speech	Conversation partnership Dialogue/panel with undergraduate students Panel of experienced TAs Online additional resources	(Baese-Berk, Bradlow, & Wright, 2013) (Derwing, Rossiter, & Munro, 2002)
Confidence for public speaking	Practice group Microteaching with feedback	Bidyuk (2017) Echelberger, McCurdy & Parrish (2018)
Functional vocabulary for guiding active learning	Practice group Teaching observation	(Madden & Myers, 1994); (Lazarton, 2001)
Knowledge of local educational culture	Panel of experienced TAs Dialogue/panel with undergraduate students Practice group	(Crabtree & Sapp, 2004); (Petro, 2006); (Costantino, 1987); (Sarkisian, 2006)
Accuracy of grammar	Intake follow-up Microteaching with feedback Private consultation	(Larsen-Freeman, 2001); (Yule, 1998)
Self-assessment/reflection	Videotaped microteaching Practice group Intake follow-up	(Pollock, Samuel, Sardegna, & Wei, 2018); (Sardegna, 2018)

Description of current TAMU CTE-ELP program

The CTE-ELP program, operated by instructional consultants in year-round staff positions, fosters effective oral communication among instructors and students. To make the greatest impact possible, the CTE-ELP

¹ Suprasegmental features are the prosody of speech, including word stress, rhythm, thought groups, pausing, connected speech, and intonation. They are “above” the level of individual segments (consonants and vowels). Although speakers and listeners alike may be unconscious of suprasegmentals, suprasegmentals greatly impact the comprehensibility and interpretation of utterances.



1. Educates instructors who are non-native speakers of American English to speak more clearly and understand cultural norms of the U.S. university; and
2. Educates native speakers of American English (undergraduate students) to comprehend accented speech.

The first of these - training instructors who use English as a Second Language to speak comprehensibly - occupies the majority of the CTE-ELP's efforts and resources. However, communication is a two-way street. American students will be more prepared to thrive in a global society if they can converse with speakers of English as a Lingua Franca (whose accent is other than American). The listening comprehension of undergraduates - the second aim - can be enhanced by thoughtfully constructed activities (Derwing, Rossiter, & Munro, 2002; Kang, Rubin, & Lindemann, 2015; Subtirelu & Lindemann, 2014), such as the conversation partners program. Enhancing the listening abilities of American undergraduates entails addressing language attitudes, providing opportunities for undergraduates to engage with a variety of accents, and teaching them strategies to modify their own speech in intercultural interactions.

Rather than offering semester-long courses, the program now has the freedom to operate outside of the registrar's constraints and can offer programming in a variety of formats and schedules. For example, in a five-day stretch between semesters, it delivers content usually delivered over ten weeks, because some participants prefer intensive focus on language development.

The result has been a suite of language support services that is accommodating and personalized in several ways.

1. Clients can enter or exit the program at any time in the calendar year, including between semesters.
2. Clients help design their own path to improvement, selecting services that meet their needs and preferences.
3. Clients can select appointments that fit their own schedules.
4. Clients can participate at different levels of intensity (a few hours per month to many hours per week).
5. Clients who prefer privacy can utilize discreet services such as one-on-one appointments with a consultant instead of group workshops. (Cooper, Payne, & Hu, 2018)



“The linchpin of this individualized approach is the Intake Assessment -- a 45 minute interview with the ELP Consultants. The data garnered from this interview are used to identify the strengths and the weaknesses in the client’s English speaking proficiency. Learning outcomes are set based upon the weaknesses identified in the client’s speech, and a path for improvement is established by selecting the CTE-ELP services whose learning outcomes match the needs of the client” (ibid, para. 4). Periodic private consultations provide the accountability, structure, cohesion, and regular feedback that a course usually provides.

Rather than assign a grade, the ELP consultants give detailed feedback on a client’s speech production. If appropriate, the consultants will recommend that a client retake a recognized language test to demonstrate improved proficiency. Table 3 lists the individual services as well as their intended outcomes.

