

## MINI-COURSES ON ECONOMIC DISCIPLINES IN AN ADVANCED ESP COURSE FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF ECONOMICS

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**Abstract.** *The paper discusses a specific approach used in an ESP course taught to Ukrainian university students majoring in Economics. The approach was introduced at an advanced stage of students' ESP studies (after learners have already reached their B2 level in developing English skills for professional communication). The specificity of the approach is in designing an advanced ESP course as a sequence of English-medium mini-courses on economic disciplines from the list of students' majoring subjects. The mini-courses developed by the authors included such economic disciplines as "Microeconomics," "Finance," "Marketing" and "Management". Each of the mini-courses was planned for 18 academic hours of in-class work and the equal number of academic hours of students' autonomous out-of-class activities. All the four mini-courses were developed to be taught in one semester (four months), and the entire ESP course consisting of four English-medium mini-courses on economic subjects was taught by an ESP teacher with a degree in ELT and in Economics. The data from a practical case study are given demonstrating students' high learning outcomes which prove the efficiency of the suggested approach.*

**Key words:** *ESP, preliminary (preparatory) ESP immersion, total ESP immersion, mini-courses, C1 ESP level*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) the share of teaching and learning it for various professional purposes is steadily growing (Graddol, 2006). That means that ESP should be in the forefront of studies that are connected with finding more efficient ways and methods of EFL teaching and learning. That holds true of Ukraine too where the list of studies and publications devoted to teaching ESP to university students majoring in different professional fields is so big that it is probably useless to even try and enumerate the names of researchers (all the more so that their publications are mostly either in Ukrainian or in Russian). Regretfully, this 'flow' of studies has almost invariably been limited to more traditional forms of ESP teaching and learning embodied in the classical works by Robinson (Robinson, 1991). More cutting edge trends in ESP such as target language immersion developed in North America (Calvé, 1991; Cummins, 2000; 2001; Johnson & Swain, 1997; Rehorick & Edwards, 1994; Walker & Tedick, 2000) and CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning (Coyle, 2007) – as the European version of target language immersion are much less known and still less researched in their applications to Ukrainian tertiary schools.

Our many-years-long study with numerous publications on its results (e.g., Tarnopolsky et al., 2008) was aimed at closing, at least partially, this gap by gradually introducing immersion/CLIL programmes into teaching ESP to future economists majoring in Economics and Business Studies at departments of Economics of Ukrainian universities. It should be noted that in our study target language immersion and CLIL have always been considered as quite similar, if not identical, approaches – both integrating teaching the target language and non-linguistic disciplines, with the former being the medium of instruction for the latter ones. We prefer to use the term ‘target language immersion’ (and this terminology, with no mention of CLIL, will be followed further in the article) because, on the one hand, CLIL in the European context is more often referred to as courses of secondary and high school disciplines taught in English and, on the other hand, the term ‘immersion’ is used more frequently when speaking of English as a medium of instruction at universities in non-English-speaking countries – the trend of introducing just this medium of instruction spreading fast through universities on the European continent (Kerikaan, Moreira, & Boersma, 2008; Labi, 2011; Phillipson; Tarnopolsky & Goodman, 2012).

Immersion programs for tertiary (higher) schools are universally defined as foreign language learning integrated with teaching other academic/professional subjects with the aim of giving students the best means of acquiring their target language for professional communication (Walker, & Tedick, 2000). Such programmes are always taught not in ESP language classes but in classes of non-linguistic academic disciplines.

The general scheme of introducing the ESP immersion at Ukrainian universities developed by us is based on the necessity of making students approach very gradually the courses of total immersion (Johnson & Swain, 1997), i.e., the courses of non-linguistic academic disciplines taught totally through the medium of English. Ukrainian students’ level of English on entering higher schools in the overwhelming majority of cases is absolutely not sufficient for such immersion since it requires C1 (or close to it) level of English according to the Common European Framework of Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). And this close to C1 level should be attained not only in General English but in English for professional communication (ESP) as well. That is the condition practically unachievable for Ukrainian students in the first year of their university studies because, as a rule, they enter higher schools with their level of General English at B1 (sometimes even lower) and with no idea of ESP. Our experience and studies have shown (Tarnopolsky, 2012; 2013) that in that first year the best option for the mandatory ESP course would be to teach it using the more traditional ESP teaching mode advocated in the ESP teaching system developed by Robinson (1991). This allows students to reach their B1 ESP level without encountering too many (and too great) linguistic and content difficulties in their language studies.

