

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES & PUBLIC SPEAKING. COMPARATIVE STUDY

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*The human brain starts working the moment you are born
and never stops until you stand up to speak in public.*

Oscar Wilde

Abstract. *A large part of a university ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course is dedicated to developing public speaking skills. It is mainly done through presentations on students' subject matter. This transferable skill is much appreciated by all professional subject teachers, as well as by future employers. Some students of Mykolas Romeris University -The Debate Club members – have achieved impressive results on the national and international level. However, in practice during classes and seminars very few students are willing to present their research findings in public at the beginning of their academic undertaking. The authors made a comparative study of responses by Lithuanian and multinational foreign students, who study at Mykolas Romeris University. The aims of the research have been to identify the students' attitude towards academic public speaking in English and the causes of a sometimes reluctant/poor accomplishment of the task. The objectives of this research were to examine learners' views on preparing and delivering presentations; to explore strengths and weaknesses in public speaking of different cultural background learners' and to deduce some*

elements vital in teaching to master speaking skills. The research employed a survey of students' responses to a specially designed questionnaire. These responses revealed learners' attitudes towards speaking in front of the audience and the perceptions of individual difficulties in preparation and delivery stages. Learners' responses to questions are diagrammed in charts and presented in the article.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes, public speaking.*

Introduction

Every academic year with a new intake of freshmen some basic issues of making presentations and speaking in public demand attention. Initially, in a new academic setting very few ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students are eager to present their research findings in public due to the lack of self-confidence for this activity or of fear to speak in public.

Moreover, it is believed that representatives of some nations due to the cultural background and conventions are quite reluctant to speak in public, even if it is only in subject classes. With the growing quantities of joint study programmes at Mykolas Romeris University and our students going out to study abroad, it is important to identify the major difficulties in making presentations and to deal with them, developing an overall strategy applicable in multicultural class settings.

This paper addresses the research into learners', who come from different cultural background, attitudes to speaking in public in English (a foreign language for them) on professional subject topics and learners' perceptions of experienced gains and lacks. Evaluation of students' speaking in front of the audience allows teachers to determine their strengths and weaknesses and work out the ways of teaching effective presentations.

The outcome of this research is identifying problem areas in making presentations, drawing general outline of good practice in helping learners' master public speaking in ESP and highlighting the most effective tools for it.

1. Review of Literature and the Objectives of the Research

Skills of speaking in front of the audience can be taught like any other language skills, although the process is slow, needs systematic training and guidance. There is a wealth of publications on the issues of making presentations and how to prepare one's talk and deliver it. The instructions are quite straightforward and include tips on, firstly, how to prepare oneself, secondly, how to choose the material, and thirdly, how to prepare the presentation. Nevertheless, learners need some systematic training

in preparing and performing – from planning and introducing a topic to concluding and handling questions. Learning to make well-organized presentations in front of the audience takes a lot of practice.

Public speaking is a productive skill aiming at communication. For communication in a foreign language to be successful, ‘a speaker needs to be familiar with linguistic and cultural backgrounds, that are shared by native speakers, and has to obey certain rules and conventions, that are not written down anywhere, nor are easy to define’¹.

Learning to speak in a foreign language differs from learning other subjects basically due to its social nature. Language has always been part of person’s identity, and speaking is used to convey this identity to other people. ‘Exposing language imperfections in front of others, person’s self-image becomes more vulnerable, and it leads to anxiety’². The key reasons for anxiety in public speaking appear to be lack of confidence, unfamiliar situation, sense of isolation, self-consciousness, fear of looking foolish, and fear of the consequences, i.e. being judged by others.

Since oral production is open to audience scrutiny, speakers are concerned with various difficulties such as grammar, lexis, and pronunciation. Referring to pronunciation problems of language learners J. Morley points out that ‘it is well documented that speakers with poor intelligibility have long-range difficulties in developing into confident and effective oral communicators; some never do’³.

It is claimed that every day the average person spends about 25 percent of time speaking and listening to other people. And yet, when polled, the number one fear of many people is that of public speaking.

