

CASE STUDY

Co-construction of Academic Identity in EAP: A materials-led alternative pathway for EFL-to-EAP transition

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ABSTRACT

This reflective case study examines the transition from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching into English for Academic Purposes (EAP), arguing that existing routes are often opaque and may unnecessarily restrict entry and professional development. Drawing on over four years of experience leading a diverse team of EAP practitioners, this reflective study explores how the structured use of learning materials, which go beyond worksheets and tasks, can support vocational transition and professional identity development for EFL teachers working in EAP contexts. Informed by sociocultural and constructivist theories of professional identity formation and development, the article outlines a materials-led approach that makes tacit knowledge visible through exemplars, guided practice, mentoring, and technology-enhanced learning. It outlines how a structured 'Present, Practice, Produce' (PPP) framework can be effectively adapted to support teacher development within EAP contexts. Our reflection demonstrates how such practices support the simultaneous development of student academic literacies and teacher professional identity within a shared pedagogical framework within institutional settings, suggesting that EAP providers should give greater consideration to supported in-role transition and professional socialisation over pre-entry requirements to promote more inclusive and sustainable practice through structured pedagogical artefacts and interactional systems that mediate both teaching practice and student learning.

KEYWORDS:

EAP practitioner development, EFL-to-EAP transition, professional identity construction, materials-led pedagogy, alternative pathway.

To cite this article:

Devane, D. and McIlroy, S. (2026). Co-construction of Academic Identity in EAP: A materials-led alternative pathway for EFL-to-EAP transition. *BALEAP Journal of Research & Practice*, 2(1), 66-86. <https://doi.org/10.31273/baleapjrp.v2.n1.2198>

1. Introduction

Pathways into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching are varied and often non-linear, reflecting the diverse professional backgrounds from which practitioners enter the field. Consistent with Campion (2016), our experience of not only entering EAP but also recruiting into, supporting, and leading EAP teaching teams suggests that the pathway into EAP can often be confusing and contradictory, leaving the EFL teacher unaware of their potential and career possibilities. Nevertheless, multiple routes and backgrounds do, and should, lead into EAP. However, the pathways often require prior experience or specific qualifications, creating potential barriers to entry, practitioner development, and career diversity. Given the relatively specialised nature of EAP, reliance on narrowly defined entry requirements may also restrict the pool of prospective practitioners entering the profession, raising questions about the field's long-term sustainability and renewal. In practice, recruitment criteria frequently privilege postgraduate qualifications or prior EAP experience as indicators of readiness for the role. Whilst such requirements may reflect legitimate concerns regarding quality assurance and academic standards, they may also result in experienced practitioners holding lower-level teaching qualifications, e.g., a level 5 qualification, being overlooked despite possessing substantial pedagogical expertise and development potential. Arguably, EAP teaching teams benefit from drawing on a diversity of professional backgrounds, experiences, qualifications, and perspectives, as this can enhance inclusivity, relevance, and pedagogical responsiveness when working with increasingly diverse student cohorts. Existing EFL and EAP practitioners themselves reflect a wide range of fields and backgrounds. Nevertheless, this diversity is not always apparent at the point of entry into EAP. Irrespective of the entry pathway into EAP, support is still needed to enable teachers' socialisation and professional development. Ding and Bruce (2017) point out that an EAP qualification is often recognised and accepted as the most accessible way to support EFL transition, enabling knowledge, experience, and reflection to contribute to identity development. However, despite obtaining such a qualification, teachers may still encounter barriers to entry without relevant EAP experience. This raises questions about the sufficiency of qualifications alone and foregrounds the need to explore alternative, practice-oriented forms of support for EFL-to-EAP transition.

To understand how EFL practitioners transition into EAP roles, it is necessary to consider the processes through which professional identities are formed, maintained, and developed. Understanding how individuals shift between their self-concept and their self-identification as a member of a group sharing an identity (Turner, 1987) is invaluable in any professional context. McCune (2021) points out that little is known about how academics in teaching-intensive roles (in research-intensive universities) maintain their identities and care for teaching. Understanding what encourages or constrains transformative learning and teaching lies at the heart of insight into how best to support the teaching-intensive practitioner (McCune, 2021). Drawing on over four years of experience leading a diverse group of EAP teachers, this reflection proposes that the transition from EFL to EAP can be made more accessible vocationally through the structured use of a set of EAP 'learning materials'. As module convenors (MCs) responsible

for parallel undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) modules, which build knowledge of university spoken and written genres, we led and supported a team of 20+ teachers each year. Materials were used alongside other forms of support to aid the transition. We found that the focused use of materials, conceptualised in this article as an integrated pedagogical system rather than discrete teaching resources, can meaningfully contribute to the development of the academic identity of both the teacher and the student.

