



A Comparative Evaluation of Activity Types in Locally Developed Iranian EAP Textbooks versus International Counterparts: Communication in Focus



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to address the limited integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in English for Academic Purpose (EAP) books, and to raise awareness about this issue. This study adopts a cognitive critical approach and employs theoretical frameworks to fill the gap in the current literature. The research investigates three Iranian EAP books and their international counterparts by examining the types of activities included in them. In addition, the study includes interviews with Iranian EAP instructors. The findings of this study indicate that the majority of Iranian EAP books lack communicative activities, while international EAP books contain a wide range of diverse activities. The international EAP books feature communicative activities that facilitate the development of soft skills and extension of students' skills. The interviewees of the study confirmed the findings of the initial phase of the research and highlighted the challenges faced in designing communicative activities. As a solution, the article suggests the inclusion of activities that encourage communication, which would lead to an enhancement in students' communication skills in EAP. Overall, this study serves as a cognitive tool that emphasizes the importance of incorporating CLT activities in EAP books, and highlights the need to increase awareness among authors, professors, and students about the significance of communicative activities.

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1. Introduction

The field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has a long-standing history of conducting studies that investigate and increase awareness about course books for instructors. [Atai and Tahririan \(2004\)](#) highlight the objectives of Iranian EAP textbooks, stating that their main purpose is to bridge the gap between students' General English proficiency and their ability to read specialized texts in their field, with less emphasis on communication skills. The question arises whether this approach aligns with the main needs of students in these courses.

From the authors' personal experiences, it can be noted that students often lack the ability to present their research work in English at international conferences in their respective fields. The issue with these books and their authors is that they often view language as a skill that primarily consists of memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. However, communication skills such as the ability to speak English for business management graduates can significantly benefit their careers and business transactions. In a recent study by [Zand-Moghadam et al. \(2018\)](#), it was emphasized that EAP students require a focus on developing communication skills. Moreover, [Atigh and Khabbazi \(2021\)](#) acknowledged in their findings that communicative activities are often neglected in Iranian EAP books.

The findings of previous studies have highlighted the importance of communication skills and knowledge and the need to strengthen them in English language teaching classes with

academic objectives. This current research is unique in the Iranian context of ESP and EAP studies as it investigates to what extent EAP textbooks have included activities that can motivate Iranian students to communicate in a second language. Such activities are viewed as an indirect and quick way to engage language learners in developing communication skills.

Different disciplines have different needs when it comes to EAP textbooks. For example, fields such as computer sciences or mathematics may primarily focus on teaching technical English vocabulary. However, in other fields such as business and management, considering the communication needs of students is crucial. This includes the ability to participate in scientific seminars, communicate effectively with colleagues or foreign companies, and advance their careers. In such cases, English conversation skills should be considered as one of the main goals of the EAP program.

The current state of English language teaching in Iran, particularly in the ESP and EAP classes, seems to be lacking in communicative aspects. Instead, the emphasis is primarily on reading comprehension and translation of texts, as pointed out by [Hayati \(2008\)](#) and [Sadeghi and Richards \(2016\)](#). This lack of emphasis on communication in textbooks poses a challenge for teachers who wish to adopt the communicative approach or Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in their classes.

Studies like [Al Asmari \(2015\)](#) stress the significance of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in English language education, including EAP classes. The inclusion

of communicative activities in EAP textbooks can assist teachers in incorporating CLT and TBLT in their classrooms, thereby enabling students to practice and develop their communication skills.

Business and management students, in particular, require a high level of communicative skills, given the nature of their fields of study. These students may need to engage in international business transactions, participate in scientific seminars, or collaborate with international colleagues. Therefore, it is imperative to introduce communicative activities in EAP textbooks and to integrate them into the English language curriculum.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has been conducted to investigate the types of activities included in Iranian EAP textbooks and how these activities compare with their international counterparts. Given the significance of EAP textbooks and the needs of students in this field, the present study aimed to analyze all the activities in three EAP textbooks published in Iran and three international equivalent books, in terms of their activity types.

