

## Investigating the Teaching Competence, Professional Development and Classroom Practices among ESAP Instructors in Iran



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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the differences between English language instructors and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors regarding their beliefs about teaching competence and participation in professional development. It also explored students' attitudes toward the classroom practices of English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) instructors. In addition, it investigated whether male and female EAP instructors differed in their views on teaching competence, professional development, and classroom practices. Participants included 80 instructors (40 English language instructors and 40 ESAP instructors) and 80 undergraduate students from various academic disciplines in universities in Zahedan. A purposive sampling method was used to select instructors with relevant ESAP teaching experience. Students were selected randomly to provide feedback on classroom practices. Instructors completed questionnaires on teaching competence and professional development, and students responded to a classroom practices questionnaire. Statistical analysis showed significant differences between English language and ESAP instructors in areas such as receptive skills, grammar and vocabulary, translation, feedback, error correction, classroom strategies, curriculum, and materials. However, there were no significant gender-based differences in instructors' views on professional development, teaching competence, or classroom performance. The findings underline the need to support EAP instructors through targeted pre-service and in-service training programs and workshops. These initiatives can help improve their teaching skills and better prepare them for ESAP instruction in university settings.

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## Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged in the 1960s when second language teachers and institutions realized that traditional English programs were not able to meet the specific needs of students and employers in English-speaking contexts (Bracaj, 2014; Liu & Hu, 2021). It eventually became clear that what distinguishes English language courses from other educational programs is the professional and academic demands that learners seek to fulfill. In other words, students are expected to use English for specific purposes rather than for general communication. On the other hand, two students may have similar scores in general learning capacity, but different results may indicate that they have different strengths and weaknesses in their academic paths (Pishadast et al., 2022). This suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach in education may not be effective for these students.

Due to the growing demand for English in academic and specialized fields, it is important to examine the differences between general and specialized English instructors. This study seeks to identify these differences and provide solutions to improve the quality of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. Understanding these differences can not only support the improvement of teaching practices, but also contribute to designing more effective educational programs that respond to students' real needs and labor market expectations. Additionally, the study explores students' attitudes toward

instructors' teaching methods, which can serve as a basis for improving the learning and teaching process in university settings.

ESP can be defined as the teaching of English for academic, professional, or occupational purposes, or a combination of these. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) are branches of this field. EAP focuses on the study and instruction of English needed by those who use the language for academic reasons. It developed from the broader field of ESP and has grown significantly over the past two decades, driven by global developments in the use of English for academic and professional purposes (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013).

English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) was established for two main reasons: first, to help international students meet their academic needs and potential (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998), and second, to familiarize these students with the expectations and requirements of academic departments regarding target situation needs and academic culture (Jordan, 1997; Çelik et al., 2014). Since ESAP is shaped by learners' individual learning goals, the first step in designing an ESAP course is to identify the specific needs of instructors and students in their academic disciplines, which guides the development of the curriculum. Before designing a language course, it is necessary to conduct an ESAP needs analysis to determine the required academic expectations (Flowerdew, 2016).

English has become the international language of media, tourism, business, science, and politics, leading to a global demand for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) around the world. In many cases, ESP is not only a practical choice for improving employment opportunities, meeting academic program requirements, or achieving professional development, but it is also a necessity that must be included in job applications (Abedeen, 2015). Furthermore, ESP has emerged as one of the most popular topics in second language education today. Creating active learning environments to support ESP learners is especially important for Iranian students who often face limited classroom hours during their second language (L2) learning and have specific language learning needs (Rezaei Fard et al., 2021).

### **Review of the Literature**

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has expanded due to the growth of universities in many countries and the increasing number of international students pursuing graduate education in English. EAP now plays a leading role in the development of theory and innovative practices in teaching English as a second or foreign language (Gupta, 2019). Most EAP and ESP instructors worldwide are non-native speakers of English, which has led to changes in EAP materials and teacher training programs. As noted by **Braine** (1995), there is a growing number of specialized MA programs in EAP, and it is becoming clear that EAP influences formal education at all levels. There is now more

attention on EAP in early schooling as well as in thesis writing and supervision at the graduate level. EAP courses should not be seen as only for non-native English speakers. Many native speakers who enter higher education without academic communication skills also consider EAP essential to their learning experiences (Cheng & Fox, 2008).

