

**INVESTIGATING EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF AN ONLINE ENGLISH MODULE IN AN  
OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY**

**by**

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## Declaration

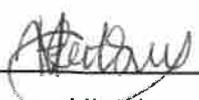
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### **Investigating effective teaching of an online English module in an Open Distance Learning environment: A case study**

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Vivienne Hlatshwayo

24 APRIL 2019  
Date

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

AL	Academic Literacy
CALL	Computer Aided Language Learning
CELFS	Centre for English and Academic Studies
CEMS	Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences
CL	Collaborative Learning
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
COI	Community of Inquiry
COMSA	Communication Science
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EGP	English for General Purposes
ELP	European Language Portfolio
EWP	English Word Power
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ESAP	English for Specific and Academic Purposes
HC	Higher Certificate
LF	Lingua Folio
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MOODLE	Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
ODL	Open Distance Learning
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
SFP	Science Foundation Programme
TBL	Task Based Learning
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFS	University of the Free State
UK	United Kingdom
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria

USA	United States of America
WSU	Walter Sisulu University of Technology
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

## Abstract

In a quest to identify best practices in teaching courses in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), this study investigated effective teaching of an online English module in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) environment. Although ODL is attractive to both students and lecturers, there are significant problems regarding how learning, teaching, interaction and assessment should be conducted in this context. The problems are exacerbated by the limited knowledge of using the online systems and constraints linked to time spent on tasks. The study adopted the qualitative research approach, using a case study design and data collected from three research instruments, namely online questionnaires, an online observation schedule and a content analysis schedule. The research population in the current study comprised students, lecturers, and e-tutors based at one ODL university. In order to engender best practices of effective teaching in an ODL environment, the Community of Inquiry (Col) framework and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory were applied to the research findings of the current study. The findings indicate that effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL context could take place when content is effectively structured; assessment reflects course content; there is teamwork and collaboration amongst lecturers; students effectively interact with the material, lecturers/e-tutors, and with each other. The findings of this study add to the volume of research on best practices for effective online ESP teaching in ODL higher learning institutions.

**Key Terms:** open distance learning (ODL), e-learning, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), portfolio of evidence (PoE), Community of Inquiry (Col) framework, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), teaching and learning, assessment, interaction, interactivity, English language proficiency

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the introduction to the investigation into effective teaching of an online English module in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) environment is provided. This includes the background to the study (§1.2), the statement of the problem (§1.3), the research questions (§1.4) and research objectives (§1.5) that this study sought to address. Importantly, as the research conducted in the current study involved human subjects, before providing the delineation (§1.7), significance (§1.8), a discussion of the ethical considerations (§1.6) is provided. The concepts used in the study are then defined (§1.9), followed by an outline of the entire thesis (§1.10). The concluding section (1.11) is a summary of the whole chapter.

## 1.2 Background to the study

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is a process in which students learn in their own space and with limited face-to-face interaction between the students, the lecturers and the e-tutors. With the onset of electronic learning (e-learning) as an alternative way of learning, ODL and contact delivery institutions have opted to use this learning approach, as it allows them to teach and assess students who may not be available to attend classes due to work commitments or other reasons. However, teaching and learning an online English course in an ODL environment at tertiary level can be both exciting and challenging for lecturers and students alike.

Most students enter a tertiary institution with phlegmatic English language skills and may need face-to-face interaction to engender reassurance regarding their studies. Lecturers may face problems in terms of using effective teaching methods and identifying appropriate learning and assessment material in an ODL context. Brown and Atkins (2002) state that effective teaching requires teachers who know their subject, how to teach it, and how their students learn. Students are also expected to play their role in the process of learning.

However, in some cases, both lecturers and students may not have the necessary skills to deal with the ODL context; and the ODL environment may not be entirely supportive to help students and teachers contribute to effective learning and teaching.

In a South African context, most of those who are charged with the responsibility of managing the economic resources must first acquire economic management knowledge in their university studies through the English language. Warschauer (2000) emphasises economic and employment trends will change the way English is used, in that people will need to use the English language to present ideas and to engage in international collaboration. While Academic Literacy (AL) is more readily accessed in English in most universities, some students may experience problems since English is a second or third language to them. AL is defined as ways of thinking, reading, speaking, and writing characteristic in academic settings; involving ways of receiving knowledge, managing knowledge, and creating knowledge for the benefit of a field of study (Neeley, 2005: 8). This AL problem is exacerbated by the fact that secondary school education in South Africa and in much of Africa has not been effective in producing school leavers who are proficient in English. In this regard, Warschauer (2000:515) encourages teachers to exploit this situation by “creating opportunities for communication based on values, needs of learners, and cultural norms”.

It is against this background that some universities offer first-year students courses such as AL or English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which is directed to a specific discipline or workplace context. Depending on the literacy level and the needs of the students, these courses may be offered at a foundation level to prepare students before they enrol for a diploma or degree. It is against this background that the current study investigates effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL environment. The ESP course, known as English for Economic and Management Sciences, was used for the current case study. English for Economic and Management Sciences was introduced as an online course in an ODL context as part of a foundation programme offered by the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at Unisa.

In this case, the students enrolled in the foundation programme do not meet the mandatory requirements for entry to first year studies at university. This is due to their

poor secondary school leaving results - known as Matric results in South Africa. Such students are therefore required to complete the foundation programme before they can enrol for a degree or diploma in Economic Management Studies. One of the subjects included in the core modules for this foundation programme is English for Economic and Management Sciences. After passing all the modules in the foundation programme, students are awarded a higher certificate qualification, which enables them to register for a degree or diploma in their chosen discipline. The content of this course is included in the module form in Appendix 3.

In recent years, the Department of English Studies, in which this course is offered, has been innovative by collaborating with other faculties. For example, the Department worked with the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Sciences to teach ESP modules relevant to these disciplines. However, the modules were later phased out at the request of the faculties. At that time, the modules were not offered online nor were they designed for under-prepared students. Despite these modules having been phased out, the faculty of Economics and Management Sciences saw a need to empower under-prepared students by adding an English module at the foundation level, specifically for Economics students.

The discontinuation and reintroduction of the modules not only highlight the significance of the problems associated with ESP modules, but also offers an opportunity for an incisive study that investigates best practices in teaching ESP online. Therefore, the present study aims to provide useful insight into addressing this problem. The course under study took place within a period of six months, which is regarded as a single semester at this institution. Registration for and administration of the course started in January, and the next four months (February to May) were dedicated to teaching and completing formative assessment. Summative assessment took place between end of May and June. This means that the learning process ran for three-and-a-half months.

The teaching material utilised during this period comprised a tutorial letter that contained information on the module, a formative and summative assessment, and a study guide that contained the learning content. There were e-tutors who taught and guided students during this period. With all this being in place and with the module

being in its infancy stage, there was a need to reflect on the current approach to teaching and assessment of this module.

Other South African universities have similarly introduced foundation programmes to teach under-prepared students, but use different names for such programmes. Some refer to them as extended or bridging programmes, for example: the University of the Free State has introduced a University Preparation Programme; the University of Cape Town (UCT) use the word 'Foundation' to designate its programme, while Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) and Walter Sisulu University of Technology (WSU) refer to their courses as 'Access' programmes (Career Planet, 2015). All these programmes were introduced to teach and guide under-prepared students to meet the demanding academic requirements in specific fields of study.

The University of South Africa (Unisa) used to admit under-prepared students to a programme known as Access, but it was later phased out. Nevertheless, other similar programmes have been introduced, such as Science Foundation Programme (SFP), English for Law, and English for Economic and Management Sciences. This indicates that programmes such as these constitute a necessary bridge for the mastery of the English language skills identified as a gap in the various disciplines. The course under study - English for Economic and Management Sciences - was introduced to teach under-prepared Economics students registered for a Higher Certificate in Economics Studies. This course is referred to as an ESP course throughout this study.

Interestingly, the problem of under-prepared school leavers is not only prevalent in Africa. Research shows that most second or third language speakers of English who require access to university education are generally under-prepared - even in the United States of America (USA) according to Cederholm (2010). In the USA, community colleges that offer courses for under-prepared students have been in existence since the 1920s and the numbers have increased over the years (Cederholm, 2010). Similarly, the number of under-prepared students has been increasing in South Africa. The term used for classes designed for under-prepared students has shifted from remedial to developmental (Cederholm, 2010), but there may be other terms used to refer to such courses at the foundation level that are offered to under-prepared students.

### 1.3 Statement of the problem

The problem this study sought to address is how best to teach an online ESP module in an ODL context. Several researchers have drawn attention to some of the problems with online teaching and learning. For example, McGreal (2009) acknowledges the significance of online teaching, but points out that as much as successful online teaching is acknowledged and praised, failure in online teaching also deserves attention.

Problems with ESP modules have continued to beset both lecturers and students at some institutions. Some of the problems in teaching an ESP course have included debate about the suitability and expertise of ESP teachers, knowledge and ability to design learning material that balances the requirements of both English and the target subject. In the current study, other problems included technical problems related to teaching ESP modules online; content and material selected for online teaching in an ODL context; accessing an effective system for interactivity; a relevant online assessment method; and time constraints related to offering an online course. Samira Haj Sassi (2015:349) recognises the following:

Most institutions offer very limited planning time before delivering courses. Therefore, planning and designing an appropriate course that suits target ESP groups can be a challenging experience for teachers, who often face various difficulties when trying to develop effective courses that address the specific language and cultural needs of their students.

In addition, most students enrolled in foundation modules enter universities with poor English language skills that obstruct their academic progress. Although not all ESP courses are based in foundation programmes, the ones that are have to deal with students who cannot read or write at the AL levels anticipated in university. Thus, Silaški Đurović (2013:145) points out that some ESP courses have faced problems in “the field of lexis and learning specialised vocabulary of particular science”. Therefore, the problems indicated above have led to an investigation into the effectiveness of teaching an online English module in ODL.

Most South African institutions have introduced online platforms to foster interaction between participants, and these can only be accessed by registered students and lecturers at the institution enrolled in. The institutions use different names for these platforms, for example, the University of Pretoria (UP) refers to its online platform as 'click up'. Similarly, the institution at which the current research was conducted has an online platform known as 'myUnisa', which is referred to in this report as the course site, course website or online platform. The Unisa online platform was designed to enable interaction between participants registered in a specific course, i.e. interaction between students, student interaction with the material, interaction between students and lecturers, and interaction between members of the teaching team.

Although this online platform appears to be a viable tool for both lecturers and students, a significant problem in this context is the 'how' with regard to learning, teaching, assessment and implementation. This is exacerbated by limited knowledge of using the system and time constraints, as indicated above. As the teaching and assessment process takes place in three-and-a-half months, it is possible that by the time students begin to understand how to access the system and comprehend the content, there is already insufficient time to deal with the content because the deadline for submission of the summative assessment is looming. In addition, problems related to the system add to the problems of teaching an online course effectively, for instance, the system may be unresponsive at times.

The other pertinent problem relates to identifying relevant online assessment tools. In the course under study, summative assessment is non-venue based and takes the form of an e-portfolio of evidence. However, the technicalities involved in delivering an appropriate interactive Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) may be a problematic. Raith and Hegelheimer (2010:157) point out that e-portfolio may include "video-based self-reflection, a web-based community of peers and feedback of a supervisor". Although an e-portfolio is reflective in nature, it is not known whether the course under study achieved this reflexivity, since the course only used the e-portfolio at the end of the learning process. Another problem is that with non-venue based assessment, the teaching team cannot guarantee that students write their own e-portfolios, i.e. there is a possibility that a family member or friend with more knowledge of the subject writes for the student.

In summary, the discussion in this section has provided an outline regarding problems related to online teaching in ODL environment, and with teaching ESP courses. Teaching online in ODL has certain problems and there is no guarantee that the specific outcomes in a course will be achieved. The problems that both the students and the teaching team face are numerous; if these problems are allowed to persist, effective teaching in the context of ODL may be compromised. It is within this context that the current study sought to investigate effective teaching of an online English module in ODL.

#### **1.4 Research questions of the study**

The present study is an empirical case study of an ESP module offered online in an ODL context. The most relevant questions asked start with how, who and why (Farquhar, 2012). However, the nature of the research problem in this study (i.e. establishing ways of effectively teaching an online ESP course) dictated that the focus should be on 'how' questions. Therefore, the following primary and secondary research questions were posed:

##### **1.4.1 Primary research question**

The primary research question is: How can an online ESP module be taught effectively in an ODL context?

##### **1.4.2 Secondary research questions**

The secondary research questions are as follows:

- How should the content of an online ESP be structured for successful delivery in an ODL context?
- How should interaction take place amongst students, between students and lecturers, amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors, and students with materials in an ODL context?
- How is the online ESP portfolio conducted in an ODL context?

Answers to these important questions assisted me in gaining significant insight into the research problem.

## **1.5 Research objectives of the study**

The aim of this study is to investigate effective approaches for use when teaching an online ESP module in ODL. The objectives of the study are set to:

- Conduct content analysis of the material used in the online English for Economic and Management Sciences course.

To achieve this objective, the materials (module form, tutorial letter, study guide and marked PoEs) utilised in the course are analysed, using a content analysis schedule to interrogate the data relevant to this specific objective. A questionnaire is used to obtain data from students, lecturers and e-tutors. The second objective is set to:

- Investigate interaction in an online English for Economic and Management Sciences module amongst students, between students and lecturers, amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors, and students with materials.

To achieve this objective, interaction between the participants on the course website for the current module is observed using an observation schedule for guidance towards the data relevant to this specific objective. Furthermore, questionnaires are used to collect data relevant to this objective. The third objective of this study is set to:

- Investigate the approach used for the online ESP portfolio assessment.

To achieve this objective, material (module form, tutorial letter, study guide and marked e-portfolios) used in the course are analysed.

Questionnaires are used to collect data from students, lecturers and e-tutors in a bid to achieve the three objectives stated above. In addition, the content analysis schedule is used to obtain data from marked PoEs and the tutorial letter, which contained information regarding assessment.

## **1.6 Research ethics**

Any research that involves human subjects as participants should take into consideration ethical issues, especially in a learning and teaching context.

According to Creswell (2012), in a qualitative study, the procedures used to collect data should be determined with sensitivity to the problems and ethical issues involved in gathering information. Because the current study involved human subjects (students, lecturers and e-tutors), ethical clearance (Appendix 1) was sought from and granted by the institution at which the data was collected.

Once permission to conduct the study was granted, a questionnaire was sent to participants, accompanied by a letter of consent. The participant clicked on 'submit' to indicate that they were willing participants in the research, and were not coerced. The letter of consent provided information about the research, what it entailed and noted that the study would not pose any harm to the participants. Participants were also informed they had the right not to take part in the research or to withdraw their participation at any time, if they so wished. The researcher also had access to the identity and contact details of participants whose information was used for the sole purpose of sorting information. The identities of all participants and research sites remain confidential. The researcher has taken full responsibility for securing the information obtained for research purposes and all the information was disposed of responsibly. In this regard, anonymity was strictly ensured in the current study.

### **1.7 Delineation of the study**

The primary objective of the current study is to determine effective ways of teaching an English module online. The secondary objectives address issues related to the material and how the content should be structured; how interaction should take place between participants; and how the process of summative assessment should be conducted. The target group comprised students registered for the foundation programme offered by CEMS in 2017, lecturers and e-tutors active in this course.

### **1.8 Significance of the study**

The purpose of the research study is to provide insight that facilitates the resolution of the lingering problems in the field of online ESP teaching in an ODL context. Online learning provides a unique opportunity for students to learn and interact with lecturers

and counterparts without being in the same room with them. However, ODL faces the problem of delivering quality learning and assessment in contexts where there are a large number of students enrolled in a course - hence the current study. Another problem is that unless ESP courses are taught effectively at university level, the risk is higher that students plagiarise the work of others and complete their studies without acquiring the skills necessary for academic success and career.

This study significantly contributes to determining best practices in effective teaching of an ESP course in an ODL context. In this sense, these are the new insights the study generates on the topic. The results of this research study are significant in that they allow a re-appraisal of the way in which ESP courses are delivered in an ODL context. In this regard, this case study serves as an in-depth enquiry applicable to any similar ODL context.

## **1.9 Definition of concepts**

The definition of the concepts used in the study begin with effective teaching in what follows.

### **1.9.1 Effective teaching**

As indicated in the topic, the study sought to investigate effective teaching of an online English module in ODL. In their description of effective teaching, Brown and Atkins (2002:1) point out: "To teach effectively one must know one's subject, know how students learn and how to teach". Therefore, 'effectiveness' is conceptualised in this thesis as lecturers and tutors having deep knowledge of the subject matter, of how to teach that subject and of how students learn English in an interactive online mode.

### **1.9.2 Online learning**

Online learning refers to using technology as the means of communication within a learning environment (Ashuja'a, 2011). In the current research, the course under study

was offered online: the teaching, learning and assessment process was conducted via the online platform and email, which meant that access to the internet was required.

### **1.9.3 Open distance learning**

The University of South Africa describes ODL as “a different way of learning...there is a physical distance between you and your university...In distance learning, YOU are responsible for planning your studies and managing your time effectively. You do not attend daily lectures. You learn from a distance and you connect to the university mostly via the internet” ([www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za), 2018). The ESP course investigated in this study is offered within the ODL context where the majority of the participants are not in the same physical space.

### **1.9.4 English for Specific Purposes**

Day and Krzanowski (2011) define ESP as a process of teaching and learning specific skills and the language needed to prepare or assist a learner function effectively at work. The course under study, English for Economics, is viewed as ESP because the course was tailor-made for a specific group of students registered in the Economics discipline.

### **1.9.5 Portfolio of evidence**

Shin (2013:359) describes a POE as an informative tool that provides “an ongoing, cumulative record of language development, insight into individual progress, and tangible, sharable evidence”. In the current study, summative assessment was non-venue based and included an e-portfolio.

## **1.10 Outline of the thesis**

An outline of the chapters of the thesis is provided in the following segment.

**Chapter 1** introduces the study as an investigation into effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL environment. The chapter includes the background to the study, research methodology, statement of the problem, research questions and

objectives. This chapter also includes a brief discussion of ethical considerations, delineation and significance of the study. The main concepts of the topic are also defined in order to locate the topic in the broader context of the study before a breakdown of the chapters.

In **Chapter 2**, the focus is on the explication of the literature review and the conceptual linkages of the theories (ZPD theory and Col framework) to effective teaching of online ESP. The chapter includes an integrative review of the literature on historical perspectives of online ESP teaching in the South African ODL context, what effective online ESP teaching and assessment entail, interaction and its implications for the online learning and teaching.

The purpose of **Chapter 3** is to demonstrate the rigour involved in this investigation into effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL environment. It reinforces the literature review chapter by justifying the qualitative research methodology used in executing the research. To this end, a case study approach set within a qualitative methodology was used to execute the current study. The research objectives are presented, as well as the research paradigms. Then, a discussion of the research design is also presented, followed by the ethical considerations.

**Chapter 4** presents the findings from the data collected using the observation schedule, interview questionnaires and content analysis schedule. The emerging themes from the findings are identified in this chapter.

**Chapter 5** serves the purpose of fulfilling the objectives of the study by synthesising the key findings arising from Chapter 4, with respect to the research questions of the current study. A discussion of the themes emerging from the data is provided, to which the larger concepts and theories are linked. Applying insight gained from the ZPD theory, the Col framework and the key literature to the empirical study allows the study to reach important conclusions and make recommendations for effective online ESP teaching in an ODL context.

Furthermore, the final chapter reflects on the significance of the findings, which allows for a re-evaluation of effective teaching in ESP courses delivered in an ODL context.

The chapter then draws the conclusions and recommendations for effective online ESP teaching in an ODL context. In this regard, the chapter contributes insight into resolving the problems in the field of online ESP teaching in ODL contexts and close the knowledge gap. The thesis closes with a list of references and appendices.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

The opening chapter introduced the topic of the study and briefly described the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, and research objectives. The ethical considerations, delineation and significance of the study were also addressed. Chapter 1 also defined the concepts utilised in the topic and provided an outline of all the chapters constituting the study. The next chapter reviews the literature, describes the theoretical framework and conceptual framework relevant to the current study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter introduced the research topic of investigating effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL environment. In this chapter, a review of the literature (§2.2) pertinent to the current study is provided, followed by the theoretical framework (§2.3). The conceptual framework (§2.4) that forms the basis of the study is then provided, before the chapter is concluded (§2.5).

### **2.2 Review of the literature**

The review of the literature begins with a historical overview of ESP.

#### **2.2.1 Historical overview of ESP**

With the many changes that have occurred at South African tertiary institutions and the need to fit into the global world, it is imperative for ESP scholars to conduct research studies in the area of ESP online in an ODL context. Moreover, it is appropriate for ODL institutions to be leaders at the cutting edge of strategies in teaching ESP modules effectively. According to Silaški and Đurović (2013:144), ESP:

has established itself as a discipline that can successfully adjust to current social trends and incorporate the latest theoretical and methodological solutions in the field of linguistics, and applied linguistics in particular.

Starfield (2014) emphasises that ESP goes beyond descriptions of texts, to exploring advanced academic literacies, and understanding the complexities of ESP language use in different contexts. Straszniczky (2010) posits that offering an accurate definition of ESP may not be simple since different people may not view the specifics of a course in the same ways. Some researchers have attempted to define ESP based on its characteristics. For example, Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) suggest that an ESP definition has to distinguish between absolute and variable characteristics.

In terms of absolute characteristics, the English language teaching (ELT) should be designed to meet the student's needs, and should include content and jargon related to specific disciplines. In terms of variable characteristics, however, the argument is that ESP should not be restricted to a specific or prescribed methodology.

Kotze (2007) suggests that the three essentials of ESP teaching are authentic material, purpose-related context, and self-directed learning. Day and Krzanowski (2011) define ESP as a process of teaching and learning specific skills and language needed to prepare a learner to function effectively at work. In the same vein, Straszniczky (2010) emphasises that, in ESP teaching, "The language itself need not be specific, but the practices in relation to the language do". In this instance, the course under study is known as English for Economic and Management Studies. It is also evident that ESP has a specific identified audience and needs in terms of the learning and teaching process.

Swales (1984) cautions researchers not to focus on the 'here and now', but to rather pay attention to previous work and research conducted in the ESP movement as such precursors in research are more beneficial in shaping ESP pedagogy and practices today. Swale's (1984) statement is consistent with the value of a historical perspective that helps in identifying research gaps and making recommendations for future research. It also fits with theories of critical literacy, which draw attention to appreciating previous work done by other researchers, which 'allows the reader to pay tribute to what is already known about phenomena,' before adding to that body of knowledge (Nchindila, 2016:57).

Research in ESP also demonstrates that more studies have been done at an international level than within the South African context. Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991:302) observed that some countries have produced their own ESP texts, which reflect the norms of local speech and discourse communities because of internal language needs. Nchindila (2016:119) adds, "It is a pity that there has been very little serious scholarship on ESP in sub-Saharan Africa". He maintains that ESP would offer 'incomparable benefits to both students and their lecturers or tutors when configured from a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) perspective". Indeed, with the many changes that have occurred at South African tertiary institutions and the

need to fit into the global world, it is imperative for ESP scholars to conduct research studies in the area of ESP online and ESP in an ODL context. Therefore, it is fitting to discuss a brief history of ESP in South Africa and its relevance to online teaching.

### **2.2.2 Online ESP teaching in the South African ODL context**

In post-apartheid South Africa, an interesting quantitative study was done by Venzke (2002), who investigated the possible correlation between learners' English proficiency and academic success in one module (Internal Auditing 1) at a South African Technikon. A questionnaire was used to gather data on the learner's background, experience of learning English and their views on Internal Auditing 1 as a subject. To determine English proficiency levels, the learner's Grade 12 results in English plus their English proficiency and English writing performance tests were used as instruments.

Venzke (2002) found that the students' own perceptions of their English proficiency contradicted both the Grade 12 results and the English proficiency test they wrote at the Technikon. Most learners had indicated that their proficiency skills were average or above average, while their Grade 12 results and English proficiency test results indicated that their level of proficiency in English was significantly lower than their individual perceptions reflected. Furthermore, learners reported that they did not find the English used in internal auditing difficult, but most of them failed the subject. Based on these findings, Venzke (2002) concluded that no significant correlation could be made between students' English proficiency levels and their academic success in Internal Auditing 1. Furthermore, possible problems could have been the level of language used by the lecturers, the language used in the tests and examinations, the way that the tests and examinations were marked, and rote learning.

Although Venzke's (2002) study did not find a correlation between learners' English proficiency at tertiary level and their high failure rate in Grade 12), it is evident that there was a significant problem that the study sought to resolve. The possible problems mentioned in Venzke's conclusion might be prevalent in the current study, since the students were enrolled in a foundation programme for under-prepared

students. ESP is about providing a course in a specific language with specific content relevant to a specific target group; therefore, language and content aspects cannot be separated. Furthermore, a student's English language proficiency cannot be compromised at this point in the student's academic career.

Kotze's (2007) study focused on developing a framework for writing of ESP study guides and the findings differ slightly to those of Venzke's (2002). The aims of Kotze's (2007) study were to determine the perceptions and concerns of students using one of the study guides at a South African university; and to create a framework for writing ESP study guides. Kotze (2007) used a one-shot cross-sectional survey design, with participants receiving a questionnaire containing a number of questions regarding a printed interactive study guide. The respondents included 185 first-year students and their 2 lecturers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the course of four weeks, with both learners (who were randomly arranged in groups of five and ten) and lecturers.

To analyse the selected ESP interactive study guides, Kotze (2007) used the framework developed by Academic Services. The study guides were analysed by the researcher using descriptive statistics. The study found that the learners confirmed they could use the study guide for autonomous self-directed learning, and were positive that it enhanced the learning process. However, they were not happy with the delayed and sometimes lack of feedback from lecturers regarding content in the study guide. In addition, problems regarding the method of assessment seemed to feature in both the Venzke (2002) and Kotze (2007) studies. For example, Venzke's (2002) study draws attention to the method of assessment as a possible cause for the poor results in Auditing 1, while Kotze's results drew attention to learners who were unhappy with insufficient, delayed and sometimes lack of feedback on assessment.

The findings in both Venzke and Kotze's studies are relevant to the current study. The aims of the current study include analysing the content of the ESP material offered in the course under study and investigating the interaction between participants on the course. Therefore, the current study sought to identify best practices with regard to the assessment of e-portfolios, making the current study one that builds on the two studies reviewed.

Another significant ESP study done in South Africa is that of Nchindila (2007), whose focus was on conditions for successful online mentoring. The aim of this study was to determine the conditions for successful online mentoring in order to develop writing skills in English in a workplace setting. At the end of the programme, all activities were incorporated in electronic portfolios. Nchindila (2007) used a case study approach and collected data using the quantitative approach and the questionnaire tool. Two types of questionnaires were designed to obtain data from 49 learners and 14 mentors, who served as tutors within the programme.

Nchindila's (2007) findings showed that 46 learners started the programme but only 14 out of the cohort remained on the programme and finished the course. Additionally, none of the learners managed to progress from the Elementary Level and complete the Advanced Level. In addition, there was a lack of agreement regarding the material and the approach used by the training providers, which led to disagreement about the standards used in assessing the English language skills of L2 learners. Learners did not trust their mentors to grade their work as tutors were viewed as the authority to decide on final marks.

Another revelation in Nchindila's (2007) study was that although a needs analysis was conducted, the programme failed to include tasks that were relevant to the learners' occupation. Nchindila (2007) also reported that some learners did not have the required computer hardware and software - hence they did not have the necessary skills to demonstrate the computer tasks involved in communicating effectively online with their mentors (2007). Based on these findings, the study concluded that learners needed a high level of motivation in order to succeed in the programme. Moreover, in order to maintain a stable relationship between students and their mentors, it was suggested that a computer skills course for students should also be provided, since communication was done using computers.

Although Nchindila's (2007) study was conducted a decade ago, it is pertinent to the current study as it focussed on ESP for workplace participants using a blended approach of online and face-to-face learning. This was one of the earliest studies to highlight the problems associated with online ESP teaching in post-apartheid South Africa. In a case study done on an international e-learning training division, McGreal

(2009) points out that academic failure such as that identified in Nchindila's study should be taken into consideration and addressed. Since Nchindila's (2007) study provided an evaluation of a project that took place more than a decade ago, it would be interesting to establish whether some of the problems that were identified then are still current. The current study seeks to fill this research gap by addressing some of the problematic areas revealed in Nchindila's (2007) study.

Ngoepe's (2011) survey on the state of ESP courses at South African tertiary institutions followed some few years later. It investigated foundation courses at tertiary institutions in South Africa. She developed a questionnaire and respondents selected whether they would respond telephonically or via electronic mail. The results of Ngoepe's (2011) study revealed that institutions structured foundation courses according to the specific needs of the students. Ngoepe (2011) also described students who were under-prepared for university study, even though these institutions had structured their foundation courses according to what were then perceived as students' needs.

Another interesting point in Ngoepe's (2011) study was that 80% of the respondents spent most of their time on remedial teaching as they were dealing with under-prepared students. She also identified that the majority of the respondents regarded the foundation course as General English, instead of regarding it as ESP. In this matrix, Ngoepe (2011) recommended that the tertiary institutions should address the problems encountered by under-prepared students and appoint ESP or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) lecturers who could prepare ESP courses according to the needs of different cohorts of students admitted to the different faculties. In addition, the study recommended that ESP courses should be based in the faculties related to the field of study rather than in the English Studies School.

Interestingly, one of Ngoepe's (2011) findings is consistent with those of Nchindila (2007), who stated that some learners felt that the tasks were not relevant to the target subject, even though a needs analysis had been done. Ngoepe's study (2011) also revealed that lecturers claimed to have conducted a needs analysis, yet all the tertiary institutions under study still faced the problem of under-prepared students who struggled throughout the courses. Abedeen (2015) points out that most students enter

tertiary level education without the necessary communicative skills in English - hence some institutions opt for placement tests to determine the student's entry level skills in English.

The problem in the course under study is that there is limited time to teach and assess students; as a result, students who enter without the necessary academic communicative skills might struggle throughout the semester. Within the advertised six months, this course offers only four months for teaching, learning and formative assessment. This is because the teaching process usually starts in February and ends sometime in May to accommodate summative assessment, which takes place between May and June. Therefore, even if rigorous needs analysis was conducted, it would be problematic to address individual such diverse needs within the stipulated time for actual course content delivery.

Ngoepe's (2011) recommendation regarding appointment of language specialists with relevant teaching skills in ESP courses draws attention to the lack of relevant expertise in teaching online ESP in ODL context. The ESP practitioners, their background in teaching and level of expertise play an important role in the successful delivery of an ESP course. There may be other ESP studies that have been conducted in South Africa, however, the problematic areas identified in Venzke (2002), Nchindila (2007), Kotze (2007), and Ngoepe (2011) provide a historical overview of what is known about ESP teaching, generally, in South Africa.

Research on ESP indicates that for effective teaching to take place, elements such as needs assessment, content-based teaching, content area informed instructors and portfolio assessment should form part of the teaching and assessment process. The effectiveness and relevance of these elements have sparked debate, as have definitions and implementation (Belcher, 2006; Ahmad, 2012; Krzanowski, 2014). Although the reviewed studies have drawn attention to some of the problems and gaps, research in effective teaching of ESP online in an ODL context is still lacking.

What the present study sought to do was to address the research questions, which probed how an ESP course should be taught effectively online. In the quest to find answers to the research questions of the study, the following actions were taken:

analyse the content of ESP materials prepared for online teaching; investigate how interaction takes place amongst students, between students and lecturers, amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors, and students' interaction with the learning materials. An investigation on approaches used in the assessment of online portfolios was also conducted. Consequently, the current study sought to shift the focus from recounting existing problems to offering possible solutions to the problems experienced in the effective teaching of ESP online in an ODL context.

### **2.2.3 Effective teaching of ESP online**

This section explores the concepts linked to the current study, starting with a general discussion of ESP teaching online. The discussion also looks into the ESP practitioner and needs assessment as some of the important elements that should be considered in ESP teaching.

Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) point out that the demand for ESP courses has grown internationally, even though it is still not clear how specific these courses should be and if the way they are structured qualifies them as ESP courses. Moreover, the interest in what is happening in the ESP classroom continues to grow in this area of study (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015; Swales, 1984). Therefore, the starting point is to look into ESP teachers and the expectations held of them.

#### **2.2.3.1 Online ESP practitioner's knowledge of content**

Teaching has evolved from approaches that go beyond instruction in a classroom environment to blended learning, where learners are exposed to both face-to-face and online interaction. Due to the demand for ESP courses in workplaces, some institutions have opted to offer ESP online, instead of offering a blended learning option. The problem at this point is that most teachers struggle to incorporate content of English with content from an unfamiliar discipline when they teach an ESP course. Based on his experience as an ESP practitioner, Johns (1997: 366) describes an ESP practitioner as a "researcher who analyses texts, needs assessments, and other studies before designing their curricula". Robinson (1991) describes an ESP

practitioner as someone who has knowledge of the student's special interest discipline, language, and has respect for these students. Master (1997) adds that an ESP teacher is a language teacher who has trained in the area of specialisation, since ESP teacher education is limited in most countries. Gatehouse (2001:1) offers an extended description of an ESP practitioner as a "teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher, evaluator".

To shed light on the role of an ESP teacher in an ELT environment, Alibakhshi, Ali and Padiz (2011) distinguish between ESP teachers and EGP teachers. The difference between ESP practitioners and teachers of English is that the former are not trained in ESP, while the latter are trained to teach EGP (Alibakhshi, Ali and Padiz, 2011). The problem at this point is that most teachers are skilled in teaching EGP, so when they find themselves having to teach unfamiliar content from other disciplines, they may feel a need to do what they think is best at the time of teaching (Ahmad, 2012).

Greenall (1981: 25) also draws attention to the 'bicycle pump' syndrome, which relates to a situation in which language teachers and course designers choose to use inappropriate language or skills to help them teach only what they understand. With so many foundation programmes that require support from ESP, it is vital that lecturers understand their role, the reason for offering such a course, and the methods best suited in executing the task.

In the findings contained in Abedeen's (2015) study, it was discovered that ESP practitioners believed that their expertise in language teaching was sufficient to teach an ESP course. However, they added that an orientation course and an in-service training course in ESP teaching was necessary. The findings in Abedeen's (2015) study also revealed a gap between the teacher's knowledge of theory and practice.

This study is consistent with Alibakhshi, et al.'s (2011) study. According to Alibakhshi, et al. (2011), ESP practitioners, unlike other English Language Teachers (ELT), need to be trained in ESP teaching, so that they can comprehend content from unfamiliar disciplines. Abedeen's (2015) study provides good examples of the problems experienced by most ESP practitioners. In most cases, it is either lecturers who find

themselves uncomfortable, or students who lack the basic skills in certain aspects of discipline-specific language.

Robinson (1991) argues that there is no ideal description of an ESP teacher's role and views the role as a contested one, and the ongoing debate about who should teach ESP cannot be ignored. Since the course under study was only three years old when the current research was conducted, it was unknown whether the course was experiencing similar problems indicated in the reviewed literature above.

### **2.2.3.2 Training for ESP practitioners**

Despite the clear description of an ESP teacher, Anthony (2007) points out three problems that prevent successful teaching of ESP: lack of expertise to teach ESP; busy or unwilling field experts (who are not language experts); and lack of knowledge regarding the strengths and weaknesses of students' language skills. Although it is known that the lecturers in the course under study are experts in the discipline of ELT, it is not known whether they possess knowledge about the Economics discipline for which the language course is offered.

In his exploration of the nature of AL interventions at South African universities, with specific reference to generic and discipline-specific content, Butler (2013:77) found that "generic language support is not adequate and specific enough for the kinds of language required in specific disciplines." Consequently, language specialists need to be innovative in developing an "applied approach relevant to a specific discipline" to compensate for their lack of specific subject competence and for meaningful communication (Tabatabaei & Mokhtari, 2014; Kotecha & Rutherford, 1991: 101).

Micic and Vekaric's (2011) study on how English for Specific and Academic Purposes (ESAP) teachers should be trained attempts to address the questions of how an English language teacher could prepare for ESAP teaching, and if there is an adequate model that could be proposed. Micic and Vekaric (2011) argue that there need not be formal training for English language teachers, as long as they have an understanding of the subject area and an interest in the way in which the subject

specialists work. Furthermore, the specialist knowledge that the learner brings would be the most important resource in the ESAP environment. In their conclusion, Micic and Vekaric, (2011) proposed that there should be training in the methodology of teaching ESP and collaboration between subject specialists and students should be encouraged.

Micic and Vekaric's (2011) point regarding the importance of the subject knowledge that learners bring into the learning environment connects well with the constructivist theory. The constructivist theory emphasises that students learn best when they bring in their own knowledge for immediate application and to acquire personal meaning (Mohamed, 2004). Anthony (2007) acknowledges that learners may possess greater knowledge about the core concepts of the specialist subject - from which teachers can learn. However, it may be argued that first-year learners, who are fresh from secondary level school, and who have no experience with ESP and ODL matters, would still rely on their teacher's knowledge to guide them throughout the learning process. Furthermore, Grobler (1991) states that tertiary level students are prepared to communicate with lecturers who already have answers related to content in their prospective work environment.