This study aims to shed light on an overlooked aspect of Iranian EAP textbooks, which is the absence of communicative activities. The inclusion of such activities will encourage and enhance the communication skills of EAP students in Iran, ultimately contributing to their future academic success. In pursuit of these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of activities are employed in Iranian EAP textbooks, according to

[Littlewood's \(2007\)](#) framework of a communicative continuum?

RQ2: What types of activities are employed in international EAP textbooks, according to [Littlewood's \(2007\)](#) framework of a communicative continuum?

RQ3: What are the differences between the activity types featured in Iranian EAP textbooks and those of international EAP textbooks?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of Iranian university instructors concerning the activities incorporated in Iranian EAP textbooks?

As a comparative study, this research aims to examine the number of communicative activities included in EAP textbooks outside of Iran, to determine whether this issue is also observed in their international counterparts. If communicative activities are present in international EAP textbooks, it raises concerns about the quality of education for Iranian students, as the global standards of education recognize the importance of communication skills for academic success.

2. Literature Review

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a teaching approach derived from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that aims to facilitate the teaching of communication skills. In TBLT, tasks serve as the primary element that provides the learning environment and promotes the use of language as it is used outside the classroom. Through tasks, students learn language and communication skills, which expands their linguistic competence (Ellis, 2003). This highlights the significant role of activities in

shaping students' communication abilities in every branch of English language education, including EAP.

The presence of activities that stimulate communication outside the classroom and in line with the real environment of the target society can be the first step towards improving the communication competence of Iranian students. Conversely, the concept of "Needs Analysis" has been proposed as one of the essential concepts in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and EAP. As [Afshar and Movassagh \(2016\)](#) suggest, most Iranian students and professors are dissatisfied with their ESP and EAP classes. One of the primary reasons for this may be the lack of communicative activities in their textbooks, which do not contextualize the language or relate to the learners' fields of study. In many contemporary discussions in the field of ESP, the importance of communication has been emphasized ([Anthony, 2015](#); [Hyland, 2006](#)).

The lack of alignment with CLT in Iranian academic English textbooks, particularly those published by SAMT, has been widely recognized and discussed in previous research. According to [Sadeghi and Richards \(2016\)](#), these textbooks primarily aim to develop reading skills to facilitate students' acquisition of knowledge and technology, rather than promoting communication skills. Similarly, [Hayati \(2008\)](#) notes that many EAP students in Iran are dissatisfied with their textbooks, as the focus is solely on reading English.

While previous studies in Iran have predominantly used quantitative methods, such as checklists and questionnaires, to analyze

textbooks, the present study employs a mixed methods approach, utilizing [Littlewood's \(2007\)](#) quantitative classification system to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of activities. Other studies have investigated more specific aspects of language education, such as educational technologies ([Nushi & Momeni, 2020](#)) and communication skills in high school and private institution textbooks ([Razmjoo, 2007](#)).

Based on previous research, the following discussion pertains to studies conducted by Iranian researchers assessing the content of textbooks in the field of English language education. [Farhady \(2005\)](#) examined different components of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) including needs assessment, textbooks, approaches, students, teachers, and the educational context. In addition, Iranian EAP textbooks have also been investigated with regards to educational technologies, as [Nushi and Momeni \(2020\)](#) explored their presence and utilization in university textbooks. While language representation has been widely studied in EAP textbooks, little attention has been given to communication-focused activities as a potential means of enhancing communication knowledge in these courses, despite the emphasis on communication skills in previous research (e.g., [Dobakhti & Zohrabi, 2018](#)) to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of such courses.

Studies in Iran have also examined ESP courses based on their educational content (e.g., [Atai et al., 2018](#)) and the needs of ESP and EAP students (e.g., [Dobakhti & Zohrabi, 2018](#)). A significant portion of these studies evaluated

textbooks in terms of their general suitability (Razmjoo & Raisi, 2010), while others investigated the perceptions of students or teachers regarding the textbooks (Eslami, 2010). Although some studies have indirectly mentioned the lack of communication aspects, there is a need for further investigation into this issue in order to address the specialized language needs of Iranian students and enhance their motivation and efficiency. [Dobakhti and Zohrabi \(2018\)](#) emphasized that “the English language is highly important for students in their education and future careers. Students need to improve their speaking skills to communicate with global markets and experts in their field” (Abstract p. 529 my Trans.). These studies demonstrate a need for further research into communication-focused activities in EAP textbooks, which has been largely neglected in previous studies ([Amerian & Marefat, 2018](#)).