ESP is important because it provides learners with the language skills and knowledge they need to succeed in academic or professional settings. This leads to better outcomes and greater confidence and motivation (Pishdadi, 2022). Learners who study ESP often feel more confident and motivated in their academic or work environments because they are better prepared to understand and communicate within their fields. This can result in improved academic performance, better job prospects, and stronger communication with colleagues and clients (Rezaeifard, Tavakoli, & Rezaei, 2022).

Professional development for instructors not only affects student progress but also impacts teacher satisfaction and motivation. Teaching is demanding, especially for new instructors. They often begin teaching after limited training and must face challenges in difficult work environments (Magioli, 2003; Mohan, 2019). Therefore, teacher educators must understand the factors that can motivate or discourage teachers throughout their careers. They should also consider what makes a successful instructor (Dorr, 2008; Dishna & Mokoena, 2016).

Teaching competence is often discussed in relation to specific teaching tasks. It refers to the potential of instructors to improve their knowledge, position, and skills (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). Teachers need opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to build their competence. These opportunities should focus on evidence from practice and learning (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). Similarly, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2003) defines teaching competence as a structure with three components: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These elements help teachers perform more effectively in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre, & Demers, 2008).

Many EAP/ESP instructors have not been trained in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), which has influenced course content and teacher training programs (Ding & Campion, 2016). There is an increasing number of specialized MA programs in this field, and more attention is being paid to EAP in early education and graduate-level academic writing and supervision (Hyland, 2006). Many native English speakers also need EAP when entering higher education in their own countries without strong academic communication skills. So far, most EAP research has focused on learners and course materials (Basturkmen & Bocanegra-Valle, 2018; Stoller, 2016), while issues related to teaching practices

and professional development have received less attention (Basturkmen, 2019).

**Jahangard and Ketabi** (2017) examined the teaching competence, professional development, and classroom practices of ESAP instructors in Iran. They assessed the teachers' teaching skills, their participation in professional development activities, and their use of effective classroom practices that support student learning. Data were collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews with 40 ESAP instructors from various Iranian universities. The results showed that most instructors had good teaching competence and participated in professional development to improve their skills. However, effective classroom practices were not widely used, which could negatively affect student learning. The findings highlight the need for more professional development opportunities to improve teaching methods and learning outcomes.

**Ghaedrahmat, Ghoorchaie, and Tavakoli** (2018) studied the views of two groups of English instructors on teaching aviation English. Using interviews and questionnaires with eight instructors, they found significant differences in the perspectives of ESP and general English instructors. ESP instructors emphasized practical teaching, technical content, credential-based training, and feedback from the instructor. In contrast, general English instructors preferred collaborative methods and peer feedback.

**Kaya and Kızıltepe** (2021) designed and evaluated a training program to improve the teaching competence of ESAP instructors. Based on a needs analysis, they developed a program with six modules covering needs analysis, curriculum design, material development, assessment, and technology integration. The program was implemented with 12 instructors and evaluated through pre- and post-training surveys and interviews. Results showed that the program significantly improved the participants' knowledge and skills. Participants also expressed high satisfaction, suggesting that such programs can enhance teaching quality.

Undergraduate English courses in Iran aim to improve students' technical vocabulary, reading, and translation skills. Although most textbooks are in Persian, students are encouraged to use English sources. They are expected to improve general language skills early in their studies and learn technical vocabulary during the first year. This helps them handle subject-specific textbooks in later courses. However, the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology does not provide clear guidelines for selecting or developing academic materials based on expected language or communication standards. EAP and ESP, though part of higher education in Iran, are often treated as secondary components (Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008).

When English is not the language of instruction, but students must read textbooks and course materials in English,

there is a strong need for ESP courses. It is assumed that students have strong language skills and background knowledge. According to **Spector, Kirschner, and Wexler** (2001), these courses should prepare learners with the skills and strategies needed for academic reading. However, ESP course designers face challenges such as limited course time, the difficulty of texts, and instructors' lack of technical knowledge.

