

# Investigating the Process of Developing a Workplace English Digital Course for Oman Petroleum Academy and Industry

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## Abstract

This study is part of a considerable project that the researchers endeavour to accomplish upon approaching the findings and developing a course design framework. The project aims to propose a training digital course offering English for the workplace (EWP) for Oman petroleum academy and industry. The study aims to explore the needs of Omani petroleum staff when developing the English for the workplace course. The study is shaped and guided by the approaches of ESP, learner needs, and e-learning. The data were collected via two methods, the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The data analysis method explored certain findings and themes that are identified in terms of linguistic and workplace needs/soft skills that must be considered when developing an effective and engaging course that suits the modern workplace setting and the digital age.

**Keywords:** English for occupational purposes, English for the workplace, course design, needs analysis

## 1. Introduction

The rapid developments and changes across the world have impacted all areas and sectors in our life, and the training area is no exception. Training is a great asset that has been relied on across various fields to suit the requirements and objectives of the modern world. Likewise other modern countries, the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed great developments and reformations over the last few decades based on His Majesty Sultan Qaboos's Royal speech stating that:

We always call for the development of human resources, their scientific capabilities, technical skills, and technological expertise to meet society's urgent requirements and needs and to provide opportunities for those resources to fully contribute to the blessed renaissance witnessed by Oman in all walks of life. (His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, 2008)

Due to globalization, English as a lingua franca is taught in the same way as the skills of the modern globalized era. The recent development demands more updated skills that graduates, fresh employees, and professionals must bring to the workplace, along with their expertise in their specific vocational or professional areas (Cheng, et al., 2019; Chan, 2019; Marra, 2012). Employees and professionals need to learn the skills of the workplace through English even though they are not in direct contact with native speakers (Clement & Murugavel, 2018; Hiranburana, 2017; Putra & Yulia, 2022). Most 21st-century employees need English for the workplace for purposes such as business trips, online collaboration, presentations, negotiations, writing business emails, and so on.

"Sultanate of Oman is one out of many developing countries around the world which have valued English as a very important international language and a tool for achieving multiple purposes" (Al Issa, 2011, p.141). English in Oman has not only institutionalized domains like business, education, and media, as well as others (Al-Busaidi, 1995), but also it has become central to Oman's continued national development (Al-Issa, 2011, p.142). The petroleum industry must be part of the national development plan. To utilize the benefit of the national development plan, there must be conscientious efforts to be consistently rendered to achieve tangible results and goals. For example, there must be constant efforts to undertake departmental needs assessments to establish training programs whose objective is to develop the English communication skills and competency of employees in a modern way that fits the contemporary modern world. In light of this demand, petroleum employees and technicians need English courses designed and tailored based on their needs.

The study is shaped and guided by the theory of English for specific purposes, which stresses the power of a foreign language needs analysis and considers it a significant adjustment in the requirements of various educational systems. Within the petroleum context, needs analysis is essential in specifying and identifying the situations in which employees need English. Identifying and implementing the language needs of a specific learner community helps prompt their wants, needs, and lacks, as well as their motivation and attitude toward learning the target language (Liulienė & Metiūnienė, 2006).

In the context of oil and gas or petroleum, the main concern of this study, professionals and new staff need to be equipped with the twenty 1st century workplace skills and competencies. Undoubtedly, professionals and employees in the petroleum industry in Oman have good English skills while dealing with expatriates. However, the demands of the 21st century have imposed an urgent need to gain more effective communication skills. This study is part of a large project that the researchers endeavor to accomplish upon approaching the findings and developing the framework. The proposed project entails developing a digital courseware offering English for occupational purposes (EOP) or English for the workplace (EWP) for oil and gas staff and technicians in Oman. The course will be developed in alignment with the requirements of the petroleum field and the modern educational tools of the digital age.

With the realization of the lack of studies of this type in the context of petroleum in Oman, the searchers have been stimulated to study English for occupational or workplace needs. This study attempted to answer two research questions Q.1 and Q.2. that intend to achieve certain objectives as stated below.

Q.1 What are the lacks and needs of Omani petroleum staff in relation to the EOP/EWP?

Objective: analyze and identify the lacks and needs of Omani petroleum staff in relation to the EOP/EWP.

Q.2 How to develop an EOP/EWP digital course to improve the linguistic and workplace competencies of the Omani staff in petroleum industry and academy?

Objective 1: investigate and identify the English language needs of Omani employees in petroleum settings from theoretical and practical perspectives,

Objective 2: develop a framework of an effective course offering workplace English for Omani employees, technicians, and trainees in petroleum industrial and institutional contexts.

## 2. Literature Review

This study is shaped and guided by theories and approaches relating to English for specific purposes (ESP), language course design, e-learning, and needs analysis.

### 2.1 The Process of Course Development

#### 2.1.1 Language Course Design

Generally, course design is viewed as a process including a series of steps described in terms of components such as need analysis, identification of context, creating content, material selection, methodology, and assessment (Graves, 2000; Al-Khalidi, 2020).

Graves (2000) proposed a considerable framework that portrays course design as a process that consists of components such as needs assessment, developing materials, formulating goals and objectives, etc. Graves recommended the non-linear approach when developing a language course reporting that "there is no hierarchy in the processes and no sequence in their accomplishment" (Graves, 2000, p.3). This implies that a course designer may start with any component on the basis of her/his beliefs and contextual understandings that are considered basic components. For further details on each component, see (Graves, 2000; Al-Khalidi, 2020).

#### 2.1.2 ESP Course Design

The purpose of this study is to develop an EOP/ EWP project based on a solid foundation of theories, approaches, and models. Thus, the researchers have taken advantage of every approach to design a comprehensive EOP/EWP course such as the ones below:

- Language-centered course design- This approach focuses on theoretical language, skills, and knowledge.
- The learner-centered approach-the main focus is totally on the learner.
- Learning-centered Approach- It is also referred to as the "Skills-centered Approach" and "Project-based Approach" that aims to improve learners' skills and competencies to function effectively in the target situation. This project assists learners in putting into practice both the foreign language and the applied skills that they will later need for the workplace. These project-based approaches often involve the use of online tools and resources. This approach is considered a new trend in ESP, especially in business English, and as such, it has become so popular. Such an approach aims to provide learners with semi-authentic practice in the skills and tools of their profession in the 21st century. This approach has been supported by many researchers and specialists in ESP (such as Warschauer, 2000). These specialists reported that workplace skills such as problem-solving, argumentation, communication, presentation, and the like are no longer learned through syntactic or functional syllabi, as in traditional EFL learning. Accordingly, new project-based approaches must be developed to help learners to learn and practice the kinds of required workplace skills such as carrying out presentations, role-play scenarios, case studies, writing professional emails, memos, meetings, and the like.
- Integrated Approach- The Integrated Approach, as shown in Figure 1, is an approach that integrates the above approaches.