Regarding teacher training for online teaching, McAllister and Graham (2016) conducted a study that used the content analysis approach to examine the extent to which tertiary institutions prepare teachers to function in online or blended classroom learning environments. The study revealed that nine out of fifty states in the USA had multiple institutions offering online teaching certificates or classes. Furthermore, prospective student teachers were required to possess previous online experience in order to enrol for these programmes. The programmes also focused on online/blended learning and its foundations, as well as on instructional design. However, the programmes did not offer curriculum for online privacy, acceptable use policies, safety, and legal issues - which should form part of an online teaching curriculum. These researchers concluded that in order to provide a foundation for future online preparation courses and programmes, more investigation should be conducted in this field as teaching in an ODL environment is complex and growing.

McAllister and Graham's (2016) study is relevant to the current study as it supports online education for those who are entrusted with teaching in an ODL context. At this point, it was not known whether the teachers offering this ESP course possessed the necessary skills to teach an ESP course in an ODL environment. There seems to be agreement amongst researchers that a good starting point for ESP teachers and those who teach online would be to offer some training (McAllister & Graham, 2016; Micic & Vekaric, 2011; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991). Therefore, any action taken regarding ESP teacher-training programmes that would help prepare teachers for successful ESP teaching in various subjects and for teaching online should be welcomed.

### **2.2.3.3 Teamwork and collaboration between online ESP practitioners**

ESP researchers and language specialists have been concerned with addressing problems related to teamwork and collaboration in designing ESP material. Devlin's (2011) study investigated designing appropriate ESP material for an ESP group. The study also reflected on issues involved in creating an ESP book. Data used in this study was from an in-house study book produced for Saudi Arabian students who were learning English and training in operating rooms at one of the Military Hospitals in Riyadh. The results revealed that teamwork was essential for material development. Devlin (2011) concluded that although designing good materials may be a problematic, teamwork, applying different approaches in designing material, evaluation and reflection might yield significantly positive results. Since the content of the course under study was centred on Economics and the English language, there was an interest in how teamwork worked during the process of designing the materials used in the course.

Anthony (2007:3) points out that the success of ESP design and teaching lies in the adoption of the approach referred to as 'the teacher as student'. This approach refers to teachers acknowledging their shortcomings, so that they can address them, sometimes with the help of their students. Another point made, which links to Anthony's (2007) observation, suggests that cooperation between field experts and ESP practitioners could lead to effective teaching of ESP courses.

Other early researchers have also suggested that teamwork could be the answer to effective ESP teaching (Greenall, 1981 and Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991). For example, these researchers suggest that a shift from using the preposition 'for' in English for Economics, to using the preposition 'with' – English with Economics - would be a good starting point for teamwork between English and Economics teachers (Greenall, 1981). This means that the English language teachers would work with the Economics specialist on the ESP module. In the current study, it was unknown whether teamwork existed between lecturers assigned to teach the ESP and other lecturers from the Economics discipline.

A good example of teamwork is evident in Richards' (1997) study on teachers of English for specific purposes. This study looked at ESP teachers reviewing their work in teaching ESP. The study was conducted over 15 months in a small language school. Although Richards was a participant of the study (teacher and observer), he also focused on two ESP practitioners. One of the most striking findings was that teamwork was obvious with the ESP teachers. Although they shared the common room with other English teachers, they had their own corner with 'specialist materials' where they shared ideas about their area of specialisation. Richards concluded that any claims to effective teacher education should be investigated thoroughly within the specific context and environment. It is also against this background that the course under study looked into interaction between members of the teaching team.

Flowerdew (2013: 325) draws attention to the interrelated stages of course development that an ESP practitioner should take into consideration: "needs analysis, followed by curriculum design, material selection, methodology, assessment and evaluation". However, it is still not known whether teamwork and training are sufficient components to ensure successful delivery of an ESP module in an ODL context. In the next section, an examination of how needs assessment contributes to effective teaching an ESP course is conducted.

#### **2.2.4 Needs assessment in ESP**

According to Belcher (2006), needs assessment in ESP is the foundation on which all decisions regarding the teaching and learning process should be constructed.

Consequently, the key features of an ESP course design should be based on what students need to be taught to prepare them for their studies in their chosen field (Basturkmen, 2006). Flowerdew (2013: 325) views needs analysis as the first step in ESP teaching as it is meant to be used to discover the 'what' and 'how' of a course. Flowerdew adds that needs analysis should be a continuous exercise, as teachers may modify their teaching once they get to know more about the students. In addition, needs assessment has yielded positive results with numerous ESP courses (Chovancová, 2015). However, needs assessment would have to be approached in a different way with pre-service students who might have to identify future needs.

Swales (1984) cautions that what happens in one institution in a specific year may not be the same in other institutions. This means, for example, that the needs of ESP first-year students at one institution may differ from those of a similar group at another institution. What this means is that lecturers should not just conclude that offering a module containing what worked previously would yield the same results.

Ahmad (2012) also states that ESP courses might have been based mainly on teachers' intuitions of students' needs, but that would not constitute effective teaching. It is against this background that Ahmad (2012) emphasises the importance of needs assessment and its significance in establishing what to include and how an ESP course should be designed to cater for a specific group of students. Unlike other ESP modules that are offered face-to-face or in blended approach, the ESP module under study is taught online to underprepared students, which makes the needs assessment even more imperative.

The results of Tabatabaei and Mokhtari's (2014) study on ESP learners' perceptions of ESP programme problems at Iranian universities revealed that success with learning ESP was related to learners' needs and to their professional needs being met. Tabatabaei and Mokhtari's (2014) aim was to examine problems experienced with an ESP programme in Iran, with the focus directed at the perceptions of ESP teachers and learners'. Although needs analysis is crucial and should be conducted, as indicated above, some of the studies discussed earlier (Kotze, 2007; Nchindila, 2007; Ngoepe 2011) have also demonstrated that conducting a needs analysis does not always lead to a successful ESP programme. This means that the lack of success in

offering an ESP course could be based on other factors, which might have been missed in the preparation for the course.

Dudzik and Dzieciol-Pedich's (2014) study on what students need between ESP and EGP draws attention to student expectations that might not have been considered during the planning process. This study compared the ESP language needs of students at two universities in Bialystok using a questionnaire. They discovered that students expected that the ESP classes would help them develop their speaking skills and knowledge of specialist vocabulary. Secondly, they wanted a curriculum that included both EGP and ESP, instead of having ESP as the only focus. In their conclusion, Dudzik and Dzieciol-Pedich (2014) recommended that both EGP and ESP instruction should be simultaneously taken into consideration. Although it sounds reasonable for students to expect both ESP and EGP to cater for their social and educational needs, one could argue that ESP and EGP are put in place for specific purposes. Therefore, it may not be ideal for a short course to cater for both EGP and ESP if the objective is to offer ESP for a specific context. It is also problematic if students' needs differ from lecturers' aims, as this may lead to conflict and dissatisfaction.

Dudzik and Dzieciol-Pedich's (2014) study is consistent with that of Robinson (1991), who indicated that within the process of needs assessment, there is a contrast between objectivity (which is perceived by the teacher) and subjectivity (usually perceived by the student). Robinson indicates that some learners may still have a clear view of what they want from a course as indicated in Dudzik and Dzieciol-Pedich's (2014) study. For example, students may have a need to develop their confidence, which is a valid need, but the teacher may not view this as an objective need or an urgent one in this context. Furthermore, subjective aims, which may be viewed as personal needs, may not relate to the requirements of the course. This may also lead to conflict between students and lecturers, as both parties want their needs to be met. Another empirical study that is apparently consistent with Robinson's first point is one by Lourens (1993). The aim of Kotze's study (1993) was to determine students' needs and establish their feelings of isolation from other students and the institution. This study comprised a questionnaire survey and structured interviews. In the findings, the majority of the respondents highlighted the need to interact through group meetings,

open days and seminars, while some wanted to be supported by lecturers through 'encouragement, reassurance and motivation'. Furthermore, a few of the respondents wanted guidance and detailed feedback on assessment, and emotional support from both lecturers and family. This study demonstrates the extent to which student needs vary and which, at times, may not be easy to address.

Most of the respondents' needs identified in Lourens' (1993) study seem more objective than subjective; therefore, these needs should be expected and could be regarded as relevant and necessary in any teaching context. These results are also similar to those in Kotze's (2007) study, where learners' needs, which could also be viewed as being objective, were not met due to delayed feedback and sometimes a lack of feedback from their lecturers. Delayed feedback or a lack of it ties in with lack of support and guidance, which means that lecturers may not be doing what is expected of them. In most of the studies reviewed above, the problem was that although a needs assessment was conducted, the needs were not implemented at the delivery stage of the module content.

The literature reviewed demonstrates that it is necessary to conduct a needs assessment to ensure a successful ESP course. However, lecturers and teachers cannot use their intuition to identify the needs of their students (Ahmad, 2012). The current teaching and learning environment requires both teacher and learner willing to go beyond the classroom environment and becoming technologically skilled in order to obtain the requisite information. However, as indicated earlier, this can only happen once both teachers and students understand the processes in ODL environment and are willing to implement the results, regardless of the high demands therein.

In summary, it is also important to consider that needs assessment has become increasingly sophisticated, and educators need to be aware of this and know how to meet the needs within a course. Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) also point out that although needs assessment is significant in ESP teaching, content-based teaching has also been viewed as being at the centre of ESP teaching. It is, therefore, fitting that this study also examine the material used in the module under study, bearing in mind that it is the ESP teachers' responsibility to prepare such material. This also serves as an attempt to get insight into best practices in delivering a well-rounded ESP

module online, so that current and future courses could be developed and sustained for many years to come.

### **2.2.5 Content analysis of online ESP materials**

According to Holzweber (2012), the kind of material that lecturers use or develop during the teaching and learning process depends on students' needs. The identified needs would assist lecturers to produce content that is relevant and pertinent to the course. In order to answer the question regarding successful delivery in an ODL context, it is imperative that this study analyse the content of online ESP material, as it attempts to seek answers regarding how ESP content should be organised. Therefore, one of the aims of this study was to identify best practices in developing material for a fully online module within the ODL context.

Coffey (1984:7) draws attention to John Munby's '*Communicative Syllabus Design*' that is viewed as one of the founding patents of theoretical bases in language teaching and ESP. The Communicative Syllabus Design condenses needs analysis and course design into one undertaking. According to Coffey (1984), Munby highlights two problems in offering ESP: the reluctance of lecturers to begin with the student instead of the content; and lack of motivation to identify the communication needs relevant to what is supposed to be taught. Some scholars have raised concern regarding Munby's Communicative Syllabus Design, stating that it is not easy to identify communication needs beforehand because of a lack of time – hence lecturers end up using their intuition (Belcher, 2006). The Communicative Syllabus Design draws attention to the problems faced by ESP teachers, hence in the next section, the teacher is viewed as a student who has to learn new approaches and trends during the design period (Anthony, 2007).

#### **2.2.5.1 ESP practitioner as a 'student' in designing ESP material**

In her discussion of key issues in ESP curriculum development, Gatehouse (2001) addresses the role of the ESP practitioner as a course designer and materials provider. She points out that many ESP instructors are not given enough time to

conduct a needs assessment or materials research and development, which leads to the use of ESP texts that do not specifically meet the needs of the ESP course.

Abedeen (2015) emphasises that ESP teachers should familiarise themselves with the subject specific specialist language, even if they are not required to have the specialized knowledge in the subject. It is in this regard that some researchers (Holzweber, 2012; Anthony 2007) view ESP practitioners as learners in the ESP world of teaching because of the processes involved - researching, getting to understand what they teach and a constant exchange of knowledge between them and students, in order to offer a successful course.

It was also noted in the previous section that some ESP practitioners use their intuition to develop ESP material - an approach that has been criticised by researchers like Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991). In their defence, Holzweber (2012) argues that it may be easier for ESP practitioners, who are native speakers of English, to use their intuition, compared to non-native speakers of English, who might be influenced by their first language (L1).

Despite Holzweber's observation, it may be argued that there is no guarantee that a native speaker who lacks knowledge in offering ESP would offer a successful course, as ESP teaching requires more than language skills. As a result, Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991:307) caution against the "danger of overdependence on the materials writer's intuition regarding what is involved in such activities rather than upon research and analysis of representative discourse".

Gatehouse (2001) also argues that every text contains important information; therefore, an ESP instructor can collate together information from different sources and sometimes design their own special material to create relevant content for a specific group of students. Holzweber (2012:15) reiterates that an ESP practitioner does not necessarily need to be an expert in a specialised area of study to design material, but they should "conduct research, design a curriculum that covers important aspects of the specialist field, terminology, patterns of communication and language used within that specialist field". It is evident that the emphasis is on having an ESP practitioner who is familiar with the specific specialist subject in order to design

relevant material. Once again, attention is drawn to the issue of time constraints, which is prevalent in teaching semester courses.

### **2.2.5.2 Authentic material in online ESP**

Robinson (1991: 54) states that the term authentic material refers to “the use of print, audio, video and pictorial material originally produced for language teaching purposes and specialist areas of study”. Kilickaya (2004) states that the common definition of authentic material relates the use of language in a specific context. Samaranayake (2012:13) points out “authentic materials are practical because they are samples of real language used by real speakers, for real situations, with the key term being reality beyond the classroom”.

When it comes to authentic materials, two important questions that Holzweber (2012:17) asks are “how important is it to find authentic material, and how does one decide whether a text is authentic or not”? Holzweber’s (2012) questions are important, as authenticity is at the heart of ESP materials and research. Straszniczky (2010:35) attempts to simplify the term authenticity by drawing a comparison between authentic texts and ‘genuine text’. In this case, the term ‘genuine text’ applies to texts produced by proficient speakers of English, while ‘authenticity’ applies to the relevance of such a text to the learner. Some problems with ESP materials design include the lack of answers to Holzweber’s questions above.

McBeath’s (2011) paper on creating an ESP courses for Omani Air force technicians outlines the value of using authentic material to facilitate learning. McBeath (2011) emphasises that every effort was made to keep the material authentic, even though there was still a question of what the term authentic meant. Like Micic, Vekaric (2011) and other researchers, McBeath (2011) concurs that students can only authenticate the material when they apply their own interpretation to the texts. McBeath (2011) also draws attention to the point mentioned earlier regarding problems in preparing materials for individuals and a large group of students. A teacher can manage a small group more easily than a large group. The problem with the course under study was that it was online; therefore, lecturers did not have much control over students’ actions, except to outline the requirements of the course in the hope that students would

cooperate. In this regard, there were between three-hundred and four-hundred students enrolled in the course under study. As a result, some students may have accessed the main course website to download the study guide, but failed to access the e-tutor website, where extra supplementary material and links to other internet websites were posted. Therefore, consistency in the material posted online was necessary. As McBeath (2011) cautions, care should be taken when dealing with large groups.

Similarly, Ashuja'a (2011) attempted to identify components to be included in teaching Business English. The results revealed that students, lecturers and employers were not happy with the ESP courses when material was irrelevant and insufficient. Ashuja'a (2011: 135) concluded that the ESP course under investigation should focus on business communication, instead of offering "a store of phrases and idioms". Furthermore, authentic material that would familiarise students with their prospective professions should be included in textbooks. Ashuja'a (2011) also recommends task based learning (TBL) as a practical method to design ESP material and deliver it successfully. With TBL, all the four communication skills are integrated, i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening. The findings in this study draw attention to an important point regarding using 'phrases and idioms' or words from a specific discipline without considering their relevance to the content. This means that material designers cannot use Economics jargon for the sake of meeting the requirements of passing a study guide or assessment tool as authentic ESP materials.

However, Straszniczky (2010:35) draws attention to difficult material, which may also be "culturally specific" and "easily outdated" for a new group of students. In the same vein, Holzweber (2012) warns against direct use of authentic material, which may contain content that is too difficult for students to understand - even for the ESP practitioner. Although emphasis has been placed on the importance of authentic and genuine material, caution must be exercised in identifying this type of material, which might prove to be ineffective if it is not used appropriately (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991; Phillips and Shettlesworth, 1987). Therefore, the suggested solution here is that the lecturer introduces students gradually to some sections of the material, until they are able to grasp the whole text.

Daweti (2003) deals with the diversity of social and technological contexts across regions and continents with regard to ODL programmes. In most ODL institutions, students come from different nationalities with their own preconceived ideas about what they are going to learn. In such cases, their social background and environment may influence their way of viewing things and the content offered in the ESP modules. In the course under study, it was not known whether the participants viewed the material used in the current study as authentic. It is against this background that one of the objectives in the current study sought to understand how the content of an online ESP module should be structured for successful delivery in an ODL context. As indicated earlier, the course under study was offered over a period of four months. This means the time constraints did not allow for gradual introduction of students to the content. Since this module catered for students from different social backgrounds, there was also no time to allow students' cultural background to play a role in how they interpreted the content. Suffice to concede that students' social and technological problems may influence their ways of interpreting content in ESP texts.

### **2.2.5.3 Material that promotes learning and teaching**

Material that promotes learning and teaching should be relevant to the aims of the course, user-friendly and provided in print and online. Mohamed (2004) points out that learning material for ODL must be designed properly to engage the learner and promote learning and teaching. Holzweber (2012:29) points out that before a teacher embarks on an ESP teaching journey, questions regarding the following should be considered: "skills, knowledge, genres and features of a language learner really need to know", followed by an investigation of the availability of relevant data.

Velikaya's (2014) study, on how to make teaching and assessment in ESP more efficient, investigated new approaches to teaching ESP at tertiary level where the existing syllabus of teaching ESP courses is explored. In that study, a questionnaire was prepared and sent to first and second year students in order to identify their needs. In her findings, Velikaya (2014) established that half of the students interviewed emphasised a need for additional professional texts in Economics in their answers. Furthermore, some texts for reading were considered long and had little or no

reference to their specialist subjects. Velikaya (2014) concluded that there is a strong need to reconsider the existing ESP programme on the English for Economics offered at her university to accommodate students' needs and explore new approaches, which could benefit students. Based on this finding, Velikaya (2014) suggested that instead of focusing on the development of new material only, additional activities that include reading and analysis of materials outside the prescribed textbooks could be introduced in an ESP class.

Velikaya's findings regarding the need for additional professional texts indicate unsatisfied students who did not view their texts as being in line with their expectations regarding learning language within the specialist subject (Velikaya, 2014). In addition, long reading texts, with little or no reference made to specialist subjects, was one major problem identified in most ESP material designed in-house. Velikaya's (2014) suggestion to introduce supplementary tasks and activities draws attention to the materials used in the course. The findings of Velikaya's (2014) study are relevant to the current study as the teaching content in the course under investigation was also prepared in-house.

However, it is not known whether the existing course included supplementary materials and tasks in the materials posted online. Velikaya's work could be drawn on by carefully implementing the suggestion of using supplementary tasks with large student intakes. Likewise, preparing materials that promote learning and teaching means having an ESP practitioner who is prepared to conduct research on what is needed, what should happen and how. As Velikaya (2014) posits, students are aware when they are taught or offered learning material that is not relevant to their needs.

To sum up the arguments here, the issues that have been raised in this review regarding student needs have much to do with a topic that is receiving significant attention in both ESP and English as a Second Language (ESL) scholarship. This is referred to as CLIL. Research on CLIL is reviewed in the next section.

#### **2.2.5.4 Content and language integrated learning**

An approach that is fast gaining currency as best practices in both ESP and ESL teaching and learning is CLIL. Holzweber (2012) acknowledges two kinds of content: the carrier content and the real content. These two are interconnected concepts, and problems arise when they are not given the same weighting in ESP teaching.

In some instances, language matters come first, while in other ESP classes content is considered more important. The divide between these two may also stem from the expertise of the lecturer in that class. If the lecturer does not have knowledge in the content subject and has not conducted research beforehand, they might focus on what they know best which is teaching English, and conversely for the content specialist lecturer. To this end, this point is consistent with Abedeen's (2015) study which draws attention to teachers' lack of specific content knowledge. Abedeen (2015) points out that experience plays a big role in teachers' realization that they were supposed to teach language through content, not vice versa. The teachers in Abedeen's (2015) study seemed to have ignored the importance of having a reasonable understanding of some specific concepts related to the students' field of study in order to become better facilitators for the transmission of knowledge. It is against this background that researchers such as Velikaya (2014) express the sentiment that there should be continuous revision of teaching methods and materials and that this should be supported by teamwork between language teachers and ESP practitioners.

In the end, the packaging of the ESP course, including the study material, should complement the outcomes outlined for the ESP module and meet the needs of students (Velikaya, 2014). Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) also point out that it is necessary to research and design relevant material and tasks for students within a specific context. Since the course under study was offered online and the material was accessed on the course website, the next section looks at the concept of Computer Aided Language Learning (CALL) and its relevance to the ODL environment.

### **2.2.5.5 Computer aided language learning**

According to Beatty (2013), CALL is any process in which learners use a computer to improve their language. CALL is viewed as one of the branches of Applied Linguistics, which are still developing. As a result, Beatty (2013:8) describes it as “an amorphous or unstructured discipline, constantly evolving in terms of both pedagogy and technological advances in hardware and software”. CALL is considered practical as it allows students and lecturers to search, identify and download relevant material; interact with other students through the internet and social media. There is a large store of online material, including language quizzes, which may assist both students and teachers during the learning process.

Beatty (2013:8) makes the point that, “Materials for CALL may include those which are purpose-made for language learning and those which adapt existing computer-based materials, video and other materials”. In some cases, and based on the kind of students they teach, some institutions develop their own CALL material. An example of a programme that has included CALL in the learning process is found in Shange’s (2016) study on the English proficiency skills of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) foundation students at a university of technology. In that study, interactive software— known as the English Word Power (EWP) Program was used to provide support to students in terms of language skills. According to Lee (2000:1), the benefits of CALL include “experiential learning, motivation, enhance student achievement, offer authentic materials for study, greater interaction, individualization, independence from a single source of information, and global understanding”. However, computers and cellular phones are not readily available, since not all students can afford them in many African countries. In addition, for students who can afford cellular phones that can access the internet, they may still not be able to access big documents using these phones.

Lee (2000:1) adds that some students might not have the necessary “technical and theoretical knowledge” and, as a result, they might resist any form of technology used in the learning programme. For example, in the course under investigation, some students tended to send or access information without using technology – a route that takes time and that affects the learning process. In this regard, students wait for the

material to be sent by post (instead of accessing it online). Some students also posted their assignments via the mail service instead of submitting them online. Therefore, despite CALL being a good approach, especially in an ODL context, it may be problematic if students cannot use it to access information and the material needed for learning.

Despite problems regarding access to the internet or computers, students enrolled in online courses have to find a way accessing and using supportive online technology. Through collaboration with relevant stakeholders within institutions, ESP practitioners could also find ways of offering support to students who do not have access to supportive online technology. For example, some institutions offer to sell new and used computers to students and provide internet access at a discounted price. Some institutions have computers centres and libraries where students can access computers and internet free of charge. It is argued that teachers of ESP should not compromise in supporting initiatives that contribute to effective teaching.

### **2.2.6 Interaction in ESP within ODL**

Although students in an ODL environment are expected to be active learners who are self-directed and ready to do most of the work without face-to-face interaction with lecturers, students, e-tutors and assessors, some students may not be ready to work on their own. As a result, students who are not familiar with the ODL context may not be familiar with online interactivity and may not be able to go through the study material without someone assisting them using a systematic process. This may be problematic for both students and lecturers, as the lecturers expect their students to interact with the material and to conduct research before writing an assignment.

The advantage of studying in an ODL environment is that this can be done in the student's own space. The disadvantage is that if the majority of the students come from a background of face-to-face interaction and sharing the same space with teachers and other students on a daily basis, they find themselves incapacitated in an environment that does not offer them the human contact that they received at secondary school. Lack of interaction in a learning environment may result in conflict

and lack of trust between lecturers, e-tutors and students. It is against this background that this study is aimed at investigating interaction between participants active on the course.

### **2.2.6.1 Student interaction with the material**

According to Du Plooy (2007), the study material becomes an extension of the role of the lecturer as a facilitator when the material is structured according to the transactional paradigm. The study material also allows students to “actively interact with the learning material, values, constructs and meaning bases” (Du Plooy, 2007: 27).

In order to explore ESP students’ self-directed learning readiness (SDLR) and the relationship between SDLR and ESP course accomplishment, Mohammadi and Araghi (2013) conducted a study on students enrolled in a course titled English for Students of Economy and Management, which was delivered in a distance-learning environment. The findings of this study indicate that although lecturers expect ODL students to be ready to work on their own, the students may not be ready to do so (Mohammadi and Araghi, 2013). Du Plooy (2007) argues that to be critical of the texts students come across, they should develop the ability to learn, comprehend and evaluate what they learn on their own.

To help students develop the ability to work on their own, lecturers should also find a way of presenting students with material that is relevant to their field of study. Although the focus is on the content, lecturers and designers of learning materials should also take into consideration that, in general, students are interested in exploring technology and that they respond easily to images (Mărculescu, 2015). This means that the material prepared for students should be reader friendly and interactive, in order to ensure that meaningful learning occurs. If students lose interest when looking at the material presented, they may not want to engage with it. For example, Du Plooy (2007:28) revealed how helpful it is to students when content is organised:

Student participants indicated that the following provided them with focus before they started studying a particular study unit: advance organisers (table of contents, introductory overviews and stated learning outcomes), marginal notes

and in-text activities, executive summary (at the end of certain sections, or whole study units).

In the case of the course investigated in this study, students are supposed to receive several pieces of study material, which contain general information about the module, the background to the module, assignment questions, portfolio questions, and the memoranda for all the assignment questions. The study guide comprises four units, which contain the content of the module. Lecturers and tutors usually recommend supplementary material that can be used and some post the material on the course website. However, it is not known whether students read all the material provided or if the material is sufficient to ensure that students achieve the required understanding. There is paucity of knowledge about effective ways of fostering interaction in online ESP teaching in South Africa. Therefore, it is important for the current study to establish best practices in terms of student interaction with materials.

#### **2.2.6.2 Interaction between students**

Grobler (1991) points out that the ultimate goal in ESP learning and teaching is to empower students to study their technical subjects effectively and to function in social situations using the language skills taught. To achieve Grobler's goal (1991), the students may need to interact with lecturers and other students in the context of their studies. Therefore, it is essential that interaction take place between students and all stakeholders involved in their studies.

The participants in the course under study had an opportunity to access different lines of communication that they could use to interact with each other. Some of the forms of communication that students and lecturers could use for interaction included e-mail, face-to-face consultation, meetings, Skype, teleconferencing and Learning Management System (LMS) such as the online platform. In the context of this study, the platform is referred to as the *myUnisa* online platform or course website. According to Mbatha and Naidoo (2010:171):

The *myUnisa* platform is a learning management system for academic collaboration and study-related interaction. This system has been developed to supplement and enhance academic interaction and improve communication

between all participants as well as provide an opportunity for engagement among students.

It is also imperative to find out from students what their idea of interaction is and how they want to interact with other students. In the module under study, students had an opportunity to interact actively on the course website through the discussion forum. However, it is not known if they did interact on the LMS provided by their institution.

Du Plooy (2007) conducted a qualitative content analysis study to examine self-assessment and self-reflection in higher and distance education. An analysis of about nine-thousand typed or written reports submitted in the module was conducted within a period of four years. The results of this study revealed that individual student participants indicated they had benefitted from working with their fellow students. Furthermore, the discussions held with other students allowed them to share knowledge, identify problems and solutions, and collaborate on research projects when necessary. Although it is not clear, whether these discussions took place online or in scheduled meetings, it is evident that the participants gained from the experience. In the course under study, although the course website affords students an opportunity to interact in the discussion forum, it is not known whether interaction does take place between students.

Mbatha and Naidoo's (2010) study on problems hampering the collapse of distance in ODL draws attention to students' lack of activity on the course website. The study examined e-learning as a transformational educational tool in collapsing the transactional distance between Communication Science (COMSA) students. The study used random sampling to select participants and distribute questionnaires to these COMSA students. The findings of the study revealed that students did not use the online portal for the purpose for which it was intended, namely to bridge the transactional distance, in order to ensure increased engagement between all stakeholders.

Based on the finding above, Mbatha and Naidoo (2010) recommended that an in-depth study be done to identify the cause of lack of activity on the platforms provided. The findings in Mbatha and Naidoo's (2010) study indicate that even if communication

platforms are available, students may or may not use them. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the current study to establish how students prefer to interact, whether their discussions are study related or personal, and if there are other modes of communication that they use other than the online platform provided by their institution. Therefore, it is important for the current study to establish best practices for interaction amongst students and this is a critical research gap the current research seeks to fill.

### **2.2.6.3 Interaction between students and lecturers**

In an ODL environment, interaction between students, lecturers and e-tutors plays a significant role, as both need each other for successful delivery of an ESP module. Although e-tutors may not be employed on a full-time basis at some institutions, they play a significant role in the teaching process - hence interaction between the e-tutors and the students is important. According to Prudnikova (2013:390), "Interactive teaching presupposes indirect and direct cooperation of the active subjects, helping to solve teaching tasks more effectively by using the potential of participants' cooperation and interaction". Therefore, in an ideal world of learning and teaching, interaction between lecturers, students and e-tutors should happen as a normal and expected activity. However, if students feel a distance between them or feel neglected by the people appointed to assist and guide them, the students might lose trust in their lecturers.

For example, Lourens' (1993) study focused on determining students' needs and establishing feelings of isolation from other students and the institution. The majority of the respondents indicated that they wanted to be supported by lecturers through 'encouragement, reassurance and motivation' (Lourens, 1993). Furthermore, a small number of respondents wanted guidance, detailed feedback on assessment and emotional support from both lecturers and family. The findings in this study suggest that interaction between students and lecturers was not taking place as expected by students.

Another example is that of a study on collaborative learning (CL) in ESP courses, conducted by Saba 'Ayon (2013). This study examined the following: students' attitudes towards working collaboratively, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of collaborative learning towards skills required in the workplace. The findings of this mixed method study revealed that although some students had a negative attitude towards CL, due to past negative experiences, including the lack of instructor support, most participants still had a positive attitude towards CL. The participants asserted that CL had a positive impact on their learning and the acquisition of job-related skills. Consequently, Saba 'Ayon (2013) recommended that there should be an increase in the effectiveness of CL in these courses and that students' attitudes towards it should be improved.

As the course this study focuses on is delivered online, it is important to ensure collaboration amongst students takes place. Lecturers should guide this initiative, and students should be shown the importance of collaboration during the learning process. As indicated in the social presence element of the Col framework, the participants in the learning process are expected to find ways of interacting or sharing ideas outside the classroom setting. Therefore, it is important for the current study to establish best practices in terms of interaction between students and lecturers, and this is a critical research gap that the current research seeks to fill.

#### **2.2.6.4 Interaction among lecturers, e-tutors and assessors**

Active interaction among lecturers, e-tutors and assessors is also at the heart of ESP and it links to teamwork, collaboration and cooperation in ESP teaching in ODL. In addition, interaction amongst the teaching team may prevent misunderstandings caused by different or confusing messages that may be sent to students if there is no teamwork. At some institutions, language specialists and subject specific specialists teach ESP in different faculties and these specialists find a way to collaborate to achieve the outcomes set for the course.

In the module under study, language specialists are appointed on a full-time basis to teach ESP, but there are no subject specific specialists. In addition, e-tutors and

assessors are appointed on a part-time basis. However, the roles are interconnected, as they rely on each other to plan, teach, guide and assess students. As indicated earlier, in Paiva and Rodrigues-Junior's (2009) study, success in teaching was achieved when all participants interacted and participation occurred.

Another example of active interaction is seen in Dannatt's (2014) study, which was aimed at understanding the approach used in a successful partnership between ESAP tutors and subject specific tutors at the University of Bristol. The sample for this study comprised ESAP tutors from the Centre for English and Academic studies (CELFS) and subject-specific tutors from the faculty of Engineering. In this study, Dannatt (2014) attempted to establish whether a pattern of engagement with subject specific tutors was emerging. The findings of this study revealed that the pattern of engagement reflected a shift from initial communication to increased cooperation and collaboration between the tutors. Furthermore, ESAP and subject specific tutors acknowledged that collaborative learning benefitted them as teachers and improved their students' experience. This means that as the tutors interacted and shared knowledge, whatever they learnt from each other helped in developing students in terms of their studies.

In summary, collaboration, cooperation and active interaction may result in shared views being used by tutors and lecturers, as they had discussed and agreed the approaches to be used for, and which assisted students to discuss content from relevant and reliable sources. The current study attempted to establish whether interaction was taking place between members of the teaching team in the course under study. It is important for the current study also to establish best practices in terms of interaction between lecturers, e-tutors and assessors, as this is a critical research gap that the current research seeks to fill.

### **2.2.7 Assessment of online ESP**

Although Robinson (1991) points out that assessment of ESP is one area that has not been researched in depth, Douglas (2013) argues that assessment in ESP is no different from other areas of language assessment. The assessment Douglas refers

to is defined as an ongoing process to assist lecturers to understand, improve and assess the extent of learning (Sewagegn, 2016; Lakshimi, 2011). Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2014:27) add that assessment is essential in teaching, as it can be used to help lecturers identify students' 'strengths and weaknesses and evaluate the effectiveness of programmes' offered. Douglas (2013: 378) maintains that:

ESP assessment is a definable sub-field of language assessment, with its focus on assessing ability to use language precisely to perform relevant tasks in authentic contexts while integrating appropriate aspects of field-specific background knowledge.

In this sense, the principles of assessment in language would still apply in ESP.

### **2.2.7.1 Assessment methods**

Sewagegn (2016) describes assessment methods as various approaches and procedures that lecturers can use to test what they have been teaching. The main approaches to effective assessment include formative and summative assessment, depending on the course offered. Sewagegn (2016:31-32) describes three main purposes for assessment as follows: "Assessment for learning (formative); Assessment as learning (formative); Assessment of learning (summative)".

Du Plooy (2007) describes formative assessment as a process in which lecturers guide and correct errors during the learning process. This may be utilised when giving students written assignments, oral tests, and presentations to prepare. For example, assignments, tests and group work may be viewed as significant aspects of formative evaluation of students' performance during the course (Lakshimi, 2011). Summative assessment includes students sitting an examination or submitting an electronic PoE (e-portfolio) at the end of the learning process. In most ESP modules, both forms of assessment are usually utilised to assess a student's work.

Scholars in ESP studies concur that there is no best way to assess a learner's academic work, as there are advantages and disadvantages to both types of assessment (Du Plooy, 2007). However, Sewagegn (2016) asserts that the choice of assessment method will depend on the context of what is taught. Douglas (2013) and

Robinson (1991) point out the principles of measurement used within the context of assessment: appropriateness, reliability, validity, impact, authenticity and interactivity. These principles serve as guidance when planning for assessment and preparing assessment tools. Other methods of assessment could also be borrowed from other disciplines to achieve the outcomes indicated in a course. For example, Robinson (1991:66) suggests using 'W and H' questions (usually used in the field of Journalism) during the evaluation process.

The following questions can be modified and applied when conducting an assessment, depending on the context:

- What is the subject of assessment?
- Why carry out the assessment?
- Who carries out the assessment?
- Where should the assessment take place?
- When should the assessment take place?
- How is the assessment carried out?

Therefore, as indicated, the methods used depend on the context and the lecturer's chosen approach when assessing students' work. In the ESP course investigated on this study, students submit: three assignments, as the formative assessment; and an e-portfolio, as the summative assessment. In general, assessment methods direct assessors and lecturers to empower students in their learning (Sewagegn, 2016). However, it is not known whether the approach currently used is effective, which is why one of the aims of this study is to investigate the approach used for assessment of e-portfolios in the course under study.

#### **2.2.7.2 ESP assessment tools**

Assessment tools for ESP depend on the outcomes of a module and the students registered for the module. In some cases, one module could utilise online PoEs throughout the module, while another module may opt for assignments and hard-copy written exams. For example, Sewagegn (2016) conducted a study to investigate how instructors' assessment practices enhanced student empowerment. One of the findings of the study was that instructors faced problems such as large class sizes,

high workloads, poor student-achievement levels, insufficient resources lack of commitment and awareness of different assessment methods.

These results are similar to Lakshimi's (2011) in a study that was conducted some years earlier.

In the study, Lakshimi (2011) also drew attention to poor assessment methods that were the result of various factors in the context of ESP teaching. Similarly, Lakshimi's (2011) study focussed on the role of assignments in the learning process. The results revealed that although assessment is meant to equip students with the skills required to understand the meaning and purpose of an assignment, and so be able to complete it. It was also discovered that there was no instruction regarding the guidelines to be followed when teachers assigned tasks to students. As a result, the task-setting process was disorganised, with limited follow-up, inaccurate task assessment, and no indication of how marks should be awarded.

The observation in Lakshimi's (2011) study may imply that some lecturers do not have the necessary skills required for assessment of ESP or that they are not paying attention when working on assessment. Lakshimi (2011) also recommends that submission dates for assignments should be given to students in advance and that they be spaced out to avoid rushed marking and delayed feedback after marking. This could suggest that a problem arises when there are many assignments to assess within a short period.

In their discussion on bridging the gap between needs and resources, Berry, O'Sullivan, Schmitt and Taylor (2014) suggest that lecturers and students must have an understanding of what assessment is all about, and how it should work within the particular system. Sewagegn (2016) also points out that lack of teaching experience, training and level of education may influence the way assessment methods are applied. Furthermore, Lakshimi (2011) emphasises that lecturers have to identify the most effective assessment tools and methods within their context, in order for successful assessment to occur. Turner (1997) further states that it is the lecturer's responsibility to develop an assessment to measure student progress, even though some may have not received training in preparing tests. According to Douglas (2013), ESP assessment instruments are usually described narrowly, to reflect a specific area

of language use. Nevertheless, research on best practices in assessment of e-portfolios has been growing over time. For example, Peacock, Morss, Hislop, Irvine, Murray, and Girdler (2010) contributed to the debate on the use of e-portfolios as a tool to encourage learner reflection and support at tertiary level. In this study, they emphasise the necessity of introducing a supportive technology for individual students who are reflective and accountable for their learning and skills development.