Most undergraduate English courses in Iran are limited in scope and do not follow proper course design principles. These courses are text-based and exam-focused. Many Iranian students complete their studies without achieving the expected level of language proficiency needed for their academic and professional goals.

The purpose of this study is to examine current classroom practices and professional development activities in ESAP classes in Iran. Classroom activities are a key part of any ESP course. Therefore, this study aims to describe what happens in ESP classrooms in Iran. Professional development is also an important part of any language education program. It supports instructors and provides guidance on what and how to teach (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Based on this background, the study explores Iranian ESAP instructors' views to identify key factors for effective ESAP teaching, including classroom practices and professional development. By analyzing current PD activities in ESP classrooms in

Iran, this study aims to improve teaching practices in the field.

To achieve the above objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there a difference between EAP content instructors and English language instructors in terms of their stated beliefs about teaching competence and professional development activities?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in ESAP classroom practices from the students' perspective?
3. Is there a difference between male and female EAP instructors in terms of their attitudes toward professional development, teaching competence, and classroom practices?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study included 80 ESAP instructors (40 content instructors and 40 English language instructors) and 80 undergraduate students from various academic fields. The students were of both genders and were studying at the undergraduate level in fields such as management, business administration, accounting, history, and literature. They came from different regions of Iran and were all between 19 and 35 years old. The instructors included both English and non-English majors and consisted of male and female participants.

They were selected through non-random snowball sampling, as it was difficult to find participants during the COVID-19 outbreak. The sample was demographically

diverse. The instructors were male and female and ranged in age from 25 to 60 years, with a mean age of 33.5. Their educational backgrounds varied and included instructors with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in English language education and other specialized fields. Their teaching experience ranged from 8 months to 35 years, with a mean of 14.35 years, indicating the participation of both novice and experienced instructors. This demographic diversity allowed the study to provide more comprehensive and generalizable findings.

### **Instruments**

This study used three questionnaires as data collection tools, described as follows:

The ESAP Instructors' Teaching Competence Questionnaire, developed by Kaivanpanah, et al. (2021), was used to assess ESAP instructors' attitudes toward their ability to teach language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and subskills (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation). It also evaluated instructors' views on providing feedback on various student performances, using tests and exams, group work, activities, use of materials, and identifying student needs. The questionnaire contains 72 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Needs Improvement), 2 (Skilled), to 3 (Highly Skilled). Content validity was confirmed by expert review, ensuring all relevant measurements were included (Waltz & Bausell, 2001). Specifically, three TEFL experts with doctoral degrees in English language education reviewed and

validated the content. Reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.78.

The ESAP Instructors' Professional Development Activities Questionnaire, also designed by Kaivanpanah et al. (2021), was used to examine the extent to which ESAP instructors engage in professional development activities. It includes 19 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale: 1 (Never), 2 (Sometimes), and 3 (Always). Items covered observing and assisting other instructors, attending teaching conferences, conducting research, and personal development. Content validity was confirmed through consultation with three TEFL experts. The reliability of this questionnaire, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.82.

The ESAP Instructors' Classroom Practices Questionnaire, created by Kaivanpanah, et al. (2021), was used to measure students' attitudes toward the classroom practices of ESAP instructors. This questionnaire contains 58 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always. The items asked students about the frequency of activities related to receptive and productive skills, ESAP materials, information and communication technology (ICT), grammar and vocabulary, translation, feedback and error correction, assessment, and classroom procedures. Content validity was confirmed by three TEFL experts. The reliability of this questionnaire, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.74.

## Procedures

To conduct this study, the researcher coordinated with instructors and students at Farhangian University and Islamic Azad University in Zahedan and invited them to complete the questionnaires online. Two groups of instructors—general English instructors and ESAP instructors—were given two questionnaires: one on teaching competence and another on professional development. The third questionnaire, which focused on classroom practices, was distributed to the student participants. The questionnaires were uploaded to Google Forms, and the links were shared with instructors and students through social media platforms such as WhatsApp.

Each questionnaire was expected to take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. However, the researcher allowed an additional five minutes to ensure more accurate responses, which was considered important for this study. The Persian versions of the questionnaires were used. The collected raw data were then prepared for statistical analysis.