In this regard, [Benesch \(2009\)](#) proposes a branch of Critical Approach in EAP (CEAP) which highlights the importance of addressing the phenomenon of globalization in today's era, where English is the official language of the Internet, business, and scientific contexts, and communication is becoming increasingly global. Therefore, it is not feasible to satisfy the constantly evolving and current needs of EAP students. The present study aims to evaluate EAP textbooks, specifically by examining the activities within them, in order to provide a new and comprehensive analysis of this neglected area in the field.

3. Methodology

This study is a qualitative research study that utilized content analysis as the method for data

collection. Additionally, in-depth qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with five EAP instructors at the University of Ershad Damavand in Tehran, who possessed experience in teaching EAP courses. The selection of experienced and qualified EAP instructors was based on their relatively high familiarity with the EAP field, as well as their knowledge of CLT and TBLT approaches and materials development.

This study was conducted in EAP classes at Ershad Damavand University, located in Tehran, Iran's capital city. The study utilized one EAP textbook taught at Ershad Damavand University titled "ESP for Students of Management and Translation: Emphasizing on Key Managerial Concepts". Additionally, two EAP textbooks from SAMT (the center for studying and compiling University Books in Humanities), which publishes the majority of EAP textbooks in Iran, were selected. These publications are titled "English for Students of Management" and "English for the Students of Business Administration by SAMT". The widespread use of SAMT textbooks in numerous Iranian colleges and the volume of publications were the primary reasons for their selection. The third textbook chosen offered a different perspective on EAP teaching and was authored by content and language teachers. The authors also had access to the instructors of this book. Three other EAP textbooks from international publications being taught in various universities across the world were also included, titled "English for Management Studies", "Market Leader Intermediate Course Book", and "Oxford English for Careers- Commerce". The rationale for selecting these textbooks was their aligned

coverage of content and similar field of studies to their local counterparts in the Iranian EAP context.

Using a quantitative approach, all the activities in three Iranian EAP books and three international EAP counterparts were categorized based on [Littlewood's \(2007\)](#) analytical framework, which divides exercises into five categories, ranging from non-communicative to authentic.

To ensure objectivity and minimize bias, two raters were employed to analyze the activities. They categorized the activities independently and then came together to reach an agreement on the categorizations. An EAP specialist was also consulted to validate the themes identified. The frequency of each activity type was calculated,

and the textbooks were then compared in terms of the frequency of each activity type. This approach enhances the reliability and validity of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

EAP Activities Analysis in Iranian and International Books

In order to analyze the activities based on Littlewood's framework, the researchers employed a systematic approach. Specifically, they randomly selected 10% of the data from each of the six books, and one of the researchers analyzed it. Subsequently, a second rater analyzed the same data to ensure inter-rater reliability. The findings of this analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inter-rater Reliability between Two Raters

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Measure of	Kappa	.190	.082	4.055	<.001
N of Valid Cases		454			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

The inter-rater reliability was assessed to ensure the consistency and reliability of the coding process. Two raters independently coded the data, and the resulting codes were discussed to resolve any discrepancies. An expert in the field was consulted to provide additional input and

guidance. To assess the reliability of the coding process, 10% of the data were selected and the inter-rater reliability was calculated for a second time. The resulting Cohen's Kappa score was above 0.7, indicating substantial agreement between the two raters.

