Oral Communication in a Foreign Language Competence Development in Academic Contexts

Žodinės komunikacijos svetima kalba akademiniame kontekste kompetencijos plėtojimas

STUDIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES / KALBŲ STUDIJOS

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A contemporary European university requires the competence that enables a student to understand lectures on the subject in a foreign language, to participate in academic discussions, to study in various joint programmes at Lithuanian and foreign universities, to participate in student mobility exchange programmes and international projects, to feel confidence and self-esteem in any academic and professional context. The development of academic English communicative competence of the students with no previous experience of academic language learning in a high school and integration of academic context (in addition to professional one) into the language subject programmes has become inevitable in higher education. This indicates the problems related to foreign language teaching at university level and presupposes the need to transition of teaching a foreign language for academic and professional purposes. Oral communication, especially in a foreign language, has become particularly important due to transition to innovative teaching methods. Thus, the purpose of the empirical research was to find out about students' oral communication skills in a foreign language necessary for successful functioning in the academic and professional discourse. This particular article is aimed at revealing teachers' evaluation of students' oral academic English skills in comparison with their importance as viewed by the teachers. The issues of academic speaking skills, the results of the pilot research and the methodology research were presented in a number of international conferences in the presentations on the topics regarding academic English skills development in higher education (Tuomaitė, 2014; Tuomaitė, 2015; Tuomaitė, 2016; Tuomaitė, Butlerienė, 2015; Tuomaitė, Knyza, 2014).

KEYWORDS: oral communication, foreign language competence development, academic contexts, higher education.

Introduction

Among the key priorities in EU documents 'Europe 2020' ('E 2020'), 'Education and Training 2020' ('ET 2020'), other EU youth strategy documents is mobile youth highly educated and open to communication, fully prepared for academic and professional career, and having experience of studies and work in foreign universities and companies (E 2020, 2010; ET 2020, 2010). The focus of achieving this aim lies on the need to improve the quality of studies in universities, in particular, academic excellence and equal opportunities. A contemporary European university requires the competence that enables a student to understand lectures on the subject in a foreign language, to participate in academic discussions, to study in various joint programmes at Lithuanian and foreign universities, to participate in student mobility exchange programmes and international projects, to feel confidence and self-esteem in any academic and professional context. Thus, the development of academic foreign language competence is receiving more and more attention in the contemporary higher education institution. English, that has long become a lingua franca in the academic and professional discourse, is a compulsory subject for all the students at Kaunas University of Technology (KTU). The development of academic English communicative competence of the students with no previous experience of academic language learning in a secondary school and integration of academic context (in addition to professional context) into the language subject programmes has become an increased necessity for both students and teachers. The selection and correct employment of the material and content to satisfy the needs of academic language competence development is quite a challenge for a language teacher as regards necessary academic context and language skills development. (Tuomaitė, 2016).

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a fast developing area of the English language teaching in Higher Education. Speaking in academic contexts is becoming increasingly important due to transition to innovative methods of teaching. Speaking in a foreign language is twice as big challenge for a university student. Every student can have different needs, depending on the chosen discipline, language skills, cognitive level, cultural background, and many other factors. The above indicates **the problems** related to foreign language teaching at university level and presupposes the need to transition of teaching a foreign language for academic purposes, and, thus, innovating a foreign language subject syllabus. (Tuomaitė, 2014; Tuomaitė, 2015; Tuomaitė, 2016).

To find solutions to the above mentioned problems an empirical research was carried out. The purpose of the empirical research was to find out about students' oral communication skills necessary for successful functioning in the academic context. This particular article is **aimed at** presenting, describing and revealing teachers' evaluation of students' oral academic English skills in comparison with their importance as is viewed by the teachers. Thus, the objectives of this article are (1) to describe how teachers' assess students' oral academic English communication skills, (2) to describe how teachers see the importance of oral academic communication skills, (3) to analyse and compare the results, and reveal the differences between student oral academic English communication skills and their importance as viewed by the teachers.

Teaching/ Learning English at Kaunas University of Technology

Teaching of the English language, which has become the academic Lingua franca, has always received particular attention at KTU. It is compulsory for all the students of non-linguistic study programmes at level C1 of English. Student competence of the English language is determined after the diagnostic test developed by the experts at the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Communication. Based on the test results the students are recommended to continue the competence development of the English language in groups of an appropriate level: Level B1 or Level B2 with the focus on the development of the communicative linguistic competence of general English (i.e. to help the students develop reading,

writing, listening and speaking skills), to improve grammatical knowledge and to expand the vocabulary of general English, and to prepare for further studies at Level C1 with the focus on the development of the students' communicative linguistic and intercultural competences in English at the advanced level (C1), acquiring academic and professional English and transferable university study skills.

The study modules are designed to develop students' English communicative language and intercultural competence at intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced levels and to acquire academic English and transferable university study skills through integrated linguistic activities of reception (listening and reading comprehension), production, interaction (speaking and writing) and mediation (translation), and are closely related to university studies. The English language study modules content includes grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking, as well as general and transferable academic skills development activities: a consistent and systematic grammar and vocabulary development in the academic context, reading and listening to motivating and informative authentic academic texts, discussions on original professional and academic topics, practicing of critical thinking, reasoning, and other university transferable skills. Students prepare for the university studies. Blended learning and various study methods are employed, such as the following: interactive lectures, group or pair work, role-playing, simulations of real-life situations, discussions, text analysis, information retrieval, concept mapping, design-based thinking tasks, problem learning tasks, work in the computer lab and MOODLE virtual learning environment (consultations, discussion forums, interactive tasks), individual work for practical application of the theoretical material, self-analysis and self-assessment tasks, etc.

The issues of teaching EAP (English for Academic Purposes) have been discussed by the author of the article in international conference presentations and have been summarized in this chapter. EAP is a fast developing area of the English language teaching in Higher Education. There is a distinction often made between EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes) and ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes) (Blue, 1991). EGAP deals with the language and practices common to all EAP students, whereas ESAP is concerned with the specific needs of students in particular disciplines. However, the main objective of an EAP course is to teach the language, both general academic language and subject specific language as well as language related practices. The language of the learners' academic subject and language related to study skills form the main component of the EAP skills classes. According to A. Gillet (2014) teaching EAP, therefore, involves developing in the learner the language and associated practices that they need in order to undertake quality study or work in the English medium higher education. For that reason, it must start with the learner and the academic context in which they work or study. It is unlikely that a ready-made textbook will exist for such purposes, so it will always be necessary for the EAP teacher to be able to analyse contexts and language, understand learners' needs and develop materials that suit those contexts and needs.