This experience can be seen as one of co-identity construction. In this model, both the practitioner-educator's and student-learner's professional-academic identities are encouraged to evolve, not in isolation but synchronously, through the delivery of content via materials and the completion of assessments and intended learning outcomes. A sense of shared community values and practices further unites staff and students, as made explicit in our roles as MCs for the EAP practitioner and, in turn, for the students. As a result, from the viewpoint of identity as something we do and continually become, or transition to, through the presentation and representation of the self within social, professional, and institutional contexts (Cascio & Gasker, 2001), there is significant value in this co-construction for both the practitioner and the learner. In this model, student academic literacy development and teacher professional identity development are not treated as parallel strands, but as interdependent outcomes of a single materials-led pedagogical process enacted within the same learning environment. Founded on this experience, and aligning it with theories of professional identity development, such as that by Gholami et al. (2021), we propose that schools, organisations, and institutions delivering EAP courses should be open to more vocational routes of entry for the EFL-to-EAP teacher. This approach centres on the structured use of learning materials as a transitional and developmental aid.

Taken together, these constraints suggest that formal qualifications alone may be insufficient as a primary mechanism for entry into EAP teaching roles. Instead, they risk obscuring how professional capability can be developed through structured, supported in-role practice. We therefore explore an alternative, materials-led approach to EAP practitioner development that positions transition, rather than pre-entry certification, as a legitimate and productive site of professional formation. Within this framing, student and teacher development are understood as mutually constitutive outcomes of the same pedagogical system rather than separate objects of analysis. We use 'identity' to refer to self-understanding and professional positioning within academic and institutional roles; 'development' to refer to the pedagogical, social, and material processes through which this identity is shaped; and 'transition' to refer to movement between professional roles, particularly from EFL-to-EAP contexts. Whilst these concepts are closely related, they are treated as analytically distinct to clarify the mechanisms involved in practitioner formation. Through reflection on this case, we illustrate how professional identity, expertise, and pedagogical confidence can be developed through supported participation in EAP practice rather than being treated solely as prerequisites for entry. We therefore suggest that EAP providers give greater consideration to structured in-role developmental pathways as a complement to, or in some contexts an alternative to, reliance on pre-entry qualifications and experience. The following sections first outline the theoretical perspectives informing this

position before presenting our reflective case study and its implications for EAP practitioner development, recruitment, and sustainability.

2. Background and Context

This section outlines the theoretical perspectives that informed our understanding of practitioner transition and professional identity development. These perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for the reflective case study that follows and inform the developmental elements used to analyse and interpret our observations.

2.1 Theoretical Background

We chose to align with theories of professional identity development in the context of teaching EAP because, more often than not, job descriptions for EAP roles assume that this identity has already been established. This is often reflected in stipulated essential requirements, such as a level 7 qualification and prior EAP experience, which are frequently expected before application. Whilst such requirements may serve important quality assurance purposes, they may also narrow entry routes into a relatively specialised field and limit opportunities for practitioners to develop EAP expertise through supported participation and practice.

One key tension, which often claims to justify these requirements, lies in the differing knowledge bases between EFL and EAP teaching. Whilst EFL practice is often grounded in general language pedagogy, EAP requires engagement with disciplinary genres, academic conventions, assessment literacy, and research-informed practices. This does not imply a deficit among EFL practitioners, but rather highlights areas of situated knowledge typically developed through guided engagement with academic contexts rather than pre-entry qualifications alone.

This distinction is often treated as self-evident in institutional contexts; however, its implications for professional transition are more complex than commonly acknowledged. Although EFL and EAP teaching share a common pedagogical foundation, institutional approaches to recruitment and professional recognition often position them as distinct, hierarchical knowledge domains. This creates tension between transferable pedagogical expertise and its recognition in EAP hiring practices. Experienced EFL practitioners may already possess advanced skills in scaffolding, feedback design, and learner development; however, these are frequently undervalued because they are not articulated in EAP-specific terms such as genre analysis or academic literacy development. In response, recruitment processes tend to rely on proxy indicators such as postgraduate qualifications or prior EAP experience, which function less as direct measures of teaching capability and more as mechanisms of institutional risk management. This can result in a 'hidden curriculum' of EAP practice, where disciplinary knowledge and assessment literacy are assumed rather than explicitly supported. Consequently, the transition into EAP is often framed as a pre-entry requirement rather than a developmental process, thereby limiting recognition of how EAP expertise can be developed through structured, in-role practice.

EAP job descriptions, particularly those for fixed-term staff, imply that applicants should have an established EAP background and, more often than not, a level 7 qualification, such as a master's degree in applied linguistics or one of the increasing master's in teaching EAP. While such requirements may reflect legitimate institutional concerns regarding quality assurance, consistency, and the perceived complexity of EAP teaching, they can also unintentionally restrict access to the profession and overlook the potential for structured in-role development. In this study, we have drawn on theories of professional development and applied them to the context of teaching EAP to show that there is another route to the transition from EFL teaching to EAP. We draw on definitions of professional identity proposed by Cascio and Gasker (2001) and Ibarra (1999). These two perspectives offer different but complementary ways of conceptualising professional identity formation. Within an occupational context, Cascio and Gasker (2001) define professional identity as an individual's self-concept or self-image, constituted by a combination of skills and specialist knowledge and shaped by the acknowledgement and internalisation of values associated with a particular profession. Professional identity, in this sense, functions to bind members of a profession through a shared sense of purpose (Cascio & Gasker, 2001). In this article, identity is treated as distinct from professional development and institutional transition to avoid conceptual overlap between self-concept, learning processes, and role movement. In contrast to this stabilising view, identity can also be understood as dynamic and continually reconstructed through experience. Ibarra (1999) argues that professional identity is continually reshaped over time through experimentation and developmental experiences. This involves the formation of provisional professional selves that are negotiated and re-evaluated across experience, producing ongoing identity adjustment rather than fixed positioning. Taken together, these perspectives position professional identity as both socially stabilised through shared professional norms (Cascio & Gasker, 2001) and dynamically reconstructed through ongoing practice (Ibarra, 1999). This study, therefore, draws on sociocultural and constructivist accounts of professional identity formation (Cascio & Gasker, 2001; Ibarra, 1999), in which identity is understood as socially mediated and practice-shaped, while professional development is understood as the processes that enable this shaping.

