ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Evaluation of EAP Programs for the Students of Medicine in Iranian and Iraqi Medical Universities: Document Analysis and Teachers' Perspectives

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Background: The aim of this study is to investigate and compare the policies in the Iranian and Iraqi English for Academic Purposes (EAP) education and the extent to which objectives match the policies and are materialized in practice.
Method: This qualitative study, conducted between 2023 and 2024, explored EAP policy and practice by analyzing course syllabi and conducting semi-structured interviews with English language instructors and subject-matter specialists across selected Iranian and Iraqi medical universities. We adopted seven policy areas from Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) language-in-education planning as the framework of the study. Based on document analysis and interviews with some language teachers and subject-matter specialists, the similarities and discrepancies between the two sets of data were investigated. Finally, we compared the data from Iranian and Iraqi medical university contexts.
Results: Findings revealed substantial gaps between policy and practice in both contexts though the nature and severity of these gaps differ. The results showed that EAP course descriptions do not include any comments on policy and there were discrepancies in policy and practice due to such factors as lack of communication channel between the EAP stakeholders and policymakers.
Conclusion: Due to deficiencies in both policy and practice and in order to reach an acceptable status, EAP programs are in an urgent need for reconceptualizing policy-making and practice. The findings of this study have implications for EAP policies and practice in medical academic system of Iran and Iraq. It might be beneficial for decision-makers, university administrators, curriculum planners, and EAP instructors and learners.
Keywords: English for General Academic Purposes, English for Medical Academic Purposes, EAP Documents, Language-in-education Planning, Policy and Practice

تقييم برامج اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية (EAP) لطلاب الطب في الجامعات الطبية الإيرانية والعراقية: تحليل الوثائق ووجهات نظر المعلمين

الخلفية: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء ومقارنة السياسات المتعلقة بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية (EAP) في إيران والعراق، ومدى توافق الأهداف مع هذه السياسات وتحققها على أرض الواقع.
الطريقة: استكشفت هذه الدراسة النوعية - التي أُجريت بين عامي ٢٠٢٣ و٢٠٢٤- سياسات وممارسات برامج اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية من خلال تحليل المناهج الدراسية وإجراء مقابلات شبه منظمة مع معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية والمتخصصين في المجالات الطبية في جامعات طبية مختارة في كل من إيران والعراق. وقد اعتمدنا سبعة مجالات للسياسات -مستمدة من نموذج "تخطيط اللغة في التعليم" لكابلان وبالداوف (٢٠٠٥)- كإطار عمل للدراسة. واستناداً إلى تحليل الوثائق والمقابلات، تم فحص أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين مجموعتي البيانات، وأخيراً أجرينا مقارنة بين البيانات المستمدة من سياقات الجامعات الطبية الإيرانية والعراقية.
النتائج: كشفت النتائج عن وجود فجوات كبيرة بين السياسة والممارسة في كلا السياقين، وإن كانت طبيعة هذه الفجوات وشدتها تختلف بينهما. وأظهرت النتائج أن توصيفات مقررات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية لا تتضمن أي إشارات للسياسات المتبعة، كما وُجدت تباينات بين السياسة والممارسة ناتجة عن عوامل عدة، منها غياب قنوات التواصل بين الأطراف المعنية بهذه البرامج وصنّاع القرار.
الخلاصة: نظراً لأوجه القصور في كل من السياسة والممارسة، وللوصول إلى وضع مقبول، فإن برامج اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية بحاجة ماسة إلى إعادة صياغة مفاهيم صنع السياسات وآليات التنفيذ العملي. وتحمل نتائج هذه الدراسة دلالات هامة لسياسات وممارسات هذه البرامج ضمن النظام الأكاديمي الطبي في كل من إيران والعراق، كما أنها قد تكون مفيدة لصنّاع القرار، وإدارات الجامعات، ومخططي المناهج، وكذلك لمعلمي ودارسي اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية.
الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية العامة، اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية الطبية، وثائق برامج اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية (EAP)، تخطيط اللغة في التعليم، السياسة والممارسة

ارزیابی برنامه‌های آموزش زبان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی ویژه دانشجویان پزشکی در دانشگاه‌های علوم پزشکی ایران و عراق: تحلیل اسناد و دیدگاه اساتید

زمینه و هدف: هدف از این مطالعه بررسی و مقایسه سیاست‌های آموزش زبان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی در دانشگاه‌های علوم پزشکی ایران و عراق و میزان تطابق اهداف با سیاست‌ها و تحقق آن‌ها در عمل است.
روش: در این مطالعه کیفی که طی سال‌های ۱۴۰۱ و ۱۴۰۲ انجام شد شرح درس در سرفصل برنامه‌های آموزشی زبان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی از طریق تحلیل اسناد و مصاحبه‌های نیمه‌ساختاریافته با اساتید زبان انگلیسی و متخصصان حوزه پزشکی ارزیابی شد تا وضعیت فعلی سیاست گذاری و عملکرد زبان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی در این دانشگاه‌ها بررسی شود. هفت حوزه از چارچوب سیاست گذاری برنامه آموزش زبان کاپلان و بالداف (۲۰۰۵) به عنوان چارچوب مطالعه انتخاب شد. بر اساس تحلیل اسناد و مصاحبه با تعدادی از اساتید زبان انگلیسی و متخصصان حوزه پزشکی، شباهت‌ها و تفاوت‌های بین دو مجموعه داده‌ها بررسی شد. در نهایت، داده‌های حاصل از دو بافت مختلف مقایسه شد.
یافته‌ها: یافته‌ها شکاف‌های قابل توجهی را بین سیاست و عمل در هر دو بافت ایران و عراق نشان داد، اگرچه ماهیت و شدت این شکاف‌ها متفاوت است. در شرح درس زبان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی در دو کشور هیچ اظهارنظری در مورد سیاست‌ها وجود ندارد و به دلیل عواملی مانند فقدان کانال ارتباطی بین ذینفعان آموزش زبان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی و سیاست گذاران، تفاوت‌هایی در سیاست و عمل وجود دارد.
نتیجه گیری: به دلیل کاستی‌های موجود در سیاست گذاری و اجرا و برای رسیدن به شرایطی قابل قبول، برنامه‌های آموزش زبان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی نیاز مبرم به بازتعریف سیاست گذاری و اجرا در هر دو کشور دارند. این یافته‌ها می‌تواند برای سیاست گذاران، مدیران دانشگاه، برنامه‌ریزان درسی، مدرسان و زبان‌آموزان انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی مفید باشد و در اصلاح و بهبود سیاست‌ها و اجرای این برنامه‌های آموزشی در دانشگاه‌های علوم پزشکی ایران و عراق کمک کند.
واژه های کلیدی: انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی، اسناد انگلیسی برای اهداف دانشگاهی، سیاست گذاری برنامه آموزش زبان، سیاست گذاری و اجرا

