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## How to Totally Stopon Thinking about Admissions Criteria for Teacher Education Programs? That Can Make or Break You

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### Abstract

This study examines the admissions criteria used by teacher education programs in seven countries, including the England, Canada, Oman, Australia, Finland, Singapore and Malaysia. The study compares the use of three main criteria for admission: academic qualifications, non-academic factors, or a combination of the two. The result found that there was significant variation in the admissions criteria used across the countries. Some countries placed a greater emphasis on academic qualifications, while others placed more weight on non-academic factors such as personal qualities during the interviews and assessment test. The study also found that there were differences in the types of non-academic factors considered with some countries placing a greater emphasis on literacy skills, social skills, communication skills and other skills relevant. Overall, the study highlights the importance of considering the academic, non-academic and other factors that influence admissions criteria for teacher education programs. Academic qualification is the dominant selection approach used globally in the teacher education program.

**Keywords:** Teacher Education Program, Admission Criteria Selection, Comparative Study; Academic Qualifications, Non-Academic Attributes.

### Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rising realisation that the preparation of teachers plays an essential role in boosting the achievement of students and achieving educational equity (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). As a direct consequence of this, an increasing amount of focus is being directed towards the selection of prospective teachers and the admittance standards utilised by programmes that prepare teachers. However, there has been a paucity of research conducted that compares the admissions requirements of other nations,

particularly regarding the proportion of importance placed on academic vs non-academic considerations. The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of a comparative study that was conducted on the entrance requirements for teacher education programmes in seven different countries: England, Canada, Oman, Australia, Finland, Singapore and Malaysia. In the admissions process, we place an emphasis on the following three primary criteria: academic qualifications, non-academic factors, or a mix of both sets of characteristics. Our goal is to discover best practises and areas for development in the selection of prospective teachers by comparing the admissions requirements used in various nations. Specifically, we will be looking for similarities and discrepancies.

### **The Concept of Selection to the Teacher Education Program**

The selection process is based on at least three situations in the employment or training environment: when there are more applicants than jobs or training positions, when applicants are chosen but then turn down the offer, and when the applicant's professional development profile needs to be set up in advance (Klassen & Kim, 2019). The selection process is based on a review of the available data. One of the most important decisions or indicators that the selector makes is what kind of data will be collected to predict the likelihood of future success (Patterson & Driver, 2018). Klassen & Kim (2019) also explained that in the past, the selection method depended on the judgment and intuition of the selector, with various methods such as astrology, physiognomy (analysis of facial features), and graphology (character analysis through writing) required for decision making. In fact, some of these incorrect approaches to personnel selection are still used in the workplace today.

The selection team that makes the decision may face a similar lack of critical analysis of the validity of existing selection methods, as little systematic evidence is collected on the effectiveness of selection methods (Bowles et al., 2014). For example, Davies et al (2016) conducted interviews with selection teams for teacher education programs and school-based teacher education programs in the United Kingdom and found that selection teams emphasized the importance of their intuition and instinct in making selection decisions. However, despite the selection teams' apparent confidence in their selection approach, little evidence was presented to assess the quality of their selection outcomes. Although most people believe they can accurately assess personal characteristics through interviews (Dana et al., 2013), extensive research in organizational psychology shows that interviewers tend to make unreliable judgments and are influenced in their decision making by biased actions based on race, age, and appearance (Cook, 2016). Even though most teacher selection models are based on a sophisticated framework of teaching standards that cover multiple domains of practice and competency (Klassen & Kim, 2019), they may not use selection methods that accurately test based on domains and constructs.

The selection method used may require high and expensive expenditures (Klassen et al., 2016), considering the cost of the selection team to conduct the selection process, such as the number of staff conducting interviews, observing group activities, reviewing written tests, fees for training those conducting the process, and reports for the selection instrument. Klassen & Kim (2019) emphasize that selection procedures need to be checked on a regular basis to make sure they are effective, reliable (continuous over time), valid, and fair to all applicants, no matter their gender, race, gender, or income level. Decisions about the selection of prospective teachers require the ability to make predictions about future teacher

effectiveness, which is at the heart of the selection process. The selection process often raises questions about the applicant's ability to become a competent teacher in the future and to have a clear vision and goals if appointed as a teacher in the future (Antoniou et al., 2016).