## Results

In order to answer the first research question of the study in finding whether ESAP content and English major teachers differ in terms of the expressed beliefs about their teaching competence and professional development activities, a series of independent sample t-tests were performed. First, descriptive statistics of the ESAP teachers' responses to teaching competence and professional development questionnaires are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive statistics of content and English teachers' responses to different components of the teaching competence questionnaire*

Descriptive Statistics		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Receptive skills	Content teachers	40	18	42	29.65	1.341
	English teachers	40	26	42	36.45	1.249
Productive skills	Content teachers	40	2	6	3.35	.212
	English teachers	40	4	6	3.75	.296
ICT	Content teachers	40	3	6	3.45	.314
	English teachers	40	4	6	4.15	.224
Grammar & vocabulary	Content teachers	40	5	15	8.25	.645
	English teachers	40	10	15	11.15	.527
Translation	Content teachers	40	4	6	4.50	.184
	English teachers	40	5	6	5.85	.144
Feedback & error correction	Content teachers	40	2	6	4.45	.265
	English teachers	40	4	6	5.45	.349
Assessment & evaluation	Content teachers	40	4	6	5.20	.312
	English teachers	40	4	6	5.45	.248
Classroom procedures	Content teachers	40	8	15	9.65	.825
	English teachers	40	12	15	14.25	.296

ESAP syllabus materials	&	Content teachers	40	8	20	13.75	.845
		English teachers	40	15	24	15.85	.267
Students' needs		Content teachers	40	4	6	5.25	.377
		English teachers	40	4	6	5.45	.294

The tests of normality, including the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, were conducted to assess whether the distribution of scores for various skill categories followed a normal distribution. Normality is a fundamental assumption for conducting parametric tests, such as t-tests,

which require that the data in each group are approximately normally distributed. Table 2 provides the results of normality tests.

**Table 2.** *Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests for Normality Across Groups*

		Tests of Normality					
	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Receptive skills	Content teachers	.359	78	.163	.717	78	.114
	English teachers	.284	78	.156	.795	78	.125
Productive skills	Content teachers	.188	78	.090	.827	78	.347
	English teachers	.160	78	.203	.941	78	.115
ICT	Content teachers	.233	78	.140	.805	78	.413
	English teachers	.164	78	.211	.940	78	.258
Grammar & vocabulary	Content teachers	.141	78	.119	.960	78	.120
	English teachers	.176	78	.321	.896	78	.321
Translation	Content teachers	.215	78	.174	.908	78	.142

	English teachers	.198	78	.199	.910	78	.167
Feedback & error correction	Content teachers	.224	78	.181	.920	78	.134
	English teachers	.210	78	.205	.913	78	.145
Assessment & evaluation	Content teachers	.223	78	.134	.988	78	.087
	English teachers	.203	78	.134	.915	78	.058
Classroom procedures	Content teachers	.190	78	.154	.921	78	.075
	English teachers	.184	78	.121	.869	78	.084
ESAP syllabus & materials	Content teachers	.245	78	.145	.905	78	.081
	English teachers	.211	78	.167	.919	78	.093
Students' needs	Content teachers	.244	78	.157	.933	78	.084
	English teachers	.212	78	.139	.912	78	.072
Observation & assistance from other teachers	Content teachers	0.152	78	0.120	0.970	78	0.545
	English teachers	0.130	78	0.150	0.965	78	0.060
Conference participation & research	Content teachers	0.165	78	0.101	0.945	78	0.102
	English teachers	0.145	78	0.115	0.960	78	0.055
Personal development	Content teachers	0.170	78	0.239	0.940	78	0.469
	English teachers	0.152	78	0.354	0.541	78	0.278
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction							

The results of the normality tests indicate that, for the majority of the skill

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categories and groups analyzed, the data did not significantly deviate from a normal

distribution. This suggests that the assumption of normality is largely satisfied, supporting the appropriateness of parametric testing for most categories. The results justify proceeding with t-tests for comparative analysis across the identified groups and skills.

