

Modular Multi-Stage Agent for Bug Fixing - Analysis of Potentials and Limitations

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Danksagung

[Text der Danksagung]

Abstract

Generative AI is reshaping software engineering practices by automating more tasks every day, including code generation, debugging and program repair. Despite these advancements, existing Automated Program Repair (APR) systems frequently suffer from complexity, high computational demands, and missing integration within practical software development lifecycles. Such shortcomings often lead to frequent context switching, which negatively impacts developer productivity.

In this thesis, we address these challenges by introducing a novel and lightweight Automated Bug Fixing system leveraging LLMs, explicitly designed for seamless integration into CI/CD pipelines deployed in budget constrained environments. Our containerized approach, developed with a strong emphasis on security and isolation, manages the complete bug-fixing lifecycle from issue creation on GitHub to the generation and validation of pull requests. By automating these processes end-to-end, the system significantly reduces manual intervention, streamlining developer workflows and enhancing overall productivity.

We evaluate our APR system using the QuixBugs benchmark, a recognized dataset for testing APR methodologies. The experimental results indicate that our streamlined and cost-effective solution effectively repairs small-scale software bugs, demonstrating practical applicability within typical software development environments.

The outcomes underscore the feasibility and advantages of integrating APR directly into real-world CI/CD pipelines. We also discuss limitations inherent in LLM-based solutions, such as accuracy and reliability issues and suggest future enhancement and research.

-add that this approach directly integrates into the development lifecycle reducing configuration ...

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Listings

1. Introduction

Generative AI is rapidly changing the software industry and how software is developed and maintained. The emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs), a subfield of Generative AI, has opened up new opportunities for enhancing and automating various domains of the software development lifecycle. Due to remarkable capabilities in understanding and generating code snippets, LLMs have become valuable tools for developers' everyday tasks such as requirement engineering, code generation, refactoring, and program repair [1, 2].

Despite these advances, bug fixing remains a resource-intensive and often negatively perceived task [3], resulting in interruptions and context switching that reduce developers' productivity [4] The process bug fixing can be time-consuming and error-prone, leading to delays in software delivery and increased costs [<empty citation>]. In fact, acording to CISQ: in 2022 alone 607 billion dollars were spend for finding an fixing bugs only the US[5].

Given that debugging and fixing bugs are such critical tasks in software development Automated Program Repair (APR) systems have gained significant attention. Typically, bug fixing involves multiple steps: bug reporting, localization, repair, and validation [6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. Recent research has shown that LLMs can effectively be used for bug localization and repair, thereby setting new standards in the APR world and improving the efficiency of the software development process [8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. However existing APR apporaches are often complex and require significant computational resources [16], making them less suitable for budget-constrained environments or solo developers. Additionally, the lack of integration with exisiting software development workflows/lifecycles limits their practical applicability in real-world environments [17, 11].

Motivated by these challenges, this thesis explores the potential of integrating LLM based automated bug fixing within continuous integration and continuous deployment (CI/CD) pipelines. By leveraging the capabilities of LLMs, we aim to develop a cost-effective prototype for automated bug fixing that seamlessly integrates into existing software development workflows. Considering computational depands, complexity of integration and practical contraints we aim to provide insights into possibilities and limitations of out approach.

Background and Related Work

In this section we will provide and overview of the relevant background and context for this thesis. First introducing the software engineering lifecycle and the rising role of GenAi/LLMs in it. The Second part showcases the evolution and state of APR and explores existing approaches.

2.1. Software Engineering

In the follwing section introduces the software engineering lifecycle, the role of code hosting platforms, and the importance of Continuous Integration and Continuous Deployment (CI/CD) in modern software development.

2.1.1. Software Development Lifecycle

Engineering Software is complex and including multiple stages. For structuring this work diffrent Software Developemnt Lifecycle Models have been introduced. Software Development Lifecycle Models evolve constantly to adapt to the chanign needs of creating software. The most promising and widely used model is the Agile Software Development Lifecycle [18].

The Agile lifecycle brings an interative approach to development, focusing on collaboration, feedback and adaptivity. The Goal frequent delivery of small functional features of software, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation to changing requirements. Agile can be used with multiple frameworks like Scrum or Kanban but follows a similar approach. [18].



