

The TOEFL® Teaching Framework in China: Effective Application in EAP Courses

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Abstract

The *TOEFL® Teaching Framework: Guidelines for Teaching Lessons and Courses* (Norris & Sasayama, 2022) is designed, “to provide general recommendations regarding the design of curriculum, materials, and pedagogic activities that are intended to help learners develop their academic English language proficiency” (p. 2). The *Framework*’s primary focus is on recommended pedagogical practices drawn from both empirical research and expert guidance. It is distinct from other language teaching frameworks in that it draws from principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT; Ellis, 2025; Long, 2015) in conceptualizing best practices for instructed second language acquisition in EAP contexts. There is a clear need for EAP professional development (Ding & Campion, 2016). One application of the *Framework* is that it can guide professional learning for EAP instructors. In this report, we present partial results from a study about the use of the *Framework* in a continuing professional development program with 25 EAP instructors working in Chinese higher education. Through the analysis of qualitative data collected during the course and in post-program interviews and questionnaires, we seek to understand how the *Framework*’s principles are understood and locally adapted by participants. This study contributes to a better understanding of continuing professional development for EAP instructors in China as well as the usefulness of language teaching frameworks as resources for instruction and professional learning.

Keywords: English for academic purposes (EAP), TOEFL® Teaching Framework, task-based language teaching (TBLT), teacher professional development, curriculum design, Chinese higher education

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Introduction

The *TOEFL® Teaching Framework: Guidelines for Teaching Lessons and Courses* (henceforth *Framework*; Norris & Sasayama, 2022) is designed, “to provide general recommendations regarding the design of curriculum, materials, and pedagogic activities that are intended to help learners develop their academic English language proficiency” (p. 2). As a resource for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction, the *Framework* supports the goal of helping learners develop language skills for communicating in English in academic settings. While the *Framework* is explicitly linked to the TOEFL iBT® test in that the test represents one important target of EAP instruction, the *Framework*’s primary focus is on recommended pedagogical practices drawn from both empirical research and expert guidance. The *Framework* is distinct from other language teaching frameworks in that it draws from principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT; Ellis, 2025; Long, 2015) in conceptualizing best practices for instructed second language acquisition in EAP contexts.

The context for the *Framework* is the expansive and globally diverse field of EAP instruction. Across many contexts and types of programs, EAP instructors need support in developing and applying the complex pedagogical skills needed to prepare students for academic study in English (Galloway & Ruegg, 2020; Gao & Bartlett, 2014). Both researchers and practitioners have pointed out the lack of sufficient teacher professional development programs and resources (e.g., Ding & Campion, 2016). One application of the *Framework* is that it can guide professional learning for EAP instructors. While the *Framework* does not include teacher training criteria, it does describe principles of curriculum design and effective instructional practice.

In this report, we present partial results from a study about the use of the *Framework* in a continuing professional development program for EAP instructors working in Chinese higher education. In the Chinese academic context, English language teaching and learning has been a focus of government policy from primary school through university. EAP is increasingly

prominent at the university level in China, and in some universities has replaced general English language teaching (Rao, 2018; Cai, 2021). In utilizing the *Framework* as the basis of a professional development program for EAP instructors in China, we seek to understand how its principles are locally adapted participants and ultimately to meet the call for research about and resources for EAP professional development. Additionally, this study contributes to a better understanding the usefulness of teaching frameworks as resources for instruction and professional learning.

Background

As both a field of academic research and an instructional approach, EAP is concerned with the communicative and linguistic demands of academic contexts (Hyland, 2018; Hamp-Lyons, 2011). While EAP traditionally focused on undergraduate education, the scope has expanded to include primary and secondary schooling, graduate education, and professional contexts where learners are acquiring and navigating academic discourses (Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Hyland & Jiang, 2021). Thus, EAP encompasses diverse contexts and learners and is rooted in practical and research-informed responses to the needs of academic communication.

EAP courses include those that focus on general academic English as well as content-specific academic language (Yasuda, 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Skills addressed in EAP instruction include traditional literacy skills as well as speaking and listening proficiency and multimodal language use (O'Halloran et al., 2016). In describing the field of EAP as both a research-informed instructional approach and a discipline within applied linguistics, Hyland & Jiang (2021) describe EAP as, “a practitioners’ movement, concerned with questions confronting teachers and students in real world contexts” (p. 2). They credit the growth of EAP as a field to the expansive growth of English and English teaching globally, and to sustained efforts to professionalize EAP instruction in university contexts where it is often under resourced and viewed as a remedial service (see also Hyland, 2018; Borg & Liu, 2013). EAP instructors may look to research or external resources to legitimize their work and communicate its value to others in the academy.

EAP in China

Since the mid-1980s, English language teaching has been a central focus of Chinese government policy as part of globalization goals (Xu & Fan, 2017; Chang, 2006). EAP is

increasingly relevant in Chinese higher education as policies and programs seek to prepare students for academic and professional work in English. This section addresses EAP in China in two key areas: College English Teaching and English medium instruction.

College English Teaching (CET) refers to compulsory English courses for non-majors, typically taken during the first or second year of university study. CET programs have traditionally supported the development of general English language skills, but in recent years this has started to change, and EAP has become more prominent (Cai, 2021). There are several reasons for this shift.

First, official government policy promotes bilingual or English medium content courses in universities (Cheng, 2016; Cai, 2021). There is a subsequent need for EAP instruction that reflects students' language and academic needs in content classes. Cai (2021) notes that courses often teach English for general academic purposes as this approach is easier for institutions and programs to adopt compared with discipline-specific EAP. English for general academic purposes is often more useful in the Chinese higher education context because students do not have immediate contexts to apply discipline-specific language skills.

Second, English education has expanded and improved at the primary and secondary levels. Students often enter college with higher levels of language proficiency than in the past (Cheng, 2016) making a focus on basic English skills at the college level less relevant. Third, government policy strongly promotes participation in international scholarship. Graduate studies are encouraged, and academic English proficiency is useful for students as they prepare for graduate study and future academic work.

As China transitions to expanded EAP instruction, previous research about the nature of CET programs provides helpful background for understanding the teaching context and potential challenges to implementing EAP. In a study of Chinese CET instructors, Borg & Liu (2013) found that CET is often viewed as a service program rather than an academic department and instructors often carry a high teaching load. Huang (2018) describes CET in China as characterized by large class sizes, the influence of tests on teaching, and regional differences in instructional support and practices. Each of these issues poses challenges to high quality language instruction and to the implementation of EAP. In particular, the influence of national testing requirements strongly shapes the focus of CET courses and student expectations. Because many universities require undergraduate students to pass the College English Test to graduate

(see Zheng & Chen, 2008), CET is often focused on preparing students for the more general English language skills it requires (Cai, 2021). However, Fan et al. (2022) noted the recent growth of local testing practices at Chinese universities that better align with institutional priorities such as teaching EAP. While national policy has an important role in shaping university practice, it is also realized differently across institutions and programs as they mediate policy requirements and local needs.