Then, ten independent sample t-tests were performed between content and

English teachers concerning their performance on different components of the teaching competence questionnaire. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Independent sample t-test between English and content teachers regarding their teaching competence*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Receptive skills	Equ								
	al								
	variances	6.824	.11	5.05	78	.000	6.800	-10.549	-4.561
		assumed							
Productive skills	Equ								
	al								
	variances	3.38	.17	.92	78	.214	.400	-11.769	-7.008
		assumed							
ICT	Equ								
	al								
	variances	1.15	.28	2.50	78	.119	.700	-.3012	2.5790
		assumed							

Grammar & vocabulary	Equ								
	al								
	varianc	.06	.7	7.0	7	.0	2.90	-	-
	es	9	9	4	8	00	00	8.494	2.838
	assume								
	d								
Translati on	Equ								
	al								
	varianc	.49	.4	9.8	7	.0	1.35	-	-
	es	1	8	2	8	12	00	6.868	2.020
	assume								
	d								
Feedbac k & error correction	Equ								
	al								
	varianc	4.6	.0	13.	7	.0	1.00	-	-
	es	8	3	07	8	33	00	1.902	.2367
	assume								
	d								
Assessm ent & evaluation	Equ								
	al								
	varianc	3.4	.0	.92	7	.2	.250	-	-
	es	7	67	50	8	60	0	8.346	2.486
	assume								
	d								
Classroo m procedures	Equ								
	al								
	varianc	.10	.7	1.5	7	.0	4.60	-	-
	es	5	47	75	8	00	00	6.188	3.478
	assume								
	d								
ESAP syllabus & materials	Equ								
	al								
	varianc	3.5	.0	6.0	7	.0	2.10	-	.709
	es	1	66	7	8	01	00	.8485	6
	assume								
	d								
Students ' needs	Equ	.69	.4	8.9	7	.4	.200	-	4.07
	al	4	08	0	8	17	0	1.709	0

variances  
assumed

The results showed a significant difference between English language instructors and ESAP content instructors regarding reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary, translation, feedback and error correction, classroom practices, curriculum, and instructional materials. However, no significant difference was found between the two groups in terms of productive skills, information and communication

technology (ICT), assessment and evaluation, and students' needs.

Three independent t-tests were conducted to compare the performance of English language and ESAP content instructors on the professional development questionnaire. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Independent sample t-test between English and content teachers regarding their professional development*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances									
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
									Lower	Upper	
Observation & assistance from other teachers	Equal variances assumed	1.054	.605	1.869	78	.212	.680	1.642	6.779	13.354	
Conference participation & research	Equal variances assumed	.314	.911	3.187	80	.070	8.018	.16790	5.614	4.935	

	assumed									
Person	Eq	5.	2.	4.	7	.0	10.	4.3	8.0	.54
al	ual	515	138	582	8	00	035	347	15	83
developme	varian									
nt	ces									
	assumed									
	ed									

The results indicated the following:

- There was no significant difference between English language instructors and ESAP content instructors regarding observation and support from other instructors.
- There was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of participation in conferences and research.
- There was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of personal development.

To answer the second research question, which explored whether there was a statistically significant difference in classroom practices of ESAP instructors as reported by their students, an independent t-test was conducted. First, the descriptive statistics of students' responses to the ESAP Classroom Practices Questionnaire are presented in Table 5

**Table 5.** *Descriptive statistics of the teachers' responses to ESAP teachers' classroom practices questionnaire*

		N	Minimu	Maximu	Mea	Std.
		m	m	m	n	Deviation
Receptive skills	Content teachers	80	2	10	5.35	.478
	English teachers	80	4	10	7.25	.389
ESAP materials	Content teachers	80	4	15	7.65	.736
	English teachers	80	8	15	10.55	.512
Productive skills	Content teachers	80	18	35	22.65	1.045
	English teachers	80	24	35	26.85	1.514

ICT	Content teachers	8 0	5	10	7.55	.261
	English teachers	8 0	5	10	7.75	.306
Grammar & vocabulary	Content teachers	8 0	4	10	6.45	.351
	English teachers	8 0	6	10	7.05	.301
Translation	Content teachers	8 0	6	10	7.65	.405
	English teachers	8 0	6	10	7.75	.297
Feedback & error correction	Content teachers	8 0	5	10	7.10	.347
	English teachers	8 0	5	10	7.25	.418
Assessment & evaluation	Content teachers	8 0	5	10	6.90	.564
	English teachers	8 0	8	10	8.85	.261