### Selection Procedures in Several Countries

The method of selecting personnel for the teacher education program has different emphases and dimensions, depending on the needs of the organization and the site. The selection team focuses on three main criteria, which are academically oriented, non-academically oriented, or a combination of both. Indeed, in certain countries, there is also an increase in other criteria such as background experience (Klassen et al., 2016). In all other countries around the world, there are different strategies and selection methods depending on the current needs of each country. Therefore, this paper describes the selection method practiced in seven countries, namely England, Canada, Oman, Australia, Finland, Singapore, and Malaysia.

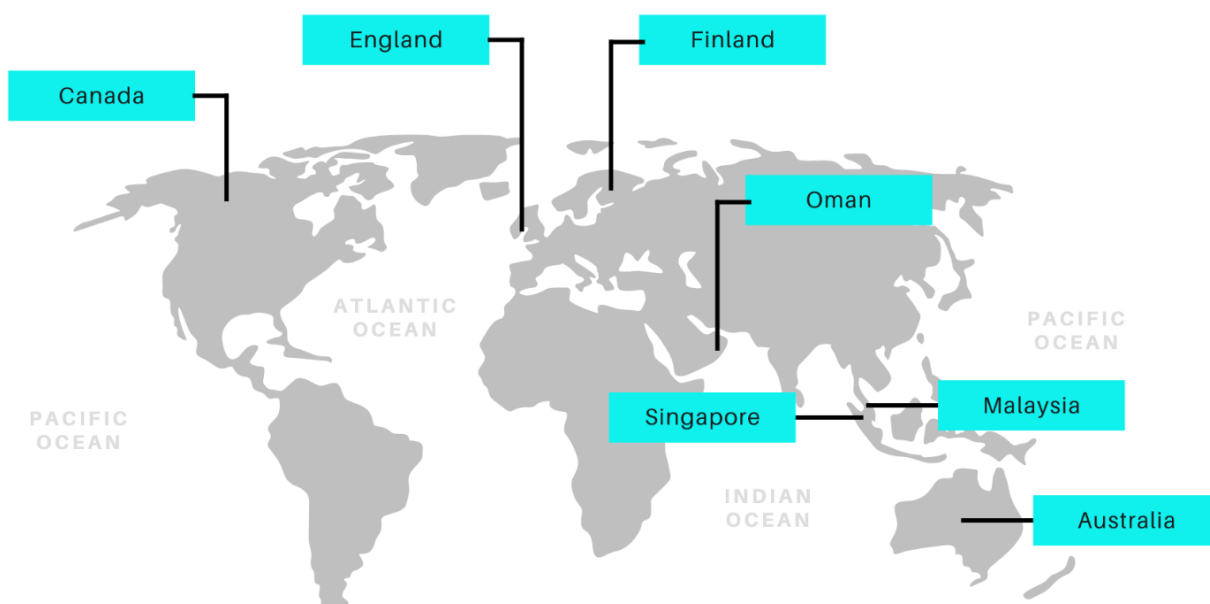


Figure 1: Seven Countries in The World

The selection process for prospective teachers in teacher education in England establishes three main criteria, academic ability, background experience, and nonacademic attributes (Klassen et al., 2016). Academic ability is measured by current academic licensure for secondary education, reasoning tests, competency tests, and letters of recommendation. Non-academic characteristics are determined through interviews and personality tests. Although various evaluation procedures are used in teacher education programs to select applicants, they show a low score for reliability, validity, and perceived fairness of the process (Klassen et al., 2016). However, the various selection procedures share a common goal of identifying applicants who demonstrate higher levels of academic and non-academic attributes. In Canada especially in the province of Ontario, getting into teacher education is based on a selection process where academic ability and professional experience are the two most important things (Darmody & Smyth, 2016).

