

Development and Evaluation of an ESP MOOC for Personal Trainers

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Abstract

Given the growing internationalization of the fitness industry and the limited availability of profession-specific English training for personal trainers, there is a clear need for accessible ESP instruction tailored to this field. This study aims to develop and evaluate an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) tailored for personal trainers. The research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a needs analysis was conducted by examining coaching education curricula offered by state universities in Türkiye and online personal trainer certification programs on Udemy, as well as semi-structured interviews with 38 personal trainers. These analyses were conducted in Microsoft Excel and aimed to identify the professional English-language needs in the field. The findings from this phase informed the design and development of a 14-week ESP MOOC. In the second phase, the developed course was evaluated through qualitative data collected from five participants who completed the program. The evaluation was conducted through online interviews to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of the course. The findings revealed that the course was preferred due to its flexible online format, its focus on profession-specific English content, and its contribution to participants' professional competence. This study provides important implications for educators, fitness professionals, and policymakers by emphasizing the value of needs-based ESP course design and the potential of MOOCs to enhance and standardize personal trainer education on a global scale.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, course design, fitness education, massive open online course

Kişisel Antrenörler İçin Özel Amaçlı İngilizce Kitlese Açık Çevrimiçi Kursunun Geliştirilmesi ve Değerlendirilmesi

Özet

Fitness sektörünün giderek daha uluslararası bir nitelik kazanması ve kişisel antrenörlere yönelik mesleğe özgü İngilizce eğitiminin sınırlı olması nedeniyle, bu alana uyarlanmış erişilebilir bir Özel Amaçlı İngilizce (ESP) öğretimine açık bir ihtiyaç bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kişisel antrenörlere yönelik ESP kapsamında bir Kitlese Açık Çevrimiçi Ders (MOOC) geliştirmek ve değerlendirmektir. Araştırma iki aşamada gerçekleştirilmiştir. İlk aşamada, ihtiyaç analizi kapsamında Türkiye'deki devlet üniversitelerinde sunulan antrenörlük eğitimi programlarının müfredatları ile Udemy platformunda yer alan çevrimiçi kişisel antrenörlük sertifika programlarının içerikleri analiz edilmiş ve ayrıca 38 kişisel antrenör ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu analizler Microsoft Excel kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiş ve alanda ihtiyaç duyulan mesleki İngilizce beceriler belirlenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular doğrultusunda 14 haftalık bir ESP MOOC geliştirilmiştir. İkinci aşamada ise geliştirilen kurs, programa katılan beş katılımcıdan elde edilen nitel verilerle değerlendirilmiştir. Değerlendirme süreci, katılımcılarla çevrimiçi video konferans yoluyla gerçekleştirilen görüşmeler aracılığıyla yürütülmüştür. Bulgular, kursun çevrimiçi ve esnek yapısı, mesleki İngilizceye odaklanması ve katılımcıların mesleki yeterliliklerine katkı sağlaması nedeniyle tercih edildiğini göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, ihtiyaç temelli ESP kurs tasarımının önemini vurgulamakta ve MOOC'ların kişisel antrenör eğitimi küresel ölçekte geliştirme ve standartlaştırma potansiyeline dikkat çekerek eğitimciler, fitness profesyonelleri ve politika yapıcılar için önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Özel amaçlı İngilizce, Ders tasarımı, kitlese açık çevrim içi ders, fitness eğitimi,

1. Introduction

Language is a living organism that constantly transforms and evolves, and is an inseparable part of human communication. Throughout history, humans have used language primarily as a means of communication. In addition to its basic use as a fundamental part of communication, people have also used language for specific purposes. The use of language for specific purposes has led to the development of the concept, and studies have been conducted in this field. When we think of language for specific purposes, the first thing that comes to mind is English for Specific Purposes (ESP), but this is not the same thing. Gollin Kies et al. (2015) define Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) as “a field that extends well beyond this to parallel domains in languages other than English, ranging, for example, from Arabic for Religious Purposes and Portuguese for Academic Purposes to Chinese for Occupational Purposes” (p. 11). In other words, language for specific purposes includes not only the teaching of English, but also the teaching of many different languages for specific purposes. Unlike LSP, ESP only covers the teaching of English for specific purposes. However, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as an approach rather than a product, and explain that it does not involve specific language, language materials, or methodology. This means these authors consider LSP and ESP to be the same term. Nevertheless, a review of the literature shows that LSP applies to many languages other than English, whereas ESP is focused on English language teaching and is related to specific areas such as English for academic, professional, and occupational purposes (Baştürkmen, 2010). Both LSP and ESP involve teaching the language for specific purposes, but what are these specific purposes? According to Strevens (1988, as quoted in Trace et al., 2015) the essential characteristics of specific purpose instruction are that “consist of [teaching] which is: designed to meet specified needs of the learner; related in content (i.e., in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations, and activities; centered on the language appropriate to those activities, in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc.” (pp. 1-2). Both LSP and ESP integrate language and content to meet learners’ specific purposes and needs. When we consider the aims of ESP, we can explain it as meeting the needs of specific groups and learners, and organizing courses and lessons accordingly.