Figure 2.1.: Agile Software Development Lifecycle

2. Background and Related Work

A Agile Software Development Lifecycle iteration consists of several key stages like in Figure starting with planning phase where requirements for the iterartion are gathered and pritorized.

Since agile focuses adaptivity arising bugs can alter iterations if priotirised and therefore slow down delivery of features. APR is supposed to help with this problem by accelerating the process of fixing bugs. —explain how bugs are handled

Software development is moving towards lightly coupled microsversives which results in more repositories which are smaller in scale tailored towards a specialzed domain. This trend is driven by the need for flexibility, scalability, and faster development cycles. Smaller code repositories allow teams to work on specific components or services independently, reducing dependencies and enabling quicker iterations. This approach aligns with modern software development practices, such as microservices architecture and agile methodologies. With this trend developers work on multiple projects at the same time, which can lead to more interrupptions and context swtiching when problems arise and priorities shift.

2.1.2. Continuous Integration

For accelerating the delviery of software in an iteration continous integration has become a standard in agile software development.

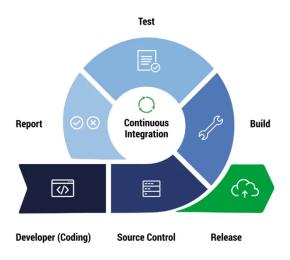


Figure 2.2.: Continuous Integration Cycle

Continuous Integration (CI) allows for frequenct code integration into a code repository. Ci can integrate steps like automated building and testing into the development resulting in rapid feedback right where the changes committed to the shared reposirotry.

Althought CI bring a lot of potential to development it can also have problemswhich can be long build durations and high maintance

CI supports aspects like fast delivery, fast feedback, enhanced collaboration which are ciritcal for agile software development. [19]

2.1.3. Software Project Hosting Platforms

Software projects are hosted on platforms like Github or gitlab. With Github being the most popular and most used [<empty citation>] These platforms provides tools and feature for the complete software development lifecycle. Project hosting, verssion control, bug and issue tracking, project management, backups, collaboration, and documentation. [20]

GitHub has features like Issue tracking for requiremtns and planning with issues looking like this: [githubdoc] —image of issue has title, description, comments, labels and mroe assioicated information

also provides a manged soltution for integrating CI into reposiries by writing work-flows in YAML files called Github Actions. The pipeliens can run on github hosted runners or self hosted runner. A workflow can be triggered by one or more event. One or more jobscan be executed on a provided runner maschiene. A job can consist of multiple steps. [21]

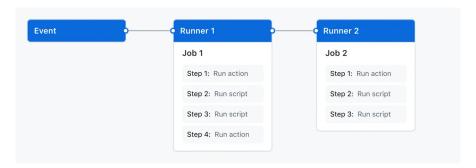


Figure 2.3.: Simple Action

Since constant feedback and reviews of code play an imporatnt role in agile workflows github also provides a pull request feature. Pull Requests allow for proposal of changes to the codebase, with an integrated review process which allows for collaboration and review before changes are integrated into the production codebase. This process is essential for maintaining code quality and ensuring that changes are thoroughly vetted before being merged into the main branch. [githubdoc]

2.2. LLMs in Software Development

Generative AI is reshaping software development by autoamting various tasks. Modern large language models have billions of paramters, are pre-tained on massive codesbases which results in extraordinary capbilites in this area [17]. Therefore LLMs get applied in generating code, debugging, refacting and testing. [sauvolaFutureSoftwareDevelopment2024, 22] By using LLMs to enhance these tasks developement cycle times can be reduced by up to 30 percent [22]. Tools like Github Copilot, OpenAI Codex, and ChatGPT have become popular in the software development community, providing developers with AI-powered code suggestions and completions for dirrent tasks [22].

Still Problems exsist as Gneerative Ai: is very researouce intensive eithical diellemas and interlecutal property issues [sauvolaFutureSoftwareDevelopment2024]

2. Background and Related Work

Problems with llms when genrating code are: Information leakage, hallucinations, and security issues

now research is looking into developing and improving specialized workflows leveraging LLMs [2].

recently mroe attention is given to itnergration of AI/ML into CICD [23] and integrating into exising workflows [sauvolaFutureSoftwareDevelopment2024]

2.3. Automated Programm Repair

Automated Program Repair (APR) is software that helps detect and repair bugs in code with minimal human intervention. This field has also benefited of the rapid advancements in AI.