Although still under-researched, studies about student perspectives are valuable for deepening our understanding of the practical needs and barriers in EAP. In a phenomenological interview study, Rao (2018) presented the stories of four university-level EAP learners studying in Shanghai. Students had previous experiences learning English in primary and secondary schools and had difficulty moving from the grammar and drill-based instruction they were familiar with to an integrated approach to teaching English for functional academic use. Additionally, students were unaccustomed to the university-level focus on speaking and listening. The results highlight the important role of instructors, who students saw as mentors helping them navigate the new challenges of university study and supporting them in the new demands of independent, self-regulated learning. Rao recommended that EAP teaching in China emphasize holistic learning goals that are grounded in the needs and experiences of learners who may need support in transitioning to EAP instructional practices.

While CET is a major sphere for EAP instruction in China, English medium instruction is rapidly expanding (see Liao et al., 2026) and is also an important site for EAP instruction. English medium instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in areas where English is not an L1 for most of the population (Macaro, 2018). EMI offerings include EMI colleges, which are typically embedded within Chinese universities; transnational joint-venture universities that are jointly operated by Chinese and international institutions; and EMI programs, which are typically embedded in academic programs within traditional Chinese-medium universities (Zhou & Delogu, 2026). Across these different types of EMI offerings, Zhou & Delogu observe that, “students experience similar language-related challenges across different types of EMI provision” (p. 2) and that the provision of EAP is one way this can be addressed. However, limited teacher training and professional development, particularly as instructors transition from teaching English for general purposes to EAP, is a major barrier to sufficiently preparing students for EMI study.

Professional Development Needs of EAP Instructors

As noted previously, EAP as a field of instructional practice has moved increasingly towards professionalization (Hyland & Jiang, 2021). As EAP programs expand in China, more instructors will be needed. Programs may face teacher shortages (Huang, 2018), and those prepared for general English teaching likely need specialized training opportunities to support them in transitioning to EAP. As Ding & Campion (2016) point out in a critical review of EAP teacher education, EAP instructors tend to vary greatly in their instructional status and departmental affiliations as well as teaching qualifications. Instructors need support in local realizations of EAP through a deeper understanding of their values, commitments, and constraints.

While research focused on the professional development needs and experiences of EAP instructors in China is limited, work about the perspectives, needs, and practices of CET instructors is relevant. In a mixed-methods study looking at instructor motivation, Han (2017) found that CET instructors have a strong commitment to professional development and desire to keep up with innovations in the field. Instructors implement new methodologies as they navigate challenges including pervasive native speaker ideologies, highly constrained curriculum, large class sizes with diverse student proficiency levels, and requirements to keep pace with textbook and syllabus coverage requirements (Huang, 2019; Li & Baldulf, 2011).

Li (2020) presented case studies of Chinese university instructors transitioning from teaching English for general purposes to EAP. Across case studies, instructors had different conceptualizations of EAP, highlighting the potential utility of shared frameworks or guidance documents for shaping instructional practice. One instructor had a relatively smooth transition to teaching EAP facilitated by the principles of TBLT, which had long been a part of his teaching practice. TBLT facilitated his understanding of student needs and helped him create tailored curriculum in both general and EAP courses. In an action research study, Bao and colleagues (2024) also found that TBLT helped facilitate one instructors' transition from general to EAP teaching in China highlighting the facilitative potential of the approach for supporting EAP instruction.

Language Teaching Frameworks

Teaching frameworks provide a shared understanding of best practices, can guide feedback to instructors, and promote consistency and equity in instructional evaluation (Bird et

al., 2025). They also serve an important purpose in supporting professional development for instructors and may be used for accreditation purposes. Several language teaching frameworks have been developed which specify skills and competencies for different language instruction contexts (e.g., BALEAP, 2008; British Council, 2011; Cambridge English, 2026; Center for Adult English Language Acquisition [CAELA] Network, 2010; Eaquals, 2025; TESOL, 2019).

Of relevance to the current study is the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP, 2008). Originally developed as a resource for supporting instructor professional development, it has been updated to differentiate competencies based on levels of teaching experience and is associated with a teacher accreditation scheme (BALEAP, 2025). The framework identifies key competencies of EAP instructors related to academic practice, EAP students, curriculum development, and program implementation. Through these key competencies, the framework is intended to “raise the profile” of EAP within institutions (p. 2). This intended impact the framework and associated accreditation scheme is notable given that, as previously discussed, EAP is sometimes viewed as a remedial or service field (Hyland, 2018; Hyland & Jiang, 2022). Within EAP instruction, frameworks can support instructors in representing the legitimacy of their work within institutions and help them demonstrate the professional skills needed to teach EAP.

While there has been limited research on the usefulness and application of existing language teaching frameworks, Aksit & Aksit (2022) described efforts of an EAP center in Turkey to incorporate the BALEAP framework into their program. Efforts included teacher development and training, certification for new teachers in key areas of competency. New EAP instructor training and certification was supported through mentoring, feedback, an action research project, and reflective practice. They describe the extensive and ongoing work of implementing the BALEAP’s Framework and note that, “changing mindsets and attitudes is an ongoing process, and [requires] dedicated commitment and focused attention on the part of all parties concerned are essential” (p. 6). This work highlights that, at the programmatic level, framework implementation is intensive and involves extensive cultural change. However, in the examples they give of mentoring and professional learning activities, the framework and key competencies provide a foundation and structure to support the local needs of their instructors while also supporting consistent quality across instructors.

The TOEFL Teaching Framework

The *TOEFL Teaching Framework* (henceforth the *Framework*) is designed to provide general recommendations for designing and implementing curriculum and materials for EAP (see Appendix 1). The TOEFL iBT provides “an important backdrop” (p.2) for the *Framework* as the test tasks reflect some of the most important real-world tasks that learners need to be able to do in academic contexts and can thus be instructionally relevant and useful for planning EAP. When the *Framework* was developed, the current TOEFL iBT test (Manna et al., 2025) had not yet been launched, and we have not reviewed the *Framework* for alignment with the current version of the test. However, rather than focusing on test content, the *Framework* is primarily designed to present principles derived from research in instructed second language acquisition and the experiences of language teachers. Table 1 summarizes the content and organization of the *Framework*.

Table 1. Content and Organization of the TOEFL Teaching Framework

Section	Subsection	Key topics
General recommendations for EAP Instruction	Basic principles	Instructional content, Relationship among the four skills, target tasks, pedagogic tasks, assessment and feedback
	Syllabus design	Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) Scope and sequence
	Lesson design: sequencing target and pedagogic tasks	Lesson introductions, recall and schema building, (simulated) authentic input, language use in tasks, peer interaction, target task performance, assessment for feedback, and TOEFL iBT task practice
Four-skills lesson and materials development	Speaking	Suggested teaching and learning activities for each of the four skills
	Listening	
	Writing	
	Reading	

The Framework begins with general recommendations for EAP instruction, including considerations for instructional content; the relationship among the four skills; definitions of target and pedagogic tasks; and the role of assessment and feedback. Next, the Framework

provides principles of syllabus design through establishing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and task scope and sequence.