If B1 ESP level has been attained in the first year of mandatory ESP studies, the second year course of such studies, also mandatory for Ukrainian university students, can be designed on the basis of content-based instruction as the integration of content matter from students’ majoring subjects and the goals of target language teaching. It ensures parallel acquisition of knowledge from certain non-linguistic disciplines together with acquisition of the target language and the skills of communicating in it. In such instruction, the ESP curriculum is most closely linked to or even based on the curricula of one or several of students’ majoring disciplines so that learning the target language content follows the requirements of learning some professional content from the majoring disciplines through the medium of the target language (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989).

Content-based instruction in the second year of university ESP studies allows students not only to reach B2 level in their command of ESP (see Tarnopolsky et al., 2008; Tarnopolsky, 2012). Its greatest advantage lies in the fact that it more or less directly leads to immersion programmes because some authors consider immersion as the highest stage of content-based instruction (Stoller, 2007).

However, our experience and our studies cited above have demonstrated that, in the conditions of Ukrainian universities, even after a mandatory ESP course based on content-based instruction, it is still too early for the absolute majority of Ukrainian students to get involved in total ESP immersion programmes taught in courses of students' majoring non-linguistic disciplines. The causes for this are threefold (Tarnopolsky et al., 2008): 1) though, after the content-based instruction ESP course, all students reach B2 levels in their command of English, for working effectively in a total immersion programme where the high level of English is taken for granted B2 is not sufficient – something closer to C1 is required; 2) students are not yet quite ready psychologically for total immersion – they are not psychologically prepared to switch from the comfortable environment of the language classroom, where their English is constantly taken care of, to the hard realities of the classroom on a non-linguistic majoring discipline taught in English but without paying attention to possible students' deficiency in that language and without giving them any specific help to overcome those deficiencies; 3) after their second year of studies at a higher school, students are still insufficiently trained in the fields of their majors to start studying majoring disciplines in the target language – thus superimposing language difficulties on content difficulties.

All this made us believe that in the specific conditions of Ukrainian tertiary schools the best time for introducing total immersion is not the third but the fourth (with continuation into the fifth, last) year of the students' university studies. On the one hand, it gives an opportunity of designing and introducing an intermediate ESP course between content-based ESP instruction in the second year and total ESP immersion in the fourth year. This intermediate ESP course may (and should) be designed as specifically aimed at preparing students both linguistically and psychologically for total ESP immersion. On the other hand, studies during the third year at their university will make students much better versed in their future profession, so that in the fourth year of studies superimposing in total immersion language difficulties on majoring subjects' content difficulties will not have such a strong negative effect on students' learning outcomes as in the third year.

Following the guidelines above, a specific ESP course aimed at directly preparing students for total ESP immersion in their fourth-year courses of majoring disciplines was developed by us. It was designed for third year students majoring in Economics who had their mandatory ESP course all through the first three years of their university studies. This article is devoted to the discussion of that specific ESP course and the learning outcomes it ensured.

## 2. THE OVERALL DESIGN AND GENERAL OUTLINE OF A PRELIMINARY (PREPARATORY) IMMERSION ESP COURSE/PROGRAMME

The ESP course under consideration got the name of preliminary (preparatory) immersion ESP programme to emphasize its direct orientation towards total immersion in ESP teaching and learning that was supposed to follow. The name was also expected to make

it clear that it was not real immersion yet because teaching was not organized in courses on non-linguistic subjects but in classes of English. It was something preceding genuine immersion and making students linguistically and psychologically ready for it.

The course was designed for third year students of Alfred Nobel University, Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, who were majoring in Economics and had a mandatory ESP course of 144 academic class hours during that year – 72 academic class hours for each of the two 18-week semesters, two two-hour ESP classes per every week (four academic class hours per week with one academic class hour of 40 minutes). All the students for whom such a course was designed had studied their preceding ESP courses in full accordance with the scheme discussed above – a more traditional (classic) ESP course as recommended by Robinson (1991) in the first year of their university studies and a content-based instruction ESP course leading to B2 level of ESP mastery in the second year.