In presentations, learners have to meet the accepted standards for organization of a presentation⁴, but teaching them requires a lot of patience. Before delivering critical remarks and giving feedback, a good teacher should remember the famous quotation by Theodore H. White: ‘the most difficult thing in the world is to know how to do a thing and to watch someone else does it wrong without comment’. In other words, before giving feedback, it is wise to allow students to use *self-assessment* and *peer-assessment* techniques to evaluate their performance by commenting on their gains and lacks. Even withdrawing feedback might be more beneficial to a learner than teacher’s critical response in front of the peers. The guidelines for giving feedback are summarized by C. McNamara⁵. Effective feedback 1) implies clarity, 2) emphasizes the positive features,

1 Harmer, J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. 3rd edition. Pearson Education Limited, 2001, p. 246.

2 Arnold, J. Speak Easy: How to Ease Students into Oral Production [interactive]. *HLT Magazine*. 2003, 2(March): 2 [accessed 12-02-2011]. <<http://www.hltmagazine.net>>.

3 Morley, J. *A Multidimensional Curriculum Design for Speech-Pronunciation Instruction: Pronunciation Pedagogy and Theory*. Morley, J. (ed.). Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 1994, p. 67.

4 Comfort, J. *Effective Presentations*. Video Course. Oxford University Press, 1995.

5 McNamara, C. *Basic Guidelines for Giving Feedback* [interactive]. 2005 [accessed 12-02-2011]. <<http://www.mapnp.org/library/commskills/feedback>>.

3) is specific, 4) focuses on behavior rather than the person, 5) is descriptive rather than evaluative, and 6) is careful with advice.

There have been few studies not only on preparing for, delivering presentations and giving/receiving feedback: D. P. Carmody's⁶ study and description of students' views on the value of undergraduate presentations in terms of gains and regrets stands out among them. However, there is a lack of studies on how students of different nationalities and coming from different cultural backgrounds perceive academic public speaking in a foreign language. Therefore, the objectives of this research are:

- a) to examine different nationality learners' views on preparing and delivering presentations.
- b) to explore strengths and weaknesses in public speaking of those different cultural background learners'.
- c) to deduce some elements vital in teaching learners to master speaking skills.

2. Respondents and Research Methods

The respondents were 83 students of Mykolas Romeris University: 61 the 1st and 2nd year day- time students at the Faculty of Social Work and 22 foreign students of different nationalities at the Faculty of Law.

Research employed a survey of learners' attitudes to speaking in front of the audience and perceptions of individual difficulties in preparation and delivery stages. For this purpose, students were requested to answer different but straightforward questions of a specially designed questionnaire (Appendix).

Students' presentations were assessed throughout the academic year. The analysis of survey data and students' continuous performance helped to highlight the differences in attitude of Lithuanian and multinational students towards public speaking, re-assess effectiveness of teaching speaking skills and outline essential techniques and skills to be taught during ESP classes. The findings are presented in the following sections.

3. Research Data and Discussion

Learners' responses to questions are diagrammed in charts for clarity, and findings are discussed below. In all charts, data are presented in double columns – the first (black) column refers to Lithuanian students, and the second (grey) – to foreigners.

6 Carmody, D. P. Student Views on the Value of Undergraduate Presentations [interactive]. *Psi Chi Newsletter*. 1996, 21(3) [accessed 12-02-2011]. <http://www.kon.org/stud_views.html>; <http://www.spc.edu/~carmody_d/psichi.html>.

Question 1. Do you like making presentations? a) yes; b) no.

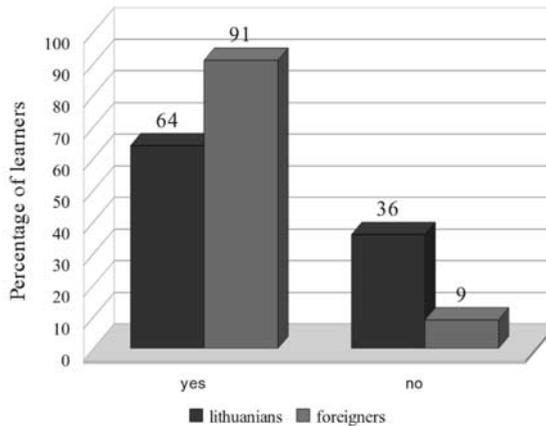


Chart 1. Do you like making presentations?

Responses to this direct question are shown in chart 1. As has already been indicated above, this chart shows two double bars. Each first bar refers to students who study at faculty of Social Work, and each second bar – to foreign students who study at Law Faculty. Interestingly, only 64% of Lithuanian students like making presentations in comparison to overwhelming number of foreign students – 91%, and 36% dislike this activity. The causes of dislikes are examined next.