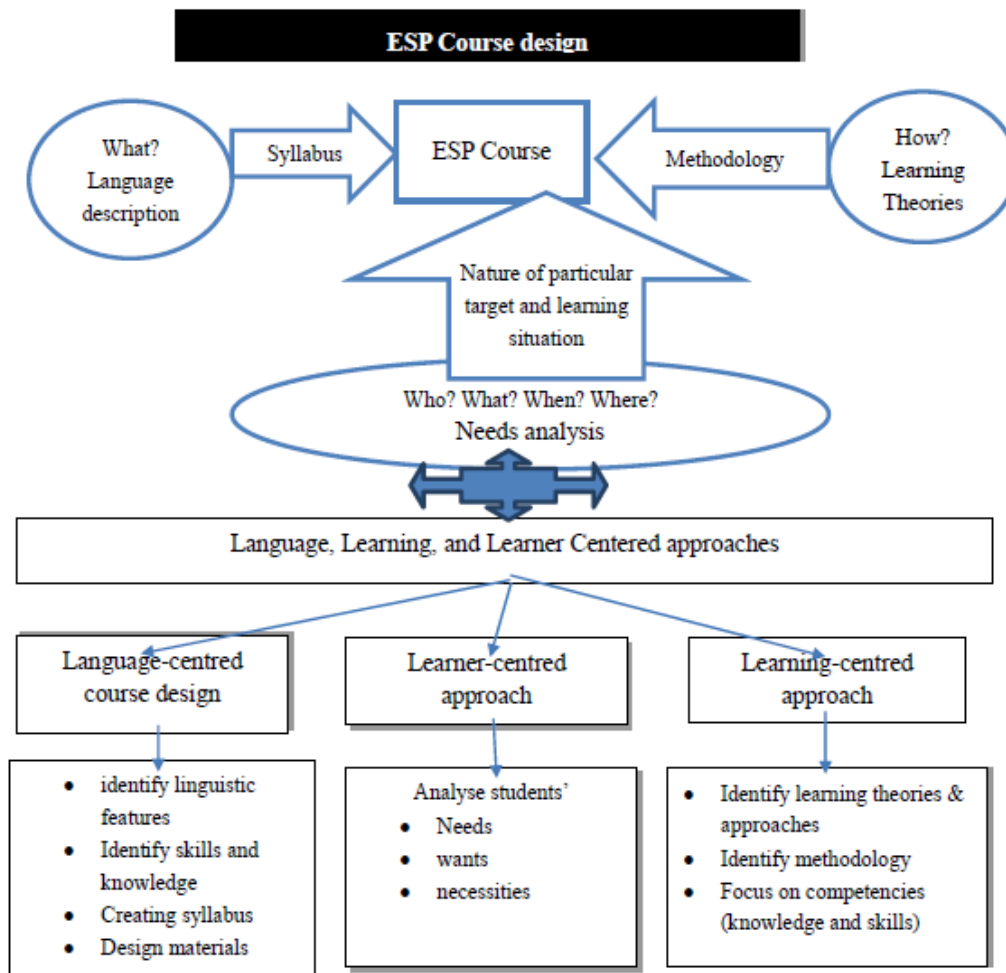


Figure 1. A Framework of Integrated Approach to EOP/EWP Cours

2.2 Steps to Designing an EOP /EWP Course Design

This section reviews the steps that articulate the process of ESP course design (Basturkmen, 2010; Graves, 2000).

**Goals and objectives-** Goals and objectives are two related terms but with considerable differences. Brown defines goals as "general statements concerning desirable and attainable program purposes and aims based on perceived language and situation need" (1995, p. 71). On the other hand, objectives are defined as "specific statements that describe the particular knowledge, behaviors, and/or skills that the learner will be expected to know or perform at the end of a course or program" (Brown, 1995, p. 73).

**Needs Analysis-** According to language curriculum experts (Richards, 2007; Brown, 1995; Jordan, 2004; Fadel, & Elys, 2015), needs analysis is considered the cornerstone in ESP/EOP course design because the subsequent steps, such as learning objectives and content selection are based on it. According to Graves (2000, p.98), needs analysis or needs assessment is "a systematic and ongoing process of gathering information about students' needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and then making course decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs." The value of its importance lies in its relatedness to students' involvement in the course design process. It is based on the belief that learning is a teacher-student interaction rather than merely a matter of learners' "absorbing preselected knowledge" (Graves: 2000, p. 98).

**Necessities-** involve what is important for students to know to act effectively in the target situation.

**Lacks-**involve any gaps between what the students already know and the target situation.

**Wants-**involve what the students wish to learn.

Learners' needs can also be categorized into 'objective needs' and 'subjective needs' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1991). Both 'necessities' and 'lacks' fit objective needs, while 'wants' fit into subjective needs (Jordan, 2004). Figure 2 below provides a framework of needs analysis that is followed in this project.

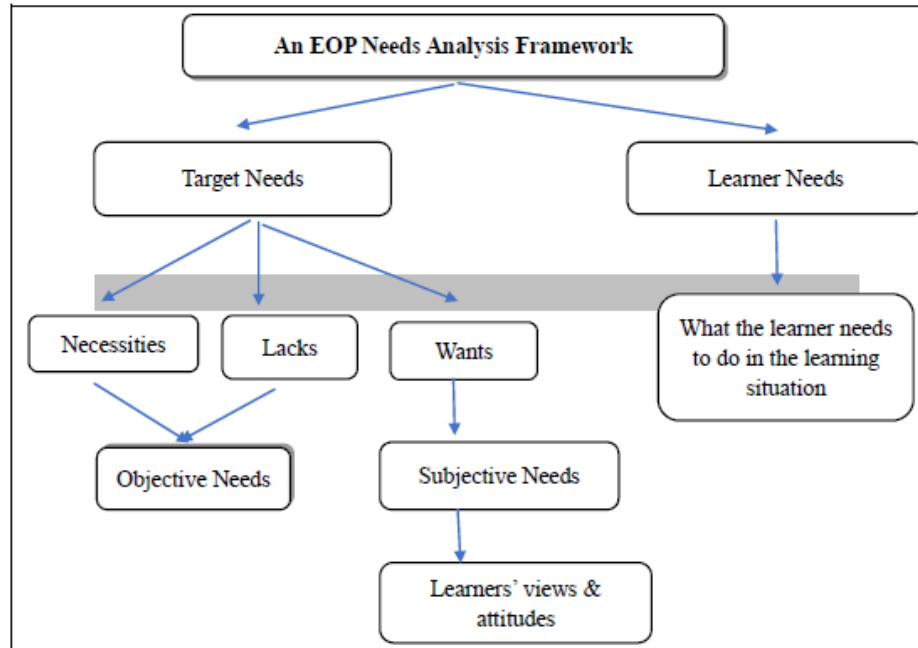


Figure 2. Integrated Needs Analysis Framework

Developing EOP/EWP Materials - Materials development is a major component of EOP courses mainly because of their important role in exposing learners to the language of a particular field as it is used. Developing materials for the ESP classroom balances learning needs, language content, and subject-matter content which implies considering several issues such as the subject matter, the learning goals, etc.

One of the characteristics of developing ESP courses is the emphasis on selecting authentic texts and tasks. Developing materials also includes selecting tasks replicating specialists in the workplace, such as writing or reading reports, case studies, presentations, and the like.