All in all, the designed ESP course could be considered as an advanced one since it was aimed at students who have already reached their B2 (intermediate) level of ESP and were progressing towards the advanced one (C1).

The specificity of the approach in designing such an advanced ESP course was in building it as a sequence of English-medium mini-courses on economic disciplines from the list of students' majoring subjects. The mini-courses developed by us included such economic disciplines as "Microeconomics," "Finance," "Marketing" and "Management". Each of the mini-courses was planned for 18 academic hours of in-class work and the equal number of academic hours of students' autonomous out-of-class activities. All the four mini-courses were developed to be taught in one semester (four months), and the entire advanced ESP course consisting of four English-medium mini-courses on economic subjects was taught by an ESP teacher with a degree in ELT and in Economics (the second author of this article). It should be noted that the article reports the experience of introducing such mini-courses only during one (the first) out of two semesters of third year students' advanced ESP studies. The mini-courses for the second semester of such studies have not been developed yet, and their development is the perspective of our future practical work in the field under consideration.

Every English-medium mini-course was designed as a short synopsis of an academic subject included into the list of students' majoring disciplines. Each of the mini-courses was divided into four themes planned for studying in English in students' ESP classes. Those themes were the principal and fundamental ones for a particular academic course on a definite economic subject. For instance, for the mini-course on "Finance" the four selected themes were: "The Nature of Finance," "Financial System," "Time Value of Money" and "The Relationship between Risk and Expected Return."

The teaching/learning pattern in every mini-course faithfully modelled the pattern of teaching/learning academic courses on economic subjects (with the difference of organizing such teaching/learning through the medium of English and not through the medium of learners' L1). Each one of the four themes in a mini-course was studied during two two-academic-hours-long classes, one of which was a lecture on the theme in English and the second one was a seminar/practical class with students' presentations and discussions combined with case studies, solving relevant practical tasks and such like activities – all done totally in English. Every mini-course, besides sixteen in-class hours planned for work on the four themes in it, also had one, last, two-hour class planned for summarizing activities on the basis of the materials learnt while studying that mini-course.

In general, the course in question may be considered as a genuine immersion model somewhat modified and facilitated in comparison with total English immersion (see further about the modifications and facilitation) in order to serve as an intermediary form between an ESP course and a total immersion course on some academic/professional subject taught in English.

This specific advanced ESP course was developed for attaining five goals:

1. Completely integrating teaching and learning ESP with teaching and learning students' future profession – in a similar way to how it is done in genuine (total) immersion courses;
2. Intensifying and facilitating students' ESP acquisition during the advanced stage to help them faster and more efficiently achieve C1 level in it;
3. Enhancing learners' confidence in their abilities to use fluently and without hindrance their advanced level command of English for academic and professional communication;
4. Preparing and training students for taking English-medium academic courses (total immersion) on professional economic disciplines during their further studies at university;
5. Implementing that preparation and training in secure conditions of the language classroom where, on the one hand, students work in the situation faithfully, though in a somewhat simplified manner, modelling the situation of total immersion (thereby gradually getting learners psychologically ready for it) and, on the other hand, they are always confident in obtaining language help whenever it is needed which makes them more relaxed than in a total immersion classroom.

For better understanding of the developed preliminary (preparatory) immersion programme implemented in an advanced ESP course, it is worthwhile to describe in details and with the examples of teaching materials and activities one of the four mini-courses included in the programme (all the four of them were designed following the same pattern).

### 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPICAL MINI-COURSE IN A PRELIMINARY (PREPARATORY) ESP IMMERSION COURSE/PROGRAMME

The four above-mentioned themes from the mini-course on “*Finance*” will be used further as a source of practical examples for discussing the structure and detailed characteristics of all mini-courses.

As it has already been said, the in-class work on every separate theme within a mini-course starts with a lecture that takes not less than 50 and not more than 65 minutes out of 80-minute (two academic hours) class.