In this regard, they recommended that a PebblePAD be used (Peacock et al., 2010), which is an assessment tool used at some of the universities in the United States of America (USA) and other universities in the United Kingdom (UK). According to the University of Wolverhampton (2015), the PebblePAD tool is a:

Proprietary web-based Personal Learning Environment or e-portfolio system designed by teachers and inspired by learners; its principle purpose is to support and celebrate the process of learning wherever and however that learning takes place

The PebblePAD allows students and teachers to interact, incorporate assessment, work on assessment, enhance personal development planning, and record student progress. Exposure to tools similar to the PebblePAD would be beneficial in the course under study, as it aims to investigate effective approaches for the assessment of the e-portfolio. In addition, other online assessment tools that can be used for both formative and summative assessment in ESP are also available. For example, Douglas (2013:378) states that “Blackboard ([www.blackboard.com](http://www.blackboard.com)) or QuestionMark ([www.questionmark.com](http://www.questionmark.com)) are some of the course management and test development software tools that are easily accessible to both students and lecturers”. Such software may assist lecturers to develop interactive tasks and videos that include sound.

Douglas (2013) cautions that delivery of tests by computers may not guarantee authenticity; therefore, it was recommended that paper-based tests should be considered in some cases. For example, assessment that is completed online without supervision may lack authenticity, as students may assign someone else to write the assignment or portfolio. It is, therefore, important for the current study to establish best practices in the use of appropriate online ESP assessment tools, as this is a critical research gap that the current research seeks to fill.

### **2.2.7.3 Assessment of online ESP portfolios**

Shin (2013) describes a portfolio as an informative tool that provides “an ongoing, cumulative record of language development, insight into individual progress, and tangible, sharable evidence”. It also contributes to students’ self-assessment on the material that they are exposed to during learning. Additionally, according to Du Plooy (2007), portfolios are used to measure a student’s knowledge of the content, but also as to assess the student’s critical and analytical skills. Unfortunately, most ESP first-year students will not be familiar with the process of assessment of online ESP portfolios in the ODL context. In this regard, Mărculescu (2015) emphasises that the introduction of assessment tools such as e-portfolios encourages students to discover new knowledge, which means there should not be an issue when they are faced with the unfamiliar assessment methods used in ODL. In addition, the e-portfolio has opened doors for non-venue based assessment, which is considered in the assessment of most ODL courses.

When it comes to assessment, students’ expectations may be different from what an ESP practitioner has in mind. Students may assume assessment entails writing assignments, tests and sitting for examinations as final assessment. Therefore, it is important that students are made aware of what to expect from the onset. For example, one of the findings in Sewagegn’s (2016) study indicated significant disparities between the perceptions of students and those of lecturers regarding assessment methods. Another problem in submitting assignments and portfolios online, as indicated earlier, is that it is practically impossible to establish whether students themselves have done their assignments and portfolios.

Notwithstanding, as innovative methods of assessment such as non-venue based exams, self-assessment, and peer assessment are developing in tertiary institutions, solutions to some of the problems will be discovered through studies such as the current one (Sewagegn, 2016). Du Plooy (2007) adds that non-venue based assessment reduces anxiety experienced by students during examinations. Therefore, it may be argued if students were given a choice between venue and non-venue based

assessment, they would prefer portfolio assessment, as they would be able to work in their own space, without the pressures of sitting in an examination room.

In an article on developing a framework for using e-portfolios as a research and assessment tool, Shin (2013:359) states, “It is not clear how tasks in e-portfolios can be constructed to represent various linguistic and situational contexts, and how they could be systematically evaluated and scored”. Although much information has been published on how to approach assessment of e-portfolios, most lecturers may not know how to approach this kind of assessment (Shin, 2013). Therefore, to avoid the stress of conducting assessment using e-portfolios which may be an unfamiliar territory, lecturers may opt for venue-based exams. In this regard, the current study attempts to gain understanding regarding effective approaches that can be used in the assessment of e-portfolios.

Shin (2013:363) draws attention to three types of e-portfolios available in Europe and the USA: “the European Language Portfolio (ELP), the Lingua Folio (LF), and the Global Language Portfolio (GLP). Each of them is utilised according to the context of what is supposed to be assessed”. For example, the (LF) caters for both K12 and university students; therefore, teachers and lecturers should identify the type of assessment that is relevant to the context and level of the students. According to Sewagegn (2016), alternative assessment practices such as non-venue based assessment (self-assessment, peer assessment and e-portfolios) promote active learning. Mărculescu (2015) adds that the 2<sup>1st</sup> century education movement emphasises that students (including ESP students learning in an ODL environment) should focus on critical thinking, interaction, collaboration and creativity, as these aspects also contribute to the development of students’ SDLR.

Another significant point regarding e-portfolios is that self-assessment and reflection are viewed as integral parts of non-venue based assessment. Self –assessment and reflection can expand and influence students’ choices when working on tasks (Du Plooy, 2007 & Shin, 2013). For example, the results in Du Plooy’s (2007) study revealed that, through the processes of integration, transformation and self-regulation, students develop critical analytical thinking skills and become creative in terms of their own activities. This means that as students work on their portfolios, they become

aware of their strong points and weak points and have an opportunity to improve their work until the final submission of such portfolios.

Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2014) conducted a study that focused on student perceptions of computerised self-evaluation of learning ESP. This study analysed student perceptions of success or failure in their performance and the data on self-evaluation was compared with the results of formal testing. The research adopted the qualitative research method and a questionnaire was administered to students enrolled in three different areas of specialisation. The results indicated that attitude to computerised self-evaluation depended on both the difficulty of the tasks and the chosen area of future specialisation. The research conclusion was that online self-testing is a novel way for students to evaluate their achievements in language learning.

However, in the module under study, the first section of the e-portfolio (reflection) is used for summative assessment and is linked to the assignments submitted during the semester (formative assessment), but the e-portfolio has its own new question, which is based on the units in the module. In this instance, it is not clear how students should integrate and develop their cognitive skills, in the module under study, as they write assignments and e-portfolios separately. As indicated earlier, online assessment may not guarantee authentic submissions if the process is not monitored properly. Shin (2013) also cautions that heavy reliance on student self-assessment and reflection may be a limitation, if it is not monitored properly. Therefore, lecturers should take into consideration problems related to authenticity during online submission and include solutions in the assessment plan. Cederholm (2010) states there are no easy answers to the debate on the appropriateness of the portfolio assessment system, and, as a result, ESP practitioners and module designers have to decide whether a specific approach is suitable for their students. The reasons for adopting a specific type of assessment should be compelling enough to eliminate any controversy related to portfolio assessment (Cederholm, 2010).

A positive point regarding ODL assessment is that research on best practice with e-portfolios is growing. Although there are still questions regarding the integrity of the work submitted by ODL students, the need for non-venue based assessment is also growing in these environments. Therefore, it is important for the current study to

establish best practices regarding how assessment of e-portfolios in ODL should be approached, as this is a critical research gap that the current research seeks to fill.

#### **2.2.7.4 Feedback on assessment of e-portfolios in ESP**

Feedback, in this regard, may be defined as the reaction from lecturers after students submit their assignments and e-portfolios for assessment. This feedback may come in different forms, such as written comments on the assignment, memoranda posted online, hardcopy documents, online questions and answers, or liaison through e-tutors. According to Sewagegn (2016), feedback is a vital aspect of the teaching, learning and assessment process. It helps students to identify where they do well and where there are shortcomings and they learn to take action to improve.

In the course under study, students submit both hardcopy and online assignments, and e-portfolios. Although this module is supposed to be offered solely online, students are still allowed to submit hardcopy assignments, as it is understood that some students do not have access to a computer or the internet, as they come from a poor background and cannot afford internet access. Although Wifi is now free in most urban areas, students in rural areas might not have this service. The advantage of submitting assignments and portfolios online is that feedback is received quicker, as students receive feedback as soon as the assessor clicks on the submit button after marking the assessment. In contrast, hardcopy submission requires a long process that may take three to four weeks before an assignment reaches the lecturer. Another disadvantage, indicated by both Lakshimi (2011) and Sewagegn (2016), is that if the student intake is large, the marking process may be delayed and some of the principles of assessment (such as reliability and impact) may not be applied, as some assessors rush through their work in order to meet the deadline.

With a large intake of students, lecturers might not have the capacity to deal with individual students (Kear, 2011 and Vandeyar & Killen, 2003). This may result in time-consuming processes that could lead to delayed feedback, and impersonal and meaningless assessment activity that is divorced from learning (Kear, 2011 and Vandeyar & Killen, 2003). Although the focus of this study is not on student numbers

and time constraints, these issues have to be addressed, as they may contribute to the success of online assessment. According to Rezende, de Almeida and de Freitas (2013), Moodle could be one of the answers to timeous feedback as the feedback is received as soon as the task is completed. In addition, Moodle may also contribute to developing an active learner, as students begin to reflect on their tasks as they receive feedback regarding their work. Immediate feedback may also encourage students to address problems experienced when writing assignments and e-portfolios. However, if students receive feedback on a formative assessment after they have submitted their summative assessment, they may find it pointless.

In an attempt to seek answers to the research question on how assessment of ESP e-portfolios should be conducted in an ODL context, the literature reviewed above indicates that although research in ESP and e-portfolio assessment started slowly, it is now an active area of research. The literature in this section draws attention to some of the factors to be considered during assessment of e-portfolios. The assessment tools recommended by various researchers provides ESP practitioners who are not yet exposed to such tools with something to start using, as they build their expertise in this area. Moreover, these tools would be beneficial to the ESP course under study, as it seeks answers regarding how assessment of online ESP portfolios should be conducted in an ODL context.

### **2.3 Theoretical framework of the study**

This section explores the theories that underpin the current study. According to Kumar (2012), the problem a researcher seeks to investigate is embedded in a number of theories, which are derived from different perspectives. The different aspects from these perspectives may have a direct or indirect bearing on one's research; hence, such aspect should be used as a basis for developing a conceptual framework. Therefore, the exploration starts with a discussion on the ZPD theory and then the Col framework.

Substantial progress has been made in the development of theory for online learning and studies in ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EAP, and linguistics in general. According to Belcher (2006:140):

Though ESP has a reputation for being eclectic in its use of theory and has long valued practitioner research, this does not mean that ESP professionals have not been informed by research and theoretical developments beyond their own immediate instructional contexts.

Most theories concerned with learning and teaching tend to draw from the constructivist approach, developed by Jean Piaget in the 1970s. Piaget developed the constructivist theory based on the idea that knowledge is constructed by building cognitive structures or schemas for understanding concepts (Westbrook, 2009). In this theory, Piaget asserts that students interpret what they learn in the world according to preconceived views, which are based on their surroundings. Furthermore, students learn by observation, processing and interpretation, and then customise the information into personal knowledge (Booyse, 2010; Mohamed, 2004). According to Le Roux and Le Roux (2004:12), “a constructivist theory of learning recognises that knowledge is constructed in specific contexts ... The aim here is that the learner will be able to apply his or her knowledge, skills and attitudes/values in the workplace. The learner centred approach to learning is also a problem-oriented approach – that is, reflective learning rather than mechanical (rote) learning”.

The constructivist approach removes the notion of a teacher, who is viewed as the one who holds knowledge and a learner who receives without active participation. Although each has its own distinctive qualities, the Col framework and ZPD theory are also learner centred and support an idea of an active learner who is able to learn in a supportive learning environment. In the current study, the ZPD theory links up with most of the concepts introduced in this study. For example, the section on the nature of interactivity in the ESP teaching and learning process demonstrates a gradual move from the zone where students attempt to find their own way in the module by interacting with other students and the material. As students begin a module, they gradually enter the proximal stage, where lecturers assist by guiding and exposing them to relevant content. This eventually leads students to the developmental stage,

where they can work on their own. It is against this background that the theories of ZPD and the Col framework are utilised as the foundation of the current study.

### **2.3.1 The Zone of Proximal Development Theory**

Two different theoretical perspectives that were believed to lend themselves to the ideas and applications of most interest to the research inform the current study. The first perspective views online ESP learning as an active, constructive learning endeavour. It draws on Vygotsky's ZPD theory. According to Vygotsky (1978: 86), the ZPD theory is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". ZPD theory draws on the theory of assisted learning, where the learning process is not achieved in isolation, but in a supportive environment (Rollnick, 2008; Booyse, 2010).

In Day (1983:155) and Vygotsky (1978) the ZPD theory is described as "a theoretical construct that can be defined loosely as the difference between an individual's current level of development and her potential level of development". The ZPD theory draws attention to what a student can do in the beginning and at a later stage. The proximal stage comes in when the teacher enters that space to guide the learner up to the point where the learner can continue without the teacher's guidance and that is when the developmental stage is reached-as indicated in Figure 1 below.

## The Zone of Proximal Development

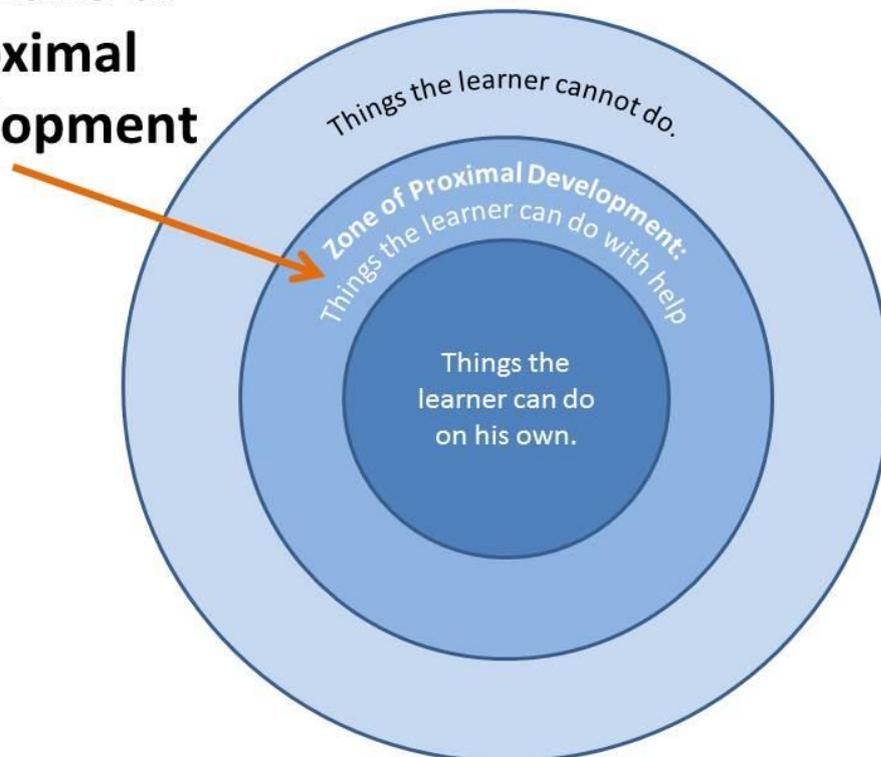


Figure 1: The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (www.cuppacocoa.com:2014)

The common instructional concept used in the ZPD theory is 'scaffolding', which refers to the guidance and support that students receive through the learning process (Le Roux & Le Roux, 2004). In this case, guidance and support comes in different forms, including lecturers responding to student queries in time and providing material that is relevant to the objectives of the course; or a more competent peer assisting a student with what is being learned. After some time, there is gradual withdrawal of support, as the student's knowledge and confidence increases (Booyse, 2010). Because teaching and learning an online ESP module requires active participants who are willing to collaborate throughout the learning process, students have to be independent while being open to guidance and scaffolding from lecturers and peers as they navigate learning in the ODL environment.

As indicated in Chapter 1, the ZPD theory takes into consideration an independent student who relies on teachers and counterparts when necessary. As a result, it has the potential to deepen our knowledge of how to make students become independent

learners while being open to guidance from lecturers and peers in an ODL environment. Therefore, the current study applied the ZPD theory, which also draws on the constructivist approach and focusses on online teaching and learning.

### **2.3.2 The Community of Inquiry Framework**

A second theoretical perspective is John Dewey's Col framework, which is grounded in constructivism and theories of online teaching and learning in higher education (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2009). According to Swan, Garrison and Richardson (2009:45), "The Col framework is a dynamic model of the necessary core elements for both the development of community and the pursuit of inquiry, in any educational environment". It is based on a model of critical thinking and practical inquiry (Shea, Vickers & Hayes, 2010). The Col framework is described as an environment where students and lecturers work together to construct knowledge and achieve set outcomes (Garrison, 2013).

Garrison (2013:4) views the community in the Col framework as the interactive setting or environment where the teaching and learning process takes place and 'Inquiry' refers to "the constructivist philosophy where collaborative communities of learners are purposely engaged". The Col framework comprises three core elements, which are viewed as 'multidimensional, interdependent, and dynamic', i.e.: the teaching presence, the social presence and the cognitive presence (Swan, et al., 2009:45). The Col framework below (Figure 2), taken from Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2009:6), demonstrates the interrelatedness of these three presence elements in an ODL context.

Bangert (2008:34) points out that "the value of educational experiences for online communities of inquiry represented by the Col model is dependent on the interaction of these core elements". In the model indicated in figure 2 below, Garrison et al.'s (2009) aim was to show that interaction on its own is not sufficient for online learning to take place. Therefore, the integration of the three presence aspects - social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence - in a supportive educational

setting, where there is relevant content, is more effective for learning and teaching (Bangert, 2008).

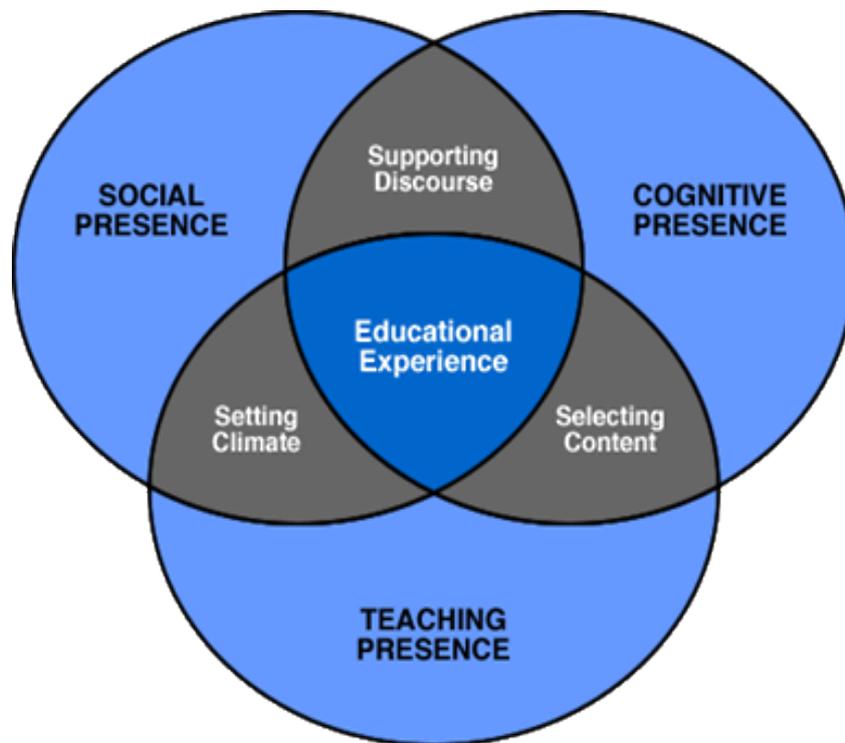


Figure 2: Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2009:6)

It is against this background that the Col theory fits within the current study, since these three presences are presented and explored in the study. Therefore, in an attempt to get answers to the research questions presented in Chapter 1, the current study examined the content of the ESP module, interaction in the ESP module, and assessment of PoEs. The first presence discussed in this section is the teaching presence. In the Col framework there are three components in order for effective online teaching to take place, namely “design and organisation [DE], discourse facilitation [FD] and direct instruction [DI]” (Saint-Jacques, 2013:87). This means that the teaching presence focuses on the content offered, how lecturers teach and what methods are used to support students during the learning process. Shea et al. (2010:3) point out that “instructor teaching presence is hypothesized to be an indicator of online instructional quality”.

In a study of teaching presence and students’ sense of learning community in fully online and web-enhanced college courses, Shea, Li and Picket (2006) explored the teaching presence and community within the Col framework. The findings indicated

there was a clear connection between the perceived teaching presence and students' sense of learning community. With regard to discourse facilitation, “student perceptions of effective instructional design and organization also appeared to matter in regard to a sense of connectedness and learning” (Shea et al., 2006:3). The researchers pointed out that these results suggested that learners’ sense of connectedness and learning were impacted by instructor design decisions in online environments. This means that the teacher’s presence within a learning environment such as ODL plays a big role in discourse facilitation.

The second presence discussed in this section is the social presence. Swan et al. (2009) view the social presence as being the most researched section of the Col framework. Swan et al. (2009:47) view the social presence as “directly impacting the development of community and collaboration in online courses”. The Col framework involves setting up a supportive educational environment for students, so that they can feel free to express themselves within an ODL setting. It also suggests that the social presence plays a vital role in mediating between teaching presence and cognitive presence. Students need to feel a sense of belonging during the learning process, which in turn makes interactivity with teachers and peers easy.

The social presence is where learners share personal expressions of emotion, feelings, beliefs, and values; open communication, where learners build and sustain a sense of group commitment; and group cohesion, where learners interact around common intellectual activities and tasks (Swan et al., 2009:48).

Brown (1997) points out that although collaboration is the most important feature in the ODL environment, it is commonly missing in online learning, and if this is missing, the teaching and cognitive processes may not be effective. According to Garrison and Akyol (2011), linking teaching and learning processes to outcomes is very important in the cognitive presence. However, Garrison and Akyol (2011:234) also point out it is not easy to assess “the quality of learning outcomes associated with deep approaches to learning”. As a way forward, they point out the need to focus on assessing actual learning outcomes, in order to associate depth of learning with interactive and collaborative approaches to online and blended learning. The third presence discussed at this point is the cognitive presence. It views reflection as an integral part

of active learners who have to reflect on their learning as they attempt to solve learning problems to achieve tasks.

In a study on understanding cognitive presence in an online and blended Col, Garrison and Akyol (2011: 233) focused on “deep and meaningful learning approaches and outcomes associated with online and blended communities of inquiry”. The researchers applied a mixed methodology for the research design. The instruments used to achieve the objective of the study included transcript analysis, learning outcomes, perceived learning, satisfaction, and interviews to assess learning processes and outcomes. The results indicated that: students enrolled in both online and blended courses were able to reach high levels of cognitive presence and learning outcomes; cognitive presence in a Col was associated with perceived and actual learning outcomes.

The online English module that forms the case study was based on online assessment processes, including assignments, e-tutor activities and assessment portfolios. However, at this stage, it is not known whether there is a link between the teaching and learning process and the outcomes of the course. As a result, the Col’s cognitive presence serves as a guideline in seeking answers to the research question related to the assessment of online ESP portfolios conducted in an ODL context. What the inclusion of the Col framework does is to complement the ZPD theory and so provide a holistic picture of the possible positive effects of online ESP teaching in an ODL context. Therefore, based on the assumptions underpinned by both the ZPD theory and Col framework, the current study proposes to go beyond recounting problems to offering solutions in online ESP teaching in an ODL context. The implication of both ZPD theory and the Col framework is that while online teaching is beset with problems, effective teaching is possible once these theories are applied. In this regard, ZPD theory and the Col framework provide unique impetus for addressing the problems experienced in the module under study.

Whereas each of these perspectives lend important insight to linguistic points of view, the researcher believes that not enough attention has been paid to the equally important issue of applying specific aspects of the Col framework to qualitative research findings, which should improve our understanding of best practices in online

ESP teaching in ODL university learning contexts. The questions that this researcher seeks to answer focus particularly on ODL within university contexts and require a point of view that includes cognitive as well as social and linguistic stances. Therefore, guided by both the literature and these two perspectives as a theoretical framework for best practices, the researcher mapped the salient points of both onto the research findings from a case study, in order to offer insight into how online ESP can be taught effectively in an ODL university environment.

## 2.4 Conceptual framework of effective teaching of ESP

In an attempt to provide insight into the conceptual framework of effective teaching of ESP, the conceptual overview of the study is provided below.

### 2.4.1 Conceptual overview

This section draws attention to the conceptualisation of the current study.

The literature and theory discussed in this chapter can be explicated as a conceptual framework, which is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

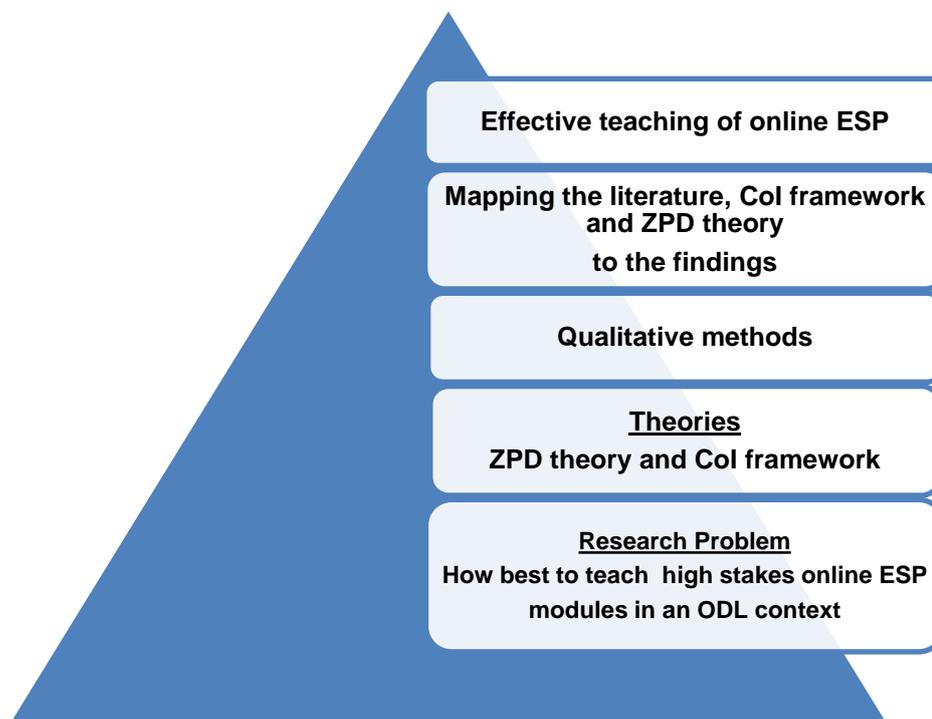


Figure 3: Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of the current study rests on the understanding that the problem relates to how best to teach high stakes online ESP modules in ODL. These problems can best be solved using Dewey's Col framework and Vygotsky's ZPD theory and qualitative methods, as it is believed that the application of the literature, Col framework and ZPD theory to the findings could lead to effective online ESP teaching.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to explore the linkages between the seminal theories, i.e. the ZPD theory and Col framework, the related literature and the conceptual overview of the study. The qualitative methodology that was used to execute the study is presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on exploring the linkages between the ZPD theory and Col framework, the related literature and the conceptual overview of the study. The current chapter presents and justifies the qualitative methodology used to execute the current study. The research objectives (§3.2) are then presented, followed by the research paradigms (§3.3) of the current study. Then, a discussion of the research design (§3.4) which is based on qualitative methods and case study approach is interrogated. In the research design section, the methodological plan of the current study is explored by looking into different aspects of research design in a qualitative study. The ethical considerations (§3.5) are then discussed, before a conclusion to (§3.6) the chapter is provided.

### **3.2 Research study objectives**

As indicated in earlier chapters of the current study, the primary objective of this study was to investigate effective teaching of an online English course, which is referred to as ESP, in an ODL environment. The objectives of the study were set to:

- a) Conduct content analysis of the online ESP material.
- b) Investigate interaction in online ESP amongst students, between students and lecturers, amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors, and students with materials.
- c) Investigate the approach used for an online ESP POE assessment.

The key concepts of this study are online teaching, online learning, ESP, ODL interaction and interactivity, assessment, POE, and e-portfolio. These concepts are crucial as they form part of the objectives of the current study. In addition, the ZPD theory and Col framework, whose attention is on a participating student and lecturer in a supportive learning environment, also add insight to a study of this nature.

### **3.3 Research paradigm**

In this section, various research paradigms are explored, as well as what it is that characterises these paradigms. The section also includes a discussion of ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, theoretical perspectives and sources used as these apply to the current study and why these methods were deemed relevant in the current study. According to Tuli (2010), a research paradigm is a set of assumptions about fundamental aspects of reality shared by members of a research community. Consequently, the set of assumptions mentioned here are where researchers work from as they set off to find the 'truth' about their study. To get to the 'truth' the researcher has to base one's study on one of the approaches - quantitative and qualitative, or both which is referred to as mixed methods.

As a result, quantitative and qualitative approaches carry different views regarding the role of a researcher and how research should be conducted. Qualitative research, however, is a subjective approach that is used:

for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014:32).

In this regard, Creswell (2014:32) defines quantitative research as "an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures". The current study utilises qualitative methods.

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative research in the current study**

Based on Creswell's (2014) description of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, and the objectives outlined in 3.1, the current research study viewed the qualitative approach as the most suitable method. This study aims to gain insight on what effective teaching of an online English course within an ODL environment entails.

According to Tolu (2010), qualitative research views the world as constructed, interpreted and experienced by people in their interaction with each other and within the wider social systems. Therefore, in the process of searching for the truth, the researcher involved a group of active participants within a specific environment (ODL) who were affected by the problem identified in the study. In addition, Mackey and Gass (2005) point out that quantitative research focuses more on experimental designs and numbers, while qualitative studies are not experimental and the majority of its data cannot be easily quantified and its findings are interpreted. Therefore, the data gathered in this study fell into the qualitative research method, as it was not based on experiments or quantifiable variables.

### **3.3.2 Objectivist and constructivist view**

Two worldviews that are known to have a strong influence in research are the objectivist and constructivist views (Thomas, 2010). Therefore, there is a natural scientist view and a social scientist view of the world - hence the quantitative approach (objective) and the qualitative approach (subjective). There are broader paradigms that link to the two worldviews mentioned here, i.e. positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (sometimes referred to as interpretivism).

The positivist research paradigm is centred on the experimental approach, maintaining that reliable knowledge is based on direct observation or manipulation of natural phenomena (Tolu, 2010). The post positivism paradigm challenges “the traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge and recognizes that we cannot be positive about our claims of knowledge when studying the behaviour and actions of humans” (Creswell, 2014:37). Another type of paradigm, which is critical theory, focuses on ideas in relation to a specific ideology. The last one, which is also my point of interest as its characteristics complement the objectives of the current study, is the constructivist or interpretivist perspective.

The constructivist perspective is viewed as the theory utilised in most qualitative research, as it sees the world as “constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people in their interaction with each other and with wider social systems” (Tolu, 2010: 100).

In this regard, the constructivist perspective fits in the current study as it also sought to explore the subjects' experiences as they interact within an ODL environment. Creswell (2014:37) also points out that social constructivists believe "individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences - meanings directed toward certain objects or things". The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. Based on this view, the constructivist view is considered relevant in the current study. Furthermore, the CoI framework and ZPD theory that underpin the current study also support the constructivist approach. As indicated in Chapter 2, CoI focuses on an environment where students, peers, and lecturers work together to construct knowledge and achieve set outcomes (Garrison, 2013).

As such, the ZPD theory draws on the constructs of assisted learning, where the learning process is not achieved in isolation, but in a supportive environment (Booyse, 2010; Rollnick, 2008). Therefore, the current study relies on the participants and the ODL environment to construct the meanings or the 'truth' regarding effective teaching of an ESP course in ODL. Furthermore, Creswell (2014:37) points out that "constructivist researchers often address the processes of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants". The objectives of the current study sought to gain insight on what effective teaching entails by analysing the content of the course under study, investigating interaction amongst the participants, and investigating the approach used in assessment of PoEs within the ODL environment.

In the next section, I discuss the three concepts of ontology, epistemology and methodology. These three characterise the research paradigms mentioned earlier in the current chapter.

### **3.3.3 Ontology**

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007:53), ontology is the 'study of the nature and form of reality'. Therefore, the ontological views of the quantitative and qualitative methods are based on concepts of objectivity and subjectivity, respectively. While positivists (objectivists) view reality as something out there, interpretivist (subjective) researchers believe reality exists within people (Tuli, 2010). The ontological perspective in the current study can be interpreted within a constructivist/interpretivist view as the current study involves interaction with the participants in their specific setting or environment.

### **3.3.4 Epistemology**

The second concept that characterises the research paradigms mentioned in this section is epistemology. Epistemology raises questions on the relationship between the knower and what is known, i.e. how do we know what we know, and what counts as knowledge (Creswell, 2014 & Tolu, 2010). Quantitative research operates according to a deductive model of fixed and set research objectives, where knowledge is viewed objectively within the laws of nature - hence all relevant terms are defined and hypotheses are detailed early in the research proposal (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research, in contrast, is inductive: it views knowledge as something that is interpreted by individuals and something that may emerge through the data analysis. This means the deductive and inductive nature of these two paradigms draw a line that indicates a researcher's epistemological perspective. In this case, the researcher's ontological view guides one in answering these epistemological questions and indicates whether one is part of the knowledge. For example, the laws of constructivism/interpretivism govern the current study's ontological view. This means that the participants, the setting and the researcher construct the epistemological knowledge within the study.

### **3.3.5 Methodology**

According to Tuli (2010:99),

The selection of research methodology depends on the paradigm that guides the research activity, more specifically, beliefs about the nature of reality and humanity (ontology), the theory of knowledge that informs the research (epistemology), and how that knowledge may be gained (methodology).

Therefore, to gain knowledge on the 'effective teaching of an online English course in ODL', I use the qualitative research approach in the current study.

### **3.3.6 Methodological assumptions of the research**

This section discusses the methodological assumptions utilised in the current study. The set of beliefs that researchers work from as they set off finding the 'truth'. Moreover, the quest to find the truth leads researchers towards conceptual underpinnings of their research (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The researcher's beliefs on the topic of effective teaching of online English in ODL are informed by the literature review undertaken (e.g. Krzanowski, 2014; Velikaya, 2014; Garrison, 2013; Ahmad, 2012; Ngoepe, 2011; Booyse, 2010, Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2009; Kotze, 2007; Belcher, 2006; Venzke, 2002; Brown, 1997; Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991; Swales, 1984). These beliefs are based on interaction between students, between students and the learning material, between students and lecturers, and between lecturers, e-tutors and assessors.

Therefore, my beliefs as a researcher are that effective learning and teaching in ODL entails active teaching, learning and interaction amongst participants within a supportive environment. Another belief is that effective teaching happens when students interact with other students, with the learning material and with e-tutors in the ODL environment. The last belief is that effective assessment of e-portfolios take place when the assessors possess the necessary knowledge to assess a specific subject in ODL. In the next section, I discuss the research design of the study.

### **3.4 Research design**

In this section, I discuss the research design of the current study. Yin (2003:20) describes research design as “the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research question and ultimately to its conclusions”. My research design is based on the qualitative data addressing the research questions and finally leading to the conclusions. The primary research question for the current study as indicated in the previous chapters of this study is: How should an online ESP module be taught effectively in an ODL context?

The secondary research questions are as follows:

- How should the content of an online ESP course be structured for successful delivery in an ODL context?
- How should interaction take place amongst students, between students and lecturers, amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors, and students with learning material in an ODL context?
- How should the assessment of online ESP portfolios be conducted in an ODL context?

The type of research design utilised in this study is the case study approach. Therefore, the case study approach is discussed in depth in the next section.

#### **3.4.1 Case study**

Nunan (1992) posits that a major strength of case study design is its suitability for small-scale research of the type often done by teachers. One reason for this may be that individual students, groups of students, and classes are ready made, so to speak, for use as case studies. “Case studies are also usually associated with a longitudinal approach, in which observations of the phenomena under investigation are made at periodic intervals for an extended period of time” (Mackey & Gass, 2005: 171).

In the same line, Yin (2011) states that in case studies, researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures with restrictions regarding

time and the type of activity they engage in. Although in the current study the data gathering period did not take place over a long period, the few months (three months) utilised to gather data through the use of questionnaires, observations and content analysis makes the current study fall within the case study approach as indicated in Nunan (1992) and Mackey and Gass (2005). The objectives of the current study required the researcher to collect data using qualitative methods and instruments that comprised questionnaires, observation and content analysis schedule.

These instruments were used to obtain data from the sources identified, including the content in the material, interaction between participants, and the approach used in the assessment of portfolios of evidence. Moreover, Mackey and Gass (2005:171) point out, "Case studies generally aim to provide a holistic description of language learning or use within a specific population and setting". This approach provides detailed descriptions of specific learners (or sometimes classes) within their learning setting. In this regard, interaction amongst participants on the course website was observed during the first semester, in their own environment (ODL).

Another point about case studies is that they "have the potential for rich contextualization that can shed light on the complexities of the second language (L2) learning process" (Mackey and Gass, 2005:172). Therefore, the current study also takes into consideration the ODL setting of the course under study. Consequently, by seeking to investigate effective ways of teaching an online English module in an ODL environment, the current study set out to understand the uniqueness of this specific course. In addition, the study set out to understand what teaching an ESP course effectively entails within an environment different from a face-to-face one.

