ets research institute

OCTOBER
2026
RR–26-12
TOEFL–RR-111

TOEFL® RESEARCH SERIES

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



AUTHORS

Meg Montee, Wen (Elyssa) Sun, and Jenna Bushton

ETS Research Report Series

EIGNOR EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Daniel F. McCaffrey
Lord Chair in Measurement and Statistics

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Usama Ali
Principal Measurement Scientist

Beata Beigman Klebanov
Principal Research Scientist, Edusoft/ETS

Katherine Castellano
Managing Principal Research Scientist

Michael Fauss
Research Scientist

Yang Jiang
Research Scientist

Jamie N. Mikeska
Managing Principal Research Scientist

Teresa Ober
Research Scientist

Jonathan Schmidgall
Senior Research Scientist

Jesse Sparks
Director Research

Zuowei Wang
Senior Research Scientist

Mikyung Wolf
Principal Research Scientist

Diego Zapata Rivera
Distinguished Presidential Appointee

Klaus Zechner
Senior Research Scientist

Jiyun Zu
Senior Measurement Scientist

PRODUCTION EDITORS

Ayleen Gontz
Manager, Editorial Services

Emily Ramsower
Manager, Editorial Services

Since its 1947 founding, ETS has conducted and disseminated scientific research to support its products and services, and to advance the measurement and education fields. In keeping with these goals, ETS is committed to making its research freely available to the professional community and to the general public. Published accounts of ETS research, including papers in the ETS Research Report series, undergo a formal peer-review process by ETS staff to ensure that they meet established scientific and professional standards. All such ETS-conducted peer reviews are in addition to any reviews that outside organizations may provide as part of their own publication processes. Peer review notwithstanding, the positions expressed in the ETS Research Report series and other published accounts of ETS research are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Officers and Trustees of Educational Testing Service.

The Daniel Eignor Editorship is named in honor of Dr. Daniel R. Eignor, who from 2001 until 2011 served the Research and Development division as Editor for the ETS Research Report series. The Eignor Editorship has been created to recognize the pivotal leadership role that Dr. Eignor played in the research publication process at ETS.

TOEFL® Research Series

The TOEFL® test is the world's most widely respected English language assessment, primarily used for admissions purposes in more than 130 countries. Since the 1970s, the TOEFL tests have had a rigorous, productive, and far-ranging research program. ETS has made the establishment of a strong research base a consistent feature of the development and evolution of the TOEFL tests, recognizing that rigorous research is essential to support a forward-looking assessment program and to substantiate claims about what test takers know or can do based on their test scores.

In addition to TOEFL-related research projects conducted by ETS staff each year, the TOEFL Committee of Examiners (COE), composed of distinguished language learning and testing experts from the academic community, funds an annual program of research carried out by external researchers around the world. To date, hundreds of studies on the TOEFL tests have been published in refereed academic journals and books, in addition to the more than 300 peer-reviewed reports about TOEFL research published by ETS.

Current (2025–2026) members of the TOEFL COE

Koen Van Gorp – Chair	**Michigan State University, USA**
Bart Deygers	Ghent University, Belgium
Becky Huang	The Ohio State University, USA
Yo In'Nami	Chuo University, Japan
Heike Neumann	Concordia University, Canada
Gary Ockey	Iowa State University, USA
Anamaria Pinter	University of Warwick, UK

To obtain more information about the TOEFL programs and services, visit www.ets.org/toefl.

ETS Research Report Series ISSN 2330-8516

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

Meg Montee[1], Wen (Elyssa) Sun[2], & Jenna Bushton[1]

[1]Georgetown University, Washington, DC, United States

[2]Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC, United States

Abstract

The 2021 *TOEFL® Teaching Framework: Guidelines for Planning Lessons and Courses* by Norris and Sasayama (see Appendix) 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 (Ellis, 2025; Long, 2015) in conceptualizing best practices for instructed second language acquisition in English for academic purposes (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 as well as from 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

Corresponding author: Meg Montee, Email: meg.montee@georgetown.edu

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our collaborator, Francesca Di Silvio. Francesca contributed to the research and training design, instrument creation, and early stages of data collection and analysis. Thank you to Veronika Timpe-Laughlin for her helpful comments on a draft copy of our manuscript.

Introduction

The 2021 *TOEFL® Teaching Framework: Guidelines for Planning Lessons and Courses* by Norris and Sasayama (henceforth the TOEFL Teaching Framework; see the Appendix) 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework supports the goal of helping learners develop language skills for communicating in English in academic settings. Although the TOEFL Teaching Framework is explicitly linked to the TOEFL iBT® test in that the test represents one important target of EAP instruction, the TOEFL Teaching Framework's primary focus is on recommended pedagogical practices drawn from both empirical research and expert guidance. The TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework is that it can guide professional learning for EAP instructors. Although the TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 from primary school through university has been a focus of government policy. EAP is increasingly prominent at the university level in China and has in some universities replaced general English language teaching (Cai, 2021; Rao, 2018). In utilizing the TOEFL Teaching Framework as the basis of a professional development program for EAP instructors in China, we seek to understand how its principles are locally adapted by participants and, ultimately, to meet the call for EAP professional development research and resources. Additionally, this study contributes to a better understanding of 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 (Hamp-Lyons, 2011; Hyland, 2018). Although 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 & Jiang, 2021; Hyland & Shaw, 2016). 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 (Liu et al., 2023; Yasuda, 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 and 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 Borg & Liu, 2013; Hyland, 2018). 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 (Chang, 2006; Xu & Fan, 2017). 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 (CET) and English medium instruction (EMI).

College English Teaching

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 (Cai, 2021; Cheng, 2016). 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 their peers 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 and 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 being 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 & Cheng, 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. Although 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-based 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 (2018) 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.

English Medium Instruction

Although CET is a major sphere for EAP instruction in China, EMI is rapidly expanding (see Liao et al., 2026) and is also an important site for EAP instruction. EMI refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in areas where English is not a first language for most of the population (Macaro, 2018). EMI offerings include the following: 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 and Delogu (2026) 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 and Campion (2016) point out in a critical review of EAP teacher education, EAP instructors tend to vary greatly in their instructional status, departmental affiliations, and teaching qualifications. Instructors need support in local realizations of EAP through a deeper understanding of their values, commitments, and constraints.

Although 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; M. Li & Baldaulf, 2011).

Y. 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 et al. (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., British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes [BALEAP], 2008; British Council, 2011; Cambridge English, 2026; Center for Adult English Language Acquisition [CAELA] Network, 2010; Eaquals, 2025; TESOL International Association, 2019).

Of relevance to the current study is the BALEAP *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (BALEAP, 2008). Originally developed as a resource for supporting instructor professional development, the BALEAP framework has been updated to differentiate competencies based on levels of teaching experience and is associated with a teacher accreditation scheme (BALEAP, 2025). The BALEAP framework identifies key competencies of EAP instructors related to academic practice, EAP students, curriculum development, and program implementation. Through these key competencies, the BALEAP framework is intended to "raise the profile" of EAP within institutions (BALEAP, 2025, p. 2). This impact, as well as the framework's associated accreditation scheme, are 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.

Although there has been limited research on the usefulness and application of existing language teaching frameworks, Aksit and Aksit (2022) describe efforts of an EAP center in Turkey to incorporate the BALEAP framework into their program. Efforts included teacher development, teacher training, and certification for new teachers in key areas of competency. New EAP instructor training and certification were supported through mentoring, feedback, an action research project, and reflective practice. Aksit and Aksit (2022) describe the extensive and ongoing work of implementing the BALEAP 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" (p. 6). This work highlights that, at the programmatic level,

framework implementation is intensive and involves extensive cultural change. However, in the examples given by Aksit and Aksit (2022) of mentoring and professional learning activities, the BALEAP framework and key competencies provide a foundation and structure to support the local needs of instructors while also supporting consistent quality across instructors.

The TOEFL Teaching Framework

The TOEFL Teaching Framework is designed to provide general recommendations for designing and implementing curriculum and materials for EAP (see Appendix). The TOEFL iBT provides "an important backdrop" (p. 2) for the TOEFL Teaching 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. For this reason, the TOEFL iBT tasks can be instructionally relevant and useful for planning EAP. When the TOEFL Teaching Framework was developed, the current TOEFL iBT test (Manna et al., 2025) had not yet been launched, and we have not reviewed the TOEFL Teaching Framework for alignment with the current version of the test. However, rather than focusing on test content, the TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework.

Table 1. Content and Organization of the TOEFL Teaching Framework

Section	Subsection	Key topics
General recommendations for English for academic purposes (EAP) instruction	Basic principles	Instructional content, relationship among the four skills, target tasks, pedagogic tasks, assessment, and feedback
	Syllabus design	Student learning outcomes and 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework, included in the Appendix, 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework provides principles of syllabus design through establishing student learning outcomes (SLOs) and task scope and sequence (pp. 7–11). Guidance for the design of lessons lists essential components (e.g., an engaging introduction to the task; schema-building activities) and a recommended order for these elements (pp. 11–13). The final section of the TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 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 second language outcomes (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; Bryfonski et al., 2025; Van Gorp et al., 2026). TBLT also informed the design of the 2000 TOEFL® test (Enright et al., 2008) in conceptualizing test tasks.

