

V. EDUKOLOGIJA

CONTINUITY OF QUALITY INTEGRATION IN TEACHING / LEARNING ENGLISH AT UNIVERSITY

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Quality is never an accident, it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.

William A. Foster

Abstract

Quality teaching and learning is a priority in higher education, and Universities worldwide emphasize the maintenance and ongoing development of quality. To pursue this aim, teaching and learning must meet learners' needs, be innovative, make appropriate use of the state-of-the-art technologies, employ proper resources to support good practice, and evaluate teaching and learning outcomes.

At tertiary level the linguistic competence of language learners depends upon the quality of learning and teaching. The important features of qualitative language instruction include the following factors: formal evaluation of learning outcomes, learner self-assessment of success or failure, monitoring learners' accomplishments, and teacher / learner feedback. Moreover, teacher's ongoing professional development and ability to evaluate critically pros and cons in one's own teaching are important elements in seeking better quality of teaching.

This paper addresses research into the idea of continuity of quality integration in teaching and learning through learner self-assessment of language skills and language knowledge, formal evaluation of learner performance in English for Specific Purposes, and evaluation of teaching by learners. The implications of the findings for learner and teacher development are discussed.

Keywords: continuity, integration of quality, teaching / learning English for Specific Purposes, self-evaluation, self-assessment.

Introduction

A commitment to quality assurance in higher education is shared by universities worldwide. Teaching and learning must meet learners' needs, be innovative, make appropriate use of contemporary technologies, use learning experience and resources to support good practice, and evaluate teaching and learning outcomes to maintain quality.

The linguistic competence of language learners depends on the quality of learning and teaching at tertiary level. The important features of qualitative language instruction include formal evaluation of learning outcomes, learner self-assessment of success or failure, monitoring learners' accomplishments and teacher / learner feedback. Teacher's ongoing professional development and ability to evaluate pros and cons in one's own teaching critically are important elements in seeking better quality of teaching.

The aims of the research: to investigate the quality of teaching and learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at university level and analyze the importance of relevant factors on the quality.

The methods of the research used: a survey of respondents' views on their achievements in learning ESP, statistical treatment of the responses by means of the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), comparison of learners' self-assessment data with their performance in formal tests, comparison of current findings of quality integration with the data obtained a few years ago, and evaluation of teaching by learners

The hypothesis for the present study: to examine how realistic current students are in their evaluations of language knowledge and skills in comparison to the students who studied ESP a few years ago.

The objective of this paper is to inform on the findings of the current research into continuity of quality integration, the main factors of quality in learning and teaching, i.e. learner self-assessment of language skills, teacher self-evaluation, evaluation of teaching by learners, the role of monitoring learner progress for learner development, and offer suggestions for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning ESP.

1. Overview of literature

High quality teaching and learning is a priority in higher education, and Universities worldwide emphasize the maintenance and ongoing development of quality. To maintain quality, teaching and learning must meet learners' needs, be innovative, make appropriate use of the state-of-the-art technologies, employ proper resources to support good practice, and evaluate teaching and learning outcomes.

Good teaching must: a) take into account learners' self-assessment; b) be focused on learning outcomes; c) ensure the clear communication of requirements to students; d) integrate aims into teaching procedures and assessment; e) promote co-operative learning with peers; f) respect students' opinions; g) encourage learners' feedback on teaching (Harmer, 2001). Learning is effective if it is: a) autonomous and self-directed; b) fostered by cooperation and interaction with peers; c) a lifelong oriented; d) individualized and personalized (Nunan, Lamb, 1996). Integration of self - assessment into language courses encourages learners to be autonomous, can raise learners' awareness of language, increase motivation in learning and reduce the teacher's workload (Black, William, 1998).