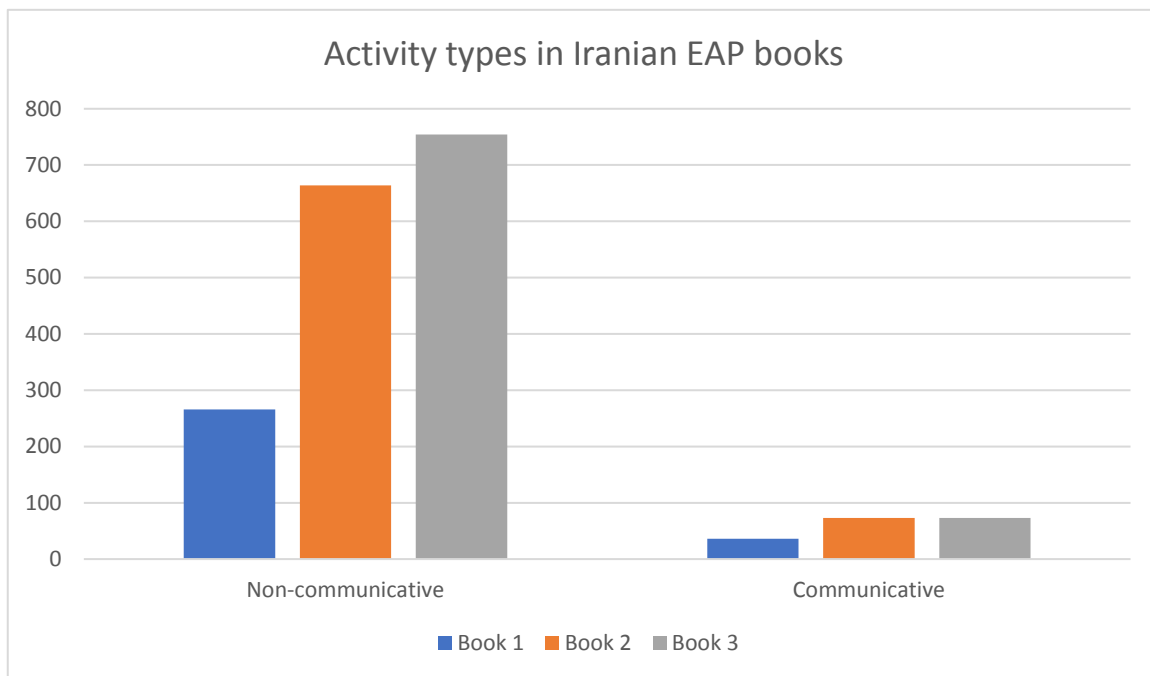
Table 2. The Frequency and Percentage of Activity Types in Iranian EAP Books

Nevertheless, the categories exist in international

	Iranian EAP books					
	Book 1		Book 2		Book 3	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Non-communicative	266	88%	664	90%	754	91%
Pre-communicative	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Communicative	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Structured-communicative	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Authentic-communicative	36	12%	73	10%	73	9%
Total	Iranian EAP books					
	Frequency			Percentage		
Total Communicative	182			9.7%		
Total Non-communicative	1684			90.3%		

As shown in Table 2, Iranian EAP counterparts. This shows the lack of textbooks do not cover every aspect of communication in the Iranian textbooks. [Littlewood's](#) communicative continuum.

Figure 1. The distribution of activity types in Iranian EAP textbooks



The results presented in Figure 1 and Table 3 indicate that a significant portion of activities in the analyzed EAP textbooks are non-communicative. Conversely, only a small percentage of activities are communicative in nature, with the majority being found in the EAP textbook by Moshabaki et al. (2019). These

findings suggest that the principles of communicative language teaching are not being fully utilized in Iranian EAP textbooks. Specifically, non-communicative activities appear to make up the majority of activities in these textbooks.

