

# *Exploring EAP teachers' expertise: reflections on practice, pedagogy and professional development*

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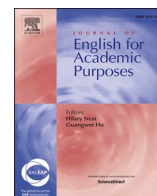
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# Exploring EAP teachers' expertise: Reflections on practice, pedagogy and professional development

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## ABSTRACT

The last 10–15 years has seen significant change in the ways in which English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is labelled and positioned within higher education institutions in the U.K. (Hyland, 2018). EAP teachers are often viewed and treated as a uniform group even though they work under a number of often interchangeable and locally specific titles, deploying their teaching expertise across a range of different settings. Despite such generic perceptions of EAP teachers and teaching, little is known about what EAP teachers see as central to their profession, what constitutes EAP teaching expertise, and how this expertise is gained and enhanced. This paper reports on a mixed-methods design study that sought an emic perspective on what EAP teachers consider as their expertise and what opportunities they have to develop professionally. Drawing on 116 questionnaires and 15 interviews with EAP teachers the data gives voice to EAP practitioners, which has often been missing from research in the field (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Initial findings highlight issues including the types of training and development colleagues feel they need and what they receive, where EAP professional knowledge and expertise is located and the position of EAP knowledge within the broader academy.

## 1. Introduction

With the fast development of EAP as an independent field (Hamp-Lyons, 2011) and a well-established industry over the past two decades (Ding & Campion, 2016), EAP teachers have become important players in academia in the UK (Hyland, 2018). Their central role in engaging students in the world of academic English and preparing them for the academic practices they will be involved in during their studies has been recognised by scholars (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Despite the centrality of their role in the field of EAP, there is little research investigating EAP teachers in terms of background and qualifications or their views and beliefs about their professional practice (Ding & Bruce, 2017). EAP teachers are often viewed and treated as a uniform group even though they work under a number of different titles that are often overlapping, interchangeable and locally specific, with their teaching expertise spread across a range of different settings within and across the academy. Despite such generic perceptions about EAP teachers and teaching, little is known about what EAP teachers see as central to their profession, what constitutes EAP teaching expertise, and how this expertise is gained and enhanced. Expertise, defined as 'knowing, acting and being of experts' (Tsui, 2009a, p. 190) and as a dynamic process that develops over time (Tsui, 2003) is an under-researched area of EAP. So far, little research has been conducted to understand how EAP

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teachers perceive their own expertise or how their professionalism develops over time. This is a gap the current paper aims to help fill. Adopting a teaching expertise perspective (Johnson, 2005; Tsui, 2009a) and situating our work in the area of teacher cognition (Borg, 2015), we aim to understand and provide evidence for what EAP teachers consider as the expertise in their profession and what opportunities they have to develop professionally. In order to do this, we give voice to EAP practitioners, which has often been missing from research in the field (Ding & Bruce, 2017).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. EAP and EAP practitioners

Several studies have aimed at exploring and identifying the position of EAP and EAP teachers. While there are different views about whether EAP is a sub-discipline of applied linguistics, English language education or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (See Gillett, 2011; Ding & Campion, 2016; Ding & Bruce, 2017), there is common consensus that EAP is “a legitimate academic discipline in which research and publication are component parts, integrated with teaching” (Davis, 2019, p. 72). The fact that EAP is considered a ‘specialist, theory- and research-informed branch of English language and literacy education’ (Ding & Bruce, 2017, p. 53) indicates that EAP teachers/practitioners are a specialist group of academics who provide language and literacy education.

Davis (2019) argues that the term ‘practitioner’ more appropriately defines this profession as their practice goes beyond teaching to include the wider context of their profession from identifying students’ needs to facilitating the relationship between students and their subject/content teachers. Despite the consensus about both EAP being a field and the scope of EAP practitioners’ work, there is less certainty/transparency about the position of EAP practitioners in universities. Research in this area (Charles & Pecorari, 2015; Davis, 2019; Ding & Bruce, 2017) suggests that EAP practitioners’ academic status and teaching and research roles vary, quite considerably, across different contexts, leading to ambiguity about who EAP practitioners are and what roles and responsibilities they hold. The variation, although largely influenced by educational systems and cultural contexts, can usually be observed in a single educational culture. For example, in the UK higher education, variations exist across institutions in terms of EAP practitioners’ academic status, educational background, qualifications required, and opportunities for development and promotion. There is evidence, for example, to suggest that while EAP is recognised as a distinct field of study in British universities, many of the teachers move from teaching General English to EAP (Campion, 2016), and routes that allow practitioners to move into the profession, are most often ‘informal and ad hoc’ (Alexander, 2007, p. 1).

Most EAP teachers in the UK context, will typically hold an advanced language teaching diploma such as the Diploma in English Language Teaching (DELTA) with universities often requiring applicants to also hold a Master’s degree in TESOL or a related field, though few of these have an EAP component (Stapleton & Shao, 2018; Ding & Campion, 2016). Over recent years BALEAP (BALEAP: the global forum for EAP professionals) has positioned itself as the dominant professional body for the development of EAP and is increasingly influencing the ways in which EAP is conceptualised within the UK. It has established the Teaching English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) (BALEAP, 2014) which offers a series of pathways for individuals to continue with their EAP professional development, and although this is positive, some limitations of the current scheme have been highlighted (Ding & Campion, 2016). Despite not universally considered to be an EAP-relevant qualification in terms of content (Campion, 2016), the DELTA/Diploma qualification is often considered to be a marker of good classroom practice, for example classroom management and lesson planning. This means the reliance on these qualifications indicates something of a gap in the professional development, and/or the professional identity of EAP teachers.