Teachers' ongoing development is an important part of enhancing the quality of teaching. An exploratory approach to teacher development, which refers to deeper understanding of teacher's beliefs, theories, principles, and attitudes, allows to examine teachers' practices and make informed decisions about one's own teaching (Gebhard, Oprandy, 1999). Teachers' evaluation and self-evaluation are the basis of good educational practice. Evaluation is a complex process and includes a series of activities and actions. "Teachers have to be evaluated as professionals. The emphasis of teacher evaluation should be on their teaching and not individuals and take into account the involvement and responsiveness of people involved in the education process. The purpose of teacher evaluation is to safeguard and improve the quality of instruction received by students by fostering self-development" (Nunan, Lamb, 1996).

In order to evaluate one's performance teachers can employ the Teacher's Perspectives Inventory (Pratt, Collins, online). It is an online questionnaire which consists of 45 questions that summarize teachers' views and perceptions about teaching. There are five teaching perspectives in individual profile: Transmission, Apprenticeship, Nurturing, Developmental, and Social Reform. Perspective of Transmission refers to commitment to the subject matter. Perspective of Apprenticeship refers to guiding learners into new ways and norms of working. Developmental Perspective refers to 'bridging knowledge' that is meaningful to the learner. Nurturing Perspective refers to long-term, persistent efforts to individual growth and achievements. Social Reform refers to changing society. Research shows that "the vast majority of teachers hold one or two dominant perspectives. Many hold an additional 'back-up' perspective. The combination of dominant and back-up perspectives allows teachers to accommodate changes in context, content, and learners.

Teachers can also be evaluated by students or colleagues. Students' ratings have the potential to contribute positively to improvement of teaching. When teachers review their teaching in the light of the students' feedback, it is important to be positive and cater for students' concerns, complaints or suggestions. As a result, learners would expect some positive changes in teaching (England, Hutchings, McKenachie, online).

2. Respondents and research methods

The respondents were the full-time students of the Department of Social Policy, Mykolas Romeris University, who studied English for Specific Purposes for the field of social work. The number of participants in earlier studies, i.e. in 2004, was 60, and in the comparative current research the number of learners was 36. The size of respondent classes varied from 10 to 12 students per class. Students were aged between 19 and 22 years old. The amount of time spent in the second language environment was 4 hours a week per one semester, which amounted to about 60 hours of instruction.

Research employed the interim and end-of-course questionnaires on students' self-assessment and teacher evaluation. Questionnaires were designed in accordance with the standard requirements to questionnaires for Social Sciences (Dörnyei, 2003). The questionnaire designed for the evaluation of teachers' work by students was administered at the end of each semester.

3. Learner self-assessment

The results of self-evaluation of speaking, listening, reading, writing, and translation skills are presented in this section. It implies students' judgment of their performance in each skill. Students were asked to evaluate their performance by writing themselves a mark: excellent, very good, good, satisfactory or weak, in accordance with accepted grading at the university level.

Charts 1 to 4 display self-evaluation data collected over two academic years, 2004 and 2008. The earlier findings, which were obtained for 60 respondents, were reported elsewhere (Kavaliuskienė 2004) and reproduced here in order to compare these data with the current findings and to investigate possible changes that might have occurred since the earlier study.