ایران اور عراق کی طبی یونیورسٹیوں میں طب کے طلبہ کے لیے EAP پروگراموں کا جائزہ: دستاویزات کا تجزیہ اور اساتذہ کے نقطہ نظر حد تک نافذ کیے گئے ہیں۔

پس منظر: اس مطالعے کا مقصد ایران اور عراق میں 'تعلیمی مقاصد کے لیے انگریزی' (EAP) کی تعلیم سے متعلق پالیسیوں کا جائزہ لینا اور ان کا موازنہ کرنا ہے، نیز یہ دیکھنا ہے کہ آیا طے شدہ مقاصد پالیسیوں سے کس حد تک مطابقت رکھتے ہیں اور عملی طور پر کس حد تک نافذ کیے گئے ہیں۔
طریقہ: ۲۰۲۳ اور ۲۰۲۴ کے درمیان کی جانے والی اس معیاری (qualitative) تحقیق میں، ایران اور عراق کی منتخب طبی یونیورسٹیوں میں نصابی خاکوں (syllabi) کا تجزیہ کرکے اور انگریزی زبان کے اساتذہ و متعلقہ مضامین کے ماہرین کے ساتھ نیم ساختی انٹرویوز کے ذریعے EAP کی پالیسی اور عملی صورتحال کا جائزہ لیا گیا۔ مطالعے کے فریم ورک کے طور پر، ہم نے کیپلن اور بالڈاف (۲۰۰۵) کے 'تعلیم میں زبان کی منصوبہ بندی (language-in-education planning)' کے ماڈل سے پالیسی کے سات شعبوں کا انتخاب کیا۔ دستاویزات کے تجزیے اور زبان کے اساتذہ و ماہرین مضامین کے ساتھ انٹرویوز کی بنیاد پر، ڈیٹا کے دونوں مجموعوں کے درمیان مماثلتوں اور تضادات کا جائزہ لیا گیا۔ آخر میں، ہم نے ایران اور عراق کی طبی یونیورسٹیوں کے سیاق و سباق سے حاصل شدہ ڈیٹا کا موازنہ کیا۔
نتائج: نتائج سے ظاہر ہوا کہ دونوں ممالک میں پالیسی اور عملی نفاذ کے درمیان نمایاں خلیج موجود ہے، اگرچہ ان خلاؤں کی نوعیت اور شدت مختلف ہے۔ نتائج سے یہ بھی پتا چلا کہ EAP کورس کی تفصیلات میں پالیسی سے متعلق کوئی تبصرہ شامل نہیں ہوتا، اور پالیسی و عمل میں تضاد کی وجوہات میں EAP کے متعلقہ فریقین (stakeholders) اور پالیسی سازوں کے درمیان مواصلاتی رابطوں کا فقدان جیسے عوامل شامل ہیں۔
نتیجہ: پالیسی اور عمل دونوں میں موجود خامیوں کے پیش نظر اور ایک قابل قبول معیار تک پہنچنے کے لیے، EAP پروگراموں میں پالیسی سازی اور عملی طریقہ کار کی ازسرِ نو تشکیل کی اشد ضرورت ہے۔ اس مطالعے کے نتائج ایران اور عراق کے طبی تعلیمی نظام میں EAP کی پالیسیوں اور عملی اقدامات کے حوالے سے اہم مضمرات رکھتے ہیں۔ یہ نتائج فیصلہ سازوں، یونیورسٹی انتظامیہ، نصاب سازوں، اور EAP کے اساتذہ و طلبہ کے لیے مفید ثابت ہو سکتے ہیں۔
کلیدی الفاظ: عام تعلیمی مقاصد کے لیے انگریزی، طبی تعلیمی مقاصد کے لیے انگریزی، EAP دستاویزات، تعلیم میں زبان کی منصوبہ بندی، پالیسی اور عمل

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INTRODUCTION

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past fifty years (1), with a growing body of research in Iran over the last two decades (2–7). Despite this expansion, EAP curriculum policy-making in Iran remains largely top-down: policies are centrally designed to regulate programs, and objectives are defined to implement these policies (8). However, there is a clear gap between research and practice, as EAP policies and decisions are often not grounded in empirical findings (5). Moreover, much of the existing research has focused on isolated, decontextualized aspects of EAP rather than examining the broader educational system. Only a limited number of studies (8, 9) have investigated EAP policies from planning to implementation in Iranian academic contexts, and most have concentrated on non-medical fields (6). To address such area, Kaplan and Baldauf (2005) proposed the language-in-education planning (LEP) framework, a comprehensive model for designing and evaluating language programs (10). Widely applied in foreign language education research (11), the framework includes seven policy areas: access, personnel, curriculum, methods and materials, resourcing, community, and evaluation (12). Despite its potential, the LEP framework has rarely been used in EAP research in Iran (6) and appears to have been largely neglected in Iraq (11). Given its systematic evaluative capacity, this study adopts the LEP framework to examine EAP policies and practices in medical universities in both countries.

