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Title: Design-based research of ESP/EAP materials : online courses for the MA and PhD students

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Design-based research of ESP/EAP materials: online courses for the MA and PhD students

A b s t r a c t: Design-based research (DBR) involves developing materials based on a strong link between research and educational practice. The paper aims to follow the DBR and describe English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purpose (EAP) online courses presented for the MA and PhD students. The paper seeks to address two following questions: What is the model of ESP online course for the MA students? What is the model of ESP online course for the PhD students? The project will use the mixed type of research, including a questionnaire study and self-reflection analysis. The results are hoped to bring practical implications for further online courses developed at the university level.

Keywords: ESP materials, design, evaluation, online course, students

Introduction

"Materials" are defined as the resources used in education, including online materials, reference materials as well as DIY (teacher-prepared and learner-generated) materials (McGrath, 2013: 2–5). Materials' research has a long and rich tradition in applied linguistics. In this paper, the term "material research" is used interchangeably with "material development", incorporating ESP/EAP material development. Materials development refers to all processes involved in the production of materials for learning: design and production, exploitation and adaptation, evaluation and analysis of materials.

The development of materials for ESP/EAP aims to produce online resources for specific contexts and conditions (Tomlinson, 2012: 143–144). ESP and EAP online materials have become the necessary tools imposed in education during the pandemic period of Covid 19. They present the ESP/EAP

reality, which influences students' understanding of their future job (BEZEMER and JEWITT, 2018: 286–289). Similar to ELT print materials, the courses are cultural artifacts with content transferring knowledge, values, and hidden messages.

Students at the university level usually represent B1/B2 or, sometimes, more advanced English levels. They need English for professional training and future jobs/careers. The literature stresses that ESP must be seen as an approach, not as a product" (SOBKOWIAK, 2008: 13). It is a distinctive approach to English education based on goal-oriented learning. MA or PhD students are adult learners who are highly motivated to improve their English skills for professional purposes. Their ESP/EAP courses are limited in time (usually 1–2 semesters) and full of specific content. These courses are classified as in-service (simultaneous) courses and are discipline-based learning English as a part of their studies.

The paper aims to depict the ESP/EAP online courses on the Moodle platform for the MA university students in the field of "English for Pedagogy" and in the Doctoral School implemented by the University of Silesia¹. The idea is to investigate the online course development to indicate the most influential factors, constraints, and trends in this area. The research is diagnostic with the descriptive and evaluative function (STEC, 2011, unpublished PhD thesis). It originates from the sudden need to teach English online during the outbreak of the Covid 2019 pandemic in March 2020.

1. Design-based research of ESP/EAP materials

Design-based research (DBR) is a methodological approach, not to be mistaken with the process of design itself, linking theory and practice in educational research. The DBR approach is classified within a methodology of the learning sciences, sometimes blended with mixed methods or action research, developmental research, or formative evaluation. The goal of DBR is to use the close study of a single learning environment and develop new theories, artifacts, or practices that can be widespread in other educational settings. The outcomes are built as a part of the output and practical solution (Kennedy-Clark, 2015: 106–107).

DBR aims to develop specific learning theories and artifacts using a recurrent improvement and retrospective analysis. DBR involves qualitative data, as

¹ The research study is developed within the project entitled: ESP/EAP online university courses: design, implementation, and evaluation.

the research is situated in a real-world environment, which includes complex variables. Research procedures can be flexible and social interactions are complex. The idea is to describe the process of design in practice when the findings are reported. Both teachers and students are active participants and influence the course model. Simultaneously, the systematic changes affect students' English education (BARAB, 2006: 153–155). DBR is hoped to demonstrate the local impact of these courses and offers insight into ESP/EAP course development. It will help understand the artifacts used in the pandemic conditions, as later on they can be applied by other users.