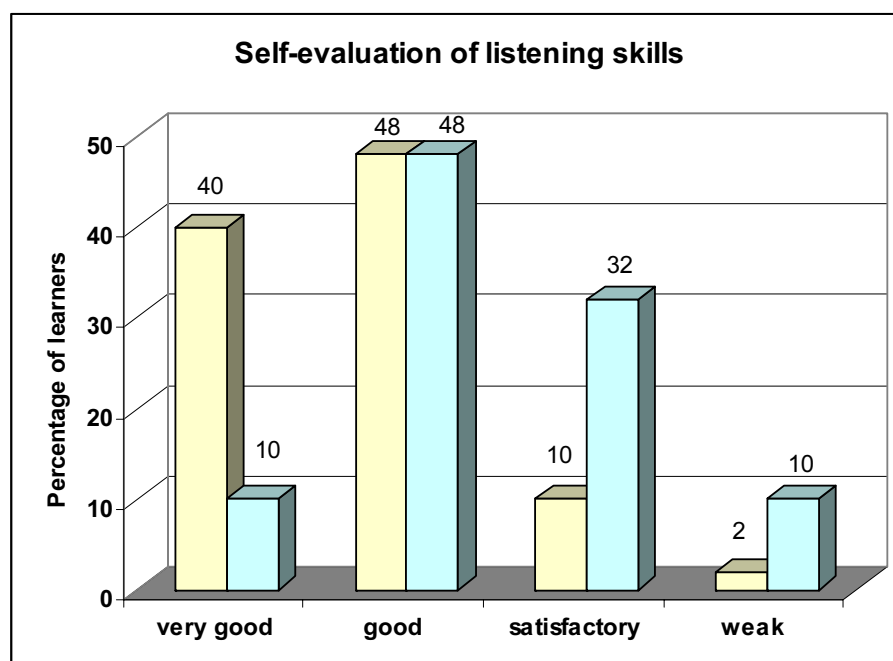


Chart 1. Self-evaluation of students' listening skills. (1st bars show data referring to research in 2004, and 2nd bars – the corresponding data collected in 2008).

Learners' self-assessment of listening skills (Chart 1) over the years has changed: there are fewer learners who consider their listening ability very good (10% against 40%), and more students feel their listening skills are satisfactory or weak (32% against 10%, and 10% against 2%, respectively). About half of the learners in both streams assess their listening as good. There is no reasonable interpretation to account for the observed differences.



Chart 2. Self-evaluation of students' writing skills. (1st bars show research data collected in 2004, and 2nd bars – corresponding data collected in 2008).

As can be seen in Chart 2, students' perceptions of their writing ability have undergone a change: as many as 74% feel their writing skills are good in comparison to previous 40%, and 26 of respondents consider them satisfactory in comparison to the previous value of 38%. Interestingly, none of the current students think that they have either very good or weak ability to compose in the ESP area. The sound argument in the interpretation of these findings is learners' awareness of the difficulties that they face in producing cohesive and coherent compositions as well as inability to avoid making grammar and discourse errors.

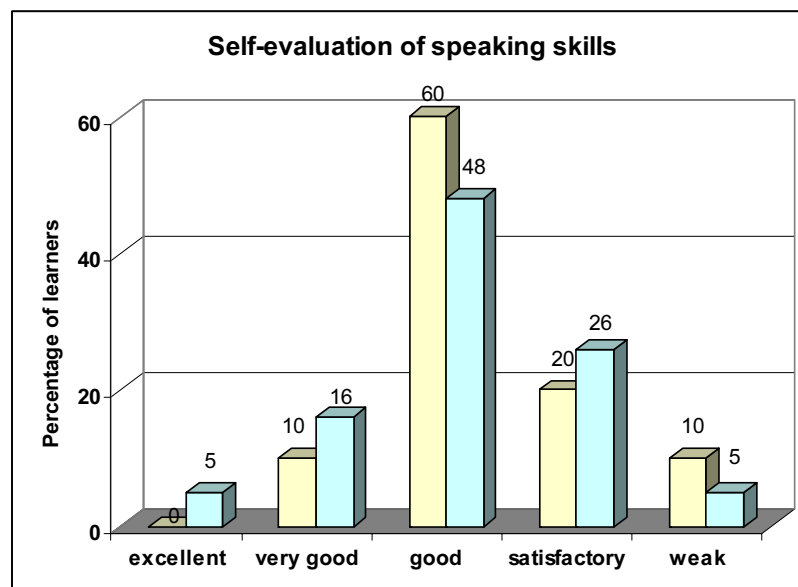


Chart 3. Self-evaluation of students' speaking skills. (1st bars show research data collected in 2004, and 2nd bars – corresponding data collected in 2008).

Learners' speaking skills seem to undergo a positive change. This fact is certified by the data in Chart 3 which shows that there are more students who have excellent or very good speaking skills, and fewer learners whose speaking skills are weak. Communicative approach to teaching General English in secondary schools bears fruit in developing better speakers of English. The learners' aptitudes for fluent speaking help them to convey ideas accurately and clearly without any breaks off in communication.