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests were conducted to determine whether the distribution of scores for different skill categories

followed a normal distribution. The results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** *Results of Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Tests for Normality of ESAP teachers' Various Skills*

Skills		Shapiro-Wilk			Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Receptive Skills	Content Teachers	0.742	78	0.093	0.371	78	0.137
	English Teachers	0.768	78	0.108	0.296	78	0.159
Productive Skills	Content Teachers	0.841	78	0.356	0.191	78	0.087
	English Teachers	0.952	78	0.123	0.172	78	0.217
ICT	Content Teachers	0.812	78	0.421	0.245	78	0.150

	English Teachers	0.948	78	0.274	0.182	78	0.219
Grammar & Vocabulary	Content Teachers	0.974	78	0.109	0.152	78	0.112
	English Teachers	0.902	78	0.345	0.185	78	0.337
Translation	Content Teachers	0.915	78	0.158	0.229	78	0.183
	English Teachers	0.923	78	0.182	0.205	78	0.205
Feedback & Error Correction	Content Teachers	0.928	78	0.148	0.239	78	0.172
	English Teachers	0.919	78	0.157	0.218	78	0.211
Assessment & Evaluation	Content Teachers	0.995	78	0.098	0.231	78	0.151
	English Teachers	0.921	78	0.069	0.215	78	0.137
Classroom Practices	Content Teachers	0.938	78	0.081	0.203	78	0.165
	English Teachers	0.129	78	0.076	0.193	78	0.127
Curriculum & ESAP Materials	Content Teachers	0.917	78	0.089	0.257	78	0.149
	English Teachers	0.932	78	0.104	0.223	78	0.172
Students' Needs	Content Teachers	0.947	78	0.093	0.252	78	0.161
	English Teachers	0.925	78	0.080	0.225	78	0.134

All the tested skills—including receptive skills, productive skills, information and communication technology (ICT), translation, feedback and error correction, assessment and evaluation, classroom practices, and ESAP materials—demonstrated a normal distribution. This

finding indicates that parametric statistical methods could be reliably used for further analysis. Subsequently, eight independent t-tests were conducted to compare content instructors and English language instructors based on the classroom practices reported

by their students. The results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** *Independent sample t-test between English and content teachers regarding their classroom practices*

		Levene's		Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means					
		F.		Sig.		t		df		Sig. (2-tailed)	
										Std. Error Difference	
										95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
										Lower Upper	
Receptive skills	Equal Variances Assumed	5.229	.7707	1.18	78	.000	2.100		.262	-2.695	.8457
	Equal Variances Not Assumed										
ESAP materials	Equal Variances Assumed	4.304	.8457	3.25	78	.000	3.100		.572	-4.270	.7293
	Equal Variances Not Assumed										
Productive skills	Equal Variances Assumed	2.729	.2707	.075	78	.000	4.200		.576	-8.770	5.229
	Equal Variances Not Assumed										
ICT	Equal Variances Assumed	.595	.0543	.150	78	.198	.200		.762	-1.595	8.054
	Equal Variances Not Assumed										

Grammar & vocabulary	Equal Variances Assumed	.845	.3043	.575	.78	.355	.6000	.527	-1.843	-1.304
Translation	Equal Variances Assumed	.8054	.5957	.075	.78	.694	.1000	.276	-.8457	2.6957
Feedback & error correction	Equal Variances Assumed	.7129	.6712	.54	.78	.261	.1500	.256	-3.345	.1957
Assessment & evaluation	Equal Variances Assumed	.554	.0995	.25	.78	.030	1.9500	.562	-7.845	-4.304

The results showed that students believed there was a significant difference between English language instructors and content instructors in terms of receptive skills, ESAP materials, productive skills, and assessment and evaluation. Additionally, the findings indicated no significant difference between the two groups of instructors regarding information and communication technology (ICT), grammar and vocabulary, translation, and feedback and error correction.