Tomlinson (2003) provided a set of principles and criteria that must be taken into account by course developers, teachers, and stakeholders when designing a general or ESP language course. The main focus is on the variable of “needs analysis.” Similarly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) presented a list of main principles that should be considered in materials development.

- Materials should be interesting- According to Hutchinson and Waters (1991, p.107), “good materials do not teach: they encourage learners to learn. Accordingly, good materials should “contain interesting texts; enjoyable activities which engage the learners’ thinking capacities; opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills; content which both learners and teacher can cope with.” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1991, p.107)
- Materials should be clear, systematic, and well organized to help teachers plan the lessons and offer students a sense of progression.

Likewise, Harding (2007) offers some useful tips for selecting materials, such as:

- “Use contexts, texts, and situations from the students’ subject area. Whether real or simulated, they will naturally involve the language the students need.
- Exploit authentic materials that students use in their specialism or vocation – and do not be put off by the fact that it may not look like ‘normal English.’
- Make the tasks authentic, as well as the texts. Get the students doing things with the material that they need to do in their work.” (Harding, 2007, pp. 10–11)

Conceptualizing EOP/EWP course content- Conceptualizing content is a key component in course design (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Content is referred to as “input” (Richards, 2013) and syllabus design. This step involves taking into account what the learners need, making decisions about what topics to be includes, and the way of organizing or sequencing the topics. Conceptualizing the content also includes aspects such as skills, vocabulary, genres, concepts, and notions.

### 2.3 The Process of E-Learning Course Development

This part of the literature review deals with the process of designing a digital course or courseware. The term courseware is composed of two words “course” and “software.” It consists of a combination of materials that are delivered by means of digital software. The privilege of courseware is due to the combination of technology and the power of text with the integration of pedagogical activities and tasks (Gibbs et al., 2001). Theoretically, courseware is guided by the theory of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the Theory of Multimedia. The emergence of technology has inspired many education sectors to take advantage of digital tools and

techniques to integrate along with traditional methods and techniques.

Entirely online courses are delivered over the Internet and usually take advantage of a learning platform or environment (Learning Management System, LMS). The course structure, materials, exercises, and guidelines are distributed via the platform, which can also serve as a channel for synchronous (chats) or asynchronous discussions (forums). Learners can either be required to participate at certain times (synchronous) or at a time of their choosing (asynchronous).

### 2.3.1 Steps in developing an E-Learning Course

The process of developing an e-learning course is somehow similar to the regular course design in terms of the articulation of components. The process of developing an effective e-learning course also involves initial steps such as setting up goals, analyzing learners’ needs, identifying appropriate content, and determining assessment criteria (E-Learning Methodologies and Good Practices, 2021). However, the e-learning course development may be more complex than the regular one since it requires extra activities such as:

- the interaction between the subject matter expert and instructional designer,
- Selecting an instructional design model such as ADDIE Model for analysis, development, design, evaluation, and implementation
- linking the content to some types of learning/pedagogical methods or instructional strategies’
- choosing the multi-media based medium for representing the content,
- allocating specific medium type (text, audio, graphics, animation and video) to pieces of the instructional material

Choosing an effective Learning platform is a very important step in delivering the course to the audience. The way you distribute the digital course content will define the choice of the course format (video, SCORM, etc.) and the needed type of software. If the course is developed for training employees, for instance, then the learning management system (LMS) is the easiest and most comfortable way as it helps automate a number of functions like invitations, course assignments, and result tracking.

Creating e-learning content is the most important component in the course development process as it includes not only the content of the subject matter but also the tasks, activities, and assessment. This step includes the identification and collection of the content. In other words, it involves gathering information and knowledge about the subject matter from the expert. The step also requires interaction between the expert and the instructional designer. First, the subject matter expert creates the content, and second, the instructional designer develops the storyboard.

Creating a storyboard is a preparatory step that visually lays out the course or model in terms of a framework. It involves splitting the course into modules and subtopics. It presents the information in terms of images, graphics, videos, animations, and other interactive features that will be used in the course. It is often prepared by the instructional designer.

Module One: English for Meetings

Topic	Transcript	Video	Quiz
Introduction			
Expressing opinions			
Agreeing			
Disagreeing			
Accepting & rejecting suggestions			
Chairing a meeting			
Finishing up and action points			



Figure 3. A storyboard Sample of the EOP/EWP Digital Course

Regarding materials selection, it is very likely that the subject matter expert should combine a set of materials for a specific subject such as the ones below:

- manuals and technical documentation;
- classroom course handouts and lecture notes;

- presentations, such as PowerPoint slide shows;
- documented case studies;
- photographs, images, graphs, tables and other illustrative materials;
- training materials, such as self-study guides, web guides and other distance learning materials; and
- reference materials, such as specialized thesauri and glossaries.

2.4 Developing a Framework of EOP/EWP Digital Course Development

Having reviewed the literature and previous studies on the process of course design and development in the field of English for occupational purposes, it is important to provide a framework as shown in Figure 4 below. The framework is shaped and guided by the theoretical approaches and models that have been adopted for the purpose of the entire study.