Table 3. *Description of ELP services*² (Cooper, Payne, & Hu, 2018)

Service	Brief Description	Learning outcomes (Clients will...)
Intake assessment	Diagnostic interview by two ELP consultants to assess spoken English proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take next step towards English language certification • Give explicit permission to be corrected by consultant • Communicate their goals for language acquisition • Read aloud every phoneme of American English • Speak extemporaneously, simulating interaction between instructor and student • Self-reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as a speaker of English
Intake follow-up	Private consultation in which ELP consultant shares findings with client	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the linguistic feature(s) that cause incomprehensibility in their speech • Develop a personalized improvement plan based upon the initial intake interview (i.e. accent analysis)

² Clients select services based on the needs identified during their Intake Assessments. Not all clients partake of all services. Some resource-intensive services are restricted to high-priority clients (those currently teaching with a marginal oral proficiency).



(strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations); client and consultant agree to an Individual Improvement Plan

Other private consultations	Weekly meeting of consultant with client, to tutor, give feedback, and hold client accountable to Individual Improvement Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate pronunciation accuracy and fluency through strategic readings, • Practice motor control of the vocal tract • Reflect on progress toward goals and adherence to individual improvement plan • Communicate need for additional resources
Formative assessment	Private consultation in which consultant measures current proficiency compared to proficiency at Intake Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud every phoneme of American English • Speak extemporaneously, simulating interaction between instructor and student • Identify areas of progress, stagnation, and new priorities
Conversation partnerships	Pair composed of one international grad student and one domestic undergrad student; meets weekly for 10 weeks to discuss cultural differences;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak fluently with little processing time • Negotiate meaning; clarify misunderstandings • Listen with good comprehension to informal American English • Exhibit curiosity and respect for other cultures • Communicate their own values and cultures to an outsider • Develop a willing, flexible, and open communication style in intercultural



	builds listening comprehension and pronunciation accuracy	interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the influence of their own culture on intercultural interactions • Analyze cultural practices from multiple perspectives
Practice groups	Interactive workshop for ITAs (and aspiring ITAs) emphasizing pronunciation, functional vocabulary, and the culture of the American college classroom; series of 10 lessons led by consultant. Includes one panel presentation by experienced TAs and one dialogue/panel presentation with domestic undergraduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach with clear pronunciation, appropriate body language, effective visual aid, engagement with the audience, and confidence • Anticipate the expectations American students have of their instructors
Classroom observations	Visit by consultant to a client's class/lab; feedback provided in a later consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak comprehensibly (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) • Use student-centered teaching techniques
Workshops	Information about adult second language acquisition,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop phonological awareness • Identify services offered by the CTE-ELP that meet their individual linguistic needs and schedule



spoken communication, and linguistic diversity presented by consultants

Videotaped micro-teaching

Opportunity for clients to teach a micro-lesson in front of a video camera and receive feedback from a consultant as well as the opportunity to self-reflect

- Teach with clear pronunciation, appropriate body language, effective visual aid, engagement with the audience, and confidence
- Self-assess

Pronunciation software

Listening and speaking practice via *American Speech Sounds for Academics* in the English Language Proficiency Lab, or via *Carnegie Speech Native Accent* (web-based) at a location of client's choice

- Discriminate between similar-sounding phonemes and intonation patterns when listening
- Pronounce consonants, vowels, and suprasegmental features comprehensibly
- Self-monitor the accuracy of their own speech

Additional resources

Referral list of educational opportunities outside the CTE-ELP, such as CTE workshops (for pedagogy) and the Writing

- Take initiative to participate in programs and Internet activities outside the CTE-ELP to address own unique linguistic needs



Center and
other
educational
websites (for
English
language)