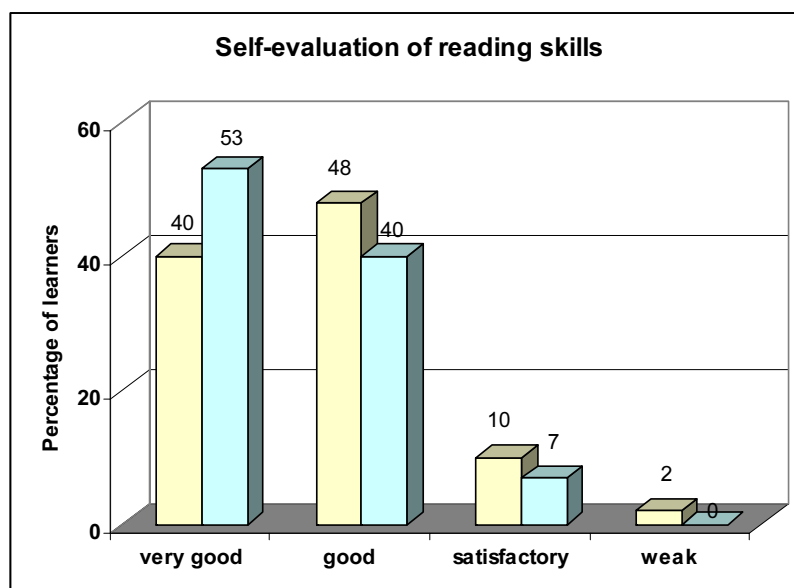


Chart 4. Self-evaluation of students' reading skills. (1st bars show research data collected in 2004, and 2nd bars – corresponding data collected in 2008).

As can be seen from the findings shown in Chart 3, students self-assess their reading skills favorably. Majority of learners feel their reading skills are either very good or good, and only a slight minority of learners (7% against 10%) admit having satisfactory skills.

This trend to highly evaluate one's reading ability has been described in the linguistic literature. It is thought that students overestimate their reading ability basically because they are not aware what reading skill involves. As a matter of fact, students usually find it difficult to read between the lines, i.e. to infer and use critical thinking skills for interpreting the material they have read.

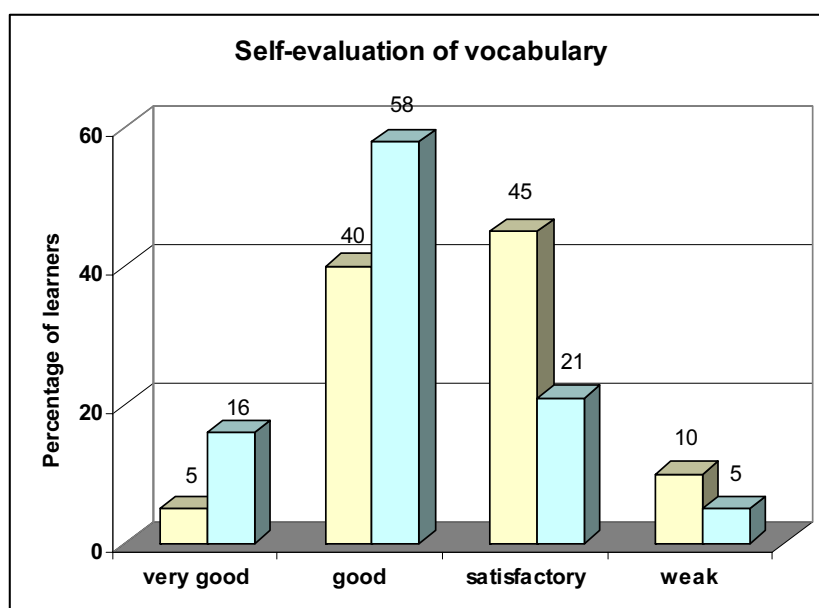


Chart 5. Self-evaluation of ESP vocabulary. (1st bars show research data collected in 2004, and 2nd bars – corresponding data collected in 2008).