APR system are supposed to take over the process of fixing bugs therefore making more time for developers to focus on more relevant work. localization, repair, and validation

2.3.1. Evolution of Automated Program Repair

APR was first introduced in xxx and has come a long way since then. Earliest APR techniques were based on version control history, using the history to roll back to a previous version of the code part, where no issues were present. This approach, while effective in some cases, often lacked the ability to perserve new features. (more like instant rollback) history based

- search based repair,
- -semantic based repair,
- —tempalte based repair, apply predefined transformtions to the code based on rules
- —The emerge of llm based techniques LLM based APR techniques have demonstrated singnificant uimrpovements over all other state of the art techniques, benfitintting from theor coding knowledge [24]

Agent Based agent based system improve fixing abilities by probiding llms the ability to interact with the code base and the environment, allowing them to plan their actions [12].

Ilms lay the groundwork of a new APR paradigm [17]

complex agent arcitectures produce good results espically paired with containerized environments. Emphasis on quality insureance and Devops practices [2]

modern aprs usally consist of multiple stages, including localization, repair, and validation. These stages are often implemented as separate modules, allowing for flexibility and modularity in the repair process [12].

recently a push towards more lightweight approaches has emerged, focusing on simplicity and efficiency. These approaches aim to reduce the complexity of APR systems while maintaining effectiveness in bug fixing [8].

2.3.2. Related Work - Existing Systems

end to end without llms Sapfix from Facebook. Fixing bugs in production envrionments lowerring incidents mean time of recovery significantly [25]

2. Background and Related Work

FixAgent [7] swe agent [12]

Agentless minimal system [8] claims exsiting systems are too complex and compute/costs intensive. lacks the ability to control the decision planning. they use a minimalist approach using localization, repair and validation.

this appraoch inspried the thesis to test how a simple approach will perform in a real world scendario on a code hosting platform.

- -point out areas where current systems see limitation
- during the research for this thesis, full integrations where published by companies like OpenAI Codex and Github Copilot but these are not open source

2.3.3. APR in CI Context

CI allows seemless integration... this way there is no harmfull code executed on own machiene, its encapsulated mutliple times container in Ci runner

3. Methodology

The primary objective of this thesis is to assess the potentials and limitations of our APR pipeline when integrated into a real-world software development lifecycle. We aim to answer the following research question to evaluate the system's capabilities and impact on the software development process:

What are the potentials and limitations of integrating an LLM-based automated bug-fixing pipeline into a CI/CD workflow, as measured by repair success rate, end-to-end execution time, and API cost, and how does this integration impact the overall software development lifecycle?

For awnsering this question we streamlines this process into three phases Preparation, Implementation / Application and Evaluation.

3.1. Preparation

3.1.1. Dataset Selection

For the evaluation of the APR integration into the software development lifecycle, we selected the Quixbugs dataset [26] as our primary benchmark for testing APR integration. This dataset is well-suited for our purposes due to its focus on small-scale software bugs in Python. It consists of 40 algorithmic bugs each in one file consisting of a single erroinums line, each with a correspoding tests for repair validation. Because these bugs where developed as challending problems for developers [26], we can evaluate if our system can take over the complex fixing of small bugs without developer intervention to prevent context switching for developers.

Compared to other APR benchmarks like SWE-Bench [27] Quixbugs is relaivly small which accelerates setup and development.

if archieved I will ad swe bench lite later [27]

3.1.2. Environment Setup

To mirrow realistic software development environment, we prepared the Quixbugs dataset by creating a GitHub repository. This repository serves as the basis for the bug fixing process, allowing the system to interact with the codebase and perform repairs. The repository contains only relevant files and folders required for the bug fixing process, ensuring a clean environment for the system to operate in.

We automatically generated a GitHub issue for each bug, using a consistent template that captures just the Title of the Problem. These issues serve as the entry points to our APR pipeline.