Early indications of program effectiveness

Although it is only a year old, there are early indications that the CTE-ELP program is effective in its approach. In one STEM department, incoming graduate students are expected to lead undergraduate labs during their first semester of study. This is a significant challenge for non-native speakers, especially given that most TAs (domestic and international) have little to no experience teaching in their native language. To demonstrate their language proficiency, ITAs in this STEM program are expected to achieve a certifying score on a recognized language exam or risk dismissal if they fail to do so by the end of their first year of study. In the previous five years (2013-17), 77% (n = 88) of ITAs were able to demonstrate proficiency by the first class day. As such, nearly one quarter of newly admitted international students were unable to complete a core requirement of their degree program by serving as a TA in their first semester, putting their funding in jeopardy and risking dismissal.

This past summer, incoming graduate students in this department were strongly encouraged to participate in CTE-ELP programming over the course of five business days. These students attended ten, hour-long sessions that reviewed and rehearsed functional vocabulary for active learning and high-impact topics in pronunciation -- topics that have been shown to bear heavily upon a speaker's comprehensibility. After ten hours of training, which included videotaped micro-teaching, 92.5% (n = 25) of these international graduate students were able to demonstrate speaking proficiency by the first class day - an increase of over 15%. Remarkably, nearly two-thirds of participants who responded to a survey (n=11) indicated that their "English oral communication [had] changed since participating." Those who commented identified "rate of speech" and "stress" as aspects that they had modified.

In the period from August 2017-March 2018, the CTE-ELP administered intake assessments to graduate students who were not eligible to teach without conditions due to an insufficient demonstration of oral proficiency as measured by recognized language tests. After participating in CTE-ELP programming, 29 of them retested (either taking the same



recognized language test or a different one) and demonstrated sufficient proficiency to be eligible for appointment as a TA without conditions. All who participated in CTE-ELP programming with an intensity of five hours per week achieved that in a semester or less.

In a survey distributed to participants immediately after their Intake Assessment and Intake Follow-up appointment, all the participants (N=67) indicated that they would recommend these individual diagnostic services to a friend. When asked for their reasons, they indicated in open-ended responses that they (1) received specific information about their speaking skills from trained linguists, (2) had the opportunity to create a path to improve their spoken English proficiency, and (3) had noticed improvement in their speaking skills since participating.

Likewise, the Conversation Partner events were well-received based on feedback from the final survey (i.e. all respondents rated the events as *Good* or *Excellent*). More importantly, all respondents (domestic and international) indicated that they (1) feel they now understand their partner's way of speaking better, (2) had learned ways of modifying their own speech in intercultural interactions, and (3) would recommend Conversation Partners to a friend. When asked about any new insights they had had as a result of their participation in the Conversation Partners program, respondents indicated in open-ended responses that they had gained (1) insight into their own cultural assumptions, (2) confidence in intercultural interactions, (3) improved English speaking proficiency, (4) an appreciation for cultural differences, and (5) understanding of the importance of being a patient communicator and good listener.

During the fall and spring semesters in 2017-2018, participants in the ELP for Instructors Practice Groups were surveyed once at the midterm and once at the end of the semester. Those who participated during the intensive winter session were surveyed once. All respondents (n = 42) indicated that they *Agree* or *Strongly Agree* that they would recommend Practice Groups to a friend. A follow-up, open-ended response prompt asked them why. Participants wrote that they would recommend Practice Groups to their friends because they (1) felt a sense of connectedness to other internationals, (2) appreciated the interactions they had with undergraduates, (3) increased their confidence, and (4) learned a lot about speaking and culture from the experience.



The Brazilian Context

The rise of migration around the world is a phenomenon that is bringing new demands to the countries that receive this population. These new demands are from a lot of types including education and jobs necessities (Porter & Russell, 2018).

As is happening in the world, the population of migrants living in Brazil increased by 20% between the years 2010 and 2015, reaching 713,000 people. Of this amount, 29% (about 207,000) come from other countries in South America (International Organization for Migration - IOM, 2018).

