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IRANIAN EAP PRACTITIONERS' COMPETENCES, PRACTICES, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

Given the importance of teaching methodology in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and professional development (PD) for EAP teachers, this survey examined and explored the differences of the self-adjudged perceptions of EAP practice competences and PD activities of two main groups of Iranian teachers: those with an English language teaching (ELT) background and subject content teachers who teach EAP. A sample of 105 EAP teachers (53 English language teachers and 52 content teachers) responded to two questionnaires: a granulated, 72-item questionnaire exploring competences in a wide variety of aspects of EAP practice and a smaller 19-item questionnaire relating to frequency of participation in PD activities. Additionally, the teacher data sets were triangulated by the use of a 58-item questionnaire completed by 502 Iranian undergraduate students taking EAP courses. The teacher questionnaire findings indicated higher self-adjudged competences by the ELT-background teachers in the areas of receptive and productive skills, grammar and vocabulary, feedback and error correction, and assessment and evaluation. Similarly, the student questionnaires rated those teachers with an ELT background more highly in the same five areas. The implications of the findings for the future development of EAP in Iran in terms of teacher development and further research are then discussed.

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Key words

English for academic purposes (EAP), teachers, teaching competence, professional development, classroom practices, Iran.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English for Academic Purposes (EAP), as an important branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), has traditionally been responsible for teaching “specialized linguistic knowledge and literacy skills” (Pérez-Llantada & Swales, 2017: 42) to prepare tertiary students and researchers for successful communication in academic and research settings. EAP courses subdivide into general EAP courses (EGAP) for students preparing to study in a range of disciplines and specific EAP courses (ESAP) for students preparing to study in a specific discipline. The focus of the research reported here relates to teachers of ESAP courses, who are involved in the preparation of students for discipline-specific academic study (rather than professional practice), but for whom the insights of much of the ESP literature is considered relevant and drawn upon extensively here.

To inform the activities of ESP (and EAP), research to date has addressed a range of areas such as student needs analysis, materials development and evaluation, and discourse analysis (Hyland, 2019). In considering the range of research activities of the allied fields of ESP and EAP, a number of writers note that the focus has been mainly on the two areas of students and materials/textbooks, which are regarded as the essential elements of any language teaching and learning program (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Richards, 1998). Exemplifying this view, a considerable body of ESP research has addressed students and their needs (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016; Hyland, 2019) as well as materials/textbooks (Basturkmen & Bocanegra-Valle, 2018; Stoller, 2016). Similarly, when considering the larger body of EAP research, the literature on EAP teachers (*vis-à-vis* other areas of EAP) is relatively limited (Ding, 2019; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Ding & Campion, 2016). The situation seems to be that issues relating to teachers’ practices, professional development, and needs have been eclipsed by the large body of research on materials and students’ needs (Basturkmen, 2014, 2019). Belcher (2013: 544) even suggests that “the community that ESP [and EAP] professionals know the least about is their own”.

A decade ago, Hamp-Lyons (2011: 100) also decried this lack of focus on the EAP practitioner, asserting that “progress in materials development has not been matched by progress in developing and delivering professional training courses for future teachers of EAP, and a great need still remains in this area”. A recent review article by Nazari (2020) and studies of the bibliometrics of journals in the EAP and ESP fields (Hyland & Jiang, 2021; Liu & Hu, 2021; Riazi, Ghanbar, & Fazel, 2020) also highlighted the limited range of research on EAP teachers. Thus, although such programs are becoming increasingly widespread around the world, it seems that only marginal research attention has been paid to the training, development, and practices of teachers (Basturkmen, 2014, 2019; Belcher, 2013).

Because of the demanding nature of their profession, EAP and ESP teachers play multiple roles beyond classroom teaching (Charles & Pecorari, 2016; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). According to Woodrow (2018), their roles and

responsibilities include needs analysis, course design, materials development, collaboration with subject-matter teachers, analysis of discipline-specific discourse, and course/program evaluation. Similarly, Brown (2016) states that ESP teachers play a central role in developing their field, the four main pillars of which are identified by Anthony (2018) as materials and methods, needs analysis, learning objectives, and evaluation. Yet, despite this “plurality of identities, roles, contexts, and praxis” (Ding & Campion, 2016: 548), to date only a small body of research on teachers has been carried out in a few countries (e.g. Bocanegra-Valle & Basturkmen, 2019; Campion, 2016; Chang, 2017; Li & Ma, 2020; Li & Wang, 2018; Nguyen, Haworth, & Hansen, 2019). Considering the diversity of EAP contexts in inner circle, outer circle, and particularly in expanding circle countries (Ding & Bruce, 2017), further research is required to shed light on, among other things, EAP teachers’ practices, teaching competences, and professional development (PD) activities.