Question 2. Why do you dislike preparing presentations? a) it takes a lot of time; b) using PowerPoint is problematic; c) it deprives me of leisure; d) other.

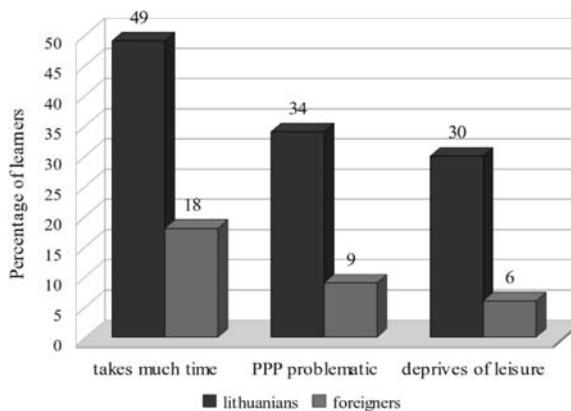


Chart 2. Why do you dislike preparing presentations?

Learners' responses are shown in chart 2. All respondents prefer choosing answers provided in a questionnaire. The number of local learners who find preparation of presentations time consuming is 49%, depriving them of leisure - 30%, and using PowerPoint software problematic - 34%, exceed the percentage of foreign students. The majority of Lithuanian students had not much practice with PPP software before, but there is a quite a number of foreign students who had not been required to make PPP at their home universities, either. Accordingly, the main instructions on PPP and the new software Prezi.com⁷ usage have to be given in class or specially dedicated time for student consultations.

Next question addresses learners' difficulties in preparing presentations.

Question 3. What difficulties do you have in preparing presentations? a) searching for relevant materials; b) selecting information; c) using a PowerPoint software; d) memorizing the contents of my talk; e) boredom of rehearsing a presentation; f) other.

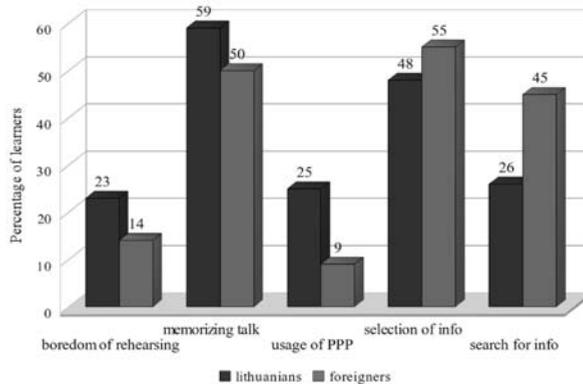


Chart 3. What difficulties do you have in preparing presentations?

Lower of two double bars shows responses of Lithuanian students, and upper bars – of foreign students. Searching for information (26% and 45%, respectively), selecting appropriate information (46% and 55%, respectively), and memorizing the contents of one's talk (59% and 50%, respectively), seem to be the major problems that learners face in preparing presentations. Boredom of rehearsing is a concern to about a quarter of respondents (5th double column in chart 3).

Learners' possible difficulties in the stage of delivery have been examined by analyzing responses to the next question.

7 Prezi's Education Exchange [interactive]. [accessed 12-02-2011]. <<http://edu.prezi.com>>.

Question 4. What difficulties do you have in presenting your talk? a) fear of speaking in public; b) worrying about questions to be asked; c) evaluation mark; d) reaction of the audience; e) other.

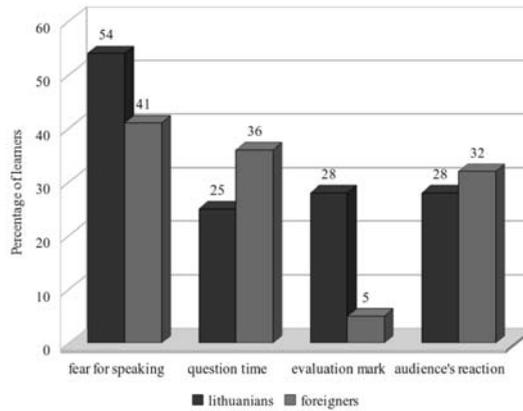


Chart 4. What difficulties do you have in delivering your presentations?