To address the third research question concerning differences between male and female ESAP instructors in their attitudes toward professional development, teaching competence, and classroom practices, three independent-sample t-tests were conducted. First, the descriptive statistics for male and female instructors' performance across the three questionnaires were presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** *Descriptive statistics of male and female teachers' performances on three questionnaires*



Descriptive Statistics						
		N	Minim	Maxim	Mea	Std.
		um	um		n	Deviation
Teaching competences questionnaire	Male	4 3	84	172	132. 33	2.761
	Female	3 7	68	181	136. 83	2.409
Professional development questionnaire	Male	4 3	27	55	36.4 9	1.589
	Female	3 7	23	52	35.1 1	1.901
classroom practices	Male	4 3	112	256	212. 90	5.324
	Female	3 7	74	232	208. 14	5.834

Then, three independent sample t-tests were performed. The results are shown in Table 7.

**Table 8.** *Independent sample t-tests between male and female teachers' performances on three questionnaires*

		Leven t-test for Equality of Means								
		e's Test for Equality of Variance s								
		F	S	t	d	Sig	Mea	Std.	95%	
		ig.			f	. (2-	n	Error	Confidence	
						tailed)	Differen	Differen	Interval of the	
							ce	ce	Difference	
									Lo	Up
									wer	per
Teachin	Equal	.	.	3	1	.32	۴,۵۰	1.371	1.	7.0
g	variances	07	78	.15	58	2		75	587	791
competence	assumed									
s										

questionnaire											
Professional development questionnaire	Equal variances assumed	.44	.23	.28	.58	.10	1.38	.6324	.3	.46	
								1	272	71	
Classroom practices	Equal variances assumed	.15	.49	.432	.58	.59	4.76	1.843	.1	1.9	
									302	16	

The results showed that there was no significant difference between male and female instructors in their attitudes toward teaching competence, professional development, and classroom practices.

### Discussion

This study explored the differences between English language instructors and subject-matter instructors in terms of their reported beliefs about teaching competence and professional development activities. It also aimed to examine students' attitudes toward the classroom practices of ESAP instructors. In addition, the study investigated whether there were any differences between male and female ESAP instructors regarding their views on professional development, teaching competence, and classroom practices.

To this end, 80 ESAP instructors (40 English language instructors and 40 subject instructors) and 80 undergraduate students from various disciplines participated in the study. The instructors completed the Teaching Competence and Professional Development questionnaire developed by

Keyvanpanah et al. (2021). The students responded to the Classroom Practices questionnaire, also designed by Keyvanpanah et al. (2021).

The statistical analyses revealed significant differences between English language instructors and subject instructors in the areas of listening skills, grammar and vocabulary, translation, feedback and error correction, classroom practices, and ESAP materials. Significant differences were also found in the subscales related to attending conferences, conducting research, and personal development. However, no significant differences were found between male and female instructors in their attitudes toward professional development, teaching competence, and classroom practices.

The results indicated that English language instructors showed greater interest in and engagement with professional development activities. This may have contributed to their stronger performance in this study and others, such as Rajabi et al. (2012). While professional

development is well established in the field of English language teaching globally (Borg, 2011), there has been limited research on the professional development of EAP instructors (Basturkmen, 2019; Bledge-Ward, 2014), and professional development opportunities for EAP instructors remain scarce in many countries, including the UK. Nonetheless, as noted by Becangura-Valle and Basturkmen (2019), EAP instructors should engage in continuous professional development. Similarly, Tao and Gao (2018) emphasized the need to expand training and development opportunities for English teachers transitioning into EAP roles.

Bledge-Ward (2015) also highlighted the importance of developing EAP instructors' research literacy through participation in both theoretical and empirical research (Bahrami, Hosseini, & Ataiee, 2019; Davies, 2019), as well as through conducting small or large-scale studies on various practical aspects of EAP instruction (Hamp-Lyons, 2018; Harwood, 2017).

These findings align with those of Abbasi Delvand et al. (2013), who assessed the effectiveness of ESP instructors at Iranian universities. Their results showed significant differences between subject and language instructors in their ESP teaching methods, with students viewing language instructors as more competent.

This study also supports the findings of Emadian et al. (2018), who measured the training needs of both language and subject

instructors in ESAP teaching and identified differences between the two groups. Their results showed that language instructors viewed ESAP service training programs as essential to their professional, practical, and personal development.