This wider situation of a dearth of EAP (and ESP) practitioner-related research is also reflected in the expanding-circle country context of Iran (Kaivanpanah et al., 2021). Similar to other contexts, an increasing body of research has focused on learner needs as well as on EAP textbooks in several university majors (e.g. Atai & Hejazi, 2019; Atai & Nazari, 2011; Atai & Shoja, 2011; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008; Soodmand Afshar & Movassagh, 2016). However, only a limited number of studies (e.g. Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014; Atai & Nejadghanbar, 2017; Atai & Taherkhani, 2018; Iranmehr, Atai, & Babaii, 2018) have exclusively addressed issues relating to EAP teachers. Therefore, given the situation that EAP and ESP research has remained highly focused on teaching (Anthony, 2018; Hyland & Wong, 2019), the importance of teaching methodology (Hafner & Miller, 2019; Hyland, 2006; Northcott, 2013), and that there is still a paucity of research on EAP teachers’ PD generally (Ding & Bruce, 2017), it is argued here that there is a pressing need in the Iranian context (as elsewhere) to undertake further systematic studies to fill the research gap relating to EAP teachers’ classroom practices, teaching competence, and PD activities.

2. THE STUDY CONTEXT

As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) maintain, contextual differences determine learners’ needs and the appropriate levels of specificity in ESP and EAP programs. In Iran, as an expanding-circle country in the Middle East, mainstream education at tertiary level is delivered in Persian, the country’s official language. Undergraduate students are required to take one general English course, known as English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), as well as a few discipline-based EAP courses, characterized as English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) to become prepared to access textbooks and publications in English during their undergraduate and graduate studies (Tavakoli & Tavakol, 2018). While all EGAP courses are implemented and administered by ELT departments and taught by

English language (EL) teachers, ESAP courses are mostly taught by content teachers and a limited number of content-informed EL teachers (Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014). The focus of the present study is on ESAP teachers. It should be noted that although ESAP courses are included in subject-matter curricula (e.g. chemical engineering, psychology, physical education), the national curriculum does not explicitly state who should teach them (Taherkhani, 2019). Additionally, while EL teachers can benefit from a wide range of PD opportunities and activities, there are unfortunately no well-established teacher training/education programs and PD opportunities for ESAP teachers.

Substantial criticism of the current Iranian EAP system at tertiary level has been expressed concerning, *inter alia*, issues directly related to ESAP teachers and their education/training (Iranmehr et al., 2018). The background to this critique is that there are no formal, established ESAP teacher training programs in Iran. ESAP courses are taught by either content teachers who possess a level of English proficiency or content-informed EL teachers, and there is little or no collaboration or cooperation between the two groups. While this situation is generally well-known, the present study sought to examine more closely the knowledge and practice competences as well as the professional development of these two teacher groups.

Therefore, the study was motivated by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Is there any statistically significant difference between ESAP teachers (content & EL) regarding their beliefs about their ESAP teaching competence?

RQ2: Is there any statistically significant difference between ESAP teachers (content & EL) in terms of their PD activities?

RQ3: Is there any statistically significant difference between ESAP teachers' (content & EL) classroom practices as reported by their students?

3. METHOD

The study is a response to Basturkmen's (2014, 2019) call for more in-depth, empirical research on teachers in a wide variety of contexts, in this case the Iranian context, and specifically the previously highlighted issue of ESAP practitioners. The overall design framework of the study is interpretive, the research style (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) is survey, and the data collection instruments used are fixed-response item questionnaires. The purpose of this survey research was to provide a panoramic overview of the main trends and tendencies in current Iranian ESAP practice by the two main teacher groups. The 'panoramic overview' approach was taken to provide empirical evidence for a structural situation in the wider context of ESAP teaching in Iran. It was considered that, given the nature of the issue under investigation, the research questions asked, and the ethical issues

involved, this ‘big picture’ approach was more appropriate than more granulated research styles such as ethnography or case study.

3.1. Participants

There were two main groups of participants in this study: ESAP teachers and undergraduate students. Specifically, 105 ESAP teachers (53 EL teachers and 52 content teachers) were surveyed for the purposes of the study. The ESAP teacher group included several teachers who taught the students in this study and other teachers chosen via convenience and snowball sampling. The teachers were from several academic majors (N=16) and leading state universities (N=15). Two groups of teachers were identified through the questionnaires for comparative purposes in the analysis – those with an English language teaching background (EL teachers) and subject content teachers who also taught ESAP (content teachers). In addition, a total of 502 undergraduate students taking ESAP courses were chosen through random cluster sampling in the 2018-2019 academic year. To ensure sample representativeness, they were selected from a wide range of majors (N=21) and a large number of leading state universities (N=15). The students were taught by either EL teachers (52.6%, N=264) or content teachers (47.4%, N=238). Table 1 provides a detailed profile of the participants’ demographic information.

