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Assessing Teacher Discourse in a Spoken English Proficiency Test

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Defining proficiency

- General English language proficiency
- An ESP-derived approach to language proficiency



English-for-teaching

A focussed approach converts the problem of language improvement from one of general proficiency to one of **specialized contextual language use**, which is likely to be more efficient in bringing about practical impacts on teacher classroom efficacy and student learning outcomes (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015)



Target population

- Pre-service ELT teachers
 - who are L1 and L2 speakers of English
 - who completed a teaching methodology course
- ELT teachers applying for a teaching permit



SEPTT

- Spoken English Proficiency Test for Teachers
- Meant to ensure high levels of spoken English proficiency amongst English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners
- Tests candidates' ability to use spoken English for a variety of functions, including **conversing, explaining, presenting information, and giving instructions and feedback** in a context specific to ELT (Vassallo et al., 2017)



Spoken English Proficiency Test for Teachers (SEPTT)

Centre for English Language Proficiency



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Measuring performance

- Performance on SEPTT is assessed by means of an **analytic** rating scale
- Five criteria and twenty descriptors corresponding to four bands
- Candidates attaining Band 3 are deemed **operational**
- The lowest band attained for a specific criterion determines the global band attained in the test



Rating procedures

- The examiner in SEPTT also acts as an interlocutor
- Every single part of the test is **timed**
- Interaction with the candidate is **scripted**
- Every SEPTT examiner is periodically provided with **rigorous training**
- Every single test is **recorded** and these recordings are used to regularly monitor examiners' rating performance



The test

- 1) An **introductory interview** in which the examiner asks questions about the candidate's interests, plans, and training in relation to ELT
- 2) A **long turn** based on a prompt focussing on some aspect of an English language lesson, such as managing the classroom, communicating content, or setting up an activity
- 3) A **conversation** focussing on the candidate's ability to respond to a particular lesson scenario or provide instructions to learners



Assessment criteria

- **Teacher discourse**
- Coherence and cohesion
- Pronunciation
- Vocabulary
- Grammar



Teacher discourse (TD)

- A discourse that fits the classroom
- Classroom interaction occurs in a **social and institutional context**
- Classroom activity is a 'socially constructed and negotiated activity' (Christie, 2002, p. 161)
- Teacher-student interaction involves specific features of language (e.g. conversational frames and teacher directives)



The role of TD in ELT

- Teacher talk should be a threshold concept and made explicit in teacher education curriculum (Skinner, 2016, p. 152)
- Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) promotes 'understanding and facilitates professional development' (Walsh, 2011, p. 1)
- Walsh (2011) designed the Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) framework to foster teacher development through classroom interaction
- Four features of classroom discourse: (1) control of the interaction; (2) speech modification; (3) elicitation; (4) repair (Walsh, 2011)



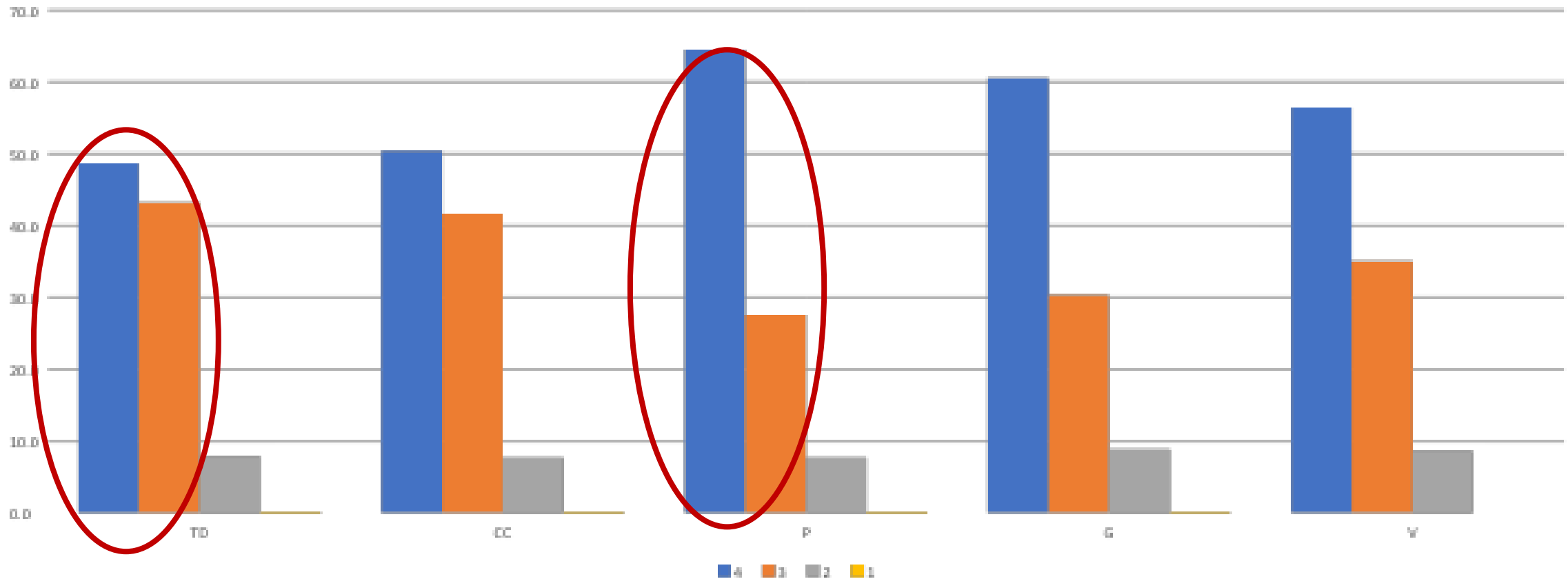
TD in SEPTT

- Targets candidates' language use in context (Vassallo et al., 2019)
- Exploits candidates' knowledge of pedagogy
- Elicits teacher discourse based on the activities determined by the test materials
- SEPTT TD assesses candidates':
 - ability to speak at length on teaching related topics
 - range of discourse functions appropriate to the teaching context (explaining, presenting information, giving instructions and summarizing)



SEPTT overall performance

SEPTT Results June 2017 – January 2019





Washback and feedback

- Examiners observed a change in candidates' preparation and performance
 - Greater focus on TD
 - Perceived improvement in TD
- Washback on pre-service education
 - ELT Council TEFL Cert. assessors reported changes to course content
 - Courses are designed to incorporate a clear focus on TD
- An information meeting was held with DOSs
- Interviews are being held with active TEFL Cert trainers

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Thank you!

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