### 2.2. EAP teacher cognition

The importance of teacher cognition and its impact on teacher practice has been known for a long time (See Lortie, 1975; Woods, 1996; Breen et al., 2001). Teacher cognition, or “what teachers know, think, and believe and how these relate to what teachers do” (Borg & Burns, 2008, p. 457) has been of interest to the field of language education as researching cognition is identified as an effective way to understand teachers’ practice. Borg (2009, p. 163) argues that ‘we cannot make adequate sense of teachers’ experiences of learning to teach without examining the unobservable mental dimension of this learning experience’. Research in this area has provided a strong and almost “uncontested view” (Borg, 2009, p. 166) that there is a strong relationship between teacher cognition and practice, with some (Borg & Burns, 2008; Phipps & Borg, 2009) arguing that teachers’ core beliefs are the most influential factor in shaping teachers’ instructional decisions. This relationship, although it may look linear and straightforward, is shown to be highly complex and dynamic as teaching experience and cognition interact with one another as teachers’ experiences develop (Borg, 2009, 2013). Research has also highlighted factors influencing this relationship including context, prior learning experience and opportunities for development. A significant contribution of teacher cognition research has been providing an insight into the process of both becoming a teacher and developing professionally as a teacher. In this study, while we are interested in both these perspectives, our main focus is on the latter, that is, how EAP practitioners develop professionally as they practise their profession every day.

While research on teacher cognition among in-service/practicing teachers has focused on a range of diverse aspects of teaching, it has been predominantly concerned about teachers’ views, beliefs and thoughts that inform teachers’ practice (Borg, 2009). An important branch of this body of research has examined the opportunities for teacher professional development (PD). PD course/s/activities are commonly known as opportunities that enable teachers to learn new ideas and develop knowledge and skills (Johnson, 2009; Ur, 2019). PD is typically anticipated to result in some kind of teacher learning reflected in a *change* in teacher understanding, knowledge and/or beliefs. PD is therefore assumed as a learning opportunity that will in turn lead to a *change* in teaching practice

(Desimone, 2009; Sokel, 2019). While some (e.g. Borg, 2013) argue that PD is limited in providing a potential for sustainable change in teachers' practice, most researchers (e.g., Borg, 2013; Johnson, 2009) agree that PD is a rich source of learning which may result in a change in cognition and/or practice over a period of time. Other researchers (e.g., Cimer, Cakir, & Cimer, 2010; Paran, 2017; Ur, 2019) argue that providing PD even in the form of a short-term intervention has direct implications for teacher cognition and practice. Despite such debates about whether PD results in change or how long the change lasts, there is little disagreement about the important role of PD in teachers' development and in enabling them to become professionals in their fields. In the field of EAP, there is little research evidence to suggest what PD is available to teachers and in what ways it can help teachers become professional in their fields. This study aims to provide an insight into this rarely researched aspect of EAP.

### 2.3. Expertise and professionalism in teaching EAP

Our interest in teacher professionalism and expertise originates from questions raised in the literature about the distinctiveness of EAP as a professional practice. It is known that many EAP teachers have moved from neighbouring professions such as teaching general English to EAP, and as such they face specific challenges when working as an EAP practitioner (Alexander, 2012; Campion, 2016). It is also known that in making such transitions, most teachers have had to obtain new educational or professional qualifications that would predictably prepare them for their professional practice. What remains unknown is what kind of training and support they receive in the job to give them the opportunity to become a professional EAP practitioner or to develop expertise in teaching EAP (Campion, 2016). This is in contrast with the more established fields of language teaching (e.g., TESOL), in which a more long-standing history in educating practitioners and providing them with opportunities for PD can be observed (Borg, 2011; Farrell, 2012). Before providing an overview of research in EAP teacher expertise and professionalism, it is necessary to define and discuss the two terms.

Expertise in this paper, following from Tsui (2009b, p. 422) is perceived as "the distinctive qualities" of successful EAP teachers that distinguish them not only from novice teachers, but also from those who have made the transition from neighbouring disciplines and which may lead them to feel challenged by many principles and practices of teaching EAP. Expertise in teacher education can be seen from varying perspectives, including "a state of superior performance achieved after a number of years of experience and practice" (Tsui, 2009b, p. 422). In our study, however, we are interested in the concept of expertise from the teachers' own perspective and we are keen to know whether such views are linked with both their background and qualifications as well as opportunities for PD. We take a process-based approach to understanding expertise where expertise is perceived as "a process of continuous search for excellence, in which practitioners work at the edge of their competence" (Tsui, 2011, p. 32).

The second important term to define here is the concept of professionalism. Leung (2009, p. 49) defines professionalism as a term regularly used to refer to "practitioners' knowledge, skills and conduct". At the core of the concept lies important questions such as what teachers should know, what skills and abilities they should bring to their practice, and how they should carry out their teaching. Leung (2009) considers professionalism to be of two types: *sponsored* versus *individual professionalism*. In his classification, *sponsored professionalism* denotes an "institutionally endorsed and publicly heralded" concept presented by an institution on behalf of all teachers. *Individual professionalism*, in contrast, refers to individual teachers' developing a social and political notion of professionalism (Leung, 2009, pp. 49–50). Leung (2009) argues that English language teaching programmes should provide teachers with opportunities in which they can create a balance between the two.