Although 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 TOEFL Teaching 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, 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework principles in their diverse EAP contexts. We address the following research questions:

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

Methodology

The design of the study follows the development and implementation of a 4-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.

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 1, which is explained further in the Participants subsection. 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 five-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 3 months after completion of the course, instructors completed a seven-item web-based questionnaire about the perceived impact of the training program on their instructional practices and their plans to use or apply the TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework principles in their classroom. The submission of the work sample was optional. We waited 3 months for the final data collection activities in order to allow participants time to consider and apply concepts, and therefore better capture participants' perceptions of the course's impact and usefulness.

Post-Training Interview

Approximately 3 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 Microsoft Excel using descriptive statistics. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and were video recorded and transcribed using Zoom's automated transcription feature.

To address the second research question, the 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. Reflexive thematic analysis was selected because it provides a flexible and inductively oriented approach to analyzing qualitative data from diverse sources. Steps in the reflexive thematic analysis included (a) data familiarization, (b) generate initial codes, (c) sort initial codes into potential themes, (d) refine themes, (e) determine the "essence" of themes, and (f) write analysis of themes.

We used MAXQDA to conduct data familiarization, coding, and sorting of initial codes. In coding the data, we utilized both semantic coding that reflected the direct meaning of language and latent coding to capture underlying intentions. We initially identified a large number of codes, and sorting and clustering these allowed us to reduce the codes to a smaller number.

The steps of theme refinement, determining the essence of the themes, and written analysis were conducted 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 4-week online training program was developed specifically for the study. To develop the course, we first analyzed the TOEFL Teaching Framework. We then conducted think-aloud

interviews with 24 EAP instructors to determine which aspects of the TOEFL Teaching Framework to prioritize in the short-term training. (Note: These data are reported in a separate study.)

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

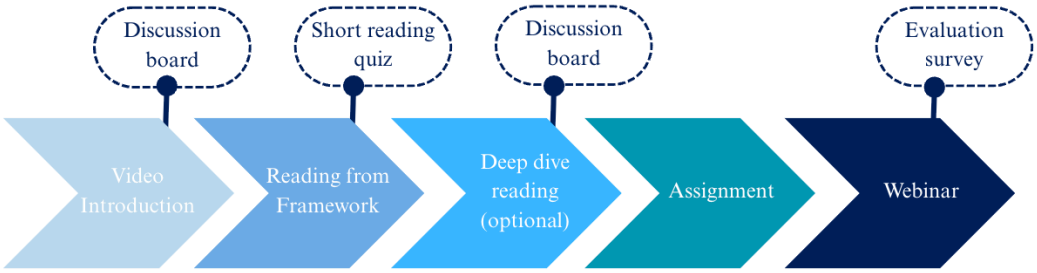
Table 3. Application of Interview Findings to Training Program Development

Issue	Implications for training program
Need for differentiated content based on familiarity with TOEFL Teaching Framework 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework

As noted in Table 3, we found that some EAP instructors already had an extensive background in TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework principles. Based on interview data, we prioritized sections of the TOEFL Teaching Framework to include in the course because we could not cover the entire document in 4 weeks.

The primary goal of the course was as follows: Participants will be able to design curricula and related lessons for EAP courses by applying the principles of the TOEFL Teaching Framework, including developing task scope and sequence and SLOs. The TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 1-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 5 to 7 days of submission. Finally, instructors interacted with participants directly during the weekly live webinar, which included time for questions and discussion.

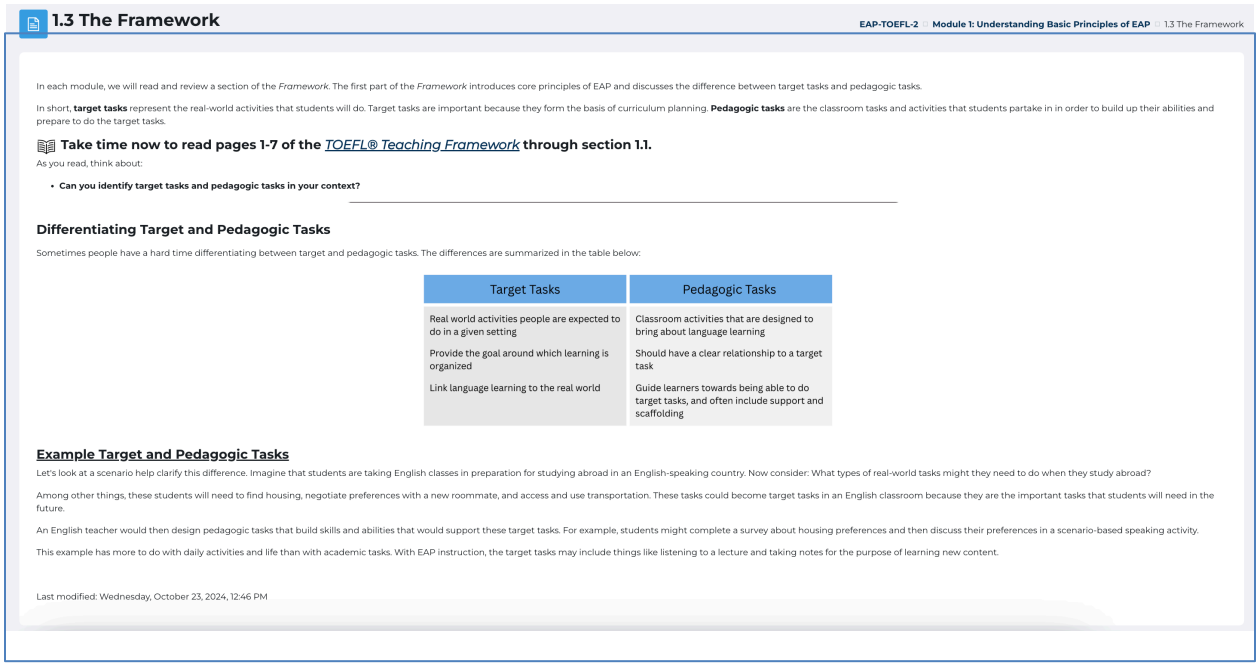
Table 4 presents the four content modules, including the SLOs, key topics, and TOEFL Teaching Framework sections covered in the module, and assignments. Figure 3 shows an example screen from Module 1 to illustrate the presentation of content in the Moodle Learning Management System used to deliver the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

Table 4. Training Program Content

Module	Student learning outcomes (SLOs)	Key topics (TOEFL Teaching 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, and student motivation (Section 1.1)	Develop a student needs analysis instrument
M2: Developing SLOs	Participants will be able to develop SLOs that meaningfully capture expectations for student learning based on target tasks.	SLOs, backward design, and task components (Section 1.2)	Create SLOs
M3: Building Scope & Sequence	Participants will be able to establish appropriate scope and sequence for tasks in their EAP courses.	Scope and sequence and continuous formative assessment (Section 1.2)	Develop task scope and sequence aligned with SLOs
M4: Applying Practical Skills for Lesson Design	Participants will be able to bring together what they have learned about SLOs and scope and sequence to create meaningful, relevant lessons embedded with a larger curriculum.	Effective lesson planning and encouraging student interaction (Section 1.3)	Create a lesson plan

Note. EAP = English for academic purposes

Figure 3. Screenshot of Training Program Presentation in Moodle



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 (a) teaching in an EAP program or (b) 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 due to 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 the online course and associated research activities. Note: We counted participants who responded to approximately 80% of course assignments and activities as having completed the course.

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 more than 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 4-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 4-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 comfort with 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	Details	# 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%

Note. EAP = English for academic purposes. Geographical location (*N*) = 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)

Most instructors from joint-venture universities completed graduate degrees in Australia, North America, or the United Kingdom; 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, though it is possible that these institutions may have EMI programs within their universities. 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework. As noted in the Methodology section, we focused on three key concepts in the training: target and pedagogic tasks, SLOs, 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework terms were often new to them even if they were familiar with the underlying ideas and practices. They saw the TOEFL Teaching 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 the following:

> 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework and terminology, describing how it solidifies and clarifies concepts and helps them 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework covered in the online course and summarize findings about participant understandings of these concepts.

Target and Pedagogic Tasks

The TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 a 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 expressed familiarity 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

The TOEFL Teaching 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 previous 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 integration 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 TOEFL Teaching 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, saying, "Everything you do in the classroom should have a direction to it." This instructor 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework principles are integrated in how they support planning.

