

DESIGNING A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FOR EVALUATION OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES ACTIVITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Competence-based teacher education provides new knowledge within the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation. Communicative competence is of the greatest importance which individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment (European Commission, 2004). The successful development of teachers' communicative competence requires English for Academic Purposes activity in teacher education to be evaluated. Aim of the following paper is to identify the qualitative research design to examine efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity in teacher education. The study presents how the steps of the process are related: qualitative evaluation research → principles of the qualitative evaluation research → the methodology of the qualitative evaluation research → methods of the qualitative evaluation research → empirical study within a multicultural environment. The findings of the research reveal the qualitative evaluation research design to evaluate efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity in teacher education for the improvement of student teachers' communicative competence. Directions of further research are elaborated.

Key words: Teacher Education, Student Teachers, Qualitative Evaluation Research Design, Communicative Competence, English for Academic Purposes Activity

1. Introduction

Competence-based teacher education provides new knowledge within the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation. The successful development of teachers' communicative competence requires English for Academic Purposes activity in teacher education to be evaluated. Aim of the following paper is to identify the qualitative research design to examine efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity in teacher education.

The qualitative evaluation research is aimed at the evaluation of current practice (Flick, 2004a) in complex and constantly self-regenerating environments (Kardoff, 2004). Evaluation of current practice is oriented to check the effectiveness, efficiency and goal-attainment of programmes, measures, models and laws, of pedagogic interventions and organizational changes (Kardoff, 2004). The paradigm in the development of qualitative evaluation research has shifted from the assessment of results and goals with reference to the relevant environment to the qualitative process-oriented procedure (Kardoff, 2004). Hence, the key components of the qualitative evaluation research design are depicted in Figure 1 by the author of the present contribution.

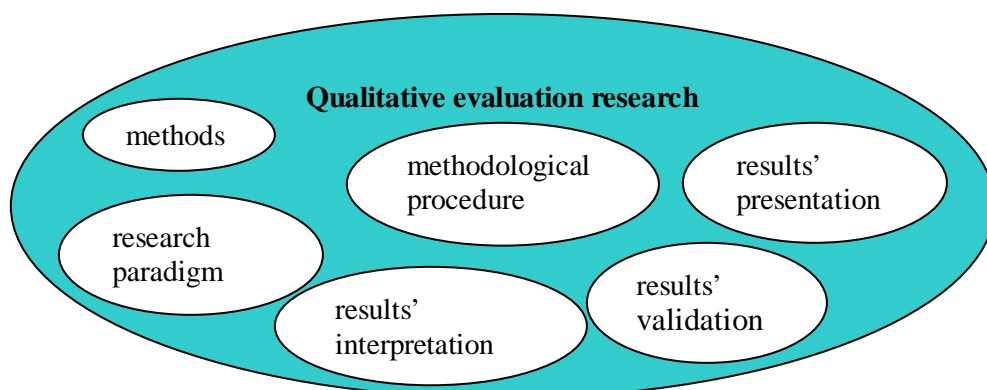


Figure 1: Key components of the qualitative evaluation research design

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework on the qualitative evaluation research. Research design is revealed in Section 3. The associated empirical results are presented and interpreted in Section 4. Finally, some concluding remarks and directions of further research are elaborated in Section 5.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Research Paradigm of the Qualitative Evaluation Research

The present qualitative evaluation research is based on the interpretative research paradigm. The core of this paradigm is human experience, people’s mutual everyday interaction that tends to understand the subjectivity of human experience (Lūka, 2007). The researcher’s close contact and interaction with the people involved in the study is an advantage in obtaining the research results (Lūka, 2007). Researcher is an interpreter.