This brief introduction demonstrates the complex and multidimensional concept of professionalism and the key questions it raises about teachers' knowledge, skills and conduct and the relationship between them. Professionalism is undoubtedly a more complex phenomenon in the field of EAP as it is a relatively new and inherently diverse discipline. To shed light on the complex interaction between knowledge, skills and conduct in EAP, BALEAP (2008) introduced a framework in which, following Aitken (1998), competency was defined as 'the technical skills and professional capabilities that a teacher needs to bring to a position in order to fulfil its functions completely' (BALEAP, 2008, p. 1). The framework aims at providing an outline of what knowledge, skills and capabilities new EAP teachers should bring to the job and how they can expand their knowledge and skills to develop professionally. For example, according to the framework:

Practitioners are expected to demonstrate a systematic understanding of the main theoretical areas of a discipline and critical awareness of current issues and problems. They should be able to exercise independent initiative to make complex decisions, plan tasks or deal with problems in the absence of complete or consistent information. They should show a commitment to continue to develop professionally (BALEAP Competency Framework, 2008, p. 1).

The BALEAP competency framework was originally developed on the concept of *individual professionalism* as it emerged from individual teachers' views (responding to a survey in 2005–6). However, in its current form it serves as *sponsored professionalism* in Leung's (2009) terms as it is institutionally endorsed and publicly advocated. The study we are reporting here is aimed at investigating professionalism from an individual perspective, but we are aware that teachers may refer to the sponsored professionalism in terms of their expectations. Therefore, the results may provide us with an opportunity to compare issues related to both types of professionalism.

### 2.4. A summary of research on professional development and expertise in EAP

While there is ample research on specific characteristics of EAP teaching and learning, there is little research on EAP teachers' professional development and expertise (Ding, 2019; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Ding & Campion, 2016; Kaivanpanah et al., 2021). Ding and Campion (2016, p. 548) have highlighted the need for research in this area by arguing that despite the 'plurality of identities, roles,

contexts, and praxis' in EAP, there is very little research in this area to stipulate the details of this diversity, while [Blaj-Ward \(2014, p. 113\)](#) sees a 'dearth of literature on EAP professional development', which clearly suggests a need for more understanding of this area.

One of the few studies conducted in this area is [Kaivanpanah et al. \(2021\)](#) who have examined teaching competencies and professional development needs among 105 EAP teachers in Iran. Their study was particularly interested in language skill areas focusing on teachers' self-reported beliefs about their strengths and areas of development. Drawing on their data collected through questionnaires and interviews, the authors observed that most teachers considered themselves competent in teaching academic reading and translation, and were able to identify their needs in developing expertise in listening and writing skills. An important finding of the study is that the teachers were aware of their needs, but the employers were not providing PD opportunities to meet those needs. The authors have called for more research in this area.

### 3. Methodology

As highlighted above, this paper is driven by an interest in better understanding the different types of professional development (PD) that UK-based EAP teachers engage with and whether, and to what extent, this mirrors their own views on what they would like or think they should be engaging in. We are interested in this not only in terms of what it tells us about current PD practices within the field but also in terms of how it can inform future directions and opportunities for PD. As such, we address the following research questions:

- 1) What forms of Professional Development do EAP teachers receive and what do they want?
- 2) What characterises current EAP Professional Development practices?
- 3) Where might EAP Professional Development go in the future?

A mixed-methods design and an emic perspective are employed in this study in order to give voice to EAP practitioners who we know have not been well represented in the field ([Ding & Bruce, 2017](#)). The data reported on here are part of a larger project in which we conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 EAP teachers from a wide range of Higher Education Institutions in the UK and surveyed 171 EAP teachers from around the world. Given what we know about the diversity and scope of practice and practitioners that is subsumed under the heading of 'EAP', this larger project was driven by an interest in gaining a better understanding of current EAP practitioners in terms of their professional practices, development and experiences. For the purposes of this paper, we draw from the interview data and specifically from the questionnaire data provided by the 116 UK-based EAP practitioners and as they were the largest group of practitioners from one particular area, the paper is written from a UK perspective. The data were collected over a number of months between 2017 and 2018. We were all involved in conducting the interviews as well in designing, piloting and disseminating the questionnaire.

#### 3.1. Semi-structured interviews

15 teachers participated in semi-structured interviews that took place during 2017–2018. The main goal of these interviews was to explore participants' routes into EAP and what they felt are the necessary qualities, characteristics and professional knowledge EAP practitioners need to have and develop (see [Appendix A](#) for the interview questions). While the focus of the interviews was oriented towards writing (for further discussion see [Costley et al., 2020](#)), many of the questions invited participants to talk about their training and development as an EAP teacher. 13 of the 15 interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 15 and 60 min each. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed and the authors all conducted between three and five interviews each. Two participants, who were unable to meet in person but who were keen to participate, were emailed the interview questions and responded in writing. At the time of the interviews, our participants (6 males and 9 females) had all been teaching for between 13 and 36 years and had been specifically teaching EAP for between 5 and 20 years.

