

MEd Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)

Program Evaluation

Executive Summary

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Context

For the period under review, the MEd TESL program experienced various changes and challenges that has led to an improved and more competitive program. After approximately 5 years with an adjunct professor coordinating the program, Dr. Kevin Carroll transferred from the UPR Mayagüez campus, with tenure. Shortly upon his arrival, program changes were proposed and ultimately instituted in the middle of the 2017-18 academic year. These program changes, required to meet institutional policies, completely altered the competitiveness and length of the program. Changing the program from 40 to 30 credits and substituting the thesis for a capstone project made the program more competitive and in-line with other programs on the island and in the US that work with in-service teachers. The revised program has had relatively steady interest in terms of applications and classes are full, despite major external factors that have made studying at the UPR and in the College of Education less attractive as in past years. Despite current challenges, the coordinator, and only full time professor assigned to the program, has worked hard to strengthen the program by hiring adjunct professors who are energetic and leaders within the PRTESOL community. Furthermore, petitioning for a trimester schedule and changing the modalities of all courses to allow hybrid and online formats when necessary has made the program more versatile.

Strengths

The MEd TESL program has some of the top leaders in TESL on the island of Puerto Rico teaching and participating in the program. For instance, Dr. Anibal Muñoz Claudio a professor who has consistently taught two courses a year in the program served as President of Puerto Rico TESOL in 2018 and current doctoral student Ms. Larissa López served as PRTESOL president in 2020. In addition to being well connected to both public and private school teachers around the Island, professors in the program are some of the most published in the Department of Graduate Studies and in the College of Education. According to the results of this current self-study, Dr. Kevin Carroll has approximately 40% of the peer reviewed publications in the DEG. Moreover, the program changes implemented in 2018 along with the proposed shift to a trimester offering promises to make the program more attractive and the ability to teach courses in hybrid and online modalities gives the program the flexibility to adapt to the needs of the students in the program. Furthermore, the program has been consulted on numerous occasions in providing professional development to in-service PRDE teachers through workshops as well as former graduate and undergraduate coursework.

Weaknesses

As with all programs, the MEd TESL has notable weaknesses, the first being that there is only one full time professor assigned to the area. This is less of an issue now that the master's thesis has been removed as a requirement for the program, freeing up countless theses committee work by the coordinator, but nevertheless, the sole responsibility of coordinating, teaching and generally being responsible for the entire program is a lot of pressure put on one person. Unfortunately, within the College of Education, there are only two professors in all the college with a specialization in TESOL. Therefore, when campus finances permit, seeking at least a joint appointment in the program would allow for increased stability and less reliance on one individual. Similar to the other programs in the DEG, the MEd TESL has been crippled by the increase in tuition for graduate students as well as the lack of housing available to students, which is a particular issue for international graduate students

who are interested in the program. Furthermore, up until 2017 all courses were offered in the College of Education but due to issues in the building classes were moved to the old General Studies building which is completely inadequate for studies, much less graduate studies where students pay considerably more for their courses and expect quality not just in the professors but also in the physical space in which they are studying. Another weakness that the program has is that there are few funds for advertising which are needed in order to spread the word regarding program changes.

Opportunities

Creating opportunities for teachers and aspiring teachers to complete the MEd TESL in a competitive timeframe without compromising content is the goal of the move to a trimester schedule. While the program would have preferred starting the trimester schedule at the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, there are current plans to start the program in a new, 12-week trimester format starting in August of 2022. These changes will allow for our program to be completed in as little as 4 trimesters which will make us the quickest program related to TESL on the island. Furthermore, Dr. Carroll has submitted a proposal for a post-baccalaureate Bilingual Education Certificate (BEC) to be offered in face-to-face and online formats. The courses that make up the 18-credit BEC are courses that are generally taken as recommended and free electives in the MEd TESL program. The eventual offering of the program will allow current MEd TESL students an opportunity to add an additional credential onto their diploma while at the same time keeping the time to degree reasonable. The online offering of the BEC will also provide the MEd TESL program with additional stability in the offering of courses as the same courses offered face-to-face will be offered in the subsequent semester online. This is important particularly for adjunct professors who will keep their course preparations to one per year while simultaneously being able to make double their current compensation for the online version of the same course. The change to the trimester calendar and the implementation of the BEC are two opportunities that the MEd Program continues to peruse and if successful, there would be a possibility of offering a shorter, “basic” TESL certificate, particularly online to generate more funds for the Department, College, and Institution.

Threats

Similar to many of the other graduate programs in the DEG, the threats posed to the MEd TESL are more administrative and structural than they are with the program or its curriculum. After thorough reflection and contemplation, the MEd TESL Area came up with two very real threats:

1. **Institutional threats.** Lack of desirable classroom spaces to hold face-to-face classes has been an issue since Hurricane María in 2017. The lack of adequate space is also confounded by increased tuition, particularly for international students, who also have very limited and safe areas to live in surrounding the university.
2. **An over reliance on one Coordinator.** Dr. Kevin Carroll and before him, Dr. Elsie Candelaria have coordinated the MEd TESL programs and the TESL sub-specialty of the Curriculum and Instruction over the period of this program evaluation. With only one tenured line associated with TESL in the DEG and only one other in the whole College of Education, the decisions, success, and failure of the program largely rests in the hands on one individual. Should this individual leave the department or institution, see a drop in productivity, or designate more time and effort to another program, like the EdD program in Curriculum and instruction, the MEd TESL program would feel immediate repercussions.