Guidance for the design of lessons (section 1.3) lists essential components (e.g., an engaging introduction to the task; schema-building activities) and a recommended order for these elements. The final section of the Framework presents specific and practical classroom recommendations for each of the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. For example, the writing section includes the recommendation to “have learners work on producing a variety of written texts that differ in terms of communication purposes and audience for example, writing an email to a professor versus describing information presented in a graph or table to inform reader” (p. 18). In including all four language skills, the Framework promotes the idea that academic skills include more than just reading and writing and requires preparation in the range of ways students need to use language in academic settings.

The Framework is distinct from other language teaching frameworks, including BALEAP’s which is also specific to EAP, in that it relies on evidence-based practices from task-based language teaching (TBLT). TBLT is an approach to language teaching based on scientific principles of instructed second language acquisition (Long, 2015) in which real-world tasks (target tasks) are the organizing principle of instruction (pedagogic tasks). TBLT has been shown to be effective across many contexts in promoting L2 outcomes (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; Bryfonski et al., 2025; Van Gorp et al., in press). TBLT also informed the design of the 2000 TOEFL® (Enright et al., 2008) in conceptualizing test tasks.

While research on TBLT implementation for EAP is limited, results suggest that across contexts, TBLT may be well suited to preparing students for the functions and linguistic demands of content-area study. The Framework uses the concepts of target (real world) and pedagogic tasks to help EAP instructors conceptualize and sequence learning outcomes in their courses, thus encouraging key principles for task-based instructional design (Ellis, 2003; Ellis, 2025) while avoiding the label TBLT and any related disagreement about what does or does not constitute TBLT (see also Long, 2016; Norris, 2021).

Overall, the principles and guidance in the Framework are flexible enough to be used in a variety of EAP contexts and approaches, including English for general academic purposes and discipline-specific courses. However, the local application and potential uses of this document need empirical exploration.

The current study addresses the need for contextually meaningful EAP professional development in China and the potential usefulness of the Framework for supporting this professional development. Through a research study embedded in a training program for EAP instructors across different EAP programs, we seek to better understand how instructors understand and seek to apply Framework principles in their diverse EAP contexts. We address the following research questions:

- How do EAP instructors understand key concepts from the TOEFL Teaching *Framework*?
- What local and context-specific considerations affected how EAP instructors understood and reported applying the *Framework*?
- What was the perceived efficacy of the course and impact of the *Framework* on participants' planning and instructional practices?

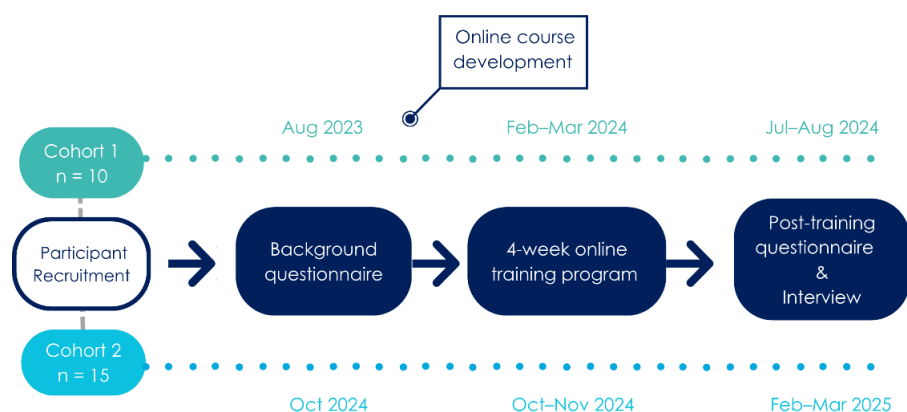
Methodology

The design of the study follows the development and implementation of a four-week online training program.

Research Design

We completed the research study in two phases. In Phase 1, we developed the online course based on interviews with EAP instructors. In Phase 2, we piloted the online course with two cohorts of EAP instructors. In this report, we present data from Phase 2 to address our research questions. Information from Phase 1 of the study, in which we developed the online course, is presented later in this section of the report as part of the Methodology.

We addressed the three research questions through a descriptive qualitative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) using multiple methods in which insights from different data sources are collected and analyzed in an integrated way. The research design is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Design

As illustrated in Figure 1, two cohorts of participants took part in the study. The total cohort sizes for cohort 1 ($n = 10$) and cohort 2 ($n = 15$) represent the total number of participants who completed the course and related data-collection activities. We conducted the course twice because of attrition in cohort one, which is explained further in the Participant section. The following subsections detail the data collection instruments and procedures used.

Background Questionnaire

Participants completed a web-based questionnaire about their professional background, the course(s) they currently teach, their goals, and previous experiences with the TOEFL and with TBLT. The questionnaire included a minimum of 26 items (or up to 37 items for participants who entered information about multiple courses that they currently teach). Questions included selected response and open-ended response types. (Note: Data from Cohort 1's questionnaire was also used in Phase 1 of the study to develop the course, which explains the extended time between questionnaire administration and the start of the online training program.)

Course Data

As part of course completion, instructors posted in course discussion boards, completed module assignments, and (if available) attended a weekly webinar session. Course participation data, including assignments, discussion board posts, and webinar attendance data, were extracted from the learning management system as text files for analysis and coding. The structure and design of the training program is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Course Evaluations

Participants completed a brief 5-item evaluation questionnaire upon the completion of each of the four modules. These were reviewed weekly by the project team as part of course facilitation and planning. We administered a final 31-item evaluation questionnaire of the entire course within 2 weeks of course completion.

Post-Training Questionnaire

Approximately three months after completion of the course, instructors completed a 7-item web-based questionnaire about the perceived impact of the training program on their instructional practices and their plans to use or apply the *Framework* in the future. As part of the post-training questionnaire, instructors were also asked to upload a work sample that demonstrated the application of *Framework* principles in their classroom. The submission of the work sample was optional. We waited three months for the final data collection activities to better capture participants' perceptions of the course impact and usefulness of the training after some time had elapsed and they had opportunities to consider and apply concepts.

Post-Training Interview

Approximately three months after the completion of the course, instructors took part in a 30-minute online interview administered by a member of the research team using a semi-structured protocol. Interview questions focused on reviewing feedback from their post-training questionnaire, discussing implementation of the *Framework* concepts, reviewing the instructors' work sample (if submitted), and discussing recommendations for improving the training. As with the questionnaire, the timing of the interview was intended to capture reflections on the perceived impact of the program.

Data and Analysis

Data collection resulted in the data listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Sources and Number of Participants

Data source	Number of participants
Background questionnaire	24
Course data (assignments, discussion boards)	25
Post-training interview	18
Post-training questionnaire	24

All questionnaires in the study were administered via SurveyMonkey. Selected response item data were downloaded and analyzed in Excel using descriptive statistics. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, video recorded and transcribed using Zoom’s automated transcription feature.