This migration process has been aggravated. As of April 2018, there has been a significant increase in the number of refugee requests to Brazil compared to the same period in 2017. According to the Ministry of Justice, between January and April 2018, the Federal Police registered about 20,000 applications, of which 14,500 were from Venezuelan citizens. Compared with the same period in 2017, which totaled 7,434 applications, there was a 161% increase. It is estimated that 40,000 Venezuelans live in the capital of the border state of Roraima, Brazil today. This number represents about 10% of the local population (Salerno, Arcoverde, & Sousa, 2018). According to the CIA, Brazil currently has 60,548 refugees from Venezuela (Central Intelligence Agency - CIA, 2018).

Data collected in surveys by the Public Policy Analysis Directorate of the Getulio Vargas Foundation state that the non-indigenous Venezuelan population that has migrated to Brazil has a good level of education, with 78% having a high school level and 32% having, at least, an undergraduate level. As a result, despite the immigrant being underestimated professionally, this is a migration that brings a qualified workforce to Brazil, and is therefore, in this aspect, positive. According to the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), this Venezuelan population has a school level higher than the average Brazilian population on the border between the two countries, causing a significant social impact and dispute for positions of qualified employment (Guedes, Accioly, Duarte, Oliveira, & Sanches, 2018).

The increase in schooling is not a phenomenon restricted to Venezuela. All of South America, including Brazil, has experienced a significant increase in its number of students. This is despite the low investments in education that occur in the region (Stallivieri, 2007).

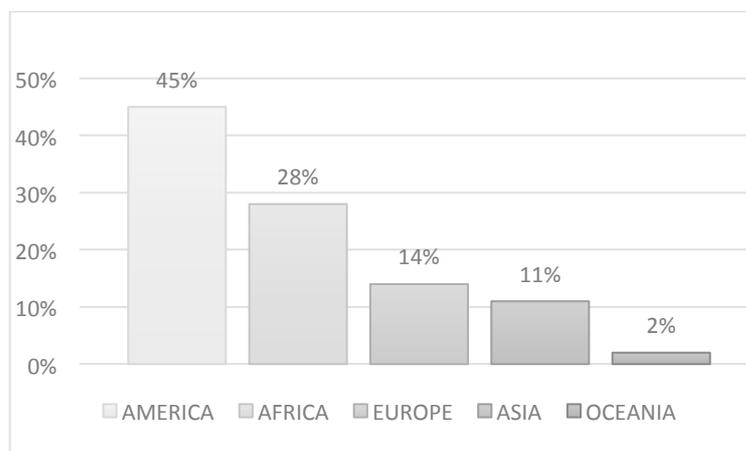
Brazil is today the eighth largest economy in the world, the largest of all Latin American countries, with an inflation of 2.9% per year, a historical mark for the country (Central Intelligence Agency - CIA, 2018). This position of economic leadership is reflected



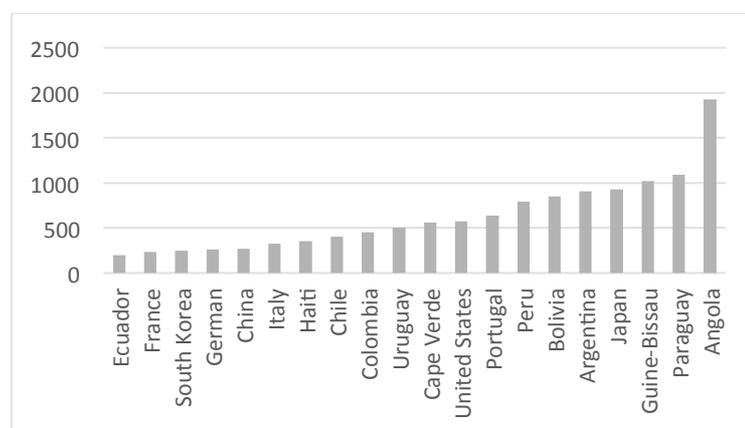
in other aspects, including the educational one. Just as the United States is a world economic leader, in Latin America, more particularly in South America, Brazil takes the place of regional leader.