The defining characteristics of EAP, that set it aside from other subjects in higher education, are its focus on the language and associated practices that leaners need in order to undertake a leading capacity of study or work in higher education. What students' skills and needs are, and how teachers view students' skills and needs of EAP are the main issues to be discussed. Thus, the paper is aimed at presenting the description of the existing problem in the field, presenting the theoretical background for the research, the analysis of the research data and the discussion based on the results of the research data analysis.

The Issues of Teaching EAP for Quality Study or Work in Higher Education

Academic Speaking Skills vs Syllabus Innovation

Oral communication fulfils a number of general and discipline-specific, pedagogical-educational and academic functions. Learning to speak is an important goal in itself as it provides students with a number of skills they will be able to use for the rest of their lives. Speaking is the type of communication most often employed to express opinions, make arguments, give explanations, convey information, or make impression upon others. Students need to speak well in their personal lives, various social interactions, academic discourse and their future professional context, where they will have meetings to attend, presentations to make, discussions and arguments to participate in, and groups and teams to work with.

University studies include various oral academic English communication opportunities. With regard to this, the following speaking opportunities in academic contexts can be distinguished:

_ General one-to-one meeting with a tutor, course or paper advisor at any level (graduate/ undergraduate/ postgraduate);

_ Group or team project;

_ Informal social interaction;

_ Lecture;

_ Presentation, talk, or conference paper;

_ Seminar or discussion;

_ Specialist one-to-one meeting with a supervisor (e.g. interview) at research level;

_ Tutorial (undergraduate and postgraduate levels), etc.

Oral academic English communication opportunities presuppose various challenges. Thus, the challenges of academic speaking according to E. de Chazal (de Chazal, 2014) are the following:

_ **Practical**

Initiative: working out what to say, and when and how to say it;

Pragmatic: coping with the speed of interaction with the other speaker(s), and understanding their message.

_ **Linguistic**

Language (grammar and vocabulary): finding appropriate language to convey the meaning;

Phonology: producing an intelligible utterance;

Functional / notional: finding appropriate language to interact, e.g. ask for clarification, express a quantity.

_ **Content and knowledge**

Ideas: coming up with sufficient good-quality ideas to express.

_ **Cognitive / affective**

Development: understanding, processing, and building on the ideas of other people in the academic spoken communicative event;

Personality: speaking when having to rather than wanting to; gaining confidence in speaking in public settings.

_ **Academic**

Community: establishing oneself as part of an academic community, which implies certain levels of knowledge, skills, and engagement;

Assessment: managing and producing material that is assessed, e.g. a presentation.

‒ **Textual**

Multi-textuality / multimodality: presenting and referring to other texts, e.g. visuals in a presentation, graphs in a text, other audio-visual texts;

Intertextual: relating and synthesizing information and meaning across different spoken and written sources.

‒ **Contextual and knowledge-based**

Applying the content of the spoken interaction to the student's individual context;

Understanding, interpreting, and situating the meaning in the world;

Working out what to do next, e.g. how to use the information from the interaction.

Methodologically the research is based on the conceptions of modern educational theories such as holism, humanism, pragmatism, progressivism and constructivism, and the conceptions of modern educational theory of constructivism in language learning (e.g. Perkins, 1991, Brooks, J.G. & Brooks, M.J., 1993) that promote modern personality development aims; the main teaching/learning principles; curriculum development principles; the principles of definition for the study results, outcomes, competencies, knowledge, skills, and abilities in the context of educational paradigm transitions that form the conceptual foundation for the lifelong learning paradigm.

The research methods are descriptive document and scientific literature analysis, quantitative data analysis, using survey via the questionnaire and content analysis. The data was processed and statistical analysis was performed by operating the programmes of SPSS 13.01 and MS Excel (MS operational system). The methods of descriptive statistics, non-parametric and parametric criteria were employed for the analysis and discussion of the empirical research results.

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

To find out about students' oral communication skills necessary for successful functioning in the academic context the teachers were given a written questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of document and scientific literature analysis regarding the skills of oral communication in a foreign language, mainly on A. Gillet (2014).

The questionnaire contained 16 questions: 7 of them were quite extended, the other were very short for finding out general information. The extended questions (11–16) regarded exactly the competences of students in the areas of academic presentations such as preparation and teamwork, delivery and body language, content and organisation, introduction and conclusion, language, design and visual aids, and academic conventions. Each of these extended questions contained from 6 to 15 detailed questions regarding the issue of the oral academic English communication. The teachers had to evaluate their students' academic English needs and skills in making oral academic English presentations. They had to evaluate the following: 1. How *important* it is for the students to perform these tasks well in English: Not important/Quite unimportant/Very important/Essential; 2. How *well* they can perform these tasks in English: Not at all/Not well/Quite well/Very well. The number of the teachers who participated in this research was 10 (n = 10).

Thus, among several general questions for the teachers there was one to evaluate their students' general English language competence, i.e. their students' writing, reading, listening, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary (Fig. 1).
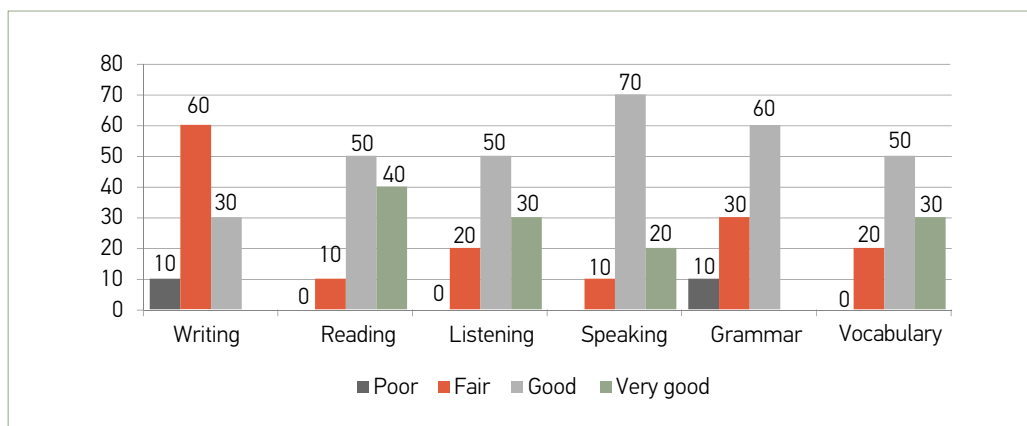
The data analysis reveals that according to the teachers' assessment students have good and very good (90%) speaking skills and indicate this competence as being the best developed