Moreover, design-based implementation research (DBIR) is a recent trend that involves scaling DBR to support changes in more extensive systems or school areas (SVIHLA, 2014: 42). The core principles of DBIR focus on problems as viewed by different participants, collaborative design, and the development of knowledge with a systematic inquiry to make the outcomes effective and sustainable. DBIR follows the tradition of evaluation research, community-based participatory research, design-based, and implementation research. The question is not only what works, but also when, for whom, and under which conditions. It also refers to a dilemma as to how this innovation – theory or artifact can work under a wide range of conditions (FISHMAN, PENUEL, ALLEN, CHENG, SABELLI, 2013: 136–156).

1.1. The development of ESP/EAP online learning materials

The development of ESP/EAP materials involves a consideration of their format, purpose, and production. At the level of format, these are electronic materials used in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (GARTON and Graves, 2014: 10). At the level of the purpose for which they are implemented, these are the instructional materials generated for English education at the university level. At the level of production and design, these are in-house (DIY) materials, workshops, and glossaries, to name a few (McGrath, 2013: 2–3). They are visually appealing materials with various language-image dynamics, composition, and integrated layout. They attempt to be glocal materials to combine international (global English) issues with linguistic localization based on the ESP/EAP principles offered in verbal/visual content. Materials developed for these courses are the resources designed for a specific context with a goaloriented content based on students' functional English requirements (TOMLINson, 2012: 143–144). The courses reflect the relationships between the users, the context of teaching, and English materials (media) needed in a professional career (JORDAN, 2002: 276-277).

The development of materials is investigated here at the level of content (HARWOOD, 2014: 1–4). All language courses, including ESP and EAP modules, are currently developed following the seven fundamental principles listed below:

- 1) Localization materials are relevant and related to learners' world and background;
- 2) Modernization materials are up-to-date and include the latest glottodidactic procedures, approaches, and methods;
- 3) Individualization materials offer a wide selection of activities and tasks catering to different learning styles and multiple intelligences;
- 4) Personalization materials stimulate learners to speak and write about their own experiences and skills;
- 5) Humanizing materials stimulate learners' holistic and systematic development:
- 6) Simplification, differentiation, complexification materials are appropriate to learners' language level, knowledge, and experience of the world, a level of challenge, and difficulty increasing gradually over the learning time;
- 7) Variety materials offer different and interesting verbal and visual content (McGrath, 2013: 66–70).

In practice, a designer defines needs and purposes, selects approaches, recognizes constraints, selects methods, collects the data, evaluates and interprets the results, determines objectives, implements decisions, and finally, evaluates all procedures and data. The Council of Europe promotes the cyclical view of the development of materials to spotlight the various learning processes (Jordan 2002: 23; Graves, 2000: 100). No matter what learning/ teaching materials are developed, a number of variables should be considered, starting with the users, students (their language level, needs, and learning objectives), teachers (their abilities, proficiency, and self-confidence), and ending with the time factor (availability, long/short courses). Other variables are related to the syllabus (approach and methodology implementation), materials, and procedures (tasks and techniques). The subject literature highlights the challenges encountered in online education and linked with time constraints, syllabus, and materials coverage, the time-consuming preparation of activities, and the need for teachers' professional development (KIDDLE, 2013: 191).

To describe online materials such as ESP/EAP online courses, which have been developed from scratch under the pressure of Covid 19 pandemic period, both their potentials and boundaries should be identified. Considering the possibilities and positive aspects, the online materials are accessed for free, are also easy to navigate, offering high quality and the most up-to-date approaches to English education. Their use enables individuals to develop autonomy and collaborative interactions outside the classroom almost anytime and anywhere.

The limitations may be linked to the various level of financial resources and technical support experienced by students. Other difficulties relate to teachers' self-improvement, IT support, and planning process. which may be very chaotic during the pandemic period. It is also associated with costly requirements such as technological devices and network connections. Moreover, technology changes fast, and it is challenging to keep up with all innovations. The online courses support learning, while students' personal aspect of education as a type of meeting and interaction is missed (TOMLINSON and MASUHARA, 2018: 176–184).

