# Language Exchange Activities via E-mail between ESP Classes: Preparing Power Point Presentations

## Galina Kavaliauskienė and Vilhelmina Vaičiūnienė

**Abstract.** Language exchange activities via e-mail achieve several language learning purposes, e.g. reading, writing, spelling, grammar, vocabulary. E-mail correspondence enhances collaboration, involves in real life communication within the formal educational course.

In a meaningful context and peer-to-peer communication between e-pals, e-mail tasks provide a genuine exchange of views between key partners and motivate learners to communicate clearly.

This article will address the findings of the research into e-mail exchange between students in the ESP classes of different specializations. The major objective of this research has been to investigate key partners' ability to negotiate the choice of materials and the content of Power Point presentations on professional topics via e-mail exchanges. Prior to setting an experiment, learners' attitudes to e-learning were surveyed by administering a questionnaire. Analysis of e-mailing between key partners has been carried out, focussing on the scenarios of correspondence. A final stage of this e-mail project is the collaborative delivery of prepared presentations in front of the audience. Learners' self- and peer-assessment of their performance finalizes the outcomes of e-mail project and its impact on the learning process.

## Introduction

Many scholars involved in research studies on education and its improvement are considering the issue of new paradigm of education in the era of technological advancement and information society. The availability of multi-source information (online, IT, Internet, library, video, media, etc.) has a great impact on students' language skills development, providing an opportunity to integrate ICT skills, computer literacy, information literacy into the process of mastering ESP competency.

New challenges of modern society call teachers of ESP to review teaching / learning methods, tailoring them to the learners' needs. E-mail correspondence between students of different specialities increase their abilities and self-confidence to communicate in EFL on content-based topics. Furthermore, it involves students into learning process where the dominating factors are interactivity, student centred learning, critical thinking. Interrelation of the literacies and their impact on language studies have been observed and discussed worldwide focusing on such important aspects as learner autonomy, motivation, and CALL.

**The aim of the research** has been to evaluate the integration of the collaboration of equally skilled ESP learners specializing in different areas of law and the use of ICT and CMC into the second language classroom. This paper describes the research into the language exchange activities via e-mail between two English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes of different specialities.

**The methods** used were as follows: theoretical analysis of the sources related to the use of ICT in learning / teaching and elearning; empirical analysis of e-mail communication between students, evaluation of Power Point presentations and self-assessment questionnaire.

**Research object:** the integration and application of modern technologies in ESP settings with the view to learner autonomy in acquiring vital skills such as mastering Power Point software, negotiating on relevant professional material via e-mail.

**Research objectives**:

1. The respondents' attitudes to the utility of ICT have been surveyed before setting up an experiment on e-mail exchanges for the meaningful communication;

2. The primary accent of this research has been to investigate e-partners' ability to negotiate the choice of materials and the content of Power Point presentations on ESP themes via e-mail exchanges;

3. The peer-to-peer delivery and quality of Power Point presentations in front of the audience have been assessed.

## State-of-the-Art Review on E-learning

In modern scientific literature on education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) three different educational paradigms have been identified:

1.The Technocratic paradigm;

2. The Reformist paradigm;

3. The Holistic paradigm (Aviram and Talmi, 2004). These three clusters of approaches have been grouped according to their view to the use of ICT in education.

The Technocrats treat the ICT revolution as unavoidable fact and discuss about the technocratic matters (number of computers per school or students per computer). The Reformist paradigm views ICT as a tool that encourages a certain attitude to knowledge and learning. The third, Holistic paradigm discusses and presents their socio-cultural,

ideological approach regarding the use of ICT in education. The authors in the third group discuss such questions as values of education and judge the values that ICT revolution brings. They also investigate opponents' attitudes to technologies. One of them claims that technology will have to serve educational purpose not vice versa. They emphasize the idea that the impact of ICT on education and the final outcome very much depends on the way the modern technologies are introduced.

ICT has been associated with the use of the Internet and implies its interactive use for education. Last century ICT was more often referred to as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Nearly all learning today incorporates some 'e'. In the short space since the last century, e-Learning has become the state-of-the-art. Therefore, today's language learning process is impossible or inadequate if it lacks such components as computer, the Internet, or any up-to-date technology.

However, recent statistics indicate that Europeans are unimpressed with e-Learning (The European Training Village Web, (http://www.trainingvillage.go). European views on quality of e-Learning are as follows: 1% – excellent, 5% – very good, one third – good, 46% – fair / poor.

Human communication via computers has been in demand lately. The term Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has been associated with such communication via computers. Two types of CMC – synchronous, where interaction takes place in real time, and asynchronous, where participants are not necessarily online simultaneously, have been distinguished (Simpson, 2002). Synchronous CMC includes online chat and conferencing, while asynchronous CMC – e-mail, mailing lists and discussion forums or groups.

The BBC E-mail Discussion Group, one of the learning via e-mail examples, has been operating since 1997. It is an e-mail discussion group with 2,500 members in 85 countries. The group discusses topics such as lifestyles and the news as well as learning and teaching English. Similarly, Message Boards on the BBC World Service Learning English website allow sharing one's experiences of learning English with people all over the world and asking various questions that are promptly answered by English language practitioners ("E-mail Discussions Group", http://www.bbcworld service.com/learningenglish, 2004).

"E-Tandem Europa" is a project funded by the European Commission. Its objective is to introduce the opportunity of learning a foreign language, not necessarily English, with e-Tandem ("e-Tandem", http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/ etandem, 2004). It has been available since 2001 and become popular with students all over the world.