On the one hand, the interpretative research paradigm is determined by the researcher’s practical interests in English for Academic Purposes activity as the development of the system of external and internal perspectives. On the other hand, the given paradigm corresponds to the social constructivism theory, symbolic interactionism theory and action and activity theories (Lūka, 2007) as well as to the nature of humanistic pedagogy because it creates an environment for the individual development to promote his/her potential (Lūka, 2008). The interpretative paradigm is oriented towards one’s conscious activity (Lūka, 2007). It is aimed at understanding people’s activity: how a certain activity is exposed in a certain environment, time, conditions, i.e., how it is exposed in a definite socio-cultural context (Lūka, 2007). Thus, it is future-oriented (Lūka, 2007).

2.2. Methodology of the Qualitative Evaluation Research

The methodology of the present qualitative evaluation research is depicted in Figure 2 by the author of the present research.

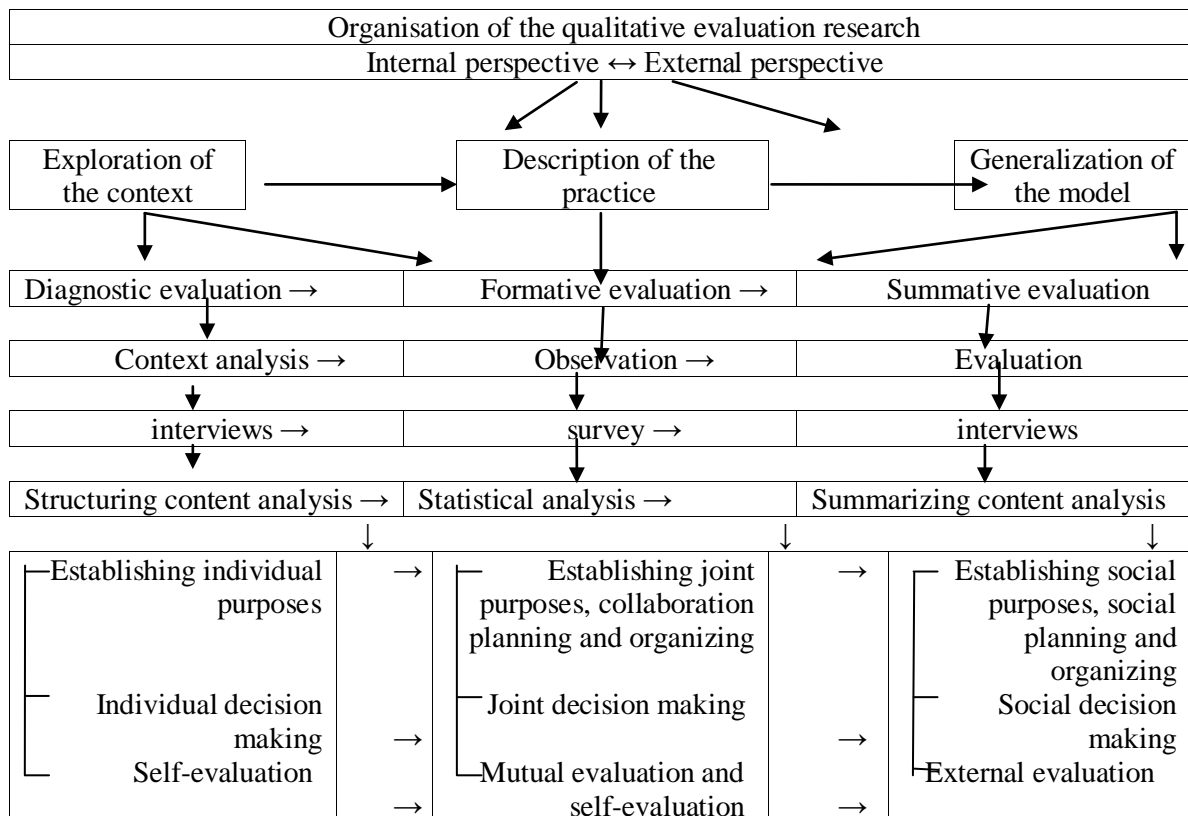


Figure 2: The scheme of the organization model of the qualitative evaluation research to examine efficiency of English studies for academic purposes for the development of students' communicative competence