2. Research project

Several questions have been raised about learning and materials during the epidemic period; this paper gives a brief overview of the recent online courses developed at the University of Silesia.

2.1. Research purpose

Following the DBR approach, the project aims to describe ESP and EAP online courses placed on the Moodle platform and presented respectively for MA and PhD students. The MA course was entitled *English for Pedagogy*, while the PhD course was entitled *English B2 for Doctoral School*. The visual and verbal content has been constructed with considerable attention to students' needs and topic areas. The author implemented specific ready-made and DIY materials in these ESP/EAP courses. The courses are designed following a multimodal approach based on image-language-sound-music coordination (BEZEMER-JEWITT, 2018: 281).

2.2. Research questions

For this project, two subsequent questions were designed: What is the model of ESP online course for the MA students? What is the model of ESP online course for the PhD students?

2.3. Procedures

The project entails two stages: an initial and a proper one. The initial stage constitutes a designer's evaluation, focusing on self-reflection and comparisons of the selected courses. The proper stage is the participants' evaluation focusing on students' reflection on the courses. The project was performed after the first semester of each course, which was the final semester for the MA students. The course for the PhD students lasted one additional semester.

The tool implemented in this project was designed following a set of the universal criteria (applied to any language learning materials and learners); content-specific criteria (ESP courses); age-specific criteria (young adults); local criteria (university, resources, students' needs and wants) and other criteria (teacher-specific, culture-specific or L1-specific criteria) (Tomlinson, 2013: 21–49). The author added two more sets of criteria: media-specific criteria (online materials) and multimodal criteria (related to the core and sub-modes used for making meanings) (STEC, 2018: 86–90). Consequently, the students' semi-structured questionnaire was designed and divided into two parts: introduction (general background information) and ESP/EAP course for the PhD and MA students, respectively².

3. Presentation and interpretation of the results

Reporting the results gathered from the initial stage, several similarities and differences were observed by the designer. Both courses shared six similar (or sometimes the same) elements. The list included the following factors:

- 1) Environment applied in the courses: Moodle platform;
- 2) Procedures: an in-course process of design;
- 3) Social interaction established: Moodle platform, MS Teams;
- 4) Content applied: no coursebook limited;
- 5) Role of participants: teacher's and students' active impact on course development as an electronic artifact;
- 6) Reporting the findings: students' works, questionnaires, and test Further analysis of the selected courses indicated a set of six aspects that differ to a considerable degree. The set incorporated such elements as:
- 1) Content: various/open resources and materials implemented in the courses;
- 2) Variables: different levels of English (B1-B2) and knowledge of ESP/EAP;

² For details, see a sample of the questionnaire for the PhD students in Appendix 1.

- 3) Student's background: MA students study a similar study area; PhD students share both similar/different areas;
- 4) Goals of English education: short-term ones for MA students/long-term for PhD students;
- 5) Course time: 1-semester course for MA students /2 semesters for PhD students;
- 6) Products: similar for all MA students; similar and various for PhD students.

The findings from the initial stage – the teacher's evaluation and comparisons of the courses indicate that the significant similarities are easier to classify in terms of media, tools (Moodle platform) and procedures used, and participants' role and outcomes. These data points must be interpreted with caution. Namely, content is grouped in the set of similarities and differences as well. On the one hand, both courses are not limited by the subject matter from any coursebooks. On the other hand, each course offers various resources and online materials as its content. A similar case is represented by the variables related to English level and their knowledge of the subject matter at the beginning of each course. Other differences include the users' background in the fields they represent with a partly similar and different knowledge respectively for the MA and PhD students. The changes observed among goals, course time, and products seem to be obvious as the consequences of the period and learning outcomes completed.

