



OPINION PIECE

Bridging the 2008–2026 gap: Updating the BALEAP Competencies Framework for the AI era

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ABSTRACT

This opinion piece argues that BALEAP’s 2008 Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (CFTEAP) does not adequately represent the core competencies of EAP practitioners in the AI era and urgently requires a comprehensive update. While the CFTEAP has played an important historical role in supporting teacher development in EAP, it is underpinned by assumptions that predate major technological developments in the field, particularly GenAI. Drawing on recent literature in EAP, language teaching and educational technology, this paper highlights the centrality of digital and AI literacy to current EAP practice, arguing that the limited treatment of technology in the CFTEAP significantly restricts its ability to fulfil its intended roles in 2026. The paper concludes by suggesting that explicit digital and AI competency descriptors (along with descriptors reflecting other recent developments in the field) should be incorporated into an updated CFTEAP to ensure its continued relevance and utility.

KEYWORDS:

EAP, BALEAP, Competency framework, Artificial Intelligence, Teacher development

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Introduction

The teaching of EAP (TEAP) has changed significantly since 2008. In the last 18 years, the field has been transformed by a range of developments, including (but not limited to) increasing institutional and professional recognition (e.g. BALEAP, 2024), greater contextualisation and interdisciplinarity (see Jiang & Hyland, 2026), an expanding research base and ongoing disciplinary maturation (see Hyland & Jiang, 2021), and, unfortunately, rising precarity in working conditions (see Joubert & Clarence, 2024). However, arguably the most salient change in TEAP since 2008, particularly in terms of everyday teaching practice, has been the growing centrality of technology, with EAP teachers increasingly positioned as intermediaries between human cognitive processes and technological systems (Jiang & Hyland, 2026). Although EAP has a long historical association with the educational use of technology (see Watson Todd, 2003), the technological turn in EAP has largely been driven by two recent transformative periods. First, in 2020, the forced transition to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic compelled EAP teachers to engage with digital pedagogies like never before (Curry & Riordan, 2026), resulting in a range of new platforms, tools, applications, systems and devices suddenly becoming central tenets of EAP courses (see Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021). And, many of these technologies have remained part and parcel of EAP in post-pandemic contexts (see Kohnke & Zou, 2021; Hudson, 2023; Rodríguez-Peñarroja & Haba-Osca, 2024; de Lima Guedes, 2026; Curry & Riordan, 2026), fundamentally changing EAP for teachers and learners. Then, in 2022, EAP entered another transformative phase when AI technologies, moreover GenAI, became available to the masses. While AI is now being used to develop innovative approaches to language teaching (e.g. Bonner et al., 2023; Li & Wang, 2024; Liu, Wang & Zou, 2025; Moorhouse & Wong, 2025), it has undermined fundamental assumptions in EAP (Jiang & Hyland, 2026), reshaping TEAP in the process.

Despite these two transformative periods significantly changing the EAP landscape, BALEAP's Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (CFTEAP) has **not** changed since 2008. Based on research commencing over twenty years ago, the CFTEAP was created in recognition of the steep learning curve that is associated with transitioning to teaching EAP (typically from the teaching of general English) and the paucity of EAP-specific teaching qualifications (BALEAP, 2008). Its aim was to describe the core competencies of a professional EAP practitioner, providing less experienced teachers with a clear understanding of the technical skills and professional capabilities expected of their new role (BALEAP, 2008: 2). At the time, the framework "constitute[d] the only systematic attempt to articulate and frame the competencies required of practitioners" (Ding & Campion, 2016: 549). As envisaged by BALEAP (2008: 2), the CFTEAP has since been used to recruit and select EAP teachers; support the professional development of EAP teachers; accredit EAP teachers' professional portfolios; design and accredit EAP courses; and design and accredit EAP teacher training courses. In other words, it "now operates in a gatekeeping role regarding recruiting and developing practitioners" (Ding & Bruce, 2017: 185). It is still referred to in BALEAP literature (e.g. BALEAP, 2024) and also in EAP literature more widely (e.g. Aksit & Aksit, 2022; Kirk & King, 2022; de Lima Guedes, 2026), but attitudes towards certain aspects of the CFTEAP have been critical for some time (see

Campion, 2016; Ding & Champion, 2016; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Ding, 2019). In 2026, given the increasing centrality of technology to EAP, the CFTEAP’s relevance is arguably more questionable than ever.