Results and Discussion

compared to other competences of linguistic activities. Teachers also indicate their students' reading skills as good and very good (90 %), also listening – (80%), and vocabulary – (80%). According to the teachers' evaluations their students' grammar skills are quite poor or only fair (40%), and writing skills are the poorest (70%). In general, on the scale of very high/ high/moderate/low, 50 % of the teachers evaluate their students' general English skills at level C1 according to the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) as high, and 50 % as only moderate. However, the teachers' evaluation of the students' oral academic English communication skills on the scale from 1 to 4 is only 2.1 (from low to very high), i.e. only slightly above average. In addition to this, the teachers' evaluation of the importance of learning to make academic presentations in academic contexts, i.e. to develop oral academic English communication skills, on the scale from 1 to 4 was 3.8 (from not important to essential). This leads to the assumption that the development of students' oral academic English communication skills at level C1 is important. This also presupposes further research and detailed analysis of the students' skills and the need to develop them as regards oral academic English communication skills in the context of university studies.

Another question for the teachers was to enumerate the order of importance of speaking opportunities in English in academic contexts (in present or future academic studies) (Fig. 2).

Thus, according to the teachers' enumeration the most important oral communication in English in academic contexts opportunities are discussion and presentation, then lecture, working in a group project, talk, working in an international team of students, tutorial, and seminar (Fig. 2).
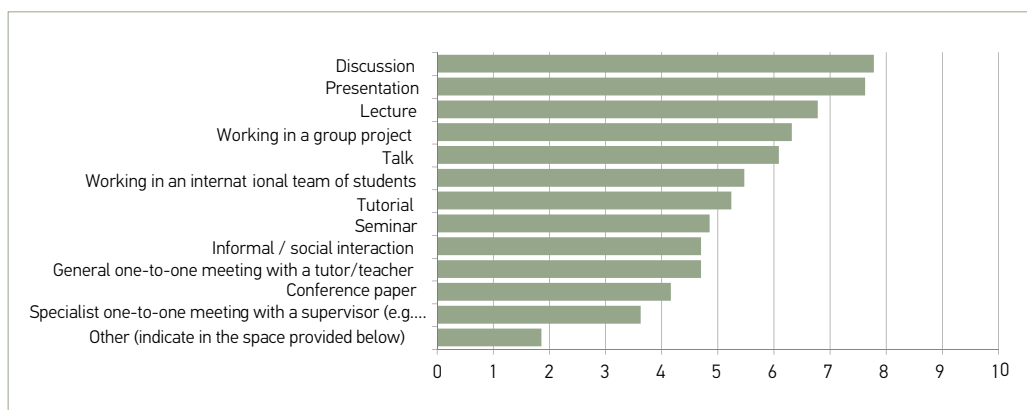
As, in the opinion of the teachers', one of the most important oral communication opportunities in English in academic contexts is giving a presentation for various purposes, e.g. to share information, knowledge or experience in the classes on the subjects related to the students' major, to give a subject related presentation in a seminar, to present a course paper, a Bachelor degree or Master degree thesis, etc., further analysis and the discussion of the results is related to the teachers' evaluation of the importance and the students' skills of giving academic presentations.

The research regarding the teachers' opinion and evaluation on the (1) *importance* and (2) *students' skills* on giving presentations was divided in surveying separate areas of giving academic presentations, such as *preparation and teamwork*, *delivery and body language*, *content and organisation*, *introduction and conclusion*, *language*, *design and visual aids*, and *academic conventions*. The importance and the students' skills of all those constituent parts of an academic presentation were discussed and evaluated in detail by presenting specific questions regarding each area enumerated above. The results of this survey are presented in relevant bar charts and graphs and discussed in the following paragraphs.

First of all, the teachers were asked to evaluate their students' academic English needs and skills in making academic presentations regarding *the preparation* and *the teamwork issues*. They had to answer a set of questions related to the skills in this area of making academic presentations and to evaluate (1) how *important* it is for them to perform these tasks well in English (i.e. Not important/Quite unimportant/Very important/Essential), and (2) how *well* they can perform these tasks in English (i.e. Not at all/Not well/Quite well/Very well). The questions related to the preparation for the academic presentations and teamwork were the following: how important it is and how students can be aware and analyse the audience; set clear aims and objectives; choose a topic based on the student's study field; decide on the working title; analyse the topic from multiple perspectives; develop critical thinking skills; search for scientific texts; select the most relevant sources; identify new information on the topic; synthesize and select relevant information to include; develop research skills; develop constructive critical peer feedback skills; develop group learning skills; plan and produce the academic presentation; prepare an original academic presentation.
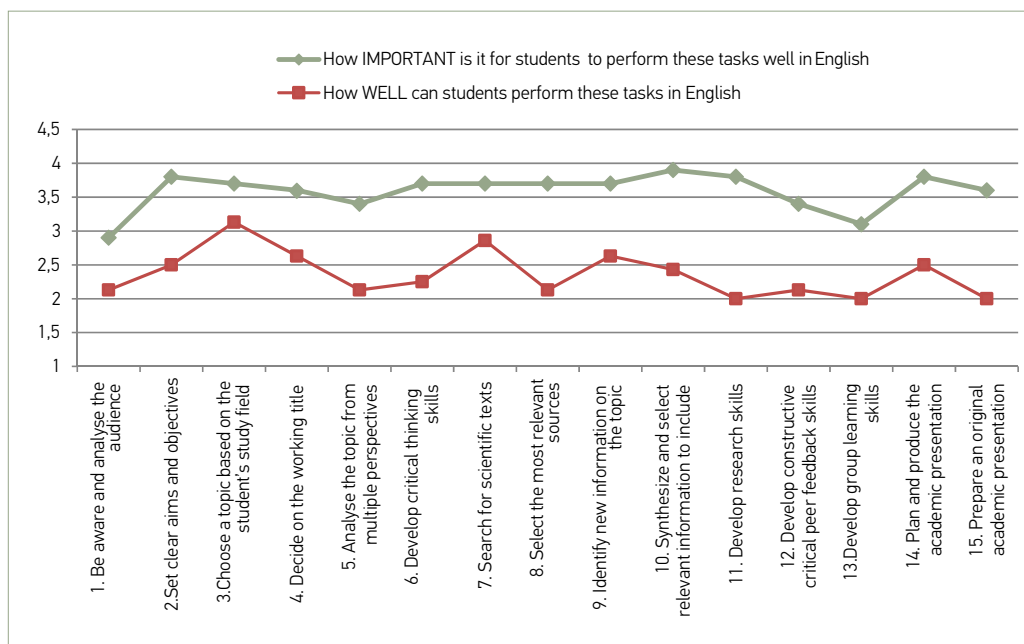
According to the teachers' evaluation the essential skill for the students' confident and veritable participation and functioning in the academic context regarding the questions of *the preparation* and *the teamwork* as a part of successful academic presentations is the ability to synthesise and select relevant information to include (90%). Other essentially important skills regarding this area are the ability to set clear aims and objectives, search for scientific texts, develop research skills, plan and produce the academic presentation (80%), also choose a topic based on the student's study field, decide on the working title, develop critical thinking skills, select the most relevant sources, identify new information on the topic (70%), as well as prepare an original academic presentation (60%), and analyse the topic from multiple perspectives (50%). Other preparation for the academic presentations and teamwork skills are also considered as very important or quite important (from 40% to 70%).