ESAP TEACHERS	UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
N = 105	N = 502
Gender: 38.1% female, 61.9% male	Gender: 58% female, 42% male
16 majors: TEFL, Business Administration, Chemical Engineering, Computer Engineering, Educational Psychology, Electrical Engineering, History, Mechanical Engineering, Metallurgy Engineering, Mining Engineering, Petroleum Engineering, Philosophy, Physical Education, Physics, Sociology, Textile Engineering	21 Majors: Business Administration, Chemical Engineering, Computer Engineering, Dentistry, Educational Psychology, Electrical Engineering, History, Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Medicine, Metallurgy Engineering, Midwifery, Mining Engineering, Nursing, Petroleum Engineering, Pharmacy, Philosophy, Physical Education, Physics, Sociology, Textile Engineering
15 universities	15 universities
Age range: Below 30 (4.8%), 30-35 (33.3%), 35-40 (31.4%), over 40 (30.5%)	Age range: 18-22 (84.9%), 22-26 (14.1%), 26-30 (1%)
Degree: Masters (42.9%), PhD (57.1%)	
Teaching experience: below 5 years (45.7%), 5-10 years (36.2%), 10-15 years (10.5%), 15-20 years (3.8%), over 20 years (3.8%)	Taught by EL teachers (N=264) & content teachers (N=238)
EL teachers (N=53) & content teachers (N=52)	

Table 1. Participants’ demographic information

3.2. Instruments

Based on Dörnyei's (2010) steps for questionnaire development, three Likert-scale questionnaires were designed to explore ESAP teachers' teaching competence, PD activities, and classroom practices. The statements in questionnaires were developed based on BALEAP's Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (CFTEAP) and Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) documents (BALEAP, 2008, 2014) as well as the results of preparatory unstructured interviews with EAP and content teachers who participated in a related project (Hejazi, 2021). The questionnaires relating to teaching competences and classroom practices drew on Alexander (2012), Atai and Fatahi-Majd (2014), Atai and Hejazi (2019), Chostelidou, Griva, and Tsakiridou (2009), and Rajabi, Kiany, and Maftoon (2012). In addition, the professional development questionnaire was designed based on previous questionnaires by Jing (2010) and Wichadee (2012). Then, the questionnaires were examined and revised to enhance their clarity, content-relatedness, and format by a reference panel of applied linguistics professors, EAP teachers, and psychometricians (N=8). The questionnaires were originally designed in English, but translated into Persian and back-translated to English with the help of some EAP teachers and translation experts in order to make sure about the quality of the translation. Finally, some additional modifications were undertaken to improve the questionnaires based on a pilot study with representative samples of ESAP teachers and undergraduate students.

Following the common practice for scale development and validation (Hair et al., 2010; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was run in Amos (Version 23) to verify the factor structure of the questionnaires, that is to ensure that the questions were actually measuring the construct that the researchers intended to measure. Higher factor loadings for items indicate that they are suitable to measure the intended construct.

No.	Factor	Item numbers	Alpha	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
1	Receptive skills	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	.90	111.94	58	1.93	.90	.80	.09
2	Productive skills	17-24	.88	15.83	13	1.21	.96	.90	.04
3	ICT	25-28	.79	7.54	2	3.77	.96	.90	.10
4	Grammar & vocabulary	29, 30, 31, 33, 34	.80	1.60	3	.53	.99	.97	0
5	Translation	35-38	.80	.75	1	.75	.99	.96	0
6	Feedback & error correction	42-47	.95	12.97	6	2.16	.96	.90	.10
7	Assessment & evaluation	48-51	.80	1.32	2	.66	.99	.96	0
8	Classroom procedures	39, 40, 41, 52, 53	.83	.38	2	.19	.99	.98	0

9	ESAP syllabus & materials	55, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64	.82	35.22	18	1.95	.93	.90	.09
10	Students' needs	65-72	.92	15.33	11	1.39	.96	.90	.06

Table 2. CFA results and reliability indices of ESAP teachers' teaching competence questionnaire (see Appendix A)

No.	Factor	Item numbers	Alpha	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
1	Observation and assistance from other teachers	1-5	.74	.09	1	.09	1	.99	0
2	Conference participation and research	6-11	.94	2.75	2	1.37	.99	.91	.06
3	Personal development	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19	.75	12.55	10	1.25	.97	.90	.05

Table 3. CFA results and reliability indices of ESAP teachers' PD activities questionnaire (see Appendix B)

No.	Factor	Item numbers	Alpha	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
1	Receptive skills	1-16	.91	168	22	3.00	.95	.90	.06
2	ESAP materials	17-19 & 38	.71	.58	2	.29	.99	.99	0
3	Productive skills	20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27	.87	31.03	11	2.82	.98	.95	.06
4	ICT	28-31	.80	4.80	1	4.80	.99	.95	.08
5	Grammar & vocabulary	32-37	.83	3.21	2	1.60	.99	.97	.03
6	Translation	39-42	.70	4.29	2	2.14	.99	.97	.04
7	Feedback & error correction	46-51	.94	5.80	3	1.93	.99	.97	.04
8	Assessment & evaluation	52-55	.71	1.66	1	1.66	.99	.98	.03
9	Classroom procedures	43-45 & 56-58	.84	7.75	6	1.29	.99	.98	.02

Table 4. CFA results and reliability indices of ESAP teachers' classroom practices questionnaire (see Appendix C)

After removing a few items with factor loadings below 0.3 and making some model modifications, three separate questionnaires were obtained to explore ESAP

teachers' teaching competence (Appendix A), ESAP teachers' PD activities (Appendix B), and students' perceptions of ESAP teachers' classroom practices (Appendix C) with acceptable model fitness indices and internal consistency coefficients. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the CFA results as well as Cronbach's alpha coefficients of reliability for different sub-scales of the questionnaires.