After discussing teaching English to meet students’ needs in specific subjects and areas, we need to discuss an ESP course that addresses these needs. ESP classes enable students to learn English for specific purposes. Needs analysis in ESP classes plays an essential role in designing an effective and suitable curriculum. Paltridge and Starfield (2013) define needs analysis as “carried out to establish the “what” and the “how” of a course, which is the first stage in ESP course development, followed by curriculum design, materials selection, methodology, assessment, and evaluation” (p. 325). To summarize, ESP is not a separate part of English Language Teaching but rather the teaching of English for specific purposes, tailored to students’ needs and interests. In this context, it focuses on the reasons students want to learn English and develops a lesson plan, syllabus, and evaluation based on these specific purposes.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

ESP continues to grow and develop in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). New studies are being conducted daily to meet the needs of learners in fields such as English for Medicine, English for Business, English for Science, English for Technology, and English for Tourism (Bilokcuoğlu, 2012). Since these areas are primarily focused on professional learning, they can be grouped under English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), a sub-branch of ESP. EOP consists of specialized areas tailored to students’ needs and interests in a particular professional field (Supriadi, 2019).

Considering the general purpose of EOP, it is to ensure that learners can be at an adequate level in a particular job or profession. Abduvaliyeva (2019) states that the development and implementation of an EOP course includes identifying the demands, language requirements, and subject areas of a specific job. So, what are the key principles of EOP? Learners know what they need to learn in this context and why. The materials used in the context of EOP must be authentic and include components from learners’ real lives. In this way, learners learn about the information and requirements of a job or profession in a way that connects to real life. In addition, the courses taken in the context of EOP should cover content relevant to the profession learners want to learn and include appropriate activities. Moreover, the activities used in the lessons should include terms, context, and grammatical rules that can be used in

communication related to the chosen occupational fields (Brand-Fonseca & Segura-Arias, 2023; Sudipa et al., 2020).

Since EOP is an area that meets learners' communicative needs in occupational life, learners learn effective verbal and written communication in the workplace. Learners acquire the necessary vocabulary, documentation, terminology, and workplace correspondence related to their chosen occupational field. Regarding the EOP fields, courses are available in various occupational fields. For instance, since medicine is a highly sought-after field of study, many resources and courses have been developed in English. Similarly, in the field of English for sports, various resources have been studied and developed worldwide, and these differ across sports such as volleyball, basketball, and football. In addition to these sports branches, fitness, crossfit, and pilates are available in sports centers. Now, as in almost every aspect of our lives, English is indispensable in sports. Almost all the terms used in any sports branch are in English, which requires coaches to be knowledgeable about them. Although there are many studies on English for sport, there are very few resources on English for personal trainers.

1.2. Significance of the Study

Since English is a lingua franca, it is indispensable for communication. English is widely used as a lingua franca in many international contexts, and you can communicate in English anywhere. Whether it is for a daily conversation, an interview, an academic interview or a lecture, English provides communication and a common understanding in almost every aspect of life. Due to globalization and increased international professional and interdisciplinary mobility, individuals are no longer considered proficient with just general English knowledge; instead, they are expected to communicate effectively and accurately in their own fields of specialization. In this context, the ESP approach is of great importance in general, both for increasing learner motivation and for making the learning process more efficient and meaningful (Belcher, 2009; García Mayo, 1998).

Research on ESP is evaluated based on its contribution to the literature, specifically by addressing the limitations of broad, traditional approaches to language teaching and by suggesting context-specific techniques (Paltridge and Starfield, 2013). Instead of limiting English instruction to general English, it broadens its reach by including methods for academic, medical, and business contexts, adapted to learners' needs in various circumstances. The literature on ESP presents both theoretical and practical guidelines on topics such as needs analysis models, experiential instructional processes, original material design, and proficiency in language concepts in professional contexts, providing a comprehensive guide for both researchers and educators (Flowerdew, 2013). Furthermore, a comparative assessment of ESP research across disciplines reveals interdisciplinary similarities and contrasts, demonstrating that ESP is a dynamic, constantly shifting topic. Hence, each new study not only quantitatively expands the ESP literature but also enhances it qualitatively. In this study, it is expected that, although there are studies across many areas within the ESP approach and new studies continue to be added to these areas, this approach lacks sufficient resources in the field of sports. The aim is to fill this gap in the literature to meet the academic and professional needs of coaches who are studying and currently working in this field.

1.3. Research Questions

ESP is represented by a limited number of studies, specifically in the field of sports, increasing the importance of research in this area. Professional athletes, personal trainers, students of sports science, and coaches need to communicate with clients, provide training, and engage with academic or professional content in an international environment; however, they do not have sufficient access to original, systematic ESP materials that meet these needs (Shmakova et al., 2023). ESP studies focused on sports have the potential to identify the language needs of this professional group and to highlight terminology, sentence structures, interactive patterns, and discourse features specific to the sports context, thereby filling an important gap in the literature.