In fact, quite a different picture is revealed as regards the teachers' evaluations of the students' competence to perform the tasks of *the preparation* and *the teamwork* before making academic presentations compared to their importance in the academic context. Thus, the students' ability to synthesise and select relevant information to include is evaluated as very well by 0% of the teachers, and quite well by only 42.9%, while 57.1% consider this competence as insufficient or even absent. Other important skills regarding this area such as the ability to set clear aims and objectives are evaluated as very well by 0% of the teachers, and

quite well by only 50%; develop research skills – 0% as very well, and only 12.5% as quite well; develop critical thinking skills – 0% as very well, and only 37.5 as quite well; select the most relevant sources – 0% as very well, and only 25% as quite well; prepare an original academic presentation – 0% as very well, and only 12.5% as quite well (60%), and analyse the topic from multiple perspectives – 0% as very well, and only 25% as quite well. Other oral communication in academic context skills that the students lack badly as regards the preparation and the teamwork in the teachers' opinion were group learning skills (100%), and constructive critical peer feedback skills (87.5%), even though they were identified as less important skills in the context of university studies. This leads to the assumption that the above discussed issues have to be considered and taken into account in developing the curriculum for the English language courses at university studies.

The graph in Figure 3 reveals the differences between the importance and the students' skills in *the preparation* and *the teamwork* before making academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation.

Fig. 3

The comparison of the importance and the students' skills of academic presentations: preparation & teamwork (the teachers' evaluation).

The above graph (Fig. 3) clearly reveals the ultimate gaps between the importance and the students' skills to perform certain tasks regarding the preparation and the teamwork before making academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluations. Such utmost differences include the following: to synthesise and select relevant information, the ability to set clear aims and objectives, develop research skills, develop critical thinking skills, select the most relevant sources, prepare an original academic presentation, and analyse the topic from multiple perspectives. A bit smaller gap between the importance and the students' skills to perform certain activities includes the students' ability to develop group learning skills, and to develop constructive critical peer feedback skills.

Another set of questions presented for the teachers' evaluation of the importance and students' skills in academic presentations was related to *the delivery* and *the body language*. The questions related to the delivery of the academic presentations and body language were the

following: how important it is and how students can be clear, simple and fluent; speak at correct speed; use natural academic spoken language; use pauses for emphasis; be confident; be aware of the audience; keep to the time limit; work well together (as a team) and communicate the topic clearly; use strong clear gestures for emphasis; use good eye contact with the audience; present in a positive, confident, and relaxed manner; avoid distracting gestures.

Thus, as regards the importance of *the delivery* and *the body language* while giving academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation the essential skill is to speak at correct speed (80%). Other very important skills are the students' ability to be clear, simple, and fluent, to use natural academic spoken language, to be confident, to present in a positive, confident, and relaxed manner, to avoid distracting gestures (60%), to keep to the time limit, to use good eye contact with the audience (50%).

As regards the students' skills of *the delivery* and *the body language* while giving academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation the essential skill to speak at correct speed is evaluated as very well by 0% of the teachers, and as quite well by 50% of the teachers. Other very important skills regarding this area such as the students' ability to be clear, simple, and fluent are evaluated as very well by only 12.5% of the teachers, and as quite well only by 25% of the teachers; to use natural academic spoken language – 0% as very well, and only 25% as quite well; to present in a positive, confident, and relaxed manner – 0% as very well, and only 37.5% as quite well; to keep to the time limit – 0% as very well, and only 37.5% as quite well; to use good eye contact with the audience – 0% as very well, and only 37.5% as quite well. Other oral communication in academic context skills that the students lack badly as regards delivery and body language are the students' ability to use pauses for emphasis and to be aware of the audience (62.5%).

The graph in Figure 4 reveals the differences between the importance and the students' skills in *the delivery* and *the body language* while making academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation.

The above graph (Fig. 4) clearly reveals the ultimate gaps between the importance and the students' skills to perform certain tasks regarding the delivery and body language while making academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluations. Such utmost differences include the following: to speak at correct speed, to be clear, simple, and fluent, to use
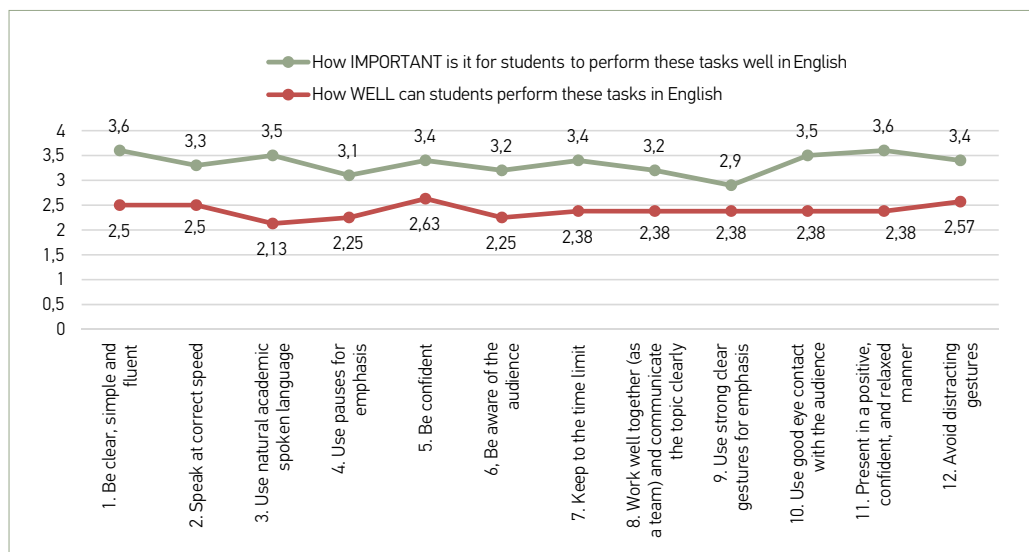