As a subfield of Applied Linguistics, EAP encompasses both General English for Academic Purposes (GEAP) and discipline-specific English for Academic Purposes (ESAP) (13). One important specialization is English for Medical Academic Purposes (EMAP), which has developed significantly in recent decades and gained attention in both linguistic and medical domains. Proficiency in EMAP is believed to enhance diagnostic accuracy, improve physician–patient communication, and reduce clinical errors (14). Therefore, EMAP is particularly important in non-English-speaking countries such as Iran and Iraq. In some cases, GEAP instruction incorporates medical topics (referred to as English for General Medical Purposes) (15), providing familiar contexts for learners and facilitating the transition to more specialized EMAP learning.

In Iran, medical students are required to complete three compulsory courses in general English and EMAP, designed by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MHME). National bodies such as the legislative system and the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) play a central role in shaping EAP policy by determining curricula, instructional approaches, and teaching materials, often through state-led publications (6). Since in Iran medical sciences universities are affiliated with the Iranian MHME, the ministry should also have such a role in promoting language acquisition policy and planning.

Despite the recognized importance of EAP, research findings reveal that medical students frequently lack sufficient language proficiency and communication skills. This shortcoming is largely attributed to unsystematic curriculum development and reliance on intuition rather than research-based decision-making (2). Under such circumstances, program accountability and effectiveness have not been adequately assessed, and the incoherent EAP curriculum development in Iran and overly ambitious policy goals have proven difficult to achieve (6).

In Iraq, medical education is overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) and follows a six-year British-based curriculum delivered entirely in English (16). However, English instruction within this system typically focuses on general English rather than academic or discipline-specific skills (17). Medical students are required to complete two 30-hour non-credit English courses, which have been found insufficient to meet their academic and professional needs (17).

After decades of practice of EAP as an area within the Iranian medical education system, the need for a thorough evaluation to see how much EAP programs have achieved the expected goals and objectives seems necessary (6). The inadequacies of EAP programs have been widely documented (18, 19), particularly in areas such as materials development, methodology, curriculum design, and needs analysis (20, 21). Additionally, there is a notable lack of research on EAP policy and practice in Iraqi universities (17). Evaluation, therefore, emerges as a critical yet underdeveloped component in the cycle of planning, implementation, and improvement of EAP programs (2, 5, 6, 19, 21–23). As Hutchinson and Waters (1991) emphasize, evaluation is essential in ESP contexts due to the presence of clearly defined objectives (1).

Although English is considered a foreign language in both Iran and Iraq, a key difference lies in the language of instruction: Iranian medical education is conducted in Persian, whereas Iraqi medical education is delivered in English. This contrast further underscores the need for a comparative evaluation of EAP programs. Accordingly, this study utilizes Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) LEP framework to analyze and compare EAP policies and practices within Iranian and Iraqi medical universities. It aims to identify current challenges and evaluate the extent to which institutional objectives align with actual implementation.

METHODS

This qualitative study, which was conducted between 2023 and 2024, provides a detailed, micro-level analysis of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) policies and practices for medical students at four leading Iranian universities (IRUs) and four leading Iraqi universities (IQUs). To facilitate a comprehensive comparison of these two contexts, the research is structured around Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) multi-dimensional framework for language-in-education planning. This framework examines seven key policy domains (10):

- Access Policy: Focuses on learner entry requirements, proficiency levels, and course duration.
- Personnel Policy: Concerns the selection, employment, and training of instructors, as well as their language proficiency standards.
- Curriculum Policy: Addresses the issues of what curriculum should be mandated and who determines it (12), specifically the amount of academic space allocated to language instruction.
- Methods and Materials Policy: Examines the regulation and selection of pedagogical approaches and instructional materials.
- Resourcing Policy: Focuses on the provision of physical equipment and financial budgeting within the educational system (10).
- Community Policy: Addresses the role of stakeholder engagement and feedback mechanisms.
- Evaluation Policy Evaluation Policy: Constitutes a holistic assessment of language programs to determine the extent to which stated goals are achieved.

The comparative analysis is contextualized by the shared cultural, religious, and geographical history between Iran and Iraq. Data were gathered through a combination of document analysis and qualitative insights from English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals and subject-matter specialists. The researchers employed the constant comparative method (24) to systematically juxtapose teachers' perceptions with institutional document findings, enabling the identification of both similarities and discrepancies within and between the two national contexts.

Document analysis served as a key methodological tool, particularly suited for examining how high-level educational policies are implemented at institutional levels (25). A structured protocol guided the analysis of official materials related to EAP program development and evaluation in both countries. These documents, viewed as objective representations of social facts (26), included policy texts from the Iranian MHME and the Iraqi MHE, as well as curriculum documents and EAP-specific materials.

The EAP documents consisted of a corpus of EAP course description documents in academic curricula, course plans, and syllabi obtained from institutional websites or faculty members. In total, the dataset included four GEAP and eight EMAP syllabi from Iranian universities, and four GEAP syllabi from Iraqi universities. These were analyzed through content analysis to identify key components such as language skills, teaching materials, resources, assessment methods, instructional approaches, and teacher qualifications.

For qualitative data, seven ELT teachers (five Iranians, two Iraqis) and three Iranian subject-matter specialists participated in semi-structured interviews (Table 1). Iranian ELT teachers ranged in age from 32 to 58 years (M=45), and had an average of 15 years of teaching experience. The two Iraqi ELT teachers had a mean age of 44 years and a mean teaching experience of 14 years. The Iranian subject-matter specialists were aged 45 to 60 years (M=51.6), with an average of 12 years of teaching experience in EAP. These interviews explored language-in-education policy planning using a localized framework adapted from Iranmehr et al. (2018), based on Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) model. Follow-up interactions were conducted as needed via additional interviews or email. All data were transcribed and analyzed inductively (27). To ensure reliability, coding was conducted independently by two researchers, with discrepancies resolved through discussion in a review panel.