The next sections unpack the logical processes within the case study approach, and their relevance to the current study. The focus is on the following sub-topics: the researcher's role, research sample, population sample techniques/strategies, data collection instruments, reliability and validity of the research, methods of data analysis, pilot study and research questions.

### **3.4.2 Role of the researcher**

In this section, I discuss my role as a researcher on the topic of effective teaching of an online English module in ODL. According to Duff (2008), it is important for a researcher to give information that contextualises the research and helps the reader understand the researcher's personal interest in the study. Therefore, my task as a researcher in the current study was to be curious enough to probe, and collect information helpful in understanding the value of teaching an online English course in ODL.

Another point is that as a researcher, I sought a balance between objectivity and subjectivity in my reporting (Duff, 2008). Consequently, knowing and understanding my role as a researcher, I was fully involved in preparing and administering questionnaires, conducting observations of online interaction amongst participants, and analysing the documents relevant to this study. I also made sure there was no unnecessary interference and production of invalid and unreliable results during the data collection and analysis process. As a result, I was responsible in using reliable sources during the study to avoid losing my integrity as a researcher. This also permitted me to identify a population from which the research sample was selected. In the next section, I discuss the research sample population.

### **3.4.3 Sample population**

In this section, I discuss the research sample population within the identified course under investigation. According to Dörnyei (2007), a group of participants whom the researcher examines in a research study is known as a sample and the population is the entire group of people whom the study is based on. The population in the current study comprises students, lecturers, e-tutors, assessors involved in ESP course in an ODL environment. At the point of data collection, there were four lecturers and three e-tutors assigned to this course. Out of a team of four lecturers, only two were available to participate in the study. To collect and present reliable data, all the three e-tutors who were appointed to teach this course were available to participate in the study.

Hundred students were contacted but only 77 students returned the interview questionnaires. Therefore, the sample included 77 student respondents (N=77); two lecturer participants; and three e-tutor participants (N=5). In addition, content analysis of a module form, tutorial letter, study guide and marked 10 marked PoEs formed part of the document analysis component of this study.

A sample population is described as a subset of individuals or cases who share similar characteristics and descriptions related to the variables of the study (Nunan, 1992; Dörnyei, 2007). For example, in the current study, one group of respondents share common characteristics such as similar educational background, as they were all studying towards a higher certificate (HC) to gain access to register for a diploma or degree. In addition, they were all described as Economics students within this specific course.

To sum up, the sample population of the current study was of a group of subjects involved in an ESP course in ODL. Out of the identified population, I selected purposively the sample of the current study. In the next section, I explore the sampling strategies to explore how data was collected from the selected sample.

#### **3.4.4 Sampling strategy**

In this section, I discuss sampling strategies and the types of sampling methods utilised in the current study. Griffiee (2012) describes sampling as the process of collecting data from a smaller group that represents a specific population, and generalizing interpretations about this group to the entire population. In addition, Dörnyei (2007) points out that identifying an appropriate sampling strategy to select a small number of participants could produce accurate results and save time, money and effort in the process. Griffiee (2012:56) also points out a researcher should decide 'the unit of analysis to assist in narrowing one's target population'. For example, the units of analysis in the current study were identified as students, lecturers, e-tutors, assessors and the study material.

In selecting a sample in research, the researcher should understand the types of sampling methods available. Consequently, there are two classes in sampling methods and they are categorised under probability methods and non-probability methods (Welman et al., 2005; Maree and Pietersen, 2007; Griffie, 2012). The probability sampling method is popular for its objectivity since there is no human interference or subjectivity in these methods. Probability sampling methods 'involve complex and expensive procedures that are usually well beyond the means of applied linguists' (Dörnyei, 2007:97). Furthermore, this probability sampling methods is associated with four aspects known as simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, systemic sampling, and cluster sampling (Welman et al., 2005; Maree and Pietersen, 2007).

Since the current study is a qualitative case study, which involved direct contact with participants, the probability sampling method was not applicable.

Creswell (2014) points out that the non-probability sampling method or convenience sample is known for its subjectivity and, sometimes, direct contact with subjects in a study. This means respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability (Creswell, 2014). In addition, this type of sampling method is known to 'use resources that are within the means of the ordinary researcher' (Dörnyei, 2007:97).

The non-probability method is also associated with sampling strategies known as snowball sampling, convenience/opportunity/purposeful sampling; quota and dimensional sampling (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007).

Consequently, the current study identified *purposeful sampling*, which is viewed as one of the common sampling types in L2 research (Dörnyei, 2007). The purposeful sampling strategy is also referred to as the convenience or opportunity sampling. This method of sampling is used in qualitative research where researchers intentionally select participants for data collection to assist in developing insight that might help people learn more about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In addition, the identified participants must possess certain key characteristics related to the purpose of the study hence this method is referred to as purposeful. The current study is a good example of purposeful sampling as the selected individuals share important traits related to the objectives of the study; the sample was identified from the total population at the researcher's own institution (Dörnyei, 2007).

However, researchers such as Maree and Pietersen (2007) caution it would not be safe to draw conclusions about an entire population since the non-probability methods do not select its population randomly. Despite Maree and Pietersen (2007) and Welman et al.'s (2005) caution against generalising findings obtained from a non-probability sample, one could argue that as long as there is internal consistency between the aims and epistemological basis of research, then non-probability sampling does not pose a serious problem with regards the findings and their interpretation (Oliver & Jupp, 2006). Dörnyei (2007) points out if details of the limitations of such sample are described sufficiently during the reporting of the findings as well as drawing attention to the shared characteristics between the particular sample and the identified target population, there would be no problems.

Although the non-probability sampling strategy may not be popular as compared to probability sampling methods, purposive samples are still used in the field of applied linguistics. As discussed in previous sections, the purpose and objectives of the study serve as guidance towards the choices that a researcher makes in a study. Moreover, the epistemological knowledge is constructed within this study by the participants, the setting and the researcher. Therefore, even with the different types of sampling strategies under the probability and non-probability sampling methods, the researcher was still guided by the delimitations of the research.

The current qualitative case study identified the purposeful strategy to aid the researcher in the quest of finding the truth of the study as outlined in the objectives in previous sections. The next section explores data collection instruments used in the current study.

### **3.4.5 Data collection instruments**

Zacharias (2012) emphasises that the instruments a researcher chooses depend on the purpose and research questions of that specific study. Data collection instruments in qualitative research comprise open-ended and close-ended questionnaires, in-depth open-ended interviews, direct and recorded observations, written documents, field notes, physical artefacts and teacher/learner diaries (Zacharias, 2012; Yin, 2011;

Mouton, 2001). For this study, an interview questionnaire was used as an instrument to gather data from participants; an observation schedule was used to observe interaction amongst participants; content analysis schedule was used to analyse written documents comprising a module form, tutorial letter, study guide and marked PoEs. The purpose of using a battery of research instruments in the collection of the data was to integrate qualitative data obtained from multiple sources in order to provide a consistent and rich view and reliable research findings. This is consistent with Yin (2011:13) where he states, “establishing converging lines of evidence makes one’s findings as robust as possible”.

Mackey and Gass (2005) point out there is a link between the findings in L2 research and the data collection instruments used. However, they also point out there is no specific prescribed data gathering instrument, nor is there a best or wrong data gathering instrument even though common instruments may feature in specific paradigms (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Instruments designed in and for specific countries may not be relevant to the population in a different country – hence the relevance of instruments should be taken into consideration (Mouton, 2001). For example, most research in teaching ESP online is common in the UK and USA, but not in most African countries. Therefore, one has to be careful when using instruments from these other countries when attempting to find the ‘truth’ within a specific environment. For example, Mouton (2001) points out that some instruments developed in Europe may not be applied to the South African context without some adaptation.

The instruments used to elicit feedback relevant to the objectives of the current study were interview questionnaire, observation schedule and content analysis schedule. Further discussion regarding each research instrument used in the current study is discussed below.

#### **3.4.5.1 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are used as instruments to collect data related to the current study. Depending on its purpose, a questionnaire may be presented in different forms such as hardcopy or online copy - both with their advantages and disadvantages (Griffie, 2012). For example, one of Venzke’s (2002) data collection methods was using

questionnaires in which respondents had to complete the questionnaires in the presence of the researcher and hand back them back upon completion. This approach saves time and money since data is collected immediately from a group of respondents. The same may be said about online questionnaires since the researcher does not need to travel to access the respondents.

Nevertheless, the disadvantage of online questionnaires is the uncertainty connected to participation from respondents, incorrect completion from respondents and delayed submission of completed questionnaires. Zacharias (2012) also cautions that questionnaires may sometimes limit a researcher's access to probe further if interesting responses emerge. However, in the current study, a pilot study was conducted to get an impression of participants' responses on the prepared questions to guard against Zacharias' concern. Despite the problems associated with online questionnaires, the online questionnaire was considered a relevant research instrument. This was because of the context of the current study, i.e. the ODL environment, where face-to-face contact with students is limited and the course under study is offered online. Therefore, data collection using questionnaires included open-ended questions aimed at eliciting information from student, lecturer, and e-tutor participants. The aim of using this type of questions was to elicit data that would be amenable to a qualitative analysis.

The sequence of the questions in the questionnaires was informed largely by the objectives of this research study. Afterwards, questions were prepared for distribution to participants' Unisa e-mails as pilot study. Afterwards, questionnaires were distributed to respondents registered and active in English for Economic and Management Sciences in the first semester.

#### **3.4.5.2 Observation schedule**

According to Griffiee (2012), human beings' observation of things are often not reliable as people see things according to their cultural and social preconceptions. As a result, the observation approach in research is also viewed in that light. Griffiee's argument matches concerns mentioned in the previous sections regarding the subjectivity of

qualitative research and its methods. Griffee (2012:178) states that observations may “be open (does not specify what to look for in advance) or closed (items are specified in advance)”. For this study, the ‘closed’ approach was used when an observation schedule was prepared.

Seliger and Shohamy (1990:15) describes empirical knowledge as “a way of knowing something by means of interacting with the real world, direct observation of the phenomena and drawing conclusions from the experience”. Therefore, by using observations within the current study, the researcher accomplished what Seliger and Shohamy (1990) suggest above. This kind of approach in data collection is referred to as “interaction-based research in which the focus is on the learners’ conversational interactions with others (e.g. other students, native speakers and teachers) and the developmental benefits of such interactions” (Mackey & Gass, 2006: 65).

For this study, direct observation was utilised, which included observing students, lecturers, e-tutors and assessors’ activities on the online platform designed for the course under study. In line with Mackey and Gass (2005:65), the goal was to “manipulate the kinds of interactivity in which learners were involved, the kind of feedback they received during interaction, and the kind of output they produced in order to determine the relationship between the various components of interactivity and second language learning”. To achieve this, observations of participants’ online interaction started four weeks after registration (mid-February 2017), midway through the semester (March & April 2017) and before submission of the portfolio of evidence (May 2017). During this period, I accessed the course site once per week to give participants ample time to engage with the course materials and participate before gathering data.

Mackey and Gass (2005:175) add, “When collecting data using observational techniques, researchers aim to provide careful descriptions of learners’ activities without unduly influencing the events in which the learners are engaged”. Griffe (2012:178) states that observations may be open (‘does not specify what to look for in advance’) or closed (items are specified in advance). For the current study, the ‘closed’ approach was used and a schedule was prepared in this regard. For best results, an

observation schedule was drafted and later finalized according to the research aims of this study - similar to the sequence used in the questionnaires. Furthermore, the observation schedule focused on establishing interactivity amongst participants in the course under study. The best way of observing participants in action was to follow their interaction on an online portal referred to as the course website within the current study. For example, the materials, announcements and discussion forums were accessed on the course website.

It is important to note that there were different online course websites dedicated to this course. The first was the main course site co-ordinated by the primary lecturer, which could be accessed by all participants. Only students and lecturers were permitted to participate on the main course website, but e-tutors and assessors could still access the content of that specific site. The second website also managed by the primary lecturer or an assigned lecturer was the e-tutor website intended for communication between e-tutors and lecturers only. The third website managed by the primary lecturer or an assigned lecturer was the marker website also intended for communication between assessors and lecturers. The last of the websites was managed by e-tutors. Each e-tutor had his or her own website where they could post material and interact with students at agreed times. Although lecturers could access and evaluate the e-tutor and student websites, they were not permitted to participate on them.

There are two different types of observations in qualitative research: highly structured and less structured observations. According to Mackey and Gass (2005: 175), "In a complex L2 environment such as the language school, workplace, or community, a structured observation can facilitate the recording of details such as when, where, and how often certain types of phenomena occur". This would allow the researcher to "compare behaviours across research contexts in a principled manner. In less structured observations, the researcher may rely on field notes for detailed descriptions of the phenomena being observed, or transcripts of tapes of those events" (Mackey & Gass, 2005: 175).

Griffe (2012:181) points out two situations in which an observer may fall: 'unstructured participant observation' and 'non-participant observation'. In unstructured participant

observation, the researcher participates in the activities designed for participants. In unstructured non-participant observation, the researcher sits back, observes, and takes notes without participating in the activities designed for participants. Although observation for the current study was conducted online, the researcher was a non-participant; as a result, there was no interference from the researcher during the data collection process. Consequently, Mackey and Gass (2005) point out that some threats may be avoided if researchers paid attention to the cause and identify ways in which they could remedy the problem.

Brown and Rodgers (2002) point out that most researchers have developed their own observation schedules hence there are many varieties of observation schedules within literature. In line with Brown and Rodgers (2002), the researcher opted to develop an observation schedule relevant to the research objectives of the current study. In some cases, some content in the schedules was adapted from Brown and Rodgers (2002). For best results, the observation schedule was prepared before the data collection process commenced to ensure that what was observed was consistent with what was outlined in the objectives and the observation schedule. The observation schedule also focused on establishing interaction amongst students, between students and lecturers, amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors, and students with materials. The best way of witnessing participants in action was to observe their interaction on the online portal, since that was where the material, announcements and discussions were accessed.

Although observations for the current study were conducted online, the researcher was a non-participant observer since there was no interference from the researcher's part during the data collection process.

#### **3.4.5.3 Content analysis schedule**

According to Mouton (2001:165), content analysis refers to an evaluation of "the content of texts or documents such as letters, speeches and annual reports". In the case of the course under study, the focus was on analysis of the content contained in the material provided. In this regard, the content of the module form, tutorial letter,

study guide and marked PoEs was analysed. Nieuwenhuis (2007:83) points out that researcher should “guard against selectivity, unfair treatment of authors, misinterpretation of author’s ideas, selective interpretation to suit one’s own argument”. This means that that researcher should not distort the information in the material from which data was collected.

To avoid the problems mentioned in Nieuwenhuis (2007), content analysis schedules with statements structured around the research objectives of the study were designed and compiled to assist in data collection from the material. These questions were structured in such a way that they followed each other in a logical manner and comments regarding such statements were based on what was extrapolated from the written sources. In line with Brown and Rodgers (2002), a content analysis schedule relevant to the research objectives of the current study was developed. In some cases, some content in the content analysis schedule was adapted from Brown and Rodgers (2002). Therefore; one may argue that the problems identified by Nieuwenhuis (2007) were adequately addressed in this study.

Data collected were easy to interpret as all the information needed was in the module form, tutorial letter, study guide and marked portfolios of evidence. In this regard, the content was analysed as presented in the original documentation of the data. In the next section, I discuss how the research methods and design explored in this chapter were applied during the piloting stage of the current study.

#### **3.4.6 Pilot study**

According to Mackey and Gas (2005), a pilot study tests whether the methods and material to be used in the main study are attainable; if not, the researcher may need to revise the applied research methods on the main study. Welman et al. (2005:148) add that a pilot study provides an opportunity for researchers to notice non-verbal behaviour in participants during the data collection process and that the purpose of a pilot study is to:

- detect possible flaws in the measurement procedures
- identify unclear or ambiguously formulated items.

The aim of the pilot in the current study was to detect possible flaws in the research instruments and identify unclear or ambiguously formulated items in the research instrument. This pilot study took place in 2016 (second semester) and data were collected online using qualitative methods within a case study design. The research questions posed in the pilot were the same as the ones in the current study.

Consequently, the one used at this stage was the student questionnaire. The phases of the pilot study are discussed in different, but related sub-topics in the next section.

#### **3.4.6.1 Participants**

The sample population was a group involved in the ESP course under study. As a result, the sample within the pilot study comprised ten student participants (N=10), two lecturers and two e-tutors (N=4) assigned to the course in 2016 (second semester).

#### **3.4.6.2 Research instruments**

The research instruments utilised for this study included interview questionnaires, observation schedules, and content analysis schedules as discussed in 3.3.5.

#### **3.4.6.3 Pilot data collection procedures**

All research instruments for the collection of data, namely observation schedule, content analysis schedule, and interview questionnaires were administered electronically. Motivation for administering these research instruments online emanated from the fact that the course under study was offered solely online. Therefore, the success or failure of the current study depended on specific online factors. The focus of the pilot study was on the content of the interview questionnaires as they were sent to participants who might not be available at a later stage. The

content analysis and observation schedules were readily available online and the instruments could be tested and corrected anytime without pressure.

Interview questionnaires designed for participants who comprised students, lecturers, and e-tutors were sent to them on email. In this regard, open-ended questions were grouped according to the objectives of the study as indicated earlier in this chapter. In this regard, all respondents received questionnaires and consent letters in which the purpose of the study was explained. The respondents were advised to read the consent letter before proceeding to the questionnaire. Data collected from these participants were used to contribute to the answering of the research questions posed on this study.

#### **3.4.6.4 Analysis of the pilot data**

I reorganized and arranged the questions and answers in the questionnaires, based on the research objectives, which also served as topics in a logical order.

#### **3.4.6.5 Results of the pilot study**

The results of the pilot study were elicited mainly from interview questionnaires sent to lecturer, e-tutor, and student respondents. The focus was on this data collection instrument as there would not be an opportunity to recall it once sent to the participants in the main study. Results from all the questionnaires revealed that responses from the lecturer and e-tutor respondents' questionnaires were –well-structured and clear. As a result, no component of the questionnaire was amended.

In the student respondents' questionnaire, most of the questions had to be restructured, some removed and new ones added. The interview questionnaire used in the pilot study consisted of 25 questions, but after correction, the final interview questionnaire contained 31 questions. Although there is a notion that questionnaires should not be too long, the researcher considered the importance of adding follow-up questions to elicit additional information from the respondents. One example is taken from the original pilot study questionnaire - Question 14 – which comprised a general

question with no options or follow-up questions. However, after restructuring and adding follow-up questions related to question 14, the number of questions increased in the final questionnaire.

Old question:

*Who do you communicate with most during the learning process?*

New question:

*Between e-tutors, lecturers, and students, who do you communicate with most regarding the ENG1512 module?*

- Students
- Lecturers
- E-tutor
- Any other

Follow-up questions:

*Which mode of communication do you use with the person(s) identified above? (You may mark more than one):*

- Discussion forum
- WhatsApp
- E-mail
- Meeting
- Telephone

Follow-up questions:

*When you communicate with the person(s) identified above, what things do you talk about, e.g. study related issues, personal issues or both? Explain.*

In some questions, I only changed the vocabulary used as indicated in the example below. In the example, I used the verb 'discuss' in the old question, and in the new one, I changed this to the verb 'write' since students' online discussions were based on writing.

Old question:

*Please, share with me what you discuss on the ENG1512 course website?*

New question:

*Please share what you write about on the ENG1512 course website, if anything.*

The pilot study assisted the researcher to identify the problems and rectify them on one of instruments before embarking on ultimate data collection for the main study. In the next section, we discuss the concepts of validity and reliability regarding instruments used and their implication on the results in the current study.

### **3.4.7 Validity and reliability of the research**

In the current study, the concepts of validity and reliability are discussed regarding the instruments used and how the concepts affect the results if these are not applied as expected. The concepts of validity and reliability are important in qualitative research (Brown & Rodgers, 2002). In this regard, validity is defined as the extent to which data collection measures what it intends to measure; the results of a study correctly lead to what is claimed (Seliger & Shohamy, 1990 & Brown, 1991). Reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability, predictability and accuracy of the research tools across different projects (Creswell, 2012). Davies and Elder (2005:796) point out that "validity is what gives a test its life, its uniqueness as a measure, but to do that, to exist as an entity, it needs reliability". This means that both concepts are essential for effective data collection.

In natural sciences, machines and gadgets may be used in data collection, while in social sciences, the researcher is the data-gathering instrument who uses tools such as questionnaires, checklists, schedules, tests and other data collection instruments

mentioned in the previous sections (Mouton, 2001). Therefore, the data collection procedure should measure what it intends to measure, and should do so accurately and consistently by using appropriate instruments. Consequently, the next section below unpacks the concepts of validity and reliability from the qualitative research background.

### **3.4.7.1 Concept of validity**

As indicated in the previous section, any research process is viewed as valid when a procedure measures what it sets out to measure. Seliger and Shohamy (1990) point out that although validity cannot be proven; there should still be evidence of validity within a research project. The different types of validity that provide evidence for validity are recorded as follows: content validity, external and internal validity, criterion validity, concurrent validity and predictive validity, and construct validity (Seliger & Shohamy, 1990; Brown, 1991; Mackey & Gass, 2012 & Creswell, 2012).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the concept of trustworthiness to support validity in qualitative research. Therefore, the first part explores different types of validity; and the second part traces the component of trustworthiness within the ambit of validity.

#### ***i. Types of validity***

The types of validity that may be used to defend the strength of a given test are content validity, internal and external validity. Firstly, content validity examines whether a test is a representative sample of the content of whatever the test claims to test (Brown, 1991:102). In addition, content validity “refers to the representativeness of the researcher’s measurement about the phenomena we want to get information from” (Mackey and Gass, 2012:109). Research participants may be reluctant to participate if the content does not look familiar or is not linked to their studies or line of work. For example, in the current study, the questions asked in the questionnaires related to the content of the course the respondents were familiar with; as a result, they were able to respond to the questions posed in their interview questionnaires.

Secondly, internal validity refers to whether the results of a study are due solely to those variables being identified and compared within the study rather than something else (Brown, 1991). Conversely, 'unnoticed or uncontrolled variables, in some cases, may pose a threat or compromise internal validity: participant characteristics, participant mortality, participant inattention and attitude, participant maturation, data collection (location and collector), and instrumentation and test effects' (Mackey & Gass, 2012:109 & Brown, 1991). It is therefore, the researcher's responsibility to watch out for such and if possible, try to eliminate them. Although internal validity is popular in experimental research designs, it may also apply in qualitative research as in the current study (Welman et al., 2005). For example, some participants may choose not to participate fully on the questionnaires sent to them due to carelessness, lack of interest or a plain negative attitude. Fortunately, none of the above affected the study or the data collected in the current study.

External validity is concerned with generalisability of the findings of a study, beyond the observed sample, to the real world (Mackey & Gass, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007). External validity refers to the extent to which the findings are relevant not only to the research population, but also to the wider population (Mackey & Gass, 2012; Brown, 1991). However, some researchers such as Brown and Rodgers (2002) caution against generalising the design and interpretation of case study researches as this may interfere with the concepts validity and reliability in instruments and the study as a whole. The qualitative nature of the current study, which used a small sample, disallows generalisability of the findings beyond its research population.

The third point is criterion-related or concurrent validity, which Mackey and Gass (2012:109) describe as, 'the extent to which tests used in a research study are comparable to other well-established tests of the construct in question. Kumar (2012: 180) adds, "Concurrent validity is judged by how well an instrument compares with a second assessment concurrently done". Kumar (2012) further suggests, "Predictive validity is judged by the degree to which an instrument can forecast an outcome".

Lastly, construct validity relates to when 'a test developer sets up an experiment to demonstrate that a given test is indeed testing the construct it claims to be testing' (Brown, 1991:104). In addition, this type of validity establishes correct operational

measures for the concepts being studied. It is viewed as the most important and sophisticated but also the most difficult type of validity in research (Seliger & Shohamy, 1990; Mackey & Gass, 2012). Yin (1984) points out that the problem in case studies within the qualitative research is that most researchers fail to develop a functional set of measures and some rely on subjective judgment when collecting data.

However, within the current case study, also based on qualitative methods, the operational measures that were questionnaires, observation and content analysis schedules were designed and refined before the data collection process commenced to avoid subjective judgment indicated in Yin (1984). In this case, each instrument set out to measure exactly what was initially planned as set in the objectives of the current study.

### 3.4.7.2 Trustworthiness

As indicated earlier, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested concepts equivalent to validity and reliability in qualitative research. The main concept of ‘trustworthiness’ was introduced and four components proposed: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Brown and Rodgers, 2002 & Dörnyei, 2007). Nevertheless, the different types of validity and the components of trustworthiness correspond to their quantitative counterparts as indicated in Figure 4.

Quantitative		Qualitative
Validity	Internal	Credibility
	External	Transferability
Reliability	Internal	Dependability
	External	
Objectivity		Confirmability

Figure 4: Quantitative and qualitative research terminology: rough equivalences

Source: *Brown and Rodgers, 2002*

Mackey and Gass (2005: 178) concur with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) assertion even though they only list the same concepts as “three important issues in qualitative data

analysis - credibility, transferability, and dependability”. Nevertheless, the important point in this regard is that these concepts address similar views with regard to the concept of trustworthiness. Firstly, credibility is viewed as the truth or value of a study. Similar to validity, the data collected should be about what the study set out to do and portray a complete picture within the study. For example, the current study set out to investigate effective teaching of an online English course by looking at the content, interactivity and assessment within the course under study. Therefore, the credibility of this study should be reflected in the truth of the findings related to how effectively online English was taught to the participants. These findings are presented in the next chapter.

Secondly, transferability refers to the applicability of the results to other contexts. Also similar to external validity, which is concerned with the generalisability of the results, the concept of transferability views the research context as the most important part. Mackey and Gass (2005:180) point out that “although qualitative research findings are rarely *directly* transferable from one context to another, the extent to which findings may be transferred depends on the similarity of the context”.

Important for determining similarity of context is the method of reporting known as "thick descriptions", which refers to the process of using multiple perspectives to explain the insights gleaned from a study, and taking into account the actors' interpretations of their actions and the speakers' interpretations of their speech”. In the case of the current study, the findings are based on qualitative research that deploys thick descriptions to articulate the findings. Research transferability would therefore be dependent on the extent to which researchers seeking to use the current study ensure that their research context is as similar as possible to that of the current study.

Confirmability is concerned with the neutrality of the findings in a research study. In this case, researchers are required to make available full details of the data on which they base their claims or interpretations. This is similar to the concept of replicability in quantitative research, with the point being that another researcher should be able to examine the data and confirm, modify, or reject the first researcher's interpretations. Since the current study was based on qualitative research, researcher availed full

details of the data on which the claims and interpretations of the findings were based. This therefore serves to explicate how confirmability was achieved in the current study.

Similar to the concept of reliability, dependability is concerned with the consistency of the results within a study. To enhance dependability, researchers may ask the participants themselves to review the patterns in the data. Electronically recorded data helps to recreate the data collection context and allow the researcher to make use of all interpretive cues in order to draw inferences and evaluate the dependability of the inferences that have been drawn. However, since qualitative research is usually subjective, reliability is not enforced in the sense in which it is in quantitative research, which normally draws on reliability-measuring models.

According to Ponterotto (2006), a key aspect of validity in qualitative research lies in the use of rich, thick descriptors. Mackey and Gass (2005:180) add, "The idea behind thick description is that if researchers report their findings with sufficient detail for readers to understand the characteristics of the research context and participants, then the same audience could compare the research situation with their own and thus determine which findings may be appropriately transferred to their setting".

Mackey and Gass (2005:180) draw attention to three essential components of thick descriptions, as follows:

- Particular description: Representative examples from the data.
- General description: Information about the patterns in the data.
- Interpretive commentary: Explanation of the phenomena researched and interpretation of the meaning of the findings with respect to previous research.

Thick descriptors entail attaining accurate description and interpretation of the information gathered from interview questionnaires, observation and content analysis schedules to trace points of convergence in the study. Consequently, the use of multiple sources of evidence provided rich information for the researcher to look for convergence that is evident in some of the concepts of validity. This convergence of information validated the responses elicited from the research instruments identified in the current study. In summary, validity, in the current study, was achieved by the researcher reporting the findings in a detail manner for other readers to understand the characteristics of the research context and participants. If other researchers would

compare the research situation with their own and thus determine which findings may be appropriately transferred to their setting then validity would be enhanced for the current study.

#### **3.4.8 Data analysis**

In this section, I discuss how I analysed the data that I collected to arrive at the findings of the current study. According to Seliger and Shohamy (1990), data analysis depends on the nature of the research problem, design and type of the data. This means the approach followed within a research study leads a researcher to the appropriate method for analysis of the data. Friedman (2012) adds that analysis of data in qualitative research begins when one collects data until the end of the research process.

Therefore, according to Friedman (2012:191) the activities involved in data collection include the following:

- a) thinking about how data relates to the research purpose;
- b) categorizing the data;
- c) reflecting on the process of analysis;
- d) organizing the data to look for patterns and themes;
- e) connecting emergent themes to larger concepts and theories and collecting more data afterwards.

Consequently, the current study included the activities mentioned in Friedman (2012) by following the 'iterative, cyclical, or inductive analysis of data' as indicated in Duff (2008:159).

Zacharias (2012:4) points out the process of categorizing one's data towards the purpose of the study involves "trying out different categories and fitting the data into them". In the current study, an organised system of categories already existed as questions on the questionnaires, observation and content analysis schedules were already based on the research questions and objectives of the study. Mouton (2001) points out that in some cases, some types of data can be considered ready for analysis

immediately after collection, while other types of data become amenable to analysis only after they are collected as such data may need to be prepared for coding.

In the current study, Phase 1 involved selecting and sorting data according to the existing categories. Phase 2 focused on the identification of common and emerging themes. To probe the findings further, the content of the observation based on participants' activities in the online portal designed for the course under study were analysed. In content analysis (module form, tutorial letter, study guide and portfolios), the data was analysed based on the content adapted from *Checklist for Analysing Course Books* by Brown and Rodgers (2002). According to Nieuwenhuis (2007:101), document analysis "is a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises the messages embedded in content". As an iterative process, in Phase 3, the data was re-scrutinised in more depth according to the established themes in order to construct a proper argument about the findings. The categories were also cross-referenced to see whether there were relationships that would assist in the fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study (Seliger & Shohamy, 1990).

Analysis of data collected from questionnaires, observation and document analysis schedule included sorting, reorganising and categorising data according to each research question to form a logical narrative. In this regard, the analysis of the data was carried out in three phases (Phase 1, 2 and 3). All this was accomplished in a separate notebook before the writing up of the findings. The entire process was conducted to enable the researcher to discuss the findings in Chapter 4.

In summary, in the current study, the data were analysed in an inductive and cyclic approach as the researcher drew on the theoretical perspectives and literature in Chapter 2. In the meantime, the next section focuses on the process followed to obtain permission to conduct the current study.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

According to Mackey and Gass (2005), informed consent is crucial in research involving human subjects. Furthermore, methods of collecting data should be

approached with sensitivity to the problems and ethical issues of gathering information in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). Because this study involved human subjects, ethical clearance was sought from the Ethical Clearance Committee at the institution where the study was conducted. The process of obtaining ethical clearance (Appendix1) was followed before commencement of the study and permission was granted.

Mackey and Gass (2005:26) point out that there are “helpful sources which outline in detail the essentials of informed consent - in particular, the responsibilities of the researcher - as well as typical elements of a written informed consent document”. Therefore, this study was conducted with permission under the stipulated research ethics within the institution in which the research study was conducted. Furthermore, the researcher supplied all the necessary information related to the study to allow potential participants ‘in language understandable to them based on educational background, mental capacity, and language proficiency and literacy’ to make informed decisions regarding their participation (Mackey & Gass, 2005:31).

In this regard, participants in the current study were informed about what the research entailed and a letter of consent (Appendix 2) was sent to the respondents. The consent form also indicated this study did not pose any harm to the participants and that they reserved the right not to take part or to withdraw their participation if they so wished. Although I have access to identities and contact details of participants, such information was used for the sole purpose of sorting information accordingly. Therefore, identities of all participants and research websites, within the institution in which data was collected remain confidential.

I also take responsibility for securing the information obtained for research purposes and the condition of anonymity were strictly observed in the study. The safeguarding and storage of information obtained for research purposes is the sole responsibility of the researcher and this was fulfilled. All the gathered empirical data collected was securely stored in a password-protected folder, and the password was known and maintained by me as the researcher.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to present the qualitative methodology that was used to execute the current study. The objectives of the study and methodological assumptions were established. Furthermore, this chapter examined the research design methods in which a case study approach and purposive sampling strategy were identified. The research design included sub-topics related to the process of collecting data and the pilot study. Before concluding this chapter, ethical considerations where permission was sought and granted to conduct the pilot and current study was also reviewed. In the next chapter, I present the findings of this study based on the data collected using interview questionnaires, observation and content analysis schedules.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, focus was on presenting the qualitative methodology used to execute the current study on investigating effective teaching of an English online course in ODL. The current chapter focuses on presenting the findings, analysis, interpretations in line with the research objectives. The first segment relates to the structure of the content of an online ESP course (§4.2). The second part pertains to interaction in an online course (§4.3), and the third relates to assessment of e-portfolios in an online course (§4.4) before the chapter concludes (§4.5).

Friedman (2012:191) suggests an analytical approach that includes:

thinking about how data relate to the research purpose, then categorizing the data, followed by reflecting on the process of analysis then organizing the data to look for patterns and themes, and finally connecting emergent themes to larger concepts and theories.

In this chapter, the results presented are based on data obtained using qualitative methods in a case study design. The research instruments used to collect this data comprised a module form (Appendix 3), content analysis schedules (Appendix 4), student questionnaire (Appendix 5), e-tutor questionnaire (Appendix 6), lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7), observation schedules (Appendix 8). Principally, the study utilised the purposeful sampling strategy to select participants, the material and platforms from which to collect data.

Data was analysed by examining completed questionnaires, field notes obtained from observation schedules and content analysis schedules of documents used in the teaching of the ESP Economics and Management course under study. I then completed the interpretive analysis of the collected data by placing the data in the framework of the literature reviewed on effective teaching of an online English course. This led to significant themes emerging from the current case study.

The method and labelling of respondents in presentation of data collected from questionnaires was based on the number of respondents as per questionnaire. For example, before presenting examples of representative comments extracted from student questionnaires (77), I used '*Student respondent*' to indicate the examples were based on student respondents' comment. On the other hand, because there were only two lecturer respondents, I used '*Lecturer respondent 1*' and '*Lecturer respondent 2*' for any comments extracted from their questionnaires. A similar approach was applied in presenting examples of comments from e-tutors. For example, I used '*e-tutor 1*, *e-tutor 2*, and *e-tutor 3*' to indicate where the extracted comments were coming from.

The method and labelling of participants in presentation of data collected from the course website using the observation schedule was also based on the number of participants. As a result, before presenting examples of representative comments extracted from the course website, I used '*Student participant*' to indicate the examples were based on comments from student who had participated on the course website. Furthermore, the approach in labelling and presenting data collected from PoEs using the content analysis schedule was also based on the number of the PoEs used during data collection. Because there were only few PoEs (10), I used '*PoE 1*' to '*PoE 10*' based on the content extracted from the PoEs.

## **4.2 Structure of the content of an online ESP course**

To establish how the content of an online ESP course should be structured, the study administered student questionnaire (Appendix 5), e-tutor questionnaire (Appendix 6), lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7), and observation schedules (Appendix 8) by email; and content analysis schedules (Appendix 4) on course material (module form, tutorial letter, study guide and marked PoEs).

### **4.2.1 Students' perceptions of the material used in the course under study**

To establish students' perceptions of the material used in the course under study, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) was administered to the students.

Since the course was supposed to be fully online, it was imperative to establish how the respondents accessed their material. In this regard, the majority (81%) respondents indicated that they accessed the material from the main course website designed for this specific course. However, few (19%) of them indicated that they received the material by post. Mohammadi and Araghi (2013) point out that some learners enter universities when their SDLR is not yet developed. This means such students might not know how to work on their own in a new environment such as ODL platforms. Therefore, the respondents who accessed the material online demonstrated that they were ready to study within an ODL environment and were able to navigate the course website.

Accessing materials online saves time since such material can be accessed from any computer, as long it is connected to the internet. Although it was not clear why a few respondents opted to receive the material by post, it could be that the students did not have access to a computer, or access to the internet, or they lacked the skills to access the system. Some students come from a schooling background where computers were not used and, as a result, using computers and accessing the internet might be a problem for them. Nevertheless, the implications of the findings is that student respondents were open to the notion of learning in an ODL environment; therefore, they knew where to find the learning material.

#### **4.2.1.1 Clear information in the tutorial letter**

To establish whether the tutorial letter contained clear information, I administered a student questionnaire (Appendix 5) to the students.

In response to the question, *Is the information in the Tutorial letter clear?* most (84%) respondents confirmed that the information they had read in the tutorial letter was clear, accurate and relevant. However, few (9%) respondents indicated that some of the information was not clear. On the other hand, fewer (1%) respondents indicated the entire tutorial letter was not clear. Some examples of answers extracted from the student questionnaire are provided below.