Academic achievement and the evaluation of non-academic attributes are considered in the selection process for the teacher education program in Oman. This process is based on looking

at two things: how well a student does in school and how well they measure up in other ways (Al Hashmi, 2018). In Australia, academic and non-academic success are the two most important things that determine who get into the teacher education program (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020). However, each state and territory have autonomous authority to implement selection procedures into teacher education programs at the discretion of teacher education program providers (Darmody & Smyth, 2016). Therefore, each state and territory may have additional or specific criteria or requirements in conducting staff selection that providers must consider as part of the admission and selection process for teacher education programs (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020).

In Finland, personnel selection for teacher education programs differs by school category (Darmody & Smyth, 2016). For elementary teacher education, there are two phases: an academic test in the first phase and an interview in the second phase. Singapore is using a three-step process to choose candidates for teacher education programs: a background check, a test of literacy skills, and an interview (Ingvarson et al., 2013). During the background check phase, applicants are asked to fill out an online application and send in documents like personal information and school records. Applicants are judged on how well they did in school and how interested they are in children and education. In the second phase, successful applicants will take an English literacy test. The last step is the interview, which is done by a group of current or former school principals. This interview tests communication skills, passion for the teaching profession, and potential to be a good role model for future students.

Table 1

*Admission Criteria Selection*

<b>Criteria Countries</b>	<b>Academic Qualification</b>	<b>Non-Academic Attributes</b>	<b>Background Experience</b>
<b>England</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Canada</b>	✓		✓
<b>Oman</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Australia</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Finland</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Singapore</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>Malaysia</b>	✓	✓	

The selection procedure into the teacher education program in Malaysia is divided into two categories, namely the Bachelor of Teaching (B. Teach.) and the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.). B. Teach. is run by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) which aims to train trainee teachers who will be placed in primary schools. While B. Ed. run by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) which aims to train trainee teachers who will be placed in secondary and post-secondary educational institutions such as secondary schools, matriculation colleges, community colleges, vocational colleges and polytechnics. The selection procedure for trainee teachers to enter the B. Teach. program involves several stages that have been set based on the General Quality Procedures for Student Recruitment Management (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2018). This teacher selection stage involves three main stages which are the selection stage according to the basic requirements and field conditions; Teacher Candidate Eligibility Test stage which includes two tests namely a written test and a fitness



test; and the face-to-face interview stage. Candidates who pass all the previous tests will be called for the next stage which is the interview stage. This interview stage will identify candidates who are talented and interested in the teaching profession. While the selection procedure for the B. Ed. program. through three levels, which are general conditions and special conditions; Malaysian Educators Selection Inventory (MEdSI) test stage; and the face-to-face interview stage. The MEdSI test is a psychometric test of the intrinsic qualities of teacher candidates based on personality, interests, achievements, integrity values, and emotional intelligence (Sidek et al., 2009). The next stage is the interview stage. This interview stage has special criteria regarding the candidates called interview. Table 1 shows the selection criteria for admission to Teacher Education Programs in several countries.

Each country has a mechanism for selecting personnel for the various teacher education programs according to established requirements, policies, and standards. However, all the mechanisms put in place have been tested for their effectiveness and are updated from time to time to produce quality teachers. In fact, there is still room for research to improve the validity and reliability of the selection mechanisms in the future. This scenario provides an opportunity for researchers and stakeholders to explore other methods that yield good returns not only in terms of teacher quality but also student quality.

## **Finding and Discussion**

### **a. Academic Qualification**

In all countries, academic qualifications are considered the main criterion for personnel selection in teacher education. However, not all sub-criteria for the selection of academic qualifications are the same in all countries. In England, academic qualifications are measured by the current upper secondary academic record, reasoning tests, competency tests, and letters of recommendation. In Canada, applicants are assessed by written and oral English tests. The situation in Oman shows that academic qualifications vary in certain subjects. For example, academic qualifications in the General Education Diploma for the English language program must have a score of 90% or higher for the English subject and a score of 65% or higher for the Arabic and Islamic Studies subject.