Table 1. Demographic data for the EAP Teachers (ELT Teachers and Subject-matter Specialists)

Participants	Country	Academic Field	Academic Degree
ELT Teacher 1	Iran	TEFL	PhD
ELT Teacher 2	Iran	TEFL	PhD
ELT Teacher 3	Iran	Linguistics	MA
ELT Teacher 4	Iran	Applied Linguistics	PhD
ELT Teacher 5	Iran	Applied Linguistics	PhD
ELT Teacher 6	Iraq	Linguistics and Translation	PhD
ELT Teacher 7	Iraq	Linguistics and Translation	PhD
Subject Specialist 1	Iran	Clinical Pathology	MD, PhD
Subject Specialist 2	Iran	Medical Genetics	MD, PhD
Subject Specialist 3	Iran	Biochemistry	MD, PhD

RESULTS

Overall, the findings reveal substantial gaps between policy and practice in both contexts, though the nature and severity of these gaps differ (Table 2).

Access Policy

In Iranian medical universities, official curricula issued by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MHME) mainly specify the number of course units and hours (28), with limited attention to proficiency levels. However, institutional practices show more variation. Most universities require placement tests that group students into different levels, including introductory, prerequisite, and General English for Academic Purposes (GEAP) courses, followed by English for Medical Academic Purposes (EMAP). Typically, students complete one GEAP course (three credits, recently reduced to two) and two EMAP courses (each three credits). Teachers emphasized the importance of prerequisite courses (ELT Teacher 2) and students' minimum proficiency levels (ELT Teacher 1).

#1

Introductory and prerequisite English courses should be included in the curriculum because of the heterogeneity of classes. Of course appropriate measures should be taken by the university officials to manage such courses. (ELT Teacher 2)

#2

In case of student's weak knowledge of the basics of English, there is no proper repertoire of English vocabulary and the basics of English structures. S/he may believe that EAP texts are beyond his/her English proficiency knowledge. It seems that even for entering GEAP courses certain levels of English proficiency are needed. So, we should consider prerequisite English courses based on placement test upon the students' enrollment. (ELT Teacher 1)

In contrast, Iraqi medical curricula issued by the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) make no explicit reference to English courses. Institutional syllabi only indicate instructional hours, not credit units, and require students to take two non-credit GEAP courses (30 hours each) in the first two years. No rationale for these structures is provided.

Personnel Policy

Our analysis reveals significant neglect in both countries. Iranian syllabi rarely define criteria for selecting, training, or evaluating EAP instructors. While EMAP is generally expected to be taught by ELT specialists, shortages of qualified staff often result in subject-matter specialists teaching these courses. Teachers attributed this to low institutional prioritization of English (ELT Teacher 3) and insufficient recruitment (ELT Teacher 3). They also highlighted a mismatch between ambitious curricular goals and limited institutional support (ELT Teacher 1). Similarly, Iraqi syllabi lack any formal guidelines for teacher qualifications or professional development, indicating systemic oversight in staffing policies.

#3

In our institution, they prioritize recruiting faculty members for medical specialties and sub-specialties, and despite the allocation of three vacancies for recruitment of language teachers into the department by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, university officials fill such faculty vacancies by members from medical specialties. Thus, English language department has to employ part-time language teachers even for teaching GEAP courses. (ELT Teacher 3)

#4

Although we are aware that in teaching specialized English courses, subject specialists mostly focus on teaching medical terminology and reading comprehension through translation of medical texts, and predominantly use mother tongue language in the class; however, because of the limited number of faculty members in the English language department, we inevitably have to recruit content teachers with acceptable levels of English language proficiency to teach specialized English courses. (ELT Teacher 3)

#5

Teaching English in medical universities suffers from some major deficiencies such as absence of a department for assessment or evaluation of teaching and teachers, not to mention of minor issues such as teacher training programs, teacher continuing professional development, new teaching methods and technology, …. Unfortunately, ambitious objectives included in the curriculum are not compatible with the kind of support required for language teachers in medical universities. (ELT Teacher 1)

Curriculum Policy

In Iran, top-down policies clearly define EMAP objectives but provide little guidance for GEAP. EMAP emphasizes reading comprehension, medical vocabulary, listening, and speaking, but it neglects writing skills. Syllabi analysis confirms a strong focus on reading across all courses, with less attention to listening, speaking, and especially writing. Vocabulary is the dominant language component, while pronunciation is largely ignored. Translation from English to Persian appears in some syllabi, reflecting traditional approaches, but reverse translation is absent. Academic skills such as report writing, research, and editing are mostly neglected. Iraqi curricula show similar patterns: strong emphasis on reading, some inclusion of listening and communication skills, and focus on vocabulary and grammar. Subject-matter specialist 1 believed that EMAP classrooms were the place learners needed to read in English and translate

Table 2. A comparison of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) policies and practices across Iranian and Iraqi medical universities