- **Student respondent:** *It is clear because it tells us where to find certain information about the course in MyUnisa.*
- **Student respondent:** *The information provide is a guideline on how to approach the study guide and assignments.*
- **Student respondent:** *It is relevant because it contains important information about scheme of work, resources and assignments.*

Since the tutorial letter served as a document with information regarding navigating the content of the course, and the course being an ODL offering, it is imperative that the module should present clear and accurate information in the material. Therefore, if most respondents found the content of the tutorial letter clear, one could conclude that the respondents understood the guidelines outlined in the tutorial letter.

It is disappointing to note that a comment from one of the respondents indicated the respondent had not yet read the tutorial letter that was intended to guide them on the content of the course. The problem at this point is that a semester is presented in six months; therefore, it is unacceptable to have students who have not yet read their materials by the second or third month of the semester. ODL requires students need to take responsibility of their own learning and this behaviour does not show any serious attitude towards learning. The implication of this finding is that effective learning and teaching was not taking place in the case of students who did not bother to read the tutorial letter in its entirety in order to get familiar with the prerequisites and objectives of the course they had registered for.

#### **4.2.1.2 Additional content in the materials**

To establish whether students saw a need for additional content in the course materials, I administered the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) to the students.

The question I asked regarding the need to add more information in the Tutorial letter was, *'In your opinion, what additional information should be added to Tutorial Letter 101?'* Some of the comments extracted from student's questionnaire are indicated below.

- **Student respondent:** Nothing
- **Student respondent:** *In my opinion the dates of which we will receive our assignments back would be nice.*
- **Student respondent:** *More information on what students need to focus in order to prepare for Portfolio of evidence.*
- **Student respondent:** *Proper details on how to contact lecturers or tutors.*

Although most (52%) respondents did not see a need for additional information in the tutorial letter, the points evident from the remaining (48%) respondents included a need for more information regarding time and dates for e-tutor sessions, consultation with lecturers, exam dates, more examples in the tutorial letter, and feedback regarding marked assignments. All the points raised in the responses are valid even though it is also evident in some cases that some respondents had not read the tutorial letter nor accessed the tutor websites to obtain relevant information. Nevertheless, the respondents' comments regarding receiving feedback on assignments and clear timelines for interaction with lecturers are valid and should be noted, as they are consistent with students' needs and expectations. Given this finding, it seems that some sections of the tutorial letter lacked precision and to an extent the relevant information. As a result, an emerging theme at this point was the problematic framing of the learning materials.

Another important point in the respondents' comments was the absence and non-indication of dates for training on how to navigate the online platform designed for the module. One of the responses pointing to such a gap is provided below.

- **Student respondent:** *For first year students dates on days which they will be taught how to use MyUnisa at the Computer labs.*

Although the submission above is not related to contents of the tutorial letter, it was worth noting since it was a part of the students' responses. The finding above raised an important point that is usually taken for granted or ignored by lecturers in an ODL institution. As indicated earlier in the chapter, most students are not familiar with the ODL environment, therefore, before they start learning, they need to be inducted on

how online learning and teaching works. It is therefore up to the lecturers involved in the course of study to find ways of incorporating this part within their teaching.

Another question specifically focused on the study guide. The question was based on what the student respondents thought should be added to the study guide: '*In your opinion, what information should be added in Tutorial Letter 501?*' In response to this question, most (59%) respondents indicated that there was no need for additional information in the study guide. The remaining (41%) respondents indicated a need to add more information, such as more examples, exemplars of previous PoE questions and answers, and more content related to Economics vocabulary. Some of the responses regarding this question were as follows:

- **Student respondent:** *Questions to be answered based on the previous assignment, essays.*
- **Student respondent:** *more examples in details.*
- **Student respondent:** *I think there should be added a vocabulary section relating to economics and accounting in the book. This will help students to familiarise themselves with words from their intended profession.*
- **Student respondent:** *Face to face consultation or classes maybe once or twice a week.*

Once again, the need for more information regarding content, assessment and interaction between students and lecturers was brought to light in the submissions above. This finding is consistent with some of Kotze's (2007) results in which students were disappointed because of insufficient, delayed and sometimes complete lack of feedback in assessment. The repetition of the concern regarding lack of information such as illustrations in the content and limited content related to the respondents' discipline indicate that there was a problem with the way information was shared in the materials, and on the course website. Therefore, the theme of **problematic learning materials** emerged once again.

### 4.2.1.3 Student's comprehension of course materials

To establish whether students were able to comprehend the course materials, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) was administered to them.

The starting point in this section was to establish which sections were considered easy or difficult, and a follow-up question was based on the content in the study guide. The question asked: *In your opinion, which units in Tutorial Letter 501 do you find easy to understand? Elaborate.* A few pertinent examples of responses to this question are extracted and highlighted below.

- **Student respondent:** *Unit 1 it is really easy to understand, because it guides with how to improve your vocabulary, reading skills, pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and so forth.*
- **Student respondent:** *The content isnt hard to grasp thus making it much more easier to understand.*
- **Student respondent:** *The entire content is understandable due the fact that it is something we are familiar on a daily basis.*
- **Student respondent:** *haven't read the whole study unit, since I only read the topics that covers assignment 1 only. Therefore, so far I feel that they do not provide enough information to help me complete assignment and make examples for myself.*

Based on the comments above, the findings demonstrate that most (63%) respondents found some units to be watered-down. According to the respondents, the watered-down units were similar to what was taught at secondary level. Furthermore, few (10%) respondents specified that they enjoyed learning the content on essay writing; and were able to comprehend the content in the essay unit. Although it is arguable that enjoying the content is not a key to comprehension of the content, it is possible that the respondents who enjoyed the essay writing section paid more attention to the specific sections they enjoyed. Furthermore, fewer (5%) respondents indicated some units lacked the information they were hoping to find in the study guide.

Some of the examples of responses to this question are extracted and highlighted below.

- **Student respondent:** *I haven't read the whole study unit, since I only read the topics that covers assignment 1 only. Therefore, so far I feel that they do not provide enough information to help me complete assignment and make examples for myself.*
- **Student respondent:** *The units in tutorial is not relevant to the assignments.*

The respondents who found the content lacking may also fall into the same group as the ones who did not see a problem in the content. In a learning environment, both lecturers and students have expectations from each other. For example, lecturers expect students to use their critical thinking skills during the learning process, while students expect to be provided with relevant and sufficiently challenging content. One may also argue it is good when students are able to comprehend the content, but it should not be too watered-down to the point where they do not see any academic problem or opportunity to learn beyond their current levels of knowledge. Once again, the mixed comments regarding watered-down content in the study guide raised the theme of **problematic learning materials**.

A follow-up question was posed: *In your opinion, which units in Tutorial Letter 501 do you find difficult to understand?* As indicated in some of the examples extracted from student questionnaires, there were mixed responses from student respondents.

- **Student respondent:** *visual literacy*
- **Student respondent:** *Study Unit 3, I think they can give a clearer understanding (breakdown) of pronouns, etc. Some of us has made use of English more then 15 years back.*
- **Student respondent:** *Unit 4 because writing essays can be tricky it's easy to repeat yourself or write unnecessary things.*
- **Student respondent:** *To me they are all very easy and relevant. I really do not have a problem with any of the content*

Although some (46%) respondents maintained that they did not find any difficulty in understanding content in the study guide, other (44%) respondents found specific units difficult to comprehend. The remaining few (10%) respondents did not give answers relevant to the question posed. This could mean that the respondents did not have the necessary comprehension skills to grasp the units that they considered difficult to understand. It should be noted that the students enrolled for the course under study were categorised as 'under-prepared' because their secondary school results were not sufficient to qualify them to register for a degree or diploma qualification.

Another point is that the mixed responses from the respondents suggests that different learning backgrounds may influence the level of understanding, e.g. paradoxically, some found the watered-down content difficult to understand. Therefore, the difficulty experienced in the essay writing section could be linked to their learning background. Thus, the theme that emerged from the finding above is **limited comprehension skills amongst students.**

Another question that is also critical to the research question related to structuring the content of ESP is with regard to the authenticity of the content. According to Dudzik and Dzieciol-Pedich (2014), most ESP students are interested in expanding their knowledge in the specialist language subject; if they do not find the content relevant to their discipline, they may disregard the materials. Therefore, the following question was posed, *How helpful is this information in your other Economics courses?* Based on the responses from the respondents, there was an indication that the information in the course was helpful but they added there was a need for more Economics aspects to be integrated in the study guide. They also indicated that there was only a single unit that seemed relevant to the Economics discipline. The respondents added that this specific unit helped them understand diagrams and graphs in Economics, and found academic writing effortless after exposure to this course.

- **Student respondent:** *It is very helpful because you can use it in other courses for example graphs are used to interpret information in a more understandable way. This is done in all businesses.*

- **Student respondent:** *I personally thing the information is not enough there is still more that need to be added.*
- **Student respondent:** *I get more information that I did not know of and it is very helpful to have this module and I am glad that I have this module as one of my modules.*
- **Student respondent:** *Not really helpful but in the assignments I've come across meanings that refer to my other courses.*

On this question, there were few (18%) respondents who indicated that there was no link between the course and their Economics studies. The remaining (6%) respondents gave responses not relevant to the question. Therefore, the question posed and the answers expressed above demonstrate how respondents viewed the content with regard to their target subject – in this case, Economics. The respondents' comments could stem from each student's expectations regarding what was in the course and the link to other subjects within the Economics discipline.

In this regard, Micic and Vekaric (2011) and McBeath (2011), point out that the concepts of authenticity are open to interpretation by ESP scholars. However, there is a belief that a student's interpretation determines the authenticity of the content. The implication of the findings at this point is that the content in the study guide did not contain content related to the specific Economics discipline. This means the authenticity of the learning materials was questionable in the course under study. Therefore, the emerging theme on the findings above is **problematic learning materials**.

#### **4.2.1.5 Level of English language proficiency in an ESP course**

To establish students' level of English language proficiency in an ESP course, the following instruments were administered: content analysis schedule (Appendix 4) applied to the marked PoEs, student questionnaire (Appendix 5) to the students, and observation schedule (Appendix 8) on the course website.

Another unplanned finding in the student questionnaires indicated countless grammatical errors in their responses to the questions posed. The same problem was

also prevalent in the comments on the main course website. This finding raises a question on whether effective teaching was taking place since one of the units in the study guide was dedicated to content related to English language proficiency skills. This finding is consistent with Abedeen's (2015) findings that teachers had to deal with students whose English language proficiency skills were viewed to be at elementary level. These students were unable to produce and articulate accurate sentences. As a result, teachers had to re-arrange whatever they were teaching to accommodate remedial actions with regards the students' weakness in English language proficiency skills.

Although this study did not set out to focus on students' English language proficiency skills, when these glaring errors manifested themselves in the majority of the respondents' comments in the questionnaires and online discussion forum, the researcher could not ignore them. The course under study is ESP; therefore, English language proficiency is crucial as it contributes to effective learning and teaching. The following examples that contain grammatical errors are an indication of some of the responses obtained from student questionnaires:

- **Student respondent:** *In my opinion the dates of which we will / our assignments back would be nice.*
- **Student respondent:** *After going through it, I realize that every units it is easy to understand especially.*
- **Student respondent:** *The content isn't hard to grasp thus making it much more easier to understand reading while you are focused.*
- **Student respondent:** *Study Unit 3, I think they can give a more clearer understanding (breakdown) of pronouns, etc. Some of us has made use of English more then 15 years back.*
- **Student respondent:** *is helpful and I personally thing the information is not enough there is still more that need to be added.*
- **Student respondent:** *questions to be answerd based on the previous assignment, essays.*

The different types of errors listed above range from spelling, punctuation, capital letter, concord, tenses, misplaced adjectives, pronouns, nouns, sentence structure

and others, all indicating there were severe problems with the respondents' English language proficiency. It would also seem that the respondents struggled to write structurally and grammatically correct sentences. In this regard, the theme that emerged from this finding was **limited English language proficiency skills amongst students.**

One of the units in the study guide contained content on grammar skills, as indicated in the example below.

### ***Grammar for Economic and Management Sciences***

#### ***Outcomes for the Unit***

*At the end of this learning unit, students should be able to:*

- *Show sensitivity for appropriate and correct English as a branding mechanism, including sentence construction, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, tenses, pronoun agreement and appropriate word choice.*
- *Produce coherent and cohesive academic texts appropriate in Economics and Management Sciences.*

The example above indicates the expected and explicit outcomes for this unit, but it is clear that most respondents were still far from achieving these, as indicated in the examples below. Although the content in the marked portfolios was related to summative assessment, similar errors were still evident.

- **PoE 4:** *Reflection on assignment 3 I was required to write an essay, the essay was about free education for all it was a great journey to embark on I enjoyed writing an essay.*
- **PoE 7:** *Lectures through technology have the opportunity to supplement their lectures with more content and live examples obtained from their colleagues all over the world.*
- **PoE 10:** *Some may say that technology is not the way to go, and that pen and paper is still the best method of learning, sure it has its down sides, but I assure you that the pros definetly out way the cons and that technology is the future.*

One of the specific outcomes in the study guide included: students' demonstration of '*appropriate and correct English*' and '*coherent and cohesive academic texts*'. The errors captured in the examples of students' writing above and the ones in the questionnaires indicated that some of the grand outcomes were not achieved. Another important point is that the learning assumed as having been mastered by students enrolled in the course under study included a demonstration of proficiency in '*the ability to learn from predominately English written material*', and '*the ability to present and communicate information, opinions and arguments based on the world of commerce*'. In this regard, it seems that most students did not have the specified requirements on entering the course under study. It would also appear that the outcomes of the course were not met, since students still struggled to write comprehensible content.

Despite the respondents indicating the content was watered-down and that they had been taught most of it at secondary level, the findings paint a different picture. Another finding consistent with this one is seen in Venzke (2002), where learners reported that the English used in the ESP course was not difficult, but the majority of them still failed the subject. Straszniczky (2010) points out the significance of teaching ESP is based on the way the language is used by means of activities the students engage in.

The findings above are perplexing because the current course is online which means there are supporting language systems within computers, therefore one would expect students to use such tools as 'Thesaurus' and 'Spelling and grammar' that are available to them when writing online. For example, spell checkers and grammar correctness are usually built in computers; therefore, students should have been able to produce error free content despite their limited English language proficiency skills had they been able to prompt such facilities on their computers. From the findings above, it is evident most students were not familiar with using the available grammar support systems within their computers. Therefore, the conclusion in this regard is that **students lacked basic skills of using computer applications to assist them in the learning process.**

## **4.2.2 Lecturers' perceptions of the material used in the course**

To establish lecturers' perceptions regarding materials used in the course, the following instruments were administered: the content analysis schedule (Appendix 4) used to mark PoEs, lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7) to the students, and observation schedule (Appendix 8) on the course website. Similar to student submissions, data from lecturers were obtained from questionnaires prepared and sent to them by email. In this lecturer questionnaire, I asked questions that related to respondents' perceptions regarding materials used in the course under study. It is also important to note that the lecturers who participated in this study were not part of designing the module form and the study guide. However, they had participated in editing the content of the study guide and preparing the tutorial letter, feedback letter and assessment tools annually. Therefore, their input in the content and materials of the course was valuable.

### **4.2.2.1 Lecturers' perceptions of the relevance of the material used in the course**

To establish lecturers' perceptions regarding the relevance of materials in the ESP course, the lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7) was administered to the lecturers.

The line of questioning in this questionnaire related to sections which lecturers might want to see added or removed, and the relevance of the content in the course. In this regard, when the respondents were asked, '*In your view, is the content of the ENG1512 tutorial letters relevant to students registered in Economics*', they apparently confirmed student responses regarding the relevance of the material, by answering 'yes'. This means both student and lecturer respondents agreed that the content of the tutorial letter served its purpose.

A follow-up question required lecturer respondents to specify what was not suitable in the materials utilised in the course: *In your opinion, what information should be removed from the tutorial letter?* Once again, the findings showed that the respondents felt the content in the course was relevant, as indicated in the examples below.

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *All the information in the study material is relevant - nothing should be removed because it measures [and] addresses the aims of the course contained in the course form.*
- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *None*

The responses above indicate the respondents acknowledge the consistency between the aims and the content in the course. Lack of consistency between materials may lead to confusion for participants who may not have been there when the materials were prepared.

The next question was to determine whether the respondents viewed the material as relevant to the Economics discipline: *'In your view, is the content in the ENG1512 tutorial letters (501, 101, and 201) relevant to students registered for Economics? Elaborate on your answer'*. The respondents indicated that more information could be added in the study guide. The examples below suggests that the respondents were aware of the problems in the material and of the lack of content related to the Economics discipline.

Lecturer respondent 1: It might be necessary to add the specific times that students should phone their lecturers because often it is difficult to concentrate on other things due to the incessant ringing of telephones.

Lecturer respondent 2: *More information, examples and activities associated to the Economics context would be beneficial to students.*

Consequently, the respondents' need to see more information and authentic content in the study guide indicates that the content in the study guide was inadequate to an extent. However, it is surprising that lecturer respondents indicated that specific information should be added when it was their responsibility to provide this information in the first place. Additionally, if some information was not included in the study guide or tutorial letter, it could be uploaded to the course website and the e-tutors' website by the very same respondents.

Haj Sassi (2015:346) points out that there is usually limited time for lecturers to plan and write materials before delivering courses. As a result, “planning and designing an appropriate course that suits target ESP groups could be a challenging experience for teachers who often experience various difficulties when trying to develop effective courses that address the specific language and cultural needs of their students”. To add, in some cases some lecturers may not be familiar with the approach of preparing materials for a course, which requires other skills they may not possess. Therefore, the implication of the finding above is that the limited content related to the Economics discipline suggests the theme of **problematic learning materials**.

#### **4.2.3 E-tutor’s perceptions of the material used in the course under study**

To establish e-tutors’ perceptions regarding the relevance of materials in the ESP course, the e-tutor questionnaire (Appendix 6) was administered to the e-tutors. Since e-tutors are also regarded as lecturers in this context, they were assigned to work with students online and it was fitting to include them in the study. Therefore, data from e-tutors were also obtained using a questionnaire which was sent to them by email. When asked to comment on the content of the course under study, the respondents indicated that there was a need to develop the content by adding more information in the study guide. Some of the e-tutor respondents’ comments are indicated below.

- **E-tutor 1:** *The study guide needs to be upgraded. There needs to be more detail on the various aspects dealt with. This would help students who have difficulty accessing the internet to find additional information ... There should be more links given in the study guide to relevant website pages and “You Tube”.*
- **E-tutor 2:** *To interact more with Economics to ensure that there is seamless synergy between our course and Economics and students see both as complementary of each other. I am not sure of how strong that aspect is.*

In the responses above, it is clear that e-tutor respondents also felt that the study guide was lacking in relevant content that would be useful to students. The respondents also indicated a need to get exposure on aspects of the target subject (Economics) to

ensure there was '*seamless synergy*' between both English and Economics within this specific context. Because e-tutors rely on the materials to prepare their sessions with students, it could be challenging them to teach content they do not endorse.

Another important point that emerged from the findings is that e-tutors realised there were problems with the content during the teaching process, but did not point it out during the teaching and learning process. It would seem that there were no opportunities to discuss or share ideas regarding the course content. It is arguable that the problems noticed by e-tutors should have been discussed amongst e-tutors and lecturers before the materials were uploaded, printed and presented to students. Researchers such as Greenall (1981) and Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) emphasise the importance of teamwork and collaboration in teaching ESP. Since lecturers, e-tutors and assessors work towards the same course outcomes, it is imperative that they work as a team to prepare the materials, teach and assess students. Thus, the theme that emerged from the findings above is **insufficient collaboration amongst lecturers and e-tutors**.

#### **4.2.4 Train the trainer in ESP**

To establish whether lecturers and e-tutors were qualified to teach the course under study, the lecturer questionnaire (appendix 7) and e-tutor questionnaire (Appendix 6) were administered to lecturers and e-tutors respectively.

An interesting finding out of e-tutor and lecturer questionnaires was that the respondents felt their qualification in English was sufficient to carry them through in teaching the course under study. For example, when asked which qualification was important in teaching an ESP course, the respondents indicated they would be more suited to teach an ESP course with an English studies qualification since the focus was more on the English language, academic writing and communication skills across all industries. One of the respondents pointed out:

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *This is not content-specific about ECONOMIC STUDIES but more on language and academic writing and communication.*
- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *Eng1512 is primarily a language module, so a person qualified in English is best placed to teach it”.*
- **E-tutor respondent 1:** *The issue is that self-empowerment plays a major role in getting knowledge in the other discipline.*

A reasonable interpretation of this finding is that although the respondents valued the English qualification within the course, they were also aware of the importance of the target subject from another discipline.

For example, one e-tutor respondent indicated the following when asked what they would change in the way the course was offered:

- **E-tutor respondent 2:** *To interact more with Economics to ensure that there is seamless synergy between our course and Economics and students see both as complementary of each other.*

This observation is in line with the features of CLIL that acknowledges the ‘synergy’ in the interaction between the learning of the subject matter and of language (Holzweber, 2012). The respondent’s comment indicates there was no ‘synergy’ regarding Economics as a subject and the English language aspects. In addition, there was no lecturer or e-tutor qualified in the Economics discipline in the course under study. According to Haj Sassi (2015:349), course planners’ decisions on the content depends on the following: “teachers’ beliefs and knowledge, the needs analysis results conducted for the course, and the materials available as resources in addition to reviewing similar courses, tests in the area, and consultation with teachers and specialists”.

This means the content in the study guide was based on what the lecturers and e-tutors perceived they knew of the subject instead of what was supposed to be included according to best practices in the Economics discipline. In addition, Abedeen’s (2015) study highlighted that the teacher participants in the study indicated that they did not have any kind of training on the specific content of their ESP courses. They also

indicated that the ESP courses they were offering were more general than specific and the result was students with low competency in English, in some cases.

In this regard, the teaching team would be required to identify problems in the materials and work on improving them. It is also against this background that training for all ESP practitioners should be considered (McAllister & Graham, 2016; Micic & Vekaric, 2011; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991). Once again, this finding brings to light the need for training of ESP practitioners, with the theme of **insufficient collaboration amongst lecturers and e-tutors** emerging.

#### **4.2.5 Material posted on the main course website**

To establish the type of materials posted on the course website, the observation schedule (Appendix 8) was administered on the course website.

Regarding the materials on the main course website, the findings showed that there were three documents in Portable Document Format (PDF). The materials posted on the main course website comprised the study guide, tutorial and feedback letters. These documents were also posted to students as hard copies. This means students had access to these materials online and in hard copy format. Apart from these three documents, there were no other documents posted on the main course website. Therefore, an interpretation of this finding is that the posted materials were available online, but there were no additional materials to supplement the three, and there were no recommendations of other texts or links to internet websites containing relevant material.

Velikaya's (2014) study suggests that a good way of making an ESP course more efficient would be to add activities that include reading and analysis of texts extracted from various sources. This indicates the importance of supplementary materials or tasks towards effective teaching in ODL. The implication of this finding is that the **course website lacked supplementary materials to assist in the learning and teaching processes.**

Another finding indicated the three documents posted on the course website were the same as the hard copy ones in PDF. This means the online documents did not accommodate any form of interactivity with the documents. Mohamed (2004) emphasises a need for proper designing of learning material for ODL to engage the learner and promote learning and teaching. It is arguable that the hard copy documents even had an advantage since students could even make annotations and add notes on them. The implication of this finding is that **there was limited interactivity within the materials utilised in the course.**

#### **4.2.6 Materials posted on the e-tutor website**

To establish the type of materials posted on the e-tutor website, the observation schedule (Appendix 8) was administered on the e-tutor website.

The findings in the observation schedule also revealed that although the e-tutor websites also comprised the same documents posted on the main course website, it also included supplementary materials. The supplementary materials posted were in the form of notes, titles of recommended texts and links to relevant information.

The finding indicates that although the e-tutor website provided what was missing in the main course website, it is arguable whether the supplementary materials were included on the e-tutor course website since the teaching and learning process was supposed to take place on the e-tutor website.

Therefore, it could be concluded that although supplementary materials were limited, they were available on the e-tutor course website. In addition, students, as carriers and interpreters of knowledge, were also expected to be active learners who should have also brought in supplementary materials as part of 'active learning' in ODL as proposed in the Col framework ZPD theory.

#### **4.2.7 Module form, study guide and tutorial letter**

To establish how the content of ESP materials should be structured in the course under study, the content analysis schedule (Appendix 4) was used to collect data from the materials. The content analysis schedule assisted in focusing on specific items

and summarising the data obtained from the module form (Appendix 3), study guide, tutorial letter and PoEs. Some of the schedule content was adapted from Brown and Rodgers (2002), and the researcher developed some additional statements based on the objectives of the current study.

***i) Module form***

The content in the module form was intended to guide the direction of the content, teaching and assessment of the whole course. The first question in the schedule was intended to establish whether the course form outlined the purpose and objectives of the course. The results indicated that the course form included the purpose, outcomes, scope and context, and assessment criteria of the course. The module form is an important document that can be viewed as the 'blue-print' of a course. Having a document such as a module form in a course is a good approach as this document contains guidelines for material designers, lecturers and assessors. Therefore, one may conclude that the course form fulfilled its task of outlining the expectations, scope and assessment criteria of the course under study.

***ii) Study guide***

The second document included in the study and which is relevant to promoting effective teaching was a study guide that contained units that were structured to meet the objectives of the course. A content analysis schedule was used to establish whether the content was clear and relevant to the course, in terms of expectations, purpose, objectives, outcomes, relevance, readability, editorial qualities and availability. To achieve this, some of the questions in the schedule for the study guide were adapted from Brown and Rodgers (2002) and some were my own ideas based on the thrust of the research question.

Analysis of the study guide showed that each unit in the study guide was based on the objectives outlined in the module form. These units were listed as follows: reading Economic and Management Texts, visual literacy in Economic Management Sciences, grammar for Economic and Management Sciences, and writing essays and referencing for Economic and Management Sciences. Unit 4 comprised content for

two outcomes, instead of one and the study guide comprised four units that were based on five outcomes. It was also established that each unit began with a list of expected outcomes for the specific unit. The implication of this finding is that **there was consistency between the content of the module form and the study guide.**

The findings also revealed that some units in the study guide contained content related to aspects of Economics; some units presented general examples and activities that were not specific to the Economics discipline. This finding is in line with the findings in student questionnaires where the respondents indicated some content was related to the Economics aspects. The implication of this finding is that although some of the content of the study was authentic, more content related to subject specific specialist language could have been added. Thus, the theme of problematic learning materials was seen yet again.

The results also indicated the content in this study guide was interactive in some sections as they referred students to the e-tutor website for further discussion on specific topics. For example, one of the students commented about this approach on the e-tutor website as indicated below.

*5 Feb 2017 @ 10:48*

**Student participant:**

*Good day*

*When are we going to commence with other tasks of this course? After each and every task on tutorial letter 501. It always say that "Your E-tutor will provide a text for you to practise" This is a very good initiative, looking forward to this*

The comment above indicates that students welcomed interactive materials that led to effective learning. However, the disappointing factor was that the materials comprised content which were saved in 'PDF'. This means there was no opportunity for interactivity within the content. However, it would seem the little interactivity evident in the content was limited to certain sections of the study guide where very few internet links and references to e-tutors' course websites were mentioned. As discussed earlier, interactive content draws the student's attention and curiosity, thus encouraging the student to engage more with their materials. Therefore, based on the

findings at this point, one may conclude there was limited interactivity in the study guide.

An important point worth noting is the inconsistencies in the presentation of the content, several spelling errors, and alignment issues in some tables and numbering within the study guide. For example, in some sections, a topic was presented with notes, followed by activities; some topics were presented with notes, but no activities. Although there were very few spelling errors and alignment issues, these errors should never appear in any academic material. In the light of effective teaching of an English course, grammar and writing skills are a requirement; therefore, presenting materials riddled with structural and syntactic errors does not demonstrate effective teaching. The implication of this finding is that **some parts of study guide contained grammatical errors and errors in alignment and numbering.**

### *iii) Tutorial letter*

The third document that also played an important role in the learning process was a tutorial letter - hence it was included in this study. The focus was on establishing whether its content (with regard to expectations, purpose, objectives, outcomes, relevance, readability, editorial qualities, and availability) was clear. To achieve this, some of the statements and questions in the schedule were also adapted from Brown and Rodgers (2003); some were the researcher's own ideas, and were based on research question.

The data obtained from the tutorial letter indicated that the purpose and outcomes, as outlined in the '*module form*', were also repeated in the tutorial letter. Repetition of the purpose and outcomes in the tutorial letter is important as it provides guidance regarding the content of the course. Students did not have access to the *module form* hence it was important that relevant information included in the *module form* was also provided in the tutorial letter. In addition, the content regarding assessment also followed the guidelines in the *module form*.

Furthermore, the content of the tutorial letter also included three assignments and PoE questions. Therefore, the assignments and PoE questions that served as formative

and summative assessment were presented right after discussion of the requirements in the tutorial letter. This means that all students who had accessed the tutorial letter were able to read information regarding the course and access all assignments on time. Therefore, the results indicated that the tutorial letter contained content relevant to the course and the guidelines in the course form. The results of the assignment and PoE content are discussed in the next section.

#### **4.2.8 ESP assignments and PoE**

To establish whether there was consistency between the course materials and assessment tools used in the course, the content analysis schedule (Appendix 4) was administered on the course website.

The data collected from the assessment tools (assignments and PoE questions) showed that there was an interconnection between the content of the assignments, the PoE, and the outcomes outlined in the course form and study guide.

For example, the second outcome stated that students should “*Understand visual presentations of information related to the field of Economics*” and the examination of Assignment 2 indicated that the content was about visual literacy. This was also seen in one of the units of the study guide.

##### **i) Assignment 1: CRITICAL READING AND THINKING SKILLS**

The results in assignment one showed that there was a link between this assignment and one of the outcomes outlined in both the course form and study guide. Moreover, the questions comprised reading and answering questions based on a given article. The authenticity of the content within this assignment was also examined. In this regard, the findings indicated there were some sections that included content related to Economics, but most of the sections comprised questions that required general knowledge. For example, one of the questions contained an activity that required students to match a list of words that included Economics terminology, such as audit, budget, insolvent and net profit.

The findings also showed that there were similarities to some of the questions found in the study guide and assignment one questions. For instance, an activity in the study guide which required students to match words in the first column with their meanings in the second column was also used in assignment one. These findings demonstrate that this section of assessment took into consideration the objectives, outcomes and assessment criteria indicated in the course form. In addition, the flow of information between the materials and assessment tools indicated alignment and consistency.

However, repetition of the same questions in the study guide and assignments did not demonstrate effective teaching. A student should be able to distinguish the teaching approaches and outcomes between secondary and tertiary level. In addition, repetition of questions across materials would not challenge students to apply their minds in the set tasks. Therefore, this finding may also be linked to the recurring theme of problematic learning materials where repetition for instance encourages rote-learning and often regurgitation of learnt materials.

#### ii) Assignment 2: VISUAL LITERACY

One of the questions asked in the content analysis schedule was related to an attempt to establish a link between the guidelines of the *module form*, content of the study guide and assessment. In this regard, the findings showed that the content in Assignment 2 was also linked to another outcome indicated in the *module form* and study guide. In addition, most of the questions in Assignment 2 seemed to contain content related to Economics. Some questions included a table with numbers and students were required to analyse the table and answer questions based on the contents of the table. Furthermore, some questions included images that students had to analyse and respond to questions based on these images. Similar to Assignment 1, some questions in Assignment 2 were not structured around the Economics content. Therefore, this assignment indicated some degree of inconsistency regarding the aims and outcomes of the intended questions.

#### iii) Assignment 3: WRITING AND REFERENCING

The findings regarding the content of Assignment 3 indicated that the assignment comprised a single essay question which could be linked to the last two outcomes

indicated in the module form. The essay question comprised two topics from which students were supposed to choose one and then write an essay as indicated in the example below.

*Topic 1*

*Present two informal financing institutions you are familiar with and discuss the advantages and disadvantages they pose to society. [50 marks]*

*Topic 2*

*Assume you and your friends were entrepreneurs, starting a new business venture. Explain the type of your business/trade and the marketing strategies you would employ to advertise your company and the products. Briefly include the benefits of entrepreneurship in your discussion.*

*[50 Marks]*

In this assignment, students were expected to apply their critical thinking, reading, writing and referencing skills. It is remarkable that this single question was able to incorporate the content of the other learning units. For example, in attempting to answer the essay question, students would have had to conduct research and read on the chosen topic. They would then write the essay and apply their grammar and referencing skills. This process required the students to apply their critical thinking skills as well. In a nutshell, the essay questions set in Assignment 3 demonstrate a fusion of diverse skills requisite at this tertiary level of study.

The findings showed that one of the two topics could be related to the Economics discipline, while the other seemed open to the inclusion of matters relating to Economics, but this was dependant on the student's view of the world. Once again, the question should be clear whether students should respond to questions based on general views or Economics discipline. One may conclude there was some degree of inconsistency with regard presenting content related to the Economics discipline.

#### iv) Assignment 4: PoE

A PoE is described as an informative tool that may be viewed as continuous assessment that records a student's noticeable development and progress which can even be shared. Although students are awarded marks, the PoE also contributes to students' self-assessment on what they learn (Shin, 2013). The findings in the content analysis schedule indicated that the PoE was only used for summative assessment instead. Shin's (2013) description of a PoE indicates that activities related to a portfolio should be ongoing to allow time for self-assessment and reflection. Therefore, the theme that emerges from this finding is **watered-down summative assessment**.

In summary, the themes that emerged from the data collected through using various research instruments were identified. The larger concepts and theories pertinent to this study are now linked to the emerging themes in the next chapter.

### **4.3 Interaction in an online ESP course**

The objective of interaction amongst students, students with learning materials, between students and lecturers, and amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors was addressed by eliciting data through the administration of the interview questionnaires and observation schedules to students, lecturers, e-tutors and on the course website.

The findings below were yielded from the administration of interview questionnaires and observation schedules to students, lecturers, e-tutors, and on the course website.

#### **4.3.1 Interaction between students**

##### **4.3.1.1 Students' online participation**

To establish students' online participation, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) and observation schedule (Appendix 8) on the course website were administered.

With the course under study being offered on this specific online platform, it was important to understand how students shared knowledge and assisted each other

during the semester. Therefore, a starting point in the student questionnaire was to ask the question: '*About how many hours per day do you spend on social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, twitter, etc.)?*' The question was asked to find out whether students had access to internet and if they were comfortable interacting with people online. In this regard, the findings showed that most (97%) student respondents could access internet websites and could spend time participating on interactive platforms such as WhatsApp. However, the few (12%) respondents who spent a few minutes on social media indicated they were not allowed to use cellular phones within their working environment.

The respondents who could not access the internet because of work obligations during the day could pose a problem for ODL since most activities and interactivity within the courses take place during the day. Despite this problem, one may conclude the respondents had access to the internet and were able to participate with their counterparts online.

The question that followed, '*How often do you participate on the ENG1512 course website (myUnisa)?*' yielded disappointing results. Responses to this question were varied; one group (32%) of respondents indicated they accessed the course website often, while another group (45%) pointed out that they rarely participated in the course website. A smaller (8%) number of respondents indicated that they had never participated in the course website. The respondents who indicated they accessed the course website often elaborated that they accessed the course website to check deadlines for submission of assignments, discussion forum or discuss the content of assignments with other students. However, there were student respondents who indicated they did not see a need to access the course website, as the materials that were posted were also accessible in hard copies they had already received from the institution. Another disturbing comment was from respondents who added that data to access internet was expensive, as a result, they could not afford to access the system as much as they would have wanted to.

These findings above are a cause for concern as this course website was designed to enable interaction amongst all participants active in the course. Furthermore, this is where students were supposed to share information and guide each other as they

navigated the course. However, it seemed most respondents could not participate on the course website. For those who accessed the course website, it seems they focused on specific information, but did not interact with their fellow students. These findings are consistent with those of Mbatha and Naidoo's (2010) study which revealed that students did not use the online platform actively, frequently and consistently. Therefore, the theme that emerged from this finding was **limited student participation on the course website**.

To corroborate the findings in student questionnaires, the exchange of information in the discussion forum within the course website was observed. Therefore, to establish whether there was interaction amongst students, the following statement was included in the observation schedule: '*Student participation is evident in all platforms*'. Unfortunately, the findings, in this regard, showed that there was only a single discussion forum with numerous queries and a single response from one of the students - all in a period of five months.

The findings also indicated that the participants were mainly students who introduced themselves to the forum in the first two months and a few queries regarding face-to-face classes, WhatsApp groups and information regarding the required format in assignments. In the third month, most student participants' queries were based on information regarding submission of assignments. For example, the participants requested information on how to attach a signed plagiarism form on an assignment, submission of assignments online, and feedback regarding submitted assignments. Some of the comments regarding the participants' queries were as follows:

- **Student participant:** *Im nervous ppl i dnt even know how we attatch plagarism form along with the assignment and the cover page.*
- **Student participant:** *Hey guys, please add me on whatsapp, my number 0724754595 tnx.*
- **Student participant:** *The question that I have is the plagiarism form... how does one attach it to the assignment? Cause it says that NB No assignment will be accepted without this attachment.*

It seems that most comments from the participants indicated that they were also struggling with technical issues in trying to submit assignments, which indicates the need to induct the students into this type of information either in the tutorial letter or on the course website. It is arguable that students' queries on the main course website were valid, but some of them could have been directed to the wrong people. For example, a lecturer instead of a student might have addressed the question regarding attaching a plagiarism form better. Since most students were new on the course and online delivery environment, it might have been difficult for other respondents to respond to queries or share meaningful information when they were also struggling.