Scope and Sequence

Norris and Sasayama define task scope and sequence in the 2021 TOEFL Teaching Framework (see Appendix) as a description of the steps that will support learners in achieving SLOs (p. 9). Scope and sequence establish 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. Although the idea of ordering tasks and activities in curriculum was not new to instructors, the principled way this is presented in the TOEFL Teaching 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 toward 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching 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	*N*	%
Student learning outcomes	18	78%
Task scope and sequence	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 3 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	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
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	3.17	0.83	4.30	0.56
Establish appropriate scope and sequence 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 contextual considerations for applying concepts from the TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework.

Theme 1: 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 TOEFL Teaching 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.

Theme 2: EAP Instructors May Lack Direct Experience With Target Tasks

EAP instructors teaching English for specific academic purposes courses, as well as 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 that work. These instructors felt they had limited experience with that type of writing and had not received training in it. Thus, although 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 United States or United Kingdom 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.

Theme 3: Developing Awareness of Student Needs Helped Instructors Address Motivation

In designing the online course, we found that many EAP instructors were particularly concerned about and challenged by student motivation. For example, several instructors reported teaching large courses in which student motivation varied greatly by individual. Other instructors felt their students lacked motivation because they did not have a clear need for learning English nor plans to use it in the future. We addressed motivation as a topic in Module 1 by showing how using authentic, real-world tasks can address student motivation and make learning more purposeful. We also included a presentation of how student motivation can be defined within an instructed second language teaching context and what factors may influence motivation. The motivation-focused content and discussion were helpful for many instructors, and discussed 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 questionnaire, and introducing new units by discussing real-world language use. Instructors reported that these practices helped them address concerns about low student motivation and apathy toward learning English. As instructors, we saw how linking target and pedagogical tasks to contextual challenges with student motivation both was helpful for course participants and led to reported changes in teaching.

Theme 4: 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 (a) had to cover a certain amount of material within a course or (b) 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework to advocate for improved planning and instruction but were unsure if program change would be possible. Other instructors in the course had some autonomy to modify their instructional practices, but they struggled to

know what changes they could make and said they would have benefitted from examples and specific support for this.

Theme 5: Instructors Want More Support for Changing Technology Use

Many instructors discussed the use of generative AI in their EAP classes. Several instructors reported using generative AI to plan lessons and described how they applied concepts from the TOEFL Teaching 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 also changing what target tasks are relevant and how students learn, and instructors in the course wanted 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. The course content did not address generative AI in the materials, and so instructor comments came up in assignments, webinar discussions, and in the post-course interview data.

RQ3: Perceived Efficacy and Impact

The third research question focuses on the perceived efficacy of the training and impact of the TOEFL Teaching 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
Module 1: Determine appropriate target and pedagogic tasks for their EAP courses and use these as the foundation of curriculum design.	0%	0%	9%	**78%**	13%
Module 2: Develop student learning outcomes (SLOs) that meaningfully capture expectations for student learning based on target tasks.	0%	0%	13%	**74%**	13%
Module 3: Establish appropriate scope and sequence for target tasks in their EAP courses.	0%	0%	17%	**70%**	13%
Module 4: Bring together what they have learned about SLOs and scope and sequence 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 reported that 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 9 shows responses to a question about how many times the instructor has referenced the TOEFL Teaching Framework in the 3 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	*N*	%
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 TOEFL Teaching 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 Prompt, "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 TOEFL Teaching Framework.	3.96	0.98
I use target tasks when planning curriculum.	4.30	0.88
I use student learning outcomes when planning curriculum.	4.30	0.88
I use task scope and sequence 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, particularly with attendance at the webinar, and so the ratings may reflect less interaction with the course content at this phase of the training.

Participants reported that they found the TOEFL Teaching 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 scope and sequence 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework to their teaching. In applying what they learned from the training, instructors discussed how the TOEFL Teaching Framework concepts helped them reflect on and make changes to their teaching. One instructor described their planning process before the TOEFL Teaching 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, noting, "At the end you have this beautiful structure and it's not haphazard." Many instructors echoed this sentiment that the TOEFL Teaching 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 the TOEFL Teaching Framework concepts were new to them—and others were highly experienced instructors interested in expanding their knowledge of theory and research. This variation led to differences in recommendations and feedback: Some requested more content, and other participants noted feeling overwhelmed by information in the course.

Discussion

To summarize the results of our study, our first research question looked at how instructors understand key concepts from the TOEFL Teaching Framework. In general, the clarity and structure of the TOEFL Teaching Framework helped instructors in our study (a) articulate their practices clearly to themselves and (b) facilitate reflection and instructional change. Although concepts were new for some instructors, participants in the course tended to integrate and map TOEFL Teaching 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 that felt "logical." Our second research question focused on contextual considerations for applying the TOEFL Teaching Framework across local EAP programs. Reflexive 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework 3 months after the completion of the online course, and instructors described changing their planning and instruction to incorporate concepts such as target and pedagogic tasks.

Consistent with previous research about CET instruction (Huang, 2019; M. Li & Baldaulf, 2011), 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework as useful, particularly target and pedagogic tasks, because 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework and so it provided a way of expanding on and building from their EAP teaching practices. We saw teachers in our study synthesize information in the TOEFL Teaching 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 and applied concepts that were most relevant to their immediate teaching challenges. For some participants, interactive, discussion-based learning was not seen as effective or meaningful, and this finding 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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework, demonstrating critical engagement with the framework and taking a stance as experts in their own teaching contexts and best practices. In particular, the instructors' stance as experts in their own local contexts, although not apparent for all participants, is important in understanding how teachers in China utilize a resource and framework that reflects Western norms and best practices.

Some instructors in our study also identified advocacy uses for the TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework to articulate the benefits and key characteristics of EAP and to serve as a guiding document for instructors transitioning from 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 in which the TOEFL Teaching Framework and associated training could be made more relevant and meaningful for instructors based on findings from this 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. Given the strong interest in using generative AI, we could also see a training program that helps

instructors use AI tools for developing pedagogical tasks and instructional materials. 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. Discipline-specific training may be another area where generative AI tools could be utilized. For example, teachers could take part in customized training by using AI-generated scenarios and interactions or could learn to utilize AI to conduct research about disciplinary practices and language use.

One additional practice that would be useful in supporting TOEFL Teaching 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 (2024) and shows teachers how changes to existing content can incorporate purposeful, authentic communication into more traditional textbook activities (see also Gurzynski-Weiss, 2024, for a description of how the task was developed).

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 TOEFL Teaching Framework training and implementation would be most effective if done at the programmatic level. Although 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 the TOEFL Teaching Framework. Aksit and 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 4-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 TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework and how they were or were not able to apply its concepts.

Overall, this study illustrates the potential usefulness of the TOEFL Teaching 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 TOEFL Teaching Framework would be most effective when adopted by departments or programs as part of coordinated and sustained professional development—which 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 TOEFL Teaching 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. 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 remains an ongoing need.

References

Aksit, T., & Aksit, N. (2022). Establishing an institutional EAP teacher development scheme based on BALEAP's competency framework: A critical review of the competencies. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *60*, Article 101175. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2022.101175

BALEAP. (2008). *Competency framework for teachers of English for academic purposes*. https://www.baleap.org/downloads/teap/teap-competency-framework.pdf

BALEAP. (2025). *BALEAP TEAP individual accreditation scheme handbook 2024*. https://www.baleap.org/downloads/teap/baleap-teap-handbook--updated-jan-2026.pdf

Bao, C., Chen, X., & Jiang, F. K. (2024). Self-empowerment in the struggling transition from general English to EAP: Action and reflection of a Chinese teacher. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *68*, Article 101343. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2024.101343

Bird, B. J., Brunow, B., Kyle, E., & Simonson, S. R. (2025). Exploring the connection between teaching frameworks. *International Journal for Transformative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *1*(2), Article 1. https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/ijttl/vol1/iss2/1

Borg, S., & Liu, Y. (2013). Chinese college English teachers' research engagement. *TESOL Quarterly*, *47*(2), 270–299. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.56

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: a practical guide.* SAGE Publications.