Furthermore, as McCune (2021) points out, understanding what encourages or constrains transformative learning and teaching lies at the heart of understanding how best to support the transitioning teacher. Therefore, from the perspective of professional identity as something we become, or transition to, within social, professional, and institutional contexts, we reflect on how the EFL teacher's professional development can be supported within EAP contexts, by using materials as a specific tool, and how such development may facilitate transition into EAP roles. This concept is also central to Lave and Wenger's (2001) Community of Practice (CoP), in which practitioners are granted access through legitimate peripheral participation. This concept proposes a socially situated model of learning in which participation, rather than formal instruction alone, enables newcomers to move from peripheral to fuller participation within a professional community. We adopt this as the overarching theoretical framework for this study. However, we position our contribution not as an alternative to CoP, but as an operationalisation of it within a structured EAP teaching context. In our interpretation, CoP explains how learning occurs through participation in a socially situated community. However, we extend this by arguing that such participation can be deliberately scaffolded

through designed pedagogical materials, guided practice, and institutional interactional systems. Legitimate peripheral participation, therefore, is not understood as occurring only organically or informally, but as something that can be actively supported and structured within teaching environments. Our materials model is therefore situated within CoP, functioning as the mechanism through which participation, identity formation, and professional learning are operationalised in practice. However, we are not outlining how formal knowledge or experience may be gained, as it has already been established that there are numerous and varied routes into EAP (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Practitioners' backgrounds, knowledge, and skills cannot encompass everything relevant to EAP teaching. Instead, we wish to show how tacit knowledge in situ can be surfaced and how the EFL teacher can transition into the EAP role whilst in that role. Transition is a given phenomenon, as EAP practitioners' professionalism is also recognised to develop over time (Tsui, 2011). All time spent on transition and development, irrespective of length, is therefore valuable. We see this experience as one of co-identity construction in that both the teachers' and the students' professional-academic identity are supported to evolve synchronously through both the delivery of the content, via the materials, the accomplishment of the assessments and the intended learning outcomes. A sense of shared community values and practices (CoP) further unites staff and students, aiding the development of both groups.

2.2 Context and Positionality

We convened parallel pre-sessional undergraduate and postgraduate modules that focus on broadening an awareness of wider university spoken and written genres, practices, and skills. Both modules included formative and summative oral and written assessments, requiring students to deliver a reflective oral presentation, and produce a critical review for the postgraduate module, or a case study report for the undergraduate module. These oral and written genres were new to almost all students on the modules. Focusing on these modules specifically allowed us to draw comparisons from similar experiences as convenors, but also to reflect on modules that provide a common entry route into EAP for the EFL transitioning practitioner. The teaching team consisted of those of varying backgrounds. Whilst some of the teachers hold PhDs or have experience in academic writing, many had limited experience in full-time teaching in higher education, focusing more on international EFL roles; others may have built extensive experience, often in management roles, but in cultural contexts beyond the UK.

As module convenors, we were responsible for overall module delivery and quality assurance, serving as both academic leads and pedagogical guides for the teaching team. This included developing and curating teaching materials, designing and overseeing assessment and marking processes, and leading and supporting a team of over 20 teachers during intensive six-week teaching periods in the summers of 2021-2024 (PG module) and 2022-2025 (UG module). We were also members of the curriculum development team and involved in the development, compilation, and final curation of materials. We share an interest in the creative process of materials writing and regularly reflect on how such work can best support teachers whilst ensuring smooth operationalisation of the modules. Our observations draw on our ongoing

professional experience as MCs and on Dr McIlroy's doctoral research into the development of professional academic identity (McIlroy, 2025).

We have chosen to refer to the EAP teacher as both a teacher and an EAP practitioner. Like Charles and Pecorari (2016), we recognise that the role extends beyond classroom teaching to include involvement in materials development, scholarship, and research. We take a wide view of professional academic identity development of the teaching-intensive practitioner and use the term 'practitioner' to cover all members of a CoP, encompassing its wide breadth of backgrounds, qualifications, and lived and professional experiences.

The modules we are discussing are primarily English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), focusing on developing transferable academic skills and genres applicable across disciplines. Whilst the undergraduate module includes elements of discipline-specific content (e.g., Business and Management), and the postgraduate module requires students to produce a critical literature review within their own discipline or a closely related one, the overall emphasis remains on general academic practices rather than subject-specific language instruction. The modules were delivered either on campus (in person) or through online distance learning, depending on students' registration. Both modes incorporated synchronous teaching sessions and guided independent study (GIS). In this context, synchronous teaching refers to real-time, timetabled classes, while GIS denotes structured asynchronous learning activities designed to support independent engagement with module content.