Meanwhile in Australia, as in the state of New South Wales, academic entry requirements are based on Higher School Certificate (HSC) performance, which is Band 5 in English and Band 4 in Mathematics. This is to ensure that applicants have good literacy and numeracy skills. Finland, on the other hand, uses an academic test, the VAKAVA test, which requires candidates to analyze and interpret research articles. The need for this measurement is to create a research-based profession from the beginning of the selection process. In Singapore, however, academic qualifications are screened at two levels. The first screening is based on passing the Singapore General Certificate Examination. Applicants are then given a test on English reading and writing skills. This test assesses the level of English language proficiency. Although English is not the primary language in Singapore, English is used as the language of instruction in schools. The purpose of this test is to ensure that only applicants with a good command of English are admitted to the next level.

Academic qualifications are measured by specific subjects in Malaysia. Applicants must achieve excellent results in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination. In Design and Technology Program, for example, the requirement is to obtain at least a grade of excellent in

one of the technical and vocational subjects such as Business Management, Home Economics, Basic Accounting, Food Cultivation, Catering, and Commercial Studies. The Mathematics Program specialization requires obtaining at least Excellent at the SPM level for the subjects of Modern Mathematics and Additional Mathematics. The Science Program requires obtaining at least Excellent at the SPM level for one of the subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Science and Additional Science. This is to ensure that applicants of high quality and qualified from an academic point of view are given preference in the entrance examination for the next higher level. This also indirectly establishes the condition of cognitive ability and skills as the main requirement for selection in the first level by measuring the academic excellence of the applicant. Finally, they were first tested based on their academic performance before being selected for the next level. Table 2 shows some sub-criteria for academic qualifications for the selection of admission to Teacher Education Programs in several countries.

Table 2

*Academic Qualification Sub-Criteria*

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Sub-Criteria</b>
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upper secondary academic record</li> <li>• Reasoning tests</li> <li>• Competency tests</li> <li>• Letters of recommendation</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written English Test</li> <li>• Oral English Tests</li> </ul>
Oman	General Education Diploma: Score of 90% or higher for the English subject and a score of 65% or higher for the Arabic and Islamic Studies subject.
Australia	Higher School Certificate (HSC): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Band 5 in English</li> <li>• Band 4 in Mathematics</li> </ul>
Finland	VAKAVA Tests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze and Interpret Research Articles</li> </ul>
Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing the Singapore General Certificate Examination</li> <li>• English Reading Skill Test</li> <li>• English Writing Skills Test</li> </ul>
Malaysia	Excellent in the <i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> Examination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and Technology Program - Technical and Vocational subjects such as Business Management, Home Economics, Basic Accounting, Food Cultivation, Catering, and Commercial Studies subjects</li> <li>• Mathematics Program - Modern Mathematics and Additional Mathematics subjects</li> <li>• Science Program - Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Science and Additional Science subjects</li> </ul>

**b. Non-academic Attributes**

As for the sub-criteria of non-academic attributes, only Canada does not focus on this issue. There are several countries that focus on the same non-academic cluster. In fact, there are

also other countries that emphasize some skills and abilities that can be highlighted by potential candidates. This can provide added value to prospective candidates to highlight talents that are hidden in specific fields.

England emphasize three clusters non-academic attributes which are empathy and communication, organization and planning, and resilience and adaptability. Empathy and communication are assessed based on the candidate demonstrates active listening and engages in open dialogue with both students and colleagues. The candidate proactively seeks advice and is responsive to both professional feedback and student needs. They have the ability to appropriately adjust communication style and type of dialogue. Meanwhile, organization and planning focus on the applicant's ability to manage competing priorities and effectively use time management and personal organization skills to promote positive learning interactions with students. Candidate demonstrates the ability to remain resilient under pressure. Demonstrates adaptability and the ability to change lessons and lesson sequences appropriately as needed. They are aware of their skill level and has the confidence to either ask for help or make decisions independently. They also can handle challenges to own knowledge and is not hindered by constructive, critical feedback and uses effective coping strategies related to resilience and adaptability.