British Council. (2011). *Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for teachers*. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teachers/articles/continuing-professional-development-cpd-framework-teachers

Bryfonski, L., & McKay, T. H. (2019). TBLT implementation and evaluation: A meta-analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, *23*(5), 603–632. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817744389

Bryfonski, L., Ziegler, N., & Montee, M. (2025). Technology-mediated task-based language teaching: A meta-analysis. *CALICO Journal*, *42*(3), 472–501. https://utppublishing.com/doi/full/10.3138/calico-2024-0029

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition Network. (2010). *Framework for quality professional development for practitioners working with adult English language learners*. Center for Applied Linguistics. http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/profdev/framework/index.html

Cai, J. (2021). EAP in China: A case study of a paradigm shift in Shanghai college English programmes. *International Journal of English for Academic Purposes: Research and Practice*, *1*(2), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.3828/ijeap.2021.2

Cambridge English. (2026). *Cambridge English Teaching Framework.* https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/educators-organisations/professional-development/teaching-framework/

Chang, J. (2006). Globalization and English in Chinese higher education. *World Englishes*, *25*(3–4), 513–525. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2006.00484.x

Cheng, A. (2016). EAP at the tertiary level in China. In K. Hyland & P. Shaw (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English for academic purposes* (pp. 97–108). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315657455-10

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ding, A., & Campion, G. (2016). EAP teacher development. In K. Hyland & P. Shaw (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English for academic purposes* (pp. 571–583). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315657455-49

Douglas, S. R., & Kim, M. (2015). Task-based language teaching and English for academic purposes: An investigation into instructor perceptions and practice in the Canadian context. *TESL Canada Journal*, *31*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v31i0.1184

Eaquals. (2025, April 23). *The Eaquals framework for language teacher training and development*. https://www.eaquals.org/our-expertise/teacher-development/the-eaquals-framework-for-teacher-training-and-development/

Ellis, R. (2003). Designing a task-based syllabus. *RELC Journal*, *34*(1), 64–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/003368820303400105

Ellis, R. (2025). Task-based and task-supported language teaching. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, *6*(4), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.58304/ijts.20240401

Enright, M. K., Bridgeman, B., Eignor, D., Kantor, R. N., Mollaun, P., Nissan, S., Powers, D. E., & Schedl, M. (2008). Prototyping new assessment tasks. In C. A. Chapelle, M. K. Enright, & J. M. Jamieson (Eds.), *Building a validity argument for the Test of English as a Foreign Language*™ (pp. 97–144). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203937891

Fan, J., Frost, K., & Jin, Y. (2022). Local English testing in China's tertiary education: Contexts, policies, and practices. *Language Testing*, *39*(3), 453–473. https://doi.org/10.1177/02655322211070839

Fernández, C. (2024, June 24). ¿Cómo nos sentimos hoy? Bienestar mental. In. L. Gurzynski-Weiss, & IATBLT (n.d.). *The TBLT language learning task bank.* https://thetaskbank.com/tasks/details.html?id=157

Galloway, N., & Ruegg, R. (2020). The provision of student support on English Medium Instruction programmes in Japan and China. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *45*, Article 100846. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2020.100846

Gao, Y., & Bartlett, B. (2014). Opportunities and challenges for negotiating appropriate EAP in China. In I. Liyanage & T. Walker (Eds.), *English for academic purposes (EAP) in Asia: Negotiating appropriate practices in a global context* (pp. 13–31). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-752-0

Gurzynski-Weiss, L. (2024). Let's talk tasks: a conversation between task-based researchers, language teachers, and teacher trainers. *TASK: Journal on Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning*, *4*(2), 290–308. https://doi.org/10.1075/task.00036.gur

Hamp-Lyons, L. (2011). English for academic purposes. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. 2, pp. 89–105). Routledge.

Han, J. (2017). *College English teacher development in China: A mixed-method study.* Peter Lang.

Huang, Z. (2018). *Native and non-native English speaking teachers in China*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5284-2

Huang, Z. (2019). An exploratory study of non-native English-speaking teachers' professional identity construction in a globalizing China. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *42*(1), 40–59. https://doi.org/10.1515/CJAL-2019-0003

Hyland, K. (2018). Sympathy for the devil? A defence of EAP. *Language Teaching*, *51*(3), 383–399. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444818000101

Hyland, K., & Jiang, F. (2021). A bibliometric study of EAP research: Who is doing what, where and when? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *49*, Article 100929. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2020.100929

Hyland, K. & Shaw, P. (2016). *Introduction*. In K. Hyland & P. Shaw (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English for academic purposes* (pp. 1–13). Routledge.

Li, M., & Baldauf, R. (2011). Beyond the curriculum: A Chinese example of issues constraining effective English language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, *45*(4), 793–803. https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.268058

Li, Y. (2020). *Educational change amongst English language college teachers in China: Transitioning from teaching for general to academic purposes*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3053-1

Liao, S. J., Zhang, L. J., & May, S. (2026). English-medium instruction (EMI) language policy and implementation in China's higher education system: growth, challenges, opportunities, solutions, and future directions. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *27*(2), 241–260. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2025.2453263

Liu, L., Yuan, Y., & Du, Z. (2023). Discoursing disciplinarity: A bibliometric analysis of published research in the past 30 years (1990–2022). *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *63*, Article 101317. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2023.101317

Long, M. H. (2015). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Long, M. H. (2016). In defense of tasks and TBLT: Nonissues and real issues. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *36*, 5–33. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190515000057

Macaro, E. (2018). *English medium instruction: Content and language in policy and practice*. Oxford University Press.

Manna, V. F., Li, S., Papageorgiou, S., & Gu, L. (2025). *TOEFL iBT® technical manual* (TOEFL Research Report No. RR-106). ETS. https://doi.org/10.64634/eje8f497

Norris, J. (2021). The long road to TBLT: 40 years of innovation, investigation, and inspiration. *TASK: Journal on Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning*, *1*(2), 162–183. https://doi.org/10.1075/task.21015.nor

O'Halloran, K. L., Tan, S., & Smith, B. A. (2016). Multimodal approaches to English for academic purposes. In K. Hyland & P. Shaw (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of English*

for academic purposes (pp. 256–269). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315657455-24

Rao, X. (2018). *University English for academic purposes in China: A phenomenological interview study.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0647-1

TESOL International Association. (2019). *Standards for initial TESOL Pre-K–12 teacher preparation programs*. https://www.tesol.org/media/v33fewo0/2018-tesol-teacher-prep-standards-final.pdf

Van Gorp, K., Coss, M. D., Guan, X., Burton, D., & Tuzcu, A. (2026). Task-based or task-supported language education? A longitudinal comparative effectiveness study of two pedagogical approaches. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263126102034

Xu, J., & Fan, Y. (2017). The evolution of the college English curriculum in China (1985–2015): changes, trends and conflicts. *Language Policy*, *16*, 267–289. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-016-9407-1

Yasuda, S. (2023). What does it mean to construct an argument in academic writing? A synthesis of English for general academic purposes and English for specific academic purposes perspectives. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *66*, Article 101307. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2023.101307

Zheng, Y., & Cheng, L. (2008). Test review: College English test (CET) in China. *Language Testing*, *25*(3), 408–417. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532208092433

Zhou, J., & Delogu, P. (2026). Bridging EAP and EMI: Professional development for EAP teachers in Chinese higher education. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *79*, Article 101623. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2025.101623

Appendix

TOEFL TEACHING FRAMEWORK

Guidelines for Planning English Language Lessons and Courses

TOEFL iBT Edition

John Norris and Shoko Sasayama

The purpose of this framework is 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. As the premier test of academic English worldwide, the TOEFL iBT test offers both an important backdrop to these guidelines as well as a meaningful target for English learning. The tasks on the TOEFL test reflect some of the most important kinds of tasks that learners should be able to do in English in academic settings; likewise, learning to communicate effectively in academic settings should result in successful performance on the TOEFL test. In this framework, we outline basic considerations for language instruction that will help learners develop their abilities to succeed on English communication tasks that occur in academic settings. The practices recommended here are derived both from empirical research findings in instructed second language acquisition and the accumulated experiences of successful language teachers. For much more detailed consideration of related issues, we suggest consulting the following texts:

Norris, J. M., Davis, J., & Timpe-Laughlin, V. (2017). *Second language educational experiences for adult learners*. Routledge.

Xi, X., & Norris, J. M. (Eds.) (2021). *Assessing academic English for higher education admissions*. Routledge.

The document is organized as follows. First, we discuss general recommendations for approaching the design of courses within an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) language curriculum, addressing basic principles that should underlie course design. We also make suggestions for course syllabus design, including the statement of student learning outcomes and determination of appropriate scope and sequence of learning objectives and instructional activities at the course level. We then outline the design of individual lessons in the form of the recommended type and order of pedagogic tasks and materials. We conclude with recommendations for teaching each of the four skills and associated communication tasks, with overall suggestions regarding the design of lessons and materials for each skill.

1. General Recommendations for EAP Instruction

The overarching focus of EAP instruction should be on developing learners' abilities to engage effectively in English communication within an academic environment. While TOEFL iBT test tasks and content serve as an important backdrop to teaching and learning activities —of course learners want to improve their test scores—they should not in and of themselves be the sole targets of instruction. Rather, it is the social, navigational, and especially academic purposes for language use within a typical English-medium educational environment that provide the appropriate targets for language learning within effective EAP courses. Tasks related to these purposes for language use are certainly reflected in the TOEFL iBT test, and these kinds of tasks can provide useful targets for language learning. To be clear, though, TOEFL iBT tasks are designed for measurement purposes, not pedagogy; merely having learners practice TOEFL-like tasks will not be sufficient to support effective language learning. In order to promote effective English language development (in ways that will likely lead to increases in TOEFL scores), a variety of carefully planned instructional activities will be called for. The following recommendations are intended to provide a basic starting point in thinking about the design of courses, lessons, and materials to support teachers and learners in working towards this goal.