2.3 Definition of Materials and Approach

In this study, the term 'materials' is used in an expanded sense to include both designed pedagogical artefacts and structured interactional resources that mediate teaching and learning processes. These materials may also be conceptualised as pedagogical artefacts (in line with socio-material accounts of teaching practice), depending on their function within the learning environment. We will refer to learning materials as both teacher-facing and student-facing. Materials have a co-constructed, dual, or even multi-faceted purpose and function, through which we meet the requirements and expectations in our roles as MCs for both key stakeholders. They support and develop the 'practitioner-learner', i.e., the teacher, who, in turn, supports and develops the 'student-learner'. The materials allow both students and teachers to achieve greater autonomy in developing their conceptual understanding and practical application of the required academic skills, practices, and genres for the modules, whilst also allowing the teacher to develop and meet the operational requirements of the module and the role.

Therefore, for our reflection, we include the following as the module materials:

1. *Student-facing learning materials. Divided between the taught lesson materials and the GIS materials.*
2. *Comprehensive teachers' notes included in the lesson and GIS materials, including lesson context and frame, extension tasks, and notes for differentiation.*

3. *Weekly overviews (i.e., summaries of objectives achieved), both student and practitioner facing*
4. *Support videos and guides, showing how, e.g., to locate information and complete tasks in order to build autonomy – both student and teacher facing.*
5. *Weekly staff meetings.*
6. *Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) upcoming lesson postings – on a specific module materials channel.*
7. *MS Teams chat with teachers, demonstrating open communication, availability, and a forum for questions and clarification, i.e., ‘concept checking’.*
8. *Induction sessions.*
9. *Standardisation sessions.*

For analytical clarity, these materials can be grouped into three overlapping categories:

- (1) designed pedagogical artefacts (e.g. lesson materials, teacher notes, videos),
- (2) communicative infrastructures (e.g. MS Teams posts, chat channels),
- (3) structured developmental practices (e.g. induction and standardisation sessions, meetings).

Extending existing staff induction practices, the use of these materials was structured around a ‘Present, Practice, Produce’ (PPP) approach to support practice development and align with operational timelines. This framework was deliberately used to accommodate a range of staff development needs, including those with prior experience, those requiring refresher support, and those developing new knowledge and skills.

The approach was implemented as follows:

- **Present:** Materials, skills and tasks were introduced to the teacher in the learning materials, weekly meetings, via MS Teams posts, or in induction and standardisation sessions.
- **Practice:** Teachers were given structured time to ‘practice’ and concept check during timetabled slots for lesson preparation, helping them to reinforce their understanding and professional development. This was supported through additional resources, peer collaboration, and mentoring within a developing community of practice, e.g., support via videos or instructional guides or 1:1 Q&A and support sessions. Practice can include activities such as rehearsing lesson stages, trialling tasks from the student-facing

materials, anticipating student responses, and discussing potential challenges or adaptations with peers and MCs.

- (Re-)Produce: Teachers can then reproduce their understanding in practice by leading and guiding students through the lessons, tasks, and the materials supporting them in completing assessments and achieving the module's intended learning outcomes.

Whilst developed within our own institutional context, this framework offers a practical model that could be adapted by other EAP providers seeking to support practitioner transition through structured participation rather than relying on pre-existing EAP expertise.

3. Reflection

Having established the theoretical foundations for professional identity development and outlined the materials-led approach adopted within our context, we now reflect on how these processes operated in practice. Drawing on our experiences as module convenors, we consider the factors that appeared to support practitioner transition, identity development, and participation within the EAP teaching environment. To structure this reflection, we synthesised key themes from the literature and used them as an analytical lens through which to examine our observations. The developmental elements discussed below are derived from the theoretical perspectives outlined in Section 2 and serve as an analytical framework for interpreting our experiences as interrelated mechanisms through which materials-led pedagogical practice enables the co-construction of professional and academic identity. We take a wide view of professional identity. By extracting and synthesising key arguments from the literature, we identified and created the following list as core elements for opportunities in aiding professional transition and identity construction:

1. Developing professional identity;
2. The role of the 'role model';
3. Gaining expertise;
4. The role of technology;
5. Developmental and guidance opportunities.

In the following discussion, we narrow our focus to our experiences leading a team of fixed-term summer teachers in developing greater autonomy and conceptual understanding, and in meeting learning outcomes, before outlining our observations on co-identity construction and the transition of the EFL-to-EAP role.

The discussion below considers each of the five developmental elements in turn, integrating insights from the literature with reflections on practice and observations relating to co-identity construction. These five elements may be interchangeable, or prioritised differently, depending on individual contexts and needs.