Students' assignment for the lecture may be formulated as follows:

*Listen to the lecture on the “Nature of Finance.” While listening, you will be requested to answer questions and discuss some points emphasized by the speaker. You are also required to take written notes of what you hear. The supporting annotated plan of the lecture that you are going to see on the screen will help you in note-taking. Use the materials of the lecture, the notes you have taken, what you have learnt when answering questions and taking part in the discussion during the lecture for: a) all your further work on this theme; b) writing the abstract (or summary) of the lecture in English; c) comparing and evaluating what you hear in the lecture with what you are going to read on the same theme doing the following tasks. At the beginning of the next class, hand in your written notes of the lecture and its abstract (or summary) written by you at home to your teacher for checking and grading.*

The supporting annotated lecture plan mentioned in the assignment above that the students see on the screen all through the lecture (and which serves for facilitating not only their note-taking but also their listening to the lecture in English) may look like the following one developed for the lecture on the theme “*Time Value of Money*”:

*The basic theory of Time Value of Money (TVM) says that a dollar today is worth more than a dollar in the future because it can be invested, and that will bring an additional income.*

*Money is assumed to be more valuable in the earlier years, and each sum that is received every next year costs less than the previous one.*

*Time value of money depends on many factors. They are:*

1. *Present value, PV. (Sum of money that is invested).*
2. *Future value, FV. (The money you will receive after depositing it at X percent annual interest).*
3. *Interest rate, r. (Measure of investment profitability).*
4. *Time, t. (Term of investment).*

### 3.1 Compounding

Compounding shifts the value of money from the present to the future. For example, how much will you have after some years if you deposit today a certain sum of money?

Compounding uses a compound interest rate that computes a sum of money (principal) at the present to another sum of money at the end of X years. To illustrate, let us assume that you deposit \$100 at 10 percent interest. How much will you have after three years?

	Principal \$100	Percentage 10%
After 1 year	$100 + 100 * 0.1 = 100(1 + 0.1) = 110$	
After 2 years	$110(1 + 0.1) = 121$ $100(1 + 0.1)^2 = 121$	
After 3 years	$121(1 + 0.1) = 133$ $100(1 + 0.1)^3 = 133$	

Using the previous data, the formula of compounding is as follows:

$$FV = PV(1 + r)^n \quad (1.1)$$

n– the number of years

Clearly, after three years, a \$100 deposit is worth \$133 at a 10 percent interest rate. So, \$100 and \$133 are two ways of presenting the same sum of money, but at different time: \$100 now means \$133 after three years.

The advantages of compounded money:

- it helps to see return on investment;
- it gives the opportunity to compare some alternative investment variants.

The disadvantages are:

- inaccurate forecast of compound interest rate will lead to inadequate calculation of future value of money;
- unconsidered escalation of inflation will lead to decline in real future value of money

### 3.2 Discounting

Discounting is the reverse of compounding. Whereas compounding shifts the value of money from the present to the future, discounting shifts the value of money to be received in the future back to the present.

Discounted money has some advantages:

- it provides a basic common ground for all types of projects (The common denominator for discounted money calculations is interest rate);
- it provides an ideal method of ranking projects.

If you need \$10,000 in five years, how much must you deposit today at 10 percent annual interest?

Using the formula of compounding (1.1), present value of money is calculated as follows:

$$PV = \frac{FV}{(1 + r)^n} \quad (1.2)$$

The result is as follows:

$$PV = \frac{10,000}{(1 + 0.1)^5} = 6,209.21$$

Clearly, one should deposit \$6,209.21 at 10 percent to have \$10,000 in five years.

As it can be seen from the assignment above, lectures also obligatorily included lecturer's questions to the audience and discussions of some of the lecture points, i.e., were interactive.

All class periods, in which lectures occupied the most prominent part and took, with all interactive elements in them, not less than 80% of class time, also included 10 to 15-minute-long learning activities that can never be observed in genuine immersion programmes. It was a kind of specially designed work on the basic vocabulary of the lecture and the theme as a whole. For instance, together with the supporting annotated plan for the lecture on "*The Time Value of Money*" in the mini-course on "*Finance*" the students also received the following vocabulary list:

- |                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. annuity           | 13. interest rate |
| 2. assigned          | 14. outgoing      |
| 3. to assume         | 15. previous      |
| 4. compounding       | 16. profitability |
| 5. compound interest | 17. ranking       |
| 6. to compute        | 18. to relate     |
| 7. denominator       | 19. reverse       |
| 8. decline           | 20. to shift      |
| 9. to deposit        | 21. term          |
| 10. discounting      | 22. unconsidered  |
| 11. escalation       | 23. to underlie   |
| 12. incoming         | 24. valuable      |