The general trend in self-evaluating ESP vocabulary in current research is positive: 74% of respondents assess their ESP vocabulary as either very good or good in comparison to 45% in 2004, and fewer learners feel it is not appropriate – 26% against 55% in the past. This is a significant improvement in learning ESP. Students' reflections reveal their enjoyment in learning which brings positive outcome (Kavaliauskienė, Kaminskienė, Anusienė, 2007).

The natural question that emerges looking at these findings is how realistic learners are in their self-evaluation. There are two ways of answering this question. One is to test learners' skills formally, i.e. by administering appropriate tests, and another is to process their responses statistically using the appropriate methods of statistics. Both possibilities have been explored in this study.

The best indication of learners' competence is their performance in various situations. Therefore, more reliable information on learning outcomes could be obtained if students' performance were to be compared with the data of their perceptions of task accomplishment and self-evaluation.

Table 1. **Comparison of students' self-evaluation of listening skills** (data from Chart 1) **with their average performance in listening tasks, and comparison of self-evaluation of writing skills** (data from Chart 2) **with average performance in writing tasks.** (These findings refer to the current research in 2008, and the number of respondents is 36).

Evaluation Mark	Self-evaluation of listening	Average performance in listening tasks	Self-evaluation of writing	Average performance in writing tasks
Excellent	-	-	-	-
Very good	10%	15%	-	10%
Good	48%	50%	74%	50%
Satisfactory	32%	35%	26%	20%
Weak	10%	-	-	20%

Two language skills are compared in Table 1. Interestingly, there are no any significant discrepancies between self-assessment of listening skills and performance in listening tasks (columns 2 and 3). On average, half of the students demonstrate good listening skills in listening tests, but there are none poor, although 10% of students assess their listening ability as weak. However, there are not any excellent performers, either, so students seem to estimate their skills reliably. The data of learners' performance in writing tasks is compared with their self-evaluation in columns 4 and 5 of Table 1. Learners underestimate the quality of their writing skills: 10% get very good grades, however there are some poor performers: 20% of students demonstrate weak writing skills. The percentage of satisfactory performers (20%) is close to the estimated self-assessment (26%), which shows learners' awareness of writing ability. Learners' reflective practice provides information on the major difficulties that students face in writing tasks, which are grammar, vocabulary misuse, prepositions, and inability to produce coherent and cohesive written work (Kavaliauskienė, Kaminskienė, Anusienė 2007).

An application of statistical processing to learners' responses aimed at estimating the degree of relationship between two sets of rank-ordered data. Two groups of students were chosen at random for statistical study, and Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients ρ were calculated. As it is known, a correlation coefficient indicates the degree of relationship between two sets of data. If there is no correlation, a value of correlation coefficient is 0.00, and if the correlation is perfect, it is equal to 1.00. It is worth noting that the higher the value ρ , the better correlation between the two sets of data, and the lower the value ρ , the worse the degree of correlation. The calculation results demonstrated that values of correlation coefficients ρ vary from the lowest value of 0.85 to the largest value of 0.95. The high values of ρ confirm that such relationships exist: correlation coefficients ρ are high. In other words, the Spearman rank-order correlation shows there is correlation between learners' skills. However it is important to bear in mind that statistical data are no more than an estimation of the degree to which two sets of data are related. Moreover, it is essential to be aware that correlation coefficients do not indicate causality.

Overall, it can be concluded that learners' judgments on their performance are realistic and there is a good correlation between language skills. The software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to compute the values of the Means, Standard Deviations and the levels of significance. It was found that the Means show high values on the Likert scale, and Standard Deviations are close within the error limits. The levels of two-tailed significance are about .001.

4. Teacher's profile and self-evaluation

Teacher's self-evaluation is an important part of self-development. A self-contained teacher must think about her teaching methods, manner, intentions, beliefs, and seek perfection in all her class activities.