Despite the emphasis placed on *technical skills* in the CFTEAP, there are surprisingly few references to technology within it. Throughout the entire document, there are just five mentions of technology and/or related concepts. There is one explicit mention of “technology” under the student autonomy competencies where it is stated that an EAP teacher will have knowledge and understanding of “the use of new technologies to support autonomous learning” (BALEAP, 2008: 7). Then, “IT” (Information Technology) is mentioned twice under teaching practice competencies, where it is stated that an EAP teacher will “integrate IT into delivery, to enhance students IT skills and reflect academic practices” (BALEAP, 2008: 9). Finally, “electronic media” and “electronic modes” are each mentioned in relation to understanding different modes of knowledge communication in academic contexts (BALEAP, 2008: 4). In very broad terms, these competencies are still valid. However, in 2026, owing to the proliferation of accessible digital technologies, it is reasonable to attest that knowledge, understanding and integration of technology are essential skills in almost all aspects of EAP teaching competence (e.g. fostering student critical thinking, developing syllabi and programmes, processing and producing texts, assessment practices, etc.), not just those aspects mentioned in the CFTEAP (i.e. student autonomy, teaching practice, academic contexts). It could, then, reasonably be argued that the CFTEAP urgently requires a major update if it is to fulfil its aim of describing the core *technical skills* an EAP teacher needs to function in their role completely in 2026 and beyond.

Technology and AI in EAP

Despite its representation (or lack of) in the CFTEAP, technology has, for a long time, been considered a key tenet of teaching EAP (see Watson Todd, 2003). Although technology is now more pervasive in the teaching of general English (Bell, 2022), it is probably safe to say that universities are still better resourced than many other English language teaching contexts, and most contemporary EAP courses will incorporate a range of technology-oriented objectives to prepare students for higher education. For example, to meet the learning objectives of a typical EAP course, students (and by extension, teachers) are likely to have to engage with some or all of the following technologies: learning management systems (see Tuomainen, 2016), video conferencing software (see Simpson, 2024; Pal, 2025), online collaboration tools (see Dhillon & Murray, 2021; Asadnia & Atai, 2022); academic search engines (see Stapleton & Helms-Park, 2006; Helms-Park, Radia & Stapleton, 2007); referencing and citation tools (see Hamam, 2023); plagiarism detection software (see Seviour, 2015; He & Tinsley, 2025); corpus software and/or corpus-informed tools (see Crosthwaite & Baisa, 2024); interactive websites and applications (see Frankenberg-Garcia et al., 2019; Shahmohammadi & Afshar, 2026) and, now, AI technologies (see Ngo & Hastie, 2025). Within each of these categories, there are already a wide range of products and resources and more are becoming available by the day.

In relation to AI tools specifically, there are a myriad available. Although they have undermined core assumptions in EAP and have been extremely disruptive to the industry, many of them undoubtedly have “the potential to assist language teachers in helping their learners achieve their language learning goals” (Moorhouse & Wong, 2025: 1). For example, GenAI has already been noted for its potential for lesson planning and materials development (e.g. Kohnke & Zou, 2021; Bonner et al., 2023); generating customised content for students (e.g. Amanova et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023; Kostka & Toncelli, 2023; Li & Wang, 2024); increasing learner engagement, motivation and autonomy (e.g. AbuSahyon et al., 2023; Chiu et al., 2024; Jeon, 2024); designing assessments and providing feedback (e.g. Godwin-Jones, 2022; Mizumoto & Eguchi, 2023; Moorhouse, 2024); and offering immediate feedback to students in self-directed learning (e.g. Wang et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025). But, as teachers we must ensure we are modelling the responsible use of AI for our students (Hockly, 2023). This goes for language teachers generally, but is of particular significance to EAP teachers. After all, EAP courses are (for the time being at least) heavily focussed on the writing process with the aim of helping students produce their own written texts, but text production is exactly what GenAI is trained to do. As such, there is now a general consensus emerging in EAP that practitioners need to have a thorough understanding of the uses of AI technology (BAAL, 2025). These technologies are complex and so different to other technologies that they require an entirely unique set of competencies (Ng et al., 2023; Moorhouse & Wong, 2025). What this means is that EAP teachers, who are already required to engage with a range of digital technologies, some of which are highly specialised (e.g. corpus linguistics software), now also need a comprehensive knowledge of AI technologies.