The model of the qualitative evaluation research indicates how the steps of the process are related following a logical chain: exploration of the context → description of the practice → generalization of the model. The basic directions of the development of the qualitative evaluation research designed by the author of the present research are determined as following:

- from diagnostic evaluation in Phase 1 through formative evaluation in Phase 2 to summative evaluation in Phase 3,
- from context analysis in Phase 1 through description of the practice in Phase 2 to generalization of the model in Phase 3,
- from interviews in Phase 1 through surveys in Phase 2 to interviews in Phase 3,
- from structuring content analysis in Phase 1 through statistical analysis in Phase 2 to summarizing content analysis in Phase 3 and
- from self-evaluation in Phase 1 through internal evaluation in Phase 2 to external evaluation in Phase 3.

The phase of exploration of the context analysis of the qualitative evaluation research is aimed at determining the present situation of English for Academic Purposes activity in promoting the students' motivation and their readiness to implement the joint activity. The description of the practice analyzes differences in the level of features researched. The phase of generalization of the model determines whether the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity is efficient for the development of students' communicative competence. The phase of generalization of the model shows directions of further research, too.

Evaluation of different levels provides a feedback and interaction among evaluators (Lūka, 2007). The aims of evaluation determined by Hahele (Hahele, 2006) change from diagnostic evaluation in Phase 1 to summative evaluation in Phase 3 through formative evaluation in Phase 2. Diagnostic evaluation is carried out at the course beginning to obtain information on students' knowledge and skills (Hahele, 2006). Then, formative evaluation is organized in the middle of the course to check students' gradual educational progress (Hahele, 2006). And, finally, summative evaluation at the course end reveals whether the students have achieved their aims and could be pointed to the next (a higher) educational level (Hahele, 2006).

The type of evaluation proceeds from self-evaluation in Phase 1 to external evaluation in Phase 3 through internal evaluation in Phase 2. Self-evaluation is defined as the students' process to think, analyze and plan their learning in accordance with criteria worked out together with the educator that results in a report called *self-evaluation* in a written form (Hahele, 2006). Internal evaluation is determined as the process when the educator and students evaluate the student's work in accordance with the joint criteria as well as students and the management of the educational establishment evaluate the educator's work that results in a report called *internal evaluation* in a written form (Hahele, 2006). External evaluation is identified as the process by external experts to evaluate the work of educators, students and the management of the educational establishment in accordance with certain criteria that results in a report called *external evaluation* in a written form (Hahele, 2006).

2.3 Methods of Qualitative Evaluation Research

Methods of the qualitative evaluation research are differentiated into five groups as depicted in Figure 3 by the author of the present contribution.



Figure 3: Methods of the qualitative evaluation research

The empirical methods of each phase of the present qualitative evaluation research are demonstrated in Table 1 by the auhtor of the present research.

Table 1

Empirical methods of the qualitative evaluation research

Phase of the qualitative evaluation research	Method of data obtaining	Methods of data processing	Methods of data analysis	analysis of data validity
Phase 1 Exploration of the context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students' questionnaire -students' structured interviews, - educators' semi-structured interviews, - researchers' non-structured interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - content analysis - qualitative data (frequences of students' expressions) processing in the AQUAD 6.0 software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - structuring content analysis and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the method triangulation and - the data triangulation
Phase 2 Description of the practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students' surveys, - students' observation, - students' self-evaluation and - students' evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - qualitative data of self-evaluation, internal and external evaluation, with use of content analysis, - quantitative data (students', educators' and researchers' questionnaires) processing in the SPSS 17.0 software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - analysis of students' self-evaluation and - analysis of differences in the level of features researched (frequencies), 	
Phase 3 Analysis of the research results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students' structured interviews, - educators' semi-structured interviews, - researchers' non-structured interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - content analysis of the qualitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - - analysis of differences in the level of features researched (Mode), - - analysis of correlation among samples by the <i>Pearson's correlation analysis</i>, - summarizing content analysis of external evaluation by external experts 	