At this stage, it is contested that the participants wanted someone with knowledge regarding their queries to step in, but it seems that was not possible. According to Mbatha and Naidoo (2010), the online platform serves as a learning management system (LMS) for collaboration and study-related interaction. This means collaboration amongst students should have been taking place at this point. Therefore, the implication of the finding above is there was no evidence of productive and meaningful interaction nor collaboration amongst students. In this regard, the theme that emerged from this finding was **insufficient interaction in online learning**.

A follow-up question was asked, based on an assumption that interaction was taking place between students: *'Do students discuss the content related issues?'* The question was used to establish what exactly respondents spoke about when interacting on the course website. In this regard, the findings in the observation schedule revealed that although the respondents shared content-related issues in the course, some of their queries were not specific, so it would not have been easy for other students to assist. For example, some students wrote the following on the course website:

- **Student participant:** *Hey Guys ..., Please guys help m lost how do we go abt this course?*
- **Student participant:** *Hi guys am also doing ENG1512, how do we go about this subject, anyone who has a clue come to my rescue.*

The comments above indicate that the respondents did not seem to know how to navigate through the course, and other students might not know how to address these problems. It is argued that students who struggled to navigate the course were those who were not familiar with the ODL environment or those who were guided by teachers every step of the way in non-ODL environments in the past. At this stage, the tutorial letter had all the information to guide students navigate the course, but it seems these specific students had not read it. It is also evident from their comments that their English language proficiency skills were not yet developed. The finding at this point indicated that despite the materials having been posted online and in hard copies, some participants still did not know how to navigate the course. This is consistent with Mohammadi and Araghi's (2013) assertion regarding the urgent need to improve students' self-directed learner readiness (SDLR) in ODL as some students might not know how to work on their own. The themes that emerged from this finding were **limited comprehension skills and limited English language proficiency skills amongst students.**

#### **4.3.1.2 Students' preferred point of interaction**

To establish students' preferred point of interaction, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) was administered to students. The first question posed was to determine students' preferred point of interaction by asking, *Between e-tutors, lecturers, and students, who do you communicate with most regarding the ENG1512 module?* The findings to the question revealed that most (64%) student respondents communicated with other students, family members and friends. However, lecturers and e-tutors were the least point of communication regarding the course. The fact that there was interactivity amongst students is good since they would be able to share ideas and assist each other where possible. The Col framework and ZPD theory also encourage interaction with counterparts within the learning environment. However, as indicated earlier, there was no evidence of the interaction mentioned by the respondents.

In addition, it is disappointing that the respondents preferred to interact with the peers and family members instead of lecturers and e-tutors. Although it is good for students to involve their peers in their studies, at some point, students would need lecturers

and e-tutors to guide them regarding the content of the course. Therefore, it would be pointless for students to avoid interaction with their teachers within the course. The emerging theme on this finding was **insufficient interaction in online learning**.

#### **4.3.1.4 Students' participation on social media**

To establish students' participation on social media, I administered the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) to students.

The findings in the student questionnaire indicated that interactivity amongst students took place mostly on WhatsApp and e-mail. This means information regarding the content of the course was shared outside a recognised platform in the course. Although it is good for students to share ideas online, it may be a problem if the teaching team does not recognise the platforms.

Firstly, this form of interactivity isolates students who are not invited to these platforms. In the questionnaire, the respondents who wanted interaction to take place on the course website felt interaction amongst students was limited because most students used platforms outside the course website. The following example extracted from the course website illustrates this point:

- **Student participant:** *The discussion groups are not yet active since people post their numbers to request group chats. Therefore, this type of a behaviour limits our interaction with other students who want to discuss the content of the course”.*

Although Du Plooy (2007) points out that student should be able to learn to work on their own in ODL, the comment above indicates that some students may still need their counterparts and lecturers to help them navigate their way in ODL. In addition, as indicated in Mohammadi and Araghi's (2013) study, some students need training to improve their SDLR that directly contributed to ESP learning in ODL. This means as students get used to learning in ODL, they would still need a supportive environment with students and lecturers to assist when there is a need.

Secondly, interactivity outside the course website may not afford lecturers to monitor and assist when students feed each other with incorrect information. The implication of these findings is that interaction between the respondents and other students did take place, although there was no solid proof of this, since they used platforms outside the recognised mode of communication or interaction. Moreover, platforms not recognised in the course led to isolation of some students who want to share ideas on the course website. The theme that emerged from this finding was **isolation of students from others**.

A follow-up question was used to establish what the respondents discussed using the platform they preferred - in this case, WhatsApp, as mentioned previously. The respondents were given three options from which to select an answer: *study related issues, personal issues or both*. The findings revealed that most (79%) respondents focused mainly on study related issues; they shared ideas and discussed assignment questions. Examples of some of the respondents' comments are listed below.

- **Student respondent:** *Study related issues like the marks we obtained on the course assignments.*
- **Student respondent:** *Study material, relevant material, textbooks, past experiences.*
- **Student respondent:** *Study related with regards to how they have attempted to do certain questions and provide help where necessary.*

Although the respondents did not participate as expected on the course website, it seems active learning was taking place amongst students as they shared ideas and experiences regarding their studies. However, as indicated earlier, the problem in this instance is that it is known whether this was happening and if it was happening, there was no way of knowing whether the knowledge shared was correct. Therefore, the implication of this finding is that there was no evidence of students' interaction within the course. As a result, the theme that emerged from this finding was **insufficient interaction in online learning**.

To establish whether students had specific expectations, the following statement was included in the observation schedule: '*students' expectations are evident*'. The results showed that in the last month of data collection, more queries were regarding feedback regarding submitted assignments, submission dates for PoEs, and clarity in writing the PoE. As indicated in the examples below, some students indicated they were expecting to receive feedback from the submitted assignments, as the information in the assignments was essential to respond to the reflection section of the PoE.

- **Student participant:** *Hi I'm ... and I would just like to know when we will receive feedback on our assignments.*
- **Student participant:** *Hello everyone, Has anyone received their marks yet? I feel like I'm the only one who hasn't.*
- **Student participant :** *Hi all anyone who has got results for these course i'm confused now I haven't got the result even for one assignment and assignment 4 it requires us to revert back to the assignment we have already done.*

The findings above showed that although most participants were directing the questions to other students, it proved to be a futile move since students could not assist in this regard. It could be argued that it is within students' rights to expect to receive results before submission of the next assignment as comments in the marked assignments could assist in improving for the next assignment. In their study, Dudzik and Dzieciol-Pedich's (2014) point out that in most cases student' expectations were not considered during the planning process. Students' needs and expectations are intertwined; therefore, it is important to find a way of establishing these before the teaching and learning process begins. Therefore, the conclusion on the findings above is that interaction amongst students and lecturers was not taking place because of limited interaction and delayed feedback. Therefore, the themes that emerged from this finding were **delayed feedback on students' marked assignments and insufficient interaction in online learning.**

More probing using an observation schedule was conducted to establish whether some students participated more than the others in the discussion forum. In this regard, the observation findings indicated that there were no responses to queries

posted on the main course website, but a few students continued to send more queries. This finding indicates that the students were still hoping to receive feedback regarding their queries. Although there was just one response from a student, the student who received feedback acknowledged the response and extended their gratitude. This indicates the importance of human interaction in making students feel that they are not alone in their learning journey. Other examples of students' need to connect with fellow students are indicated in their comments extracted from the course website:

- **Student participant:** *Hello guys I am ..., really looking forward to work together with you and help each other to all pass this course. if there is and WhatsApp group or anyone who would like to discuss anything about this course here is my contact.*
- **Student participant:** *Good Day fellow students, ive asked to be added on a whatsapp group for this course but respond dololo, so im in need of study partner/s via whataspp, if interested please whatsapp me on.*

The comments above indicate that the participants on this website were addressing their fellow students, but were not receiving feedback.

It can be a daunting experience for new students in an ODL environment not to have someone with whom they can share study related issues. In addition, when someone responds to a query posed, it adds a human touch to the silent world of posting messages on the course website. Since most first year students were used to face-to-face interaction environment, they might find learning online challenging, especially if there is lack of guidance or interaction within the online platform. However, as indicated in their questionnaire feedback, there may still have been interactivity on social media such as WhatsApp and electronic mail, as revealed by some student respondents. Therefore, the finding above indicates there was a yearning by students to interact with fellow students on any available platform, but their wish was not granted.

### 4.3.2 Students' interaction with the tutorial letter

To establish students' interaction with the tutorial letter, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) was administered to students.

The first question asked in the student questionnaire was related to the tutorial letter as a document that should have contained all the information regarding the course and assessment. The question asked was intended to establish whether the respondents read the content intended to guide them in the course under study. In this regard, the following question was posed, *When you accessed Tutorial letter 101, did you read everything?*

The findings showed that although most (79%) respondents indicated that they had read everything or specific information, few (21%) stated that they did not read everything.

Examples of some of the responses were as follows:

- **Student respondent:** *Yes i read everything because I need to know all about the course before I start with the assignments.*
- **Student respondent:** *about assignments due date, whom to contact for queries, year marks and how to go about with my course.*
- **Student respondent:** *I JUST PERUSE AND TAKE WHAT IS IMPORTANT.*

For respondents who indicated that they just perused the material or that they did not read everything, it could be argued that they were not serious about the learning process. However, it could be the case that some of these respondents did not know how to work on their own or were just not ready to deal with an unfamiliar ODL environment, as mentioned earlier. Although some skills are developed as they are learnt, students are expected to enter a tertiary level course with skills such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, comprehension, creative thinking and the ability to analyse content. The finding is that the respondents did not read everything at once, but only read sections that were relevant to them at the time of reading.

### 4.3.3 Relevance of the content

To establish the relevance of the content to the Economics discipline, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) was administered to students.

When asked whether the content of the course was relevant to the Economics discipline, the majority (76%) respondents indicated the content was relevant. However, few (18%) respondents indicated that only some parts of the content were relevant. A smaller (6%) number of respondents indicated the content was not relevant. Examples of some of the responses are indicated below.

- **Student respondent:** *I think there should be added a vocabulary section relating to economics and accounting in the book. This will help students to familiarise themselves with words from their intended profession.*
- **Student respondent:** *Yes because reading and writing is what we do every day, critical thinking is what i do on other courses as well. Its more English based than economics.*
- **Student respondent:** *More detailed and useful information that not only teaches us but helps us with our assignments.*

For respondents to understand the relevance of the content, they had to engage in the materials that means they were aware of what was in their materials. In addition, the findings indicated there was a need to add authentic content related to the Economics subject in the materials. Although some units attempted to included content related to Economics, it would seem the respondents wanted all sections to be consistent in this regard.

In other sections of the questionnaire, the respondents indicated they found the content “*tricky and challenging*”. Once again, the comments above indicate that the respondents did engage with the material, but might have had trouble grasping the content because of lack of comprehension skills when reading the material. This means the process of students’ interaction with their materials could be hampered if they do not understand the content. The emerging theme to this finding was **limited comprehension skills amongst students.**

The findings in the questionnaire also revealed presentation of the content might also trigger lack of interest in the materials if the respondents find the content to be watered down. In other sections of the questionnaire, respondents indicated they were familiar with content as it was covered when they were still at secondary level. For example, one of the respondents commented as follows:

- **Student respondent:** *These are topics that are meant for secondary students, therefore having them here won't necessarily add value especially at this level.*

The general finding in the student questionnaires was that the respondents found the materials lacking interactivity, authenticity, and difficult to comprehend in some cases. Nevertheless, the respondents still read and used the content presented in the tutorial letter and study guide for effective learning.

#### **4.3.4 Students' interaction with materials on the course website**

To establish students' interaction with materials on the course website, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) to students and observation schedule (Appendix 8) on the course website were administered. During my observation of the content posted on the main course website, the findings revealed that most questions from student participants were related to the content. As indicated in the examples below, some participants wanted to know how to respond to specific assignment questions, while others wanted information regarding content in the study guide.

- **Student participant:** *Hi all anyone who has got results for these course i'm confused now I haven't got the result even for one assignment and assignment 4 it requires us to revert back to the assignment we have already done.*
- **Student participant:** *Plz help with method referencing hw it done.*

However, one of the participants noticed errors in the material and was able to draw attention to them, as indicated in the example below.

- **Student participant:** *Hi I have realised that numbering on question 3 of assignment 2 is not correct. So I would like to know whether I should correct it or just write it as it is.*

The comments above indicate that the participants were engaging with the materials, given that they were asking questions related to that content. In addition, the participant who was able to identify some of the errors also demonstrated the participant engaged actively with the materials. It is also interesting to note that other students did not comment about the error on the assignment. One wonders how they answered the questions if there was a problem with the numbering. It is arguable that any form of errors in the materials is unacceptable. It would be pointless to expect students to improve their English language proficiency skills when in reality they were exposed to mediocre materials. Nevertheless, the implication of the finding is that most respondents were engaging in their learning materials.

The question *'In your view, in which unit were you exposed to new information?' was also posed. In response to the question, a few (55%) respondents identified different units which included writing skills, visual literacy or referencing. However, there were respondents who identified the unit that focused on referencing as the only one that had new information. Few (31%) indicated there was no specific new information in the study guide. The following examples extracted from the student questionnaire indicate some of the respondents' responses.*

- **Student respondent:** *study unit 4: relating to Referencing for Economic and management Sciences.*
- **Student respondent:** *At this moment in time I have come across everything that I've seen in tutorial 501 in high school.*
- **Student respondent:** *Nothing I haven't seen before, whole course was just a reversion of primary high school rather.*

As indicated in the comments above, once again, there were respondents who indicated they had already been exposed to the content in all the units so there was nothing new to learn, instead they regarded the content as a reminder of some of the

things they were exposed to before. Despite some respondents' previous exposure to the content, there were student respondents who indicated they had learned something from the study guide. Once again, having students who have learned something from the materials indicated they gave time and attention to understand the content in the materials.

The findings above are important, as they draw attention to the need for students gain relevant knowledge about the discipline. In addition, effective teaching will not happen if the target group does not receive relevant content in the learning materials that are supposed to impart meaningful learning. These findings are consistent with those of Gatehouse (2001), who argues that an ESP instructor - who is also viewed as a researcher - can find and piece together relevant information from different sources or even design special material to create relevant content for students. Therefore, implication of the findings above is that there is evident interaction of students with their materials in the course under study.

#### **4.3.5 Interaction between students and lecturers**

To establish whether interaction between students and lecturers was taking place, the student questionnaire (Appendix 5) and observation schedule (Appendix 8) to students and on the course website were administered.

##### **4.3.5.1 Support for students**

To establish whether students were receiving support through interaction between them and lecturers, the student questionnaires (Appendix 5) and an observation schedule (Appendix 8) were administered to the students and lecturers.

One of the questions posed in the student questionnaire was '*In your opinion, what kind of support would you want to receive in the ENG1512 course*'. The responses from the student respondents were varied with few (19%) respondents indicating a need for interaction with the lecturers while some (26%) indicated they were pleased with the support they were receiving. The remaining student respondents indicated

various issues which included 'more scenarios, assistance in writing assignments and e-portfolio, and examples for the content provided'. A point that had been repeated throughout the questionnaire was a need for face-to-face interaction. Although focus of the study was not on face-to-face interaction since the course was offered online, one could not ignore this need for face-to-face interaction. Examples of some of the student respondents' responses are indicated below.

- **Student respondent:** *Lectures should avail themselves in our campus once or twice a month for clear understanding.*
- **Student respondent:** *To have a lecture that will teach me on how to go about understanding these course where I can attend classes. Since its online subject I find it hard for to understand.*
- **Student respondent:** *i would like to receive more support in visual literacy. the tutorial letter 501 doesnt really have enough information regarding how to approach visual literacy questions.*

The responses above indicate the respondents were feeling isolated because they were not receiving the attention they needed from lecturers. Most of their comments indicated they were struggling with some units in the study guide and working on the PoE. As a result, they needed guidance from someone with knowledge.

It is arguable that the specific comments regarding what student respondents wanted to see happen in the course also indicate that respondents felt there was no active interaction, as in some instances, they used the word 'practical'. The comment also indicates the respondents understood they were in an ODL environment, and were not requesting to be in the same room with the lecturers; however, they did including additional multi-media resources to afford interactivity. The implication of this finding is that the respondents wanted interaction to take place between students and lecturers.

The findings in Lourens' (1993) study have shown that most respondents wanted to be supported by lecturers through 'encouragement, reassurance and motivation'.

However, based on the responses provided in the current study (see examples below); it seems that respondents were not getting this support from their lecturers.

When asked if students were satisfied with the teaching that they were getting from their ENG1512 lecturers during the learning process, they indicated they wanted more interaction with lecturers:

- **Student respondent:** *think there needs to more interaction from the tutors and lecturers with the students.*
- **Student respondent:** *Lecturers are not active on myunisa, for instance assignment 2 is still yet not opened for submission and the due date is soon.*
- **Student respondent:** *I'm not sure If i'm slow but I will preffer to meet with the lecture or tutor face to face for these subject.*
- **Student respondent:** *Feedback from lecturers took 3 weeks. Way too long. the e-tutor however was fantastic.*

The follow-up question required respondents to indicate the kind of support they expected when writing assignments (including the PoE). The results to this question still indicated lack of interaction between respondents and lecturers. Some of the examples below are responses to the question regarding support in their assignments.

- **Student respondent:** *When writing assignments i need a support of like communicating to other fellow students and lectures to enquire about what I do not understand regarding that particular assignment.*
- **Student respondent:** *To understand of what is needed from me to do and pass the assignment these is one of the subject that is stressing me the most, the office numbers are not answer they ring but no answer soo I feel helpless.*
- **Student respondent:** *immediate answer when I enquire about them.*
- **Student respondent:** *to call lectures so that they can help me to explain difficult questions. Because when I call some calls are unanswered.*

The responses above indicate the respondents' desperation and helplessness. As indicated earlier, lack of interaction between students and lecturers may lead to

students developing a negative attitude towards their lecturers. According to Prudnikova (2013:390), “interactive teaching entails cooperation of the active subjects, helping to solve teaching tasks more effectively by using the potential of participants’ cooperation and interaction”. Although CL is viewed important in ESP teaching, the findings in Saba ‘Ayon (2013) showed that some students had negative attitude towards collaboration due to lack of instructor’s support. Based on these findings, Saba ‘Ayon (2013) recommended an increase in effective CL in ESP courses. Therefore, the conclusion based on the findings above is that there was limited interaction between students and lecturers. The theme that emerged from the findings above was **insufficient interaction in online learning**.

#### **4.3.5.2 Lecturers’ preferred mode of teaching ESP in ODL**

To establish lecturers’ preferred mode of teaching ESP in ODL, I administered the lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7) the lecturers.

According to Gatehouse (2001:1), an ESP practitioner is a “teacher, course designer, materials provider, collaborator, researcher, and evaluator”. Therefore, to establish the respondents’ background in teaching ESP and preferred mode of interaction, a starting point in this regard was to ask the question “*In your opinion, do you think you would be more suited to teach ENG1512 if you were qualified in the following: Economics Studies, English Studies, or Both*”.

The results to the question above revealed the respondents believed a qualification in English was compulsory since the course was primarily a language one. One of the respondents added, “*I am comfortable in teaching the course without a qualification in Economic studies*” and added, “*The issue is that self-empowerment plays a major role in getting knowledge in the other discipline*”. This response suggests that lecturers would rather use their own way of finding knowledge that is required to teach this specific course. This could also mean that they did not see a need for training to be provided, in order to be able to teach an ESP course.

Another comment from another respondent, “*Eng1512 is primarily a language course, so a person qualified in English is best placed to teach it*”. From this response, it is

clear that the lecturers felt their qualification in English studies and the little knowledge they had to teach this course were sufficient. This finding is consistent with that of Ahmad (2012), who points out that ESP teachers find themselves compelled to do what they think best when in unfamiliar territory and the respondents felt that 'their best' was sufficient. However, in this instance, it is submitted that lecturers should be empowered to deal with teaching in an ODL environment in which the approach is not the same as in the face-to-face teaching environment.

In this regard, training in teaching an ESP course in ODL would give lecturers insight regarding collaboration and interaction with counterparts and students. As indicated in Gatehouse (2001), Johns (1997), and Robinson (1991), an ESP teacher could be a collaborator, someone who possesses knowledge on student's specialist interest area, and a researcher who tries to get information beforehand. Consequently, it is arguable that within this context, training in online teaching and student interest area is necessary (McAllister & Graham, 2016; Micic & Vekaric, 2011; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991).

In another question, lecturer respondents were asked to indicate the mode of teaching they preferred between face-to-face and online teaching. In their answers, the respondents opted for face-to-face teaching. Examples of the comments regarding the respondents' preferred mode of teaching are indicated below.

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *Face to face: because of the lively and personal interaction with students that it entails.*
- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *I prefer face-to-face. It affords me the opportunity to interact with students, to clarify all matters immediately, to encourage students and to serve as an inspiration in many ways.*

The findings above indicate the respondents were more comfortable with face-to-face interaction instead of online. Although the lecturers' comments did not indicate why they preferred face-to-face interaction when the course was taught online, it was evident there were problems regarding online teaching. Perhaps, they had experienced problems they could not address or were not familiar with some the

system they were using. Nevertheless, there is no way of avoiding online teaching in ODL, therefore, important for lecturers to identify innovative ways of teaching online which could include face-to-face interaction. The importance of innovation in the approach used to promote effective interaction between lecturers and students in specific disciplines is also emphasised by other scholars, such as Tabatabaei and Mokhtari (2014), Kotecha and Rutherford (1991).

These findings are also consistent with students' comments in questionnaires when they indicated they wanted face-to-face interaction with lecturers. As discussed earlier, it is understandable that students request a face-to-face learning environment, as that is what they were familiar with. However, active learning involves an inquiring mind that seeks to learn at all times. Therefore, students cannot enrol in an ODL institution, but expect to be taught as if they are still in a face-to-face / classroom environment. This finding indicates that most respondents still preferred a face-to-face learning environment even when they were enrolled in an ODL course.

#### **4.3.5.3 Lecturers' role in supporting students in ODL**

To establish lecturers' role regarding support for their students, the lecturer questionnaires (Appendix 7) were administered to the lecturers and an observation schedule (Appendix 8) used on the course website.

The first question asked regarding lecturers' role in supporting their students was '*In your opinion, what kind of support should be provided to students registered for ENG1512 course?*' Their responses, as indicated below, were interesting because they seemed to understand students' need for online and academic support.

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *Both technological and academic [support]. Technological in the sense that this is an online course, so it is important for support systems such as myUnisa to be always functional. Often, students complain that these online systems are not working. Intensive academic support is necessary because this is a bridging course for students who cannot out rightly enrol for a degree or diploma.*

- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *Initially, they need a form of face-to-face orientation of the entire course and goal setting. They need practical workshops to manipulate technology to access materials online. A prescribe textbook would be useful.*

The responses above also indicate that lecturer respondents seemed to know the kind of support students needed but they distanced themselves in offering support regarding technical matters when submitting assignments or accessing information on the course website. For instance, they indicated that matters related to technology was not their responsibility. They also mentioned that the staff, which dealt with technical matters, should offer practical workshops to teach students about online navigation. In this case, there should be collaboration between lecturers and technical staff on orientation to students regarding online navigation; and to share ideas on how what should be done when there are problems within the online system used for learning. Based on the findings above, the conclusion is that lecturers' knowledge regarding supporting students in ODL was limited.

#### **4.3.5.4 Lecturers - time spent with students' online tasks**

To establish the amount of time spent by lecturers with students' online tasks, the lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7), student questionnaire (Appendix 5) and an observation schedule (Appendix 8) to the lecturers, students and on the course website, were administered.

When asked to indicate the time spent and what was discussed on the course website, the respondents indicated they spent between four and fifteen hours on the course website. During these hours, the respondents indicated they responded to student queries, explained content and assignments as indicated in the comments below.

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *[4hrs] Answering queries pertaining to assignment content. 2) Fielding questions about assignment due dates 3) Requests for*

*extension of due dates 4Requests to submit assignments as hardy copies instead of online.*

- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *[Between 10 and 15 hrs] Explanations of content and assignments, marking queries, extension of due dates, technical problems and dealing with issues by email and telephone.*

However, in the student questionnaire, the respondents seemed to dispute the responses above as they indicated that there was no interaction with lecturers online. The content on the course website was also examined, to establish the time lecturers and their students spent interacting. Although lecturer respondents listed all the activities they conducted on the course website, the analysis of the course website revealed no indication of such activities by the lecturer respondents. It is not clear why there was this dissonance as lecturer respondents indicated they were active online when they were not.

The welcoming message on the course website indicates that the following:

*Discussion Forum – the General Subject Related Discussions forum is primarily for students to communicate freely with each other. Try to contribute in a meaningful and constructive way so other students can benefit from your comments. To avoid repetition and confusion, before posting queries or comments, check if the issue has already been addressed ... Lecturers and e-tutors will generally observe, and sometimes participate in these discussions.*

The welcoming message above indicates clearly that the discussion forum is for students to interact with each other, and lecturers would only comment when necessary. Therefore, this finding indicates lecturers would participate in the discussion forums whenever necessary. However, there was no indication of when the 'sometimes' indicated on the welcome message would apply. Students posted many relevant queries but there was no feedback from lecturers active in the course. Perhaps the vexed issue regarding the responsibilities of an online ESP teacher calls for future research to establish when and how the 'proximal' stage in ZPD should take place in online learning. Although it is clear that the e-tutors are available to teach and guide students, it would be beneficial for students to understand the roles lecturers

and e-tutors play in the teaching and learning process in ODL. The theme that emerged from this finding was **insufficient interaction in online learning**.

#### **4.3.5.5 Lecturers' communication with students on the course website**

To establish lecturers' communication with students on the course website, student questionnaire (Appendix 5) and the observation schedule (Appendix 8) to the students and on the course website were administered.

The findings from the observation schedule indicated that there was no indication of an exchange of ideas, response to queries, or additional supplementary materials. Although one could argue the welcoming message, content of the tutorial letter and the announcement posted on the main course website (see example below), included interaction with students, it was not the same as direct interactive communication. The announcement indicated below was the only one posted on the course website throughout the semester.

#### **Announcement**

**Subject**                      *Submission of assignments*

**Modified Date**          *08-Feb-2017 13:10*

**Groups**                      *Site*

#### **Message**

*Dear Students*

*Welcome to the first semester.*

*It has come to our notice that some students wish to submit assignments 2 and 3 already. Please note that the system will not be open for these assignments, it is at the moment open for submission of assignment 1 only.*

*Best wishes*

An interpretation of these finding is that the only direct communication with students on the course website was from a single announcement posted at the beginning of the semester. It is arguable that lecturers could have posted more announcements to

respond to student queries on the main course website. However, lecturer respondents also indicated they sometimes interacted with students on e-mail. One of the examples of email communication is indicated below.

- **Student:** *My name is ... I've got feedback that I only submitted declaration form, I didn't submit my assignment hence ive got zero for my assignment 01. I did submit my assignment and I submitted the declaration form separately but under the same assignment as I had to scan the form and save it to my usb I was not able to put it in one document/folder with the assignment. Please help me in these matter. Thank you.*
- **Lecturer:** *Dear Student ... Please note that the system allows you to submit once – we posted instructions on how to submit assignments online. If you did not follow the instructions, it means you sent only the declaration form not the assignment. Kindly note that it is your responsibility to submit as required, to avoid such frustrations. I hope you submitted the subsequent assignments properly. Regards.*

Although some of the findings in student questionnaires revealed there were delayed responses on email queries, it would seem students received responses at some point. The example above indicates that although interaction was limited on the course website, lecturers and students still interacted on e-mail. However, it could be argued that continuous interaction on e-mail would not be ideal for teaching, as it is not inclusive. It is arguable that interaction on e-mail is good for quick queries however, lecturers' comments online platform would reach many students, and in some cases, there would not be many queries on e-mail.

Consequently, the implication of this finding is that the online platform designed for the module should be the main point of interaction as it is more inclusive in online learning. The emerging theme from this finding was **insufficient interaction in online learning**.

#### 4.3.6 Interaction between students and e-tutors

To establish whether interaction between students and e-tutors took place, the student questionnaires, e-tutor questionnaire (Appendix 5) and observation schedule (Appendix 8) to the students, e-tutors and on the course website were administered.

As indicated earlier in the chapter, e-tutors are appointed to teach students and work with them through assignments and PoE. Therefore, a questionnaire was also prepared with questions directed at establishing the nature of interaction between e-tutors and students. Some of the questions were similar to the ones in the lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7). Regarding the time e-tutor respondents spent interacting with students, the findings revealed that they spent at least four to six hours per week interacting with students. However, they added, in some instances, students and e-tutors missed each other online as their timing was not the same. As a result, the e-tutor would just respond to questions posed in the hope that the same students would return to find answers to their questions. In some cases, only a few students responded to information posted on the e-tutor website as indicated below in the examples of e-tutor respondents' comments extracted from their questionnaire.

- **E-tutor respondent 1:** 6-10
- **E-tutor respondent 2:** *[2 Hours x 6 Days] However, very few students actually responded to the information posted by me.*
- **E-tutor respondent 3:** *I am online for the required 6 hours, but the students are not often online at the same time as me. They do, however, leave me messages that I respond to during my sessions. I would estimate that 4 out of the 6 hours is for engagement with Students and 2 hours is for new content creation.*

The findings above draw attention to the conflicted messages received from students. In their questionnaire, they complained about their need for interaction, but when the e-tutor offered, they did not show up. When asked about the content of their discussion on the course website, e-tutor respondents added the following comments:

- **E-tutor respondent 1:** *Mostly the students ask me to elaborate on academic writing and referencing. This is often the very first time they get in contact with this and those who want to further their studies was to master the skills of academic writing.*
- **E-tutor respondent 2:** *Many of the discussions were about the administration, for example how to draw a graph using Word. Other discussions revolved around clarification of the contents of the assignment questions.*
- **E-tutor respondent 3:** *A few students discussed spelling and language elements of the course. Some students shared interesting websites they had found and encouraged their fellow students. However, very few students actually responded to the information posted by me.*

The findings in student questionnaire indicated that respondents interacted with e-tutors more than lecturers. However, the findings in the e-tutor questionnaire gave a different perspective; they indicated that whatever was shared on the e-tutor course website was not reaching all the students since most of them were not participating. In this regard, one may conclude that although there were few students who were participating on the e-tutor website, interaction between e-tutors and students was limited.

When student respondents were asked ‘*Are you satisfied with the teaching that you get from your ENG1512 lecturers during the learning processes*’, the general response from most (85%) respondents indicated they were satisfied with the *teaching they were getting from ENG1512*, but their specific comments indicated they were referring to the teaching they were getting from e-tutors. Some of the comments extracted from the student questionnaires are listed below.

- **Student respondent:** *feedback from lecturers took 3 weeks. way too long. the e-tutor however was fantastic.*
- **Student respondent:** *I think there needs to more interaction from the tutors and lecturers with the students.*
- **Student respondent:** *Lecturers are not active on myunisa, for instance assignment 2 is still yet not opened for submission and the due date is soon.*

The comments regarding student respondents' satisfaction about the feedback they got from the e-tutors mean the teaching and learning process was taking place on the e-tutor website despite limited participation from other students. Despite this, one wonders if the teaching provided by the e-tutor and the main course website are sufficient to be regarded as 'effective' teaching because of the massive grammatical and spelling errors that manifested in students' responses, which were discussed in the previous sections.

When e-tutor respondents were asked to indicate the mode of interaction they preferred, the findings revealed that the respondents preferred face-to-face teaching only, while some preferred both face-to-face and online teaching. The respondents who preferred face-to-face teaching indicated they found it easier to engage with students directly and received immediate feedback. Meanwhile, another respondent preferred to teach online because this mode of teaching gave them time to consult reference material sources and colleagues before responding to students' questions.

The findings in the current study seemed to suggest that the need for face-to-face interaction was common amongst student, lecturer and e-tutor respondents. This finding may imply that most respondents participated in online activities because they found themselves in this environment, but that they would rather engage in an environment where they could see and touch each other. This means if they were given an option, perhaps they would not opt for an ODL environment. As discussed earlier, learning online is one of the teaching methods that are approaching the education environment fast. As a result, it is either students or lecturers join in the innovative ways of teaching and learning or be left behind. Therefore, the implication of the finding above is that face-to-face interaction was in demand, but it could only be provided if it was also conducted online. Therefore, the theme that emerged from this finding was **insufficient interaction in online learning**.

#### **4.3.7 Interaction between lecturers, e-tutors, and assessors**

To establish whether interaction amongst lecturers, e-tutors, and assessors took place, the lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7), e-tutor questionnaire (Appendix 6) and

observation schedule (Appendix 8) to the lecturers, e-tutors and on the course website were administered.

#### **4.3.7.1 Lecturers' perceptions regarding interaction with their counterparts**

To establish lecturers' perceptions regarding interaction with their counterparts, the lecturer questionnaires (Appendix 7) was administered to the lecturers on the course website. In the lecturer questionnaires, the first question asked was for the respondents to indicate their interaction time with e-tutors. The findings revealed that interaction did take place between lecturers and e-tutors on e-mail, but not on the course website. The interaction entailed discussion of queries from students and clarifying content. Some of the comments are indicated below.

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *[2hrs] Queries that students raise with the e-tutors, especially with regards to subject content. 2) queries about marked assignments which students would have directed to e-tutors.*
- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *[5hrs] Clarifying content, responding to emails and sending out any relevant information that would be beneficial to students.*

The findings from lecturer questionnaires imply there was limited interaction between them and e-tutors. In addition, it seemed the respondents believed they did what was expected of them and that was sufficient. Continuous interaction and collaboration amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors is important as they all contribute to the success of the teaching and learning process. In Dannatt's (2014) study, the findings revealed that there was increased cooperation and collaboration between tutors when they interacted and that this improved the students' experience. Contrarily, lack of interaction and collaboration amongst the teaching team often leads to conflict, as indicated in Nchindila's (2007) study. Teachers end up blaming each other and showing a lack of respect towards each other. Therefore, the emerging theme in this instance was **insufficient interaction in online learning situations.**

#### **4.3.7.2 E-tutors' perceptions regarding interaction with their counterparts**

To establish e-tutors' perceptions regarding interaction with their counterparts, the e-tutor questionnaire was administered to the e-tutors on the course website.

When the question regarding the nature of interaction between e-tutors and lecturers was posed, the findings revealed there was not much interaction between the e-tutors and lecturers. However, the respondents confirmed that interaction between them and lecturers was on e-mail, even though they did not receive responses to all the queries they sent. The respondents added that they only discussed questions from the students that they could not answer, or the subject matter regarding the course when necessary. The following statements are from e-tutor respondents regarding the nature of interaction between them and lecturers:

- **E-tutor respondent 1:** *I used to send my assigned lecturer an email per week, but then my assigned lecturer changed and the new lecturer never got back to me so I stopped emailing the lecturer. I have been a tutor for 3 years now and my content is up to scratch. Unless there is a major crisis, there is no need for me to speak to a lecturer.*
- **E-tutor respondent 2:** *Very seldom. Less than an hour per week.*
- **E-tutor respondent 3:** *2-4 hours*

The findings above did not indicate the collaboration contemplated in Dannatt's (2014) study. The comments above indicated a sense of disappointment and giving up on the e-tutors' part. Although there was no indication of what was lacking in this relationship, it is clear that e-tutors were hoping for more interaction between them and lecturers. The implication of this finding is that there was limited interaction between e-tutors and lecturers.

#### **4.3.7.3 Interaction with assessors**

To establish the lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7) and observation schedule (Appendix 8) to the lecturers and on the course website were administered.

The main purpose in this regard was to establish whether interaction between lecturers and assessors was taking place. The question regarding the nature of interaction between lecturers and assessors assigned in the course under study was included in lecturer questionnaire. The findings revealed interaction between the respondents and assessors only took place when there was a need or when there was marking to be done. Some of the responses from lecturer questionnaires are indicated below.

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *Interaction with assigned markers is seasonal, it depends on whether or not there is work to be marked. Normally I interact with them just before they begin marking assignments/portfolio to discuss what is expected of them, marking standards, memo, etc. Then we interact during the course of the marking to discuss whatever query they have. Also, we interact during the moderation of scripts where I inform them how to adjust their marking where necessary.*
- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *it is difficult to say because it depends on whether or not there is marking to do. When there is no marking, I don't interact with markers. When it's marking time, I can spend about 2 – 3 hours a week with them ... routing scripts for marking, sort j-Router problems, marking tools, clarifying the marking guide, remuneration issues.*

The comments above also indicated interaction took place whenever it was necessary. Given the environment and time constraints, perhaps, interaction when necessary was the option. However, continuous interaction and the process of sharing ideas regarding assessment in the course should be taken into consideration. The marking process takes place from the beginning of the semester until the end, therefore, there cannot be breaks when it comes having interactive sessions between lecturers and assessors.

The findings from the observation schedule indicated that there was zero interaction on the e-tutors and marker website; this means these websites went unattended the whole semester. These course websites were intended for sharing ideas, adding supplementary materials and updates between lecturers, assessors and e-tutors. The education offered online and exchange of ideas amongst students, e-tutors and

lecturers is important. The findings at this point showed that although interaction amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors took place, it was severely limited.