The students' questionnaire results opened with the background information about the users who had participated in this investigation. The students were divided into two groups based on their course participation, either as MA or PhD. The initial sample consisted of 32 MA students (of whom four did not complete the structured questionnaire) and 25 PhD students (of whom five did not succeed in this task). Then, a sample of 28 female undergraduate students and 20 (13 female, seven male) postgraduate ones were selected. The undergraduates represented Pedagogy (15 students: integrated education, 13 ones: special needs education/ arts education and surdopedagogy). The postgraduates represented several fields (or even integration of 2/3 ones) such as Natural sciences (10 students: Biology, Chemistry, Earth science, Physics, Materials sciences) and Humanities (10 students: Law, Linguistics, Sociology, Theology, Political science). The current study found that the English level among the course participants ranged between B1 and B2. Another important finding focused on the participants' experience of English. Fig.1 presents the MA students' experience of English.

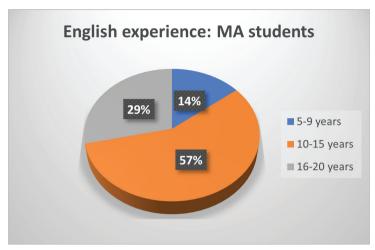


Fig. 1. MA students' experience of English Source: Own study.

As depicted above, 57% of the students have been learning English for between 10 and 15 years. 29% of them have been exposed to English in the period of 16 and 20 years. The smallest number of them, namely 14%, have known this language for between 5 and 9 years. Similarly, Fig.2 below depicts the postgraduates' experience of English.

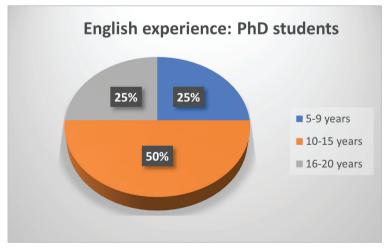


Fig. 2. PhD students' experience of English Source: Own study.

Figure 2 confirms that 50% of the PhD students have been learning English for more than 10 up to 15 years. Surprisingly, the same amount of them,

as much as 25%, have been involved in English education in the period of between 5 and 9 years, as well as between 16 up to 20 years respectively. In general, the MA and PhD participants' experience of English seems to be at a similar level.

The proper part of the questionnaire showed the details about the investigated courses, namely, the most respected and valuable materials. Fig. 3 depicts such materials in the MA course for pedagogues.

THE MOST IMPORTANT MATERIALS IN THE MA COURSE

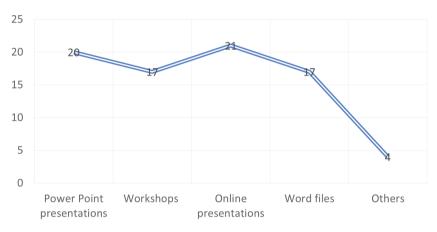


Fig. 3. Valuable materials in the MA course for Pedagogy Source: Own study.

It is clear that PowerPoint and online presentations (recorded lectures, speeches) are the most valuable parts of this course. It is apparent from this figure that the students like workshops and word files to the same degree. The PhD students' answers on this matter are shown in Fig. 4.

Then, online presentations are the most valuable materials for the PhD students. They also find workshops and word files equally useful. PowerPoint presentations and other forms offered (films, mind-maps) are recognized as the less valuable materials. Both groups of respondents prefer materials related to online presentations (or PowerPoint presentations in the case of the MA students). Only later do they indicate more interactive forms, such as workshops and word files. Still, the respondents listed the most useful sections offered in each course, as depicted in Fig.5 below.

THE MOST IMPORTANT MATERIALS IN THE PHD COURSE

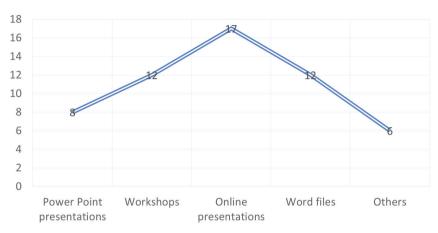


Fig. 4. Valuable materials in the PhD course Source: Own study.