The data are displayed in chart 4. As it has been anticipated, the major difficulty is fear of speaking (54% and 41%, respectively). This finding is quite significant. In the process of instruction, teachers have to encourage learners by giving praise and enhance their self-confidence using well known techniques of psychological persuasion and reassurance. Only about the third of respondents are concerned with the question time (2nd pair of bars) and the reaction of the audience (4th pair of bars). Evaluation mark is important to 28% of Lithuanians and 5% of foreign students. Students’ feelings after delivering presentations have also been examined.

Question 5. After your presentation, do you have a feeling of a) success; b) failure; c) relief; d) satisfaction; e) pleasure in sharing research with a receptive audience; f) other?

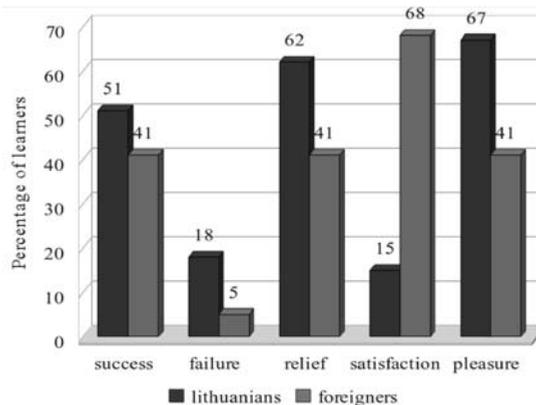


Chart 5. How do you feel after presentations?

Responses are demonstrated in Chart 5. Good news is that feelings are largely positive: about half of learners feel they were successful. Feelings of relief, satisfaction and pleasure are predominant (this is true about more than simple majority of the respondents). Satisfaction in the sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy and pleasure in sharing their findings with a receptive audience amounts to nearly two thirds of the respondents, which is notably higher percentage if compared to a research conducted by D.P. Carmody⁸. However, 18% of Lithuanian students experience a sense of failure and only 15% are satisfied with their accomplishment, which is quite worrying. These results imply a necessity of negotiating with learners the ways of improving their negative perceptions, which also might be due to cultural aspects.

Some students volunteered giving their views under items ‘other’ in the questionnaire. These responses are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Learners’ individual views on presentations expressed under the item ‘other’ of the questionnaire.

No	Students’ Personal Views	Number of Students
1	No difficulties	1
2	Presentations are useful and important	10
3	Will use PPP software in the future	20
4	A good way of learning to speak in public	15
5	Interesting to prepare and deliver	5
6	Lack of general knowledge	1
7	Unable to plan the time	1
8	Unable to organize information	1
9	Feel anxious before presentations	2
10	Afraid of forgetting something	4
11	Afraid of saying something incorrectly	3
12	Not sure about contents	1
13	Do not have a PC at home	13

Surprisingly, only 1 student has no difficulties at all (1st row). Some additional information has been mentioned: 10 students included usefulness and importance of presentations (row No 2), 20 students will use the PPP software in the future (row No 3), 15 students think that presentations help them learn to speak fluently and accurately (row No 4), and 5 students find it interesting to prepare presentations and deliver them. Among students’ worries, there is anxiety (9th row), fear of forgetting something important (10th row), and fear of saying something incorrectly (11th row). Very few students lack knowledge (6th row) or are unable to plan or organize (7th and 8th rows). Not having a

8 Carmody, D. P., *supra* note 6.

personal computer (PC) at home complicates matters of preparing presentations for 13 students (13th row).

As it has already been mentioned, only a few students at Faculty of Social Work were familiar with the PPP software, so the rest had to be instructed how to use it. Moreover, the majority of both Lithuanian and international students did not have any experience in making presentations, either. Therefore, the first step in teaching presentations involved a thorough examination and practice of how to meet the standards⁹. By the end of this introductory course and some training on giving short (2 to 5 minutes) talks¹⁰ students were familiar with the common standards which are listed below in the form of public speaking evaluation.

4. Recommendations for Development of Students' Presentations

Students are expected to meet the general standards in presentations. However, a thorough analysis of learners' public speaking on various topics throughout academic year enabled us to highlight students' weaknesses which should be kept in mind and need a constant attention while helping students prepare for the presentations: memorized message, unnatural ('written like') speech, frequent register errors, reading from notes or spelling errors in PPP guidelines, mispronunciation of terms and collocations.