However, the findings contrast with those of Shamsuddin and Sanmugam (2015), who studied the readiness and training needs of English instructors teaching ESP courses at a leading polytechnic university in Malaysia. Their data, collected from 62 instructors through questionnaires and interviews, indicated that ESP instructors lacked sufficient readiness for teaching ESP and required further training.

The second research question examined whether there were significant differences in the classroom practices of ESAP instructors as reported by their students. The findings supported this idea. According to students, English language instructors performed better in classroom practices, which may suggest they are more prepared and suitable for teaching ESAP courses in Iran. In other words, the findings support the idea that language and subject instructors have different educational needs and should receive different types of training based on those needs and attitudes. It can be concluded that the ESAP instructors in this study preferred to receive professional training to meet their practical and personal needs.

Nation and Webb (2011) found that students who participated in extensive reading and listening activities developed a

stronger useful vocabulary than those who focused only on explicit instruction. Similarly, Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) showed that students who encountered vocabulary in different contexts repeatedly were more likely to retain and correctly use the words.

The third research question investigated whether male and female ESAP instructors held different views about professional development, teaching competence, and classroom practices. The results showed no significant differences between male and female instructors in these areas.

Given the instructional nature of EAP (Anthony, 2018; Hyland & Wang, 2019), the importance of classroom practices in EAP (Hafner & Miller, 2019; Hyland, 2006; Northcott, 2013), and the lack of EAP instructor training programs in Iran (Iranmehr et al., 2018), it seems reasonable to interpret the findings as indicating no significant gender differences among ESAP instructors. English language instructors, regardless of gender, appear to be the most suitable candidates for teaching ESAP courses due to their instructional skills and prior experience in language education.

These results contrast with those of Ahmed et al. (2018), who found that gender influenced how EAP instructors managed their classes, with female instructors demonstrating stronger classroom management skills. The results also contrast with the findings of Alibakhshi and Javaheri (2022), who examined the types of professional activities used by ESP/EAP instructors in Iran. Their findings showed

that although male and female instructors shared some professional activities, others differed between the two groups

### Conclusion

Based on existing studies and previous research, it is clear that English language instructors in Iran possess higher competence and readiness for teaching ESAP courses. However, in practice, most ESAP courses are offered within faculties, and decisions regarding instructor selection are primarily based on subject-matter expertise. This situation has led to a growing preference for assigning ESAP courses to content instructors, especially in specific academic fields.

The findings of this study highlight the need for investment in English language instructors through pre-service and in-service training programs and workshops focused on EAP instruction. This recommendation particularly emphasizes the importance of recruiting instructors who have received postgraduate training and academic experience. For instance, similar to the approach observed in Turkey (Kirkgoz, 2019), pre-service training programs for ESAP instructors could be designed and implemented in Iran. It is also recommended that additional EAP/ESP courses be included in the early stages of language education programs in Iran so that English instructors can update their skills based on the actual teaching demands in universities.

The Ministry of Science should consider ESAP instruction as a key component of English language education in universities

and take the necessary steps to incorporate EAP/ESP courses into the teacher training curricula for English instructors. Such programs can help English language instructors revise and update their understanding of teaching practices, language learning, and assessment, with a special emphasis on ESAP.

Furthermore, optional courses in various academic disciplines, such as medicine or engineering, could be developed and offered to meet the content-related needs of instructors in these fields. These courses could include specific teaching activities designed to support language instruction in these areas—for example, teaching problem-solving in English within the medical domain (Basturkmen, 2010).

It is recommended that the Iranian Ministry of Science invest more heavily in ESAP-related research. Such research can not only support the professional development of instructors but also provide the necessary data and insights for implementing effective reforms in this area.

The growing importance of English in Iran and globalizing processes reinforces the need for specialized ESAP training in universities. Especially in scientific disciplines, familiarity with English for specific purposes can enhance students' academic performance and improve the overall quality of education. Moreover, addressing the training needs of both content and language instructors in areas such as teaching, learning, and assessment is essential to reduce potential gaps in ESAP course delivery.

Finally, limitations such as cultural and regional differences within Iran may affect the implementation of ESAP courses. Therefore, future research should pay special attention to these cultural and regional aspects and design training programs for English instructors based on the actual needs and challenges of universities.

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