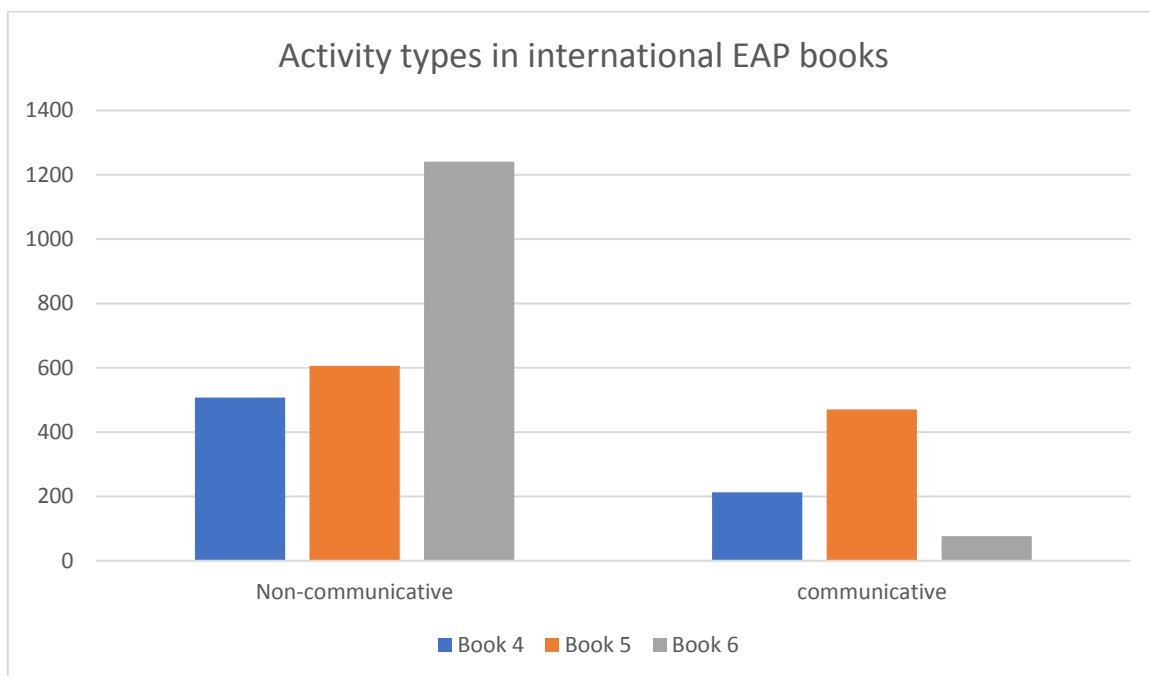
Table 3 .The Frequency and Percentage Of Activity Types in International EAP Book

	International EAP books					
	Book 4		Book 5		Book 6	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Non-communicative	507	70%	606	56%	1241	77%
Pre-communicative	69	9.5%	136	12.6%	76	4.7%
Communicative	75	10.4%	52	4.8%	125	7.8%
Structured-communicative	21	2.9%	15	1.3%	28	1.7%
Authentic-communicative	48	6.6%	268	24.8%	126	7.8%
Total	International EAP books					
	Frequency			Percentage		
Total Communicative	1039			30%		
Total Non-communicative	2354			70%		

The results showed that an extensive range of activity types was found in these books. Moreover, a high proportion of Communicative activities (30%) was found in them which is a considerable amount. This refers to the significance of communicative activities in international EAP books. Thus, it can be

concluded that they are in line with the principles of CLT. Besides, the findings revealed some emerging categories in international EAP books, including extending skills or soft skills such as email writing, CV writing, research skills, report writing, paraphrasing skills, summarizing, and note taking.

Figure 2. Activity Types in International EAP Textbooks



According to the figure above, 30% of the whole examples of activities used in three international EAP textbooks were communicative activities. Conversely, non-communicative activities make about 70% of all activities. This shows that in international EAP textbooks, CLT principles were followed.

Comparison of Iranian EAP Books with Counterparts

Upon further inspection of Figures 1 and 2, it becomes apparent that the distribution of communicative activities varies greatly between Iranian and international EAP textbooks. Based on the data analysis, there is a noteworthy disparity observed in the frequency of communicative activities between the two groups

of textbooks. This points to a critical issue in Iranian EAP textbooks, namely the inadequacy of communicative activities. To obtain a more precise comparison between communicative and non-communicative activities, two separate chi-square tests were conducted: one on Iranian textbooks and another on international textbooks.

Table 4 Chi-Square for Comparing the Frequency Of Communicative with Non-Communicative Activities in Iranian EAP Books

	Value	Df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.437	2	.036

Based on the statistical analysis presented in Table 4, the Chi-square test yielded a value of 2.437 with a p-value of .036, which is below the accepted level of significance of $p < .05$. This indicates that there is a significant

difference between the frequencies of communicative and non-communicative activities in the selected Iranian EAP textbooks. The results suggest that Iranian EAP textbooks do not incorporate a sufficient number of communicative activities, representing a deviation from the principles of CLT as posited by Littlewood (2007). Specifically, the low frequency of communicative activities (3%) in the Iranian EAP textbooks indicates a lack of focus on promoting communicative competence among Iranian EAP learners.