As it has been mentioned in the literature review, teachers can evaluate themselves by answering Teacher's Perspectives Inventory, which consists of 45 questions and is available online. My Teaching Perspectives profiles can be viewed in (Kavaliauskienė 2005). Dominant perspectives in teacher's profiles are Transmission and Nurturing, and two back-up perspectives – Apprenticeship and Developmental. The recessive perspective is Social Reform. This is quite a natural outcome because in teaching English the teachers are not concerned with changes in society. The results certify the consistency of scores. Teaching Perspectives Inventory has been widely recommended for teachers' self-evaluation and self-awareness.

5. Evaluation of teaching by students

Evaluation of teaching by learners is part of quality assurance in higher education. Students' evaluation of teaching is the result of administering an anonymous Course Experience Questionnaire. For the convenience of reading this article, the statements of this questionnaire and students' responses are shown in Table 2. As it has already been mentioned, the number of the current respondents was 36, and the number of the respondents in 2004 was 60.

In accordance with the standard approach, five degrees of variations on Linkert scales were used: strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree, strongly agree. Figures in columns of Table 2 indicate the summative percentage of learners who ticked appropriate responses. The current data are compared with the data of the similar study in 2004.

Table 2. **Teacher's evaluation by learners: comparison of responses in 2004 and 2008.** (The number of respondents in 2004 was 60, and in 2008 it was 36).

Survey questions	Strongly disagree + disagree 2004	Strongly disagree + disagree 2008	Not sure 2004	Not sure 2008	Agree + Strongly agree 2004	Agree + Strongly agree 2008
Teaching is good	-	-	12%	3%	88%	97%
Goals are clear	6%	-	-	7%	94%	93%
Testing is appropriate	7%	-	-	10%	93%	90%
Workload is normal	10%	7%	-	19%	90%	74%
Lessons satisfaction is good	5%	-	-	10%	95%	90%

The current negative response (disagree + strongly disagree) refers to workload, but the percentage of respondents is smaller. The learners' positive responses (agree + strongly agree) on the quality of teaching, clarity of goals, the quality of formal testing and the lesson satisfaction are similar now and in the past. However, there are some significant differences in evaluating the workload: fewer students (74% against 90%) think that it is normal, i.e. 'not sure' responses amount to 19%. This fact is understandable. The amount of information that students have to study keeps increasing, and it takes students more time to learn it, therefore, the feelings of overload persist.

Evaluation of teaching has the potential to contribute positively to improvement of teaching by stimulating teacher development. Teachers need constantly to question and evaluate their teaching in order to establish better practice. There is an opinion that a successful teacher should be able to keep most of the learners happy most of the time. As a result, some changes in teaching have been introduced as the outcome of this evaluation. First focus was on the issue of the "negotiated syllabus". The term means that the content of a course is a matter of discussion and negotiation between a teacher and students, in accordance with the needs and wishes of the students in conjunction with the judgment and expertise of the teacher. The second productive focus was to get regular feedback from the students and adjust teaching to their rotational needs. It implies the following: 1) requesting learners' interim feedback regularly; 2) encouraging their reflective practice; 3) introducing some changes into

formal testing by replacing it by an alternative assessment, which proves to be beneficial in many respects (Kavaliauskienė, Kaminskienė, Anusienė, 2007).

6. Monitoring students' progress

An important factor in effective learning is monitoring students' progress. Learners not only need to recognize their lacks but also figure out their accomplishments. Student's success is bound to lead to an enhanced motivation and confidence boost. Success is vital in the process of language learning because it fosters learners' positive attitudes.

Chart 5 shows the end-of the course self-evaluation of learners' progress in 2004 – first columns, and the interim self-evaluation of progress in 2008 – second columns. It should be emphasized that the data are not for the same groups of students. Interestingly, learners' achievements in all language skills in 2008 are overwhelmingly higher than in 2004. Partly this phenomenon can be explained by the fact that current learners have better background knowledge of English and profound skills than the learners had a few years ago.