Analysis of qualitative data, including course data and post-training interview transcripts data was conducted using a six-phase reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2021) to synthesize patterns from the dataset. Steps in the reflexive thematic analysis included: (1) Data familiarization; (2) generate initial codes; (3) Sort initial codes into potential themes; (4) Refine themes; (5) Determine the “essence” of themes; and (6) Write analysis of themes.

The steps of data familiarization, coding, and sorting of initial codes were conducted by the first author using MAXQDA. In coding the data, we utilized both semantic coding that reflected the direct meaning of language and semantic coding to capture underlying intentions.

The steps of theme refinement, determining the essence of the themes, and written analysis were conducted by the first author in consultation with the second author through an iterative process of discussion and revision, in line with the principles of reflexive thematic analysis. The resulting themes are informed by the steps in the reflexive thematic analysis process and by our experiences and observations as course instructors, which we reflected on and discussed during the analysis process.

Online Training Course Design

The four-week online training program was developed specifically for the study. To develop the course, we first analyzed the Framework. We then conducted thinkaloud interviews with 24 EAP instructors to determine which aspects of the Framework to prioritize in the short-term training. (Note: These data are reported in a separate study.)

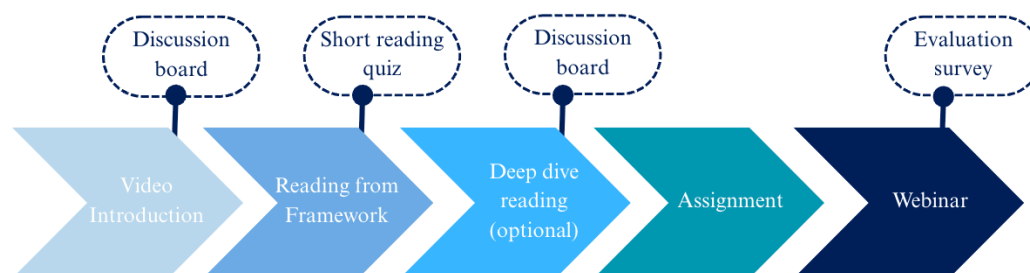
Table 3 summarizes key issues from the thinkaloud interviews and how these were addressed in the program design.

Table 3. Application of Interview Findings to Training Program Development

Issue	Implications for training program
Need for differentiated content based on familiarity with <i>Framework</i> concepts	Developed optional course material in each module for more experienced instructors; Provided personalized feedback through assignment comments
Contextual challenges of large class sizes and differentiation	Created discussion board topics and webinar discussion questions related to class size to encourage reflection and shared resources
Student motivation and expectations	Developed lecture content related to student motivation research and connected this to concepts in the <i>Framework</i>

As noted in Table 3, we found that some EAP instructors already had an extensive background in *Framework* concepts and reported familiarity with TBLT. This was especially true for highly experienced instructors working in joint-venture universities. We attempted to develop a course that would be useful for EAP instructors at different levels by providing additional readings and content for experienced instructors to extend their learning. We also included discussions about strategies for practical challenges such as large class sizes and differing levels of student motivation as these were issues instructors identified as challenges to implementing *Framework* principles. Based on interview data, we prioritized sections of the *Framework* to include in the course because we could not cover the entire document in four weeks.

The primary goal of the course as follows: Participants will be able to design curricula and related lessons for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses by applying the principles of the Framework, including developing task scope and sequence and student learning outcomes. The *Framework* was presented within the course as a tool for designing EAP curricula and lessons. For the four course modules, we used a standard module structure for presenting content that was iterated each week. The module structure is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Training Module Design

Each module began with a video introduction of about 20 minutes in length. The slides and transcript of this video introduction were also posted to provide multi-modal support for participants in understanding context. The video was followed by a discussion board post designed to promote reflection about the module topic. Next, participants completed a short reading from the *Framework*. This was typically two to four pages and was supported by infographics and additional contextual information. Participants then completed a reading quiz as a learning check. Next, participants could extend their learning through an additional, optional reading (e.g., academic research article) related to the module topic. This was followed by a second discussion board topic. Finally, instructors completed an assignment designed to support them in applying module concepts to their own teaching. We also held a weekly one-hour webinar with an additional short lecture and discussion topics and application activities in breakout rooms. At the end of each module, participants completed a short evaluation quiz to provide feedback on the content and format of the module.

Instructors provided feedback to participants in several ways. First, through comments on discussion board posts. Next, through comments and feedback on assignments. This feedback was typically returned within five to seven days of submission. Finally, instructors interacted with participants directly during the weekly live webinar, which included time for questions and discussion.

Table 4 presents the four content modules, including the SLOs, key topics and *Framework* sections covered in the module, and assignments. Figure 3 shows an example screen from Module 1 to illustrate the presentation of content in the Moodle Learning Management System used to deliver the training. We selected Moodle because it was widely accessible to participants in China.

Table 4. Training Program Content

Module	SLOs	Key topics and Framework section	Assignment
M1: Understanding Basic Principles of EAP	Participants will be able to determine the appropriate target and pedagogic tasks for their EAP courses and use these as the foundation of curriculum design.	Target task Pedagogic task Student motivation Framework Section 1.1	Develop a needs analysis
M2: Developing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	Participants will be able to develop Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that meaningfully capture expectations for student learning based on target tasks.	SLOs Backward design Task components Framework Section 1.2	Create SLOs
M3: Building Scope & Sequence (SAS)	Participants will be able to establish appropriate scope and sequence (SAS) for tasks in their EAP courses.	SAS Continuous formative assessment Framework Section 1.2	Developing task SAS aligned with SLOs
M4: Applying Practical Skills for Lesson Design	Participants will be able to bring together what they have learned about SLOs and SAS to create meaningful, relevant lessons embedded with a larger curriculum.	Effective lesson planning Encouraging student interaction Framework Section 1.3	Create a lesson plan

Note. EAP = English for academic purposes

Figure 3. Screenshot of Training Program Presentation in Moodle

1.3 The Framework

EAP-TOEFL-2 · Module 1: Understanding Basic Principles of EAP · 1.3 The Framework

In each module, we will read and review a section of the *Framework*. The first part of the *Framework* introduces core principles of EAP and discusses the difference between target tasks and pedagogic tasks.

In short, **target tasks** represent the real-world activities that students will do. Target tasks are important because they form the basis of curriculum planning. **Pedagogic tasks** are the classroom tasks and activities that students partake in in order to build up their abilities and prepare to do the target tasks.

Take time now to read pages 1-7 of the [TOEFL® Teaching Framework](#) through section 1.1.

As you read, think about:

- Can you identify target tasks and pedagogic tasks in your context?

Differentiating Target and Pedagogic Tasks

Sometimes people have a hard time differentiating between target and pedagogic tasks. The differences are summarized in the table below:

Target Tasks	Pedagogic Tasks
Real world activities people are expected to do in a given setting	Classroom activities that are designed to bring about language learning
Provide the goal around which learning is organized	Should have a clear relationship to a target task
Link language learning to the real world	Guide learners towards being able to do target tasks, and often include support and scaffolding

Example Target and Pedagogic Tasks

Let's look at a scenario help clarify this difference. Imagine that students are taking English classes in preparation for studying abroad in an English-speaking country. Now consider: What types of real-world tasks might they need to do when they study abroad?

