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Operating in the Shadows: the Epistemic Economy of Privatesector-Sector Eap Practitioners

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Abstract

The surge of international students has turned English for Academic Purposes (EAP) into a lucrative unit and prompted the proliferation of private education providers and the outsourcing of EAP provision to private sectors (Bell, 2016; Ding & Bruce, 2017; Fulcher, 2009), yet academic scholarship on EAP practitioners in the private sector remains scarce or absent from mainstream EAP literature, including Journal of English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes, and even TESOL Quarterly. The absence of results for 'private-sector EAP practitioners' in the Journal of English for Academic Purposes archives indicates legitimacy hierarchies that position academia as the probable sole arbiter of valid knowledge. The underrepresentation of private-sector EAP in academic discourse risks marginalizing a critical segment of the field, overshadowing possible pedagogical innovation in foundational EAP courses, and perpetuating inequalities in knowledge production.

To address this gap, this study investigates two central questions: 1) Why are private-sector EAP practitioners underrepresented in the academic discourse? 2) What systemic factors might have perpetuated such exclusion? Guided by legitimacy theory and the critique of neoliberalism in education, this study drew data from recent job postings (2024-2025) on major quality job boards such as LinkedIn, Indeed, and Study Group (an international private language school). A content analysis of selected job postings was then conducted to identify possible recurring themes. Three interconnected themes surfaced: 1] the construction of a client-centric professional identity that excludes research, 2] institutional norms that discourage scholarly engagement, and 3] systemic barriers grounded in neoliberal market logic and legitimacy hierarchies. Based on these findings, implications are proposed for stakeholders, including academia, private language education providers, and EAP practitioners, to mitigate marginalization.

Keywords: Privatesector-Sector Eap Practitioners, International Students, Legitimacy Theory,

Neoliberalism in Education, Content Analysis