3.1 Developing Professional Identity

Cascio and Gasker (2001) showed that it is not just about acquiring knowledge but also about embracing values and purpose, which lie at the core of academic identity and its conventions. The first responsibility of the teacher is to establish what academic integrity is and make clear the related values and purpose. Campion (2016) showed that developing this specialised knowledge and familiarity was one of the biggest challenges for newly qualified EAP teachers. Davis (2019) observed that EAP practitioners foster the relationship between student and teacher by establishing the values and purpose that underpin academic integrity. Therefore, this suggests that professional identity binds members of a group through a shared purpose and values as its foundation. Practitioners can, in turn, support students in building an understanding of these values and purpose. Through understanding and acceptance of the values and purpose, the new member adopts the related practice and further builds their identity.

Viewed through this lens, our own approach focused not simply on developing teachers' knowledge of EAP practices but on creating opportunities to participate in the values, relationships, and collaborative activities that underpin academic communities. This relationship extends across all academic practices within the academic community. As convenors, we also actively sought to build a sense of community. This was achieved via a variety of means:

- Through arranging meetings or during existing planned meetings;
- in-person and online informal communication channels;
- peer support and collaboration;
- autonomous self-directed materials.

This was mirrored in the classes through, for example, group work, group discussions, Q&As, and collaboration, as part of the same pedagogical system that supports teacher development. These suggestions were also integrated into the student-facing materials and within differentiation in task requirements or instructions.

Regular meetings, open channels of communication, and peer support helped purposefully build a sense of trust and inclusion, which was further reflected in the scaled-response feedback option "I feel part of the academic community" with only 'agree' or 'strongly agree' responses. This indicates that professional identity formation can be actively supported through structured, in-role developmental practices rather than relying solely on pre-entry qualifications. We therefore argue that creating intentional opportunities for inclusion, communication, and participation should be considered a core component of EAP practitioner development. This establishes identity formation as a socially embedded process within structured EAP practice.

3.2 The Role Model: The Role of the Convenor and the Buddy

Extending this focus on identity formation through participation, the role of modelling and peer support becomes central to transition processes. Houston et al. (2006) suggest that teachers should align their professional identity development with either their teaching community, the department, colleagues or teams, or the institution more broadly. Ibarra (1999) proposes carefully locating and adopting a role model as part of identity development. This is echoed in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Through observation and social relations, we build experience and self-efficacy until we evolve into a fully recognised member of a community of practice rather than remaining on the periphery (Lave & Wenger, 2001). Furthermore, role models and collegial support through professional team groups in which 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4), understood as knowledge that is practical, experiential, and often difficult to articulate formally but is demonstrated through action and participation within a professional context, can be recognised and exchanged, reinforces the value of practice for teaching academics (van Lankveld et al., 2017). Therefore, we have found that the professional development of the EFL-to-EAP teacher appears to be best supported through good practice, either modelled by the module convenor or through a peer buddy system. These principles informed the support structures embedded within our modules.

The Role of the Module Convenor (MC): Reflecting the importance of role modelling, collegial support, and guided participation highlighted in the literature, the MC role is not so much that of a role model, but acts as a guide through the module and its materials. Both MCs have either previously taught on the module or played a central role in mapping and developing it, so we understand the various challenges that may arise and can advise accordingly. Our experience means we can reassure through foresight and preplanning. We also make clear that we are a team whose fundamental aim is to ensure trust and understanding. Therefore, no question is considered irrelevant or unnecessary. In this way, MCs can ensure inclusion, rather than exclusion or EAP peripheral isolation due to real or imagined differences in experience, knowledge, employment, or contractual status.

We also further built on the concept of a community of practice (CoP). Less experienced EAP teachers were buddied up with returning teachers, or experienced teachers were given localised responsibilities; for example, those with confident IT skills helped support colleagues with tasks such as recording oral presentations. This illustrates tacit knowledge in action, experiential, practice-based knowledge that is demonstrated through participation (Polanyi, 1966). In our modular team meetings and chat channels, teachers were encouraged to connect; they could contact MCs and one another online for clarification if needed.

Informal drop-in observations, as well as more formal observations, also took place. However, a marker of success in creating a sense of community was that by the middle of the module, teachers were inviting MCs to drop in and observe classes to provide suggestions and guidance rather than the MC requesting it.

As a further example of building on tacit knowledge, the oral presentation was modelled by one teacher from the module. This was recorded and served as both an example for teachers in induction and in student-facing materials. In the video, the teacher reflected on their own

experience of learning and developing scholarship, extending the concept of identity development. Thus, the teacher becomes a role model for students, in addition to exemplifying the intended learning and assessment outcomes. This indicates that supported participation within a guided CoP can play a significant role in facilitating EFL-to-EAP professional transition, whilst simultaneously developing student academic literacies within the same pedagogical environment. For institutions seeking to widen participation in EAP teaching, formalising peer-support and buddying structures may therefore provide a relatively low-cost but effective developmental intervention. This illustrates how guided participation operationalises identity development within a CoP.

3.3 Gaining Expertise

Building on socially mediated identity formation and modelling processes outlined above, this section considers how EAP-specific expertise is developed through structured engagement with teaching practice. Fitzpatrick et al. (2022) looked at issues relating to developing teacher expertise and outlined four key areas, or themes, which are:

1. EAP-specific knowledge and training.
2. Qualifications.
3. Insight and understanding of what students are asked to do.
4. Observations of peers.