Such lists contained both terminology and some lexical units of general use important for the theme – those that could be unknown to students. The learning activities with vocabulary units, which were considered as a language support part in every mini-

course, consisted of students' getting the teacher's help in defining the exact meaning of every such unit and doing several vocabulary-reinforcing exercises. The two examples of such exercises used in the mini-course "Finance" may be:

*1. Complete these sentences about Central Banks using the given words:*

Central Banks, such as the Bank of England, the Federal Reserve Board in the US, and the Bundesbank in Germany:

*act fix implement issue control function influence supervise*

1. .... as banks for the government and for other banks.
2. .... monetary policy – either the government's, as in Britain, or their own if they are independent, as in Germany and the USA.
3. .... the money supply, measured by different aggregates, such as MO, M1, M2, M3, etc.
4. .... the minimum interest rate.
5. .... as lender of last resort to commercial banks with liquidity problems.
6. .... coins and bank notes.
7. .... (floating) exchange rates by intervening in foreign exchange markets.
8. .... the banking system.

*2. Explain in writing the terms "discounting" and "compounding" using proper words and formulae.*

Actually, in what concerns studying each of the four themes within every mini-course, the learning activities described above were the only ones directed more at language than at the meaningful content of the theme. Their inclusion into the preliminary (preparatory) immersion programme was considered reasonable to facilitate learning for students for whom vocabulary was the main difficulty. Modifying the standard design of genuine immersion programmes, having, as a rule, no specific language-oriented learning activities, by including a very limited number of them could serve as a transition device between much more language-aimed content-based instruction ESP course and a total immersion ESP course totally devoid of language orientation.

The home assignments that students get after their first (lecture) class on a certain theme in a mini-course always comprise:

1. Writing in English an abstract (or summary) of the lecture that they were listening to in class (see the assignment to the lecture above);

2. Reading (for the seminar and practical class that follows) around the theme of the lecture to expand and reinforce the knowledge received. The materials for reading suggested to students are divided into two categories: a) authentic (professional) English texts on the theme supplied by the teacher as mandatory materials for reading by all the students in class; b) additional authentic (professional) English texts on the theme that students themselves find on the Internet using the teachers prompts as to the recommended sites. These texts may be, and mostly are, different for different students. In this case, the Internet is used in its main function in foreign language teaching – serving as an inexhaustible source of authentic target language information (Barrett & Sharma, 2003; Harmer, 2001).

3. Preparing, on the basis of the lecture and the materials read, for the discussion during a seminar, getting ready for solving practical tasks during a practical class and also (for some students in accordance with individual teacher's assignments) preparing short presentations on the theme and case studies to be discussed during the seminar.

The second 80-minute class period devoted to working on one of the four themes within a mini-course always starts with a 50-minute seminar on the theme. Students discuss everything they have learnt from the lecture and from their out-of-class reading voicing their own ideas and formulating theoretical conclusions. The discussion is stimulated by teachers' questions such as (for the theme "*The Time Value of Money*"):

*"What are the differences between the time value of money and other kinds of financial values? Give examples"* or *"What are the advantages and disadvantages of compounded money? How do you understand the advantages and disadvantages of discounted money? List and explain each of them."*

As a rule, the starting point of the discussion is a three-five minute presentation prepared by one or two students at the teacher's task. The discussion often finishes with a practical case study researched on the Internet by one or two other students (also at the teacher's task). The case study serves for drawing practical conclusions from the seminar.

Discussing a case makes a transition to a 30-minute practical class within the same class period. This practical class is always devoted to students solving (and explaining the solution of) practical professional tasks connected with the theme being studied – like the following two ones from the theme "*The Time Value of Money*" in the mini-course on "*Finance*":

1. *An enterprise is going to buy some new equipment in five years. The equipment costs \$12,000. How much must you deposit now in order to have the possibility to purchase the equipment if the interest rate is:*

- 12 percent,*
- 13 percent.*

2. *An enterprise has free monetary resources in the amount of \$30,000 and is going to invest them into some company at 25 percent annual interest rate. How much will the enterprise have on its account after three years?*

The home assignment that the students receive after the second, last, class period on the theme being studied includes a written work to be submitted to the teacher for checking, assessing and grading. Such written works are designed so as to summarize everything learnt by the students in the process of studying the theme – demonstrating their knowledge of the theme's content matter, as well as (indirectly) their progress in ESP acquisition. The written assignment completed by the students is usually the description of the process and results of solving a professional problem task that can be solved on the basis of what the students have learned while working on the theme. Thus, it can be considered as a mini analogy of a course paper that students usually write when studying in their L1 separate themes in courses on their majoring disciplines. The example of such an assignment for the theme "*The Time Value of Money*" may be as follows:

*If the interest rates are 13% per year, what is the present value of \$1,630.47 to be paid in four years? Discuss all the related factors.*

This kind of task finalises the work on one theme and signals the transition to the next theme in the mini-course the work on which is structured in an identical manner.