3.3. Procedure

The data collection procedure was conducted in the 2018-2019 academic year. Out of 140 and 625 questionnaires distributed among the ESAP teachers and students, respectively, 105 and 502 were returned in person or via email, which resulted in response rates of 75% and 80%, respectively. The participants were allowed sufficient time to complete the questionnaires in their native language, i.e. Persian. The anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data were guaranteed for the participants. Additionally, the teachers and students provided their informed consent and were informed that their participation was on a voluntary basis. The exclusion criteria were refusal to give informed consent, incomplete questionnaires, and unwillingness to continue the study.

3.4. Design and data analysis

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The study involved the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. The values of skewness and kurtosis did not exceed 2 and 7, respectively; thus, there was no departure from the normality assumption (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995). Independent samples *t* tests were performed to analyze the data. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha coefficients and CFA were used to examine the reliability and construct validity of the questionnaires, respectively.

4. RESULTS

To investigate the findings relating to RQ1, independent samples *t* tests were run to explore any possible statistical differences between ESAP teachers (content and EL) regarding their beliefs about their ESAP teaching competence (Table 5).

No.	Component	Items	Levene's test for equality of variances		EL teachers	Content teachers	t test for equality of means		
			F	Sig.			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Receptive skills	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	.00	.95	34.15	26.92	6.71	103	.00
2	Productive skills	17-24	14.54	.00	19.31	16.55	2.87	92.49	.00
3	ICT	25-28	.90	.34	9.49	9.65	-.38	103	.70
4	Grammar & vocabulary	29, 30, 31, 33, 34	9.13	.00	13.47	10.28	7.57	85.88	.00
5	Translation	35-38	11.06	.00	9.18	9.48	.64	94.89	.52
6	Feedback & error correction	42-47	9.97	.22	14.88	10.30	6.44	91.28	.00
7	Assessment & evaluation	48-51	3.00	.08	9.98	9.32	1.48	103	.14
8	Classroom procedures	39, 40, 41, 52, 53	2.66	.10	12.54	9.57	5.31	103	.00
9	ESAP syllabus & materials	55, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64	.33	.56	18.60	18.23	.47	103	.63
10	Students' needs	65-72	.64	.42	19.39	14.78	5.60	103	.00

Table 5. Results of descriptive statistics, Levene's test, and *t* tests for ESAP teachers' teaching competence (see Appendix A)

As Table 5 shows, EL teachers have statistically significant higher means in different categories such as *receptive skills* ($t(103) = 6.71, p = .00$), *productive skills* ($t(92.49) = 2.87, p = .00$), *grammar and vocabulary* ($t(85.88) = 7.57, p = .00$), *feedback and error correction* ($t(91.28) = 6.44, p = .00$), *classroom procedures* ($t(103) = 5.31, p = .00$), and *students' needs* ($t(103) = 5.60, p = .00$). However, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of *ICT* ($t(103) = -.38, p = .70$), *translation* ($t(94.89) = .64, p = .52$), *assessment and evaluation* ($t(103) = 1.48, p = .14$), and *ESAP syllabus and materials* ($t(103) = .47, p = .63$). It is noteworthy that EL teachers had slightly higher means in *assessment and evaluation* and *ESAP syllabus and materials* but slightly lower means in *ICT* and *translation*.

Similarly, independent samples *t* tests were run to explore statistical differences between ESAP teachers (content and EL) in terms of their PD activities (Table 6).

No.	Component	Items	Levene's test for equality of variances		EL teachers	Content teachers	t-test for equality of means		
			F	Sig.			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Observation & assistance from other teachers	1, 2, 3, 4, & 5	.15	.69	9.49	8.17	3.43	103	.00
2	Conference participation & research	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, & 11	22.21	.00	13.00	7.67	8.42	86.28	.00
3	Personal development	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, & 19	.33	.56	17.39	14.30	5.67	103	.00

Table 6. Results of descriptive statistics, Levene's test, and *t* tests for ESAP teachers' PD activities (see Appendix B)

Table 6 indicates that EL teachers have statistically significant higher means in all three categories of PD activities, namely, *observation and assistance from other teachers* ($t(103) = 3.43, p = .00$), *conference participation and research* ($t(86.28) = 8.42, p = .00$), and *personal development* ($t(103) = 5.67, p = .00$).

For RQ3, independent samples *t* tests were also run to explore any possible statistical differences between ESAP teachers' (content and EL) classroom practices as reported by their students (Table 7).