Point 4 above is part of the wider programme level quality assurance processes, which we will not address here. Point 2 can vary greatly and is usually considered in recruitment and selection. The wide and varied backgrounds and qualifications of a teacher should mirror that of the student cohort, so not having a restrictive list of qualifications will help ensure a team with a diverse knowledge base is employed.

In relation to point 1, EAP knowledge and training, the BALEAP Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP, 2008) and the more recent TEAP Scheme (BALEAP, 2026) offer a professional pathway for EAP practitioner development. These frameworks articulate a developmental set of competencies encompassing academic literacy awareness, genre knowledge, pedagogical practice, assessment literacy, and engagement with scholarship. These descriptors are explicitly framed as developmental rather than exclusionary benchmarks. However, in recruitment contexts, they are frequently operationalised indirectly via proxies such as prior EAP experience or postgraduate qualifications, thereby functioning as entry thresholds. In contrast, our findings suggest that these competencies can be developed incrementally through structured in-role participation, materials-led scaffolding, and guided engagement with teaching practice. From this perspective, the frameworks are best understood as guiding maps for professional formation rather than fixed standards of pre-entry readiness. They may therefore be more effectively used to inform recruitment design and staff development pathways than to define essential entry requirements. As noted by Fitzpatrick et

al. (2022), professional EAP training remains ill-defined, leaving many unclear which combinations of qualifications and experience best support EAP professional development. Although we acknowledge TEAP training as invaluable, it is more formalised and can be difficult for staff on fixed-term contracts to implement, particularly over intensive summer teaching periods.

Therefore, our discussion here focuses specifically on point 3: gaining insight into students' understanding of what they are being asked to do. In our context, this insight was developed primarily through structured engagement with teaching materials, assessment processes, and the practical demands of module delivery rather than through formal pre-entry training alone.

Support was provided through MS Teams lesson posts, weekly meetings, and via the inclusion of specific tasks in the teacher-facing materials, such as queries related to Turnitin (an online software-as-a-service [SaaS] academic integrity tool) and, for the postgraduate module, databases. Although these examples involve digital tools, the focus here was not on technical training itself but on developing the professional judgement and disciplinary understanding required to guide students' engagement with academic practices. For example, when teachers had less experience with Turnitin, specific academic databases, or identifying related literature, such as articles that had cited a target text, additional support was provided or made readily available. This was shared in a generic, supportive way with everyone so that members of the teaching team did not feel isolated or targeted by this expertise gap. This resulted in the production and inclusion of instructional videos and written guides. These interventions served to externalise tacit knowledge, making implicit, practice-based understanding visible and transferable to novice practitioners. The use of Turnitin, the interpretation of similarity reports, and the use of online databases and catalogues also posed varying degrees of challenge. At the postgraduate level, there was a wider variety of student disciplines in each class. Students needed to consult various databases to find literature for their critical review related to their future field of study. Teachers' feedback indicated that they felt more confident in guiding students' use of databases after reviewing instructional guides or liaising with convenors; many also gained confidence in using citations, DOIs, and hyperlinks. Consequently, they were able to communicate this to the students, who, in turn, searched for, located, read, evaluated, and critiqued discipline-specific academic literature. This highlights how students' academic literacies and teachers' professional identities are developed simultaneously through shared engagement with disciplinary academic practices.

Regarding Turnitin, teachers questioned the implications of similarity and whether it indicated poor academic practice or academic misconduct. Many were concerned by the similarity report, especially when it returned a higher percentage of matches. However, this was often a similarity achieved through legitimate means, e.g., the use of subject-specific vocabulary or the target language of the genre, rather than poor paraphrasing or source use. As previously mentioned, guided instructional materials helped develop teacher expertise. They were then better placed to guide and instruct students in the required academic skills and practices for the genre. Through subsequent discussion, we recognised this as an example of non-EAP-specific knowledge that practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to have prior to delivering these modules.

Our insight also arises from the operational structures of module convening, e.g., insights gained through standardisation sessions for assessment submissions. Prior to each standardisation, teachers were given samples to mark against the assessment rubric. In the live session, they then conferred with colleagues before either aligning with the benchmark or, for modules with fewer teaching groups (e.g., the UG module), meeting with the MC until they agreed on a very clear rubric. This allowed teachers to feel justified and confident in their application of the rubric and their marking against it, reassuring and guiding them in the standardised approach being taken to ensure uniformity and conformity across the cohort. The moderation and standardisation processes further helped confirm and guide their application of and understanding of the rubric. Guidance for these sessions was given first orally during the sessions, and also in written and video forms for teachers to refer back to, to foster autonomy and assist in building their confidence, development, and transition. This was again further complemented by the open channels of communication mentioned earlier. We recognise that our consideration of standardisation and moderation is particularly relevant and transferable good practice.