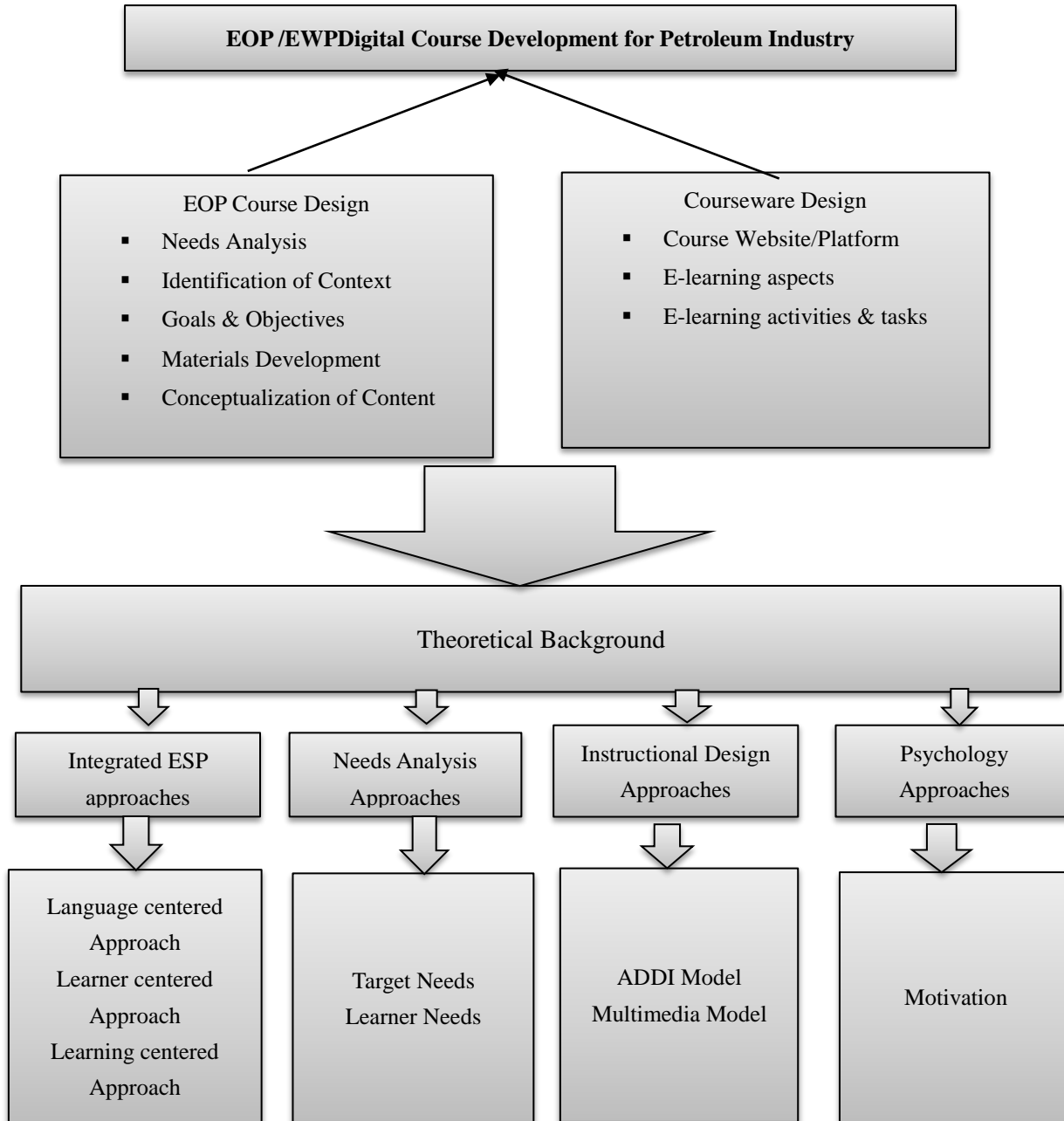


Figure 4. Conceptual Framework of EOP/EWP courseware development

**3. Methodology**

The research design includes sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods. In what follows is a brief description of each stage.

*3.1 Methods of Data Collection*

For the purpose of data collection, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was employed since different kinds of research methods lead to different kinds of knowledge about the investigated phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Dornyei, 2011, Marriam, 2002, Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2013). The quantitative and qualitative methods were selected based on the objectives and research questions as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Methods of Data Collection Based on Research questions and Objectives

Research Question	Objective	Method
Q.1 What are the lacks and needs of Omani petroleum staff in relation to the EOP/EWP?	1. analyze and identify the lacks and needs of Omani petroleum staff in relation to the EOP/EWP,	Quantitative
Q.2. How to develop an EOP/EWP digital course to improve the linguistic and workplace competencies of the Omani staff in petroleum industry and academy?	2. investigate and identify the English language needs of Omani employees in petroleum settings from theoretical and practical perspectives, 3. develop a framework of an effective course offering workplace English for Omani employees, technicians, and trainees in petroleum industrial and institutional contexts	Quantitative and Qualitative

The main research method employed for this study was the semi-structured interviews, both individual and focus group, with many petroleum employees. The semi-structured interview is selected as a tool for eliciting thick information from the participants, professionals, and employees in the petroleum industry because of its ‘flexibility’ and ‘incredible richness’ (Kvale, 2006; Merriam, 2002) of interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee.

For the quantitative data, a survey questionnaire was utilized. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), survey research is “a collection of information from a sample by asking questions in order to describe some aspects of the population of which the sample is a part” (p.423). Researchers usually design survey research to describe the attitudes, perceptions, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a group.

For the purpose of validity, accuracy, and relevance to research objectives, three sources contributed to the development of the questionnaire survey, (1) a literature review on ESP/EOP, feedback from colleagues in the context of the study, (2) professionals and employees in Omani oil and gas companies and institutions, and (3) the researchers’ teaching experiences in the English language teaching field.

*3.2 Sample*

The method of sampling for this research includes a population of representatives from various petroleum companies situated in Oman. The population of the study consists of professionals, employees, and professors working in the oil and gas industry and academies across Oman.

The sample who participated in the survey consisted of 111 individuals, male and female, with no limit to their degrees, qualifications, and age. However, the sample who participated in the interviews included professionals, trainers, and professors. The sample was representative due to their expertise in the field, needs, and training purposes. The study's sample represented the targeted population that fits the context and objectives of the study. The importance of choosing experienced persons will no doubt contribute to supporting the purpose of presenting comprehensive and meaningful findings (Dornyei, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

*3.3 Instruments of Data Analysis*

For the quantitative data, the descriptive method of statistical analysis was used to analyze the data arising from the survey questionnaire using statistical features, frequencies and percentages of every item in each part of the survey. The process of data analysis started firstly by using the tool of Google Form to collect the quantitative data online. Secondly, the responses were automatically recorded and represented in a Google spreadsheet in an analyzable format using graphical representations such as bar and pie charts. Thirdly, the responses were grouped in terms of themes and short statements to ease the interpretation of every item values, as in Tables 3 and 4.

For the qualitative data analysis, Miles and Huberman’s approach (1994; 2013) was adopted. First, the data were transformed into written texts focusing on meaningful segments and quotes. Second, the written texts and segments were categorized into two categories according to the main research questions. In this step, the thematic analysis technique was utilized to analyze and identify the information and ideas relevant to the questions and objectives of the study (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Third, the data were coded. In this study, the coding process begins with reviewing the transcribed data word by word and line by line within each particular answer of each interview. Codes were used to generate the important information to describe it later in terms of key themes.

**4. Findings of the Study**

The findings obtained from the data are presented in two parts A and B based on to the research questions Q.1 and Q.2, respectively.

*4.1 Part A Findings: What Are the Lacks and Needs of Omani Petroleum Staff of EOP/EWP?*

This category includes answers to Question Q.1 concerned with exploring the lacks and needs of the Omani petroleum staff of the English language skills required in the workplace as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Lacks and needs of Omani petroleum staff of EOP/EWP

	Item/Responses		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	Do you think Omani professionals and employees need specific English for the workplace?				
	Valid	Yes	80	72.7	72.7
		No	30	27.3	100.0
		Total	110	100.0	
2	Have you attended any related workshops, training, or seminars on improving English language proficiency?				
		Yes	53	48.2	48.2
		No	57	51.8	100.0
		Total	110	100.0	
3	Are you motivated to learn English for specific purposes in your workplace?				
		Yes	98	89.1	89.1
		No	12	10.9	100
		Total	110	100	
4	Do you prefer to take a course offering English for the workplace that is designed and tailored to the needs of the Omani petroleum context?				
	Yes	Yes	95	86.4	86.4
		No	15	13.6	100.0
		Total	110	100.0	
5	Would you use the workplace English digital course if one is offered at your company or institution?				
	Valid	Yes	97	88.2	88.2
		No	13	11.8	100.0
		Total	110	100.0	
6	Overall, do you think Omani petroleum staff should have a good command of English for the workplace to improve their professional development?				
	Valid	Yes	80	72.7	72.7
		No	30	27.3	100
		Total	110	100.0	
7	Do you think you need technical English terms, phrases, or texts that are related to the petroleum field?				
	Valid	Yes	95	86.4	86.4
		No	15	13.6	100.0
		Total	110	100.0	
8	Do you think you need special English terms, phrases, or texts for the workplace?				
	Valid	Yes	88	80.0	80.0
		No	22	20.0	100.0
		Total	110	100.0	

Part A asked participants to respond to a series of items on a Yes/No scale. The items (1-8) aimed to explore their lack and needs regarding English language skills, workplace skills, previous and current training, and the overall need of the proposed course.