One of the most important reasons why EAP teachers need a deep understanding of AI technologies is that they pose a serious risk to academic integrity in higher education. GenAI in particular has raised serious concerns around ethics, authorship, ownership and integrity (Creely, 2024). These concerns highlight the need for a pedagogical response in EAP contexts. As EAP teachers, an important part of our role has always been making sure students understand rules and policies around academic integrity (Şık Keser & Razi, 2024). With the advent of GenAI, breaching academic integrity rules (either accidentally or deliberately) has become easier than ever for students. On the flip side, it has become more difficult for EAP teachers to identify and evidence potential academic misconduct (as was clear from an interesting BALEAP JISCMAIL thread in January 2026) because, unlike more traditional plagiarism (*those were the days!*), detecting AI (mis)use is currently very challenging. As of writing this piece, plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin should **not** be used to determine whether AI has been used in the production of texts (see Weber-Wulff et al., 2023; Cotton et al., 2024). This software is not only unreliable, but also biased, discriminating against the exact cohort EAP teachers work with – second language writers (see Liang, Yuksekgonul, Mao, Wu & Zou, 2023). Detection software is unlikely to improve significantly, as any advances in detectability would imply a decline in the quality and sophistication of GenAI systems. Rather than relying on detection, emphasis should be placed on the responsible and critical use of GenAI to minimise the risk of students intentionally or inadvertently misusing these new technologies. Therefore, it is important that EAP teachers are able to model and demonstrate responsible and critical uses of AI themselves.

Placing this responsibility on EAP teachers is in line with recent calls for EAP to incorporate a focus on critical AI literacy. Jiang and Hyland (2026), for example, have advocated for the development of critical AI literacies in EAP to enable students to responsibly evaluate, prompt, verify, and disclose AI use. Literacy skills such as these (i.e. the skills that are required to become responsible members of the academic community) are some of the most important that we can impart on our students. This is because the strategies, practices and habits students pick up in our EAP classes are the ones that they are likely to rely on throughout their academic careers. EAP teachers, then, are one of the first lines of defence against the improper use of AI in higher education and beyond. As such, new EAP teachers (and experienced ones too, for that matter) need to be engaged with new and emerging AI technologies. In other words, EAP teachers in 2026 require a high level of technological and AI competence (i.e. technical skill) to effectively perform their roles. This is recognised in recent empirical work that explicitly recommends targeted training in digital pedagogies for EAP practioners (e.g. de Lima Guedes, 2026). None of this is reflected in the 18-year-old CFTEAP, though.

Updating the CFTEAP for the AI era

The fact that there have been no major updates to the CFTEAP in 18 years reinforces the long-standing argument that there has always been a greater focus on the 'what' rather than the 'how' in EAP (Watson Todd, 2003; Bell, 2022). This imbalance underscores the need to ensure that the few 'how' resources we do have, like the CFTEAP, are up-to-date and include major developments in the field. Of course, a competency framework should represent a stable model, but 18 years without *any* updates could be described as "stuck" rather than "stable". It has been ten years since Ding and Campion (2016) suggested the CFTEAP had the potential to stifle innovation in TEAP, which is unfortunate because EAP is an innovative field. It has had its own dedicated journal for over twenty years (*Journal of English for Academic Purposes, or JEAP*) and there are now at least two more (e.g. *BALEAP Journal of Research and Practice* and *International Journal of English for Academic Purposes: Research and Practice*). A search of JEAP alone for articles with "AI" (or closely related terms) in the title, abstract or keywords returns 44 results, most of which have clear implications for TEAP. In other words, there is no shortage of innovative EAP research that could be used to inform technology- and AI-oriented updates to the CFTEAP - a fundamental 'how' resource.

Although much of the initial research into the educational use of AI was reactionary, there is now a growing body of literature investigating the responsible incorporation of AI into language teaching generally and EAP specifically. For example, in their book, Moorhouse and Wong (2025) provide an accessible, thorough and practical guide for language teachers looking to use AI responsibly in the classroom. This is built around a five-point Professional GenAI Competency (P-GenAI-C) framework, much of which is directly relevant to EAP teachers. From a more empirical perspective, Pérez-Paredes, Curry and Ordoñana-Guillamón (2025) and Pérez-Paredes, Curry and Jiménez (2025) set out to delineate and investigate critical AI literacies in language education. Interestingly, these two studies argue for the direct use of corpora in the classroom (i.e. data driven learning) as a means for helping students develop critical AI literacy. With the longstanding relationship between data driven learning and EAP, this approach could

be particularly promising for TEAP. Moving on to an EAP-specific framework, the Artificial Intelligence for Academic Purposes (AIAP) framework has been developed by Ngo and Hastie (2025). This is a five-point framework with practical suggestions for teachers who may want to implement it. When incorporated into an EAP course, the AIAP was found to improve students' ability to understand, use and evaluate AI tools (Ngo & Hastie, 2025). In terms of assessment too, there are now resources with direct relevance to EAP. Perhaps the most oft-cited is the AI Assessment Scale (AIAS) (Perkins et al., 2023), which is being widely adopted across higher education. The AIAS has been discussed specifically in the context of EAP by its developers (see Roe et al., 2024; Perkins et al., 2025) and in an excellent [BALEAP TELSIG podcast](#). These are just a few of the more practical and relevant resources, but there are undoubtedly many more. The field is moving fast, but there now exists a foundation of literature to support the development and incorporation of AI competencies into an updated CFTEAP.