Fig. 4

The comparison of the importance and the students' skills of academic presentations: delivery & body language (the teachers' evaluation)

natural academic spoken language, to present in a positive, confident, and relaxed manner, to keep to the time limit, to use good eye contact with the audience.

The teachers also evaluated the importance and the students' skills of one of the most important constituent parts of the academic presentations, i.e. *the content* and *the organisation.* The questions related to the content of the academic presentations and the organisation of it were the following: how important it is and how students can make content appropriate to aims; how they can make content relevant; use appropriate argument or exposition of content; make balance of content within presentation; make appropriate analysis, exemplification, and evaluation of the content; make content interesting for the audience; be good at planning: a clear structure and a sense of timing; be good at organising: clear connections between the different parts or ideas; be good at presenting information: what they say is interesting and relevant to their audience; be good at making impact: a strong introduction and conclusion; link/sequence ideas; signpost for the audience.

The analysis of the research results regarding the importance of *the content* and *the organisation* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation revealed the following skills as being the most essential: to be good at making impact (90%); to make content appropriate to aims, to make content relevant, to make content interesting for the audience, to be good at presenting information: what they say is interesting and relevant to their audience (80%); to use appropriate argument or exposition of content, to make appropriate analysis, exemplification, and evaluation of the content, to be good at planning: a clear structure and a sense of timing, to be good at organising: clear connections between the different parts or ideas (70%); to make balance of content within presentation (60%).

The analysis of the research results regarding the students' skills of *the content* and *the organisation* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation revealed that most essential skills were evaluated as follows: to be good at making impact: a strong introduction and conclusion was evaluated as very by 0% of the teachers, and only 33.3% as quite well; to make content interesting for the audience – 0% as very well, and only 11.1% – as quite well; to be good at presenting information: what they say is interesting and relevant to their audience – 0% as very well, and 44.4 as quite well; to use appropriate argument or exposition of content – 0% as very well, and only 11.1% as quite well; to make appropriate analysis, exemplification, and evaluation of the content – 0% as very well, and only 33.3% as quite well; to be good at planning: a clear structure and a sense of timing – 0% as very well, and 44.4% as quite well; to be good at organising: clear connections between the different parts or ideas – 0% as very well, and only 22.2 as quite well; to make balance of content within presentation – 0% as very well, and 44.4% as quite well.

The graph in Figure 5 reveals the differences between the importance and the students' skills in *the content* and *the organisation* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation.

The graph (Fig. 5) clearly reveals the ultimate gaps between the importance and the students' skills to perform certain tasks regarding the content and the organisation of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluations. Such utmost differences include the following: to be good at making impact: a strong introduction and conclusion; to make content interesting for the audience; to be good at presenting information: what they say is interesting and relevant to their audience; to use appropriate argument or exposition of content; to make appropriate analysis, exemplification, and evaluation of the content; to be good at planning: a clear structure and a sense of timing; to be good at organising: clear connections between the different parts or ideas; to make balance of content within presentation.
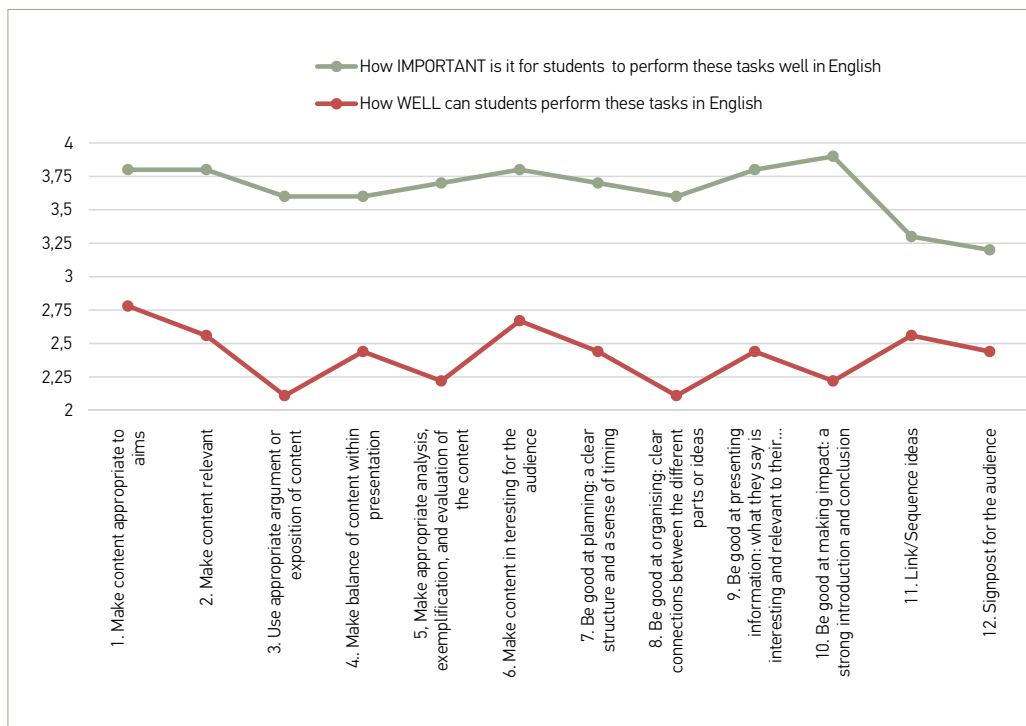
In addition, the teachers gave their evaluations on the importance and students' skills regarding *the introduction* and *the conclusion* of the academic presentations. The questions related to the introduction and the conclusion of the academic presentations were the following: how important it is and how students can introduce themselves - their name and position; present the title/subject; explain the purpose; say how long they will take; summarise the main parts or points they will cover; be aware of the audience; explain the handouts they will use; tell the audience when they may ask questions; introduce key terms; give a clear signal to the end; give a clear summary; make a conclusion; invite for questions.