The purpose of this study is to determine the professional English language requirements of personal trainers working in the sports industry, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of an ESP teaching design designed in response to these requirements. In this sense, the research first analyzes the content offered in coaching education departments at Turkish universities, with an emphasis on whether themes are presented in English. Following that, it seeks to determine the goals for which personal trainers use English in professional contexts, the language skills they need the most, and the extent to which their existing English competence is sufficient for professional communication. Additionally, the study investigates the impact of the developed ESP-focused teaching content on participants' professional English proficiency and examines how the teaching process is evaluated through participants' perceptions, experiences, and satisfaction levels. Finally, the study is framed by research questions that aim to reveal the pedagogical contributions this ESP approach, designed specifically for the field of sports, offers in the context of field-specific language teaching and how it can serve as a model for similar professional fields. The fundamental questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: What should the content of an ESP course for personal trainers in the fitness field be?

RQ2: What is the satisfaction level of the participants of the MOOC developed for personal trainers?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

A qualitative research design based on qualitative content analysis was used in this study. Qualitative research designs are typically employed to examine, understand, and systematically evaluate the content of written and other documents with a view to uncovering patterns, ideas, and conceptual classifications (Krippendorff, 2018). Such designs emphasize systematic interpretation and category development when working with textual data (Schreier, 2012). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest that a comprehensive framework for meaning-centered analysis of social research contexts is provided through qualitative inquiry. The study aims to develop a 14-week coursework by analyzing existing course materials and drawing on perspectives from university instructors and active personal trainers in the field. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the qualitative approach aims to identify, structure, and justify what is to be included in the study. A qualitative educational research perspective focuses on understanding how learners create their own meaning rather than measuring variables in isolation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research focused on examining various qualitative data sources, including information from university courses, online course materials, and interviews with active personal trainers. Information gathered from these sources played a role in various phases of the course's creation. Document analysis further enabled systematic comparison across data sets during the course development process (Bowen, 2009). This approach enabled the identification of recurring topics, areas of emphasis, and potential gaps within existing course structures.

The study used a two-phase qualitative design to inform the development of the proposed course content. The study design draws on qualitative research principles and uses repeated rounds of analysis throughout each stage of the research process. Phased research designs are particularly suitable for studies in which successive analytical stages inform subsequent data collection and interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The proposed course content was developed using a step-by-step design process. In the first phase, the topics were identified through qualitative content analysis of university course syllabi and online course materials, as well as interviews with 38 currently employed personal trainers. These data were analyzed to include practitioner perspectives in topic selection, which guided the design of a 14-week course outline. In the second phase, the draft course structure was reviewed through semi-structured interviews with five participants who attended and completed the 14-week course, to evaluate the course and gather feedback on its content and structure. Interviewees reviewed the final 14-week course materials and shared their feedback.

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted in the context of higher education and focused on developing a proposed 14-week MOOC. The study's setting included curriculum and course content analysis, as well as the examination of existing instructional materials and expert academic input. Documentary materials and interview data were the primary sources of information. In the context of documentary analysis, teaching content across 55 universities was analyzed through a systematic review to identify the most frequently included subjects, learning objectives, and weekly distribution. These university course materials represented an institution-specific perspective and served as a reference point for the proposed course outline. In addition to university syllabi, 45 Udemy courses related to the target subject area were examined during the document analysis. The inclusion of these courses enabled the study to compare formal academic curricula with market-driven and practitioner-oriented course designs. The participant group consisted of 38 personal trainers actively engaged in professional practice related to the subject area covered in the suggested course content. Regarding gender, 12 participants were female, and 26 were male. Their professional experience ranged from 2 to 14 years, with most participants having at least 3 years of experience in the fitness field. The participants worked in various professional settings, including private gyms, fitness centers, and individual coaching services. This diversity helped ensure that the views gathered reflected a range of professional backgrounds and practical experiences within the field of personal training. In the initial phase of the study, participant interviews were conducted to gather the views of experienced, knowledgeable individuals in fitness training. Participants for interviews were selected using purposive sampling based on their experience and knowledge of the fitness training field; this ensured their views contributed to the research topic. The second phase of the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with five participants who completed the MOOC. Using this combination of settings and participants, the study sought to ensure that the proposed course content was grounded not only in existing curricular practices but also in expert academic judgment.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

For this research, a two-phase qualitative data collection procedure was used to prepare a proposed MOOC. Regarding instruments, document analysis was used to assess and analyze materials, while semi-structured interview forms were used to collect qualitative data from research participants. The first set of data was based on course materials collected from 55 universities. The course materials were collected from publicly available university websites, Bologna information systems, and official course syllabi. Analysis of course material across universities was conducted to identify common themes emphasized and to establish a general content map based on common curricula. Regarding topic identification, emphasis was placed on recognizing common themes, subject matter, and content in the course material. The second data source included 45 online courses selected from the Udemy platform. Udemy was selected because it is widely used, its course material is regularly updated, and its courses are primarily designed around practical tasks and applications. The courses were chosen in line with the proposed course content. Course descriptions, topics, and formats, such as weekly or module-based approaches, were used as sources of data to identify current trends, applied perspectives, and emerging topics that supported or extended the university curriculum. The third data source comprised interviews with 38 personal trainers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather feedback from experts on the initial 14-week MOOC plan prepared through document analysis. Participants were posed a primary guiding question, such as: *"Which topics could be added to this 14-week course plan?"* The participants were encouraged to provide a minimum of two to four topics to be added to the initial plan based on their academic and professional expertise in coaching education. In the second phase of the study, a second set of evaluative semi-structured interviews was conducted with five participants who had completed the 14-week MOOC. The interviews examined participants' perceptions of the relevance and overall quality of the course content. These interviews helped identify topics that were missing or underrepresented in current curricula and provided input to refine the course structure. The interviews were conducted to identify topics that participants felt were missing or given insufficient attention in current curricula, and to include academic perspectives that could strengthen and refine the draft course structure.