No.	Component	Items	Levene's test for equality of variances		EL teachers	Content teachers	t test for equality of means		
			F	Sig.			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Receptive skills	1-16	.09	.75	51.65	43.17	7.68	500	.00
2	ESAP materials	17-19 & 38	.46	.49	11.03	9.75	4.01	500	.00
3	Productive skills	20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27	.63	.42	20.68	14.16	11.46	500	.00
4	ICT	28-31	.55	.45	10.82	9.18	4.40	500	.00
5	Grammar & vocabulary	32-37	11.02	.00	23.00	18.75	9.34	465.39	.00
6	Translation	39-42	18.90	.00	11.85	12.35	-1.55	484.72	.12
7	Feedback & error correction	46-51	.16	.68	21.53	12.23	17.50	500	.00
8	Assessment & evaluation	52-55	19.87	.00	14.70	10.47	14.34	438.32	.00

Table 7. Results of descriptive statistics, Levene's test, and *t* tests for ESAP teachers' classroom practices (see Appendix C)

Based on Table 7, EL teachers have statistically significant higher means in different categories, namely, *receptive skills* ($t(500) = 7.68, p = .00$), *ESAP materials* ($t(500) = 4.01, p = .00$), *productive skills* ($t(500) = 11.46, p = .00$), *ICT* ($t(500) = 4.40, p = .00$), *grammar and vocabulary* ($t(465.39) = 9.34, p = .00$), *feedback and error correction* ($t(500) = 17.50, p = .00$), and *assessment and evaluation* ($t(438.32) = 14.34, p = .00$). In addition, although content teachers' mean in *translation* ($M = 12.35$) is higher than EL teachers ($M = 11.85$), this difference is not statistically significant ($t(484.72) = -1.55, p = .12$).

5. DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to address and provide further empirical evidence for a recognized structural issue in the Iranian ESAP practitioner community, specifically divergences between the two ESAP teacher groups of English language and subject content teachers. This goal was achieved by developing overall profiles of the two groups in terms of their teaching competences, participation in PD activities, and classroom practices. In what follows, a comprehensive discussion of the findings is presented. The findings are then used to support the case for further EAP teacher development in a number of areas, which are outlined in the conclusion section.

5.1. ESAP teachers' teaching competences

In relation to the teaching competences of ESAP teachers (RQ1), the questionnaire results showed EL teachers' higher and statistically significant means in *receptive skills*, *productive skills*, *grammar and vocabulary*, *feedback and error correction*, *classroom procedures*, and *students' needs* as well as higher but not statistically significant means in *assessment and evaluation* and *ESAP syllabus and materials*. These findings are in line with Hejazi's (2013) observations and confirm the assertion that content teachers have "insufficient knowledge about English language methodology as well as low levels of competence in the areas of EAP instruction, course design, and needs analysis" (Rajabi et al., 2012: 280). EL teachers' greater competences could possibly be attributed to their higher general English proficiency (GEP) level, familiarity with different language teaching areas, and English language teaching experience (Hejazi, 2021).

5.2. ESAP teachers' PD activities

As to the findings relating to the PD activities of ESAP teachers (RQ2), the questionnaire results revealed that EL teachers had statistically higher means in

observation and assistance from other teachers, conference participation and research, and personal development. This finding seems to indicate that EL teachers place more importance on, and are more actively involved in PD activities, which could have possibly led to their outperformance in this study, as elsewhere (e.g. Rajabi et al., 2012).

In fact, while PD in the field of ELT is fully fledged around the world (Borg, 2011), there is still limited research on EAP teachers' PD (Basturkmen, 2019; Blaj-Ward, 2014) and a limited number of development opportunities in only few countries, e.g. the UK, for EAP teachers. However, as Bocanegra-Valle and Basturkmen (2019) emphasize, it is important for EAP teachers to undertake ongoing professional development. Similarly, Tao and Gao (2018) highlight the importance of creating increased PD activities and opportunities for EL teachers entering the EAP teaching field. As part of this, Blaj-Ward (2015) emphasizes the need for EAP teachers to enhance their 'research literacy' by engaging with theoretical and empirical research on EAP (Bahrami, Hosseini, & Atai, 2019; Davis, 2019) and by conducting small- or large-scale studies on different practical aspects of EAP (Hamp-Lyons, 2018; Harwood, 2017).

5.3. ESAP teachers' classroom practices

When considering ESAP teachers' classroom practices (RQ3), the statistically significant higher means of EL teachers in the areas of *receptive skills, ESAP materials, productive skills, ICT, grammar and vocabulary, feedback and error correction, and assessment and evaluation* could indicate their higher potential and readiness to teach ESAP courses in the Iranian context. However, it is the case that most ESAP courses are taught by content teachers in Iranian universities, which has been the object of criticism of previous studies (e.g. Tavakoli & Tavakol, 2018). The results of the present study are in line with past research indicating the higher performance of EL teachers in several areas, such as the implementation of the objectives of EAP instruction, EAP teaching methodology, course design, needs analysis, classroom management, and assessment (e.g. Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014; Atai & Taherkhani, 2018; Davoudi-Mobarakeh, Eslami-Rasekh, & Barati, 2014; Rajabi et al., 2012). These differential findings between the instructional practices of EL and content teachers could be attributed to their contrasting cognitions on key EAP issues such as EAP goals, differences between EAP and English for General Purposes (EGP), and EAP teachers' qualifications and roles (Atai, Babaii, & Lotfi Gaskaree, 2017).

Given the nature of EAP as highly focused on teaching (Anthony, 2018; Hyland & Wong, 2019), the significance of teaching methodology in EAP (Hafner & Miller, 2019; Hyland, 2006; Northcott, 2013), and the absence of EAP teacher education programs in Iran (Iranmehr et al., 2018), it seems that EL teachers could

be considered better candidates to teach EAP courses thanks to their generic ELT qualifications and previous language teaching experience.