#### 3.2. Questionnaires

In addition to the 15 teacher interviews, we employed a questionnaire to discover more about how EAP teachers described their practice(s). Based on themes that emerged from the teacher interviews as well as from the literature (e.g. [Ding & Bruce, 2017](#)), the questionnaire was divided into five broad sections which included a biographical section as well as sections on teachers' understanding of EAP, their experiences of and attitudes towards professional development, their views on the challenges of being an EAP practitioner, as well as their views and experiences on teaching writing (see [Appendix B](#)). The questionnaire comprised 41 questions: 19 closed questions and 22 open-answer questions prompting the participants to provide free text answers. While such a high number of open-ended questions may be less common in questionnaire designs ([Dornyei, 2007](#)), we made this choice in order to give respondents as much opportunity as possible to share their experiences in their own words. After piloting the questionnaire, we adopted a snowball technique to collect participants by sending the research instrument to colleagues and various professional bodies that are connected to EAP teaching such as The European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW), BALEAP: the global forum for EAP professionals and the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL).

### 3.3. Data analysis

Following a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), the data handling was an iterative process involving cycles of time working in the data and in discussion with each other and the research literature (see also Baralt, 2011). With regard to handling and analysing the data we adopted a complementary process for both the interview and questionnaire data. We collected all the answers to questions relating to professional development that were open-ended and qualitative in nature. The first round of coding was led by one team member who worked through the data coding the responses to each question separately. When this first round of initial/open coding (Friedman, 2012) was complete the codes were shared with the second coder who went through all of the codes to check for agreement and disagreement. While there was close agreement between coders it was still a multi-step process in terms of finalising the codes. The next stage was to revisit the coded data to identify patterns and themes within each of these main codes allowing us to move to the next stage of our analytical work that involved working with descriptive statistics to identify and present patterns.

### 3.4. Participants

In total, 171 teachers from 27 different countries responded to the questionnaire demonstrating the current increasing global reach of EAP. Of these 171 respondents, 116 were teaching in the UK (either full or part-time) and it is this group who form the data for this paper. The large number of respondents working in the UK may be due to the fact that the researchers are based there and that we used both the BALEAP and BAAL listservs to recruit participants.

One of the aims of this study is to discover more about what it means to work as an EAP teacher, especially as there is significant variation in what the role actually means and does (Ding & Bruce, 2017). This lack of homogeneity can be seen in the wide range of the job titles from the participants in our study. From our 116 participants 81 different job titles/posts were given within which only 27 participants actually included a reference to EAP in their job title such as EAP Course Tutor; EAP Lecturer or EAP Manager. Around 20% of the participants (25) reported holding some sort of management role such as programme leader, director, coordinator or head with many of these sharing both a management and teaching role. 92 of the participants' job titles can be described predominantly as being related to 'teaching' but even here different terminology is used (See Appendix C for most common job titles). Such diversity raises interesting questions about what the differences are in these roles, identities, contracts and possibilities of progression for teachers, tutors, lecturers or fellows. This myriad of titles highlights not just the different contexts that EAP practitioners work in at the university but also how they operate and are seen to operate. For example, 26 of the participants had the word 'lecturer' in their title (Associate Lecturer (2); EAP Lecturer (7); Lecturer (3) and Senior Lecturer (13)), while there was one associate professor and one assistant professor of English language suggesting that these roles may well allow access to such things as promotion and funding, which is not always the case for many other job titles of teachers in this study (See Appendix D for full list of job titles).

The majority of those who participated in the study were experienced teachers with all but one of them having taught for more than 6 years. With respect to this EAP teaching experience, 64 of them (around 55%) had worked in EAP teaching for more than 10 years (see Table 1 below). This suggests that in terms of participants in this study, this is a group of experienced teachers who are well-positioned and equipped to discuss their work and who are also likely to be aware of and possibly belong to professional development groups such as BALEAP.

As may be expected, there was a broad range with respect to how the 116 participants described their qualifications, with all but one of them, who 'learned on the job', possessing either a Certificate, Diploma, Masters, Doctorate or a combination of some (or all) of them (see Table 2). 76 participants held at least a CELTA qualification with the vast majority of these also possessing a Diploma and a Masters (49). A majority of the participants have a Master's degree (99), with some having more than one, while the most common of these degrees were an MA TESOL or MA in Applied Linguistics, though there were also 39 other Masters degrees included in the data. Interestingly, there did not seem to be a consistent or typical 'qualification path' but the most common set of qualifications that participants held was a combination of the Certificate, the Diploma and a Masters (49) with another 20 holding a Diploma and a Masters.

### 3.5. Teachers' professional development

When asked if they had received any EAP in-service training 73 of the respondents said yes. The most common types included attending conferences, participating in Continuing Professional Development workshops, BALEAP-related events, in-house training, mentoring and receiving different kinds of funding.