The group of data obtaining methods are only presented in the present part of the contribution. Three properly fitted methods are found to be sufficient for a good research (Oganisjana and Koke, 2008). Methods of data obtaining in the present research first include the research context analysis to give an insight into successful possibilities of realization, causal relationship and conditions (Chatterji, 2005). Then, observation of students' social and individual differences is included as an essential method in human pedagogy (Lūka, 2007). And, finally, evaluation provides comprehensive results of the research (Hunter, Brewer, 2003). Hence, methods of data

obtaining move from the context analysis in Phase 1 through observation in Phase 2 to evaluation in Phase 3. Implementation of mixed methods for data obtaining provides the researcher with wide scope of data to study a research question in a more detailed way (Hunter, Brewer, 2003). In order to measure the phenomena the use of mixed methods is provided by different forms of interview, participant observation and documents analysis (Kardoff, 2004).

2.4. Validity and Reliability of the Qualitative Evaluation Research

Validity and reliability of the results of the qualitative evaluation research may be validated as shown in Figure 4 by the author of the present contribution.

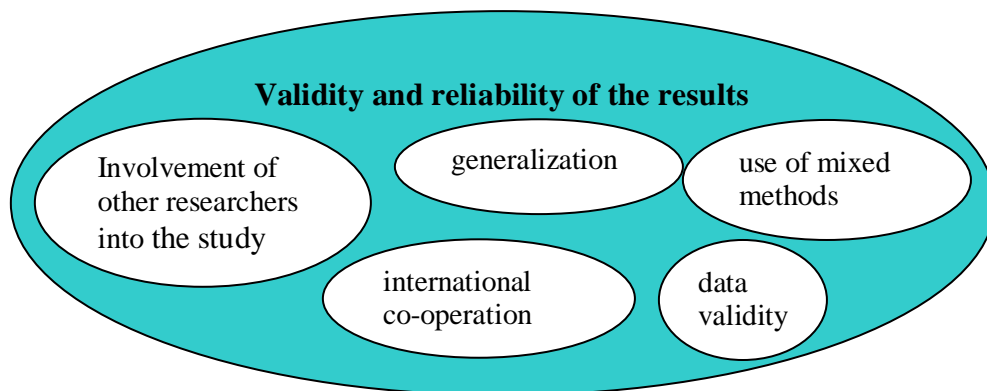


Figure 4: Validity and reliability of the research results

Moreover, the systemic relationship between reliability and validity (Kropļiņš, Raščevska, 2004) may be improved by (Lūka, 2007)

- non-experimental research design,
- the data obtaining methods,
- ordinal data and
- similarly, statistical testing of hypothesis.

Non-experimental research design comprises conducting the research not in a laboratory but in the real environment that provides highly favourable external validity (Lūka, 2007). Observing as the data obtaining method provides highly favourable reliability and internal validity whereas expert assessment emphasizes highly favourable external validity (Lūka, 2007). Ordinal data reveals highly favourable reliability and internal validity while descriptive statistics – external validity (Lūka, 2007). And, similarly, statistical testing of hypothesis provides highly favourable reliability and internal validity meanwhile content analysis – external validity (Lūka, 2007).

3. Research design

3.1. The research purpose and questions

The present research was conducted during the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity in the *English for Academic Purposes* course within the master programmes *School Management*, *Pedagogy* and *Music Pedagogy* of Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy in Latvia in 2008-2009 to examine efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence in order to promote the quality of studies. Its topicality is determined by ever-increasing flow of information in which an important role is laid to communicative competence to get information and gain experience. The research question is as following: has English for Academic Purposes activity been efficient to promote the development of the students' communicative competence?

3.2. The respondents of the research

The respondents involve seven researchers, four language educators and 75 first year master students of Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy in the 2008/2009 study year, namely,

- 30 students of the professional master's study programme *School Management*,
- 25 students of the professional master's study programme *Pedagogy* and
- 25 students of the professional master's study programme *Music Pedagogy*.

The sample with different cultural backgrounds and diverse educational approaches was selected. 60 of the student teachers had certain expectations from the master programmes and, consequently, from the *English for Academic Purposes* course. The expectations were demonstrated in the answer to the question why they had chosen this programme. The students' communicative competence in English for Academic Purposes in the studies was one of the answers.