THE MOST USEFUL SECTIONS IN MA COURSE

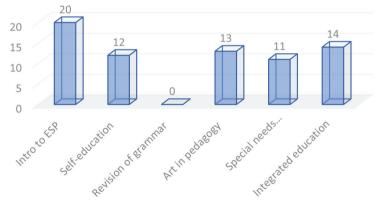


Fig. 5. Sections useful in the MA course Source: Own study.

The present study shows that the most beneficial section for the MA students is "Introduction to ESP" as the professional springboard for their future careers. Other sections entitled "Integrated education", "Art in pedagogy" or "Self-education" reveal a similar degree of value. The MA participants neglect

the section related to grammar. The PhD students recorded the most beneficial sections of their course as well, which is presented in Fig. 6 below.

THE MOST USEFUL SECTIONS IN PHD COURSE

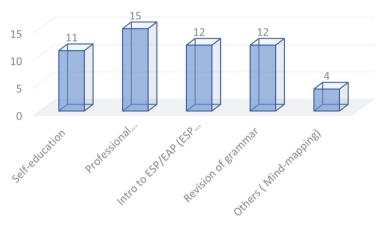


Fig.6. Sections useful in the PhD course Source: Own study.

Their most effective section is "Professional development" (e.g. bio-notes, European CV). Further analysis shows that other sections which the PhD students indicate at a similar level, include "Introduction to ESP/EAP", "Revision of grammar", and "Self-education". They seem to be less interested in other sections, such as mind-mapping. Comparing the results from both groups confirms that the goal-oriented sections are the most respected in ESP/EAP online courses. These results are consistent with those of other findings on tasks that helped students to improve their skills. The most practical tasks listed by the MA students are illustrated in Fig. 7 below.

The ranking suggests that tests/quizzes are beneficial for the major part of the participants. Similarly, the ESP glossary is classified as the second practical task. The third important type of task is based on asking questions and answering them. Other types, such as mind-maps, discussion forums, and essays, are the lowest in this classification. The following students' comments support the findings: "I have never experienced [an] ESP course – speaking about special needs in English"./"ESP Glossary was very difficult but helpful to write [a] summary (of my work) and my future work"./"Mind-maps required time and personal involvement – it was a challenge to draw and think about space"./"It is difficult to define terms precisely in [the] ESP Glossary". The results provided by the PhD students enrich the list of the most practical tasks, as is presented in Fig. 8 below.

THE MOST HELPFUL TASKS IN THE MA COURSE

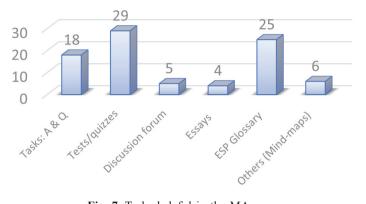


Fig. 7. Tasks helpful in the MA course Source: Own study.

THE MOST HELPFUL TASKS IN THE PHD COURSE

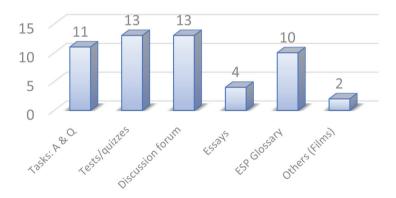


Fig. 8. Tasks helpful in PhD course Source: Own study.