The direction of the data analysis in the present study was guided by qualitative content analysis, which served as the sole comprehensive approach for analyzing two data types: course materials and interview data. Although the approach remained the same, it was applied differently depending on the nature or purpose of the data. First, qualitative content analysis was used to analyze data from university course materials. Data such as course descriptions, weekly plans, and topic lists were reviewed. During this process, recurring themes and thematic emphases were identified using inductive coding. The following

examples demonstrate how the topics were created using the data outcomes from the analysis of university course contents:

Topic: Developmental Perspectives in Movement and Coaching Education

University course contents informing this topic: U1, U4, U7, U10, U13, U18, U22, U26, U31, U37, U42

This topic was derived from curricular content that addressed different stages of development, the characteristics of different age groups, and learners' readiness in movement and coaching contexts. The significance of this topic stems from the prominence of discussions in university courses on how physical, cognitive, and motor development shape coaching and movement education programs. In addition to examining university courses, qualitative content analysis was conducted of course descriptions, syllabi, and learning outcomes for 45 UdeMy courses. Course descriptions, topic lists, and the presented weekly or modular formats were analyzed to identify practice-oriented perspectives of the courses, the skills that were frequently addressed, and supplementary fields beyond a formal university curriculum. Throughout the analysis, online course content was examined in relation to the topic framework developed from the analysis of university course content. Rather than generating a separate set of topics, UdeMy materials were used to inform, support, and refine the same pool of 115 topics identified across data sources. Topics were identified based on conceptual coherence and repetition across courses rather than individual course structures. For instance, practice-oriented topics such as fundamental movement skills, movement-based activity design, and physical fitness development appeared repeatedly across multiple online courses and were clustered under shared analytical categories. In contrast, more specialized topics, such as training program design for specific populations and injury prevention strategies, were retained as separate units when they reflected distinct instructional intentions. Using qualitative content analysis, interview data were examined inductively, based on participants' responses, to identify common suggestions on the course topics, gaps in content, and practical needs that could not be addressed solely through document review.

The final stage of data analysis involved integrating findings from university course content, online course materials, and interview data. Through qualitative content analysis, a pool of 115 topics was identified based on the combined examination of documentary sources. These topics did not directly translate into weekly course units; instead, they served as an analytical foundation for subsequent refinement. During this stage, a thorough evaluation of the topic-level findings from document analysis was conducted alongside suggestions from the interview data. The information obtained from the interviews added field-related and practice-based perspectives to the topic analysis and identified several areas of the curriculum that were believed to be lacking. The combined view of the two analyses led to the grouping of overlapping or conceptually related topics while retaining distinct, pedagogically valuable topics.

3. Findings

An analysis of the reviewed documentation revealed that several common themes run through the materials, relating to the course's foundational topics, though the level of detail and breadth of the themes vary across the documents. However, given the repeated occurrence of these themes across documents, this suggests an underlying theme for each material. Content overlaps were identified, and similarities in the presentation of information across the documents were noted. Schreier (2012) points out that identifying patterns across documents provides deeper insights into how information is structured and represented in the data. Certain educational practices and content characteristics existed in many of these documents. These findings provide a descriptive overview of the general types of content available for this set of documentation.

3.1 Core Content Domains

Through the analysis of university curricula, online course content, and interviews with personal trainers, professional domains and topics related to personal fitness training are identified. According to Krippendorff (2018), comparing data across multiple sources and different content, and categorizing similar patterns are central processes in qualitative content analysis. During identification, content from different sources was compared, and similar topics were grouped under overlapping titles for the course. Thus, differences in professional terminology were taken into account, and topics covering similar

content areas were gathered together. While the program is organized around key knowledge areas in personal training, these areas are not designed to serve as fitness education. Instead, they are used as contextual domains in which professional English for personal training can be constructed. In this way, the chosen content areas offer authentic communicative contexts in which learners can exercise domain-specific vocabulary, pedagogical language, and client-trainer communication. The blending of professional subject matter with language-centered learning activities aligns with the principles of ESP, which position language development within occupational contexts. Following the identification and analysis process, the core content that emerged is presented below:

- Week 1 – Personal Trainer
- Week 2 – Testing and Goal Setting
- Week 3 – Basic Anatomy
- Week 4 – Health Problems
- Week 5 – Injuries and First Aid
- Week 6 – Nutrition and Supplements
- Week 7 – Basic Movement Education
- Week 8 – Upper Body
- Week 9 – Lower Body
- Week 10 – Core and Cardio
- Week 11 – Sports Implements
- Week 12 – Exercise Equipment
- Week 13 – Home Gym Training
- Week 14 – Mobility and Flexibility

Based on these identified core content areas, the program’s weekly structure was created, and the content was systematically distributed across a 14-week lesson plan. Through the identified content, the MOOC training program was structured around modules that support terminological development. Weekly content progressively moves from core knowledge areas of the profession towards practice-based components.