Policy Dimension	Iran	Iraq	Summary of Key Findings
Access	MHME curricula specify course hours/credits, but proficiency is not clearly defined. Universities commonly use placement tests and offer GEAP/EMAP progression.	MHE curricula do not explicitly mention English courses. Syllabi specify hours only and include two non-credit GEAP courses.	Iran has a more structured and proficiency-based system in practice; Iraq provides minimal policy guidance and no stated rationale.
Personnel	Iranian syllabi rarely specify criteria for teacher selection, training, evaluation, or language proficiency. EMAP is ideally taught by ELT specialists, but shortages often lead to subject-matter specialists teaching the courses.	Iraqi syllabi provide no formal guidelines for teacher qualifications, recruitment, training, or professional development.	Both countries show weak staffing policy; however, Iran has some informal expectation of ELT specialization, whereas Iraq lacks explicit personnel guidance altogether.
Curriculum	EMAP objectives are clearly defined at the top level, but GEAP receives limited guidance. Reading and vocabulary dominate; listening and speaking are secondary, while writing, pronunciation, and academic skills are largely neglected. Translation appears in some syllabi, but reverse translation is absent.	Similar emphasis on reading, vocabulary, and grammar, with some listening and communication. Pronunciation appears in some syllabi, but translation and higher-order academic skills are mostly absent.	Both systems prioritize reading and vocabulary over integrated language and academic skills; Iraq includes pronunciation in some syllabi, while Iran retains some translation content.
Methods and Materials	National curricula do not prescribe teaching methods. Syllabi rarely provide methodological guidance, though some suggest communicative approaches. GEAP typically uses local textbooks, while EMAP relies more on international materials. Teacher choice and digital resources are limited.	Syllabi also lack methodological prescriptions and mainly use international textbooks, with little mention of supplementary resources or teacher autonomy.	Both systems are weakly regulated in terms of methods and materials, with limited flexibility and minimal integration of digital or technology-enhanced resources.
Resourcing	Syllabi commonly recommend audiovisual tools, but rarely mention libraries and do not include internet-based resources or educational software. Budget allocation for EAP development, research, or teacher recruitment is unclear. Teachers reported financial constraints as a major barrier to innovation.	Similar constraints are evident. Syllabi make partial provision for audiovisual and traditional resources, but do not integrate digital technologies. Some physical teaching spaces are specified, but broader resource planning is lacking.	Both countries face weak resourcing policy, with limited infrastructure, no systematic digital integration, and insufficient budgetary planning for EAP development.
Community	Documents lack mechanisms for gathering feedback from students or instructors. Communication channels for feedback are not outlined. EAP course design is not typically based on needs analysis, leading to disconnected decisions. Teachers report minimal consultation in policy-making.	Similar to Iran, community policy is largely ignored, with no established mechanisms for stakeholder feedback or consultation in course design.	Both countries exhibit a significant gap in community policy, with a lack of stakeholder engagement, feedback mechanisms, and needs-based course design, reinforcing a top-down approach.
Evaluation	Evaluation is inconsistent and often shaped by student perceptions rather than systematic criteria; teachers also advocate structural reforms (e.g., dedicated English departments and qualified instructors) to support coherent evaluation.	No clear unified framework for GEAP/EMAP evaluation; assessment and instruction are reported as dependent on individual instructors, with standardized textbooks despite known deficiencies.	Across both contexts, EAP evaluation lacks clear, unified criteria and institutional guidance, resulting in inconsistent assessment practices and uneven accountability.

medical texts into Persian, which is largely necessary in medical contexts (Subject-Matter Specialist 1).

#6

In my opinion, reading comprehension and the ability to translate medical English texts into Persian is the most significant skill needed for the students of medicine in their future professional career. Other skills could be paid attention later on. (Subject-Matter Specialist 1)

Unlike Iran, some Iraqi syllabi include pronunciation. However, translation skills are absent, and higher-level academic skills (e.g., report writing) are also largely missing. Both contexts demonstrate limited alignment with modern, skills-integrated EAP approaches.

Methods and Materials Policy

Methods and Materials Policy is underdeveloped in both countries. Iranian national curricula do not prescribe teaching methods, and most syllabi lack explicit methodological guidance though some imply communicative approaches. Materials selection is loosely regulated: GEAP courses often rely on locally published textbooks (notably by SAMT), while EMAP courses tend to use international materials. There is little flexibility for teacher-selected materials, and limited use of digital or online resources. Interviews suggest resistance to updating textbooks despite availability of newer materials (ELT Teacher 3).

#7

We teach an ESM textbook published by SAMT more than 20 years ago. Though we acknowledge

its deficiencies and …, but we would like to contribute a new textbook to be replaced by the earlier one. (ELT Teacher 3)

Iraqi syllabi similarly lack methodological prescriptions and rely primarily on international textbooks, with minimal mention of supplementary resources or teacher autonomy. The system also fails to systematically integrate modern or technology-enhanced learning materials.

Resourcing Policy

Our study highlights constraints in infrastructure and funding. In Iran, most syllabi recommend audiovisual tools, but few mention libraries, and none include internet-based resources or educational software. Budget allocation for EAP development, research, or teacher recruitment is unspecified. Teachers identified financial limitations as a major barrier to curriculum improvement and innovation (ELT Teacher 4 & ELT Teacher 2). Iraqi syllabi show similar limitations: partial provision for audiovisual tools and traditional resources, but no integration of digital technologies. Physical teaching spaces are occasionally specified, but broader resource planning is absent.

#8

EAP curriculum policy is constrained by budget …, they do not employ the required EAP teachers and there is a lot of educational burden on just a few teachers. (ELT Teacher 4)

#9

The current syllabi, which have been developed many years ago, have been a response to such conditions as lack of technological facilities and limited studies on EAP teaching, but recent growing technological advancements could pave the way for developing a new syllabi based on the findings of recent research on EAP teaching and learning. This could compensate for time constriction, absence of language labs and lack of technological tools in EAP classroom, which in turn could reduce budget deficits. (ELT Teacher 2)

Community Policy

Community Policy appears largely ignored in both contexts. Neither Iranian nor Iraqi documents include mechanisms for gathering input from students or instructors, nor do they outline communication channels for feedback (ELT Teacher 4).

#10

In my opinion there is no opportunity to develop a consultative community policy because the culture of cooperation and teamwork is so poor in our society. (ELT Teacher 4)

Furthermore, EAP course design is generally not based on needs analysis research, leading to decisions that are disconnected from actual learner and institutional needs (ELT Teacher 1).