Superimposed on the work with all the four themes within one mini-course is the students' project assignment. For instance, while studying the mini-course "*Finance*" the students are expected to complete a learning project called "*Company Finance*."

For their project work, learners are divided into small groups of three or four students in each of them. Every group chooses a company in their home city with accessible information about some non-confidential financial aspects of its activities. All the small groups are organized in such a way as to choose different companies for their analysis. They are expected

to collect and analyse all accessible financial information about ‘their’ company and, before the end of the mini course, to summarize the findings in a written report. During the last two-hour class in the mini-course which is devoted to finalising all the work in it (see the part of the article about the general outline of a preliminary immersion ESP course), small groups are expected to submit their written report to the teacher for checking, assessing and grading. They also report the results of the work orally for the benefit of all the other students in class (30 minutes are planned for short reports of all the small groups).

The remaining 50 minutes of the finalising class in the mini-course are planned for students to do different test type assignments and to write abstracts or essays on topics suggested by the teacher, those tests, abstracts and essay topics helping to demonstrate how well the students have acquired professional knowledge and ESP language skills planned to be acquired as the result of studying a particular mini-course. This serves as a platform for introducing the next mini-course which is structured identically.

The detailed discussion of the suggested preliminary (preparatory) ESP immersion programme, presented above by way of describing the structure of the teaching/learning process in one typical programme’s mini-course and one of the themes within such a mini-course, shows how well every such mini-course models university’s academic courses on students’ majoring subjects and all their standard teaching/learning procedures. The principal difference is in the language of instruction which is not students’ L1 but English only (ESP) in all mini-courses of the developed programme. That makes it an immersion programme, but a specific immersion programme – a simplified, facilitated and sheltered one: held in the comfortable and sheltered conditions of a language (ESP) classroom with additional language support for students; with short, simplified and accessible mini-courses on majoring disciplines and with the teacher prepared to help with both the content matter difficulties and the language difficulties of the students. Such modifications of the developed preliminary immersion programme were implemented with the purpose of simplifying and facilitating it as compared with what is expected of existing total immersion programmes. The goal of those facilitations and simplifications was, as it is clear from what was said before, to create a preparatory programme *leading* to total immersion, so as to make students completely ready for such total immersion both psychologically and linguistically. Whether this goal has been attained is discussed below.

#### 4. LEARNING OUTCOMES IN A PRELIMINARY (PREPARATORY) ESP IMMERSION COURSE/PROGRAMME

The learning outcomes that were planned to be measured after the introduction of the developed preliminary (preparatory) ESP immersion programme into the ESP course for the third year students majoring in Economics at Alfred Nobel University in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, can be summarized in two questions:

1) whether the students, after studying in such a programme, objectively achieved the ESP level close to C1 sufficient for working in total ESP immersion programmes taught in courses on their majoring disciplines;

2) whether the students, after studying in such a programme, became subjectively confident in their level of English sufficient for working in total ESP immersion programmes, i.e., whether they were psychologically ready for working in such programmes.

For answering these questions in the process of a longitudinal study, five groups of students who were trained in the preliminary (preparatory) immersion ESP course/programme in their third year at Alfred Nobel University were tested as to their learning outcomes at the completion of each of the four mini-courses in that programme. In this way, every group mentioned further was tested four times during students' work in the programme. The first group consisted of 12 students (6 males, 6 females – 19-20 years of age) who were tested in 2003/2004 academic year; the second group of 12 students (7 males, 5 females – 19-20 years of age) in 2004/2005 academic year; two other groups of 22 students in both (13 males, 9 females – 19-20 years of age) in 2005/2006 academic year and the last group of 13 students (5 males, 8 females – 19-20 years of age) in 2006/2007 academic year. All the 59 students belonged to the two economic departments of Alfred Nobel University – the Department of Economics and Finances and the Department of Economics and Business Management. All of them during their second year of university studies (preceding the year when they became involved in the preparatory immersion ESP course/programme) had been learning ESP in the content-based instruction course and, as it was shown by special testing at the end of that course, had achieved the B2 level in their command of ESP. These five groups of students will further be labelled A, B, C, D and E in the same order as they were presented above.