Also, the teachers' evaluated the importance of *the introduction* and *the conclusion* of academic presentations. According to the teachers' evaluation the most essential skills in making good introductions and conclusions of academic presentations are the ability to explain the purpose, to make a conclusion (70%); to present the subject (60%); to give a clear summary (66.7%); to summarise the main parts or points they will cover, to invite for questions (50%).

The analysis of the importance was followed by the analysis of the students' skills of making *the introduction* and *the conclusion* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation. According to the teachers' evaluation as regards the students' skills of making the introduction and the conclusion of academic presentations the weakest ones are as follows: be aware of the audience, give a clear summary, make a conclusion and invite for questions.

The graph in Figure 6 reveals the differences between the importance and the students' skills in making *the introduction* and *the conclusion* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation.

The graph (Fig. 6) reveals the following utmost gap between the importance and student skills regarding making good introductions and conclusions of academic presentations: explain the purpose, summarise the main points they will cover, be aware of the audience, give a clear summary, make a conclusion and invite for questions.
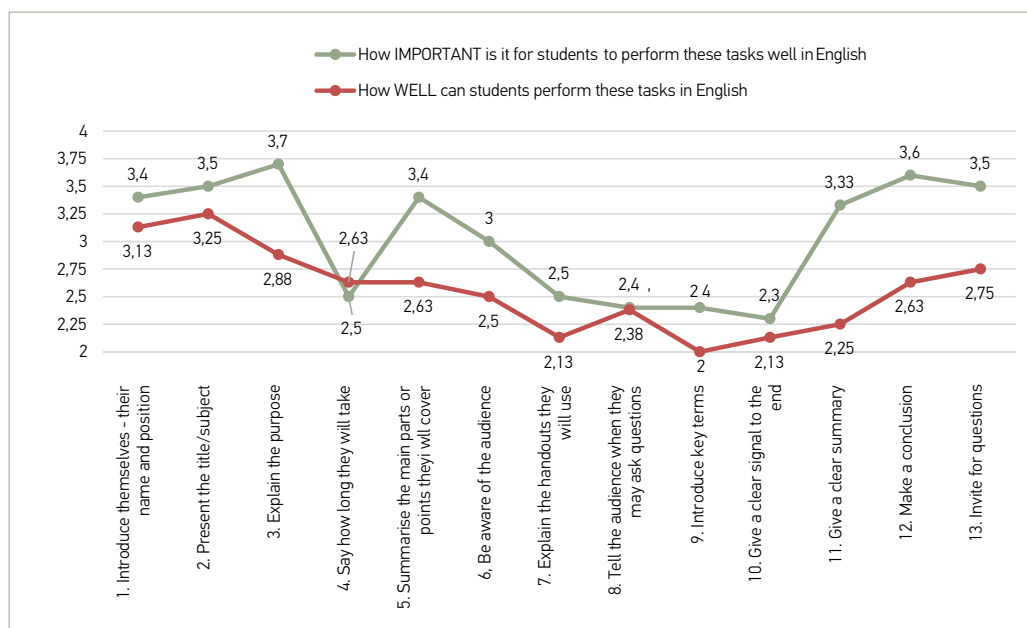
One more of the key aspects that the teachers had to give their evaluations on was *the language* of academic presentations The questions related to the language of the academic presentations were the following: how important it is and how students can use accurate and appropriate language in terms of pronunciation; use accurate and appropriate language in terms of grammar; use accurate and appropriate language in terms of academic and specific vocabulary; use accurate and appropriate language in terms of style; use accurate and appropriate language in terms of sophistication; use accurate and appropriate language in terms of choice of words.

Then followed the analysis of the importance and the students' skills of *the language* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation. In the teachers' opinion, the essentially important skills of language in academic presentations are the following: to use accurate and appropriate language in terms of pronunciation, to use accurate and appropriate language in terms of grammar, to use accurate and appropriate language in terms of academic and specific vocabulary (60%); to use accurate and appropriate language in terms of style (50%).

The analysis of the data on the skills of *the language* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation revealed that though the teachers evaluated the majority of the students' language skills as quite good; however, no students' language skills were evaluated as very good.

The graph in Figure 7 reveals the differences between the importance and the students' skills in *the language* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation.

The most considerable gaps between the importance and the students' skills regarding the language of academic presentations (Fig. 7) are such as the following: to accurate and appropriate language in terms of grammar, academic and specific vocabulary, style, and choice of words.

The teachers evaluated the importance and the students' skills in *the design* and *the use of the visual aids* in academic presentations. The questions related to the design and use of the visual aids in the academic presentations were the following: how important it is and how students cannot just repeat what they say; not use too much information; use visuals to support what they say; use only key words, not lines of the text; use the right kind of visual
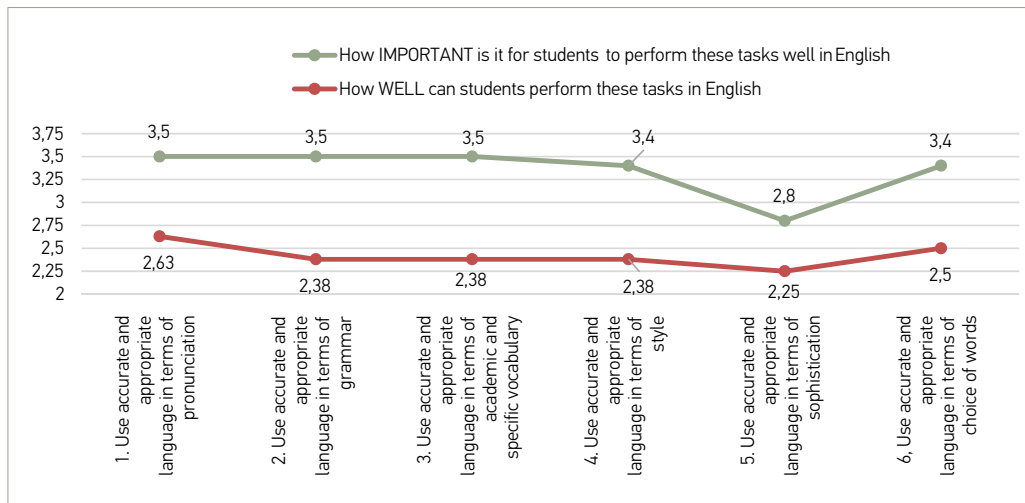
for their topic; use colour (but not too much); make visuals visible from the back of the room; use appropriate number of visuals; make sure the visuals are clear; use a pointer/masking if it is appropriate; look at the audience as much as possible; not read from the visual; not stand in front of the visual – can the audience see?; use the technology confidently.