Interaction, teamwork and collaboration amongst the teaching team should run as a well-oiled machine, but something seemed to be missing. One of the comments in the lecturer questionnaire is as follows:

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *It would also be beneficial if tutors would also do the marking, or the markers be tutors. That would to a great extent guarantee some measure of quality and fairness for students.*

The assessors within the course are also qualified as teachers or lecturers. Therefore, it would be beneficial if they were also allowed to interact with students and explain the implication of their comments in students' assignments. In this regard, there would be consistency and accountability in teaching and assessment. Therefore, the theme that emerged from this finding was **insufficient collaboration amongst lecturers and e-tutors.**

In summary, the themes that emerged from the data collected, using various research instruments, were identified. The larger concepts and theories pertinent to this study are linked to the emerging themes in the next chapter.

#### **4.4 Assessment of online ESP portfolios**

To establish how the assessment of ESP portfolios should be structured, the lecturer questionnaire (Appendix 7) and the content analysis schedule (Appendix 4) to the lecturers and on the PoE questions and marked PoEs, were administered.

Du Plooy (2007) points out that portfolios are used to measure students' knowledge of the content, and assess critical and analytical skills. The main problem with e-portfolio relates to how the process of assessing a PoE is approached.

#### 4.4.1 Student's perceptions of assessment of PoEs

To establish student's perception towards assessment of PoEs, the student questionnaire was administered to the students. The starting point was to establish student's perception towards assessment in general and then moved to understand their views on the assessment of PoE.

The following question was asked to establish which sections in the portfolio were difficult to comprehend: *In your view, which of the PoE questions were challenging to answer?* The findings revealed that the essay writing section was the most difficult. In the essay section, the respondents were required to conduct research and reference their sources. The comments listed below are examples of the responses to the question.

- **Student respondent:** *Writing and Referencing, doing research.*
- **Student respondent:** *Both are topics that are sensitive on our day and age.*
- **Student respondent:** *section B it is challenging because i have to write 400 words about corruption.*
- **Student respondent:** *Section B is most challenging because I have to write about a topic that I do not know about. It is actually challenging because I have to do a lot of research and put more time to it.*

The comments above indicate that students seemed to find the process of conducting research on an unfamiliar topic challenging. As indicated, the topics the respondents had to choose from were open to include views from an Economics point of view, however, they found this section difficult to comprehend. In addition, amongst other things, the question asked in the PoE was intended to challenge students' inquiring mind, research skills and critical thinking skills.

A follow-up question sought to establish the section that respondents found least demanding. The findings revealed that although some (44%) respondents found the reflection section less demanding, they were confounded in responding correctly to these very same reflective aspects. The comments listed below are some of responses provided to the question: *In your view, which of the PoE questions were easy to answer?*

- **Student respondent:** *Section is about reflection and now its difficult to have a better understanding because even the first assignment is not marked yet.*
- **Student respondent:** *Section A, I need to explain why I failed my assignment and only the truth that I need to say not assumption.*
- **Student respondent:** *Section A i still cant believer how i failed assignment number 2 what exactly it is that needed for one to pass.*

The implications of the findings above is that the respondents found the essay writing section difficult because they had to apply their minds. This finding also draws attention to several other findings in this chapter, such as, delayed feedback, lack of feedback when they posed questions on the course website, and lack of participation from students via the course website. When all these findings are considered, it would appear that the teaching and learning process was limited - hence students struggled with the essay writing section.

Peacock et al.'s (2010) support the use of e-portfolios to encourage learner reflection and support at tertiary level. However, if there were no continuous support and reflection during the semester, the results would be disappointing for both lecturers and students. Therefore, the theme that emerged was **limited comprehension skills amongst students.**

To establish whether the respondents preferred the e-portfolio approach, the following question was asked: *Do you prefer to submit a PoE or write examination as final assessment?* Examples of some of the comments from student respondents are indicated below.

- **Student respondent:** *Portfolio is my preferential because will have enough time to think in my own space and rewrite my work until am satisfied.*
- **Student respondent:** *portfolio it gives more time to check and rectify the mistakes if needs be.*
- **Student respondent:** *submit a portfolio, as it will give more time to do the research.*

- **Student respondent:** *I prefer submitting a PoE because you get more time and resources to do it. You can research on the topic in that way you do much better than writing an exam.*

The findings to the question above indicated that all respondents preferred the e-portfolio approach as they had ample time to work on the content without pressure. According to Du Plooy (2007), non-venue based assessment reduces anxiety when compared to venue based examinations. Mărculescu (2015) adds that non-venue based assessment that comprises an e-portfolio is a compelling force in ODL assessment that also encourages students to discover new knowledge. Consequently, the implication of the finding above is that students preferred non-venue based examination that was recommended for assessment of PoEs.

#### **4.4.2 Lecturers perceptions of assessment of PoEs**

To establish lecturers' perception towards assessment of PoEs, the lecturer questionnaire was administered to the students.

In the lecturer questionnaires, when asked their opinion regarding the mode of submission students should use to submit assignments, the response was 'online'. This means the respondents preferred online submission to avoid the problems that came with hard copy submission. However, in the case of the course under study, some hard copy assignments were accepted which indicated lack of consistency within the course. Examples of comments from some of the lecturer respondents are listed below.

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *Online: This ensures that assignments reach the lecturers timeously and that they do not get lost.*
- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *Online: Tutorial letter 101 states that the course is fully online. It thus ought to be treated as such. Hard copies take time to reach the department, and some scripts go astray.*

The statement from the tutorial letter, as indicated below, and comments from the lecturer questionnaire, indicates that the course was delivered online, so if hard copy assignments were accepted, the rules were not always followed.

**“\*\*\*N.B.: Your assignments and the PoE must be submitted ONLINE in PDF files via myUnisa. DO NOT SUBMIT ASSIGNMENTS BY POST. Assignment submitted by post WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED”.**

The comment above indicates that expectations regarding assessment should be made clear and the rules in this regard should be adhered to, especially on delicate matters such as assessment. In this regard, Sewagegn (2016) draws attention to disparities between the perceptions of students and those of lecturers regarding assessment methods. Berry et al. (2014) add that lecturers and students must have an understanding of what assessment is all about, and how it should work within their system. Therefore, consistency should be maintained at all times; if submission of assignments is online, it should apply to all students. This would also reduce the delay in sending marked assignments since it took long to do so with hard copy assignments. Therefore, this finding shows that there was lack of consistency regarding lecturers' expectations and within the assessment processes.

In the lecturer questionnaire, I probed further about the respondents' views regarding what they would change in the course under study. The results showed that some lecturer respondents did not like non-venue based assessment.

For example, one of the respondents stated the following:

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *I would change the exam from being non-venue based to venue based.*

The response from the lecturer respondent indicates either that there was a problem with this approach or that the respondent was not familiar with the approach used.

Comments provided by another lecturer respondent indicated that there were problems with assessing online. For example, one of the comments indicated the following:

- **Lecturer respondent 2:** *Late registration/extension affect assignment due dates. J-Router problems affect marking progress. Corrupt pdf files delay marking process. Students' inability to access materials technologically.*

In all the materials within the course, there was an emphasis of online submission; therefore, it is not clear whether the negative attitude towards non-venue based was motivated by the problems encountered in the assessment system known as the j-router, which was deemed unreliable. Therefore, one may conclude the unreliable assessment system contributed to the problems encountered in non-venue based assessment.

Another problem in submitting non-venue based assessment is that it is impossible to establish whether students worked on their portfolios. Although, in some cases the lack of consistency in students' writing tasks could give them away, it is not easy to detect that in large classes. However, in some cases, it might be too obvious to recognise plagiarised content when the style of writing is not consistent in a document.

In the lecturer questionnaire, a respondent drew attention to the issue of plagiarism, when asked about the problems experienced in the course, e.g.:

- **Lecturer respondent 1:** *Students plagiarise a lot especially in their essays, and often it is difficult to find the source from which they got the information.*

The problem with the finding above is that assessors need to provide evidence if a student has plagiarised. Given the time constraints within the system, it would not be easy for lecturers to identify all the assignments, which demonstrated plagiarism. Sewagegn (2016) asserts that alternative assessment practices - such self-assessment, and e-portfolios - promote active learning. However, if students plagiarise or do not write their own work, active learning would not occur. The implication of this

finding is that, in the course under study, there is no proper system to validate students' work. The theme that emerged from these findings was **problematic non-venue based assessment**.

#### **4.4.3 The structure of an e-portfolio**

To establish how an e-portfolio should be structured, the content analysis schedule (Appendix 4) and student questionnaire (Appendix 5) were administered.

Shin (2013) points out there has not been much information on how to approach assessment of e-portfolios, as a result, a structure of e-portfolios may vary. In the current PoE, the structure and its content were examined. The findings revealed that the PoE in the current study comprised two sections, which did not include all the work done during the semester. This means that the people who worked on the PoE questions might not have had insight into the assessment of e-PoEs. Although Shin (2013) points out there is no clear indication regarding the structure of e-portfolios to represent various linguistic and situational contexts, lecturers should develop a summative assessment tool suitable for the learning activities that took place during the semester.

The findings in the PoE revealed that although it was used in summative assessment, it could not be separated from the assignments within the course.

As a result, the first question in the PoE required students to reflect on their performance in one of the assignments. For example, one of the student respondents' comment was as follows:

- **Student respondent:** *Section is about reflection and now its difficult to have a better understanding because even the first assignment is not marked yet.*

The finding above draws attention to the significance of feedback on marked assignments. In this case, the delayed feedback meant students could not correct their mistakes, if there were any, before writing other assignments. In addition, there was a possibility of repeated errors or mistakes in students' final assessment if feedback is

not received in time. The implication of this finding is that delayed feedback could affect the teaching and learning process.

The findings in the content analysis schedule indicated that the layout of the PoE was different from the three assignments' in the ESP course. For example, the PoE comprised a list of instructions regarding online submission and break down of marks according to sections. In addition, the structure of the PoE questions comprised a reflection on students' performance in the course, and an essay question similar to the one in assignment three.

The findings above could raise one's eyebrow regarding the structure, manner in which it was presented and content. As indicated earlier, the description of a PoE by Shin (2013) seems different from the one presented in the course under study. Although there was an emphasis on online submission, the content of the PoE was not interactive and students could either type or just write using a pen and paper for their answers. Therefore, one may conclude that although the course under study was advertised as being fully online, the PoE did not possess the characteristics of an e-portfolio - hence it is regarded as a PoE instead of 'e-portfolio' in this study. The theme that emerges from this finding is **limited interactivity in summative assessment**.

Another finding indicated that although there was consistency between the questions in the PoE and other assignments, the PoE seemed to be lacking in sufficient content to engage students' cognitive skills. The cognitive presence of the Col framework "reflects the learning inquiry process", which addresses effective learning, application and solving of problems, making sense of and integrating ideas and testing plausible solutions (Garrison et al., 2009:32). Although relevant and important, the reflection section and essay question did not seem sufficient in summative assessment. More questions related to the work done during the semester could have been included. It is not clear why this PoE comprised only two questions when students were given sufficient time to work on the questions. It is also perplexing that the content of visual literacy that formed part of the content in the course was not included in the PoE. Therefore, the emerging from these findings is **watered down summative assessment**.

The content of marked students' PoEs were also examined. The results revealed that some student participants had benefitted from the feedback and comments in their marked assignments. For example, some comments taken from the reflection section in students' portfolios included the following:

- **PoE 1:** *I have taken a lot of time and effort in completing this assignment and was therefore extremely excited about my mark of 86%. Applying all the useful techniques that I learnt has paid off. This has motivated me significantly and has given me a hunger for applying my new-found knowledge in all spheres of my life.*
- **PoE 4:** *My overall performance is 56%!" which is not bad but I should have done better than I did if I avoided certain mistakes like read carefully on how to cite a reference in Harvard referencing method.*
- **PoE 5:** *Going through the lecture notes on my marked scripts have enabled me to go through my tutorial notes for better understanding. To better develop my ideas when writing and use my resources usefully especially when adding them to the text.*
- **PoE 6:** *My overall performance and the marks obtained on the assignment was good. I did not use any resources but mostly my personal experiences to complete it. After viewing my marked assignment, I see things that I could have paid more attention to and did not follow some instructions clearly stipulated.*

Although reflection of students' learning was only conducted during summative assessment, the findings above indicate the importance of continuous self-assessment and reflection. The comments above also indicate that constructive feedback on students' marked assignments was contributed to effective teaching and learning. The students' comments also indicated that they were able to identify and correct their errors based on the guidance received from the assessors. One can only imagine how students could have progressed if they were given an opportunity to reflect on their work during formative assessment. One may conclude that although the learning process did take place, students were not given opportunities to engage in reflection and self-assessment. The theme that emerged from this finding is **limited interactivity in summative assessment**.

To determine whether the essay writing section was difficult to understand indicated earlier, I examined the second section of the marked PoE. In this regard, the results showed that although some participants had performed well on this section, most were still struggling. Some of the assessors' comments on the essay section in the marked PoEs were as follows:

- *Excellent*
- *Not satisfactory (off topic)*
- *No chronological order*
- *Satisfactory on essay but wrong format in referencing*
- *Good work*
- *Incomplete work (no answer in section B)*

The assessors' comments in students' marked PoEs demonstrated that some students were not yet ready to proceed to the next level. It is evident that most students still needed to be taught to read and write in the English language. This means that if these students passed the course, they would continue to struggle with their English language skills in their academic career. Therefore, the implication of the finding is that effective teaching had not taken place in some parts of the course. Therefore, the themes that emerged from these findings were **limited comprehension skills and limited English language proficiency skills**.

In summary, the themes that emerged from the data collected, using various research instruments, were identified. The larger concepts and theories pertinent to this study are linked to the emerging themes in the next chapter.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings and analysis of the data collected and obtained through the three research instruments (content analysis schedule, interview questionnaire, and observation schedule); and identifying the emerging themes from the data. In an attempt to answer the research questions posed, the themes that emerged are discussed, conclusions are drawn and suggestions are offered, based on the findings detailed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on presentation, analysis and interpretation of the findings of the current study on investigating *effective teaching of an English online course in ODL environment*. I also identified emerging themes in the data in the previous chapter. To begin with, this chapter provides an overview and synopsis of all the chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 1 provided a description of the background to the study, definition of the concepts used in the topic and an outline of all the chapters within the study. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature pertinent to this study, discussed the theoretical framework and its relevance to the study, and the conceptual framework that forms the basis of the study. Chapter 3 presented the qualitative methodology used to execute this study. The methodology included the research objectives, research paradigms, research design and a case study approach. Chapter 4 presented the analysis and interpretation of the findings of this study. The chapter also highlighted emerging themes from the analysed data.

The current Chapter 5 discusses the common themes that emerged in the responses to the research questions. The broad concepts and theories pertinent to this study are linked to the themes. Then, the first research question that elicited information related to structuring of the content of an online ESP course is addressed (§5.2). The second research question that sought to answer the question on interaction amongst participants in the ESP course follows (§5.3). The next in line is the third research question that sought to answer the research question on assessment of e-portfolios (§5.4). The findings emanating from the research questions are synthesised (§5.5), and a presentation of the main contributions to the study is discussed (§5.6). The limitations of the study (§5.7) are presented before the recommendations (§5.8) emanating from the study, followed by a conclusion (§5.9) of the study.

## **5.2 How should the content of an online ESP course be structured for successful delivery in an ODL context?**

In an attempt to answer the research question provided above, the information linked to the theme of problematic learning materials is presented below. The literature and theories related to the themes are then interrogated in the light of the findings.

### **5.2.1 Problematic learning materials**

The findings from the questionnaires and content analysis schedule coalesced around the theme of problematic learning materials. There was less content on the Economics discipline as the domain of authentic materials. According to Kotze (2007), authentic materials are considered as factors that contribute to effective teaching in ESP. This means that if students are provided with relevant learning materials in a supportive environment, they might find learning to be less complicated. Garrison (2013) and Bangert (2008) also point out that integration of the three concepts of presence - social, teaching and cognitive presence - in Col, with relevant content, is more effective for teaching and learning.

The theme also revealed that the course contained limited supplementary online materials that were only posted on the e-tutor website, especially, which was an online course. In this regard, the study guide prepared for the course was the only document used for teaching. Although there was an indication that supplementary materials would be added on the main course website, no additional material was posted throughout the semester.

The theme also revealed that there was limited interactivity within the materials utilised in the course under study. For example, the materials were in PDF format instead of software materials that would have allowed interactivity. For example, Shange's (2016) study on *the English proficiency skills of information and communication technologies (ICT) foundation students at a university of technology: Assessing the effectiveness of the English Word Power Programme* refers to an interactive software

that could benefit students more than consolidated material that disallows such interaction.

The theme also showed that some of the outcomes indicated in the study guide were not achieved. According to Le Roux and Le Roux (2004), the biggest problem in higher education today is aligning teaching strategies and assessment with curriculum outcomes. In the course under study, the outcomes outlined at the beginning of each unit projected what students would have achieved at the end of being exposed to a specific unit. However, the findings revealed that there were persistent errors in the marked PoEs indicating that students were still struggling with English language skills at the end of the semester. This means the set outcomes for some of the units in the course were not achieved, either because they were set at an ambitious level, or alternatively the materials were inadequate in engendering the specific attributes anticipated.

Therefore, problematic learning materials in an online course point to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. The teaching presence in the CoI framework views a teacher as the one who is in charge of instructional design and organisation, facilitation of productive discourse, and direct instruction (Saint-Jacques, 2013). As a result, it is the lecturer's responsibility to provide relevant materials and guide students through the material.

Selection of relevant materials in a course is pertinent to the three presences (teaching, social and cognitive) as indicated in the CoI communication (Figure 2). Therefore, to answer the research question on how the content of an online ESP course should be structured for successful delivery in an ODL context, this study applied the CoI framework linking the social presence to the findings. The answer to the research question is that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when there are relevant interactive materials in an online ESP course.

### **5.3 How should interaction take place amongst students, between students and learning material, and between students and lecturers in an ODL context?**

In an attempt to answer the research question above, the information linked to the following themes below is presented before mapping the literature and theories on the following themes that emerged from the findings:

- delayed feedback on students' marked assignments
- insufficient interaction in online learning
- isolation of students from others
- limited students' participation on the main course website
- insufficient collaboration amongst lecturers and e-tutors.

#### **5.3.1 Delayed feedback on students' marked assignments**

The findings in the current study crystallised into the theme of delayed feedback regarding marked assignments in the course. Most students complained about delayed feedback for marked assignments which affected their performance in other assignments. The findings with regard to the marked PoEs of evidence also revealed that most participants found the feedback in the form of comments in their assignments supportive and empowering. However, the findings in the study indicated that one problem was that some students submitted their assignments by post; and the other problem was based on the unresponsive electronic system.

Delayed feedback on students' marked assignments within an online course materialises as the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. This finding relates to the social presence within the Col framework that implies students need to belong within the community of the course they are learning, which in turn makes interaction with teachers and peers effortless. Therefore, responding to queries and returning marked assignments containing relevant comments contributes to effective teaching.

It is arguable that the zone and the proximal stages in the ZPD theory apply the concept of 'scaffolding', in which a more knowledgeable instructor or peer enters the

context to guide a student and steps out once guidance is complete (Booyse, 2010). Therefore, applying the theories of the Col framework regarding teaching and social presence, and ZPD regarding the zone and proximal stage to this finding, it can be concluded that effective teaching of an online English course can take place when feedback is received timeously during the course.

### **5.3.2 Insufficient interaction in online learning**

The findings in the current study manifested and developed into the theme of insufficient interaction amongst students, students, lecturers and e-tutors, lecturers, e-tutors, and markers on the course website. Considering that the course was offered online, it is disappointing that interaction was lacking where continuous interaction should have been the main characteristic of the teaching and learning process. In Col framework, the social presence enables an educational environment where interaction amongst participants should be fully developed and enacted. However, the findings on the course website revealed that although queries were posted, there was no serious interaction on academic matters amongst students.

On the e-tutor questionnaires, e-tutor respondents revealed that there was limited interaction amongst them and students on the e-tutor website designed for teaching and interaction. The results in the observation schedule also revealed that interaction amongst lecturers, e-tutors and markers was limited. For example, there was no content or discussion forums on the course websites. As indicated in Paiva and Rodrigues-Junior's (2009) study, success in teaching was achieved when there was active interaction and participation amongst teachers. Therefore, effective teaching is evident when there is interaction amongst participants within a course, a trait that was apparently missing in the current online course.

Insufficient interaction in online learning in an online course coalesces into evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. Therefore, applying the Col framework regarding the teaching and social presence and the ZPD theories to the findings, it can be concluded that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when there is interaction among the students.

### **5.3.3 Isolation of students from others**

The findings in the current study showed the theme of isolation amongst students. The majority of the respondents indicated they participated mostly on WhatsApp, a platform viewed as social media. The lecturers in the course under study did not recognise this platform as an academic forum. As a result, some students felt isolated because they could not interact with other students on the course website nor could they access the private WhatsApp groups. Considering that the course was offered online, it is disappointing that interaction was lacking where continuous interaction should have been privileged in the teaching and learning process.

The issues regarding student isolation within an online course point to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. The social presence in the Col encourages interaction amongst peers in the learning environment. Therefore, applying the Col framework regarding the social presence to the findings, it can be concluded that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when there is interaction among the students.

### **5.3.4 Limited student participation on the main course website**

The findings in the current study showed that there was limited student participation on the main course website. Most students posted queries, but did not attempt to respond to other student queries. This finding is consistent with those of Mbatha and Naidoo's (2010) study that was conducted at the same institution as the current study, but in a different discipline, which concluded that students were not participating on a course website designed for them in the manner envisaged in the design process.

It is also important to indicate there was an e-tutor website dedicated to active interaction between students and e-tutors. However, the findings in this study showed that there were very few students who participated as indicated in the e-tutor questionnaires. On this platform, e-tutors indicated their availability, shared notes and supplementary materials, but only a few students participated. Although the respondents in the student questionnaires indicated they preferred interaction with e-

tutors because they responded to their queries, from them, there was still limited participation on the e-tutor course website.

The findings from the questionnaires revealed that students, lecturers and e-tutors preferred face-to-face interaction to online interaction. For example, on the observation schedule, the findings showed that students sent numerous queries regarding venues and dates for face-to-face interaction. However, some respondents in the student questionnaires added that they were open to face-to-face interaction within the online limits.

The findings also showed lecturers and e-tutors indicated face-to-face interaction would enable them to deal with whatever problems students were facing at once. These findings indicate an unspoken problem in ODL where participants prefer face-to-face interaction even though ironically they are aware that they ought to be operating in an ODL environment. It is significant to observe that with the advent of the use of advanced technology around the world, online teaching and learning cannot afford to lag behind.

The issues regarding limited students' participation on the online course point to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. This finding relates to the CoI in which the integration of the presences (social, teaching and cognitive) involve providing a supportive educational environment for students so that they can feel free to express themselves as they learn. Therefore, by applying the theories of the CoI framework to the findings, one may conclude that effective teaching of an online English course can take place when students participate effectively in an online course.

### **5.3.5 Insufficient collaboration between lecturers and e-tutors**

The finding in the questionnaires and observation schedule indicated there was lack of collaboration and cooperation amongst the teachers within the ESP course. Current studies (Velikaya, 2014; Holzweber, 2012; Brown, 1997; Richards, 1997) advocate collaboration amongst ESP practitioners, especially in CLIL. According to Holzweber (2012), the CLIL approach recognises the impact of the combined effect of the subject

matter and language in the construction of new knowledge. Therefore, one would expect collaboration across disciplines to be the norm in an ESP course.

Brown (1997) points out that collaboration is the most important feature missing in online learning. With regard to the course under study, the roles of lecturers across disciplines, e-tutors and markers are intertwined within the course under study; therefore collaboration should be at the centre of their interaction. The findings in Richards' (1997) study revealed ESP practitioners shared the same common room with other English teachers, but they created their own space where they shared ideas about their specialisation. This demonstrates collaboration and teamwork between these teachers who had expertise in different disciplines, but who shared a common goal.

To enable continuous support structures and accessibility to different kinds of online resources required, Richards (1997) draws attention to the importance of collaboration and teamwork. The findings also showed that lecturer respondents interacted with e-tutors and markers via e-mail only when there was a need; while e-tutors indicated the responses on their queries were always delayed. This means there were no meetings to discuss the content of the course, share ideas discuss how their responsibilities flowed in teaching and assessing within the course. Therefore, one may conclude there was scant cooperation or collaboration amongst lecturers, e-tutors and markers.

Although the Col framework and ZPD theory are learner-centered, the roles of teachers are not in question. For example, the teaching presence in Col acknowledges three components, (DE, FD and DI) in order for effective online teaching to take place (Saint-Jacques, 2013:87). This means collaboration amongst teachers within an ESP course should be the principal undertaking.

Therefore, to answer the research question on *how interaction amongst students, between students and learning material, and between students and lecturers should take place in an ODL context*, this study applies the Col framework regarding the social and teaching presences and the theories of ZPD to the findings. This was done to reach the conclusion that effective teaching of an online English course can only take

place when there is active and ongoing interaction that includes active participation, teamwork and collaboration amongst participants within an online course.

#### **5.4 How assessment of online ESP portfolios should be conducted in an ODL context?**

In an attempt to answer the research question above, the information linked to the following themes that emerged from the findings is presented before mapping the literature and theories:

- watered-down summative assessment
- limited interactivity in summative assessment
- problematic non-venue based assessment
- limited comprehension skills amongst students
- limited English language proficiency skills amongst students

##### **5.4.1 Watered-down summative assessment**

The findings in the PoE indicated the assessment of PoEs was watered-down. It is arguable that watered-down assessment does not engage students' cognitive skills. For example, the findings in the content analysis schedule indicated that the PoE contained only a reflection section and an essay question. Had the course under study included other language aspects, such as grammar, reading skills and visual literacy, there could have been some shift, however, these aspects were not included in the PoE. Considering that summative assessment was non-venue based, it is arguable that the PoE could have been improved to reflect all the aspects taught during the semester.

Douglas (2013) points out that assessment in ESP is no different from other areas of language assessment; therefore, the principles of assessment in language would still apply in ESP. Furthermore, Le Roux and Le Roux (2004) point out that "while there is, in any academic subject, a prescribed body of knowledge that must be learned, learners should be required to demonstrate that they have mastered a subject by

applying their knowledge to real-life contexts”. Therefore, watered-down summative assessments do not reflect effective teaching.

In this regard, watered-down assessment in an online course point to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. The cognitive presence in the Col ‘reflects the learning inquiry process’ which addresses effective learning, application and solving of problems, making sense of and integrating ideas and testing plausible solutions (Garrison et al., 2009:32). Therefore, if the assessment is watered down, students might not achieve what is indicated in the Col framework. Therefore, applying the Col framework regarding the cognitive presence to the findings, it can be concluded that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when summative assessment reflects assessment that is relevant to the context of ESP at the foundation level.

#### **5.4.2 Limited interactivity in summative assessment**

The theme also revealed the content of the PoE was not interactive and, as a result, it did not reflect the principles of an online PoE. Peacock et al. (2010) emphasise the necessity of introducing technology that will support the learners as individuals who are responsible for their own learning and skills development and therefore make them critically reflective learners. The findings also showed that students were not given opportunities to engage in reflection of their work and self-assessment. Therefore, one may conclude that although the course under study was known to be fully online, the PoE presented in the course did not possess characteristics of a fully-fledged online portfolio, which is reflective and interactive in nature.

Limited or lack of interactivity in summative assessment in an online course point to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. The cognitive presence in the Col ‘reflects the learning inquiry process’ which addresses effective learning, application and problem-solving, making sense of and integrating ideas and testing plausible solutions (Garrison et al., 2009:32). Therefore, applying the Col framework regarding the cognitive presence to the findings, it can be concluded that effective teaching of

an online English course can only take place when summative assessment encompasses interactive content within the learning process.

#### **5.4.3 Problematic non-venue based assessment**

The findings in the study showed that although lecturers preferred online assessment for formative assessment, they were not keen on doing the same for summative assessment. For example, lecturer respondents pointed out that the assessment system was unreliable and, in some cases, students did not know how to submit documents via the online system. The lecturers were given the responsibility to address these problems, while at the same time they were trying to mark and submit examination results on time. Another point made regarding non-venue based assessment was that there was no guarantee that students were submitting their own work. However, students preferred the non-venue based assessment method as it afforded them ample time to complete the PoE and caused less anxiety.

The problems linked to non-venue based assessment within an online course point to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. Although lecturers cannot be blamed for an unreliable system, students expect all electronic systems to be fully functional and in order as soon as they are registered on the course. Therefore, the teaching team should find effective ways of addressing the nagging problems they are experiencing regarding non-venue based assessment. The cognitive presence in the Col framework acknowledges active and reflective learners who are able to work independently as they attempt to solve problems during assessment. Similarly, the ZPD encourages an independent learner who is able to apply their mind in a supportive environment. Therefore, applying the COI framework regarding the cognitive presence and the ZPD theory to the findings, it can be concluded that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when there is conducive environment for summative assessment.

#### **5.4.4 Limited comprehension skills amongst students**

The findings in this study also showed that students' comprehension skills were limited amongst students. The majority of the respondents in students' questionnaires indicated that they found some units difficult in the study guide. Although some respondents had indicated most of the units were watered-down and similar to what they did at secondary level, the results showed that most respondents struggled with the essay writing section.

The issues regarding limited comprehension skills within an online course point to the evidence of ineffective prior teaching and learning. Amongst other aspects, DI is viewed as one of the important features in the teaching presence of the Col framework. This means that, at some point, students should receive direct teaching from lecturers during the course in order to deal with problems such as comprehension skills. In addition, the ZPD theory principles support the scaffolding approach, i.e. when someone with more knowledge steps in to teach a learner if the learner encounters problems during the learning process.

Therefore, applying the Col framework regarding the teaching and cognitive presences, and the ZPD theory, it can be concluded that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when students' comprehension skills are taken into consideration.

#### **5.4.5 Limited English language proficiency skills amongst students**

The theme also showed there were limited language proficiency skills amongst ESP students. The findings in the content analysis schedule showed that one of the outcomes regarding English language proficiency was not met and it seemed students were enrolled for the course without the necessary proficiency skills. The requirements for enrolment in the course required students to 'demonstrate proficiency in the ability to learn from predominantly English written material'. However, most of student respondents' comments in the questionnaires, course website and marked PoEs were marred with grammatical errors and poor expression in sentences. The results also showed that students did not seem to be familiar with the language support systems,

such as the spell check, thesaurus and language correction function of the computer which could have been used before they submitted their questionnaires and comments on the course website.

Limited English language proficiency skills point to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. The teaching presence in Col recognises 'discourse facilitation and direct instruction' as two of the components that are required for effective online teaching to take place (Saint-Jacques, 2013:87). Garrison (2016) describes cognitive presence as:

a process of inquiry that includes thinking, listening and expressing thoughts in the process of critical discourse. It is a collaborative process of thinking and learning in deep and meaningful ways. Cognitive Presence goes beyond CT by supporting thinking and learning collaboratively.

This means there should have been a point where supportive measures would have been put in place to teach and guide students towards improving their English language proficiency skills during the learning process.

Similarly, the ZPD theory principles supports the 'scaffolding' approach where a teacher or peer with more robust knowledge steps in to teach a learner if they encounter problems during the learning process. In this regard, this theory examines what the students knows today and at a later stage based on the knowledge imparted and accrued during the learning process. The knowledge gained during the learning process should also be reflected in summative assessment. Therefore, applying the Col framework regarding the teaching and cognitive presences, and the ZPD theory, it can be concluded that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when students' English language proficiency skills are taken into consideration during the learning process.

Therefore, to answer the research question on *how assessment of online ESP portfolios should be conducted in an ODL context*, this study applied the Col framework regarding the social, teaching and cognitive presences and the theories of ZPD to the findings to reach the conclusion. The conclusion reached in this regard is that effective teaching of an online English course can only take place when teaching

methods to complement formative and summative assessment, appropriate assessment tools and methods relevant to an online ESP are considered.

## **5.5 Synthesis of the answers from the research questions**

In this section, conclusions based on the findings and emergent themes are discussed in the current study, which *investigated effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL environment*. In the discussion of the conclusions, the focus was on the objectives of the current study. Furthermore, data was collected from students, lecturers and materials within the course utilising questionnaires, observation schedule and content analysis schedule as instruments.

Firstly, for the research question on how the content of an online ESP course should be structured for successful delivery in an ODL context, a content analysis of the online English for Economic and Management Sciences materials was conducted. The findings indicated that there were other areas in the course that pointed to evidence of ineffective teaching and learning. For example, problematic learning materials with limited content relevant to the subject specific specialist language. This means there was no balance between the English language and the subject specific specialist language. According to Holzweber (2012), within materials, there is a connection between the carrier content and real content; however, the problems arise when these two are not given the same weight during the learning process.

Another point that was highlighted in the findings was that there was limited interactivity within the materials utilised in the course under study. Although the course was offered online, it seemed the materials were not prepared for the online platform since everything was in PDF. It is, therefore, important to research and design materials and tasks for students that are appropriate for a specific context; continuously review materials for relevance (Velikaya, 2014; Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1991).

Thus, based on the findings in section 5.1. regarding how the content of an online ESP course should be structured for successful delivery in an ODL context, it can be

concluded that the content of an online ESP course should be structured to reflect what is outlined in the outcomes of the course; authentic and interactive materials, and include supplementary materials for successful delivery in an ODL context. Secondly, an investigation was conducted regarding the research question on how interaction should take place amongst students, between students and lecturers, amongst lecturers, e-tutors and markers, and students with materials in an ODL context. The findings in the study indicated that there were also areas that complicated the perceived and anticipated interaction amongst participants, which pointed to the evidence of ineffective teaching and learning.

For example, although there was a platform designed for interaction and interactivity within the module, the participants failed to use it as expected. As a result, there was limited interaction amongst the participants. For instance, the findings in the current study indicated that some effective teaching could have been facilitated by students' participation on the e-tutor course website. Only a few students shared ideas, recommended relevant internet websites, and responded to the content posted by e-tutors. Therefore, it can be deduced that students had an opportunity for some meaningful interaction with their e-tutors, but they did not take make the effort to benefit from the opportunity.

The limited participation within the course also led to isolation of students from others since there was no interaction amongst them. In this regard, the findings indicated that the isolation was also exacerbated by the use of platforms (WhatsApp) outside the one designed for the course under study. This is a matter that needs to be resolved expeditiously if students are to benefit fully from any interactive platforms administered outside the institutional ones.

The limited interaction among lecturers, e-tutors, markers also led to insufficient collaboration. Although a platform for interaction was available, there was no activity to indicate communication or collaborative discussion between lecturers, e-tutors and markers. One of the remarks that appeared repeatedly in student responses was regarding delayed feedback on assignments. Although both lecturers and students agreed that feedback on assignments was important, students pointed out that they wanted to receive lecturers' comments in time, so that they could avoid making the

same mistakes in the next assignments. In addition, students pointed out it was difficult to work on newer assignments without knowing how they had performed in the previous ones.

Therefore, based on the findings from the current study regarding interaction amongst lecturers, students, assessors, and students with materials, it can be concluded that the problems reflected above can be overcome if active interaction takes place. In addition, active participation online, teamwork and collaboration, and timely feedback from lecturers to students will also lead to *successful teaching in an ODL context*.

For the research question on *how assessment of online ESP portfolios should be conducted in an ODL context, the approach used for the online English for Economic and Management Sciences portfolio assessment was investigated*. As indicated earlier, there was a link in the content of the study guide, assignments and PoE but the PoE was not well structured. Therefore, the findings in the study indicated that there were areas in the assessment of PoEs that pointed to ineffective teaching and learning. For example, the PoE was in PDF format, which resulted in limited interactivity; therefore, it could not be regarded as an e-portfolio.

Another problematic area discovered was that the content of the PoE was watered down. The PoE lacked most of the content in the study guide and assignments. This means students were not assessed according to what they were taught, rendering the whole exercise rather futile. The findings in the lecturer and e-tutor questionnaires indicated that the respondents admitted there was a need to review the materials in the course under study. According to Velikaya (2014), students are aware when they are taught or offered learning materials which are not relevant to their needs.

The findings in the current study also highlighted limited comprehension skills amongst students. Although the findings indicated most students found the content in the study guide to be watered down, they still reported difficulty in responding to some of the assignment questions which required comprehension skills. This problem was exacerbated by the discovery regarding students' limited English language proficiency skills, which affected their use of the English language and their grammar skills. In

summary, the best practices detailed in Chapter 2 have indicated what constitutes effective teaching of an online ESP in ODL. However, as indicated in the findings, there were some limitations with regard to the content, interaction and assessment of the course under study, which indicates ineffective teaching.

Based on the findings of the current study with respect to how assessment of online ESP portfolios should be conducted in an ODL context, it can be concluded that the problems indicated above can be thwarted if summative assessment reflects the outcomes of the course. In addition, successful assessment can take place when there are effective teaching methods to complement formative and summative assessment, appropriate assessment tools and methods relevant to the context of online ESP are considered.

## **5.6 Main contributions of the study**

The current study, which investigated effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL environment, is novel because the course was one of the first online courses implemented fully online in the institution where this case study was conducted. Another significant contribution of this study is that there are very few other such studies conducted in South Africa about online ESP courses in ODL environment.

This study is important as it attempts to determine best practices in effective teaching of an ESP course in an ODL context. In this sense, these are the new insights the study proffers to the topic. Furthermore, the results of this research study are significant, in that they allow a re-appraisal of the way in which ESP courses are delivered in an ODL context.

The current study also improves our knowledge of both the current debates in the ESP field and the best ways of stemming potential hurdles in ODL environments. Therefore, it has the potential to make a significant contribution to the knowledge needed to empower students with the English language skills needed in critical disciplines of study.