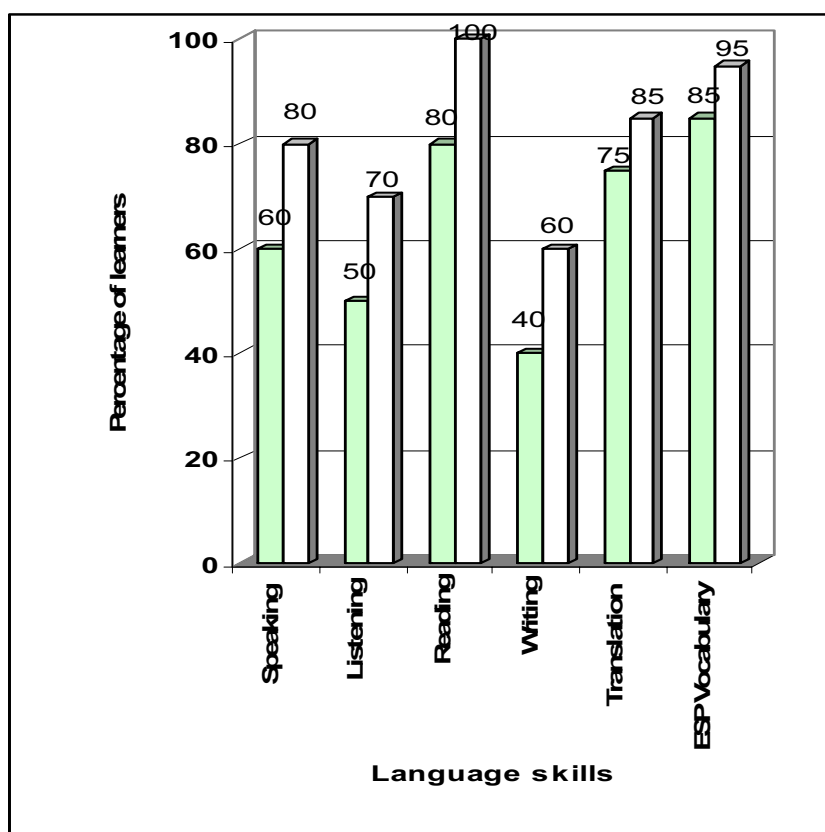


Chart 6. Success experience in learning English for Specific Purposes. (1st columns show the data for 2004, the number of respondents was 60; 2nd columns show the data for 2008, the number of respondents was 36).

It is worth noting that students' awareness of their progress enhances self-esteem and motivation and encourages further learning. Therefore, monitoring learner attainment is important part of quality integration which fosters linguistic development. On this understanding, English teachers should be encouraged to monitor learners' progress and gain more experience in this area.

Conclusions

Current research shows that learners have been able to assess their performance in language skills successfully. Monitoring students' progress is an important part of improving learning quality: it helps to raise awareness of success areas in language acquisition. Ongoing surveys of attainments contribute significantly to learners' linguistic development.

The statistical treatment of evaluation of teaching by learners from the data obtained by employing Linkert scale method has produced high values of means and reasonable dispersions of standard deviations which indicate learners' favorable perception of teaching quality. Evaluation of teaching by learners has the potential to contribute positively to improvement of teaching by promoting critical thinking and stimulating teacher development. As the outcome of teacher's evaluation, some changes in teaching have been introduced, such as learners' interim feedback and adjustment of formal testing, i.e. replacing it by the alternative assessment.

The significance of research findings lies in necessity to attract attention to the issues of continuity of quality integration in teaching and learning at tertiary level and to the importance of self-assessment and evaluation in learning and teaching professional English. Self-assessment proves to be the essential component of quality learning because it encourages learners to think about their own progress and find one's own ways for improving language skills.

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SPECIALYBĖS KALBOS MOKYMO(SI) KOKYBĖS INTEGRACIJOS TĚSTINUMAS AUKŠTOJOJE MOKYKLOJE

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Mokymo(si) kokybės gerinimas priklauso nuo žmogaus gebėjimo įvertinti savo pažangą, laimėjimus ir realius rezultatus. Aukštųjų mokyklų įsipareigojimai siekti aukštos mokymo(si) kokybės yra svarbus mokymosi visą gyvenimą nuostatos padarinys.