3.1.3. Requirements Specification

3.2. Pipeline Implementation

The Automated Bug Fixing Pipeline was developed using iterative prototyping and testing, with a focus on simplicity and modularity. Starting with constructing the functional and non functional requirements ?? we build the follwing System:

—IMAGE of HIGH LEVEL System Architecture here

When the system is in place in a target repository. An issue with the default or configured bug label can be created. This trigger trigger will spin up a github action runner which executes the APR pipeline. This Pipeline talkes to the configured LLM Api (google and openai) to localize and fix the bugy files. With the supplied file edits the code is validated and tested. When validation passes the a pull request with the fiels changes is autoamtically opend on the repository, linking the issue and providing details about the repair process. In case of a unsucessfull repair the failure is reported to the issue.

3.3. Evaluation

In this section, we describe how we measure the effectiveness and performance of our APR pipeline when integrated into a real-world CI process, using our QuixBugs repository as a bases.

For Evaluation we will focus on several key metrics to assess the system's performance and abilities in repairing software bugs. These metrics will provide insights into the system's efficiency, reliability, and overall impact on the software development lifecycle. The following metrics are automatically collected and calculated for each run of the APR pipeline:

Repair Success Rate: Calculate the percentage of successfully repaired bugs out of the total number of bugs attempted by using test results. A successfull repair is defined as a bug passesing all tests associated with it.

Number of Attempts: Track the number of attempts made by the system to repair each bug with a maximum of 3 attempts.

Overall Execution Time in CI/CD: Evaluate the time taken for the system to execute within a CI/CD pipeline, providing insights into its performance in real-world development environments.

TODO should I split overall execution and stages into seperate metrics? **Execution Times of Dockerized Agent:** Measure the time taken by the Containerized agent and its stages to execute the repair process and the execution times of individual stages.

With this CICD overhead can be calculated and bottlenecks can be identified

Token Usage: Monitor the number of tokens used by the LLM during the repair process, which can help understanding the cost of repairing and issue and the relation between token usage and repair success.

Cost per Issue: Calculate the cost associated with repairing each bug, considering factors such as resource usage, execution time, and any additional overhead.

3. Methodology

explain how these metrics are collected and calculated, including any tools or scripts used to automate the process. explain how reapir sucess rate is determined

ask zhang wether i need to include the evaluation of swe bench lite from the paper or if a ref is enought

explain statistical methods used to analyze the collected data, such as averages, medians, and standard deviations. This will help in understanding the variability and reliability of the results.

explain how resuLTS are calcuated for model comparisson

what I evaluate: script execution time + CICD overhead one issue vs mutliple issue times model vs model metrics costs attemps vs no attemps in all these categories

4. Requirements

- for this prototype we constructed Requirements which the system shall statisfy we split into functional requirements: t.3.1 (EXPLAINATION), nonfucntional Requirements combined with security requirements
- these requiremtns allow for better planning and priotisation during development. the satisfaction of all the requiremtns will allow for evaluation of the integration into the software development lifecycle

4.1. Functional Requirements

4.2. Non-Functional Requirements

$4. \ Requirements$

ID	Title	Description	Verification			
F0	Multi Trig- ger	The Pipeline can be triggered: manually, scheudled via cron, or by GitHub issue creation/labeling.	Runs can be found for these triggers			
F1	Issue Gather- ing	Retrieve GitHub repository issues and filter them for correct state and configured labeles BUG.	gate logs list of fetched issues.			
F2	Code Check- out	Fetch the repository code into a fresh workspace and branch (via Docker mount).	After F1, workspace/ contains the correct source files.			
F3	Issue Localization	Use LLM to analyze the issue description and identify relevant files.	LLM output contains file paths with files that shall be edited.			
F4	Fix Generation	Use LLM to edit the identified files.	LLM output contains adjusted content for the identified files.			
F5	Change Validation	Run format, lint and relevant tests and capture pass/fail status.	Logs show build and test results.			
F6	Iterative Patch Generation (retry logic)	If F4 reports failures, retry F4–F5 up to X times.	After retries, either F4 passes or fails with no further retries.			
F7	Apply Patch	Commit LLM-generated edits and generate patch.	Git history shows a new commit which is referencing the Github issue			
F8	Result Reporting	Open a PR or post a comment on GitHub with the diff and summary metrics.	A PR or comment appears for each issue, showing diff and summary.			
F9	Logs and Metrics Col- lection	Provide log files and Metrics with fix-rate, attempt history, timings, token ussage.	A metrics file contains fields: issue, success, timings, stages.			