#11

In one of the top medical universities, the English language department decides on having such courses or omitting them based on the results of the placement test, but in our institution instead of giving the students better options, the officials choose and decide according to their taste and liking. But in my view, though the decisions on having such courses or omitting them, and being elective or obligatory largely are made on the basis of prescribed curriculum, the MHME has shown an inclination towards decentralization of power to the universities and granting the opportunity to act as an intermediary layer to adjust policies, get the feedback from the implementation, conduct supervision, or do re-modification. (ELT Teacher 1)

Teachers reported minimal consultation in policy-making, reinforcing a top-down approach that excludes key stakeholders (ELT Teacher 2).

#12

A group of our colleagues recommend the introductory English course and the prerequisite English course before the enrollment into GEAP and EMAP courses but actually the agency belongs to a group or an individual deciding on such issues. (ELT Teacher 2)

Evaluation Policy

Our analysis exposes critical systemic weaknesses. Iranian teachers emphasized an urgent need to reform EAP programs, citing major deficiencies in curriculum design, lack of research-based practices, and insufficient teacher training. Key concerns include the absence of needs analysis (ELT Teacher 1), inadequate professional development opportunities (ELT Teacher 2), inconsistent institutional support, and lack of coordination among stakeholders (ELT Teacher 1).

#13

Current GEAP/EMAP curriculum and syllabus suffer from major deficiencies. There is a pressing need to develop a curriculum and syllabus based on recent EAP theoretical frameworks and need analysis research, to emphasize EAP teachers training and professional development. Particular attention should be paid to GEAP/EMAP textbook development and evaluation. It demands close communication and cooperation among stakeholders involved in EAP in Iranian medical universities (policymakers, syllabus writers, textbook developers, ELT teachers, content teachers, and medical students). (ELT Teacher 1)

#14

In addition to pre-service EAP teacher education programs, there is an urgent need for GEAP/EMAP teachers' continuing professional development through attending seminars, workshops and sabbatical leaves/programs in national and international fields. (ELT Teacher 2)

#15

In my opinion, we should reduce the current gaps in the officials' views on the importance of

GEAP/EMAP teaching. They should be convinced that instead of recruitment of part time teachers with minimal payments, full time EAP teachers with specific qualifications in teaching GEAP/EMAP be employed. In some medical universities, no independent department has been allocated to English language teaching although the ELT faculty members have the responsibility to teach or handle the teaching of all English language courses. ... For accreditation of medical education in our institution, there was a board of 15 experts from the MHME, none of whom had been selected from among general courses departments, let alone ELT teachers. It reveals a complete chaos in EAP courses policy in medical universities. (ELT Teacher 1)

Teachers also called for structural reforms, such as establishing dedicated English departments, hiring qualified full-time EAP instructors, and integrating EGP with EAP into a coherent system (ELT Teacher 2). Evaluation practices are inconsistent and often influenced by student perceptions rather than systematic criteria (ELT Teacher 4).

#16

In fact, heterogeneous classes especially in GEAP courses make the teachers work so much challenging. Students with low levels of language proficiency often relate this issue to their English learning during their secondary education. In my opinion, any development concerning English learning in high schools and universities requires a unified management to regard these two sections of education as a single interrelated framework, and not as two disparate bodies. (ELT Teacher 2)

#17

Evaluation of EAP program is based on learners' satisfaction, if the teacher asks them to try hard they resist and the administrative authorities support them, therefore, the quality of education is sacrificed by learners' views. (ELT Teacher 4)

In Iraq, teachers similarly highlighted the need for reconceptualizing EAP. Current curricula are largely oriented toward general English rather than academic or discipline-specific needs. They lack grounding in needs analysis, rely on non-authentic materials, and emphasize limited skill development (mainly reading and writing). Teaching practices often depend on individual instructors' efforts to compensate for weak curricula. Standardized textbooks are widely used despite known deficiencies, and there is no clear, unified framework for GEAP or EMAP instruction (ELT Teacher 6 & ELT Teacher 7).

#18

The same textbook which is taught for first year students at some universities in all its colleges and departments is 'General English for University Students' which has not been specially designed according to ESP principles. It is divided into five themes. Then, each theme is divided into four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Each skill in each theme has a sub topic. Each skill has five lessons with many exercises. Because of major problems with it including ..., in our university, teaching GEAP courses are based on the textbook 'New Headway Plus' which is a special edition of the world's most successful course for the Middle East and North Africa. The balanced methodology of New Headway Plus combines the best of traditional approaches - solid grammar and practice, vocabulary development, etc. - and newer approaches, such as communicative role-play and personalization. (ELT Teacher 7)

#19

We adopted the textbook from an international publisher. At Mosul University, GEAP classes are based on the textbook 'Headway Academic Skills' which is a four-level, paired skills course that teaches students in higher education the essential skills for academic success. The series focuses on improving students' academic skills by: developing the specific skills required for academic studies through a wide range of topics relevant to higher education; exploring strategies to help students with new vocabulary, and to record, vary, and build their vocabulary; and offering guidance in undertaking research and acknowledging sources. (ELT Teacher 6)

#20

The textbook 'General English for University Students' does not represent the students' needs. It focuses on general areas. Most of students complain from the textbook for different reasons: the textbook does not add any important detail to their major fields of study. It's demotivating for the majority of students in high level colleges, whereas students with low level English language proficiency consider this very difficult for them. (ELT Teacher 7)

Overall, the findings reveal that while Iranian universities have more structured EAP systems than Iraqi ones, both suffer from significant shortcomings: lack of coherent policy implementation, insufficient teacher support, limited methodological guidance, inadequate resources, absence of stakeholder engagement, and weak evaluation mechanisms. These issues collectively hinder the effectiveness of EAP programs and highlight the need for comprehensive, research-informed reforms in both countries.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of EAP policy and practice in Iran and Iraq reveals a striking pattern of systemic weaknesses across nearly all policy dimensions in both contexts although Iran demonstrates slightly more structure in certain areas. Specifically, Iran maintains a more proficiency-based system with informal

expectations for ELT specialization in staffing, while Iraq provides minimal policy guidance across the board. Both countries exhibit significant deficiencies in curriculum design—prioritizing reading and vocabulary over integrated academic skills—and similarly lack robust policies for methods, materials, resourcing, and community engagement, with limited digital integration, weak infrastructure, no systematic budgetary planning, and a notable absence of stakeholder input or feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, evaluation policy in both systems suffer from unclear criteria and inconsistent institutional guidance, resulting in fragmented accountability and uneven assessment standards. The study findings demonstrate systemic inconsistencies and the significant gaps between policy formulation and actual implementation. They underscore the urgent need for comprehensive, research-grounded reforms and stakeholder engagement to bridge these divides. In this section, we provide a critical interpretation of the findings by examining how EAP policies in Iranian and Iraqi medical universities function in practice across key dimensions.