Among other things, these students will need to find housing, negotiate preferences with a new roommate, and access and use transportation. These tasks could become target tasks in an English classroom because they are the important tasks that students will need in the future.

An English teacher would then design pedagogic tasks that build skills and abilities that would support these target tasks. For example, students might complete a survey about housing preferences and then discuss their preferences in a scenario-based speaking activity. This example has more to do with daily activities and life than with academic tasks. With EAP instruction, the target tasks may include things like listening to a lecture and taking notes for the purpose of learning new content.

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Participants

Eligible study participants were EAP instructors working at public, private, or joint-venture universities in China. We defined an EAP instructor as someone who was either (1) teaching in an EAP program; or (2) teaching at least one EAP course even if not working in an EAP program at the time of recruitment. During the applicant review process, we also decided to admit CET educators who were interested in implementing EAP in the future. As noted previously, we recruited two cohorts of participants because of attrition in cohort 1. For both cohorts, we used an online application delivered via SurveyMonkey to gather information about interested applicants and to ensure that they met eligibility criteria for the course. Recruitment messages, a course website, and flyers shared detailed information about the training program, including program schedule, benefits from participating, and information about the instructors, and invited people who were eligible and interested to apply via the online application.

In the following sections, we describe the recruitment process for each cohort, summarize any differences in recruitment and course administration, and then present participant demographic data together for both groups. The 25 total study participants from both cohorts are those who completed approximately 80% of the online course and associated research activities.

Cohort 1

The initial recruitment window for cohort 1 was from June 5 through July 17, 2023. We developed outreach emails, social media messages, and flyers in both English and Mandarin Chinese, and endeavored to reach out to as many EAP instructors in universities in China as possible, anticipating challenges in the recruitment efforts due to policies and potential restrictions for participants in China. In addition to directly contacting 280+ EAP instructors identified in the online search; we also posted the recruitment message and flyers through various social media platforms and sent out recruitment emails through individuals with personal connections to universities in China.

Overall, a total of 246 applications were received as part of recruitment for cohort 1. After eliminating duplicate applications and disqualifying applications that did not meet the requirements for this project (e.g., educators from high schools or test prep institutions), 39 qualified applicants were identified. We emailed these 39 applicants in both English and Mandarin Chinese, indicating that they were selected and needed to confirm participation and complete a consent form that was delivered via SurveyMonkey. Finally, 26 EAP instructors

confirmed participation and completed the consent form. Of the accepted participants, 10 completed the course. In follow-up communication with participants, we determined that the high rate of attrition was due to scheduling challenges during the semester and the disruption caused by the new year break. Although we planned a break in the online course during the holiday, many participants did not complete assignments after the holiday.

Cohort 2

To ensure we gathered sufficient data for the study and to ensure sufficient representation for participants from public universities, we decided to recruit a second cohort of instructors. Cohort 2 participants were required to complete the four-week online training program and the post-training activities. The second recruitment window was from September 4 through October 25, 2024, and followed the same process as cohort 1. To incentivize participation for cohort 2 and minimize attrition, we offered a gift card of ¥1700 in RMB to each participant who completed the training, and all required post-training activities. In addition, we prioritized communications via WeChat above emails for this cohort given that WeChat is the primary platform used for communications in China. We advertised the course in online groups and through personal connections with EAP programs.

Overall, 94 applications were received for cohort 2. When selecting participants, we prioritized those who were actively teaching EAP courses or teaching in an EAP program at public universities while taking into consideration diverse geographic representation to ensure participants represented different regions. We sought regional variation in participants in order to reflect different resources and support for EAP implementation across China. Acceptance messages were sent out to 31 accepted applicants both via WeChat invites and emails. Twenty-one applicants accepted the WeChat invites, and 18 confirmed participations. During the four-week training program, three participants decided to drop out due to workload at school, resulting in 15 participants completing all required research activities and receiving the incentive. The course content and administration was the same for cohort 2 as for cohort 1 with one difference: We added Mandarin Chinese translations of the video transcripts as a language support. We made this addition based on feedback from cohort 1 that they sometimes had technical difficulties with the videos and our observation that course participants seemed to vary in their comfortability communicating in English during the course.

Table 5 describes the institutional types, educational levels, geographical regions, genders, and age ranges represented by the 25 study participants from both cohorts.

Table 5. Distribution of Recruited Participants by Demographics

	Demographics	# Participants	% Participants
Institution type	Public university	19	76%
	Private university	2	8%
	Joint-venture university	4	16%
Education level	Bachelor's degree	1	4%
	Master's degree	11	44%
	Doctoral degree	12	48%
	Other (Graduate diploma)	1	4%
Gender	Man	6	24%
	Woman	18	72%
	Missing	1	4%
Age range	20–29 Years Old	1	4%
	30–39 Years Old	6	24%
	40–49 Years Old	13	52%
	50–59 Years Old	4	16%
	60 or Older	0	0%
	Missing	1	4%
Experience teaching English	No experience	0	0%
	Fewer than 2 years	0	0%
	Between 2–5 years	3	12%
	More than 5 years	21	84%
	Missing	1	4%
Experience teaching EAP	No experience	2	8%
	Fewer than 2 years	2	8%
	Between 2–5 years	7	28%
	More than 5 years	14	56%
Geographical location (<i>N</i>)	Beijing (4), Fujian (1), Guangdong (1), Guizhou (1), Hainan (1), Hebei (1), Inner Mongolia (1), Jiangxi (2), Jilin (1), Shaanxi (1), Shandong (4), Shanghai (5), Sichuan (1), Zhejiang (1)		

Note. EAP = English for academic purposes

Most instructors from joint-ventures universities completed graduate degrees in North America, the UK, or Australia while the backgrounds of instructors at Chinese universities were more varied. The 25 instructors worked at 18 different institutions, including three EMI joint-venture institutions. The other institutions were Chinese-medium institutions but may have EMI programs within the university. Most instructors ($n = 24$) in the study were working in an EAP program.

Results

In the following sections we present results of the study by research question.

RQ1: Understanding of *Framework* Concepts

The first research question addresses participants' understanding of key components of the *Framework*. As noted in the Methodology, we focused on these key concepts in the training: Target and pedagogic tasks; student learning outcomes, and task scope and sequence. Results from this research question come from analysis of the post-program interviews, course discussion board posts and assignments, and the post-program questionnaire.

Instructors reported that the *Framework* terms were often new to them even if they were familiar with the underlying ideas and practices. They saw the *Framework* as useful in providing ways to conceptualize and talk to others about their practices and many described it as “logical.” When asked about the impact of the training course, one EAP instructor working in a public university program stated:

[...] earlier I know some concepts from other theoretical frameworks or other frameworks or I just to design activities based on my teaching experiences. But now I think with your framework and new concepts, I have a new metalanguage to describe why I would design this way.