1.1 Basic Principles

a. Instructional Content: The topics, situations, and tasks covered in an EAP course should be based on the uses of English for social, navigational, and academic purposes[1] within typical English-medium higher education settings around the world. Due to test length and other practical considerations, social, navigational, and academic language tasks are selectively represented in the TOEFL iBT speaking and listening sections whereas a primary emphasis is placed on academic tasks in the reading and writing sections. However, it is worth emphasizing that communication skills in all three language use settings play an important role in surviving and thriving in higher education. Navigating the various services, procedures, and traditions at university, as well as socializing with fellow students, are critically important skills for success, as is the ability to engage in various types of classroom and out-of-class academic tasks. To the extent possible, authentic content (e.g.,

[1] While academic language refers to uses of language to learn and communicate about content knowledge (e.g., math, history), social language refers to uses of language for personal relationships (e.g., interacting with friends, participating in extra-curricular activities). In comparison, navigational language includes communicating with teachers, peers, university staff, and others about school-related activities (e.g., assignments, enrollment) not about academic content.

topics and situations reflective of contemporary university settings) that represents these three trajectories of language use should form the foundation of language learning materials and the focus of pedagogic activities. Content should also deliberately represent a range of academic subject matters, campus life topics as well as others of contemporary interest to students, and navigational/social situations that require distinct registers of language use.

b. **Relationship among the four skills:** Language use in academic settings frequently involves the use of multiple language skills, simultaneously or consecutively. It is often the case that receptive skills serve as a precursor to productive skills (e.g., read something then write about it), and certainly spoken interactive communication (e.g., listening and speaking in a conversation) is inherently skills-integrated. In developing meaningful instruction that is reflective of this reality, materials and activities should frequently entail some degree of skills integration. Where individual skills form the focus of separate courses, skills-integration can be conveniently fostered through shared content. In other words, each of the individual skills-focused courses might be built around the same content, and sequenced in the same order, leading to a natural synergy through treatment of the same or similar content across skills—this approach is especially effective if learners are taking such courses simultaneously. Another approach to skills integration is to build it naturally into each lesson design, using target tasks and pedagogic activities that inherently call upon multiple skills. At the same time, if there is a desire to maintain focus on a particular skill, the corresponding materials should emphasize the features of the tasks that require that particular skill. For example, in a speaking-focused lesson, while learners may listen to conversational input, their purpose in doing so can be oriented towards listening for how the speakers use English to make their points (i.e., treating the listening as a model for speaking), rather than listening primarily for comprehension, which would fit the focus of a listening lesson.

c. **Target tasks:** Target tasks are the various activities that people are expected to be able to do with English, within a given setting, such as a university classroom. For example, having a discussion with classmates in order to plan a project would be a common type of target task. Or, reading several articles and summarizing their main points might be another. Target tasks provide the purpose for communicating with a given audience within a particular situation—fundamentally, EAP students are learning English to be able to accomplish a variety of such target tasks in the academic environment successfully. A handful of prototypical target tasks appear on the TOEFL iBT test, representing some of the things learners really need to be able

to do in English-medium settings. Of course, there are plenty of other specific tasks, or variations on those prototypical tasks, that also characterize communication in such settings. In designing materials and lessons, then, target tasks provide a convenient and meaningful focus for guiding and sequencing lessons, and they help to situate and contextualize language learning by providing a critical link to reality. Target tasks offer the basic learning goal for a lesson (or a series of lessons), and they help constrain and focus the types of language abilities that need to be developed along the way. Each English-language lesson should have a clearly identified target task associated with it. Learners should be aware of what the target task is that they are working towards, and all instructional activities (pedagogic tasks, see next) should have an obvious relation to that target task as well. Target tasks should also be selected and sequenced such that learners (a) have a good chance of some degree of success in doing them, and (b) are pushed to continually develop their English knowledge and skills further. For example, for intermediate-level learners (around B1 on the CEFR), target tasks will generally present the challenge of processing or producing somewhat extended amounts of language use, beyond individual sentences or utterances, reflecting a variety of language use situations that move from the personal and familiar to the more public, interactive, and social. Target tasks should also be sequenced such that the cognitive and linguistic demands gradually increase over the duration of instruction.

d. Pedagogic tasks: Pedagogic tasks are 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. In general, these activities should maintain a clear relationship to target tasks: (a) they should focus on developing aspects of language knowledge and ability that are needed in the target task; (b) they should help learners to understand situational and procedural aspects of the target task (where, when, how, and with whom it happens); and (c) they should help learners reflect on their own abilities in comparison with what is needed for accomplishing the target task. Pedagogic tasks that have learners analyze language input, for example, can help learners to identify how language forms are used in particular ways within task models (e.g., analyzing a conversation or a lecture or a reading passage). Pedagogic tasks that provide scaffolding of various kinds (including simplification, sampling, glossing, guiding, framing, and other scaffolds) can help learners approach holistic language use in a way that both facilitates their understanding and enables them to realize and acquire patterns or rules that are made salient by the scaffold. Discussion, negotiation, and other oral- or chat-interactive pedagogic tasks can help learners to activate new language and

practice using it within relatively low-stakes circumstances that nevertheless require important processes like comprehension and production. There will also be a role for more explicit language form-focused activities, such as grammar rule explanation or vocabulary definition and practice. These explicit activities should, to the extent possible, also maintain a clear link to the target task (i.e., focusing on language forms that learners need for the task), and they should generally occur after learners have had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the task and to begin developing an awareness of the need for certain features of English that would help them in doing the task. It is important to emphasize here that explicit language learning activities should never stand alone, rather they should always emerge from an initial focus on language use (i.e., the target task), and they should always lead to a subsequent opportunity for the learner to incorporate the learned language into meaningful communication.

e. **Assessment and feedback:** All EAP materials and lessons should be designed with persistent, clear opportunities for assessment of language learners' development and performance, with a primary purpose of providing formative feedback that is intended to encourage further learning. Assessment can and should incorporate self-, peer-, and teacher-generated feedback, as well as automated feedback where that is available (e.g., from SpeechRater[2]). Learners also need to be taught how to interpret and make the most of feedback coming from these distinct sources. At a minimum, assessment of simulated target tasks at the end of each lesson provides a key opportunity for learners to demonstrate what they have learned and for teachers (and others) to provide feedback. Assessment criteria and expectations should be regularly discussed and utilized pedagogically (e.g., sharing of rubrics for rating target task performance), such that learners develop a heightened awareness of what a successful task performance looks like and how language functions in accomplishing communication tasks to varying degrees of success. Assessment criteria (and the focus of feedback) should also be leveled according to legitimate expectations for learners with different proficiencies. With intermediate proficiency learners (e.g., CEFR B1), for example, level-appropriate expectations for speaking tasks might reflect the descriptions of speaking ability around a rating of 2 on the TOEFL iBT speaking rubrics[3] (i.e., rather than a 3 or 4, which reflects a higher level of proficiency). Feedback on target and pedagogic tasks within specific lessons should also be focused on aspects of language that are developmentally appropriate targets and relevant to the expectations of the task.

[2] For more information see: https://www.ets.org/research/topics/as_nlp/speech/

[3] TOEFL iBT speaking and writing task rubrics can be found here: https://www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/resources/scoring/

For example, an intermediate-level writing task might be assessed primarily for the extent to which learners utilize longer, more syntactically complex sentences, with feedback focused on sentences that might be restructured in more complex, sophisticated ways that reflect academic writing. That same task might not be assessed for other features, such as lexical variety or grammatical accuracy, if the intent of the task was to develop more complex syntax. Keep in mind that effective feedback is always focused. Providing feedback on all errors made will make it ineffective as learners will not be able to pay attention to and process all the various types of feedback they receive.

1.2 Syllabus Design

EAP courses of any duration will benefit from careful planning of the purpose and focus of teaching and learning activities. Of course, it is always useful to pay attention to individual student's needs and tailor instruction accordingly, but courses can and should be planned in advance for specific groups of learners with known characteristics and needs. A course syllabus provides the mechanism for planning how a series of language learning lessons should fit together to accomplish EAP learning goals within the designated time available (e.g., the number of class meetings, the number of weeks in the course). Effective syllabus design has two major elements: a statement of Student Learning Outcomes and a description of Scope and Sequence. Using a trip as an analogy, the statement of Student Learning Outcomes is equivalent to the final destination, and the description of Scope and Sequence is an itinerary showing specific plans along the way to reaching the final destination.

a. **Student Learning Outcomes** (SLOs) state in readily understandable terms what it is that students should know and be able to do by the end of a course or series of courses. Good SLOs capture the value of language instruction by focusing on how learners will benefit, rather than what they will be doing in the course. For example, "Students will practice rules of English grammar" is *not* a good SLO, because it emphasizes what learners will be doing in the classroom, instead of how they will benefit. By contrast, "Students will know how to formulate declarative and interrogative sentences in English with accurate word order" is better, in that it states explicitly what students will gain from learning a particular aspect of grammar. Nevertheless, though stated well, this outcome might not really capture the value of a course. A more fitting SLO—and one that is directly related to a skill tested on TOEFL iBT—might be "Students will be able to write effectively in English to produce coherent and logical arguments, about topics of general interest, in paragraphs of 4 to 6 sentences in length, with good command over basic rules of syntax and morphology." This kind of SLO indicates one concrete achievement that

students will get out of a course of instruction by focusing explicitly on what they will know and be able to do, and it provides course designers with a clear target for lesson design. A comprehensive set of such SLOs is the starting point for designing a language course syllabus.