The above table shows that the PhD participants find tests/quizzes and discussion forums the most helpful in their course. They also observe that tasks based on questions/answers and the ESP glossary are beneficial for them. They state that essays and other tasks (films, cryptex, mind-maps) are less useful. The following comments support their answers: "[The] ESP glossary is challenging to collect all necessary vocabulary in my field"./"I need more grammar activities during course meetings"./"For me [,] it is sometimes hard

to translate Polish into English versions because I try to make the same grammar constructs"./"Professional development and bio-note - why? It was simply hard to write something short but clever about myself. It is more [a] problem of [a] way of thinking than language itself". The more diverse and significant results are those collected about tasks as they reflect the MA and PhD group preferences about specific tasks. Although tests and ESP glossaries seem to be the favourites in these groups, other types of tasks evoke various responses. These are tasks based on questions and answers or discussion forums, which are valued to a considerable degree in the PhD course in comparison with the MA course. Students are not fond of essays or other more elaborate tasks such as mind-maps.

Finally, the models of both courses were established and depicted in Table 1:

Table 1
Models of MA and PhD courses

Sections and parts	Model of ESP online courses for MA students	Model of ESP online courses for PhD students
Title	English for Pedagogy	English B2 for Doctoral School
1st part	Announcements (every-week comments/ the up-to-date)	Announcements (every-week comments/ the up-to-date)
2 nd part	ESP for a specific course/field (dictionary, glossary, cryptex, quiz) Pedagogy: special needs education, integrated education, art in pedagogy	Development and self-education in English (self-reflection, strategies, techniques)
3 rd part	Development and self-education (workshops!)	Global English (in proverbs, varieties)
4 th part	Assessment and evaluation (testing)	Professional development (LLL; bio-notes, European CV)
5 th part		ESP/EAP – introduction (glossary for PhD students, cryptex, Your ESP glossary; academic phrase bank, quiz)
6 th part		Grammar revision (tenses, passives, conditionals)
7 th part		The visual history of human knowledge (mind-maps, multimodality)
8 th part		Writing research papers (the process of writing abstracts)
9 th part		Presentations and conference talks (English for oral skills)
10 th part		Assessment and evaluation (oral/written feedback on progress)

Source: Own study.

As depicted in the table above, the models share a few characteristic features and sections, such as the first part entitled "Announcements" and others, entitled "Development and self-education", and "Assessment and evaluation". These are the universal parts of each course, with a set of general topics useful for all university students. The two models of the courses differ in ESP sections for Pedagogy and ESP/ EAP sections for the postgraduate students of the doctoral school. These are content-specific areas with similar types of tasks but various content. The results show that EAP content is reflected in such sections as "[The] Visual history of human knowledge", "Writing research papers", "Presentations and conference talks". The discrepancy between the MA and PhD models is obvious due to the courses' length, goals, and the level of English and (or) professional knowledge.

Contrary to expectations, this table shows a need for a grammar section in the PhD model, perceived as the opportunity for revisions. It is important to bear in mind that with a sample of two courses, caution must be applied in the discussion of the findings and their implications. Thus, a range of content and procedures in the sections can be easily changed.

Conclusions

The project described in this paper was undertaken to demonstrate and evaluate the ESP/EAP online courses designed during the Covid pandemic period and offered at the University of Silesia for MA and PhD students. This work contributes to the existing knowledge of the development of English materials by providing insights into online course design. On the one hand, the results of this investigation show the universal/general content (sections) beneficial for the ESP/EAP courses requested by the MA and PhD students at the university level. On the other hand, the research study provides clear evidence concerning the specific/various content adequate for each model. Moreover, the active role of all users – teachers and students – is stressed and requested in online materials development.

The current study confirms the challenges and dilemmas encountered in online course development during the pandemic period. They include management difficulties related to time-consuming preparation and time restrictions imposed on the course design and implementation. A need for further professional training is of significant importance, for example, the time and experience needed to complete tasks involved in the development of materials. It is also complicated to establish a good kind of interaction with students and a balanced approach to evaluation and assessment of their progress. Technical

difficulties constitute another group of challenges, which are experienced but not described in this paper.