Many participants expressed similar sentiments about the *Framework* and terminology, describing how it solidifies and clarifies concepts and helps them to talk about and reflect on their practices more clearly. Another instructor in a joint-venture university described having limited professional development within his department and said, “I was sort of feeling my way through [planning] without much framework or structure or an awareness of what is the standard or the best practice in doing this. And having the course has helped sort of guide that process for me in a more formal way.” For this participant and several others, having clear terms and concepts in turn facilitated reflection about their planning and instruction. Next, we describe key concepts from the *Framework* covered in the online course and summarize findings about participants' understandings of these.

Target and Pedagogic Tasks

The *Framework* defines target tasks as the real world tasks that people are expected to do. Pedagogic tasks are defined as, “the various techniques by which learners are guided, prompted, scaffolded, and otherwise encouraged to develop language ability that is related to the target task. Pedagogic tasks include all activities that are intentionally designed to bring about language learning” (p. 5). The *Framework* also notes that language activities should never stand alone but should always emerge from a focus on language use.

For several participants, the idea of starting curriculum design by considering a target or real-world task was a new concept. They described their previous thinking about tasks as focused on what students do in the classroom rather than authentic language needs and uses. One public university EAP instructor stated, “Previously [...] I will seldom think about the skills they might need in a real situation.” Another instructor who teaches EAP at a joint-venture university described how the concept of target task, which was new to her, changed her thinking about how to plan pedagogic tasks: “I know [the pedagogic task] has to be relevant to the real world [...].” Even one experienced instructor who said he was familiar with the concepts said that the training helped him refocus his teaching by removing less relevant pedagogic tasks and ensuring that classroom instruction was better aligned with the target tasks. This instructor said the concepts were a helpful “refresher” of instructional priorities.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

The *Framework* describes SLOs as a statement of what students should know and be able to do as a result of instruction. In the course and post-program interviews, many instructors expressed previously familiarity with developing and using learning outcomes and so the concept was not new to them. In discussing SLOs, participants tended to rely on their own local practices and understandings of what learning outcomes mean or how they should be constructed.

For instructors who did seem to change in their understanding of SLOs, they focused on the integrated of outcomes with tasks and how they are sequenced. For example, one EAP instructor and program administrator at a public university noted that her university had been using SLOs and backward design for several years. However, this participant also said that SLOs were difficult to implement well and that the *Framework* provided a more coherent and practical way of conceptualizing SLOs by integrating the concept with target and pedagogic tasks and task scope and sequence. She felt that the concepts working together would allow her to plan

curriculum in a more integrated and detailed way than she had done previously. Another instructor at a joint-venture university expressed a similar idea in saying that, “everything you do in the classroom should have a direction to it,” and later described how the SLOs provide the destination for planning curriculum and help orient how tasks are sequenced. These instructors articulated an understanding that SLOs and other *Framework* principles are integrated in how they support planning.

Scope and Sequence

Task scope and sequence is defined in the *Framework* as a description of the steps that will support learners in achieving SLOs. Scope and sequence establishes the design of instruction in terms of what will be learned and in what order. For many instructors, scope and sequence was a salient and useful concept. While the idea of ordering tasks and activities in curriculum was not new, the principled way this is presented in the *Framework* was a new practice for them. Instructors primarily discussed scope and sequence in terms of the ordering of instructional activities within a particular unit of instruction rather than thinking more broadly across units in a course. A few participants did describe scope and sequence at a higher level of course design when discussing planning new courses, but otherwise the focus was primarily on how to best order teaching towards one pedagogical task such as giving an academic presentation.

Instructors reported finding the structured and logical approach to ordering content helpful for reconsidering their own classroom practices. In a discussion board post about scope and sequence practices, instructors described how they typically used textbook content to sequence curriculum or in some cases had other types of mandated or shared materials. In these cases, they may not have had to consider how to order content within and across units or may not have had autonomy to change things.

Across these different *Framework* concepts, instructors reported new insights and changes in their ways of thinking. This trend is supported by data from the post-program questionnaire. Table 6 presents results from a questionnaire item about the most useful concepts from the *Framework*.

Table 6. Responses to the Question: “Which concepts from the TOEFL Teaching Framework have been the most useful to your teaching? Select all that apply.”

Response	<i>N</i>	%
Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	18	78%
Task Scope and Sequence (SAS)	17	74%
Pedagogic Task	14	61%
Target Task	14	61%
Continuous Formative Assessment	7	30%
Other (please specify)	0	0%

Table 7 presents results from a questionnaire item which asked instructors to evaluate their ability in different areas before and after the course. These data represent perceived growth approximately three months after the course was complete.

Table 7. Responses to the Question: “How would you rate your ability in each of these skills before and after the course? Rate on a scale of 1–5 with 1 being *could not do at all* and 5 being *could do extremely well*.”

Skills	Before the course		After the course	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Determine appropriate target and pedagogic tasks	3.09	0.90	4.39	0.58
Use target and pedagogic tasks to design curriculum	3.17	0.78	4.30	0.63
Develop Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	3.17	0.83	4.30	0.56
Establish appropriate scope and sequence (SAS) for target tasks	2.74	0.75	4.09	0.67
Create meaningful, relevant lessons	3.26	0.92	4.30	0.70

RQ2: Contextual Considerations

The second research question addressed context-specific considerations for applying the *Framework*. To address this question, we draw from the analysis of post-program interview data and course discussion board posts.

The second research question addressed contextual considerations for applying concepts from the *Framework*. Results for this research question come from post-program interview data, work samples, and course observations from instructors. For this research question, we identified five themes that highlight contextual challenges in applying the *Framework*.

Target tasks are challenging to identify in courses of English for general academic purposes

Many instructors described teaching large, compulsory EAP courses to undergraduate students. In these cases, they said students often did not have clearly defined goals for learning English and came from many different areas of study. For instructors teaching these types of EAP courses, it was often not clear how to select meaningful target tasks or determine students' needs. One instructor working at a public university described reading through the Framework repeatedly after the online course ended in order to better understand what a target task would be in her context. She said:

I found that [my students are] taking a course to earn some credits. And also, they might take the course to get themselves prepared for some standardized tests. So, they don't have very specific purposes to apply those skills that they learn in the course to some real world situations [...] I tried to figure out what they really need.

Compared with EAP instructors working within disciplines or with graduate students, this instructor felt uncertain about how to establish meaningful target tasks for her course and wanted specific examples of how to do this. This was a challenge shared in other English for general academic purposes classes.

EAP Instructors May Lack Direct Experience With Target Tasks

EAP instructors teaching English for specific academic purposes courses and those preparing graduate students said that they sometimes lack experience with the target tasks they are utilizing in their instruction. For example, Several instructors noted that they enrolled in the online training course because they wanted to learn more about academic writing conventions for journal articles since they need to prepare graduate students for writing these. The instructors felt they had limited experience with this type of writing and had not received training in it. Thus, while instructors in these types of courses may have an easier time conceptualizing appropriate target tasks, they feel unprepared to teach students about the tasks given their own lack of disciplinary knowledge and experience. For example, one instructor noted that many EAP instructors are preparing students for graduate study in the US or UK but have not personally studied in these contexts. For this instructor, this was perceived as a barrier to effective instruction that could be addressed through training.