In Iran, while analyzed syllabi define course units and hours, they inadequately address how these structures support learning objectives. Interviewees stressed the importance of granting credit to introductory and prerequisite English courses, viewing them as essential for building foundational academic skills for later stages. They also rejected the separation of GEAP and EMAP, advocating for a continuum where GEAP serves as a prerequisite to EMAP, aligning with the principle that EGP and EAP share similar learning foundations (29). However, decisions regarding course structure remain context-dependent and are influenced by local constraints (6).

In stark contrast, Iraqi medical curricula exhibit a conspicuous absence of explicit reference to English courses. Institutional syllabi merely specify instructional hours (two 30-hour courses) without providing a rationale for these decisions. This lack of structured planning signifies a weaker policy framework compared to that of Iran.

Both Iran and Iraq exhibit significant shortcomings in their teacher-related policies concerning EAP. In Iran, the lack of formal criteria for recruitment, training, and evaluation has resulted in what researchers term a "chaotic" system (8, 22). Despite an implicit expectation that ELT specialists teach EMAP courses, a shortage of qualified staff frequently leads to subject-matter specialists assuming these roles. This issue is exacerbated by limited institutional support, the low prioritization of English programs, and insufficient staffing. While decentralization might offer some flexibility, it also risks the neglect of sound pedagogical principles.

Similarly, Iraqi universities are characterized by the absence of any formal framework for EAP teacher selection or professional development. This shared neglect in both contexts consequently undermines the quality and consistency of EAP instruction. Research strongly suggests that EAP courses should ideally be delivered by trained language instructors (30). While the integration of the BALEAP (2008) Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (CFTEAP) has been proposed to address such issues, some scholars have also highlighted both the benefits and challenges of implementing this framework within an institutional initiative at an EAP Centre in a Turkish higher education institution (31).

Curriculum policies in Iranian and Iraqi medical universities exhibit common challenges related to skill integration and pedagogical approach. In Iran, a clear imbalance exists between GEAP and EMAP; while EMAP offers detailed objectives for reading, vocabulary, listening, and speaking, GEAP lacks guidance, and writing skills are underemphasized across both of them. Syllabi predominantly focus on reading comprehension, with limited attention of productive and communicative skills, likely due to practical constraints like large classes and resource limitations (6). This often leads to the obligatory use of traditional, teacher-centered methods such as lectures (32).

The prevalence of traditional approaches, including translation and teacher-centered instruction, stems from both contextual limitations and gaps in pedagogical knowledge. Current ESP/EAP courses frequently fall short of meeting students' academic needs, particularly in communication skills (33). While students may prioritize receptive skills like reading and listening, they often deem their ESP courses insufficient for their broader goals (18), and medical students specifically seek development in speaking, listening, and communication skills, despite prioritizing reading (19). Addressing these varying student preferences and needs requires systematic analysis.

In Iraq, similar curriculum patterns emerge, with reading as the primary focus, accompanied by some attention to listening, speaking, and writing. Vocabulary and grammar are central components, and some attention is given to pronunciation. However, like Iran, these programs lack comprehensive skill integration and are not informed by needs analysis.

Research consistently emphasizes that effective ESP/EAP curricula be learner-centered and progressive, starting with GEAP and developing all four skills before moving to discipline-specific competencies (34). Such progression, guided by detailed needs analysis and clear goals, is crucial for aligning language education with students' academic and professional trajectories.

Both Iranian and Iraqi EAP programs grapple with similar challenges regarding teaching methods and materials, often stemming from policy gaps and practical constraints. In Iran, while national curricula are decentralized, offering potential flexibility, syllabi seldom guide instructors, leading to a default reliance on traditional teaching methods. Material selection is semi-regulated, with GEAP often using locally published textbooks and EMAP preferring international sources. Despite access to updated, authentic resources, teachers may resist adopting them due to familiarity with older materials and established assessment practices.

Relevant research indicates that current materials and methods emphasize reading and translation, limiting opportunities for communicative practice (6). Although international resources and digital materials are widely available (35), they are underutilized. The lack of clear policy on teacher-selected materials may also discourage innovation, as students may perceive deviations from prescribed texts as additional workload. Thus, policymakers should have second thoughts about materials and methods for EAP programs in Iran (8).

Current pedagogical approaches and materials in Iran tend to prioritize reading and translation, consequently restricting communicative practice (6). The underutilization of widely available international and digital resources is a notable issue (35). Furthermore, the absence of a clear policy on teacher-selected materials may stifle innovation, as students may view non-prescribed texts as extra work. This suggests a need for policymakers to re-evaluate the approach to materials and methods in Iranian EAP programs (8).

Iraq mirrors these issues: syllabi do not mandate specific teaching methods, and material selection is loosely defined, with a strong preference for international textbooks and minimal support for supplementary or teacher-chosen resources. Consequently, both countries lag in adopting modern, communicative, and technology-enhanced language teaching methodologies.