The first two weeks of the program cover the theoretical frameworks and terminology of personal training as a profession. Specifically, physical fitness assessment methods, risk classification, and goal-setting strategies are included early in the program to ensure participants acquire the necessary theoretical foundation before moving on to practice-based modules. The most frequently recurring topics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Most frequently identified topics in the foundational and professional framework module

Topic	University Sources (n)	Online Sources (n)	Total (n)
Trainer roles and professional characteristics	42	35	77
Long-term training planning	37	33	70
Physical assessment methods	38	31	69
Risk classification and screening	34	27	61
Goal-setting strategies	29	24	53

These findings indicate that professional role definition and assessment processes are prioritized in the starting module of the program. This fundamental framework lays the groundwork for the scientific and practice-based content covered in subsequent modules.

From the third to the sixth week, the program covers scientific and health-based aspects of the content. These modules cover human anatomy, sports injuries, and nutrition. The aim is to further provide learners with essential theoretical and scientific terminology knowledge before practice-based content. This module includes the following weeks: Basic Anatomy, Health Problems, Injuries and First Aid, Nutrition and Supplements.

The most frequently encountered topics in this module of content analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Most frequently identified topics in the scientific and health-based module

Topic	University Sources (n)	Online Sources (n)	Total (n)
Musculoskeletal system and joint mechanics	43	33	76
Common sports injuries and prevention	38	32	70
Basic physiological responses to exercise	34	29	63
Health screening and risk classification	26	35	61
Macronutrients and sports performance	32	27	59

The findings show that topics in anatomy and injury management are strongly repeated across different resource types. This supports the prioritizing of the mentioned content areas in the program's scientifically based modules.

Starting with basic movement principles, this section of the program extends to split-workout practices and equipment use. The content structure is based on both the movement and split-workout training topics covered in academic programs and the practice-based terminology derived from field experience. This module consists of the following weeks (7-13): Basic Movement Education, Upper Body, Lower Body, Core and Cardio, Sports Implements, Exercise Equipment, and Home Gym Training. The topics included in this module were determined based on findings from both academic content analysis and field interviews. The most frequently encountered topics categorized by source type are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Most frequently identified topics in the movement and training module

Topic	University Sources (n)	Online Sources (n)	Interviews (n)	Total (n)
Upper-body resistance exercises	42	36	-	78
Lower-body strength training	40	34	-	74
Fundamental movement patterns	39	33	-	72
Core stabilization techniques	-	-	7	7
Cardio programming strategies	-	-	6	6

These results demonstrate that this section of the program systematically addresses topics such as movement training, regional training, and equipment use. This ensures content coherence as the MOOC program transitions to the final section.

The final week of the program is dedicated to mobility and flexibility, complementary components of fitness training and coaching. This module covers range of motion (ROM), methods for improving flexibility, and pre- and post-training mobility exercises. The aim is to enable participants to understand the role of mobility and flexibility exercises in planning training. The most recurring topics in this module are presented in Table 4. Completing the course as the final module, this module is titled as Mobility and Flexibility.

Table 4. Most frequently identified topics in the mobility and flexibility module

Topic	University Sources (n)	Online Sources (n)	Total (n)
Warm-up and cool-down routines	38	33	71

Joint mobility exercises	36	30	66
Dynamic stretching techniques	34	29	63
Static stretching techniques	31	27	58
Range of motion development	28	24	52

3.2 Participants' Evaluation of the Course

In this section, reflections and evaluations from participants in the course are presented. Analysis of the interview data from the course takers revealed that participants' experiences of the course fell into similar categories. These categories emerged as themes, such as *Course Participation Motivation*, *Advantages of the Course*, *Perceived Learning Outcomes*, *Limitations and Improvement Needs*, and *Overall Evaluation*. Themes were derived from recurring, meaningful patterns in participants' answers, and each theme represents a distinct aspect of the course experience. The process of developing themes helps to organize and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Guest et al., 2012). In addition to the other themes, the Overall Evaluation theme was added to include participants' general reflections and judgments, as well as their comments on specific aspects of the course. Table 5 presents the themes, brief descriptions of each, and the number of participants who mentioned each theme in the data.

Table 5. The main themes that emerged from the participants' evaluation of the course

Theme	Description	n
Course Participation Motivation	Reasons for enrolling in the course	5
Advantages of the Course	Perceived advantages of the course and the course format	5
Perceived Learning Outcomes	Self-reported learning gains from the course	5
Limitations and Improvement Needs	Limitations faced and suggestions	4
Overall Evaluation	General reflection and judgment	5

3.2.1. Course Participation Motivation

This theme captures the motivations and goals of participants who enrolled in the 14-week course. Participants stated several reasons for taking the course that are used in the code creation. Participants reported that their awareness of a lack of professional vocabulary, the importance of obtaining a professional certificate, the need to communicate with clients who do not speak Turkish, and the need to understand scientific sources in the field motivated their enrollment. These recurring categories were used as codes, including *Professional Vocabulary Gap*, *Client Communication Need*, *Access to Scientific Literature*, and *Certification Motivation*.