A convenient approach to defining SLOs related to language ability is to think about the kinds of target tasks learners should be working towards and how well they should be able to do them as a result of instruction. Tasks offer a transparent representation of language in use, which should be the goal of any language course and especially an EAP course that is related to TOEFL. Tasks also offer the opportunity to address different aspects of language knowledge and skills that will be called upon in their accomplishment. For EAP courses, obvious target tasks include those things that students will need to do with language in the academic environment, with an emphasis on distinct skills. For the listening skill, here is an example SLO that might fit an intermediate-level course:

"Students will be able to listen to a relatively brief conversation between two college students, discussing a familiar topic, and they will comprehend the main ideas expressed as well as some specific details."

Additional SLOs for the listening course would then address other target task types (e.g., lecture listening and note-taking, listening to announcements, and so on) in order to round out what it is that learners will be learning how to do with the listening skill. Note also that the SLO indicates a level of difficulty of the task, which would be based on an estimation of what learners at the particular course level can be expected to master by the end of that course: Here, they are listening to a brief (not extended) conversation, on a familiar (not unfamiliar) topic, and they are expected to get the gist/main idea of the conversation but only some of the details. The idea with the SLO, then, is to indicate appropriate tasks as well as levels of language development expected from learners in accomplishing the tasks.

In selecting and levelling SLOs on the basis of target tasks, it is useful to analyze the expectations associated with a given task, according to features such as:

- Content/Topic familiarity
- Medium of language use (e.g., listening, speaking, or both)
- Situation/Domain expectations (e.g., appropriate register, role of context)
- Purpose of communication
- Linguistic complexity of task input/stimulus materials
- Cognitive complexity of task input/stimulus materials
- Communication demands (linguistic, cognitive, and social)

- Relevant language skills/strategies/knowledge expected to be engaged

On this basis, SLOs and associated target tasks can be identified that present learners in a given course with appropriate demands, both linguistic and otherwise, in order to push their language development and learning achievement without overwhelming them with excessive challenges. Other sources of information should be consulted in identifying appropriate expectations for learners at various course levels. One helpful source for levelling learning expectations can be found in the TOEFL iBT and ITP score descriptions and feedback/improvement guides.[4]

Similarly, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)[5] may offer a helpful depiction of task types and levels of ability associated with fitting degrees of language proficiency. In the end, however, the intuitions of experienced teachers who understand their specific groups of learners may be the best source for making decisions about appropriate learning outcomes and levels of achievement.

In addition to focused language learning outcomes of the sorts described above, **higher order outcomes** may also be beneficial in conceiving of the value of a course (e.g., from the perspective of students or parents) and in linking courses together in an overall programmatic sequence. Here, for example, it may be worthwhile to conceive of the outcomes of a course in terms of achieving a particular score range on a TOEFL test, a particular proficiency level on the CEFR, or similar. Certainly, these types of overall outcomes statements are helpful in capturing the potential value of a course in practical terms. However, for the purpose of informing course and lesson design, they are insufficient in and of themselves, and much more specific SLOs of the sort introduced above will be called for.

b. Scope and Sequence: While SLOs refer to the overall end goals of a course or series of courses, a Scope and Sequence (SAS) describes how a series of instructional steps will support learners to achieve which SLOs. Fundamentally, the SAS lays out the design of a course in terms of what content will be covered, with what materials and pedagogic activities (including assessments), in what order, and with what language learning expectations. An effective SAS will be 'backwards designed', in that it should provide a clear road map to teachers and students regarding what needs to be covered in each instructional unit or class session in order to achieve a particular set of SLOs. The key here is that what gets taught in

[4] See https://www.ets.org/toefl/ibt/scores/improve and https://www.ets.org/s/toefl_itp/pdf/test_score_descriptors.pdf

[5] See https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions

the classroom should be determined by the SLOs, and not vice versa. A well-articulated SAS requires several key elements that should be carefully considered and spelled out.

First, the SAS provides specific information regarding the materials and learning activities to be used for instruction. For example, if the goal of an instructional unit is to focus on the development of students' ability to extract specific information from an academic text, then reading materials and pedagogic tasks should be chosen to focus on developing that specific skill in relation to learners' ability level. In designing materials and language activities, the designer would need to consider specific real-life situations that would require readers to extract specific information without going through extended texts. For example, situations that involve reading non-prose texts for basic understanding (e.g., navigating signs at an airport) may provide simple and easy-to-read materials for learners at more beginning levels and create a real purpose for reading.

Second, the SAS should connect language activities and materials in a logical order that makes sense to both teachers and learners. In doing so, again, a first step is to identify a range of targeted tasks, skills, and language knowledge (see SLOs above). Then, these learning targets can be ordered such that the things learners have learned previously become building blocks for what follows in the next lesson or unit. For example, a range of reading skills relevant to TOEFL iBT test tasks might first be identified and listed in the order of complexity below.

a. Skim for general understanding
b. Scan for specific information
c. Read for basic information
    - Understand gist/main idea
    - Make logical inferences based on given facts and background knowledge
d. Read to connect information
e. Read to learn—that is, read to transform knowledge from reading texts into readers' own representation of meaning

Keep in mind that these reading skills are not strictly linear in terms of complexity or challenge presented to learners. They also interact with the complexity of the specific texts that need to be processed for comprehension. For example, making a very simple inference from a brief reading might be less complex than reading a very dense text for basic information. Therefore, when sequencing the introduction of skills or other learning objectives within or across units, it is important to also consider the overall challenge of the target text or task, and to make sure the

complexity level of the information to be processed is also appropriate for the group of students.

In this example, course designers would next select and create reading materials and activities that reflect this progression of reading skills within and across units. The choice and sequence of materials and language teaching points should be carefully identified and evaluated against the ultimate SLOs to be achieved.

Repetition is another key element to an effective SAS. Repetition is necessary to reinforce previous learning and ultimately to ensure the mastery of targeted skills and knowledge. Instruction should reinforce previous learning across units (also known as 'spiraling') so that learners are able to expand their skills while consolidating what they have learned previously. The SAS should be designed to require learners to be able to apply all the knowledge and skills that they have learned throughout a course by the end of the course.

Finally, the SAS should include an element of continuous formative assessment throughout a course and point to additional supporting materials and activities to ensure that instruction helps learners make progress toward the final SLOs. Formative assessments should be designed to complement instruction, and they should focus on specific areas of learning to provide maximal support. Summative assessment(s) as well should be built into the SAS as a means for demonstrating student learning at important junctures in the course.

1.3 Lesson Design: Sequencing Target and Pedagogic Tasks

Generally, though with some flexibility in how these principles are applied across the four skills, each lesson or unit should have the following components, roughly in the order presented here:

a. **An engaging introduction to the target task or language use situation:** The purpose here is to generate learner interest and motivation by having them see/hear/consider key features of the target task, to stimulate their readiness to learn about the target task, and to expose them to language used within the task. This target task introduction may take place at the level of 'task type' and precede a series of lessons (e.g., the task type of writing argumentative essays, followed by a series of lessons focusing on specific essay tasks and topics).
b. **Recall and schema-building activities:** In this stage, learners are prompted to consider what they already know about the target task and situation, including aspects of the setting/context, participants/audience, and purpose for

communication. Learners should also generate ideas about what they do not know, both in terms of the task and situation but also in terms of likely demands on language needed to accomplish the task successfully. Learner self-assessment can be particularly useful at this stage.

c. Analysis of (simulated) authentic language input: Here, learners are exposed to substantial communicative input that provides a model of language use in the target task. Ideally, authentic exemplars of target task communication[6] will be provided to learners (e.g., video/audio recordings of the target task, written samples, and so on). Learners should be allowed time to work with the input holistically at first, discovering for themselves the basic meaning-making characteristics of the task. Subsequent activities should encourage them to focus on aspects of how communication happens (e.g., steps involved in the task, who does what) as well as the role played by specific uses of language (e.g., grammatical, lexical, phonological, discursive, and other language forms that play an important role in the given communication task). As needed, additional form-focused activities may be included at this stage to facilitate learners' development of language related to the task.

d. Scaffolded work on using language in tasks: At this stage, learners should progress from analyzing how others use language to activities that require the learners themselves to use the language communicatively. Generally, this type of language use will occur through a variety of simplified, segmented, structured, and otherwise scaffolded communicative activities that are based on the target task but do not in-and-of themselves constitute the target task. In other words, learners are not simply asked to do the target task (e.g., give a presentation in English), rather they are provided numerous opportunities to gradually develop the language knowledge and skills needed to accomplish the target task (e.g., first practice how to start a presentation, then develop an understanding of how to transition from one section to the next using transition phrases, then…). Activities here will generally include a focus on language form, which may occur intentionally (i.e., a planned introduction of a grammar rule or vocabulary word) or incidentally (i.e., a spontaneous treatment of a language form in response to learners' needs). Any form-focused activities, however, should be embedded within an overall relationship to the actual language used for communication in the task.