This research study has some limitations associated with the conditions during the last semester of the pandemic lock-down, for example, the sudden tension imposed on course design and implementation. Consequently, there is a lack of an analysis of the proper needs of the course and students, the small number of participants, and others factors such as teachers' or students' recovery after Covid-19. However, it is hoped that the tools designed in the project will be used in further research projects introduced to a bigger group of respondents. Consequently, the MA and PhD models should be tested and redesigned in subsequent semesters. ESP/EAP materials, including these "local" online courses can be implemented and adapted as glocal materials.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire for the PhD students

The purpose of the questionnaire is to improve the future online courses learning from self-experience during the pandemic period. The results of the questionnaire are anonymous and collected only for the research purposes.

Introduction:

- 1. Age:
- 2. Gender:
- 3. Which field of study (area) do you represent?
- 4. How long have you been learning English? Please circle the correct answer.
- 5. 5-10 years b) 10-15 years c)years
- 6. Please define your level of English at the beginning of the course. Please mark .
- 7. B1/B1+ b) B2/B2+ c) C1 d) (other please specify)
- 8. Think about language skills and areas (listening, reading, speaking writing, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation). When communicating in English which skills/areas are you good at, and which skills/areas are you weak at? Provide 2 examples.

I. ESP Moodle course for PhD students.

1. Which materials and elements were the most valuable in the course? Please mark 3 examples.

a. PowerPoint presentations
b. Workshops
c. Online presentations and lectures
d. Sections in Word files
e. Others: (please identify which)
Which contents (elements and sections) in the course do you value most? Please
rk <u>3 examples</u> and support your decision.
a. Self-education
b. Professional development
e. Intro to ESP
d. Revision of grammar
e. Mind-mapping
f. Others (specify)
Which elements of the online course listed in the previous question were the mos
illenging for you? Please identify 3 examples and support your decision.
a) why?
b) why?
e) why?
Which topics did you miss in the course? Please give <u>2 examples</u> .
Which topics will you certainly need in your professional career? Please give
xamples.
Which type of tasks implemented in the course helped you to develop your skill
Which type of tasks implemented in the course helped you to develop your skill st? Please mark 3 examples.
st? Please mark 3 examples.
st? Please mark <u>3 examples</u> . a. tasks: answer the questions
st? Please mark 3 examples. a. tasks: answer the questions b. tests/quizzes
st? Please mark 3 examples. a. tasks: answer the questions b. tests/quizzes c. discussion forum
st? Please mark 3 examples. a. tasks: answer the questions b. tests/quizzes c. discussion forum d. essays on a selected topic
st? Please mark 3 examples. a. tasks: answer the questions b. tests/quizzes c. discussion forum d. essays on a selected topic e. ESP Glossary
st? Please mark 3 examples. a. tasks: answer the questions b. tests/quizzes c. discussion forum d. essays on a selected topic e. ESP Glossary f. other types: (please define which)
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- e. English for EAP.....
- f. Others (specify).....
- 9. Other comments and remarks on the course (related to design, implementation, evaluation, and others):

Thank you for your time and attention!

Angielski specjalistyczny i akademicki dla studentów i doktorantów: przygotowywanie materiałów i kursów online

Streszczenie: Design-based research (DBR) polegają na opracowywaniu materiałów z uwzględnieniem silnego związku między badaniami a praktyką edukacyjną. Artykuł ma na celu omówienie kursów online English for Specific Purposes (ESP) i English for Academic Purposes (EAP), przygotowywanych dla studentów studiów magisterskich i doktoranckich w odwołaniu do badań typu DBR. W artykule starano się odpowiedzieć na następujące pytania: Jaki jest model kursu ESP online dla studentów studiów magisterskich? Jaki jest model kursu ESP online dla doktorantów? Zaprezentowano mieszany typ badań, obejmujący badanie ankietowe i analizę autorefleksji. Uzyskane wyniki mogą pomóc w opracowywaniu kolejnych kursów online na poziomie uniwersyteckim.

Słowa klucze: materiały ESP, projektowanie, ewaluacja, kurs zdalny, studenci