Table 5. Chi-Square For Comparing the Frequency of Communicative with Non-Communicative Activities in International EAP Books

	Value	df	Asymp.sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	141.093	2	<.001

Table 5 displays the results of the Chi-square test conducted on international EAP books. The Chi-square value was 141.093 and the obtained p-value was .20, which is higher than .05, indicating that the difference between the distribution of communicative and non-communicative activities in these books is not statistically significant at $p < .05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the distribution of communicative and non-communicative

activities is relatively balanced in international EAP textbooks with academic goals.

The results suggest that attention should be paid to both communicative and non-communicative activities in these books, as they both play important roles in the development of students' language skills. It is important to note, however, that the results of the study indicate a significant difference between Iranian EAP textbooks and their international counterparts in terms of communicative activities. This highlights the need for developers of EAP textbooks to take into account the inclusion of communicative activities when creating or selecting instructional materials for EAP courses.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of the communicative element in EAP textbooks, and underscores the need to consider the corpus of communicative tasks when developing or choosing instructional materials for EAP courses. The study also highlights the differences between Iranian and international EAP textbooks in terms of communicative activities, indicating the need for improvement in this area in Iranian EAP textbooks.

Perceptions of Iranian University Instructors toward EAP Textbooks Activities

To further support the findings from the first phase of the study, the authors conducted

interviews with instructors, asking them eight open-ended questions. The results of the interviews were analyzed and categorized into three main themes and 13 subthemes, as shown in Table 6. These themes include the lack of communicative activities in Iranian EAP textbooks, the negative effects of this on students' language development, and the need for more communicative activities in EAP textbooks. The subthemes include the absence of real-life

situations in textbooks, the overemphasis on grammar and vocabulary, and the limited opportunities for students to use language for communication. These results provide further evidence of the lack of communicative activities in Iranian EAP textbooks and the need for a greater focus on communicative tasks in EAP instruction. It also highlights the potential negative impact on students' language development if these issues are not addressed.

Table 6. Categories and Subcategories Emerging from the Content Analysis of Interviews

Categories	Subcategories
General Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . focusing on reading comprehension and vocabulary . A copy-paste template in activity designs . Fundamental role of communicative textbooks in EAP courses . Essential need to include communicative activities in textbooks . Lack of listening, speaking, and writing activities
Hindering factors in designing communicative activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Level of GE in EAP students . Lack of qualified EAP teachers . Financial issues
Suggestions for designing communicative EAP textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Using CLT approach in textbooks . Using context-related topics for Communicative activities . improving aesthetic visual design and using pictures in textbooks . Using technology in designing communicative activities . Running NA before designing textbooks

This article presents a critical evaluation of activities found in Iranian EAP (English for Academic Purposes) textbooks. The study aimed

to answer three research questions pertaining to the types of activities used in Iranian EAP textbooks, the types of activities used in

international EAP textbooks, and the differences between activity types in Iranian and international EAP textbooks.

Regarding the first research question, the results showed that most Iranian EAP textbooks had either no communicative activities or very few.

This finding is consistent with the findings of Sadeghi and Richards (2016), who also observed a lack of communicative approach in Iranian EAP books, resulting in minimal verbal communication in English outside of classrooms.

The second research question examined the activity types used in international EAP textbooks, and it was found that these books included a diverse range of communicative activities related to real-life situations.

The third research question aimed to identify the differences between the activity types used in Iranian and international EAP textbooks. The study found that international EAP textbooks not only included communicative activities but also extended skill-building activities, such as email writing, research skills, CV and report writing, dictionary use, summarizing, paraphrasing, and note-taking. In contrast, Iranian EAP textbooks did not include any of these activities. Crosling and Ward (2002) suggest that students often lack the necessary skills to apply theoretical knowledge in workplace environments.