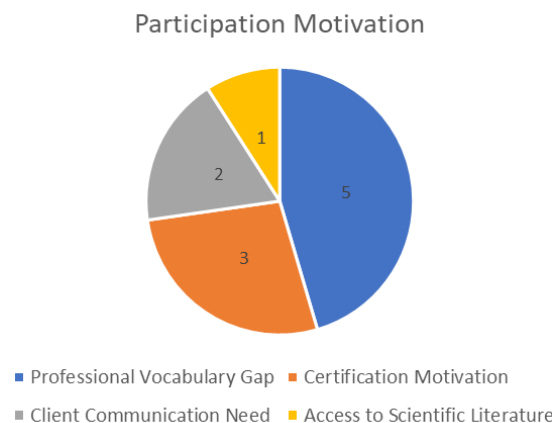


Figure1. Codes included in the theme Participation Motivation

3.2.2. Advantages of The Course

This theme explores the advantages of the MOOC format provided and the course content. According to participant reports, positive feedback mainly centers on the MOOC format’s ease of access and the flexibility of the learning process. The online course format enabled participants to access the content at their desired time and place and to progress at their own pace. Being able to pause and replay the course videos gave participants control over their learning, as P2 pointed out: “*Pausing and replaying the lessons was very useful.*” P4 reported, “*I think it was simple, clear, and easy to follow.*”. This reflects the participants’ views of the course as clear and comprehensible, as well as the accessibility of the MOOC format. Recurring themes included Flexibility, Self-paced Learning, Opportunities for Repetition, and Clear and Simple Explanations, which were incorporated into the code and are presented in Figure 2.

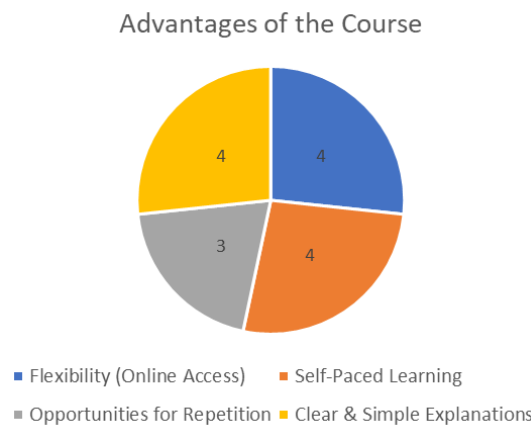


Figure 2. Codes included in the theme Advantages of the Course

3.2.3. Perceived Learning Outcomes

The Perceived Learning Outcomes theme presents the outcomes participants reported gaining throughout the MOOC. The analysis of participant comments revealed that the gains were mainly related to professional language use. Additionally, participants perceived the course as helpful for reinforcing their existing knowledge and increasing awareness of professional English use. These repeating patterns were created into codes under the categories of *Terminology Development*, *Communication Development*, *Knowledge Reinforcement*, and *Professional Language Awareness*. The codes and their preference distribution are shown in Figure 3 below.

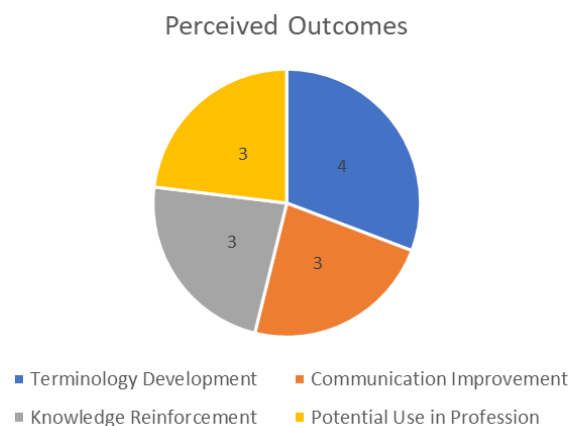


Figure 3. Codes included in the theme Perceived Outcomes

3.2.4. Limitations and Improvement Needs

This theme reveals participants’ suggestions for improving the course and the limitations they identified. An analysis of participant statements shows that the most prominent opinion is that the scope of professional content could be further expanded. Specifically, there was a request for a deeper understanding of topics such as anatomy, different training types, and more detailed field content. This indicates that although participants considered the course adequate for beginners, they expected more comprehensive content. In addition, some participants suggested that more speaking practice sessions could be provided, while others noted that opportunities to apply what they learned in real-world contexts were limited. These recurring issues within the theme are grouped under the codes *No Opportunity for Practice*, *Speaking Practice Request*, and *Deeper Domain Content Request* in Figure 4.