Our experience has proved that in order to help with presentations students need a *checklist* for preparing and delivering a presentation and feedback after delivering it. Checklist covers content and organization of a presentation, interaction with audience, register (level of formality), accuracy of grammatical structures and range of vocabulary, fluency of speech, impeccable pronunciation, and high-quality support materials.

The importance of *feedback* has already been mentioned before. Feedback can come from teachers, peers, the self. There is an opinion that feedback is beneficial under controlled conditions, but it does not always increase achievement. Some researchers feel that feedback helps learners to correct their errors and refine skills. In theory, feedback is supposed to be prompt, i.e. provided immediately after presentation.

We think that good practice in giving feedback is to delay teacher's feedback and ask learners themselves to evaluate their presentations. It might be either self-feedback or peer-feedback. Teacher's choice of appropriate and timely feedback depends on a number of factors such as student's personality, pedagogical intuition, class atmosphere, students' attitudes to a particular person, etc. Feedback to shy students might even be avoided or given individually after the class, because listening to teacher's feedback for students is often concomitant with feelings of fear or anxiety. Harsh remarks, admonition or critical comment might have disastrous effects on learners' future performance.

9 Comfort, J., *supra* note 4.

10 Zhang, Y. Reading to Speak: Integrating Oral Communication Skills [interactive]. *English Teaching Forum*. 2009, 47(1): 32–34 [accessed 12-02-2011]. <<http://forum.state.gov>>.

In ESP classes, learners' willingness to speak out depends to a large extent on how they feel about taking a social and linguistic risk. Learners who had experienced negative emotions in language classes in the past (for instance, at school) are often reluctant to make oral contributions. Teachers' duty is to do their best to enhance learners' self-esteem and to encourage every single effort of shy students to participate in expressing their opinion or taking part in a discussion. Only pedagogical intuition and goodwill can guide teachers in fulfilling such a sophisticated task.

Conclusions

The attitudes of Lithuanian and foreign students towards public speaking in the form of making academic presentations have been studied in this paper.

One of the aims of the paper was to find out the attitude of Lithuanian and international students' towards public speaking.

The comparative study of applying questionnaires to Lithuanian and international students revealed some issues which might be due to cultural/psychological background – i.e. reluctance of the Lithuanian students to talk in public and their expressed dissatisfaction with a result accomplished. Therefore, the need for a teacher to enhance learners' self-esteem and self-confidence emerged. By using all pedagogical means and skills, teacher can help in mitigating/reducing anxiety.

Students' strengths and weaknesses in making PPPs have been researched. The most aspired to strengths in delivery of presentations include fluent and accurate speech, efficient audio and video aids, choice of interesting materials, ability to deal with tricky questions. Observed weaknesses in delivery of presentations are memorized messages, unnatural 'written' like speech, reading from notes or screen, errors in pronunciation and spelling. By revealing the most troublesome areas, the third objective of the study was aimed at - to highlight the most urgent and important recommendations for teaching public speaking in academic settings.

It should be mentioned that, by completing the survey, students' awareness of their needs, lacks and wants in learning to speak in public was raised. It also led to teachers' reflection on urgent teaching changes in the perspective of exchange/degree programmes in English/joint studies. For teachers three important facts have emerged: first, some learners have difficulties in selecting information; second, memorizing the contents of a presentation, and third, they experience a fear of speaking in public. Teachers' duty is to tackle this conundrum by providing timely assistance and necessary training.

Both peer- and self-feedback, as well as teachers' delayed/given individually feedback can contribute to the personal growth of the students and the pleasure of having their work accepted and appreciated by a receptive audience.

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VIEŠO KALBĖJIMO GEBĖJIMŲ UGDYMAS MOKANT/IS DALYKINĖS ANGLŲ KALBOS. LYGINAMOJI STUDIJA

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Santrauka. *Mykolo Romerio universitete dalykinės užsienio kalbos studijose didelis dėmesys skiriamas viešo kalbėjimo įgūdžiams lavinti. Daug laiko ir pastangų skiriama studentų gebėjimams daryti pranešimus ir pristatyti studijuojamo dalyko (teisės, verslo, psichologijos, socialinio darbo) temas anglų kalba.*

Šis bendrasis gebėjimas, neabejotinai, yra reikalingas visose studijuojamose srityse ir vertinamas ne tik atskirų disciplinų dėstytojų, bet ir būsimųjų darbdavių, nes gebėjimas reikšti savo mintis įtikinamais argumentais yra svarbus veiksnys siekiant identifikuoti problemas bei siūlyti racionalius jų sprendimo būdus, priimant atsakingus sprendimus įvairiose gyvenimo srityse.