The tasks that were developed for checking whether the students' level of ESP command was objectively compatible with C1 level and sufficient for future participation in total immersion programmes will be further discussed using as examples only those tasks that served for testing students' skills after their completing the mini-course on "*Finance*." It will help in comparing the learning assignments discussed above with the tasks used for assessing the development of students' ESP skills.

The testing tasks were aimed at checking:

- the students' acquisition of content matter (knowledge) from each of the mini-courses;
- the development of their ESP speaking skills at C1 level.
- the development of their ESP writing skills at the same level.

Students' receptive ESP skills were not checked by special tasks because it was believed that advanced (C1) ESP productive skills cannot be developed if reading and listening skills lag behind. So, the high level of speaking and writing skills development was considered as indirectly confirming a similar level of receptive skills development – all the more so that without well-developed reading and listening ESP skills students simply could not successfully participate in studying any of the mini-courses included in the programme.

Three tasks were included into every testing session organized on students' completion of each of the four mini-courses.

The first of those tasks (10 minutes for completion) was a multiple-choice test checking whether the students adequately learnt through the medium of English the principal professional subject matter information from a particular mini-course. The test contained 10 questions and for every correct answer a student received one point (10 points maximum for the entire test). Such a test for the mini-course on "*Finance*" was designed as follows:

*Choose the correct alternative for answering each of the following questions:*

1. *Charges on bonds are paid from:*

- *prime cost*
- *profit*
- *sales budget*
- *retained earnings*

2. *Percentage on shares is paid from:*
  - *earnings before taxes*
  - *earnings before interests and taxes*
  - *net earnings*
3. *Time value of money depends on:*
  - *discounting*
  - *compounding*
  - *compound interest*
  - *interest rate, etc. (seven more similarly designed questions).*

The second task (50 minutes for completion) checked the development of students' ESP writing skills development. Students were requested to solve in writing and analyse (also in writing) the process of solution of four professional tasks. One of such tasks for writing used in the testing session after the mini-course on "*Finance*" is given below as an example:

*The enterprise invests money into business in the amount of \$4,440,000. The return on investment is going to be 27 percent. How much will the enterprise receive after 4 years?*

The results of students' writing task completion were assessed by two 'independent experts' – ESP teachers who have never before worked with the students being assessed (Underhill, 1987). They were using four criteria for assessing all the four written tasks completed by students (10 points maximum for every criterion, 40 points maximum for completing all the four written tasks): language accuracy; coherence and cohesion; diversity of vocabulary and grammar used; correctness of suggested task solutions. After independently assessing every student's written work, the 'experts' negotiated the points given by each of them to arrive at a single score (Underhill, 1987).

A similar assessment procedure was used in testing students' ESP speaking skills. They were also assessed by two 'independent experts' who were listening to learners' speaking in the last part of the testing session (20 minutes for every individual student). Students were requested to speak at length on four topics (spoken production) and to answer four assessors' questions concerning the content matter of a particular mini-course (spoken interaction). The topics for spoken production could be formulated like the one below from the testing session after the mini-course on "*Finance*":

*Formulate what the relationships between risk and expected return are.*

The 7 criteria (10 points maximum for every criterion, 70 points maximum for completing all the speaking tasks, including the answers to assessors' questions) for assessing students' performance in the speaking task were: correct and full analysis of the four suggested topics and correct (in meaning) answers to the four questions put; fluency; language accuracy; logical coherence and cohesion of speaking; diversity of vocabulary and grammar used in speaking; an ability to speak at length (up to three-five minutes) on each of the four suggested topics; adequate comprehension of assessors' questions.

In this way, the maximum number of points that a students could score for completing all the three testing tasks above was 120. The results of testing will be given further only as the number of points scored on the average by all students from each of the five tested groups because the admissible length of this article does allow greater detailing of data.