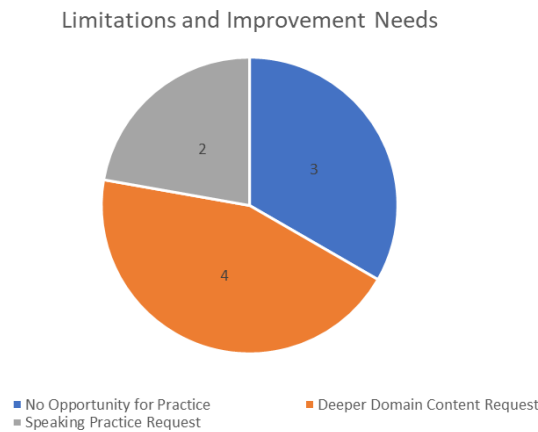


Figure 4. Codes included in the theme Limitations and Improvement Needs

3.2.5. Overall Evaluation

The *Overall Evaluation* theme presents participants’ general judgment and reflections on the MOOC format and the course. It was generally agreed that the course increased awareness of English-language use in the profession and that the online format supported and enhanced learners' control over the learning process. The course was found to be flexible, easily accessible, and enriching both English language and professional terminology. On the other hand, some participants also stated that there are areas for improvement in speaking practice opportunities and in the range of content. For this theme, all participants recommended the course and saw it as a valuable tool for professional development.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The findings of this study are meaningful primarily when evaluated in light of the theoretical foundations of the ESP approach. ESP is a method of teaching English that focuses on the language competencies necessary for a specific professional, academic, or educational subject. In ESP, the key variable in selecting content, techniques, and resources is the learner’s motivation to learn the language; thus, all decisions are influenced by this motivation (Fitria, 2020). Thus, the ESP teaching process is goal-oriented and presents content across various fields in line with specific objectives and contexts. This approach involves original materials, needs analysis, and goal-oriented lesson planning to teach language usage specific to the learner’s discipline (Belcher, 2009). Thus, ESP programs provide linguistic proficiency in

a specific context, unlike general English teaching. While general English teaching involves learning the language in all its details, the ESP approach views language more as a tool and teaches it in the context of the target content. Fitria (2020) states that, unlike General English, which focuses on overall proficiency, ESP is goal-oriented and centers on the specific linguistic needs of target students. In other words, in ESP teaching, language is structured around the goals of the student's academic, professional, or personal life, while in general English teaching, students learn the language as a whole and adapt it to their own needs as they go. From this perspective, ESP facilitates language learning by offering content tailored to students' needs (Hyland, 2022). The fact that professional requirements in the field of personal training were incorporated into the content design process of the MOOC developed in this study, and that participant feedback largely aligned with the content, demonstrates that this approach is effective in practice. Although participants had a certain level of general English proficiency, they felt a lack of professional terminology, confirming ESP's emphasis on "specific context."

Online education refers to the educational process that takes place over the internet and uses digital technologies. This educational framework allows instructors and learners to access the learning environment regardless of physical location; learning occurs through a variety of digital resources, including live courses, online materials, video lessons, forums, and interactive assignments (Weller, 2003). Online education is the internet-era version of remote learning, emphasizing flexibility, accessibility, and learner-centeredness. Online education has democratized learning processes while lowering geographical and socioeconomic barriers to learning. Students can take classes, access materials, and complete tasks at their own pace from any location with an internet connection. This function broadens educational opportunities, particularly for working people, students in different time zones, and populations facing access barriers. Along with these prospects for online education, new platforms such as MOOCs have appeared. MOOCs promote learning through time and geographical flexibility, offering free or inexpensive access to teaching resources for thousands of learners. MOOCs are important in online education because of their accessibility, flexibility, and customizable learning structure, which connect individuals with education customized to their goals, providing broad learning options that go beyond the limitations of traditional classroom education (Perifanou & Economides, 2014).

The learning process in the context of the course MOOC can be associated with constructivist and connectivist learning theories. In connectivism theory, Siemens (2005) argues that learning in the digital age occurs through networks and that knowledge is distributed. The MOOC format aligns with this theoretical framework by offering learners the opportunity to interact with the content repeatedly and determine their own learning pace. Participants' perceptions of the replay and pause features as reinforcing elements of learning demonstrate that learners acquire the ability to organize the learning process at their own pace and using their own methods, based on individual differences. Finally, the contribution of this study to the ESP literature in the field of sports can also be evaluated from a theoretical perspective. Although the sports and fitness sector is growing globally, systematic ESP programs specific to this field are limited, and there are no English studies developed for personal trainers or conducted on this subject in the Turkish context. Considering this, this study lays the groundwork for filling this gap in the field and plays a major role in future studies. This study expands the application areas of ESP by demonstrating that professional language teaching can be structured through online platforms. At the same time, integrating MOOCs and ESP addresses a gap in the field by proposing an interdisciplinary model.

This study aimed to develop an ESP-focused MOOC for English for personal trainers in a professional context and to evaluate it using participant feedback following implementation. A 14-week online course was designed for this study; its content was structured to meet the needs of the personal training profession, professional terminology, and communication requirements. In this context, topics in the field of coaching education at universities in Turkey were examined as a priority; in addition, courses on Udemy, one of the most popular online platforms, were also examined, resulting in a 9-week content

plan. Afterward, based on interviews with 38 personal trainers, the course was completed in 14 weeks, in accordance with an academic calendar. The course was then opened to participants and implemented. Participants' feedback at the end of the course provides insight into both the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

The development of this course was structured according to the ESP approach. Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) needs analysis-based design approach formed the basis of this work. During the course content development phase, academic programs in coaching and UdeMy certificate programs were first examined, occupational job descriptions were analyzed, and the field's terminology was determined. Additionally, following interviews with personal trainers in the field, a 14-week content plan was created to align with the academic calendar. As mentioned above, the course was developed using the ESP approach, resulting in a specific structure focused on professional language use rather than general English instruction.