The statistically non-significant difference between the two ESAP teacher groups in *translation* might be justified in view of the fact that *translation* constitutes an essential part of EAP classes in Iran to the extent that not only content teachers but also EL teachers implement such activities in their classes, which has received intense criticism in past research (Tavakoli & Tavakol, 2018).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The present study addressed the gap identified as the “little commentary literature concerning ESP [*and EAP*] teaching methodologies and teaching/learning activities” (Basturkmen, 2020: 6) by developing an overview of Iranian ESAP teachers’ teaching competences, classroom practices, and PD activities. The findings suggest that EL teachers may be better positioned to teach ESAP courses than content teachers. Specific issues that emerged relating to the content teachers of ESAP were: low levels of GEP, insufficient familiarity with ESAP teaching skills, and excessive focus on translation in ESAP classes, as reported elsewhere (e.g. Rajabi et al., 2012).

However, despite the results of the present study and previous research indicating EL teachers’ greater competence levels and readiness to teach ESAP courses in Iran, the reality is that most ESAP courses are offered by content departments that select who should teach them, i.e. a content or EL teacher, a situation that has consequently led to the preference for content teachers to teach the mandatory ESAP course(s) relating to their subject area. The situation is similar to Japan and some other Asian countries (Fukui, Noguchi, & Watanabe, 2009), where content teachers are generally preferred since content knowledge “take[s] precedence over knowledge about language learning and teaching” (Anthony, 2011: 2).

This situation suggests that the EAP profession in Iran can be considered a ‘peripheral support system’ (Ding & Bruce, 2017), a perception that negatively affects the position and identity of EAP teachers and EAP departments. Supporting this view of the marginal position of EAP in the Iranian higher education system is the study by Iranmehr et al. (2018), which suggests that content departments lack criteria for the selection, training, and evaluation of EAP teachers. Alongside this, the numbers of EAP departments are insufficient and, where they do exist, they have a perceived lower status. Generally, a lack of accountability and efficiency in the delivery of EAP are two inevitable outcomes, which can lead to marginalization of EAP in general and EAP teachers in particular in the Iranian context.

The present study used a cross-sectional survey design and self-reported questionnaires to provide an overview of the current EAP teacher situation in Iran. However, to build upon this study, future research could employ a longitudinal

design and gather data through triangulation of other data collection techniques (e.g. focus-group interview, observation, life history narrative, and ethnography) and draw upon a wider range of sources (e.g. heads of EAP departments, policy makers, and vice deans of educational affairs in universities). It should also be noted that the study was conducted in the context of tertiary education in Iran, an expanding-circle country with its own unique cultural, educational, and social characteristics; thus, care should be taken in generalizing the findings to other contexts.

7. IMPLICATIONS

Implications of the findings of this study, along with those of previous research, suggest the need to invest in EL teachers via pre-service and in-service EAP teacher training programs/workshops, which is in line with BALEAP's (2008: 2) assumption for employing teachers with "post-experience training in the teaching of English and experience of studying at postgraduate level". For example, similar to the Turkish context (Kırkgöz, 2019), pre-service EAP teacher education programs could be designed and implemented for ESAP teachers in Iran. As a first step, it is suggested that more EAP/ESP modules be included in TESOL programs in Iran to address the real demands and needs of EAP teachers in universities. Such modules could refresh EL teachers' knowledge about practical aspects of language teaching, learning, and testing with a special focus on EAP. Additionally, some elective content modules on different subject-matter domains, such as medicine or engineering, could be presented to cater for teachers' need for disciplinary content knowledge and address the particular teaching and learning methodologies in different subject-matter domains, e.g. problem solving in English for medical purposes (Basturkmen, 2010). This type of development could be a first step to establishing MA programs for EAP similar to those in the University of Leeds (<https://www.leeds.ac.uk>) and the University of Nottingham (<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk>) in the UK.

To underpin the implementation of these types of improvements, it is recommended that the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology invest more in EAP research that supports and informs teacher development. Given the fact that the training needs of non-native EAP teachers, who constitute a large number of the global EAP teachers' community, are different from those in countries where English is the L1 (Hamp-Lyons, 2011), further research should be undertaken to design a local competency framework for PD and training of Iranian EAP teachers, similar to those developed in other contexts (Khamis, 2019; Pham & Ta, 2016), or localize the CFTEAP (BALEAP, 2008, 2014). These developments could significantly contribute to establishing objective criteria for the recruitment and development of EAP teachers in the Iranian context. Additionally, considering the importance of close cooperation and collaboration among different stakeholders as a 'social need' (Basturkmen, 2019) for the successful

implementation of EAP programs (Belcher, 2009; Hall, 2013; Hyland, 2019), further research is needed to investigate potential institutional and cultural barriers to the advancement of the EAP field and propose practical solutions to the current issues facing the field, some of which have been raised here.