However, it is a country with a huge cultural diversity that must be well known by the instructors coming from other countries. The good understanding of local culture features is quite essential for an instructor who should exercise his or her own empathy to the class and have their acceptance (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004).

Thus, Brazil currently has 15,605 foreign students from 174 different nationalities enrolled in its higher education institutions. This distribution can be seen in Graph 1 and Graph 2.



Graph 1 – Foreign students in graduate courses in Brazil (INEP - Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2018)



Graph 2 – Distribution of enrollments in higher education according to the country of origin of the foreign student – Brazil 2016 (INEP - Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2018)



With regard to the flow of immigrants to Brazil, we highlight the presence of Latin Americans from Argentina, Paraguay, Chile and Uruguay. Brazil has been confirming itself as a territory of expansion of mobility of population displacement with emphasis on border type modalities - the case of the countries that constitute the Mercosur³ economic bloc (Baeninger, 2008).

New trends and new motivations arise in foreign migration to Brazil facilitated by agreements between countries. These agreements should attend to the demands of the students who have the opportunity to study and live abroad, enabling an academic and professional qualification, and on their return to their original countries, a social ascent and a better and greater participation in society (Ojima, Silva, & Lima, 2014; Stallivieri, 2007).

According to information from the Ministry of Education of Brazil (MEC) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, which control international cooperation programs, 15% to 20% of foreign students remain in the country after finishing their studies. The same is true of Brazilians who study abroad in other countries (Ba, 2013).

The migration of foreign instructors into Brazil began in the early twentieth century, with the need to build the universities and support research in the country. They are employed mostly in private higher education institutions. Sixty percent of international instructors hold PhD or master's degrees. This occurs in order to comply with the requirement of the Brazilian Ministry of Education that 1/3 of higher education professors must hold a master's or doctoral degree (Camargo, 2016).

If we compare this number with the Brazilian professors that have the desired degrees (approximately 30% of the total), the proportion of foreign teachers with the required degree is twice as high (Ba, 2013). It should be noted that foreigners who are graduates and qualified professionals are facilitated to stay in Brazil, as is the case in the United States, which offers scholarships and terms of stay, with the facilitation of the Green Card for foreign students who excel in studies and sports (Ba, 2013).

Our research did not locate any preparatory courses for international students in Brazil, let alone one that deals with the question regarding the preparation of the instructor. This absence of a course or process of reception/orientation/preparation has led to student disapprovals and dropouts. However, it is mandatory for international students to pass a Portuguese proficiency test (CELPE-BRAS) which is considered to be rigorous by those who

³ Free trade zone between some countries of South America (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela, which is suspended)



have to submit to it (Ba, 2013). To be eligible for a teaching role, one must score at least “intermediate” in both the writing and the speaking portions.

Thus, given the substantial number of foreigners in Brazil with real potential to become professors or teacher assistants, the adoption of a continuous program of training international instructors in the mold of what happens today at TAMU is of extreme value and, why not say, a necessity.

Some converging points found between Brazil’s reality and Texas A&M training and qualification program for foreign teachers features led us to write this article suggesting that adopting the TAMU CTE-ELP program, with necessary customizations, can be of a great value for the foreign teachers that intend to work in Brazil.

Why is the TAMU model ideal for the Brazilian context?

While international teacher preparation of any kind is welcome, the flexible model employed at TAMU is desirable, for several reasons.