The teachers were presented a set of questions related to the importance and the students' skills of *the design* and the use of *the visual aids* in making academic presentations for the evaluation. According to the teachers' evaluation regarding the design and the use of visual aids in making academic presentations the most essential skills are the following: to use the right kind of visual for their topic, to use appropriate number of visuals, to make sure the visuals are clear (60%); not to use too much information, to use visuals to support what they say, to make visuals visible from the back of the room, to look at the audience as much as possible, not to read from the visual (50%).

The analysis of the results representing the students' skills of *the design* and *the use of visual aids* in making academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation revealed that though the majority of the students' skills regarding the design and the use of visual aids in making academic presentations are evaluated quite well or even very well, still there are skills that need improvement.

The graph in Figure 8 reveals the differences between the importance and the students' skills in *the design* and *the use of visual aids* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation.

Though the graph (Fig. 8) reveals only inconsiderable differences between the importance and the students' skills regarding the design and the use of visual aids in making academic presentations, still there are gaps that need to be considered and taken into account while developing the contents of the English language courses at university level.

Finally, the teachers evaluated the importance and the students' skills in keeping to *the academic conventions* in the academic presentations. The questions related to keeping to the academic conventions for the academic presentations were the following: how important it is and how students can use appropriate and accurate references to source material; use visuals (e.g. PowerPoint slides); use handouts; use audio, websites, or realia; keep balance between visual and spoken information; give sufficient background and contextualized information to the topic; use functional English for introductions, greetings, clarifications, explanations, inter-

Fig. 8

The comparison of the importance and the students' skills of academic presentations: design & use of visual aids (the teachers' evaluation)
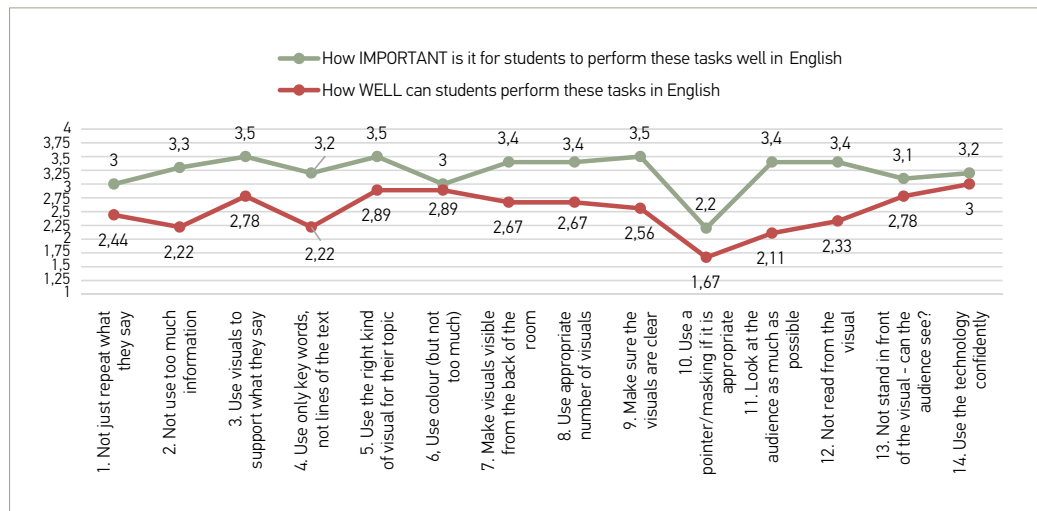
ruptions, opinions; reproduce information by using paraphrasing strategies; explain, interpret, and evaluate the data clearly; link the material to wider contexts and issues; clearly express their own stance on the topic; invite and deal with audience questions following the presentation; respond to questions accurately and in sufficient data; use appropriate language for asking and answering the questions; thank the audience appropriately at the end.

The analysis of the survey results regarding the importance and the students' skills of *the academic conventions* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation revealed that the most essential academic conventions in making academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation are the ability to use visuals, to use appropriate and accurate references to source material (70%), to keep balance between visual and spoken information (60%), to give sufficient background and contextualized information, to explain, interpret, and evaluate the data clearly, to respond to questions accurately and in sufficient data (60%), to use appropriate language for asking and answering questions, invite and deal with audience questions following the presentation, reproduce the information by using paraphrasing strategies, to give sufficient background and contextualized information (50%).

The analysis of the survey results representing the students' skills of *the academic conventions* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation revealed that though there are the students' skills regarding the academic conventions in making academic presentations evaluated by the teachers as quite well and in some cases even very well, however, there are academic conventions that badly need further development.

The graph in Figure 9 reveals the differences between the importance and the students' skills in *the academic conventions* of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluation.