As shown in table 2, in Item 1, the participants voted for the ‘Yes’ option (72.7%) reflecting their agreement on the need of developing a workplace English training course for oil and gas employees. However, only (27.3%) who voted for the ‘No’ option reflecting their disagreement on the development of the proposed course.

Item 2 explored whether the respondents received sufficient training in the workplace English area or not through attending workshops, having training courses, and so on. Less than half of the respondents (48.2%) said ‘Yes’, while more than half of the respondents (51.8%) said ‘No’. The latter percentage indicates the respondents’ lack of training in this area.

Item 3 reflected the respondents’ motivation and enthusiasm towards improving their workplace competencies. Most of them (89.1%) reported ‘Yes’ reflecting on their motivation in developing their workplace English skills, while a few of them (10.9%) reported ‘no’.

Item 4 indicated the overall staff’s need of a digital training course offering workplace English that is tailored to the needs of the Omani context. The majority of the respondents (86.4%) voted for the ‘Yes’ option, while a few of them (13.6%) voted for the ‘No’ option.

Item 5 explored the respondents’ agreement on using the proposed workplace English course in the future as the majority of them (88.2%) voted for the ‘Yes’ option. In contrast, only a few participants (11.8%) voted for the ‘No’ option. Similarly,

Item 6 explored the Omani petroleum staff’s needs of having a good command of English for the workplace. The majority of respondents (72.7%) voted for the ‘Yes’ option, while more than a quarter of the respondents (27.3%) voted for the ‘No’ option.



Items 7 and 8 intended to explore the staff’s needs of what to include in the course. In other words, must the main focus be on including special English terms and phrases related to the workplace environment or on specific technical terms related to the petroleum field? Item 7 showed that most of participants’ preferences were towards the ‘Yes’ option (80.7%) which means that they need to learn the practical language of workplace soft skills more than the technical language. However, only (19.3%) of the participants went for the ‘No’ option, which means that the workplace language skills are not very important to them. On the contrary, Item 8 revealed that most of the respondents (89.0%) need technical English terms and texts that are related to the petroleum field.

4.2 Part B Findings: How to Develop an EOP/EWP Digital Course to Improve the Linguistic and Workplace Competencies of the Omani Staff in petroleum Industry and Academy?

Part B presents findings related to Q.2 concerned with the process of course development. For this question, findings were collected from two methods, quantitative and qualitative. Accordingly, the findings are organized into two categories. Category One includes quantitative findings, while Category two includes qualitative findings.

The interview questions circled around the following major themes discovered from literature review:

4.2.1 Category One Findings: Quantitative Findings

In answer to Q.2 below, the data analysis revealed several findings and key themes.

Q.2 How to develop an EOP/EWP digital course to improve the linguistic and occupational/workplace competencies of the Omani staff in petroleum industry?

Table 3. What kind of English skills do you think must be included in the course?

Items	No.	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
All of them	77	46.7	7.00	4.60	1
Speaking	35	21.2	3.18	4.67	2
Writing	26	15.8	2.36	4.26	3
Reading	14	8.5	1.27	3.34	4
Listening	13	7.9	1.18	3.24	5

Item 1 required the participants to rank on a five-point response scale the language skills that need to be focused on when developing the course. The results in Table 3 revealed that the respondents need all language skills as the option ‘All of them’ received the highest rate (M=70), followed by Speaking that received the second rate (M=31), writing skill that received the third rate (M=23%). In comparison, reading and listening received the lowest rate (M=12) and (M=11), respectively.

Table 4. What kind of linguistic aspects must be included in the course?

Items	No.	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
All of them	80	62.5%	7.27	4.47	1
Vocabulary	23	18.0%	2.09	4.08	2
Pronunciation	14	10.9%	1.27	3.34	3
Grammar	11	8.6%	1.00	3.01	4
Total	128	100%			

According to the linguistic aspects, Table 4 shows that the ‘All of them’ option got the highest rate (M=72) which means that the integration of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation is essential in the course development. However, in terms of rating the linguistic aspects individually, Table 4 illustrates that vocabulary is more important than grammar and pronunciation because it received a higher percentage (M=2.09) than pronunciation and grammar that received (M=1.27) and (M=1.00), respectively.

Table 5. What kind of topics that must be included in the course?

Items	No.	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Mixed topics-general and specific	70	43.8%	6.36	4.83	1
Specific topics about oil and gas	46	28.7%	4.18	4.95	2
General topics about workplace such as communication skills, English for meetings, negotiation, presentation skills, and so on	43	26.9%	3.90	4.90	3
Others	1	0.6%	0.09	0.9535	4
Total	160				

Item 3 explored what topics that must be included in the course. Table 5 demonstrates that the area of mixed topics which means topics about the workplace in general and specific topics about the oil and gas field was considered to be the most important area for the course receiving the highest rate (M=6.36). The second rate was assigned to the option of the specific topic about the field (M=4.18), while the third rate was assigned to the general topics related to the workplace (M=3.90).

Table 6. What materials are interesting for Omani staff to be used in the English digital course?

Items	No.	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Audio-vidio materials	76	21.9	6.90	4.64	1
Interactive drag and drop elements	50	14.4	4.54	5.00	2

Animation	49	14.1	4.45	4.99	3
Web materials	48	13.8	4.36	4.98	4
Digital flashcards	46	13.3	4.18	4.95	5
Authentic materials (Newspapers, magazines, news reports, etc)	41	11.8	3.72	4.85	6
Textbooks		10.	3.36	4.74	7
Total		100.0%			

Item 4 revealed the type of materials that are mostly preferred by the respondents, and Table 6 portrays that the respondents voted for the audio-video materials that received the highest mean (M=6.90), followed by interactive drag and drop elements, (M=4.54%), animation (M=4.45), Web materials (M=4.36), digital flashcards (M=4.18), authentic materials (M=3.72), and textbooks (M=3.36). In terms of ranking, Table 6 illustrates that the highest rank was assigned to audio-video materials, while the lowest rank was assigned to textbooks. Table 7 also illustrates the close rate among four types of materials ‘interactive drag and drop elements, animation, Web materials, and digital flashcards’ although they were ranked differently.

Table 7. What kind of activities do you think must be included in the course?