In Iran, limited resources significantly constrain the implementation of EAP programs. Although some syllabi recommend audiovisual tools, few include libraries or digital resources, and none emphasize internet-based learning or educational software. Budget limitations affect teacher recruitment, professional development, and access to teaching tools, which in turn can reduce teacher motivation and hinder innovation. Nevertheless, some educators view technological advancement as an opportunity to address resource shortages by facilitating access to research-based materials and creating more flexible learning environments. Studies have shown the benefits of technology and supplementary materials in enhancing language learning (36) and learners' language learning metacognitions (37). EAP experts also argue that effective resource allocation requires a coherent Language Acquisition Management (LAM) system (38) to prevent waste and ensure strategic investment (6).

In Iraq, resource provision is similarly limited, with only partial support for audiovisual tools and traditional materials and no emphasis on digital technologies. This reflects a broader lack of strategic planning in resource allocation across both countries.

A significant weakness in both contexts is the absence of stakeholder engagement. Iranian documents lack mechanisms for collecting feedback from students or teachers, and there are no established communication channels between policymakers and practitioners. While interviewees stressed the need for collaboration and needs analysis in course design, they also identified cultural and institutional barriers that impede such cooperation. Iraqi universities face similar issues, with no formal structures for stakeholder feedback or collaboration, further limiting the responsiveness of their EAP programs. This lack of participatory policy-making reflects a broader disconnect between policy and practice, which can negatively impact both the needs and rights of stakeholders at the micro level (39). From a rights-analysis perspective, excluding stakeholders from decision-making processes is undemocratic and reinforces existing power imbalances (40). Scholars emphasize the importance of negotiation among all participants in the EAP system to ensure that courses effectively meet diverse needs and wants (41).

Evaluation emerges as one of the most critical challenges for EAP programs in both countries. In Iran, EAP programs suffer from poor documentation, inconsistent policies, and a lack of systematic evaluation mechanisms (6). This poor documentation is not unique to EAP but characterizes the entire language education system in Iran, leading scholars to criticize the evident shortcomings and inconsistencies in educational and developmental documents pertaining to English education (42). Without clearly defined objectives and effective communication, assessing program success becomes inherently difficult. Interviewees in our study identified numerous areas for improvement in the current and future EAP agenda in Iranian medical universities, including research-based curriculum design, teacher education, stakeholder collaboration, professional development, and institutional support.

The effectiveness of Iranian EAP programs is debated in the literature; some argue they fail to meet objectives (43), while others contend they are successful in teaching reading comprehension, technical vocabulary, and grammatical structures

(5, 8, 29). Given constraints such as large class sizes and outdated materials, both perspectives may hold validity, yet there is a consensus that substantial reform is needed (6). A proposed solution involves the implementation of a LAM system (44). This system would integrate EGP and EAP into a continuous framework, enhance communication among stakeholders, and align language education across different educational stages. Such a system would also support student-centered approaches by incorporating learner feedback and needs (8) and give a "voice to the teacher who is the closest to students" (45). It would incorporate both EGP and EAP into a unified system, defining language education throughout a student's academic life from high school to university. Campion (2012) argues that viewing language education as a continuum, rather than a dichotomy or separate modules, reveals that EAP, though perhaps arbitrarily termed EGP, begins before university (46). Finally, a LAM system would foster mutual understanding between content and language departments at universities (47).

Further complicating the landscape, Dyer (2025) advocates for a humanistic pedagogy in EAP that acknowledges diverse student profiles and the intricate academic journeys they undertake (48). Additional research highlights challenges at the institutional level (e.g., unclear goals, limited time), the learner level (e.g., low motivation, weak background), and the teacher level (e.g., insufficient training, limited content knowledge) (23). Research also indicates that students' perceptions of current ESP courses suggest that the English language skills taught and the allocated time are not compatible with their actual learning needs (19). Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms from teachers, textbook developers, and educational authorities, including curriculum revision, improved materials, extracurricular support, and needs-based program design (21).

In Iraq, evaluation findings reveal even more fundamental issues. EAP programs are largely indistinguishable from general English courses, lack needs analysis, rely on non-authentic materials, and focus narrowly on reading and writing. Teachers often compensate for these deficiencies through individual efforts, but systemic problems persist, including the use of inadequate textbooks across institutions. Scholars recommend adopting a needs-based approach to curriculum design, involving steps such as analyzing learner needs, defining objectives, designing relevant content, and continuously evaluating outcomes (17).

Overall, the study underscores that both EAP systems face significant structural and pedagogical challenges. Iran exhibits relatively more developed, albeit inconsistent, policies, while Iraq lacks a coherent framework altogether. In both cases, the absence of needs analysis, weak teacher support, limited resources, lack of stakeholder engagement, and inadequate evaluation mechanisms hinder the effectiveness of EAP programs. The findings strongly advocate for integrated, research-informed, and participatory reforms to align EAP education with students' academic and professional needs.

This study utilized a localized evaluation framework, adapted from Iranmehr et al.'s study (2018) and originally based on Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) LEP model, to examine EAP programs within the Iranian and Iraqi medical contexts. The framework demonstrated its value in capturing context-specific features and could be further refined to more accurately reflect the unique characteristics of EAP in Iran. Its application also fostered greater sensitivity within EAP research towards critical issues that may impact the long-term effectiveness of EAP initiatives (6).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights critical policy and practical shortcomings in current EMAP programs in Iran and Iraq, intending to encourage more rigorous, critical research that challenges ineffective established practices within existing systems. Acknowledging the limitations of its small sample size, the study calls for future research to adopt a broader, multi-stakeholder approach—incorporating input from EAP teachers, students, experts, and policymakers—and to utilize larger, more representative samples. Additionally, it recommends conducting comparative studies within the Middle East to provide actionable insights for improving EMAP policy and pedagogy in Iran.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Disclosure

We used ChatGPT for editing the manuscript.

Ethical Considerations:

This manuscript has been submitted to the Ethical Committee of Mashhad University of Medical Sciences. The Committee did not encounter any deviation from ethical principals in this research (Ref :05/140256).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our sincere gratitude to the esteemed ELT teachers and subject-matter specialists contributing to this research.

Financial Support: The study received no financial support.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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