The differences between the importance and the students skills as regards academic conventions in making academic presentations according to the teachers evaluation are the following as represented by the gaps in the above graph (Fig. 9): the ability to use visuals, to use appropriate and accurate references to source material, to keep balance between visual and spoken information, to give sufficient background and contextualized information, to explain, interpret, and evaluate the data clearly, to respond to questions accurately and in sufficient data, to use appropriate language for asking and answering questions, invite and deal with audience questions following the presentation, reproduce the information by using paraphrasing strategies, to give sufficient background and contextualized information.
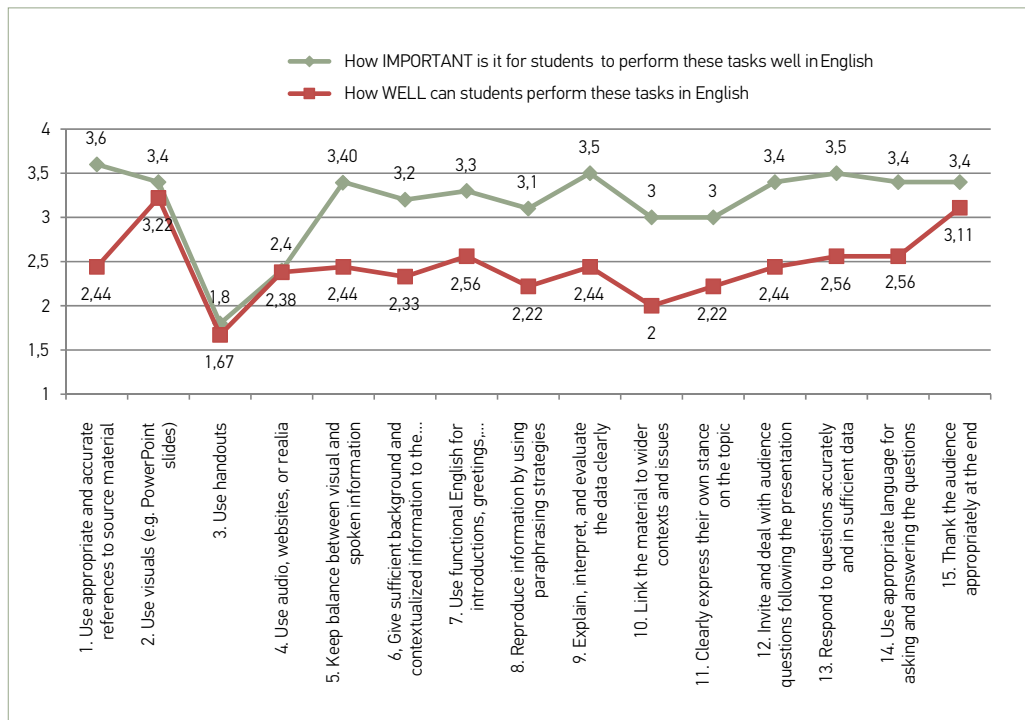
Fig. 9

The comparison of the importance and the students' skills of academic presentations: academic conventions (the teachers' evaluation)

Conclusion

Thus, to find out about students' oral communication skills necessary for successful functioning in the academic context the article presented, described, and revealed teachers' evaluation of students' oral academic English skills in comparison with their importance as is viewed by the teachers.

Given the teachers' opinion that one of the most important oral communication opportunities in academic discourse is giving academic presentations, the teachers' opinion and evaluation on the (1) *importance* and (2) *students' skills* regarding the areas of academic presentations such as *preparation and teamwork*, *delivery and body language*, *content and organisation*, *introduction and conclusion*, *language*, *design and visual aids*, and *academic conventions* has been presented and analysed.

The analysis of the findings revealed that according to the teachers' evaluations there are significant differences between the importance and students' skills in all the above mentioned areas of giving academic presentations. However, the differences in some areas are more significant than in the others.

Among the topmost differences between the importance and the students' skills in making academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluations appear in the areas of *content and organisation* (such as to be good at making impact: a strong introduction and conclusion; to make content interesting for the audience; to be good at presenting information: what they say is interesting and relevant to their audience; to use appropriate argument or exposition of content; to make appropriate analysis, exemplification, and evaluation of the content; to be good at planning: a clear structure and a sense of timing; to be good at organising: clear connections between the different parts or ideas; to make balance of content within presentation), *preparation and teamwork* (such as to synthesise and select relevant information, the ability to set clear aims and objectives, develop research skills, develop critical thinking skills, select the most relevant sources, prepare an original academic pres-

entation, and analyse the topic from multiple perspectives), and *academic conventions* (such as the ability to use visuals, to use appropriate and accurate references to source material, to keep balance between visual and spoken information, to give sufficient background and contextualized information, to explain, interpret, and evaluate the data clearly, to respond to questions accurately and in sufficient data, to use appropriate language for asking and answering questions, invite and deal with audience questions following the presentation, re-produce the information by using paraphrasing strategies, to give sufficient background and contextualized information). Nevertheless, other areas of academic presentations according to the teachers' evaluations reveal no less cardinal differences between the importance and and factual student skills.

The relevations based on the above research findings might serve as the assumptions of the recommendations for teaching a foreign language for academic purposes. The differences between the importance and the students skills regarding oral communication in the English language in academic contexts presented and analysed in the results and discussion part need to be considered thoroughly and taken into account for developing or innovating the syllabi for the English language courses at advanced levels for university studies. Moreover, they could serve as a guide for teachers for selecting teaching materials, and organising and delivering classes.

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Santrauka

Virginija Tuomaitė, Zita Zajankauskaitė. Žodinės komunikacijos užsienio kalba akademiniame kontekste kompetencijos plėtojimas

Šiuolaikinis universitetas reikalauja kompetencijų, leidžiančių studentui suprasti paskaitas, skaitomas užsienio kalba, dalyvauti akademinėse diskusijose Europos aukštojo mokslo erdvėje, studijuoti įvairiose švietimo programose Lietuvos ir užsienio universitetuose, dalyvauti studentų judumo mainų programose ir tarptautiniuose projektuose, jausti pasitikėjimą ir savivertę bet kokiame akademinės ir profesinės užsienio kalbos diskurse. Studentų, turinčių skirtingą kalbinę kompetenciją, be ankstesnės akademinės anglų komunikacinės kompetencijos plėtojimo patirties vidurinėje mokykloje, akademinės kalbos mokymosi poreikis ir akademinio konteksto (taip pat ir profesinio konteksto) integravimas į kalbos dalyko programas tapo pagrindiniu poreikiu aukštojo mokslo institucijoje. Empirinio tyrimo tikslas buvo sužinoti apie studentų žodinės komunikacijos užsienio kalba įgūdžius, reikalingus sėkmingam darbui akademiniame kontekste. Šio straipsnio tikslas išsiaiškinti ir išanalizuoti aukštojo mokslo institucijos užsienio kalbų dėstytojų vertinimą, susijusį su žodinės komunikacijos užsienio kalba akademinėje aplinkoje svarbą lyginant su student kompetencija realizuoti šią funkciją.

Straipsnyje aptariamos žodinės komunikacijos akademiniame kontekste problemos, pilotinių tyrimų rezultatai ir tyrimo metodologija pristatyti straipsnio autorių tarptautinėse konferencijose (Tuomaitė, 2014; Tuomaitė, 2015; Tuomaitė, 2016; Tuomaitė, Butlerienė, 2015; Tuomaitė, Knyza, 2014). Straipsnis parengtas remiantis šių pranešimų medžiaga.

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