Mokymas turi atitikti studentų lūkesčius, būti inovatyvus, taikyti šiuolaikines technologijas, naudotis mokymosi patirtimi ir ištekliais, palaikyti geros praktikos tradicijas, kūrybingai vertinti mokymosi rezultatus ir siekti jo kokybės.

Mokant(is) užsienio kalbų formuojama studentų lingvistinė kompetencija, kuri priklauso nuo mokymo(si) kokybės. Dėstymui tobulinti reikalingi veiksniai yra dėstytojų mokymo analizė, jų kritinis požiūris į savo mokymą bei kaip dėstymą vertina studentai.

Tyrimų tikslas buvo ištirti mokymo(-si) kokybės integracijos tęstinumą aukštojoje mokykloje. Tuo tikslu buvo nagrinėjami kokybę lemiantys veiksniai, taip pat ankstesnių metų rezultatai lyginami su dabartinių tyrimų duomenimis. Informacija buvo renkama taikant įvairius studentų apklausos ir anketavimo metodus. Buvo surinkta informacija apie respondentų užsienio kalbos žinių bei įgūdžių vertinimą. Šie rezultatai buvo palyginti su studentų formalaus testavimo duomenimis. Toks lyginimas leidžia spręsti, ar studentai realiai vertina savo mokymosi pažangą. Kiti tyrimo aspektai, tai kalbos dėstytojos atlikta dėstyimo savianalizė, ir kaip dėstytojos mokymą vertina studentai. Tokia tyrimų apimtis leidžia išsiaiškinti kokia mokymo(-si) kokybė.

Straipsnyje pateikiami dabartinių studentų kalbos įgūdžių ir žinių savianalizės rezultatai, kurie yra lyginami su formaliojo testavimo rezultatais bei su kokybės tyrimo rezultatais, atliktais prieš keletą metų su kitomis studentų grupėmis. Darbe aprašomi dėstytojos darbo savianalizės duomenys, ir tai, kaip dėstyimą vertina studentai, nes visi minėti veiksniai lemia mokymo(-si) kokybę. Dabartiniai, t.y. 2008 m. kokybės tyrimų rezultatai, palyginami su 2004 m. atliktais rezultatais. Taip palyginant buvo galima sugretinti tarpinius, t. y. gautus per akademinis metus rezultatus, ir galutinius duomenis (t.y. kursui pasibaigus), ir tuo remiantis padaryti teigiamas išvadas dėl mokymo(-si) kokybės integracijos tęstinumo.

Tyrimo rezultatai įtikinamai rodo, kad studentai sugeba realiai vertinti savo specialybės kalbos žinias ir įgūdžius. Tačiau siekiant gerinti mokymosi kokybę būtina periodiškai atlikti studentų pažangos patikrinimą, kuris padeda besimokantiems suvokti savo sėkmės ar nesėkmės priežastis ir tobulinti lingvistinius užsienio kalbos įgūdžius.

Naudojant Linkerto skalės 5 balų sistemos statistiką nustatyta, kad vidurkių vertės yra labai didelės, sklaidos koeficiento vertės yra artimos paklaidų ribose, ir reikšmingumo lygmuo visais atvejais yra apie 0,001.

Kaip dėstytojos mokymą anonimiškai vertina studentai mažai priklauso nuo to, ar atliekamas tarpinis vertinimas mokslo metų viduryje, ar kursui pasibaigus. Tai rodo, jog mokymo kokybei gerinti tikslinga atlikti tokius tyrimus mokymo proceso metu, t. y. dar nepasibaigus kursui, kad būtų galimybė atlikti reikiamus pakitimus mokant konkrečius studentus, į kurių pageidavimus galima atsižvelgti tuojau pat tebedvykstant mokymo procesui.

Atliktų tyrimų reikšmingumas – atkreipti pedagogų dėmesį į savianalizės ir vertinimo įtaką mokymo(-si) kokybei gerinti.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: tęstinumas, mokymo(-si) kokybės integracija, specialybės kalba, vertinimas, savianalizė.