**Table 1**  
Participants' teaching experience (n = 116).

	Number of Years Teaching	Number of Years Teaching EAP
0–1 year	0	4 (3.5%)
2–5 years	1 (0.8%)	16 (13.5%)
6–10 years	8 (6.85%)	32 (27%)
10+ years	107 (90.5%)	64 (55%)



**Table 2**  
Participants' qualifications (n = 116).

Qualification	Numbers
Doctorate (PhD/EdD)	23
MA (TESOL)	31
MA (Applied Linguistics)	41
Other MAs	39
Diploma/DELTA	77
Certificate (e.g. CELTA)	76
PGCE	24
TEAP	6

## 4. Data discussion and findings

### 4.1. Interview data

As mentioned above, the interviews explored themes about writing and what was involved in supporting students in developing the literacies they need to participate successfully within their studies. For the purposes of this paper, we report on the responses we received when we asked participants what training they felt EAP tutors need. In coding the responses to this question, we identified four key themes that emerged from the data and which characterise the responses we received in asking this question. These were: 1) EAP-specific knowledge and training, 2) Qualifications 3) Insight and understanding of what students are asked to do, and 4) Observations of peers.

With regard to the first theme of 'EAP-specific knowledge and training' four colleagues mentioned EAP skills and EAP content as being important and focused on aspects such as 'grammar', 'lexis' and 'voice'. Others spoke of the need for training in psycholinguistics and genre studies as well as more training in academic literacies. Lastly, two colleagues talked about the ways in which EAP-specific knowledge and training developed through experience and through doing the job.

The next most common focus in our participants' responses were references to qualifications with 12 different comments. Within these comments, eight different participants talked about the kinds of qualifications they felt EAP practitioners benefit from having with references made to CELTA, DELTA, TEAP and Master's level study (MA TESOL and MA Applied Linguistics). A key feature of these comments is that these qualifications were seen very much as starting points and useful baselines with the following quote capturing this sentiment very well:

*"And then I think there has to be ... there has to be at least some personal experience of academia, or higher education, I don't think it's enough to, say, have your CELTA or DELTA or maybe just a BA, I think you really do need some sort of post-grad qualifications. I think in Education or Linguistics or maybe an MA in TESOL or something because unless you've actually been part of that community of practice and you had to enact those kind of requirements of post-grad study you're really at a disadvantage".* (Teacher 1)

The five responses that were coded under 'Insight and understanding of what students are asked to do' all focused on the need for training and development that promoted their understanding of *"what it means to be learning English within a higher education institution"*. These responses highlighted the need for teachers to have a knowledge and awareness of what the general university expectations are as well as an *"Awareness of how knowledge is used, constructed, transmitted, preserved, and created within the university across different disciplines."*

Within their discussion of training and development, four references were made to the importance of and need for 'Observations of peers'. Two of the comments referred to observations of peers and colleagues within EAP and two referred to the need for EAP colleagues to observe other colleagues and practitioners across the University. Here we quote one of these latter comments in which one of our interviewees said *"I think it would be really interesting to get pre ... an EAP teacher to actually shadow a main course tutor and get to talk to them about the sort of issues that they have dealing with foreign students in their classes, I think, so I think that would sensitise the new teacher to EAP on the sorts of issues that they are confronted with"*. (Teacher 2).

Another question we asked in the interviews and which yielded interesting data on professional development and expertise was 'What advice would you give teachers interested in moving into EAP?' Across the 15 interviewees the four themes discussed above were reiterated and a further interrelated theme emerged strongly and this was the need to understand the dynamic and continuing nature of professional development within EAP. There were ten comments that implored colleagues to 'get ready' and 'be open to' the idea of ongoing learning and development. As the following quote exemplifies, understanding professional development as a process was identified as a common experience of EAP training and development: *"EAP teaching is a continuous development and you will still be 'wet behind the ears' for a good while yet. That's been my experience, and the experience of other teachers that I know of."* A further eight comments built on this by highlighting the need for colleagues to engage in reading and that this is a necessary part of developing knowledge and expertise and the following quote captures this sentiment clearly, *"read about EAP, investigate the literature, ...- if this doesn't make you interested to find out more, then perhaps EAP isn't for you."*

### 4.2. Questionnaire data

In addition to asking the participants about their language teaching qualifications (see Table 2 above), we also wanted to know



what qualifications they thought EAP teachers should have. Almost half of them (52) felt that a CELTA was necessary, with a further 89 suggesting that a DELTA was important to have, while 90 of the participants suggested that having a Master's (e.g. MA TESOL/Applied Linguistics) would be useful. Interestingly, 42 mentioned that a TEAP qualification would be beneficial for EAP teachers (mostly in conjunction with a Master's or a Diploma) but only 8 of the cohort actually had this qualification at the time. The low number of participants with the TEAP qualification is likely to be a result of the qualification still being quite new (or that participants did not have time to do it) but the responses suggest that a TEAP qualification is seen as covering areas that an MA or DELTA do not.

#### 4.3. Professional development/in-service training

Within the questionnaire, we asked participants if there was any additional in-service training they would like to have and 60 of the 107 responded saying yes. This was followed up with a question that sought to understand what kinds of additional training these EAP participants would like to have. Table 3 (below) shows an overview of the dominant codes that emerged along with the number of comments related to each code.

With regard to 'Classroom management, practical skills, and materials development' the main focus of the comments was on technology (3), curriculum design and course planning (3) and new/creative approaches to assessment and differentiation (3). Other comments highlighted an interest in specific areas, such as decolonising the curriculum (1), SEN (1) and pronunciation (1). The two next most frequent codes provide more insight into the kinds of content our respondents expressed interest in, as well as the ways in which they would like to receive that training.