Table 4.1.: Functional requirements (F0–F8)

$4. \ Requirements$

ID	Title	Description	Verification
N1	Containerized Execution	All agent code runs in CI runner in a Docker container to isloate it.	Workflow shows Docker container usage
N2	Configurability	User can specify issue labels, branches, attempts, LLM models via YAML.	Changing the config file alters agent behavior accordingly.
N3	Portability	The system can be deployed on any repository on GitHub.	???
N4	Reproducibility	Runs are deterministic given identical repostate and config.	Multiple runs on the same issue report similar metrics.
N5	Oberability	The system provides logs and metrics for each run, including execution times, token usage and success rate.	Logs and metrics files are generated after each run, containing all relevant data.

Table 4.2.: Non-Functional (N1–N5) requirements

5. Implementation

Here we break down the implementation of the system into its core components, following the methodology and requirements outlined in the previous sections. The full code is attached in the **??** appendix.

the goal was to create a system which not only fixes bugs but is also portable /deployable across diffrent repositories and configurable to some extend.

System Overview:

The system Consists of two main components: The APR core which hold the core logic for the repair process

The CI/CD Pipeline which put everything together and integrates the github entrypoint of the target repository with the core logic of the agent.

Configuration Layer the porgrams behavour can be altered by adjusting a configuration. A default YAML configuration is in place which allows for controlling: - labels - workdir - branches - Attempts - LLM models addiotnally these is the possibility to overwrite these values for a single repositiory using a dedicated 'bugfix.yml' configration which needs to be placed at the root of the repository.

5.1. System Components

Agent Core:

The agent core is written in python and dockerized so its slim and portable. the agent core contains the main bugfixing logic. To start fixing bugs it needs the following envrionment: The repo where to fix files on - provided using docker volumne mount the follwing Envrionment Variables: - Github Token - Github Repo - LLM API key - ISSUE TO PROCESS - Github repository

With this envrionment set the system loops over all issues which are fethced from the envrionment variables.

For each issue the main APR logic is executed. This main logic consists of tools and stages: —IMAGE here First the worksapce (a new branch based on configration naming) and a repair context is set up. the context is hing of the program its needed at every step and works as the main data structure for the APR system like memory. — JSON of Context init here: A stage uses the context to perform a specific task in the bug fixing process and returns the context with its added context. The stages are: Localize, Fix, Build, Test

With a repared workspace the repairprocess start with the localization stage. This stage construct a prompt for the LLM to localize the bug in the codebase. This prompt makes use of a contriucted hierarchy of the repositories fielstructre and the issue description. The LLM is expected to return a list of files and lines where the bug is located. — PROMPT

The results are stored in the context.

With the loclilzed files in the context the fix stages constructs a prompt with the file content and the issue description. the llm can return code or no changes needed. — Prompt these edits are then applied to the files in the workspace. The context is updated with the new file content.

To ensure the changes are properly formatted the build stages formats the code using the black formatter and lints the python code to ensure maintainable code.

Next up the test stage runs tests for the fixes files and attaches these results to the context.

if tests do not pass the system will record a new attempt and start over from the state of the fix stage. Additionally a feedback is generated using the previous attemps code and results from the context which gets added to the fix prompt.

if the validation passes or the maximum number of attemppts is reached the system will either report and unsucessfull repair to the issue or continue to the application steps

on sucessfull repair the follwing steps are executed: the fileschanges are committed and a diff file is generated. the changes are pushed to the remote repo usign the github token

a pull requirest is opened with a description of the changes and a link to the issue and more details about tests and some metrics like the number of attempts and the tokens used for the repair process.

During execution the core logs its actions, which can be used for debugging and analysis. Furthermore it collects metrics such as the number of attempts, execution time, and token usage, which are essential for evaluating the performance of the APR system. Logs and metrics are saved as .log and json files at the end

The agent core is designed to be modular and extensible, allowing for future enhancements and additional stages or tools to be integrated as needed. It is also designed to be lightweight, ensuring that it can run efficiently within the constraints of a CI/CD environment.

CI/CD Pipeline:

The Pipeline is written in YAML according to the Github CICD standard. ?? We will use runners hosted by Github which takes awayt the overhead of managing our own runners but comes at the cost of unknown performance and avaiablity It is made up of the Triggers and 3 Jobs: 'gate', 'skipped' and 'bugfix'. The triggers are set up first and will allow the execution of the APR process. Triggers can resutls in two types of runs: processing of all bug issues in correct state on manual execution requrest of the workflow ("workflow_dispatch") or scheudled execution ("cron"). processing a single issue: when an issue is openend and label with the configured labels ("issue_opened and issue_labeled") or when extra information is added or edited on an issue in form of a comment.