Developing Awareness of Student Needs Helped Instructors Address Motivation

In designing the online course, we found that many EAP instructors were concerned about student motivation, and we addressed this topic in Module 1 by showing how using authentic, real world tasks can address student motivation and make learning more purposeful. This concept was helpful for many instructors, and they discussed it in the post-program interview. Several instructors said that after the course, they began talking with their students about their needs, conducting a needs analysis, and introducing new units by discussing real-world language needs. For many instructors in the course, these practices helped them address concerns about low student motivation and apathy towards learning English.

Constraints on Instructional Autonomy Make Change Difficult

Instructors in our course had varying degrees of autonomy over their curriculum and instructional choices. In some cases, instructors had nearly complete freedom to design and implement EAP courses if they were within the broader goals of their program. Others reported more constraints on their curriculum and indicated they had to cover a certain amount of material within a course or used a common curriculum that could not be revised without consensus from a group of instructors. For those working with greater constraints, change was difficult to implement, and instructors felt there were limited practices they could implement. For some instructors, they hoped to use the Framework to advocate for improved planning and instruction but were unsure if this would be possible. Other instructors in the course had some autonomy to change their instructional practices, but they struggled to know what changes they could make and said they would have benefitted from examples and more specific support.

Instructors Want More Support for Changing Technology Use

Many instructors discussed the use of generative AI in their classes. Several instructors reported using generative AI to plan lessons and described how they applied concepts from the Framework to help them create better prompts for classroom materials. Most frequently, instructors discussed how their students are using generative AI for learning. Several instructors submitted work samples or described practices that incorporated generative AI into their pedagogic tasks. For example, one instructor developed a writing task in which students were required to use generative AI for revisions and then reflect on this practice. Another instructor said they no longer provide detailed instruction about grammatical revisions to writing because

students can easily rely on technology tools and so do not see these skills as relevant. Generative AI is changing what target tasks are relevant and how students learn, and instructors in the course want more support for this emerging challenge. Additionally, some instructors were concerned that students would no longer view language learning as important and instead rely on technology for translation and communication.

RQ3: Perceived Efficacy and Impact

The third research question focuses on the perceived efficacy of the training and impact of the *Framework* on planning and instruction. This research question is addressed using self-reported data from the post-program interview and questionnaire.

Table 8 reports instructors' evaluation of the course learning objectives for each module.

Table 8. Responses to the Prompt: “Rate how well the course achieved the intended learning objectives.”

Participants will be able to:	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
... determine appropriate target and pedagogic tasks for their EAP courses and use these as the foundation of curriculum design	0%	0%	9%	78%	13%
... develop Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that meaningfully capture expectations for student learning based on target tasks.	0%	0%	13%	74%	13%
... establish appropriate scope and sequence (SAS) for target tasks in their EAP courses.	0%	0%	17%	70%	13%
...bring together what they have learned about SLOs and SAS to create meaningful, relevant lessons embedded within a larger curriculum.	0%	0%	39%	52%	9%

Note. Percentages in bold represent the most frequent response.

Most participants rated the training met the target learning objectives “very well” or higher particularly for the objectives related to target and pedagogic tasks, SLOs, and scope and sequence. Ratings were lower for the Module 4 objective related to synthesizing concepts and applying these to lesson planning. Next, Table 8 shows responses to a question about how many times the instructor has referenced the *Framework* in the three months since the course ended.

Table 9. Responses to the Question: “Since the course ended, to what extent have you referred to the TOEFL Teaching Framework document?”

Response	<i>N</i>	%
1–3 times	14	61%
More than 3 times	5	22%
Not at all	4	17%
Other (please specify)	0	0%
All responses	23	100%

As shown, most respondents had referenced the *Framework* since the end of the course, indicating their ongoing use of this resource as a reference. Next, Table 10 shows responses to a questionnaire item about how they will or plan to use course concepts in their planning and teaching.

Table 10. Responses to the Question: Rate your agreement with each of the following statements on a scale of 1–5 with 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and 5 being *Strongly Agree*.

Statements	Mean	SD
I plan curriculum using the principles of the <i>Framework</i> .	3.96	0.98
I use target tasks when planning curriculum.	4.30	0.88
I use Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) when planning curriculum.	4.30	0.88
I use Task Scope and Sequence (SAS) when planning curriculum.	4.22	0.85
Overall, my practices for curriculum design changed as a result of this course.	4.04	0.98

Questionnaire results are consistent with our evaluation as instructors that the training course was strongest in terms of supporting curriculum and syllabus design but provided only an overview of the complex work of lesson planning. In addition, we saw decreasing levels of participation in the course as each week progressed, in particular attendance at the webinar, and so the lower ratings may reflect less interaction with the course content at this later phase of the training.

Participants reported that they found the *Framework* useful after the training and 83% reported referring to it at least once since the training ended. The core concepts of target and pedagogic task, SLOs, and SAS were all selected as useful by most course participants, and again this aligns with the primary emphasis on the training content.

Results from the interview data support questionnaire findings while providing important qualitative information about how instructors described course concepts and how they reported

applying the *Framework* to their teaching. In applying what they learned from the training, instructors discussed how the *Framework* concepts helped them reflect on and make changes to their teaching. One instructor described their planning process before the *Framework* as follows:

Previously, when I designed my course, I would consider the objectives I want to achieve in a certain say teaching session. Then I will try to design what I'm going to teach and also what the students are I supposed to accomplish So I may not have a very clear idea about target task and pedagogic task during the teaching.

In this example, the instructor describes creating lessons without clear tasks. Another instructor described the perceived impact of the training as enabling him to create logical sequences of instruction through a clear process for planning, not that, “at the end you have this beautiful structure and it's not haphazard.” Many instructors echoed this sentiment that the *Framework* provided logic to curriculum and lesson design decisions.

Interview data showed three areas of the course that participants identified for improvement in the future. First, participants uniformly asked for more models and examples of how to apply course concepts. Participants requested teaching demonstrations or videos as well as practical examples of tasks. Several participants recommended the course include examples from different EAP teaching contexts to show how to apply the course concepts locally and how challenges such as large class sizes could be addressed through task design or technology use. Second, participants felt the webinar format was challenging. The format included breakout groups with structured activities and discussions. Although this format worked well with cohort 1, which was a small group of relatively experienced instructors, cohort 2 instructors generally felt the discussion groups were not effective. In our observation and facilitation of these breakout groups, we noted that few participants spoke even when prompted by an instructor. Participants did not typically turn on their video cameras or want to interact. In interviews, instructors noted that they felt this discussion-style format was not effective and should not be used in the future. Third, participant feedback showed a need for further differentiation. Some participants had no training in EAP and *Framework* concepts were new to them while others were highly experienced instructors interested in expanding their knowledge of theory and research. Because of these differences, recommendations and feedback included requests for more content while other participants noted feeling overwhelmed by information in the course.