The 13 comments coded under the theme 'Content, subject, and discipline training' show that colleagues identified the broader field of linguistics as the primary source for knowledge and information and where the broader knowledge base is seen as residing with respect to our participants. All responses highlighted an interest in training that focused on disciplinary knowledge in some way and the following quote is an illustration of the ways in which colleagues responded: *"Relating EAP delivery to specific discipline areas"*. Other broader areas were also identified such as *"some training in teaching ESP"* along with more specific requests such as *"Practical SFL [Systemic Functional Linguistics] awareness training for classroom use"* and *"Incorporating the AcLits [Academic Literacies] philosophy into EAP"*. The responses also highlight our participants' interest in pedagogies (and training more broadly) that are research-informed. Where the responses to 'Content, subject, and discipline training' focused on broad content, the 13 responses that were coded under 'Knowledge, skills and experience sharing' very much focussed on the ways in which our participants felt this knowledge and information should be sought and provided. *"Attending professional seminars"* and being able to ask questions to *'experts'* and other colleagues were the most frequent answers in this code (with nine). Within the comments there was equal importance placed on in-house seminars as well as attending external events such as conferences. In addition to these activities there was also an emphasis on *"peer observation"* and the need to *"observe more experienced staff"* (from four of the participants). The overwhelming impression from the comments under this code is a clear sense of colleagues wanting to make sure that what they are doing is consistent with what is happening within and across other similar institutions and contexts.

The comments we coded as 'Keeping up to date with the field/discipline' were the next most frequent (with seven) and are closely linked to the two previous codes. All of the comments here referred to the need to engage with EAP research and to ensure that time was available in individuals' workloads/working weeks to be able to read and access up-to-date information as evidenced in the following comment *"more time for scholarship activity"*. The comments reveal a clear sense that colleagues felt that the field moves at pace and that they feel under (professional) pressure to keep up. An equal number of responses were also coded under 'Formalised (certified) training' and of these the BALEAP's TEAP competencies were referred to twice with other comments highlighting the need for *"something like DELTA"*, as well as EAP more generally. Under the code 'Local context knowledge and institution related training', four comments highlighted the need to ensure that colleagues were made aware of what was required of them within their institutions and the following comment highlights this theme well: *"Applying to local context - I've worked here for 10 years and learnt on the job but some training beforehand would have been good for the context"*.

The smallest code (with only three respondents) collected together comments that related to 'working with 'academics''. The three comments are: *"opportunities with academic departments – I think there is little understanding amongst academics about what we do, but also sometimes we are set in our ways and teach EAP without really adapting to the context and real-life tasks our students will need to perform in academia"*; *"More training on supporting staff from other disciplines with EAP"* and *"on co-working with academic/designing embedded academic literacies"*. It is interesting that there are only three comments that make explicit calls for closer working relationships with 'academics' although it is worth noting that within the code 'Knowledge/experience sharing' the use of 'experts' and professionals may well be referring to other academic colleagues.

**Table 3**

What kind of EAP in-service training would you like to have? (n = 107).

Classroom management, practical skills and materials development	14
Content, subject, and discipline training	13
Knowledge, skills and experience sharing	13
Keeping up to date with field/discipline	7
Formalised (certified) training	7
Local context knowledge and Institution related training	4
Collaboration with 'academics'	3
Other	7

In addition to asking participants what training and development they have and would like to have, we also asked what they felt teachers *should* have to see if there were any differences between their lived experiences and their expectations. This question generated a higher number of responses than the previous questions with 96 responses and Table 4 below presents these responses from highest to lowest frequency. We initially coded this question separately to the previously discussed questions, however, as we continued to work with the data, we found that all but one of the codes that we were identifying were the same. The additional emerging code is ‘Experience-based input/Not sure/it depends’ and we discuss all of these in more detail below.

The 23 responses provided in relation to ‘Keeping up to date with the field’ all included a focus on professional development and the need for on-going and regular provision. The comments overwhelmingly highlighted the need for colleagues to not only keep abreast of current research within the field but also the need to know how these ideas can be applied as praxis. The following quotes have been selected as they characterise the main focus and range of ideas in which our participants highlighted the need for: *“Regular practical sessions grounded in research/observation/theory that give tutors something to take into the classroom”*; *“Opportunities to stay up to date with current pedagogical research”* and the opportunity to *“attend conferences, engage with EAP reading, association memberships”*. The responses showed a clear preference for workshops and conferences as the medium via which knowledge and training should be disseminated and the role of ‘experts’ and ‘experienced colleagues’ was highlighted as being important in terms of who is best placed to provide this training.

The next two categories, ‘Classroom management, practical skills and materials development’ and ‘Knowledge, skills and experience sharing’ follow the same pattern as the previous ones (see Tables 3 and 4 above). Within the 17 comments relating to ‘Classroom management, practical skills and materials’, ten were focussed specifically on the need for training in approaches, technologies and practices that would help colleagues to better address the needs of the wide range of students they find themselves teaching such as: *“techniques for classroom management, especially given the wide disparity in students’ motivations and ability levels, often found within the same classroom”*, and *“How to teach tertiary-level students, with a more academic-based focus (away from traditional ELT style teaching)”*. Explicit reference was made for the need for ideas for materials design and syllabus development (four different comments) and to ways of approaching feedback and needs analyses (three). The focus of the comments was much more on general classroom pedagogies and practices rather than specific and/or ‘named’ training. With respect to the idea of ‘Knowledge, skills and experience sharing’ all 14 of the responses expressed an interest in and continued need for mentorship, peer observation and sharing practice. The following quotes are characteristic of the responses given in which participants highlighted the *“opportunity to share practice, peer observations, shadowing experienced teachers”*, while another recurring feature was the focus on this support and mentorship being provided ‘in-house’ and that this was seen very much as a Departmental activity (and obligation).