The results of this research study are significant in that they allow a re-appraisal of the ways in which the ESP courses are delivered in an ODL context. In this regard, this study serves the purpose of a case study research applicable to an ODL institution. Similarly, the purpose of this research was to contribute insights for resolving lingering problems and epistemological gaps in the field of online ESP teaching in ODL contexts. In this sense, these are the new insights the study brought to the topic.

### **5.7 Limitations of the study**

Like any other study, the study had its limitations. It is, therefore, important to reflect upon some of these limitations, as indicated below.

Firstly, although the course under study was offered online, using various forms of technology, this study did not explore the use of technological devices during the process of learning and teaching. Moreover, observation of interaction between students and lecturers was only conducted on platforms authorised by the university. This means that although some of the findings referred to social networks such as WhatsApp, the study did not investigate the efficacy of student interaction on these private platforms.

Secondly, in his investigation of the ways in which Academic Literacy (AL) is defined, Butler (2013) states that most scholars are caught up in a continuous state of making proposals for what should be the most appropriate academic language interventions especially in discipline-specific context. Though useful, language intervention programmes tend to be limited in that they target a particular problem. However, this study sought to shift the focus from recounting existing problems to offering possible enduring solutions to counter the problems that beset online ESP teaching and assessment in an ODL context.

The third limitation is that although the institution in which the research was conducted is the largest ODL institution in Africa, the current study was based on a very limited student sample in that these participants were from a single module, with its own idiosyncratic fundamentals.

The final limitation is that since the study was based on a qualitative research method utilising a case study research design, the findings of this qualitative study cannot be generalised beyond the research population, i.e. the findings of this research are limited to the context of the research and to similar contexts.

## **5.8 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made, based on the findings and conclusions from the current study:

### **5.8.1 Recommendation 1**

Although the principles of ODL include self-directed learning amongst students, it should be noted that students who enter the university at a foundation level still need to be taught. This is consistent with Mohammadi and Araghi's (2013) findings, which revealed that most of students' SDLR was at an average or below average level, as a result, training to improve students' SDLR would be necessary. For example, in the course under study, most students were enrolled because they did not qualify to enrol in a degree or diploma. This indicates that there were some limitations with their learning skills in general; hence, they were referred to as 'under-prepared'. Therefore, it is recommended that ESP practitioners design an interactive online session to prepare students for the new environment called ODL and the expectations of the ESP course.

### **5.8.2 Recommendation 2**

The findings indicated most students and some lecturers wanted face-to-face interaction within ODL. Although face-to-face interaction in the same room might not be possible, there are many ways of ensuring interaction, such as live streaming sessions, webinars and Skype, which could be used to give students a sense of being heard by lecturers and other students and being able to share ideas. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers research and identify ways of using face-to-face interaction approaches, such as live streaming sessions, webinars, Skype, and any other available resources to assist in this regard.

### **5.8.3 Recommendation 3**

The 'E', which stands for English in ESP should be explored, as its aspects are supposed to carry the subject specialist language throughout the course. As indicated in the findings of the current study, there was lack of participation on the e-tutor website where the teaching process was supposed to take place. This means students read their materials and wrote assessments without sufficient teaching support - hence the limited comprehension and language proficiency skills. Therefore, it is recommended that the course should include compulsory intensive teaching of certain aspects of language learning. In this regard, a specific percentage or number of points could be allocated for full participation.

Another recommendation regarding English language proficiency skills is that ESP practitioners should identify and buy, if necessary, professionally developed interactive online English language proficiency skills programmes and assessment tests to use during the teaching process. Some of these programmes have been alluded to in this study. In fact, having the same online material and programmes could also allow consistency within different groups in e-tutor websites.

### **5.8.4 Recommendation 4**

According to Sewagegn (2016), innovative methods of assessment are being developed at tertiary institutions; therefore, continuous research could assist with providing solutions to some of the problems mentioned in this study. This means using online assessment which lack interactivity would not be acceptable. It is imperative that e-portfolio in an online course is interactive and reflects relevant content. This is in line with the findings in Shange's (2016) study, which indicated students' enthusiasm and enjoyment when they were able to interact with the content when learning a language course using computers. Therefore, it is recommended that ESP practitioners design or identify relevant interactive assessment tools for online delivery. The interactive materials should be powered by suitable software that allows for instant interactive feedback, in real time.

### **5.8.5 Recommendation 5**

Literature and the findings in the current study show that interaction plays an important role in ODL learning. However, the findings also showed that collaboration between students was not encouraged; and there was no indication of teamwork or collaboration amongst the teaching team.

With regard to student interaction, it is recommended that lecturers encourage collaborations amongst students by offering some form of incentive/ points system to qualify for a prize after active participation on the course website. When students reach a specific point (agreed between the teaching team), their effort and participation could be acknowledged within the course website.

Collaboration amongst the ESP teaching team should take place. For example, the teaching team would include lectures from English studies, lecturers from Economics studies, e-tutors, and assessors. Therefore, it is recommended that the teaching teams should review their approach in the way they interact with each other.

In addition, all 'teachers' including e-tutors and markers should be afforded an opportunity to assess students' formative and summative assessment. Another point is that having separate course websites for different groups in the teaching team may prove time-consuming and difficult to manage. Therefore, it is recommended that a single course website for the teaching team should be established to enable communication and the sharing of ideas. This would enable teamwork and collaboration between members of the teaching team.

### **5.8.6 Recommendation 6**

The findings in the current study highlighted the problem with summative assessment, which seemed to be watered down, and that students were having trouble answering some of the questions during the assessment process.

Douglas (2013: 378) points out that the focus in ESP assessment is to:

Assess the ability to use language precisely to perform relevant tasks in authentic contexts while integrating appropriate aspects of field-specific background knowledge”.

Although, as Abedeen (2015) points out, ESP teachers are not subject teachers, they still require familiarity with the specific content in for teaching or assessing the language is important.

Therefore, it is recommended that skilled ESP practitioners who are familiar with teaching and assessing in an ODL environment should develop materials. This means that the current ESP practitioners, who do not possess the necessary skills to teach and assess students in an ESP course, should be trained.

#### **5.8.7 Recommendation 7**

Based on the literature and findings in the current study, it is evident that ESP teaching is demanding and there is limited literature regarding teaching of ESP specifically online (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015 & Basturkmen, 2006), particularly in the African context. As a result, it is recommended that more research initiatives focusing on an online ESP teachers and their needs should be encouraged and funded. Studies conducted in this area of study would contribute to effective teaching of an online ESP course in ODL.

#### **5.8.8 Recommendation 8**

Another recommendation with regard to assessment is non-venue based examination in which PoEs are submitted online. It is recommended that further research be conducted to investigate establishing a system that would be able to verify whether students are writing and submitting their own work within an ODL environment. In this regard, future research to identify ways of ensuring that the rightful student writes his/her own work would be beneficial in online education.

## 5.9 Conclusion

In the current study that *investigated effective teaching in an online English module in ODL environment*, the researcher sought to find best practices in teaching and ESP course designed for under-prepared students registered in a foundation programme. In this regard, the primary research questions '*How an online ESP module should be taught effectively in an ODL context*' was posed, followed by the primary objective that was set to '*investigate the most effective ways of teaching an online ESP module*' which guided the direction of the study.

To understand the context of teaching ESP and ODL learning, the researcher reviewed key literature on best practices regarding effective online teaching. This chapter was informed by both the ZPD theory and CoI framework and exposed the gaps in the literature on what is known about online ESP teaching, specifically with respect to the problems recounted in literature, and what is required to address these problems. In this regard, the researcher used the qualitative research methodology in the execution of this research within the case study.

The data collected using interview questionnaires, observation schedule and content schedule yielded results which pointed to ineffective teaching in some areas of an online ESP course. The literature identified and reviewed dealt with best practices in teaching an ESP course; principles of ODL teaching; some of the problems that have been noted, such as materials development, lack of participation online and lack of assessment skills, which resulted in poor online assessment of tasks. Over and above the problems identified, the findings in the current study also highlighted other urgent problems such as limited English language proficiency and limited comprehension skills within ESP learning. As a result, the emerging themes from the findings were utilised to explore answers to the research questions posed at the commencement of the research process.

The answers to the research questions in the current study showed that effective teaching in an online English module in ODL could be ensured if:

- there are relevant interactive materials in an online ESP course
- there is interaction in an online course, including active participation, teamwork and collaboration amongst participants.
- relevant teaching methods are in place to complement assessment and summative assessment tools.

Based on the findings and conclusions reached, the researcher proffered recommendations that would benefit both the ESP practitioners and students in an ODL environment. The researcher reflected on the contribution of the study and limitations of the study in which, as indicated earlier, focus was on students and lecturers active in an ESP course within a foundation programme. Finally, the researcher provided suggestions for further research in the anticipation that these could add to new horizons of knowledge and practices in ODL teaching and learning protocols.

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.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Ethical clearance approval, UNISA



#### COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

13 September 2016

2016-CHS-026

Ms V Hlatshwayo

Staff Number: 33785302

Dear Ms V Hlatshwayo

**Decision: Ethics Approval**

Name: Ms V Hlatshwayo

Department of English Studies

[hlatsv@unisa.ac.za](mailto:hlatsv@unisa.ac.za)

012 429 8244

**Proposal:** Investigating effective teaching of an online English module in an Open Distance Learning environment: A case study

**Qualification:** MA (English)

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee. Final approval is granted for the duration of the research period.

*For expedited review: The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Chair, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee on 13 September 2016. The decision will be tabled at the next RERC meeting on 26 October 2016 for notification/ratification.*

*The proposed research may commence with the proviso that:*

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*



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## **Appendix 2: Informed consent letters**

*Informed consent letter for students*

**Ethical clearance #:2016-CHS-026**

**Research permission #: 2016\_RPSC\_060**

Dear prospective participant

You are invited to participate in a survey conducted by Ms Vivienne Hlatshwayo, under the supervision of Prof. Bernard Nchindila, Associate Professor in the Department of English Studies. This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral study at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The Interview questionnaire you have received has been designed to investigate effective teaching of an online English module in an Open Distance Learning environment: A case study. You were selected to participate on this survey because you are registered as a student in the English for Economics and Management Sciences module (ENG1512) at Unisa. By completing this questionnaire, you agree that the information you provide may be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings.

It is anticipated that the information we gain from this survey will help us provide greater insight into best practices in delivering English for Specific Purposes online modules in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) context. You are, however, under no obligation to complete the survey and you can withdraw from the study prior to submitting the survey. Consequently, you will not be able to withdraw from the study once you have clicked the 'done' button.

Any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this survey will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

If you choose to participate in this survey, it will take up no more than 45 minutes of your time. You will not benefit from your participation as an individual, however, it is envisioned that the findings of this study will assist lecturers provide quality and professional teaching and learning environment for students registered in English for Economic and Management Sciences.

I do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by completing the Interview questionnaire. The researcher undertakes to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out of her possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual.

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed - hard copies will be shredded and electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer. You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the survey.

The research was reviewed and approved by the Department of English Studies Ethical Committee, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee and permission granted by the Research Permission Sub-committee of the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC). The study leader, Prof. Bernard Nchindila, can be contacted during office hours at 012 4296456. The primary researcher, Ms Vivienne Hlatshwayo, can be contacted during office hours at 0829226671 or email at [hlatsv@unisa.ac.za](mailto:hlatsv@unisa.ac.za). Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the Department of English Studies Ethical Committee during office hours at 012 429 3968. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

*Informed consent letter for lecturers*

**Ethical clearance #:2016-CHS-026**

**Research permission #: 2016\_RPSC\_060**

Dear prospective participant,

You are invited to participate in a survey conducted by Ms Vivienne Hlatshwayo under the supervision of Prof. Bernard Nchindila, Associate Professor in the Department of English Studies towards a doctoral study at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The Interview questionnaire you have received has been designed to investigate effective teaching of an online English module in an Open Distance Learning environment: A case study. You were selected to participate on this survey because you are registered as a lecturer in the English for Economics and Management Sciences module (ENG1512) at Unisa. By completing this questionnaire, you agree that the information you provide may be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings.

It is anticipated that the information we gain from this survey will help us provide greater insight into best practices in delivering English for Specific Purposes online modules in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) context. You are, however, under no obligation to complete the survey and you can withdraw from the study prior to submitting the survey. Consequently, you will not be able to withdraw from the study once you have clicked the 'done' button.

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The research was reviewed and approved by the Department of English Studies Ethical Committee, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee and permission granted by the Research Permission Sub-committee of the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC). The study leader, Prof. Bernard Nchindila, can be contacted during office hours at 012 4296456. The primary researcher, Ms Vivienne Hlatshwayo, can be contacted during office hours at 0829226671 or email at [hlatsv@unisa.ac.za](mailto:hlatsv@unisa.ac.za). Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the Department of English Studies Ethical Committee during office hours at 012 429 3968. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

*Informed consent letter for e-tutors*

**Ethical clearance #:2016-CHS-026**

**Research permission #: 2016\_RPSC\_060**

Dear prospective participant,

You are invited to participate in a survey conducted by Ms Vivienne Hlatshwayo under the supervision of Prof. Bernard Nchindila, Associate Professor in the Department of English Studies towards a doctoral study at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The Interview questionnaire you have received has been designed to investigate effective teaching of an online English module in an Open Distance Learning environment: A case study. You were selected to participate on this survey because you are registered as an e-tutor in the English for Economics and Management Sciences module (ENG1512) at Unisa. By completing this questionnaire, you agree that the information you provide may be used for research purposes, including dissemination through peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings.

It is anticipated that the information we gain from this survey will help us provide greater insight into best practices in delivering English for Specific Purposes online modules in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) context. You are, however, under no obligation to complete the survey and you can withdraw from the study prior to submitting the survey. Consequently, you will not be able to withdraw from the study once you have clicked the 'done' button.

Any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this survey will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you choose to participate in this survey, it will take up no more than 45 minutes of your time. You will not benefit from your participation as an individual, however, it is envisioned that the findings of this study will assist lecturers provide quality and professional teaching and learning environment for students registered in English for Economic and Management Sciences.

I do not foresee that you will experience any negative consequences by completing the Interview questionnaire. The researcher undertakes to keep any information provided herein confidential, not to let it out of her possession and to report on the findings from the perspective of the participating group and not from the perspective of an individual.

The records will be kept for five years for audit purposes where after it will be permanently destroyed - hard copies will be shredded and electronic versions will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer. You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the survey.

The research was reviewed and approved by the Department of English Studies Ethical Committee, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee and permission granted by the Research Permission Sub-committee of the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC). The study leader, Prof. Bernard Nchindila, can be contacted during office hours at 012 4296456. The primary researcher, Ms Vivienne Hlatshwayo, can be contacted during office hours at 0829226671 or email at [hlatsv@unisa.ac.za](mailto:hlatsv@unisa.ac.za). Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the Department of English Studies Ethical Committee during office hours at 012 429 3968. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

### **Appendix 3: Module form**

**1 Module title**

Title (module code): ENG1512, English for the Economic and Management Sciences

**2 Module level**

Level on the NQF: 5

**3 Credit attached to the module**

12 Credits

**4 Field and sub-field of the module**

Field (include the number of the field): English Language Studies

Sub-field: Business, commerce and management studies

**5 Purpose of the module**

- a) The module will enable students to apply language structures and conventions in relation to their studies in the field of the economic and management sciences.
- b) Students accredited with this module will be able to adapt more effectively to the challenges of the academic environment when studying accountancy, business management and economics, through the development of their language learning skills and strategies.

**6 Learning assumed to be in place and recognition of prior learning**

- a) The credit calculation is based on the assumption that students have completed a Senior Certificate or equivalent.

b) Students must demonstrate proficiency at NQF level 4 in the following:

- The ability to learn from predominately English written material.
- The ability to present and communicate information, opinions and arguments related to the world of commerce.
- The ability to take responsibility for their own progress.

c) Students must have successfully completed the English language proficiency module at NQF level 5.

## 7 **Range statement for the whole module**

The following scope and context apply to the whole module:

This module will enable first year students to gain reading and writing skills by means of studying the English language and using authentic texts within the context of the Economic and Management Sciences. Students will gain a firm background in the concepts and approaches that pertain to the learning and use of the English Language within the College. The module will develop thinking, reading, writing, listening and speaking competence, and facilitate learning in other modules or courses. It aims to develop the academic literacies (i.e. the language, thinking and communicative competence) that are needed in order to make a success in the economic and business context.

## 8 **Outcomes and assessment criteria**

A range of tasks in study guides, tutorial letters, multi-media, assignments and examinations will show that students have achieved the following outcomes:

### **Specific outcome 1:**

Critically engage with a wide variety of written texts related to the academic world, as well as the field of economic and management sciences.

### **Assessment criteria**

- 1.1 A strong awareness of the implications of topic, purpose, audience, structure and tone and is demonstrated when engaging with texts.
- 1.2 Analysing, organizing and critically evaluating information.
- 1.3 Summarise, and paraphrase texts in the field of economic and management sciences effectively.

### **Specific outcome 2:**

Make meaning of visual presentations of information related to the field of Economics.

### **Assessment Criteria**

- 2.1 Interpret and construct basic illustrations, diagrams, graphs, pie charts used in the world of commerce effectively interpreted.

### **Specific outcome 3:**

Understand and apply the purposes and structure of language forms used in accounting, economics and business management texts.

### **Assessment criteria**

- 3.1 Sensitivity for appropriate and correct English as a branding mechanism, including sentence construction, punctuation, correct spelling, subject-verb agreement, pronoun agreement and appropriate word choice.
- 3.2 A deliberate strategy for personal vocabulary building through the

effective use of dictionaries; the listing of new words, subject related jargon, proverbs, clichés, sayings, etc.

- 3.3 Produce coherent and cohesive academic texts appropriate in economics.

**Specific outcome 4:**

Implement a well-structured approach to writing different types of academic genres and referencing appropriately.

**Assessment criteria**

- 4.1 Develop an awareness of different structures of texts.
- 4.2 The meaningful implementation of strategies to structure their own writing process e.g. brainstorming, target group analysis, structuring of paragraphs and essays; writing summaries, and editing.
- 4.3 Follow acknowledged academic referencing procedures

**Specific outcome 5:**

Demonstrate the ability to access, process, evaluate and use information from a variety of sources in the field of economic and management sciences and distance learning.

**Assessment criteria**

- 5.1 Collect information efficiently for study and research purposes.
- 5.2 The application of self-monitoring and regulating of the language learning process in the field of accounting, business management and economics.

## **9 Assessment strategy and plan**

The student's final mark will be based on formative and summative assessments. It will comprise a year mark that will be gained from one or more written assignments, various myUnisa tasks, completion of self-assessed study guide activities; plus the mark gained in a written 2-hour examination.

The formative assessment mark will contribute to the summative mark in accordance with the University and departmental assessment policies. The final mark will comprise formative assessment (20%) and summative assessment (80%).

First examiners set and assess the assignments, tasks, activities and examination. In the case of examinations, second examiners are used to moderate questions, the marking process, and the marked scripts. Second examiners also assist in taking oral examinations. All examiners are academics or specialists in the field.

### **Embedded knowledge**

English for the Economic and Management Sciences Competences embedded within this module will be assessed indirectly through the specific outcomes in terms of the following:

- English and its communicative function.
- Critical awareness of language usage and interpretation of authentic texts within the College.
- Academic Literacy.
- English language learning and academic writing in the College of Economic and Management Sciences.

## **Appendix 4: Content analysis schedules**

**University of South Africa (UNISA)**

**College of Human Sciences**

**Department of English Studies**

**Doctor of Philosophy and Literature in English**

**Content analysis of ENG1512 materials**

The content analysis schedules below include questions to guide the researcher in examining the teaching materials and assessment of portfolios of evidence (PoE) in the course under study (English for Economic Management Sciences), as espoused in the outcomes of the module and executed through the study guide and PoEs.

The schedule captured relevant data collected from the ENG1512 materials (Semester 1-2017) during investigation of effective teaching of an English module in an ODL environment. The schedule includes the following:

Schedule for analysing a module form.

Schedule for analysing the tutorial letter.

Schedule for analysing the study guide.

Schedule for analysing PoE questions.

Schedule for analysing student PoEs.

## Schedule for analysing Module form

1. The authors of the module form are active in the module.

Comments:

---

2. The module form outlines its purpose.

Comments:

---

3. The module form outlines the objectives and outcomes of the module.

Comments:

---

4. The content of the module form is relevant to the module.

Comments:

---

5. The module form outlines the requirements of the module.

Comments:

---

6. All participants in the module can access the module form.

Comments:

---

7. The module form serve its purpose in providing information regarding the module.

Comments:

---

## Findings

---

## Discussion

## Schedule for analysing the Tutorial Letter

1. The authors of the tutorial letter are active in the module.

Comments:

---

2. The tutorial letter outlines the purpose of the course.

Comments:

---

3. The tutorial letter outline the objectives and outcomes of the module.

Comments:

---

4. The content is organised in a logical manner in the tutorial letter.

Comments:

---

5. The content in the tutorial letter is relevant to the purpose and objectives of the module.

Comments:

---

6. The content in the tutorial letter is relevant to the Economics discipline.

Comments:

---

7. Examples and images are clear in the tutorial letter.

Comments:

---

8. Relevant dates regarding assignments and e-portfolio are presented in the tutorial letter.

Comments:

---

9. Interactivity is evident in the tutorial letter.

Comments:

---

10. The tutorial letter is easily accessible to students.

Comments:

---

**Findings**

---

**Discussion**

### **Schedule for analysing study guide**

1. The authors of the study guide are active in the module.

Comments:

---

2. The study guide outlines its purpose.

Comments:

---

3. The study guide outlines the objectives and outcomes of the module.

Comments:

---

4. The content is relevant to the purpose and objectives of the module.

Comments:

---

5. The content in the tutorial letter is relevant to the Economics discipline.

Comments:

---

6. Examples and images are clearly presented in the study guide.

Comments:

---

7. The content in the study guide linked to internet websites are relevant to the course content.

Comments:

---

8. The content is accurate.

Comments:

---

9. The study guide is easily accessible to all students.

Comments:

---

### **Findings**

---

### **Discussion**

## Schedule for analysing PoE questions

1. The authors of the PoE are active in the module.

Comments:

---

2. The PoE outlines its purpose.

Comments:

---

3. The PoE outlines its objectives and outcomes.

Comments:

---

4. The content of the PoE is relevant to the purpose and objectives of the module.

Comments:

---

5. The PoE outline specific requirements related to the questions in the PoE.

Comments:

---

6. The questions are related to formative assessment.

7. The PoE questions are relevant to the Economics discipline.

Comments:

---

8. Interactivity is evident in the PoE.

Comments:

---

9. The e-portfolio is easily accessible to students.
- 

## Findings

---

## Discussion

## Schedule for analysing students' marked PoEs

1. Student answers in the reflection section consistent with the PoE questions.

Comments:

---

2. The questions in the PoE are consistent with the content in the study guide.

Comments:

---

3. The answers in the reflection section demonstrate student's comprehension skills.

Comments:

---

4. Student's answers in the second section demonstrate comprehension of content related to the learning process.

Comments:

---

5. Student's responses demonstrate effective learning of the course content.

Comments:

---

6. Student can share the PoE answers with other students.

Comments:

---

7. Student's answers demonstrate successful teaching.

Comments:

---

8. The PoE is accessible after students have submitted the PoE.

Comments:

---

9. Student can see assessor's comments on the submitted PoE.

Comments:

---

### Findings

---

### Discussion

## Appendix 5: Student questionnaire

1. About how many hours per day do you spend on social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)?
2. How often do you participate on the ENG1512 course website (myUnisa)?
  - Always
  - Often
  - Rarely
  - Never
3. Elaborate on the answer above by estimating the number of hours you spend on the ENG1512 course website on my Unisa per week.
4. Please share what you write about on the ENG1512 course website, if anything.
5. Do you find the ENG1512 content relevant to your other subjects in Economics studies? Elaborate on the answer above.
6. How did you access Tutorial letters 101 and 501?
  - MyUnisa
  - Post
  - Friends
7. When you access Tutorial letter 101, do you read everything in the document? Elaborate on the answer.
8. Is the information in Tutorial letter 101 clear? Elaborate on the answer
9. Do you find guidelines in your tutorial letter 101 relevant to the ENG1512? Elaborate on the answer above.
10. In your opinion, what additional information should be added to Tutorial letter 101?
11. In your opinion, which units in Tutorial Letter 501 do you find easy to understand? Elaborate.
12. In your opinion, which units in Tutorial Letter 501 do you find difficult to understand?
13. In your view, in which unit were you exposed to new information?
14. If you identified any unit in question 13, share what kind of new information you were exposed to?

15. How helpful is this information in your other Economics modules? In your opinion, which unit in Tutorial Letter 501 should be removed?
16. In your opinion, which unit in Tutorial 501 should be removed?
17. If you identified any unit in question 16, share why this information should be removed?
18. In your opinion, what information should be added in Tutorial 501?
19. In your opinion, what kind of support would you want to receive in the ENG1512 module?
20. Between e-tutors, lecturers, and students, who do you, communicate with most regarding the ENG1512 module?
- Students
  - Lecturers
  - E-tutor
  - Any other
21. Which mode of communication do you use with the person(s) identified above? Mention any other in the space provided below.
- Discussion forum
  - WhatsApp
  - Email
  - Meeting
  - Telephone
22. When you communicate with the person(s) identified above, what things do you talk about (e.g. Study related issues, personal issues or both)? Explain
23. Are you satisfied with the teaching that you get from your ENG1512 lecturers during the learning process?
24. What kind of support do you need when writing assignments?
25. Did you write competency tests in other modules at the beginning of this semester?
26. How many times per week do you interact with your e-tutor regarding assignments?
- 1-2 hours
  - 3-4 hours
  - 4-5 hours

- Never

27. What is important to you when you receive feedback on your ENG1512 assignments? Use the space provided below to explain your answer further.

- Marks
- Comments

28. Does the feedback in your assignments help you understand what was expected from you? Use the space provided below to explain your answer further.

29. In your view, which part of the portfolio of evidence questions is challenging to answer? Use the space provided below to explain your answer further.

- Section A
- Section B
- Section C

30. In your view, which part of the portfolio of evidence questions is easy to answer? Use the space provided below to explain your answer further.

- Section A
- Section B
- Section C

31. Do you prefer to submit a portfolio of evidence or write examination as final assessment in ENG1512? Explain.

## Appendix 6: E-tutor Interview questionnaire

1. Share with me which mode of teaching you prefer.
  - Face-to-face teaching
  - Online teaching
2. In your opinion, do you think you would be more suited to teach ENG1512 if you were qualified in the following:
  - Economics studies
  - English studies
  - Both
3. Estimate, how many hours per week you spend interacting with ENG1512 students.
4. Briefly share some of the things you discuss during the hours mentioned in question 3.
5. In your view, should e-tutors be given more time to interact with students on myUnisa? Elaborate
6. Estimate, how many hours per week do you interact with your assigned lecturer to discuss the teaching of ENG1512?
7. Briefly share some of the things you discuss during the hours mentioned in question 6.
8. Estimate, how many hours you spend interacting with other e-tutors who teach ENG1512?
9. Briefly share some of the things you discuss during the hours mentioned in question 6.
10. Briefly discuss what you would change in how English for Economics and Management Science is offered.

## Appendix 7: Lecturer Interview questionnaire

1. Share with me which mode of teaching you prefer
  - Face-to-face teaching
  - Online teaching
2. In your opinion, do you think you would be more suited to teaching ENG1512 if you were qualified in the following:
  - Economics studies
  - English studies
  - Both
3. In your opinion, what kind of support should be provided to students registered for ENG1512 module?
4. Estimate, how many hours per week you spend interacting with ENG1512 students.
5. Briefly share some of the things you discuss during the hours mentioned in question 4.
6. Estimate, how many hours per week do you spend interacting with your assigned e-tutors.
7. Briefly share some of the things you discuss during the hours mentioned in question 6.
8. Estimate, how many hours per week do you spend interacting with your assigned markers.
9. Briefly share some of the things you discuss during the hours mentioned in question 8.
10. Estimate, how many hours per week do you spend participating in the ENG 1512 course website on myUnisa
11. Briefly share some of the activities you participate on during the indicated hours in question 10.
12. In your view, to what extent is the content in the ENG1512 tutorial letters (501, 101, 201) relevant to students registered in Economics?
13. In your opinion, which information should be removed in the tutorial letters?
14. If you identified any unit in question 13, share why this information should be removed?

15. In your opinion, what information should be added to the tutorial letters?  
Elaborate on your answer.
16. Which competency tests did you write in other courses at the beginning of this semester?
17. In your opinion, is there a need to improve the current approach in assessment (3 assignments and one portfolio of evidence)?
18. In your opinion, how should students submit their assignments?
- Online (myUnisa)
  - Postal services
19. Which part do you focus on most when you assess students' assignments?
- Feedback comments
  - Marks allocation
20. Briefly share the challenges you have experienced in teaching the English for Economic and Management Sciences module.
21. Briefly share what you would change in how the English for Economics and Management Science module is offered.

## **Appendix 8: Observation schedules**

University of South Africa (UNISA)  
College of Human Sciences  
Department of English Studies  
Doctor of Philosophy and Literature in English

### **Observation on myUnisa**

Contents of the observation schedule focus on interaction amongst participants identified in the ESP module under study. Participants comprise students, lecturers, e-tutors and assessors.

The following schedule captured relevant data collected on the ENG1512 course website (Semester 1-2017) during observations of an *investigation of effective teaching of an online English module in an ODL environment*. The schedule includes the following:

General information and usability on course website  
Interaction amongst students on the main course website  
Interaction between students and lecturers on the main course website  
Interaction between students and e-tutors on the e-tutor website  
Interaction amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors/markers on their respective course websites.

**Module Name:** English for Economics and Management Sciences

**Course Code:** ENG1512

**Date:** February-May 2017

### **General information and usability on the main course website**

1. The welcoming message provides an outline for the module.

Comments:

---

2. The purpose of the course is conveyed on the course website.

Comments:

---

3. The content posted on the course website is relevant to the purpose and objectives of the module.

Comments:

---

4. Instructional materials are easily accessible and usable.

Comments:

---

5. Help buttons are available and lead to relevant information.

Comments:

---

6. The course website provides consistent and easy to understand navigational instructions.

Comments:

---

7. The course website conveys the purpose of formative and summative assessment.

Comments:

---

8. The course website provides previous samples of e-portfolios.

Comments:

---

9. The course website is free of errors.

Comments:

---

### **Findings**

---

### **Discussion**

## Interaction amongst students on the main course website

1. Student participation is evident in the course website.

Comments:

---

2. Interaction amongst students is evident.

Comments:

---

3. Students' expectations are evident in the discussions.

Comments:

---

4. The course website provides previous samples of e-portfolios.

Comments:

---

5. Discussions are related to the content of the course.

Comments:

---

6. Students' queries relate to the learning content and assignments.

Comments:

---

7. Students ask questions related to e-portfolios.

Comments:

---

8. Students repeat questions already posted in the forum.

Comments:

---

9. Students respond to questions posed on the course website.

Comments:

---

10. Students guide each other with correct information.

Comments:

---

11. Students invite each other to other social platforms such as WhatsApp.

Comments:

---

12. Students acknowledge the feedback they receive from other students

Comments:

---

## **Findings**

---

## **Discussion**

### **Interaction between lecturer and students on the main course website**

1. The objectives and learning outcomes of the course are outlined.

---
2. Clear standards are set for lecturer response and availability.

---
3. Requirements for course interaction are clearly stated.

---
4. Discussions between lecturers and students are evident.

---
5. The teaching and learning process are evident on the course website.

---
6. Lecturers guide the direction of the discussion.

---
7. The teaching and learning process are evident on the course website.

---
8. Lecturers guide the direction of the discussion.

---
9. Students' queries relate to the learning content and assignments.

---
10. Lecturers respond to student queries.

---
11. Students respond to lecturers' comments.

---
12. Students' questions are related to the content of the course.

---

### **Findings**

---

### **Discussion**

### **Interaction between e-tutors and students on the e-tutor website**

1. The objectives and learning outcomes of the course are outlined.

Comments:

---

2. Each participant (e-tutor and student) indicate one's expectations on the course website.

Comments:

---

3. Clear standards are set for e-tutor response and availability.

Comments:

---

4. Requirements for course interaction are clearly stated.

Comments:

---

5. Interaction between students and e-tutor is evident.

Comments:

---

6. Students' participation is evident.

Comments:

---

7. Students' queries are related to the learning content and assignments in the course.

Comments:

---

8. The e-tutor uses active learning strategies (group work, paired discussions).

Comments:

---

9. The e-tutor leads discussions.

Comments:

---

10. The e-tutor guides the direction of the discussion.

Comments:

---

11. The e-tutor asks questions that challenge students to think more deeply.

Comments:

---

**Findings**

---

**Discussion**

**Interaction between amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors/markers on the e-tutor and marker websites**

1. Learning outcomes of the course clearly stated and understandable.

Comments:

---

2. Each participant indicate one's expectations regarding teaching and assessing the course under study.

Comments:

---

3. Clear standards are set regarding availability and response online.

Comments:

---

4. Supplementary learning materials are available for e-tutors and assessors.

Comments:

---

5. Assessment tools and feedback are available on the course website.

Comments:

---

6. There any announcements posted on the course website.

Comments:

---

7. Lecturer participation is evident.

Comments

---

8. E-tutor participation is evident.

Comments:

---

9. Assessor participation is evident.

Comments:

---

10. Interaction amongst lecturers, e-tutors and assessors evident.

Comments:

---

11. Lecturer provides explicit directions for e-tutors and assessors.

Comments:

---

## **Findings**

---

## **Discussion**

## Appendix 9: Condensed Curriculum Vitae

### Vivienne Hlatshwayo Nee Sono

#### EDUCATION

<b>2015 –Current</b>	PhD LLL (LAN LIN & LIT)	UNISA
<b>2005:</b>	M.A (ENGLISH)	University of the Free State (UFS)
<b>1997:</b>	B.A. Honours (ENGLISH)	University of Limpopo
<b>1996:</b>	H.E.D. (DIPLOMA)	University of Limpopo
<b>1995:</b>	B.A. Degree	University of Limpopo
<b>2010:</b>	Certificate in TEFL/TESOL	English Access, South Africa
<b>1992:</b>	Matric Kheto Nxumayo Agricultural School	

#### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

<b>2011- Present:</b>	Lecturer	Department of English Studies	UNISA
<b>2006- 2011:</b>	English Language Trainer	Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)	
<b>2006- 2011</b>	Part-time marker	Department of English Studies	UNISA
<b>2005- 2006</b>	Lecturer	School of Languages	NWU
<b>2003- 2004</b>	Tutor	John Povey Centre	UNISA
<b>1998 - 2002</b>	Junior Lecturer	School of European Languages	UFS

#### LEADERSHIP ROLES

<b>2011- 2015</b>	Primary lecturer and Coordinator for material development in English for Economics and Management Sciences module (UNISA)
<b>2012- 2015</b>	Training representative for the department of English (UNISA)
<b>2014</b>	Supervise performance assessment of colleagues in the department of English Studies
<b>2014</b>	Primary Lecturer in Language in Education module (UNISA)

- 2012- 2013** Coordinator in Business Writing Skills workshops - Povey Centre (UNISA)
- 2011** Deputy Course Coordinator (AELS) - (UNISA)
- 2008-2011** Coordinator – English as a Foreign language (EFL) – DIRCO
- 2008- 2010** Member and Coordinator of Literacy Week Project (DIRCO)
- 2008** Coordinator for Foreign Administration Attaché trainees - Mission visit to the South African High Commission in Kampala, Uganda (DIRCO)
- 2007- 2008** Investigating Officer and Department representative (DIRCO)
- 2007** Coordinator for Diplomat trainees - Mission visit to the South African High Commission in Dar-es Salaam, Tanzania (DIRCO)
- 2006** Coordinator in Academic Language Proficiency course (NWU)

### **AWARDS AND CERTIFICATES**

- 2016 Recipient** Academic Qualification Improvement Programme (AQIP)  
UNISA
- 2014 Certificate** Blended learning in Higher Education CASI Training and Conference Solutions
- 2013 Certificate** Mentorship Programme  
UNISA
- 2012 Certificate** Young Academics Programme  
UNISA
- 2011 Certificate** Excellence in Tuition Award  
UNISA
- 2009 Certificate** Advanced Management Development Programme  
National School of Government
- 2008 Certificate** Project Management Course  
National School of Government
- 2008 Certificate** Train the Trainer: Massified Induction Programme  
National School of Government
- 2008 Certificate** Assessor Learning Programme  
Competitive Edge, Pretoria
- 2005 Certificate** Specialised Translation- Subtitling Course  
NWU

## Appendix 10: Certificate of Editing



Office: 0183892451

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Cell: 0729116600

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

I, **Muchativugwa Liberty Hove**, confirm and certify that I have read and edited the entire thesis

**INVESTIGATING EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF AN ONLINE ENGLISH MODULE IN AN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY** by **Vivienne Hlatshwayo**, student number **33785392**, submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of **PhD (LAN LIN & LIT)** in the subject **ENGLISH** at the **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**.

**Vivienne** was supervised by **Professor Bernard M. Nchindila** of the University of South Africa.

I hold a PhD in English Language and Literature in English and am qualified to edit such a thesis for cohesion and coherence. The views expressed herein, however, remain those of the researcher/s.

Yours sincerely

**Dr M.L.Hove (PhD, MA, PGDE, PGCE, BA Honours – English)**