The two-year master studies are aimed at facilitating students' research success, supporting preparation for international Ph.D. programmes in the European Union, further specializing in the chosen field and learning in a simulated environment. The aim of the *English for Academic Purposes* course in the two-year masters' programmes is to improve student teachers' communicative competence in English for Academic Purposes for the participation in international research activities. The implementation of English studies for academic purposes gradually proceeds from teaching in Phase 1 to learning in Phase 3 through peer-learning in Phase 2 as depicted in Figure 1.17 by the author of the present research. Hence, each phase of English studies for academic purposes is separated from the previous one, and the following phase is based on the previous one.

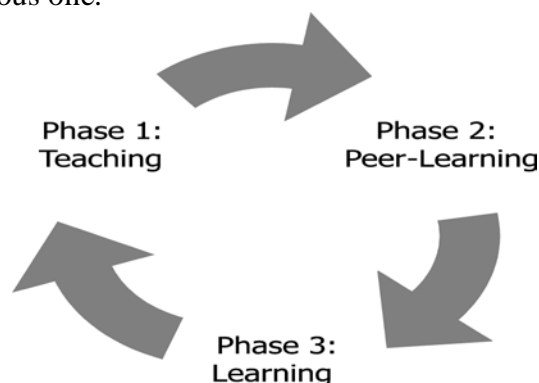


Figure 1.17: Phases of English studies for academic purposes

English for Academic Purposes activity involves various teaching and learning techniques, namely, discussion, prepared talk, communication games and information-gap activities (Zaščerinska, 2009) to promote student teachers' communicative competence in English for Academic Purposes.

3. 3. Research methodology

Efficiency involves quality and effectiveness as depicted in Figure 5 by the author of the present contribution. Quality is an idea of what are the "right things" that we are doing, and procedures for checking that we are "doing things right" (Muresan, 2003). Effectiveness is the aim achievement at a certain quality spending minimal time and energy (Žogla, 2001).

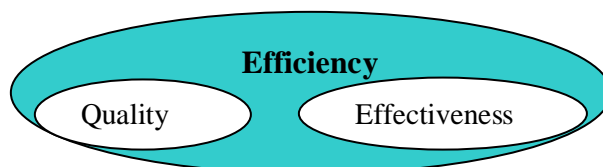


Figure 5: Elements of efficiency

Efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity involves the relationship between inputs and outputs (Robbins, 2007). Inputs are defined as opportunities of gaining experience whereas

outputs are determined as communicative competence. Moreover, communicative competence is identified as a result – a level of quality of student’s activity (Maslo, 2006). English for Academic Purposes activity is efficient if the inputs produce the maximum output (European Commission, 2006).

The focus from an input based teaching and learning process has changed to an outcome based process (Bluma, 2008). Hence, students’ communicative competence is the outcome criterion of English for Academic Purposes activity. Evaluation of students’ communicative competence is defined as the evaluation with the focus not on the evaluation of the study results but with the focus on the evaluation of the inter-connections between the activity and its results in the united system of criteria (Hahele, 2006) that comprises self-evaluation, internal evaluation and external evaluation (Maslo, 2006).

An explorative research has been used in the research (Tashakkori, Teddlie, 2003). The explorative research has been aimed at the development of general statements which can be tested for generality in following studies with different people in different times (Mayring, 2007). The study consisted of the following stages:

- exploration of the contexts in student teachers’ communicative competence in English for Academic Purposes in Latvia through thorough analysis of the documents,
- analysis of the students’ feedback regarding their needs,
- data processing, analysis and data interpretation and
- analysis of the results and elaboration of directions of further research.

Data validity in the present research has been provided (Flick, 2004b) by

- the method triangulation and
- the data triangulation.

Further on, the theoretical model of the qualitative evaluation research design described in Part 2 of the present contribution is used to examine efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity for the improvement of students’ communicative competence.