Table 3

*Non-Academic Attributes Sub-Criteria*

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Sub-Criteria</b>
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy &amp; Communication</li> <li>• Organization &amp; Planning</li> <li>• Resilience &amp; Adaptability</li> </ul>
Oman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diligence in Academic Specialization,</li> <li>• Enjoyment of Working with Students with Special Needs</li> <li>• Attitude Toward &amp; Appreciation of Islamic &amp; Omani Values</li> <li>• Cultural Awareness of Research</li> <li>• Technological Skills</li> <li>• Language &amp; Communication Skills</li> <li>• Overall Professional Demeanor</li> </ul>
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation in Teaching</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Self-Efficacy</li> <li>• Conscientiousness</li> <li>• Organization &amp; Planning</li> <li>• Culture Awareness</li> </ul>
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy &amp; Communication</li> <li>• Organization &amp; Planning</li> <li>• Resilience &amp; Adaptability</li> <li>• Cooperation &amp; Fostering of Community</li> <li>• Showcase Particular Talents in Music &amp; Arts</li> </ul>
Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication Skills</li> <li>• Enthusiasm in Teaching</li> <li>• Potential Role Model</li> </ul>



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Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-Worth &amp; Self-Concept</li><li>• Society's Cultural Values &amp; Morality</li><li>• Personality</li><li>• Emotional Intelligence</li><li>• Teachers &amp; Educational Practices</li><li>• Teachers &amp; Professional Skills</li><li>• Teaching Profession</li><li>• Mental Health</li><li>• Physical Fitness</li></ul>
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In Oman, applicants selected on the basis of academic merit are invited by the college for an interview. The interview is a prerequisite for acceptance into the teacher education program. The interviews evaluate seven criteria: academic specialization, enjoyment of working with students with special needs, attitude toward and appreciation of Islamic and Omani values, cultural awareness of research, technological skills, language and communication skills, and general professional demeanor. Applicants must achieve a score of at least 60% to be officially accepted into the teacher education program. However, Al Hashmi (2018) claimed that the effectiveness of the interview method in conducting the selection.

In Australia, on the other hand, non-academic attributes are assessed based on ability indicators, namely teaching motivation, strong interpersonal and communication skills, willingness to learn, resilience, self-efficacy, concern, organizational and planning skills, cultural awareness, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness. The mechanism for measuring the non-academic attributes will be implemented through a variety of media, such as face-to-face interviews or telephone calls, written personal statements, psychometric testing, and self-reported surveys. For additional criteria, various methods are used to measure specific indicators such as microteaching, online assignments, and day trips to schools.

The interview is conducted in Finland with the candidates who have passed the VAKAVA test. At this stage, the candidate is measured and evaluated based on their motivation, interpersonal, and communication skills (Darmody & Smyth, 2016), and a holistic assessment of their interest in the teaching profession (Ingvarson et al., 2013). This stage is also an opportunity for candidates to showcase their special talents, such as music, performing arts, and so on. For secondary school teacher education programs, candidates can apply as early as the first year of their bachelor's degree. The selection process consists of three stages, namely the aptitude test, the interview, and the average grade of the first year of study.

In Singapore, non-academic attributes are also evaluated in the final stage of selection. A panel of interviewers made up of current or former school principals conducts the interview, which is the last stage. This interview assesses communication skills, passion for the teaching profession, and the potential to be a good role model for future students.

Meanwhile in Malaysia, applicants who meet the basic requirements and the professional requirements are selected and invited to take the Teacher Candidate Qualifying Examination (*Ujian Kelayakan Calon Guru*, UKCG), which includes a written examination and an aptitude test. The written test is a psychometric test and consists of two components, namely the

Teacher Personality Inventory (*Inventori Sahsiah Keguruan*, INSAK) and the Self-Assessment Index (*Indeks Pengesanan Kendiri*, IPK). The component of the fitness test is the physical fitness test (*Ujian Kecergasan Fizikal*, UKF). This psychometric test assesses teacher personality with 135 questions or statements (INSAK) and mental health (IPK) with 60 questions or statements. The time required to complete this test is 30 minutes for the INSAK test and 15 minutes for the IPK test. INSAK is a psychological test designed to assess the applicant's suitability for the teaching profession. The questions included in the INSAK test are objective in nature, and each question has two response options, agree or disagree, which can be classified as dichotomous. The questions included in the INSAK test are related to teacher personality potential, which includes two main components, namely teacher personality and teacher personality practice.