Furthermore, during the module inductions, teachers, at both the UG and PG levels, were asked to complete analysis tasks that students would also need to complete. This put teachers in the place of the students and helped to ensure they were experiencing and reflecting on what they would themselves be delivering, as well as developing a clear(er) conceptual understanding of the module, its outcomes, and its 'student-facing' materials. MCs supported and guided teachers during induction before the teachers would support and guide the students. EAP-specific expertise can therefore be developed effectively through scaffolded, practice-based engagement with teaching processes and materials. This suggests that some forms of EAP expertise can be developed through structured engagement with practice rather than assumed at the point of recruitment. These examples show how professional expertise and identity development are co-produced through sustained engagement with EAP practice.

3.4 The Role of Technology

This developmental process is further enabled through technological mediation, which supports participation, collaboration, and confidence-building. In much of the literature, professional confidence and identity development are closely linked to practitioners' perceptions of competence in the skills and knowledge associated with their teaching roles. Although we acknowledge that technological infrastructure and virtual learning platforms vary greatly across institutions, they often sit both outside and within EAP-specific skills and understanding. Leibowitz et al. (2012) showed that, regarding professional identity, it is important that teachers feel competent in teaching-related skills, including those associated with the technologies and systems used to support and enhance learning. Consequently, our concern was not simply whether teachers could operate institutional technologies, but how confidence in using these systems contributed to their broader development as EAP practitioners.

Teachers were fully supported by the senior programme team, not only MCs, which offered individual technical support or even face-to-face help if needed. Teachers ultimately learned and developed technical skills through the module's delivery. The collaboration and sense of community amongst the leadership team, both at programme and module level, was emulated by teachers as the modules progressed; for example, they shared additional materials such as review quizzes and checklists, and helped each other with the technology. This reinforced a sense of support, community, practice, and collaboration. This suggests that confidence with essential pedagogical tools and systems can be developed in situ as part of the transition into EAP practice. At the same time, students' academic literacies are developed through guided interaction with these same tools and systems. Institutions should therefore consider technology support as an integral component of practitioner development rather than as a separate operational concern. This reinforces the role of infrastructural systems in sustaining identity and the development of expertise within EAP contexts.

3.5 Development and Guidance Opportunities

Bringing together the processes outlined above, this section considers how structural development and guidance consolidate identity formation and expertise. Van Lankveld et al. (2017) conclude that their review of teacher identity development indicates that teachers need strategies that will help strengthen teacher academic identity. They propose activities that empower teachers, both individually and collectively, and support their agency. From our experience, we recognise that teachers bring their academic backgrounds to their practice, and are often selected against the BALEAP Competency Framework (2008), but may not hold a full-time EAP role. The six-week module, in our example, may not allow for a formalised or comprehensive development programme. However, for many, it provides the opportunity for role change, which also brings greater teacher agency through identity development. Gholami et al. (2021) show that while a change in role may bring a sense of insecurity, it also creates opportunities for reinvention, self-efficacy, and the evolution of professional identity. The developmental opportunities embedded within our modules can be viewed as practical mechanisms that supported this process of professional growth and identity reconstruction.

Across these processes, teachers' knowledge, skills, and agency are further enhanced through the delivery of and engagement with the modules. Within this process, tacit knowledge is continually operationalised as embedded know-how that emerges through guided participation in teaching activities rather than through formal instruction alone. The role offers them the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of genres whilst also providing insight into how research, analysis, and evaluation are carried out. Through the materials and tasks, teachers on the PG module, along with students, learn about the methodology used, its analysis, presentation, and delivery within research. Here, 'materials' are understood as an integrated pedagogical system comprising artefacts, communicative infrastructures, and structured developmental practices. Through guiding students to write critical reviews, teachers have a clear structure against which to assess whether students have completed the required stages, irrespective of their future discipline, as part of the same pedagogical system that

supports teacher development. They do not require prior specialist knowledge to do this. Likewise, in the UG module, which is grounded in Business and Management as a discipline, teachers may come to their teaching role with limited understanding of the academic knowledge areas on which the UG module is based, specifically recruitment, selection and diversity and inclusion practices. The materials were created assuming students will enter with zero or limited knowledge of these areas, therefore everything the student needs for developmental success is provided within the module. This also allows teachers to be well-informed whilst learning and developing alongside the student, albeit one or two steps ahead. This illustrates the simultaneous development of student academic literacies and teacher professional identity within a shared pedagogical framework, where both emerge through engagement with the same materials, tasks, and assessment processes.

Over the four-year period in which this approach was implemented, we observed clear indicators of sustained impact on teacher development and progression. The majority of teachers returned to teach on subsequent pre-sessional courses, with over 90% retention in recent iterations and only one new teacher joining the team in summer 2025. This high level of return suggests both increased teacher confidence and strong alignment with EAP practices developed through the materials-led approach. In addition, several practitioners progressed into more permanent or extended roles within EAP contexts, both within the institution and in other institutions in the UK and internationally, as well as in related educational settings. Whilst these observations are based on practitioner-led and anecdotal tracking rather than formal longitudinal data, they provide strong indicative evidence that supported in-role development can meaningfully contribute to the acquisition and application of EAP-specific skills over time. This reinforces the view that structured developmental opportunities within EAP teaching roles can act as a sustained mechanism for EAP practitioner agency and progression. Taken together, these observations suggest that opportunities for supported participation, reflection, and guided responsibility should be deliberately designed into EAP teaching contexts, as they facilitate both practitioner development and professional identity formation through sustained engagement in practice.