‘Experience-based input/Not sure/it depends’ is the code we gave to the next most frequent set of responses (11). As we mentioned before, this theme did not emerge in relation to the responses presented in Table 4. This is a helpful code in that it provides an insight into what might be missing from current training and development. The main focus of responses under this heading is the idea that training and development is (or should be) related to and dependent upon teachers’ prior experiences and backgrounds as is demonstrated clearly in the two following responses: *“EAP teachers after how many years of service? Training depends on the needs of the teacher, and this would be different at different levels of service.”* and *“Depends on experience. At the beginning, the focus should be on how EAP differs from other forms of EFL. Later, the focus should be on the expectations of the students’ chosen academic programmes.”* The two quotes do a very good job of highlighting the need to take the variety of teacher backgrounds into account and that for training and development to be meaningful it should be individualised rather than generic. The majority of comments (seven) stressed the need for flexibility and only one response suggested that *“once they are employed, further qualifications may not be necessary”*. Within the category, ‘Local context knowledge and institution related training’ the ten comments all highlighted the need for training to ensure that colleagues understand the local, institutional requirements and how this impacts what is required of their students. This suggests that it might currently be an area that participants feel is overlooked and the focus on carefully designed induction activities also reiterates the need for training to be localised and context informed.

As might be expected, the nine responses that were coded under ‘Content, subject, and discipline training’ and the eight under ‘Formalised-structured (certified) training’ were more specific in the detail participants gave. With regard to the first of these, the following quotes are characteristic of what participants highlighted as being important, which were: *“Knowledge of discourse analysis and socio-semantic theories of language”* and *“Discipline-specific writing conventions (law, engineering report, etc)”*. The comments also provided insight into why participants feel that these particular areas are necessary and important and what they help teachers to do, for example: *“Awareness raising of how to identify the specific requirements of a discipline (or even degree programme). I think general EAP is fairly inadequate”*. A similar comment highlighted the need for *“discourse and genre analysis, in my view an EAP tutor = discourse analyst,*

**Table: 4**  
What kind of in-service training do you think EAP teachers should receive?

Keeping up to date with the field	23
Classroom management, practical skills and materials development	17
Knowledge, skills and experience sharing	14
Experience-based input/Not sure/it depends	11
Local context knowledge and Institution related training	10
Content, subject, and discipline training	9
Formalised-structured (certified) training	8
Collaboration with ‘academics’	4
Other	4

otherwise we just keep repeating some common-sensical rules of language and literacy in academia". Within the eight comments that made reference to formalised training, there was a clear sense that training needed to be structured and formalised in some way yet only three made reference to specific examples for example, "there should be time given for doing TEAP, MA, PhD, etc." and "Extensive workshops on the differences between EFL and EAP based on BALEAP's TEAP".

The final category under which we coded responses to the question of what professional development colleagues think should be available is 'Collaboration with academics' in which four people responded. The following quotes represent the ideas participants put forward, which were: "Training that helps them work effectively within the subject disciplines" and "communicating and establishing relationships with academics". Of the four comments, the following stands out as it is quite different in focus from the others in that the participant advocated training "subject teachers to have language understanding". This is the only comment in which the need for training and development is not focused on the teachers themselves.

At the end of the questionnaire, we invited further responses with the following question: 'Do you have any other comments about EAP teaching?' Of the 57 comments that were provided in response to this question, ten were related to professional development and of these, six touched on a theme that had not been raised in any of the previous questions and this was the importance of the idea of scholarship within EAP. The responses in which scholarship was mentioned all similarly noted the need for EAP practitioners to engage in some way with research with one participant referring to this as the need for EAP practitioners to be "research minded", while another said "I could probably say much more. I would stress how important it is to learn about EAP as a discipline - EAP teaching should be research-informed, with an awareness of what that research is, even if the EAP practitioner does not carry out research themselves. Scholarship is vital".

## 5. Key themes and discussion

As discussed above, this paper set out to explore three interconnected research questions related to developing our understanding of the ways in which professional development is organised and experienced by EAP practitioners working in UK contexts. These questions are re-stated below as they help to frame the discussion that follows:

1. What forms of Professional Development do EAP teachers receive and what do they want?
2. What characterises current EAP Professional Development practices?
3. Where might EAP Professional Development go in the future?

With regard to question 1, our data show that there is a recognition that the PD that colleagues are engaging in is considered to be valuable, appropriate and necessary and that the kinds of PD our participants said was available mirrored the kinds of PD that they thought should be available. Across the data, colleagues foregrounded the role of peer mentoring, observations and shadowing experienced colleagues as invaluable sources of professional development. As is echoed elsewhere the 'support of colleagues' (Martin, 2014, p. 311) was highly regarded and this is likely influenced by the 'on the job' nature of EAP knowledge and expertise development as discussed by our participants (see also Elsted's 2012 work). Similarly, across all the data a high value was placed on participating in conferences and workshops, as well as inviting 'experts' in to provide training. These were seen as essential ways of ensuring that pedagogies are informed by, and in line with, current research and findings and that colleagues were aware of current literature.