The IPK test is administered to measure the mental health of the applicant. This is because there are several reports and studies that show that teachers' mental health is a concern because they cannot control work and task pressure (Lia Indah, 2018; Kamaruzaman et al., 2017). Therefore, IPK is used to ensure that candidates are able to absorb pressure well. UKF measures the candidate's ability in terms of physical fitness. The UKF is divided into several components, namely the body mass index (BMI), the push-up test, the quadrant jump test, the push-up test with five variations, the lunge, the lateral rotation, and the beep test. Applicants must pass all tests included in the UKCG to advance to the next screening phase. Applicants who pass the UKCG are invited to the next stage, the interview. This interview stage identifies applicants who are talented and interested in the teaching profession.

### **c. Background Experience**

Only in two countries is focusing background experience a criterion for the admission of teachers, namely in Canada and Singapore. Canada emphasizes the educational level of the applicant in its background selection criteria. The three levels of education that available schools can offer are preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school. In each of these categories, there is a certain type of assessment that depends on previous experience. In some cases, applicants are required to have some prior teaching experience (not necessarily high school). For example, applicants for the primary level (kindergarten through grade 6), middle school (grades 4 through 10), and high school (grades 7 through 12) require two different teaching experiences. Applicants must hold teaching credentials for at least two consecutive departments and may earn teaching credentials for a specific subject area. Eligibility requirements vary for specific programs for teaching broad technical subjects, teaching the deaf, teaching native languages as second languages, and teaching persons of indigenous descent in the primary and junior divisions.

In Singapore, applicants must submit an online application at the background screening stage, where they submit documents such as personal information and academic achievements. Applicants are evaluated based on their academic qualifications and interest in children and the education field. This situation is different from those in other countries. The reason is that academic achievements are classified as background experience. Academic achievement is assessed using tests to evaluate English literacy skills. Experience is measured by teaching experience in private educational institutions and letters of recommendation.

## Conclusion

The three main criteria for selecting personnel for the teacher education program are academic achievement, non-academic attributes, and experience. Only Singapore makes the three selection criteria a condition for admission to a teacher education program. All seven countries require academic achievement as the main criterion. Only Canada does not specify non-academic attributes as a main criterion. In Canada, the focus of the selection criteria is on teaching experience. Thus, the result also shown how important it is to think about cultural and contextual factors when evaluating admissions criteria, since what is important in one country might not be as important in another. Still, some themes kept coming up, like how important it is to do well in school, to have experience working with children, and to have leadership, commitment, and cultural competence.

The selection criteria for teacher education programs may impact several aspects beyond academic achievement, including nonacademic attributes and experiential background. Academic qualifications and expertise may contribute to higher academic achievement. Teachers who excel academically are more likely to have a deep understanding of the subjects they teach, which enables them to effectively convey information and support student learning. Non-academic characteristics such as communication skills, empathy, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity can impact students' non-academic development. Teachers who possess these qualities can create a positive and inclusive classroom climate that promotes students' social and emotional development, interpersonal skills, and overall well-being. In terms of experiential background, teachers with prior experience can bring valuable insights, instructional strategies, and real-world examples to the classroom, enriching students' learning experiences and academic achievement.

The findings of this study suggest the need for ongoing dialog and exchange among countries to promote best practices in teacher education and to ensure that teacher candidates are selected based on their ability to meet the diverse needs of students in today's global society. Ultimately, the goal of all teacher education programs is to prepare teachers who are able to facilitate learning, inspire students, and contribute to the development of society. Admission criteria play an important role in this process, and it is therefore critical that they be carefully crafted and evaluated to ensure that they meet the needs of both teacher candidates and the communities they will serve.

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