Items	No.	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
All of them	55	27.6	5.00	5.02	1
Writing letters, reports, and other genres	33	16.6	3.00	4.60	2
Multiple choice	28	14.1	2.54	4.37	3
Quizzes	25	12.6	2.27	4.20	4
True/False	22	11.1	2.00	4.01	5
Drag and Drop activities	19	9.5	1.72	3.79	6
Fill in the blanks	17	8.5	1.54	3.63	7
Total	199	100.0%			

Regarding the type of activities in Item 5, Table 7 illustrates that the majority of respondents preferred the option ‘All of them’ since it received the highest mean (M=5.00), followed by ‘Writing letters and other genres’ (M=3.00). Three areas of activities ‘Multiple choice, True/false, and Quizzes’ were assigned similar rates although with minor differences in ranks (M=2.54), (M=2.27), (M=2.00), respectively. According to Table 7, the ‘Drag and Drop’ and ‘Fill in the blanks’ activities received the lowest rates (M=1.72) and (M=1.54), respectively.

Table 8. Do you prefer quizzes or short tests in each module?

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cummilative percent
Yes	93	41.9	84.5	84.5
No	17	7.7	15.5	100.0
Total		49.5	100.0	
110				

In terms of assessment, Item 6 explored the respondents’ views on a Yes/No scale. Table 8 shows that the respondents preferred online quizzes as the ‘Yes’ option received a higher valid percent (84.5%) in comparison to the ‘No’ option which received a lower percent (15.5%).

Table 9. Which contextual material is more preferred when developing the workplace course?

Items	No.	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Both of them	85	75.2	7.72	4.20	1
International Context	14	12.4	1.27	3.34	2.a
Omani Context		12.4%	1.27	3.34	2.b
Total	113	100.0%			

Item 7 revealed the contextual material that must be selected when developing the course. In other words, Item 7 intended to explore whether the Omani staff prefer materials from the Omani context, international context, or both of them. Table 9 illustrates that the respondents preferred materials from both contexts, local and international, and the percentage was (M=7.72). However, the respondents assigned a low percentage /mean (1.27) to materials from a sole context, Omani context, or international context.

Table 10. Which of the following topics should be included in the workplace English course?

Items	No.	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Email Writing	78	11.7	7.09	4.56	1
Negotiation	66	9.9	6.00	4.92	2
Oral presenttaion	62	9.3	5.63	4.98	3.a
Business report writing	62	9.3	5.63	4.98	3.b
Telephone skills	57	8.5	5.18	5.01	4
Writing business proposals	54	8.1	4.90	5.02	5
Group discussion	51	7.6	4.63	5.00	6
workplce vocabulary	50	7.5	4.54	5.00	7
Memo writing	46	6.9	4.18	4.95	8.a

Analyzing reports & charts	46	6.9	4.18	4.95	8.b
Listening for accurate understanding	45	6.7	4.9	4.93	9
Reading skills	9	1.3	0.81	0.27	10
Total		100.0%			

Item 8 aimed to reveal the type of topic that is mostly needed as part of the content when developing the course. Item 8 also aimed to reveal which language skills that must be emphasized when creating the content. As shown in Table 10, the respondents voted differently for the suggested topics that fall under four categories in terms of language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). In Table 10, it is obvious that the highest percentages were assigned to speaking and writing skills in spite of the specific variation among the sub-categories. Regarding the writing skills, Table 10 illustrates that ‘Email writing’ got the highest rate (M=7.09), followed by ‘Writing business reports’ (M=4.90), ‘Memo writing’ (M=4.18), ‘Analyzing reports & charts’ (M=4.18). Regarding the speaking/communication skills, Table 11 shows that the topic of ‘Negotiation’ got the highest rank (M=6.00), followed by ‘Telephone skills’ (M=5.18), and ‘Group discussion’ (m=4.36). The listening and reading skills received the lowest ranks (M=4.09) and (3.81), respectively.

4.2.2 Category two Findings: Qualitative Data

This category presents findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Several key findings and themes emerged from the qualitative data. Table 11 below illustrates the interview guide, including most of the important questions that were asked for eliciting information from the respondents. The discussion that follows presents the findings in terms of the main questions.

Table 11. Interview Guide

General questions	
Years of experience	
Training in English language skills	
Training in workplace skills and competence	
<b>Course Development</b>	How to develop an EOP/EWP digital course to improve Omani staff’s linguistic and occupational competencies required in the petroleum workplace?
1. Needs of the Course	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In general, what do you think of developing a digital training course for improving your English skills required in the workplace?</li> <li>Do you think Omani petroleum staff need a digital courseware for improving their workplace English?</li> </ul>	
2. English language skills and aspects to be focused on	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which English language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) the course must focus on? Why?</li> <li>Which English language aspects (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) the course must focus on? Why?</li> </ul>	
3. Course Components	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What kind of topics that must be included in the course?</li> <li>What materials are interesting for Omani petroleum staff to be used in the digital course?</li> <li>What kind of activities do you think are more engaging?</li> <li>What kind of quizzes do you think are more helpful?</li> </ul>	
4. Structure of the course	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you prefer the course to be organized?</li> </ul>	
5. suggestions for course development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have any further suggestions for developing our proposed courseware?</li> </ul>	

Finding One: Needs of the course

When the participants were asked whether the staff and workers in the petroleum industry need the proposed course or not, the majority of them reported that they need the course. Two types of needs emerged from the data analysis, the need for the course and the need for the specific linguistic and workplace skills to be included in the course. Generally, most of the participants confirmed the need for the course, considering it a “training program more than a teaching program” (EDO). Another participant from OXY considered the proposed course a major investment for his company, saying that:

Excerpt (1)

*I agree with the proposal of developing this course. I consider it a good investment for our company as it saves the company the time and cost of sending the staff abroad to take training courses...If the course is designed in a platform mode, many employees and trainees will benefit from it anywhere and everywhere.*

Another respondent from OXY focus group reported that:

Excerpt (2)

*I believe that most of new employees, especially technicians and operators in oil and gas fields need the course because they join the work with low English proficiency...This is a big challenge for the company because they need a long period to get adapted to the system and the workplace environment.*

Finding Two: English language skills and aspects for course development

The majority of participants reported that writing and speaking skills are essential for employees in oil and gas settings. One of the focus groups in the EDO reported that “we need professional writing skills to communicate properly and professionally with non-Omanis, particularly native speakers.” Another participant suggested that “after COVID-19, most of our communication with other companies has become by distance, so this demands from us good skills of writing to address many issues’. Another justification was raised by another participant from OXY who said that “ in our field, we usually meet experts, and some of them are native speakers, so we have to show a good command of our writing skills to make ourselves more understandable.” Another argument came from a native speaker who reported that “sometimes, I don’t understand the emails or reports written by some employees because of the inappropriate tuse of the techniques of writing and the technical vocabulary.

#### Finding Three: Course components

The third finding concerns the course components that contribute to the development of an effective course, such as setting up the goals and objectives, choice of materials, design of activities, and the design of online quizzes. The discussion that follows presents the findings in terms of the main components.

Content-The first major finding is related to the content of the course that must be included in the course. In this regard, the analysis of the interview data showed two arguments. One argument goes for a pure technical English course, while the second argument goes for a course offering a mixture of technical language and workplace skills. The first argument raised by a supervisor fro OXY suggests that the course development must be based on technical English to cover the essential language required in the petroleum field.