Leverages existing resources

In order to design and deliver an ITA language training program in short order, the CTE-ELP has had to leverage existing resources from the very beginning. Some workshops are delivered as elective sessions within established programs with an existing audience and logistical support like the university’s Teaching Assistant Institute and its Academy for Future Faculty. And the equipment in the language lab is serviced by Open Access Labs, which supports student computing centers across the campus. But the most valuable resource to the CTE-ELP program is its undergraduates, which are utilized at every possible point in the program. They serve as Conversation Partners, panel participants in Practice Groups, audience members for micro-teaching, and as student workers confirming pronunciation accuracy in the lab.

This direct contact with living, breathing representatives of the host culture provides much-needed insight to language learners about the way students expect them to act in a classroom as an instructor. This direct contact provides foreign students and potential instructors a kind of knowledge which is not readily provided in books but is available, and frankly more credible, in a face-to-face encounter during which undergraduates can represent their own diverse perspectives and expectations.

Another very important benefit of undergraduate involvement is increased empathy. This kind of experience makes domestic students more sensitive to the challenges of foreign



students who face not only another language but another set of customs. By this, the students become more tolerant and can come to appreciate in some way how hard this experience can be. Many domestic undergraduates are, in fact, encouraged to participate in preparation for their own study abroad.

Brazil is an enormous country of five regions, with profound cultural differences internally. Like the United States, Brazil also has affluent and impoverished regions, ethnic minorities, and substantial immigration from Africa, Europe and Asia. Since there are profound cultural differences throughout the country, adjusting to local norms can be challenging even for Brazilian instructors. In such a context, this exchange of experiences is indispensable for the success of any preparation program for foreign instructors.

Flexibility

All services offered by the CTE-ELP program are open enrollment. Participants can elect to engage in any activity for which seats and resources are available. For example, if a student is unable to attend the Practice Group session that he regularly attends each week, he can join another section covering the same content on an alternative day or at an alternative time the same week. As the Practice Group sessions are offered several days and times throughout the week during the normal, long semester, participants have several sections to choose from.

This is a convenient advantage of the service model for adult learners who have additional obligations beyond their studies including jobs and families that a full-time student often does not have. The service model can accommodate most schedules and personal demands. In Brazil this feature is particularly important because most of the foreign students come from impoverished countries in Latin America and Africa and, in the vast majority of cases, have to work to pay for their expenses, sometimes in an informal way. In this context, flexibility is essential for this kind of student.

Fee-based rather than tuition-based structure

Finding a way for this program to be financially viable is critical. Requiring the international instructors themselves to pay tuition for a customized course deters them from accessing the very linguistic and cultural training that they need. Instead, the model adopted by TAMU is funded by a small student fee paid by all internationals, which supports the special services that they require. Because this fee is levied against all international students enrolled at the university, aspects of the CTE-ELP program are accessible to all international



students, not just those employed as instructors. And based on the demographics of those who utilize CTE-ELP services, it is evident that many non-native speakers of English desire additional language development despite the fact that they meet the standards for admission to the university.

In Brazil there are no specific fees levied on foreign students, so the adoption of a training program like that of the CTE-ELP should be financially supported by the institutions which desire to implement it, or they can establish a specific fee with that purpose. This kind of program also exists in other formats in Brazil. For example, some universities have French, English, Mandarin or German courses that the students can access by the payment of a specific fee. So, the collection of this type of fee would not be a novelty, nor an impediment to the implantation of the program.

Individualized instruction

According to *The Future of Learning* (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018), individualized instruction is a high-impact approach that is gaining traction in student success initiatives. Language learners in the speaking classroom are often keenly aware that their needs differ from that of their classmates. This is often true even if their classmates speak the same native language. As such, the individualized approach has immediate face validity for participants, which increases their own intrinsic motivation and investment.

This individualized approach has a very good impact on the learning process, allowing students to progress at their own pace and choose the activities that they feel are most helpful to them. Graduate students and scholars face time constraints; it is important that their professional development be relevant and efficient.