The participant feedback gathered from interviews conducted at the end of the course indicates that this course, designed on ESP principles, meets the field's needs. Before the course, many participants stated that they considered their general English level sufficient but felt they lacked proficiency in professional terminology. The course content integrates professional terminology necessary for personal trainers working in the fitness field, exercise descriptions used in training sessions, movement definitions, basic-level movement descriptions for use during training, basic grammar structures, and listening-reading activities. The content language is designed to be simple and explanatory, specifically targeting participants at the beginner level who require basic English skills.

In addition, the majority of participants stated that the course included terms and topics specific to the professional field and exercise descriptions that could be encountered in a training session, indicating that it provided development in both the field and English. One participant stated, "*I think I have improved in the use of exercise descriptions and professional terms in English,*" supporting that the course achieved its objectives. However, some participants noted the importance of repetition and practice for retaining the information learned. The statement, "*I realized that repetition is necessary for the information learned to be retained,*" points to the continuity of learning. This situation emphasizes that the course meets the required standards and effectively provides basic knowledge and awareness; however, for long-term learning, it should be repeated regularly rather than just once. At this point, we can conclude that the course content, application methods, materials, and strategies can be expanded and diversified. This result can be considered one factor to keep in mind when designing the content of similar courses that may be offered in the future.

Participants mentioned in their feedback that the online format was familiar to them. With the transition to distance learning worldwide due to the pandemic, participants, like almost everyone else, easily adapted to online education. This supports the idea that the MOOC format is compatible with learning habits, both in the post-pandemic educational approach and in current circumstances. One participant stated, "*In this day and age, I don't want to attend a course unless I am required to do so in person,*" showing that online education has become not just an alternative but a preferred model. This situation also suggests that online and distance learning environments are increasingly accepted in the education and teaching process as life conditions change due to the pandemic and advancing technology.

Participants noted that while this MOOC-format course offers the advantages of independence from time and place, it also has certain limitations. Feedback regarding the lack of speaking practice and the absence of opportunities to use the language interactively indicates that content planned for this area should address these needs. Therefore, it can be concluded that the MOOC format is strong in terms of accessibility and flexibility; however, it may require additional applications to support skills that require interaction and immediate feedback. At this point, it can be concluded that, in future studies, the shortcomings of the MOOC format can be addressed to better meet learners' needs, based on participant feedback, and these findings can be presented as further studies.

In general, the MOOC structure has provided an effective learning model for participants, regardless of whether they are coaches working in the field, due to its time- and location-independence. The course's accessibility, the opportunity for repetition, and the ability to adjust it to individual learning speeds have also been important factors in its success. Although the MOOC format has its strengths, its limitations include the inability to meet participants' needs for speaking and interactive communication.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that an online, needs-based model, such as ESP, for teaching professional English in sports is feasible and effective, as evidenced by participants' evaluations. The combination of the ESP approach and the MOOC format has produced an effective study for learners in this field by offering learning tailored to the professional needs of personal trainers while highlighting its strengths through time- and location-independent education. In this respect, the study is an original example that contributes to both practice and ESP literature in the field of sports. As this study appears to be among the first in Turkey, it should be considered unique in meeting the needs of coaches working in the field of sports, particularly in the fitness sector.

The results of this study have significant implications for both practice and the literature. Initially, ESP-based online programs tailored to specific professional groups, such as personal trainers, were found to be useful and functional. According to participant feedback, content design based on needs analysis is closely associated with professional requirements. This demonstrates that targeting language instruction programs to a specific context, rather than using a general English approach, can produce greater success in professional sectors. As a result, educational institutions and sports and fitness certification programs can systematically incorporate professional English modules into their curricula. Moreover, the MOOC format provides an effective learning model for all learners, whether or not they work in this sector. Aspects that promote participant motivation include independence from time and location, the possibility of repetition, and self-regulated advancement. This finding also highlights the need to use flexible, digital learning platforms when designing professional development programs.

In terms of research, this study contributes to the literature as one of the few studies on ESP and MOOC integration in sports. One limitation of this study is that participant satisfaction was evaluated based on feedback from only five course completers; therefore, future research could involve a larger number of participants to provide a broader and more robust evaluation of the MOOC's effectiveness. Further studies could collect quantitative data from larger groups and evaluate educational outcomes using a pre-test-post-test design. The long-term impact analyses can also be used to determine the frequency and proficiency with which individuals use English in their professional lives. Furthermore, comparative research can be implemented by developing customized ESP programs for various sports disciplines or group fitness instructors. Last but not least, this study lays the foundation for a modular and progressive ESP model. Including intermediate and advanced modules after the beginner level can help the program remain relevant and have a greater impact. As a result, professional English instruction for personal trainers can be converted into an ongoing development program rather than a single course.

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Author Contributions

First Author: Conceptualization, methodology, writing the original draft, and data curation

Second Author: Formal analysis, supervision, review and editing.

Ethics Approval Statement

Ethical approval was obtained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Ethics Committee (Approval No. 18.01.2024 - 01/12).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

The authors used ChatGPT for language editing assistance. The authors reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content.

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