[6] Authentic exemplars do not have to be (or in some cases should not be) something that native speakers performed in the real world. A piece of writing or a recording by a fellow language learner who successfully completed a given target task can be considered an authentic exemplar. Such an exemplar may also be more effective in helping learners better understand what the task expectations are and what they will be able to do at the end of a lesson/unit.

e. **Interaction with peers and other interlocutors:** Possibly in combination or alternation with the previous stage, learners should be given the opportunity to interact communicatively in English with others. Such interaction may take a variety of forms, including activities designed to encourage negotiation of meaning (e.g., information-gap activities), collaborative co-construction of language form (e.g., planning how language will be used in a task), and others. The emphasis here is on relatively low-stakes opportunities to use the language purposefully and interactively. It is during these kinds of interactive activities that numerous opportunities arise for providing learners with feedback about their language use and/or task accomplishment, at the precise moments when that feedback is most useful. Peers and learners themselves can be encouraged (and coached) to think about formative feedback, and teachers can plan approaches to providing feedback in anticipation of these opportunities.

f. **Target task performance:** Lessons should finish by giving learners the opportunity to engage in (simulated) target task performance. Applying what they have learned in attempting the 'real thing' will highlight the communicative purpose of language learning; it will allow learners to understand what they have (and have not) achieved; and it will provide a basis for teachers to monitor progress and provide feedback.

g. **Assessment for feedback:** Target task performances should be assessed according to the extent to which tasks were accomplished according to 'real-world' criteria based on what task accomplishment actually looks like. Feedback should highlight strengths as well as selected areas in need of attention, all driven by the expectations of the specific target task (i.e., not by expectations for grammatical accuracy in the abstract). Assessment can and should be undertaken by learners themselves and their peers, as well as by teachers on a periodic basis.

h. **TOEFL iBT task practice:** As needed, lessons should add on test-practice activities that involve learners in attempting or repeating simulated TOEFL iBT tasks. Ideally, the content of these activities will be related more or less directly to the content covered in the lesson, and in some cases the activities may share communicative similarities with the lessons' target tasks, though typically the target tasks will include elements of context and communication purpose that might not be reflected in test tasks.

2. Four-Skills Lesson and Materials Development

In the following sections, instructional practices are suggested for guiding the design of lessons and materials in relation to each of the four language skills (speaking, listening, writing, reading). These suggested practices are intended to provide a sense of what kinds of

teaching and learning activities should occupy the majority of instructional time, but they are not intended to be either comprehensive or exclusive (i.e., other activities may be useful as well). Lesson designs will also vary depending on the intended learning outcomes, the specific target tasks being taught, and the language proficiency of the learners.

2.1 Speaking

Fundamentally, speaking lessons and materials should encourage and enable speaking in the target language, and a majority of the time should be devoted to having learners speak in English (i.e., as opposed to having them learn grammar or vocabulary, or speak in their first language). A primary concern with many English teaching contexts worldwide is that there is very little actual speaking or speaking-focused learning discernable in course design. Similarly, the speaking that does occur in courses may not reflect the kinds of speaking tasks that occur in English academic settings, which will constrain the ways in which, and the degrees to which, learners develop various aspects of their academic speaking ability. In general, learners who are preparing for a transition into academic English-medium settings (or preparing for the TOEFL iBT), will need to be working on all aspects of their speaking ability, including in particular: (a) developing intelligible pronunciation and articulation, as well as accurate intonation, stress, and rhythm; (b) expanding from fragmented or sentence-level to lengthier amounts of coherent spoken discourse; and (c) increasing their fluency. They should also be developing their understandings of English pragmatics and discourse conventions that characterize certain speaking registers, events, and audiences—especially in relation to the academic domain and the variety of interlocutors (other speakers) they will encounter there. Lessons should include speaking tasks that range from monologic to dialogic to group-based, as well as those that span the informal and interpersonal to the formal, presentational, and public-secondary types of demands and audiences.

In order to support the persistent development of these aspects of English speaking ability, we make the following basic recommendations:

- Begin and end every lesson with opportunities for learners to speak in English.
- Identify target tasks that require speaking abilities for their accomplishment, and build lessons around these target tasks. To make the lessons maximally effective, those target tasks should be something that learners will need to be able to do successfully to survive and thrive in the academic domain.
- Vary the types of target tasks; not all lessons should focus on conversational or interactional speaking, for example. Give learners opportunities to work on different genres of speaking (e.g., social, navigational, academic tasks of different kinds), including monologic (e.g., class presentation) as well as dialogic tasks (e.g., discussion).

- Include ample opportunity for low-stakes speaking practice, in the form of discussions, question and answer sessions, brainstorming, etc.; create opportunities for low-stakes interaction with peers as well as the teacher (and potentially other English interlocutors—native speakers or otherwise—as feasible).
- Provide good speaking models in the form of recorded (video/audio) speaking events that present learners with relevant input that they can analyze and use for further developing their own speaking; allow learners ample exposure to the input, and encourage them to analyze how different aspects of spoken language are used in order to achieve specific communication goals within it.
- Encourage learners to focus on specific aspects of their speaking ability within a given lesson, not all of it all the time; the particular focus can be determined by speaking abilities that are critical for the target task in a given lesson (e.g., pronunciation, pragmatics, fluency, task accomplishment).
- Provide explicit instruction on specific aspects of speaking ability when learners are ready to benefit from it, typically following exposure of learners to the need for using the specific aspects (e.g., after they have tried to make sense of an audio recording, after they have tried to do a speaking task that calls for a given language form).
- Utilize interactive tasks as pedagogic activities that give learners a reason to communicate (e.g., in order to jointly solve a problem or accomplish a goal) and that encourage actual meaning exchange, negotiation, repair, etc.; have learners interact in English regularly, with peers, the teacher, others.
- Have learners perform target tasks under simulated or authentic conditions, typically as the culminating speaking activity in a lesson or series of lessons.
- Give learners opportunities to plan (prepare for, but not memorize) how they will speak on given tasks, especially the first time they attempt the task; repeat speaking tasks as a regular opportunity for improvement; for more familiar tasks, remove planning opportunities to encourage development of spontaneous speaking abilities.
- Utilize recordings of students speaking for self-, peer-, and teacher assessment of target task performance on a regular basis.
- Provide feedback selectively, and always with a focus on specific aspects of speaking ability that will help learners in the context of accomplishing a given task.
- Take advantage of rubrics that define different aspects of speaking ability for different kinds of tasks, as a basis for assessing and providing feedback (e.g., TOEFL iBT speaking rubrics).

2.2 Listening

As with speaking, the teaching of listening as a communicative skill should revolve around the variety of typical (authentic) tasks students are likely to encounter in a university (social, navigational, academic) setting in an English-speaking environment. Fundamentally, the focus of academic English listening lessons should be on intensive and repeated listening with a clear purpose and often in integration with other skills. While foundational knowledge and skills (e.g., vocabulary knowledge) are important for successful listening, decontextualized learning of such skills should generally be avoided in favor of their development through comprehension-oriented listening tasks. Furthermore, given the variety of actual listening tasks that learners are likely to encounter (and the variety of voices they will need to understand), it is important to include diverse listening tasks, contexts, interlocutors, and demands in the design of listening lessons. These additional recommendations should help in thinking about the design of academic listening instruction:

- Provide a purpose for listening: Why is the learner engaged in this listening? How does it relate to a (social, navigational, academic) situation within an educational context? What will a learner do with the information they gather from listening? What happens next, as a result of a given listening task?
- Expose learners to holistic, authentic listening input first (e.g., a set of directions to a destination) prior to focusing on discrete parts of the listening (e.g., vocabulary used for giving directions). It is important to have learners focus on meaning and make sure that they attempt to comprehend the overall meaning of listening input first.
- Vary the focus of listening comprehension activities, to include a focus on general meaning, specific details, and implied meanings.
- To encourage different kinds of focus, have learners listen with a scaffold (e.g., a table to fill in, a set of comprehension or guiding questions).
- Emphasize language learning in the listening context:
  - Introduce challenging words, phrases, or grammatical patterns during warm-up discussions, especially when guiding students in predicting what they are going to hear.
  - Provide authentic visuals, such as presentation slides for academic lectures, to establish a context that mimics a real-world classroom and helps students learn by association.
  - Include new words, phrases, or grammatical patterns in listening input to encourage the practice of guessing the meaning from the context.
  - Have students listen to input multiple times prior to providing an explicit focus on language as it is used in the input; learners should have to try hard to comprehend on their own, prior to receiving support.
- Make repeated use of listening-intensive analytic activities:

- Listen to chunks of speech or pairs of turns, gradually increasing the amount of speech to be processed.
- Listen with a scaffold that focuses learner attention on particular aspects of the input (e.g., parts of speech, critical vocabulary, features of a speaker's language variety, how speakers create emphasis); for example, subtitles or a transcript of a video with highlighting of particular forms will lead learners to focus on them.
- Have learners explore transcripts in comparison with audio input (especially useful for lower proficiency learners) to identify parts of the listening they do not yet understand.