However, the study identified one Iranian EAP textbook written by a group of Iranian professors with general and specialized language education. This textbook included questions for discussion related to the management field and tasks that can be done by knowing the English language at the end of each chapter, indicating some efforts to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Furthermore, the quality of communication questions in the alternative Iranian EAP textbook was found to be in line with management topics, and the way of asking questions was effective in leading students to communicate in various workplace scenarios.

The fourth research question focused on the opinion of instructors regarding the activities in EAP books. The study found that all interviewees agreed with the results of the first phase of the research, and they provided additional insights into the factors that hinder the implementation of the communicative approach in Iranian universities. These factors include the low level of general English proficiency among students, insufficient motivation to engage in communicative activities, lack of visual aids, colors, and attractive features in EAP books, and the absence of educational aids such as CDs, videos, and technology to teach communication.

Furthermore, the study revealed a lack of listening exercises, which are essential for effective communication education, and the absence of a textbook authorship team comprising at least one expert in English language teaching and one expert in academic English. These findings suggest the need for a comprehensive approach to EAP textbook development that considers various aspects of language learning, including communication skills, motivation, visual aids, technology, and expert input.

The interviewees emphasized the significance of General Education (GE) courses in aiding students to prepare for their English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. They mentioned that if students take GE courses at the university before their EAP courses and achieve an acceptable level of GE, they would be better equipped to perform the communicative activities outlined in the EAP textbooks and respective courses. However, if they do not, it would be considerably challenging for them to engage in communicative activities in the classroom. Presently, Imam Sadiq University in Iran has made it mandatory for students to take General English for Academic Purposes (EGAP) courses. Nevertheless, in the study conducted by [Afshar](#)

[and Movassaq \(2016\)](#), they identified fundamental problems in EAP in the Iranian context. They highlighted various elements such as textbooks, students' English proficiency level, class duration, and the motivation level of both students and professors.

The study also interviewed five Iranian EAP instructors with experience teaching in general management and business administration. According to these instructors, the presence of communicative activities in textbooks could bring about significant changes towards aligning the classroom with the principles of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. This finding is consistent with the observations made by [Afshar and Movassaq \(2016\)](#). They pointed out that there is a specific model for writing books published by SAMT publications that has no flexibility, and it mainly focuses on reading comprehension activities.

Another issue identified in this research was the inadequate language proficiency level of some EAP instructors. This opinion was also confirmed in the study conducted by [Kaivanpanah et al. \(2021\)](#), who noted that EAP courses are primarily taught by non-linguistic professors of that particular field who lack

language expertise and are only experts in their field.

According to the interviewees, only a small proportion of universities employ language teaching professors to teach EAP courses, and these professors are typically on short-term contracts. They emphasized that in Iran, there is a need to train EAP teachers who possess both content knowledge and English language proficiency, especially during career advancement. Additionally, the participants in the interviews noted that in Iran, most EAP courses are not taught by language professors.

Furthermore, most of the interviewees suggested that implementing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and including communicative activities in EAP courses, while incorporating Islamic concepts, would be more favorable. Despite facing international relations difficulties due to the country's sanctions, Iran has strong connections with universities and scientific circles in other Islamic countries, particularly in the field of Islamic sciences.

5. Conclusion

The results indicate that Iranian EAP books are not in line with CLT approach. However, there is still a need for more research on other Iranian books and further investigations in this field. Based on the study corpus, the results

can solely encourage other researchers to examine other books in this field as different samples. In addition, three topics are suggested as topics for future research that include focusing on evaluating EAP books used in other countries, changing the theoretical framework, context and participants in the research in order to shed more light on the element of communicative discourse in the higher education and conducting more quantitative and qualitative research in EAP and teacher talk in the classroom, which can reveal newer aspects for probing the content of EAP books.

Despite its limitations, this study's findings can serve as a cognitive tool for researchers, teachers, and educational policy makers in the field of Critical EAP (CEAP). The results have practical implications for EAP textbook authors and professors. The authors of EAP textbooks should consider designing communicative activities that cater to the needs of their target students and conduct a needs analysis for a specific field of study and target university and city before preparing the books. If these changes are made in the disciplines of general management and business administration, other disciplines may follow suit in future publications. The study recommends that instead of using textbooks that only teach

general academic language, professors should incorporate activities in their classes that students will encounter in real university settings and workplaces.

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