Students from group A scored during the testing session held after completing the mini-course on "*Finance*" 106 points out of 120 (88%) on the average, from group B 100 points out of 120 (83%) on the average, from group C 100 points (83%), from group D 110 points (92%) and from group E 113 points (94%). Groups of students results in all

the other testing sessions after the other three mini-courses on “*Microeconomics*,” “*Marketing*” and “*Management*” were close to those cited above – for instance, for group E on the average they were, correspondingly, 112 (93%), 109 (101%) and 105 (87%) points out of 120 points. The mathematical analysis of the data, obtained after all the testing sessions were held, proved the statistical significance of those data and results (this analysis also cannot be discussed here either because of space constraints).

In view of the content and language difficulties (corresponding to C1 level of ESP command) of the testing tasks, such results of testing obviously prove that the answer to the first question studied by us could only be positive: *students, after learning ESP for one semester in a preliminary (preparatory) immersion programme, objectively achieved the advanced ESP level of C1 or very close to it which is sufficient for working in total ESP immersion programmes taught in courses on their majoring disciplines.*

A specific procedure was developed for answering the second question of the study concerning learners’ subjective confidence in the high level of their English mastery – sufficient for participation in total ESP immersion programmes (learners’ psychological readiness for taking part in such programmes). All students, after finishing all the four mini-courses and all the four testing sessions, were asked to complete *ESP self-assessment sheets*. We used the self-assessment sheets specially developed by Yaghelska (2004) for measuring the attainment of C1 ESP level by *future economists who learn ESP at tertiary schools*. The assessment sheets that were completed by all students are too long (31 lengthy statements on the development of listening, reading, writing, spoken production and spoken interaction skills) to quote them in full in this article but a part of the sheet given below in Table 1 with statements for self-assessing writing skills development is enough for giving an idea of using such sheets.

Table 1. Self-assessment sheet fragment  
(self-assessment of writing skills development on C1 level of ESP for economists)

<b>Professional communication skills I can use in the target language</b>	<b>Yes, I can use this skill</b>	<b>I want to gain this skill</b>
<b>Writing</b>		
I can write a well-structured, detailed presentation for a conference in an assured, personal and natural style, which is appropriate to the listeners		
I can write a logical well-structured article, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view with subsidiary and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion in an appropriate style		
I can write detailed expositions of challenging topics in convincing letters, giving reasons for and against certain actions, decisions or proposals		
I can carry out accounting of all enterprise activities		
I can prepare documents for joint venture start-ups		
I can report and comment upon the results of an event or action, its implications and results		

If, when completing the sheet, students mark “*Yes, I can use this skill,*” it means they subjectively believe that they have already developed the skill implied by the statement. Marking “*I want to gain this skill*” implies an opposite belief – in absence of a particular skill. In our case, students on the average gave 88% of positive responses, thus demonstrating their full confidence in their attaining C1 level of ESP for economists. Thereby (through their belief in the high level of their own ESP proficiency), students indirectly showed their psychological readiness for participation in total immersion programmes.

Those conclusions above about the success of the developed preliminary (preparatory) ESP immersion programme in what concerns getting the learners ready for effective participation in total immersion programmes in courses on majoring disciplines beginning from the fourth year of their university studies had found their full confirmation when our students had really enrolled for such programmes. But this successful experience is beyond the scope of the present article – all the more so that it has already been reported elsewhere (see Tarnopolsky et al., 2008).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This article was discussing a new approach to ESP teaching and learning at the advanced stage of its acquisition by university students – a preliminary (preparatory) ESP immersion course/programme which is designed as a transitional form between content-based ESP instruction and total ESP immersion in courses on students’ majoring disciplines taught in English only.

It was demonstrated that a preliminary (preparatory) ESP immersion programme taught in an advanced ESP course for future economists in the third year of their university studies really ensured learners’ linguistic and psychological readiness for the following total ESP immersion. For achieving this goal, the preliminary immersion course is to be designed as a series of mini-courses on students’ majoring subjects. The success of linguistic and psychological preparation of students in such mini-courses is the result, on the one hand, of faithful modelling in them of total ESP academic immersion. On the other hand, the success is ensured by giving learners additional language support and by simplifying the mini-courses as compared to academic total immersion programmes through adjusting them to the students’ existing level of linguistic and psychological readiness.

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