Discussion

To summarize the results of our study, our research question looked at how instructors understand key concepts from the *Framework*. In general, the clarity and structure of the *Framework* helped instructors in our study articulate their practices clearly to themselves and helped to facilitate reflection and instructional change. While concepts were new for some instructors, participants in the course tended to integrate and map *Framework* concepts to their existing knowledge and practices. The concept of aligning instruction to real-world target tasks was new for many of the EAP instructors in our study and helped them conceptualize instruction in a more integrated and purposeful way. Our second research question focused on contextual considerations for applying the *Framework* across local EAP programs. Thematic analysis of interview data showed challenges for instructors teaching English for general academic purposes courses in conceptualizing target tasks. For those teaching for more discipline-specific purposes, instructors' lack of experience with the discipline was a perceived barrier to instruction. The third research question looked at instructors' perceptions of course efficacy and self-reported impact on teaching. Questionnaire results confirm the perceived usefulness of the *Framework* three months after the completion of the online course, and instructors describe changes to their planning and instruction to incorporate concepts including target and pedagogic tasks.

Consistent with previous research about CET (Huang, 2019; Li & Baldulf, 2011) instruction, we found that some participants in our study also reported constrained curriculum and mandated textbook use, and instructors in more constrained teaching contexts often viewed aspects of the *Framework* as impractical, particularly related to teaching speaking skills. Participants who worked in joint-venture universities generally had more agency and decision-making authority, and many could, for example, create their own EAP course topics and materials. The instructors in our study saw many of the concepts in the *Framework* as useful, particularly target and pedagogic tasks, as it gave them a structure to understand their existing practices and consider new ideas. That is, many instructors viewed their existing practice in terms of the recommendations already in the *Framework* and so as a document in provided a way of expanding on and building from their EAP teaching practices. We saw teachers in our study synthesize information in the *Framework* relevant to their accumulated teaching knowledge.

As adult professionals taking a training program to further their own learning, the participants in our course selected the concepts that were most relevant to their immediate

teaching challenges and applied those. Our finding that, for some participants, interactive, discussion-based learning was not seen as effective or meaningful highlights the need for locally-relevant professional development formats. In this case, if we were to conduct the course again, we would redesign the webinars to replace discussion with lecture and then provide an individual reflection activity.

Teaching frameworks provide a common standard and shared language for best practices and distill important ideas in teaching and learning (Bird et al., 2025). However, there is limited empirical work about how teachers perceive the usefulness of frameworks or how and why they are used in different contexts. In this study, we found that at the level of individual instructors, the Framework did support EAP instructors in articulating their needs and describing their practices. Participants were also skeptical and at times questioned the applicability or usefulness of the Framework, reflecting critical engagement with it and taking a stance as experts in their own teaching contexts and what best practices should be. The instructors' stance as experts in their own local contexts, while not apparent for all participants, is important in understanding how teachers in China utilize a resource and framework which reflects Western norms and best practices.

Some instructors in our study also identified advocacy uses for the Framework, such as providing evidence to colleagues about the best ways to teach or legitimizing their instructional decisions. As CET in China continues to move to a more EAP-focused approach, there are opportunities for educators to utilize the Framework to articulate the benefits and key characteristics of EAP and to serve as a guiding document for instructors transitioning for teaching general to academic English courses. Although research is limited in this area, there are other studies that highlight the facilitative role that TBLT can play in EAP instruction (e.g., Douglas & Kim, 2015). The results of our study are consistent with these findings. Concepts of target and pedagogic tasks, for example, help instructors conceptualize the current and future academic language needs of their students and are also quite adaptable for English for general or discipline-specific purposes.

In the future, we see clear ways the Framework and associated training could be made more relevant and meaningful for instructors based on findings from the study. As noted, instructors wanted more examples of tasks and curriculum design. Models that show considerations for English for general academic purposes would help instructors with challenges

of conceptualizing target and pedagogic tasks for these contexts or could show how instructors could design tasks for learners without specific and clear learning goals. Examples could also show how instructors apply course concepts in large classes and strategies for using technology in the classroom as part of how target and pedagogic tasks are conceptualized. Finally, scenarios could be used to show how EAP instructors with limited discipline-specific background plan for and teach English for specific academic purposes courses.

One additional practice that would be useful in supporting Framework implementation is to show instructors examples of how existing textbook or course content could be modified to be more task-like. This would be particularly useful for instructors working in contexts with limited autonomy to change curriculum or in classrooms where textbook use drives instruction. This approach has been modeled by Fernández (n.d.) and shows teachers how changes to existing content can incorporate purposeful, authentic communication to more traditional textbook activities (see also Gruzynski-Weiss, 2024).

There are several limitations to our study. Attrition in our first cohort required a second round of data collection, and for the second cohort we offered incentives for course completion. It is possible the incentives led to more positive evaluations about the course from participants. The course attrition also points to limitations in our approach to opt-in, additive professional development from an external group. We believe future professional development would be strengthened through facilitation by experienced EAP instructors in China who can serve as mentors and leaders with in-depth contextual knowledge about practical challenges. We also recognize that training about and implementation of the Framework would be most effective if done at the programmatic level. While individual training and development opportunities support instructors in individual pathways of professional growth, some programs are not supportive of changes to instructional practices. Ideally, future training programs would be conducted with instructors from a single institution and supported through administrative processes such as the alignment of teaching evaluations with Framework. Aksit & Aksit (2022) show this type of comprehensive professional development and framework alignment is possible and productive if very resource-intensive.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the professional development needs of EAP instructors in China and to explore the usefulness of the *TOEFL Teaching Framework* to

their contexts. Through an iterative design process drawing from a background questionnaire and interview data, we developed a four-week training program. Throughout the study and after the course was complete, instructors described meaningful changes to their instructional practice and curriculum design process through the logical clarity provided by the *Framework* and through engaging with its concepts in the training program. The results of the study also show important contextual and local mediators of how instructors viewed the *Framework* and how they were able or not able to apply its concepts.

Overall, this study illustrates the potential usefulness of the *Framework* in China and in other EAP contexts. The clear distillation of teaching principles and succinct presentation of best practices can serve as a meaningful resource for instructors and is flexible for use across many different teaching contexts, student populations, and local constraints. In some of the challenges we faced in the study, we also see how the *Framework* would be most effective when adopted by departments or programs as part of coordinated and sustained professional development as this can provide instructors with a shared language and common sense of goals as they plan. Instructors clearly want and benefit from contextual examples and sample material based on the *Framework*. Such materials not only help make concepts concrete in the context of a training but also facilitate the application of principles to the challenging real-world teaching contexts that instructors must navigate.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature on how EAP instructors learn, particularly in continued professional development programs. In this study as in other research, the most meaningful professional learning takes place when principles have immediate and practical relevance to instructors' needs, challenges, and goals. As EAP instruction in China continues to grow, work that bridges teaching principles and real-world practice is an ongoing need.

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