The trigger event information gets passed as environment variables to the next job "gate" which is responsible for evaluating if the issue should be processed or skipped. This job checks the labels and resolves the issue state to determine if the issue is relevant for the APR process. If no issues pass this gate the job "skipped" is executed, which simply logs that no issues were found to process and exits the workflow.

5. Implementation

When the gate outputs issues that should be processed the job "bugfix" is executed. This job checks out the current repositiory and mounts it as a volume to the agent core container. Addionally it sets the necessary environment variables mentioned at ??. For the agent to work perimmsions are set on the job level to allow the agent to edit repository content, create pull requests and write issues.

For giving acess to the agent cores logs and metrics the job provides the logs directory as an artifact which is aviaible after the workflow run is completed.

for all of this to run the following envrionment secrets need to be deifned in the repo:

5.2. System Architecture

IMAGE of Figma diagram

5.3. System Configuration

secrets that need to be added: LLM provider API key, GITHUB TOKEN need to anable gituhb actions permission to create pull requests in repo settings explain fields:

The full implementation is listed in Appendix ??

6. Results

[Beschreibung der Ergebnisse aus allen voran gegangenen Kapiteln sowie der zuvor generierten Ergebnisartefakte mit Bewertung, wie diese einzuordnen sind]

6.1. Showcase of workflow

6.2. Evaluation Results

- descibe and showcase execution times and repair success rates - show a log? with small models and attempt loop makes small models pass the whole benchmark?

7. Discussion

7.1. Validility

- quixbugs a small dataset, not representative of real world software development - only python, not representative of real world software development - but shows the potential of applying llm based agents in a real world cicd environment

7.2. Potentials

- can take over small tasks in encapuslated envrioment without intervention small models can solve more problems with retrying with feedback this conecpt is applicable to other python repositories
- ?? accelerate bug fixing lets developers focus on more complex tasks therefor enhance software reliablility and maintainablity

7.3. Limitations

- github actions from github have a lot of computational noise workflow runs on every issue and therefor has some ci minute overhead this could be solved by using a github app which replies on webhook events
 - SECURITY ISSUE: Prompt injection in issue: CICD makes this a bit safer?
 - its limit to small issues

7.4. Summary of Findings

7.5. Lessons Learned

- ai is a fast moving field with a lot of noise

7.6. Roadmap for Extensions

- Service Accoutns for better and mroe transparent integration - try out complex agent architectures and compare metrics and results - try out more complex bug fixing tasks - SWE bench

8. Conclusion

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A. Appendix

A.1. Quell-Code

A.2. Tipps zum Schreiben Ihrer Abschlussarbeit

- Achten Sie auf eine neutrale, fachliche Sprache. Keine "Ich"-Form.
- Zitieren Sie zitierfähige und -würdige Quellen (z.B. wissenschaftliche Artikel und Fachbücher; nach Möglichkeit keine Blogs und keinesfalls Wikipedia¹).
- Zitieren Sie korrekt und homogen.
- Verwenden Sie keine Fußnoten für die Literaturangaben.
- Recherchieren Sie ausführlich den Stand der Wissenschaft und Technik.
- Achten Sie auf die Qualität der Ausarbeitung (z.B. auf Rechtschreibung).
- Informieren Sie sich ggf. vorab darüber, wie man wissenschaftlich arbeitet bzw. schreibt:
 - Mittels Fachliteratur², oder
 - Beim Lernzentrum³.
- Nutzen Sie L^AT_FX⁴.

¹Wikipedia selbst empfiehlt, von der Zitation von Wikipedia-Inhalten im akademischen Umfeld Abstand zu nehmen [wikipedia2019].

²Z.B. [balzert2011], [franck2013]

³Weitere Informationen zum Schreibcoaching finden sich hier: https://www.htw-berlin.de/studium/lernzentrum/studierende/schreibcoaching/; letzter Zugriff: 13 VI 19.

⁴Kein Support bei Installation, Nutzung und Anpassung allfälliger LATEX-Templates!

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