Given EAP teachers' "plurality of interrelated necessities, concerns, expectations, lacks, and wants" (Bocanegra-Valle & Basturkmen, 2019: 144), future studies could also explore the possible effect of teaching experience, qualifications, and PD on EL teachers' multi-faceted professional identity struggles while entering the EAP field. Considering the marginalization of EAP teachers in Iran and many other contexts like Canada (MacDonald, 2016), further research should systematically examine the Iranian ELT national curriculum as well as the actual practices and policies of higher education institutes to discover the major underlying reasons for this phenomenon and offer practical solutions to improve this situation.

EAP associations have considerable potential "for development of the knowledge base of the field, for practitioner formation, and for developing a collective voice for articulating and raising awareness of current issues, innovations, and concerns within a community, and EAP more widely" (Bruce, 2021: 33). Therefore, as one way of improving the status of EAP in the current Iranian higher education system, more national attention should be devoted to EAP as an important branch of English language teaching by organizing associations (similar to The Norwegian Forum for EAP and The China EAP Association) as well as EAP-specific events (similar to conferences held by BALEAP and the European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes). Finally, it is suggested that the Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes (IJEAP) take significant measures to draw and direct EAP researchers' attention to different under-researched EAP areas such as teacher development by running special issues and announcing call for papers similar to those published as 'Researching EAP Practices' in the Journal of English for Academic Purposes (JEAP).

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Appendix A

ESAP Teachers' Teaching Competences

Age: Gender: Major: University:

ESAP teaching experience: (years)

Background: TEFL subject-matter (If you are from a subject-matter background, please mention your major)

Dear ESAP teacher,

Please kindly indicate your present level of ability in the following areas. Thank you very much for your effective cooperation.

No.	SKILL	NEED IMPROVEMENT (%)	PROFICIENT (%)	VERY PROFICIENT (%)
1.	Activating students' subject-matter background knowledge before reading the texts			
2.	Teaching how to preview a text			
3.	Teaching how to predict or guess the text meaning			
4.	Teaching how to critically evaluate technical information in written texts			
5.	Teaching how to take notes while reading technical texts			
6.	Teaching how to scan EAP texts			
7.	Teaching how to skim EAP texts			
8.	Teaching how to guess the meaning of unknown words from context while reading			
9.	Teaching how to get the text main idea			
10.	Teaching how to draw conclusions and understand implied meanings while reading			
11.	Teaching how to predict content while listening			
12.	Teaching how to listen for main ideas while listening			
13.	Teaching how to pay attention to transitional signals while listening			
14.	Teaching how to infer the meaning of unknown words while listening			
15.	Teaching how to summarize information while listening			
16.	Teaching students how to pay attention to details in listening			
17.	Familiarizing students with how to write abstracts			
18.	Familiarizing students with how to write different parts of a research paper			
19.	Teaching how to write short technical essays			
20.	Teaching essential skills for correspondence with subject-matter specialists, journal editors, etc.			
21.	Teaching how to write a professional CV in English			
22.	Teaching correct pronunciation			
23.	Providing students with opportunities for delivering lectures in English			
24.	Providing opportunities for students to speak in English in class			
25.	Using slides and video projector			
26.	Teaching students how to use/search scientific academic databases			
27.	Using ICT and multimedia in EAP classes			
28.	Using electronic sources (e.g. dictionaries) in class			

29.	Teaching the required grammar for understanding technical academic texts			
30.	Teaching collocations			
31.	Teaching general English vocabulary			
32.	Teaching subject-related vocabulary (technical terms)			
33.	Focusing on the structure of technical terms (e.g. prefixes, suffixes, etc.) to facilitate learning them			
34.	Teaching how to guess the meaning of unknown technical words			
35.	Providing students with comments on their translation			
36.	Assigning texts for translation			
37.	Translating texts into Persian			
38.	Translating texts into English			
39.	Explaining technical terms in English			
40.	Using English as the main medium of instruction in class			
41.	Using English to give feedback to students' performance in class			
42.	Providing feedback on students' speaking fluency			
43.	Providing feedback on students' speaking accuracy			
44.	Providing feedback on students' writing fluency			
45.	Providing feedback on students' writing accuracy			
46.	Providing feedback on students' writing organization			
47.	Providing feedback on students' use of different structures			
48.	Using different assessment and evaluation techniques			
49.	Giving mid-term examination			
50.	Giving Quizzes			
51.	Asking questions orally in the beginning or during the class period			
52.	Choosing appropriate methods for teaching EAP like pair/group work, role play, group discussion, etc.			
53.	Involving students in classroom activities			
54.	Assigning homework			
55.	Using content-related video/audio clips			
56.	Using up-to-date textbooks (published in the past 10 years) in teaching reading			
57.	Using up-to-date research papers (published in the past 10 years) in teaching reading			
58.	Introducing technical dictionaries and teaching students how to use them			
59.	Designing syllabus for EAP courses			
60.	Producing materials for teaching EAP			
61.	Adapting materials for teaching EAP			
62.	Choosing authentic materials for teaching EAP			
63.	Choosing relevant content for EAP teaching			
64.	Developing appropriate activities/exercises for EAP materials used in the class			
65.	Identifying students' target situation needs in reading			
66.	Identifying students' target situation needs in writing			
67.	Identifying students' target situation needs in listening			
68.	Identifying students' target situation needs in speaking			
69.	Addressing students' target situation needs in reading			
70.	Addressing students' target situation needs in writing			
71.	Addressing students' target situation needs in listening			
72.	Addressing students' target situation needs in speaking			

Appendix B

ESAP Teachers' Professional Development Activities

Dear ESAP teacher,

Please indicate how often you have performed the following professional development activities in the last 12 months. Thank you for your kind attention.