4. Findings of the Research

4.1 Analysis of the Students’ Self-Evaluation of the Research Results

In order to find out how each student’s communicative competence changed after the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity, the analysis of the students’ self-evaluation of the communicative competence comprised the structured interviews. The structured interviews included three questions as following:

- What is your attitude to English for Academic Purposes activity?
- What have you learned within English for Academic Purposes activity?
- How can you apply this knowledge in your academic field?

The aim of the interviews was to reveal the students’ view on English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students’ communicative competence.

For example, Student *F2* thanks for giving a chance to participate in English for Academic Purposes activity: “I learned a lot from the language course. It is very useful in our daily life. From this course I learned how to make a presentation better, and etc.” Student *F2* confirms that the learning outcomes, namely, the student’s communicative competence, were enriched: “I can communicate with others more confidently.”

Comparing the answers of those 10 students in the sample, summarizing content analysis (Mayring, 2004) of the structured interviews reveals the students’ positive attitude in the development of their communicative competence. That shows that environment influences the studies and the learning outcomes.

4.2. Analysis of the internal evaluation of the research results

In order to find out how each student’s communicative competence changed after the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity the analysis of the internal evaluation

of the students' communicative competence comprised the data processing, analysis, interpretation of the results of Survey 1 and 2 of 75 first-year master students.

The *Mode* results of the descriptive statistics demonstrate that the level of the students' communicative competence in terms of the students' learning achievements in English for Academic Purposes has developed in Survey 2 (6) in comparison with Survey 1 (2).

The positive changes in the individual results of two surveys of the students' communicative competence demonstrate that all the 75 students have improved the level of the communicative competence in terms of the students' learning achievements in English for Academic Purposes.

The *p*-value results of Pearson's correlation analysis reveal that the difference between the students' learning achievements in English for Academic Purposes in Survey 2 and in Survey 1 is very significant.

Hence, considering judgment to be part of the art of statistics (Gigenzer, 2004), the results of the research reveal that the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity influenced the development of the student teachers' communicative competence by the students' learning achievements in English for Academic Purposes, determined by the significance in difference between the levels at the beginning and at the end of the present empirical study [$p=,000$].

4.3. Analysis of the external evaluation of the research results

The analysis of the external evaluation of the research results comprised the non-structured interview. The non-structured interviews included one question as following: what is the researcher's view on the present research on English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence? The aim of the non-structured interviews was to reveal the researchers' view on English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence.

Researcher *EER1* emphasized use of the phases of English for Academic Purposes activity in studies of other foreign languages. The researcher underlined that English for Academic Purposes activity is clearly- and well-organized. Researcher *EER1* considered that English for Academic Purposes activity provides the development of students' communicative competence.

Researcher *EER2* revealed that the present research on English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence includes a great deal of valuable discussion.

Researcher *EER3* considered the organization model of English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence to be a transformative methodology. The researcher emphasized that the idea of positioning the *quasi-concept* within the *quasi-autonomous zone* is fascinating for further research in education. Researcher *EER3* determines that Vygotsky's Law of Development selected could be highly successful in practice because educators can indeed change the typical classroom environment. The researcher stressed that focus on establishing a system allows, first, viewing the overall personality of the learner, and, second, connecting the external with the internal. Moreover, the scheme titled *Organisation of Productive Professional Environment* includes both external and internal factors. This scheme presents the unique approach where the basic directions of the development of the organization model of tertiary teaching and learning designed by the author of the present research proceed

- from existing concept through quasi-concept to concept as well as

- from object-regulation through other-regulation to self-regulation.

The approach provides the student with having the "ability to create knowledge". Moreover, newer constructs that will truly help the student to internalize new material have been developed.

Researcher *EER4* emphasized the conditions, criteria, indicators and levels of the development of students' communicative competence to be important for the innovative process in education.

Researcher *EER5* found the approach used for the development of students' communicative competence "promising and worthwhile".

Researcher *EER6* revealed the present research on English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence to be "argumentative in which both the methodological and theoretical underpinning are described".