#### Excerpt (3)

*The operators and technicians, especially those who don’t hold academic degrees join the workplace with low English proficiency and lack of technical language, so they face challenges in the workplace that prevent them from achieving their performance efficiently and properly. The field of oil and gas in Oman is considered modern ... and English is the medium language. This is the main challenge that faces them. Accordingly, I suggest that they need the technical English that helps them speak and write accurately to cope the challenge of the medium language at work.*

The second argument by another supervisor from OXY focus group suggests that it would be helpful to create content that focuses on the workplace skills such as (communication skills and soft skills). Their argument draws on the reality that most staff members and employees in the petroleum industry have a good command of English language proficiency. What they need is just to keep themselves more updated with the soft skills that suit both the local and global workplace settings. Excerpts 4 and 5 below illustrates the staff’s argument.

#### Excerpt (4)

*I believe that that we already gained English language skills and competencies from our formal education before we joined the petroleum industry. We also improved our English language skills through our daily communication with the expats in the workplace context. Therefore, I believe that what we need is to cope with the latest global updates is a training course that offers the workplace skills.*

#### Excerpt (5)

*Sometimes I find myself struggle when I need to write a professional email, especially when I write to a professional staff or a native speaker. I feel like I need more than English language writing skills even though my English is good to some extent.*

A similar argument was raised by a professional director in a training center offering English language courses for technicians and new employees in the field of petroleum saying that that:

#### Excerpt (6)

*This course is supposed to serve the needs of advanced learners who have advanced vocabulary and somehow high conversation skills...Those employees need to enhance their communication skills, especially when writing professional emails and reports.*

Materials-Regarding the type of materials that must be selected for the course, most of the respondents suggested that a mixture of materials would mostly contribute to the effectiveness of the course. The mixture of materials means utilizing a variety of resources such as video/audio materials, written transcripts/texts, lessons/lectures/ Websites/ social media/ newspapers, and magazines. Below are a few extracts picked up to illustrate the respondent’s points of view.

#### Excerpt (7)

*This course needs a mix of sources such as videos, audios, poscasts, graphics, live lectures, and the like to keep learners more motivated and engaged while learning.*

#### Excerpt (8)

*...Authentic material is vey engaging and motivating. In my view, the best authentic materials for this course are materials related to the oil and gas field such as case studies, technical reports, emails, daly basis senarios, meeting memoes, letters, and the like.*

#### Excerpt (9)

*A mixture of local as well as global materials would definitely contribute to the course effectiveness. From my view, I believe that we need*

*exposure to the workplace at the global level. This helps us to keep ourselves updated with the global competencies and skills.*

Activities-The findings revealed a variety of responses in this regard. One category of responses from OXY focused on the type of activities that create fun, engagement, and interaction. The second category included responses that suggested authentic activities” (OXY). They reported that “We need authentic activities that are related to the field such as case studies, reports, emails, and the like”. The third category, however, included responses that support the online activities reporting that:

*Excerpt (10)*

*We need light and short activities such as “drop and drag activities, True/false, and Fill in the blanks”. We need this course for training purposes. We don't have the time to work on activities that take so long such as writing case studies, or assignments.*

*Excerpt (11)*

*This is an online course. Most learners who will be using this course are busy with their work and daily routine, so they need flexible, fun, and relaxing learning. I believe that activities must be short, direct, and straightforward such as multiple choice, matching, ordering, and so on.*

## **5. Discussion of Findings**

This exploratory study investigated the Omani petroleum staff’s needs for workplace English and how to develop a digital course that is tailored to this purpose. As has been indicated in the section on result analysis, there are two parts of data -A and B- categorized in terms of the two research questions, Q.1 and Q.2, respectively.

Findings in Part A represented the responses to Q.1 ‘What are the linguistic and occupational needs of Omani petroleum staff in relation to the workplace English?’ The results of the study indicated that the Omani oil and gas participants appreciated the proposal of developing a digital course offering workplace English. The results also indicated their lack and needs regarding English language skills and aspects. Even though most of them had taken courses in general English during the period of school and college, they still need to enhance their communication skills that match the modern nature of the workplace. Accordingly, they assigned high percentages to the need for the course and their motivation to use it in the future. Overall, this reflects their awareness of the necessity of updating their workplace linguistic competencies. This finding aligns with several previous studies on the workplace English development ( Oliveri et al., 2021; Al-mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Mohamed, et al., 2016)

With regard to the English language skills that must be emphasized in the course development, the participants assigned the highest percentage to the “All of them” option, which means that all language skills are important in developing the workplace English course. Other skills that the participants reported as vital were speaking and writing, occupying the second and third rank, respectively. The findings in this category confirm the models of language course development (such as Graves, 2000; Richards, 2007; Al-Khalidi, 2020) that put a great emphasis on the integration of all language skills. Also, assigning the second and third ranks to speaking and writing reflects the importance of these two skills in the workplace setting. This finding supports the role of oral and written communication in the workplace, and this has been confirmed by several previous studies (Al-mahrooqi and Denman, 2017; Subtirelu, et al., 2022; Kashyap, 2021)

Most importantly, the results are related to the respondent’s awareness of the content, activities, materials, and quizzes that must be considered when developing the course. Regarding the content selection for workplace English, the findings revealed the participants’ preferences for the mixed option: general and specific topics. This result reflects the necessity of integrating soft skills such as communication, negotiations, meetings, presentation, and the like into the technical language of the field. Most of the recent literature focuses on this feature (Cheng, et al., 2019; Mohammed, et al., 2016)). Likewise, assigning the second percentage to specific topics related to the oil and gas field also reflects the participants’ awareness of the importance of contextualization in course development (Graves, 2000, Al-Khalidi, 2020; Tomlinson, 2011).

According to the type of materials, the findings revealed that the highest value was assigned to digital materials in comparison to regular materials. Video-audio materials received the highest value (69.4). It is not surprising that e-learning and technology have become the dominant trend in the field of education and training (Hawkrige, 2022; Al-Khaidi, 2021a, 2021b; Mayer, 2014; Puenteadura, 2012, wan Ng, 2015). However, the participants did not sufficiently value authentic materials such as magazines, newspapers, and news reports. It is most likely that the participants viewed such materials as traditional as the textbook. This could be argued that the participants may need to be made aware of the value of authentic materials in EFL contexts (Tomlinson, 2011; Richards, 2007). In terms of materials selection in association with the context, the respondents maintained that a mixture of both local and international materials would be better than the sole reliance on either the Omani context or the international context. Also, this finding reflects the participant’s awareness of the importance of integration of local as well as global materials, particularly in developing a language course such as the workplace English course.

Another important finding is related to activities as an essential component in course design. From the variety of options, the highest rate was assigned to the “Multiple choice” about (75.7) compared to true/false, fill in the blanks, drag and drop, and online quizzes.