No.	Professional Development Activities	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Always (%)
1.	Observing other EAP classes			
2.	Attending an EAP teaching demonstration of an expert			
3.	Asking colleagues to observe your teaching and offer feedback			
4.	Discussing or sharing knowledge related to teaching ELT/EAP with colleagues in informal dialogues			
5.	Discussing or sharing knowledge related to EAP teachers' professional development with colleagues			
6.	Attending national/international conferences/seminars related to EAP/ELT			
7.	Attending national/international workshops related to EAP/ELT			
8.	Attending national/international short courses related to EAP/ELT			
9.	Doing research concerning ELT/EAP			
10.	Publishing papers in academic journals related to EAP/ELT			
11.	Presenting a paper in national/international conferences related to language teaching or EAP			
12.	Membership in national/international associations related to ELT/EAP			
13.	Reading professional textbooks, journals, or research papers related to EAP/ELT			
14.	Searching for knowledge related to teaching general or academic English on the Internet/books			
15.	Searching for knowledge related to assessing general or academic English on the Internet/books			
16.	Regular review of one's own EAP teaching			
17.	Taking part in general English classes			
18.	Downloading subject-matter lectures from YouTube, etc.			
19.	Learning how to use new technologies in EAP classes			

Appendix C

ESAP Teachers' Classroom Practices

Age: Major: University: Gender:

Does your teacher have a TEFL background? Yes No

Dear student,

The present study aims to explore ESAP teachers' classroom practices. Please kindly indicate how frequently your ESAP teacher performs the following activities in your ESAP class. Your answers will be completely confidential. In case you are interested in the final results of this study, please provide us with your email address. Thank you very much for your effective cooperation.

No.	SKILL	NEVER (%)	SELDOM (%)	SOMETIMES (%)	OFTEN (%)	ALWAYS (%)
1.	Activating students' subject-matter background knowledge before reading the texts					
2.	Teaching how to preview a text					
3.	Teaching how to predict or guess the text meaning					
4.	Teaching how to critically evaluate technical information in written texts					
5.	Teaching how to take notes while reading technical texts					
6.	Teaching how to scan EAP texts					
7.	Teaching how to skim EAP texts					
8.	Teaching how to guess the meaning of unknown words from context while reading					
9.	Teaching how to get the text main idea					
10.	Teaching how to draw conclusions and understand implied meanings while reading					
11.	Teaching how to predict content while listening					
12.	Teaching how to listen for main ideas while listening					
13.	Teaching how to pay attention to transitional signals while listening					
14.	Teaching how to infer the meaning of unknown words while listening					
15.	Teaching how to summarize information while listening					
16.	Teaching students how to pay attention to details in listening					
17.	Using content-related video/audio clips					
18.	Using up-to-date textbooks (published in the past 10 years) in teaching reading					
19.	Using up-to-date research papers (published in the past 10 years) in teaching reading					
20.	Familiarizing students with how to write abstracts					
21.	Familiarizing students with how to write different parts of a research paper					
22.	Teaching how to write short technical essays					
23.	Teaching essential skills for correspondence with subject-matter specialists, journal editors, etc.					
24.	Teaching how to write a professional CV in English					
25.	Teaching correct pronunciation					
26.	Providing students with opportunities for delivering lectures in English					
27.	Providing opportunities for students to speak in English in class					
28.	Using slides & video projector					

29.	Teaching students how to use/search scientific academic databases					
30.	Using ICT and multimedia in EAP classes					
31.	Using electronic sources (e.g. dictionaries) in class					
32.	Teaching the required grammar for understanding technical academic texts					
33.	Teaching collocations					
34.	Teaching general English vocabulary					
35.	Teaching subject-related vocabulary (technical terms)					
36.	Focusing on the structure of technical terms (e.g. prefixes, suffixes, etc.) to facilitate learning them					
37.	Teaching how to guess the meaning of unknown technical words					
38.	Introducing technical dictionaries and teaching students how to use them					
39.	Providing students with comments on their translation					
40.	Assigning texts for translation					
41.	Translating texts into Persian					
42.	Translating texts into English					
43.	Explaining technical terms in English					
44.	Using English as the main medium of instruction in class					
45.	Using English to give feedback to students' performance in class					
46.	Providing feedback on students' speaking fluency					
47.	Providing feedback on students' speaking accuracy					
48.	Providing feedback on students' writing fluency					
49.	Providing feedback on students' writing accuracy					
50.	Providing feedback on students' writing organization					
51.	Providing feedback on students' use of different structures					
52.	Using different assessment and evaluation techniques					
53.	Giving mid-term examination					
54.	Giving quizzes					
55.	Asking questions orally in the beginning or during the class period					
56.	Choosing appropriate methods for teaching EAP like pair/group work, role play, group discussion, etc.					
57.	Involving students in classroom activities					
58.	Assigning homework					