Researcher *EER7* put the emphasis on the use of English for Academic Purposes activity in master and PhD studies. Moreover, the researcher proposed an English for Academic Purposes educator to be a non-native speaker in order to focus the students on the contents of English for Academic Purposes activity.

Summarizing content analysis (Mayring, 2004) of the data reveals that the respondents evaluate English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence positively. The researchers' external evaluation validates the findings of the present research. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity enhances students' communicative competence.

5. Conclusions and Hypothesis for Further Studies

The findings of the present research allow drawing conclusions on the efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity applied to enhance the communicative competence of 75 first-year master students in the 2008/2009 study year.

Regarding *quality assurance* it is evident that the students' communicative competence has been enriched. Irrespective of levels in the students' initial language capacity, English for Academic Purposes activity has become an effective means of the students' learning achievements in English for Academic Purposes. Moreover, English for Academic Purposes activity has served as a motivating factor to continue language learning in order to improve their communicative competence. The results of the second survey of the communicative competence of 75 first-year master students after the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity reveal that all the 75 students have improved the level of the communicative competence in terms of the students' learning achievements in English for Academic Purposes. The provided support for students, namely, English for Academic Purposes activity, resulted in the improved students' communicative competence.

Regarding *effectiveness of the educator's contribution to the students' communicative competence* it is evident that the students enriched their achievements with the implementation of English for Academic Purposes activity. English for Academic Purposes activity is positively evaluated by the students, educators and researchers. That shows that experience and environment influence the studies and the communicative competence. Hence, English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence influences and determines the students' success or failure for acquiring tertiary education and profession as illustrated in Figure 6.

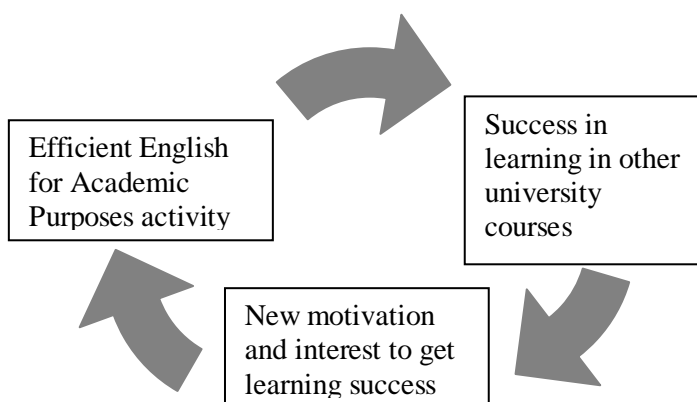


Figure 6: Successful use of English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence

Thus it might be stressed that English for Academic Purposes activity is efficient if it provides student's learning achievements:

- if students' development of the communicative competence is supported by English for Academic Purposes activity, students better attain learning outcomes, and
- if students' needs are met and a support system is created that would secure their learning achievements, students demonstrate better results of the communicative competence.

The present research has *limitations*. A limitation is the empirical study conducted by involving the students and educators at master level of one tertiary institution. Therein, the results of the study cannot be representative for the whole country. As well as the empirical study outlines the opportunities of the development of students' communicative competence. Nevertheless, the results of the research, namely, the organization model of English for Academic Purposes activity and the qualitative evaluation research, may be used as a basis of the development of students' communicative competence at master level of other tertiary institutions. If the results of other tertiary institutions had been available for analysis, different results could have been attained. There is a possibility to continue the study.

The directions for further research are proposed to include the search for relevant methods for evaluation of each criterion of the development of students' communicative competence as well as data obtaining, processing, analyzing and interpretation in the qualitative evaluation research. The qualitative evaluation research can be also used in empirical studies on English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' communicative competence at master level of other tertiary institutions and a comparative research of different countries. Another direction of further research comprises use of the qualitative evaluation research for examining efficiency of English for Academic Purposes activity for the development of students' key competences (European Commission, 2004), namely, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn competence, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression can be investigated within the qualitative evaluation research.

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