For these four reasons, the authors encourage policy-makers and administrators in higher education in Brazil and in other similar contexts (inside or outside the United States) where there currently is no professional development for international instructors, to consider adoption of this program model.

Conditions/Resources necessary to operate the program:

To provide the array of services currently offered at TAMU's CTE-ELP, a program needs applied linguists who understand the communicative norms of instructors in higher education, but more importantly who understand adult second language acquisition and



articulation/pronunciation coaching. Part-time employment of undergraduate student workers ensures undergraduate representation at key events, such as the panel discussion/dialogue. Appropriate space is needed for distinct services: a quiet room for discreet, uninterrupted private consultations; a classroom for simulated teaching practice; and a computer lab equipped with headsets and microphones in which users are encouraged to practice listening and speaking aloud.

While this seems costly, it should be seen as an investment in the quality of undergraduate education and the ethical responsibility of an institution that benefits from the instruction that international instructors provide.

Program design ideally follows an intentional path (Fowler, Lazo, Turner, & Hohenstein, 2015):

1. “Form & Orient Team
2. Gather Data
3. Create Program Learning Outcomes
4. Create Competency Rubrics
5. Create Curriculum Map
6. Create Curriculum Materials
7. Implement & Assess
8. Refine”

Data needs to be gathered (step 2) in the areas of Portuguese language (especially phonology), the culture of Brazilian universities, and the status quo (the current effectiveness of international instructors who did not receive preparation for their roles in Brazilian higher education).

Currently, there are no national training or accreditation standards for Portuguese as a Second Language. There are programs for foreign undergraduate and graduate students, and there are preparatory courses for the Proof of Certification of Proficiency in Portuguese. But the teachers in these courses are usually undergraduates with minimal training. As such, it is an under-researched area. To implement a successful program, future research should consider the linguistic correlates of comprehensibility in Brazilian Portuguese and the



functional language of the Brazilian university classroom so that program goals can be set and prioritized appropriately.

Cultural knowledge is just as important as linguistic knowledge. To set program goals, local norms of behavior should be articulated. In particular, cultural differences that are likely to cause misunderstandings between instructors and students should be identified. An example of this in the U.S. context is the well-respected resource *Teaching American Students: A Guide for International Faculty and Teaching Assistants in Colleges and Universities* published by Harvard University's center for teaching and learning (Sarkisian, 2006).

It would be useful, before implementing changes, to get a baseline measurement of the current communication skills of international instructors in Brazilian universities and the current satisfaction of Brazilian students with their international instructors. If this documents a need or problem, that documentation may be useful when seeking support from stakeholders. Also, in the future, when the new program is assessed to determine its effectiveness, the baseline will be a point of comparison.

Conclusion

The study presents the features of the English learning program for non-native instructors developed by Texas A&M University. This program has important and exclusive features that make it a unique experience for those who need to work as an instructor in the United States. The interaction with domestic undergraduate students in face-to-face sessions and the vision of cultural aspects viewed in the program are essential for the results that introduce foreign students and instructors into the United States educational reality.

As Brazil is also a big and multicultural country which has a great number of foreign students seeking to be instructors, and which does not have a similar preparation for instructors, the implementation of the Texas A&M program can be an important solution for the training of these professionals.

Two foreign instructors in Brazil reflect on their experience in the thoughtful article "Your Culture, My Classroom, Whose Pedagogy? Negotiating Effective Teaching and Learning in Brazil" (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004). They "problematize the often unexamined assumption that it is the students' responsibility to adapt to the learning environment created and controlled by the teacher" (p. 107). Rather, the teacher in this context bears some



responsibility to adapt to the local educational culture, for the benefit of the local students. The willingness of international instructors to adapt is not the issue, but rather the lack of opportunities and guidance that would accelerate their adaptation, linguistically and culturally. A flexible professional development program for international instructors similar to TAMU's Center for Teaching Excellence English Language Proficiency program can equip international instructors to make greater contributions to the institutions that employ them.

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