4. Limitations

Although this experience offers clear takeaways for providers and leaders to reflect on, it is important to note that this reflective case study is situated within a single institutional context and draws primarily on practitioner-led observations and experience. Whilst this enables rich, situated insight, it may limit the generalisability of the observations for transition beyond the EFL-to-EAP practitioner. Nevertheless, common themes and the five elements outlined to aid transition and development offer transfer to other teaching contexts.

Our dual roles as module convenors and our knowledge of the specific modules may also shape interpretation, despite efforts towards reflexive practice. Staff and student feedback is used illustratively rather than as part of a longitudinal or comparative research design, and the experiences of the sessional, fixed-term teachers we led in transitioning are likely to vary according to prior expertise, confidence, and institutional support. Furthermore, the approach

described assumes access to established materials either created in-house or externally, time, and leadership structures, which may not be equally available across all EAP contexts. These limitations suggest the need for further research across diverse settings and over longer timeframes to confirm the findings we outline.

This case study is also situated within an EGAP context, where materials and pedagogical design emphasise transferable academic literacy skills rather than discipline-specific discourse. Whilst we suggest that the principles of a materials-led, in-role developmental approach may have relevance for English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) settings, the extent to which this model would transfer effectively to ESAP contexts, where disciplinary knowledge and specialist genres are most central, remains uncertain and would require further investigation to examine how, and to what extent, the approach could be operationalised in such settings.

5. Concluding Remarks

In relation to education, Schön (1987) proposes that reflection on professional practice must encompass reflection in and on action, thereby merging practice and theory to sustain continual professional development. Our reflections here show how theory and practice are integrated to support professional development, which, in turn, contributes to identity formation. We recognise that teaching these modules offers practitioners the opportunity to develop and transition as EAP practitioners, irrespective of their existing expertise, qualifications, or experience. However, as self-reflection is needed, the modules and materials, along with their delivery and use, should be reviewed to ensure their continued relevance. Practitioners should also be asked to reflect and provide feedback on their experiences, for both self and module evaluation, as critical self-reflection is necessary to enable a re-conceptualisation and restructuring of past experience in light of present social and professional context and learning, and the possible future (Brookfield, 2017).

In summary, materials met practitioners' needs and supported their self-conceptualisation as EAP practitioners. The focused use of materials can meaningfully contribute to the professional development of both teachers and students. These materials operate as a coordinated pedagogical system rather than a set of discrete resources. This development operates through structured pedagogical processes embedded in teaching and learning activities, and supports the formation of professional and academic identities. Over time, sustained engagement with these processes can facilitate transition into EAP roles and academic practices within institutional contexts. These outcomes emerge from a single integrated pedagogical system in which professional development and academic literacy development occur through shared engagement with materials.

By aligning materials and practice with the five outlined 'core' developmental elements identified in theories of professional identity development, or by ensuring they are present, providers confirm that their learning materials, including support and guidance materials, allow tacit knowledge in situ rather than exclusively insisting on demonstrable, restrictive pre-requisites. This can be achieved through relatively small adjustments to recruitment and development practices without compromising institutional or quality assurance requirements,

for example, by reconsidering whether higher-level qualifications, i.e., level 7 EFL qualifications, should always be specified as essential criteria for entry into EAP teaching roles. In doing so, organisations can become more inclusive and sustainable by offering practitioners and learners an experience of co-construction, supporting both in evolving synchronously through the delivery of teaching and learning, and simultaneously creating a sense of a shared community regardless of place in one's academic and professional transition and development.

This reflective case study argues that structured, materials-led, in-role professional development can offer a viable and effective alternative or complement to qualification-led entry routes into EAP, particularly in contexts shaped by supported participation and institutional constraints on recruitment and development. Rather than treating professional identity as a prerequisite for entry, the outlined approach demonstrates how identity, expertise, and pedagogical confidence can be progressively constructed through sustained engagement in supported practice. This has clear implications for EAP providers and institutions. We suggest that recruitment and staff development models should place greater emphasis on developmental pathways within roles, particularly where structured support, mentoring, and materials-led guidance are available, rather than relying predominantly on pre-entry qualifications as indicators of readiness for EAP teaching, and instead view professional frameworks such as those provided by BALEAP as developmental guides informing such progression. Whilst not intended to replace formal training routes, this model offers a more inclusive and potentially sustainable approach to widening participation in EAP teaching. In a relatively specialised field, creating opportunities for supported transition may help broaden entry routes, diversify practitioner backgrounds, and contribute to the long-term renewal and sustainability of the discipline. Furthermore, our observations highlight the dual function of teaching materials. As students' academic identities develop through engagement with the materials, so too does the teacher's professional role, with identity formation occurring simultaneously for both teacher and learner through the mediated practice of teaching. These processes are further supported through interactional systems, including mentoring, collaboration, structured communication, and guided participation, which help make tacit knowledge visible and accessible to practitioners transitioning into EAP roles. Together, pedagogical artefacts and interactional systems function as mediating structures that support both student learning and practitioner development within EAP contexts.

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