Technology- and AI-oriented competencies could take a variety of forms in an updated CFTEAP. One of these could be a CFTEAP with a dedicated digital and AI literacy competency statement subsuming a series of more detailed descriptors (much like the current competency statements and the detailed descriptors subsumed under those). A dedicated digital and AI literacy competency statement might, for example, look something like this: *An EAP teacher will be able to demonstrate a responsible and critical approach to digital and AI technologies and will be able to model their appropriate use in academic settings*. This statement could subsume a range of more detailed competency descriptors (e.g. in relation to assessment, critical thinking, course development, text processing and production, etc.). Alternatively, a series of digital and AI literacy descriptors could be subsumed under more traditional TEAP competency statements. For example, the existing assessment practices competency statement in the CFTEAP could be updated to include a descriptor such as: *Knowledge and understanding of the responsible and critical uses of digital and AI technologies for assessment purposes*. Of course, the exact competency descriptors should be empirically derived, but it is important that digital and AI literacies are properly represented within an updated CFTEAP. In 2026, the CFTEAP cannot fulfil its role without explicitly acknowledging the digital and AI competencies required of EAP teachers.

The project to develop an updated CFTEAP should be a major BALEAP funded research project and should be different to the original CFTEAP project in three important ways. First, the project will need to deeply engage with EAP experts and stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds, to account not just for the 'what' and the 'how' of EAP, but also the 'who'. That is to say, EAP teachers, EAP students, EAP researchers, academics from various disciplinary backgrounds, and higher education policy makers will all need to be involved in mapping out the exigencies of EAP in 2026 (and beyond). Second, the methodology behind the development of an updated CFTEAP should be transparent. The project will likely involve (at minimum) a theoretically and practically informed group of BALEAP members carrying out a large-scale survey of the aforementioned stakeholders, followed by a series of focus groups to identify and specify the real-world professional competencies of contemporary EAP teachers. This empirical process should be documented and published in a research journal (e.g. this one). Finally, any updated CFTEAP must incorporate mechanisms to facilitate the continuous evaluation and

maintenance of the framework to prevent fossilisation. This final point of difference is particularly important in the fast-moving AI era.

Concluding remarks

This short opinion piece has argued that the CFTEAP does not adequately represent the core competencies required of EAP practitioners in the AI era and therefore urgently requires an update. However, I want to be clear that the purpose of this piece is not to devalue the CFTEAP’s historical contribution to EAP. For a long time, it was an “invaluable resource” (Hamp-Lyons, 2011: 100), and one that has helped many general English teachers (including myself) make the daunting transition to EAP. But, EAP has undergone significant change in the time that has elapsed since its production. This was recognised as long as a decade ago, when Ding and Campion (2016: 553) noted that “there is a risk of ‘fossilisation’, unless BALEAP updates the framework to include emerging developments in the field and beyond”. The actual purpose of this paper, then, is simply to suggest that perhaps 2026 is the year to re-examine the assumptions underpinning the CFTEAP. Although I have focussed very narrowly on updating the CFTEAP in light of advancements in technology and AI, there are undoubtedly many more areas in which the CFTEAP could be re-examined and refined (e.g. inclusivity [see Bakogiannis, 2025]). It would certainly not be the first time a seminal TEAP text has been re-examined in recent times. Bell (2022) recently re-examined Watson Todd’s (2003) seminal and long-standing TEAP approaches, aptly pointing out that “18 years on, it is worth looking at these approaches with fresh eyes to see if anything has changed or needs refinement.” So, I will end this opinion piece with a similar statement: 18 years on, we *must* look at the CFTEAP with fresh eyes to see if *anything* (not necessarily just technology) has changed or needs refinement.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the preparation of this work the author used an AI model (ChatGPT) to find relevant literature, to get targeted suggestions and feedback on their language, and to identify in-text citations missing from the full reference list. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the article.

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