Dalis Mykolo Romerio universiteto studentų dalyvauja Debatų klubo veikloje ir puikiai atstovauja universitetui įvairiuose turnyruose, vykstančiuose Lietuvoje ir užsienio valstybėse, televizijos diskusijose, kituose renginiuose, spaudoje.

Tačiau pastebėta, kad studijų pradžioje tik nedaugelis studentų noriai pristato savo tyrinėjimų ir apibendrinimų rezultatus viešai prieš auditoriją. Išryškėjo ir kai kurie lietuvių ir užsienio šalių studentų, kurie universitete mokosi pagal mainų arba jungtines programas, elgesio skirtumai.

Tyrimo tikslas buvo sužinoti ir išanalizuoti lietuvių ir užsienio šalių studentų požiūrį į viešą kalbėjimą abiem studentų grupėms svetima anglų kalba, pasirengimo pranešimui ir jo

teikimo auditorijai aspektus, išsamiai išnagrinėti silpnuosius ir stipriuosius skirtingų kultūrų kalbėtojų / pranešėjų viešo kalbėjimo elementus ir parengti rekomendacijas, kaip geriau ir efektyviau padėti lavinti viešo kalbėjimo gebėjimus dalykinės užsienio kalbos pratybose.

Tyrimui atlikti buvo sukurtas ir pateiktas studentams specialus klausimynas. Straipsnyje penkiose diagramose grafiškai vaizduojami lietuvių ir užsienio šalių studentų klausimyno atsakymų rezultatai bei jų lyginamoji analizė.

Gana netikėtai išryškėjo kelios tendencijos: nemažai studentų susiduria su sunkumais, atrinkdami dalykinę medžiagą savo pranešimams (nepakankami informacijos paieškos ir šaltinių analizės gebėjimai); dalis studentų sunkiai įsimena savo pranešimų medžiagą (dėl nepakankamo informacijos suvokimo pateikiama netinkamo lygio informacija). Netikėtai išryškėjo ir kita – psichologinio pobūdžio – problema: beveik visi studentai patiria nerimo ir netgi baimės jausmą viešai kalbėdami prieš auditoriją svetima kalba. Lietuvių respondentų šis baimės jausmas ir apskritai nenoras daryti pranešimą yra labai ryškus: viešo kalbėjimo baimės jausmą nurodo 54 proc. lietuvių ir 41 proc. užsienio studentų; norą viešai kalbėti išreiškė net 91 proc. užsienio studentų ir tik 64 proc. lietuvių respondentų. Tačiau tik menka lietuvių studentų dalis (28 proc.) baimę ir nenorą sieja su vertinimo pažymiu. Darytina išvada, kad tai susiję su kultūrinės aplinkos ypatumais.

Atsakydami į klausimyną daugelis respondentų pažymėjo, kokie jų pagrindiniai poreikiai, rengiantis viešam kalbėjimui; kokių gebėjimų jiems labiausiai trūksta ir kokius viešo kalbėjimo gebėjimus jie pageidautų lavinti užsienio kalbų pratybose, kad galėtų tinkamai pristatyti būsimos specialybės srities dalykinę temą.

Apdorojant respondentų atsakymus, išryškėjo neatidėliotinų pokyčių mokymo procese reikmė, todėl straipsnyje pateikiamos ir gerosios praktikos lavinant viešo kalbėjimo gebėjimus rekomendacijos. Šiuo požiūriu ypač akcentuotini grįžtamojo vertinimo aspektai.

Straipsnyje siūlomos rekomendacijos aktualios aukštosios mokyklos studijų procese: jos turėtų būti taikomos ne tik dalykinės užsienio kalbos, bet ir kitų specialybės dalykų studijose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *dalykinės anglų kalbos dėstymas, viešas kalbėjimas.*

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Galina Kavaliauskienė, Mykolo Romerio universiteto Humanitarinių mokslų instituto Užsienio kalbų katedros docentė. Mokslinių tyrimų kryptys: specialybės anglų kalbos mokymas (is): studentų savianalizė, vertimo problemos, alternatyvus ir formalus testavimas, mokymosi visą gyvenimą veiksniai, mokymo (-si) kokybė.

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