- Have learners work in pairs on language-focused listening activities (e.g., dictogloss, where learners attempt to transcribe exactly what they hear), to encourage interaction and to facilitate learning from each other.
- Introduce note-taking and the use of graphic organizers, especially for academic lectures, followed by pair or full-class review of notes taken in relation to the content covered.
- Finish lessons/units by having students work on an intact final task that requires listening for a clear purpose.

2.3 Writing

Instructional materials and lessons should be designed to encourage and enable writing ability for the variety of real-life tasks that take place in academic settings. A majority of the lesson time should be devoted to having learners write (or engage in writing-related activities, like planning to write) in authentic situations with specific purposes for writing. For learners preparing to embark on academic studies in an English-medium setting, it is likely that learners will need to be working on improving all aspects of their writing ability, including a particular focus on: (a) using a variety of sentence structures from simple to complex; (b) using genre- and audience-appropriate pragmatics and writing conventions; (c) using precise language and academic vocabulary to express ideas in writing; (d) using transitional words and other discourse markers to produce cohesive texts, and organizing sentences and paragraphs to show a logical progression of thoughts; (e) using details to support opinions; and (f) writing based on source information. They should also develop an appreciation for how distinct genres, authors' styles, and rhetorical devices are used for accomplishing different purposes in writing. In particular, they should develop familiarity with distinct audiences for writing and the implications for how they choose to write.

In order to keep writing lessons authentic and amenable to broad-based development of writing competence (beyond just writing for test-taking purposes), consider the following.

- Incorporate real-life writing tasks as the targets for a lesson/unit (including potential adaptation of TOEFL iBT tasks into real-life scenarios). For example, below are some authentic writing task types that happen frequently in academic settings:
  - Report factual information to a scholarly or scientific audience
  - Explain a concept to someone who does not understand it
  - Describe people, places, things in sufficient detail
  - Narrate events and/or tell stories
  - Summarize input material (listening and reading) in concise and comprehensive ways
  - Express an opinion about a controversial topic
  - Present and defend an argument on the basis of evidence
  - Write emails or letters for specific purposes and audiences
  - Participate in an online asynchronous discussion with peers and teachers
  - Respond to short-answer test items
  - Proofread and edit someone else's writing
- Always provide a clear rhetorical context including purposes and audiences for writing; it can be useful to have learners work with input texts to discern/guess for themselves the purposes and audiences for someone else's writing, prior to working on their own. This activity will help them make the connection between linguistic forms (e.g., vocabulary, grammatical structures, pragmatics) and meaning in particular contexts or genres.
- Expose learners to a variety of authentic written texts to model effective writing.
- Introduce a variety of genres (e.g., descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative, transactional texts) and occasions for writing.
- Encourage learners to analyze and evaluate writing critically—for example, what type of rhetorical effects did an author try to achieve? Why did an author choose a specific genre? How did an author utilize specific vocabulary or grammatical structures to achieve a writing goal? Why was the text organized in a particular way?
- Use language examples from authentic writing sources to teach or direct learners' attention to the use of language forms (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics) in context.
- 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 readers.
- Provide ample opportunity for process writing: outlining, drafting, revising, 'publishing'. Posting learners' writing (e.g., on a website) or publishing it otherwise (e.g., as an in-house journal) is one way to make writing tasks more authentic, purposeful, and relevant to the real world.

- Incorporate free writing or brainstorming activities as a basis for idea generation, prior to focusing on specific structures or organizational dimensions of a given piece of writing.
- Have learners discern genre-appropriate writing conventions through authentic input (with scaffolded activities) and develop their own schema, outlines, organizational structures for a given writing task, rather than applying prefabricated templates.
- Utilize feedback selectively to focus on particular aspects of the writing process (e.g., feedback on ideas first, then feedback on structure and organization, then feedback on language usage).
- Engage learners in self-assessment or -reflection as well as provision of peer feedback on a regular basis, especially with a focus on idea conveyance.
- Take advantage of rubrics that define different aspects of writing ability for different kinds of tasks, as a basis for assessing and providing feedback (e.g., TOEFL iBT writing rubrics).

2.4 Reading

Reading materials and lessons should be designed to encourage learners to use English for receptive communication that is mediated by written input, of which there are many varieties and sources in the English academic setting. A majority of the lesson time should be devoted to having learners use English to engage with reading of authentic texts in authentic situations and for specific purposes (i.e., as opposed to having them focus on decontextualized grammar or vocabulary skill-building, or strategies for answering test questions). Perhaps most relevant for learners preparing to study in an English-medium academic setting will be a focus on: (a) constructing inferential as well as explicit meanings from texts; (b) expanding linguistic knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, discourse practices); and (c) developing understandings of different genres of texts and literary styles and conventions in English.

In order to support the persistent development of all of these aspects of English reading ability, we make the following basic recommendations:

- Structure lessons and units to emphasize the accomplishment of authentic reading tasks for a purpose.
- Begin with pre-reading activities followed by structured reading of authentic texts and ending with more independent reading tasks.
- Consider how classroom language activities relate to real-life language activities by answering the following questions. Let the answers to these questions guide the development of materials and instruction.

  - What type of reading materials are learners likely to read in real-life academic contexts?
  - What type of information do readers extract from what they read?
  - Why do readers read and what do they do with the information they extract from reading materials?
- Use pre-reading activities to engage and prepare learners for the lesson in terms of the topic of a reading passage (i.e., content), purpose for reading, and language involved.
- Utilize interactive tasks as pedagogic activities that give learners a reason to communicate about what they are reading (e.g., in order to jointly solve a problem or accomplish a goal); have learners interact in English regularly, with peers, the teacher, others, to communicate about what they are reading.
- Balance content (i.e., reading skills and purposes) and language in designing activities; an instructional activity could improve enabling language skills (e.g., vocabulary, grammar), high-level reading comprehension skills, or both.
- Use language examples from main reading texts to determine which grammar points, vocabulary, and expressions to focus on. Reinforce and focus learning with brief language exercises (e.g., fill-in blanks, matching, error correction, and summary writing) derived from target reading texts.
- Incorporate interactive (pair, group) reading tasks that focus on language form (e.g., information-gap text reconstruction activities that focus on information flow within or across paragraphs).
- Encourage reading fluency development through authentic exercises such as timed reading, reading aloud, and extensive reading. Providing an authentic scenario, such as "read a job ad posted at a station before you have to jump on a train" or "read a flyer aloud to a friend who missed the meeting today," will help frame the activity in relation to the real world and make it more interesting for learners.
- Intersperse opportunities for reading-to-learn with a focus on detailed comprehension and interpretation (e.g., reading with a dictionary).
- Expose learners to a variety of text types (e.g., graphs, opinion pieces, e-mails, textbooks, newspapers, websites, wikis) and a variety of content or topics, and encourage learners to critically evaluate how information is presented and why it is presented in distinct ways.
- Include integrated activities that elicit other language modalities but focus on reading-based activities as the source of information (e.g., read-to-write tasks).
- Make use of task repetition to enforce learning of language forms and automatize reading processes. For example, depending on learner needs, it may be a good idea to include important vocabulary, grammar, and expressions that are integral to

accomplishing the target task across multiple reading texts, so learners will be exposed to key language forms repeatedly.

- Encourage learners to explore, state, and reflect on their own learning goals for reading. This technique is useful especially when the class consists of mixed-ability learners or learners with distinct needs and also for fostering students' autonomy in general.

In Sum

Developing learners' abilities to engage effectively in English communication within an academic environment is a challenging but worthwhile goal. These guidelines provide a solid, evidence-based foundation for working towards that goal. It is up to course and materials designers, and especially teachers, to intentionally and creatively apply these recommended practices in meeting the actual needs of specific students in their local contexts. In doing so, they will be helping students advance their academic English abilities in maximally meaningful ways, and those advances will be reflected in students' performances on tests of academic English like the TOEFL iBT.

Suggested Citation:

Montee, M., Sun, W., & Bushton, J. (2026). *The TOEFL® Teaching Framework in China: Effective application in EAP courses* (TOEFL® Research Report No. TOEFL-RR-111). ETS. https://doi.org/10.64634/hk9gd093

Action Editor: Spiros Papageorgiou

Reviewers: Lin Gu and Veronika Timpe-Laughlin

ETS, the ETS logo, TOEFL, and TOEFL IBT are registered trademarks of Educational Testing Service (ETS). All other trademarks are property of their respective owners.

Cover image by Jason Hu, Pexels

Find other ETS-published reports by searching the ETS ReSEARCHER database.

www.ets.org

Copyright © 2026 by ETS. The Eight-Point logo is a trademark of ETS. All other trademarks are property of their respective owners.