The findings of the qualitative data in Part B also revealed several key themes that must be considered in the next step of this project-course development. To begin with, the participants were found to be aware of the essential need for a workplace English course

to enhance their professional development. This is clear evidence that the development of the workplace English course is of a significant value for enhancing oil and gas employees' professional development. This finding confirms the literature review highlighting the importance of professional development in the workplace context (Zepeda, 2012; Sophie et al., 2010; Bozick et al., 2017; Ahmad & Abdul Hamid, 2017).

The participants confirmed that general English basics are insufficient to enhance their professional development. They need to be familiar with the technical terms related to their field as well as the specific terms of the workplace. This finding aligns with previous studies that focused on developing courses offering EOP/EWP (Jeannette, 2022; Al-Khatib, 2005; Kassim and Ali, 2010).

Regarding the linguistic skills that oil and gas need mostly for the workplace, the greatest priority was given to speaking and writing for the purpose of communicating professionally and properly with the expats locally and globally. Also, the oil and gas staff need to enhance their oral or speaking communication and writing skills to handle certain situations at the workplace. This study is similar to other previous studies ( Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2014; Sezer, 2014; Al-mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Kassim and Ali, 2010; Mohamed, et al., 2016) that came up with the similar results where the main focus was on speaking communication skills at the workplace more than other skills.

Perhaps, the most interesting finding is related to the components of course development. The findings reveal the participants' awareness of the basic components such as objectives, materials, content, activities, and assessment. In terms of materials selection, the preferences were towards a mixture of materials, authentic and contextual, local and global, and digital and traditional. Their perspectives are, to a large extent, similar to most theories and previous studies on course development. Experts in ESP/EOP course design and development, such as (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2007; Brown, 1995; Nation and Macalister, 2010), provided considerable arguments on the importance of selecting materials from a variety of sources. Al-Khalidi, in her study on course design (2020), also came up with the same results highlighting the combination of a variety of material sources when developing an EFL course. In another study (2019) Al-Khalidi also came up with similar results that recommend the use of audio-video materials that goes in alignment with the trend of educational technology.

The content of the topic was among the important findings obtained from the participants who emphasized the integration of the workplace required skills and technical language skills. This finding confirms the hypothesis that general English is not sufficient for the workplace unless it is injected with modern workplace soft skills such as communication, business writing, negotiations, and so on with the terms and activities related to the petroleum context.

Figure 5 below provides a framework of the course development based on the findings of the study.

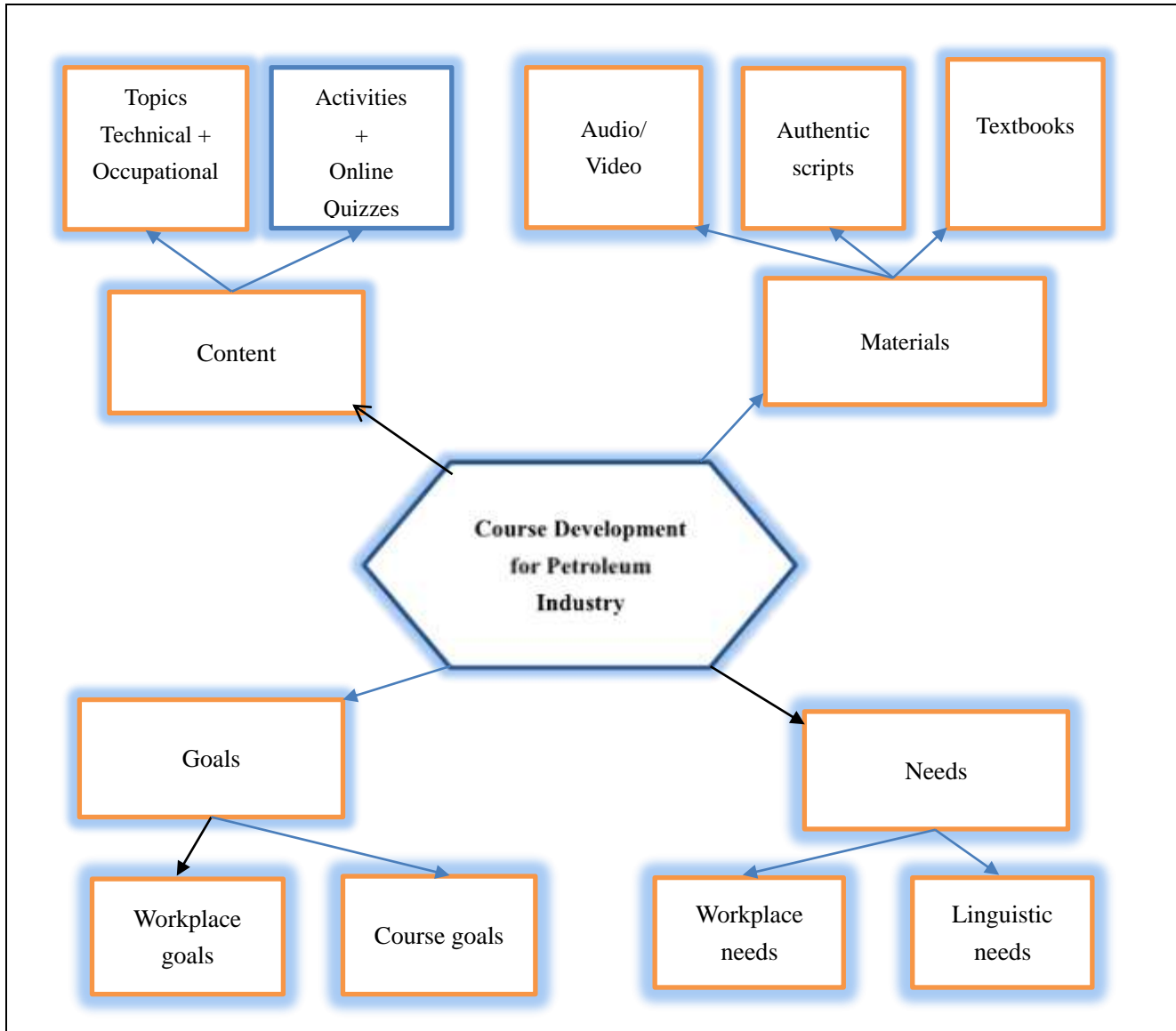


Figure 5. A Framework of Digital Course Development Based on Findings

**6. Conclusion**

This study provided answers to the research questions that aim to explore and identify the types of needs that are linguistic and occupational required in the workplace of oil and gas in Oman. Exploration and identification of the EOP/EWP needs is considered the first step of the process of developing a digital course offering English for the workplace for Omani employees and technicians in the field of oil and gas. The study draws on a synthesis of theoretical and practical views that both confirmed the value of developing a digital course offering English for the workplace to meet the standards of the twenty first century. This anticipated EOP/EWP course is considered the first experience in the country and the Arabian Gulf region.

Participants confirmed that they need such a course to boost their professional development to handle various situations in the workplace setting. Professional participants also confirmed the significant value of the course for the new employees and technicians who may join the workplace with low English proficiency and a lack knowledge of soft skills. The study appears to support the beliefs of experts in course development and the results of previous research. In this respect, the study contributes to the knowledge of language and ESP course design.

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