From the data then, there is a clear pattern of and preference for the ways in which PD should take place. This is important as it highlights not only our participants' interests in PD continuing and being a regular part of their professional lives but that the nature of this PD reflects a need for it to be fluid and responsive to the needs of practitioners. There was a clear focus on being able to invite and engage with speakers and explore the application of different practices through observations. These practices are all collaborative in nature but importantly they also give colleagues a clear agency in terms of ensuring that the PD they engage in is relevant to them. In this sense our participants highlight that PD is not understood to be a passive activity but one in which colleagues can and should be active agents in their own development.

In terms of characteristics of current provision as framed in question 2, our data, as might be anticipated, show that the regularity and provision of PD is not consistent (see also Bond, 2020; Ding and Bruce, 2017; Hyland, 2018). For some colleagues there is a formalised PD structure with regularly scheduled sessions and input, for others this is more individually decided and locally determined. While differing experiences of PD were represented, the data show clear agreement on and recognition of the need for EAP practitioners to be able to engage in a wide variety of on-going professional development. Our participants highlighted the need to ensure that colleagues are given the requisite time, opportunity and resources to maintain, update and grow their professional knowledge. This was seen as being vital in ensuring that they are not only equipped with the most effective tools and strategies for understanding, accessing and meeting the language and literacy needs of their students but that their pedagogies are informed by, and in line with, current research and findings. It is also important here to acknowledge that 40 participants did not feel that further PD was necessary or needed, and not all participants elaborated on their views about what they thought PD should look like. Similarly, it is necessary to note that in this study we have investigated teacher cognition to answer our research questions. As discussed earlier, there is substantial research evidence to suggest that teacher cognition plays a role in shaping teacher practice. Given the design of the study, we have not been able to examine teacher practice in relation to professional development and professionalism. This is an area future research should invest in.

As we have discussed, our data show that as a field there is a strong commitment to professional development and engagement in collaborative and supportive practices and developmental opportunities and this, we argue, has clear implications for directions that EAP professional development might go in the future (as posed in question 3). These practices are all firmly grounded in research and

data around the ideas of collaboration, teacher training and development, as well as reflective practice and are in many ways the foundation of good pedagogy. An important characteristic of this work however is that in terms of flows of knowledge and expertise the pattern we see is one that remains very much contained within the field of EAP and the boundaries of our own practices. What we see in our data is that the mechanisms and practices that we value and make use of in our professional development - peer review, observations, workshops, invited talks - may also be the mechanisms that restrict and contain our expertise and ensure (inadvertently) that we are our own audience.

Much of the EAP literature continues to demonstrate that EAP practice and practitioners are still often marginalised, on the fringes and at the 'service' of the University (Bond, 2020; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Hyland, 2018; Raimes, 1991). In discussing this positioning, Hyland argues that, 'We have failed to establish the value of our work and the status of our profession. In part EAP units have brought this on themselves in their willingness to work FOR rather than WITH subject specialists' (Hyland, 2018, p. 395 (*author's emphasis*)). In much the same way that other disciplines claim, maintain and defend their own spaces we must also strive to do the same and here we echo Furneaux's (2017, p. 22) call to 'put our heads above the parapet ... [and] take part across our institutions'. To this end we suggest that while some of our current practices around professional development may be a key factor in our marginalisation they also offer us a way out. The mechanisms by which we share good practice and keep up to date are very much in place and clearly successfully used within centres and cohorts of colleagues. These same mechanisms could be drawn upon in order to begin to share and disseminate our good practices and expertise with colleagues across the wider academic context. Some possible future changes that may help both to mitigate and to disseminate our expertise(s) beyond the boundaries of EAP are:

- Engaging in observations beyond our peers;
- Inviting other university colleagues to observe our practices;
- Organising presentations across the university where 'we' are the 'experts' and
- Using this EAP expertise as a way of providing professional development to academic departments.

## 6. Concluding comments

As with existing studies (Bond, 2020; Ding & Bruce, 2017), our data show that the EAP colleagues who participated in this research come from a broad range of teaching experiences and academic backgrounds and that they entered into EAP by a range of different avenues and experiences. This finding may not be new information to many, but the current study is the first to provide research evidence that highlights this broad variation/diversity. The data also show that they are highly qualified in terms of academic degrees and teaching qualifications and that as practitioners, their skills and expertise are deployed in myriad ways within the different university contexts represented. As a result of this diversity of experience and practice, our data show that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to professional development. Rather, what comes through is that our participants see professional development as an ongoing process which by nature needs to be fluid and dynamic allowing them to keep up to date with the field of EAP and to maintain their expertise (cf Tsui, 2011). A further important point here is that our data show that professional development needs to be appropriately resourced and prioritised for practitioners which is an area that could be further explored, particularly how cultures of professionalism develop and are sustained.

## CRedit author statement

The three authors have participated in all aspects of this paper.

## Appendix. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2022.101140>.

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