Keeping up to date with e-learning is a fast-moving discipline on the Internet. The respective site suggests the activities of reading daily e-learning newsletters, online magazines and attending e-learning conferences (eLearning Forum, http://www.internettime.com/e.htm, 2004).

Interpersonal exchanges engage learners in real life communication with key partners. Unfortunately, e-mailing between at random found key pals does not lead to effective learning, and, as a rule, is limited to exchanging personal information. EFL teachers often desire key partners for their students for e-mail communications. Even with suitable key partners, e-mailing can often be problematic in terms of time and reliability of the contacts.

Certainly the most readily accessible key partners for students in a class are their classmates themselves (Porcaro, 2002). E-mail activities within the class can be effectively controlled, and structured communication is easily attainable. Possible disadvantage might be the excessive use of mother tongue in monolingual classes. Moreover, effective control of a structural communication activity may also be difficult. Interesting and productive activities can be done among key partners within the class itself (Porcaro, 2002:41). It is thought that "the level of interest and productivity of lessons can be at least as great among key partners within the class as when partners are from different locations and backgrounds".

At higher levels of English language proficiency, CALL lessons involving English language exchanges by e-mail among students of different specializations seem to be promising.

Learning by e-mail within higher education has been seen as the primary means of online communication between students and between students and teachers. It has been widely used for supporting learners on a formal educational course and for students to submit assignments online.

An effective teaching / learning process must stimulate intellectual curiosity and offer a sence of enjoyment that will move students from passive role of recipients to the active role of builders of knowledge. ICT expand learning options through self-study and have the potential to restore curiosity to education (Technologies for Education, http://ict.aed.org/infocenter/pdfs/TechEdBook.pdf 2002).

A valuable quality of e-mail communication is learners' collaboration. Collaborative learning provides the opportunities for learners and teachers to communicate, discuss and collaborate online – either one-to-one or in groups. It helps to bring together groups of learners for a learning event, i.e. create learning communities (Learning by e-mail in Higher Education, website at the address http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/guide2elearning/email.htm, 2004). The term peer-to-peer learning is used for groups of learners who learn together by setting up connections between the peers.

One of the easiest ways to present information to people is through the use of Power Point Presentation. Power Point in e-learning can be used to create the informational part of a topic. It is considered to be a very easy tool to produce quick and attractive content (Presentations and Streaming media, http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/guide2elearning/ presentations.htm, 2004).

Summing up the reviewed references, the authors of the research support the Holistic approach to the use of ICT in ESP classroom. The major objective of the research, described in the article, has been to investigate key partners' ability to negotiate the choice of materials and the content of Power Point presentations on professional topics via e-

mail exchanges. A final stage has been the collaborative delivery of prepared presentations in front of the audience.

**Novelty of the Research**

The reviewed literature deals with an application of various methods of e-learning. The novelty of our approach is integration of e-learning and ICT for meaningful communication i.e., dealing with not selected information or pedagogically organized texts, online material, hypertexts on professional issues. Students were engaged in research process that required their information searching, analytical skills. This method of learning / teaching emphasizes students' information literacy competences, which develop their language learning potential and improve learning strategies.

Finding up-to-date information within an electronic environment challenge students' abilities to cope with a variety of information sources, select the most relevant and reliable ones. On the other hand, students expand their subject knowledge, develop professional lexicon. The inclusion of ICT and multimedia leads to meaningful, practical language application consequently, increasing motivation for L2 learners. In the literature analysed above these aspects have not been discussed or researched yet.

**Research Organization**

There were two classes of learners of different specialities, who participated in the experiment on language exchange activities via e-mail. Students were grouped in pairs, thus there were 6 pairs in each class, i.e. 24 students altogether.

Six ESP topics were assigned at random to each pair in both classes. Learners were asked to contact their peers via e-mail, negotiate the choice of materials, contents of presentations and prepare Power Point variant for making a public presentation in front of the audience.

Students were requested to send their exchange e-mails to each other and forward them to both teachers, who were able to monitor students' progress in preparation of presentations and analyze learners' difficulties.

Prior to setting an e-mail exchange experiment, learners' attitudes to e-learning were surveyed by administering a questionnaire. The data are to be presented and discussed in the following section.

**Results and Discussion**

Research findings are described in four sections. The first section covers the learners' views on utility of ICT in their studies at the Police Faculty of Law University of Lithuania. The second section deals with analysis of data on students' e-mailing activities and effectiveness of negotiations aiming at preparation of Power Point presentations. The third section describes the students' performance in front of the audience, and the final section presents the data of self- and peer-assessment.

**1 Data on Learners' Attitudes to ICT**

Before setting up an interactive e-mail project, the learners' attitudes to the use of the ICT in the ESP classes were surveyed. There were 6 questions to this survey, and some

data were published earlier (Kavaliauskienė, 2003). New data on the attitudes of students of different specialities have been gathered, and thereinafter these findings are being compared with previously collected data.

For the sake of clarity, the findings are presented by employing bar figures. Each bar figure displays double columns that refer to attitudes of students of two different specialities. The first column shows previously published data by one of us, and the second column – newly obtained results. Earlier findings refer to students who study law and police activities, and new findings – to students who study law and customs activities.

The bar figure 1 indicates the most common locations where learners access the Internet. Majority of respondents, 90% and 100%, respectively, get online at University computer centre, and about the third (29% and 38%, respectively) – at home. Other locations like Internet Cafes, workplace or friend's house are less popular with respondents.
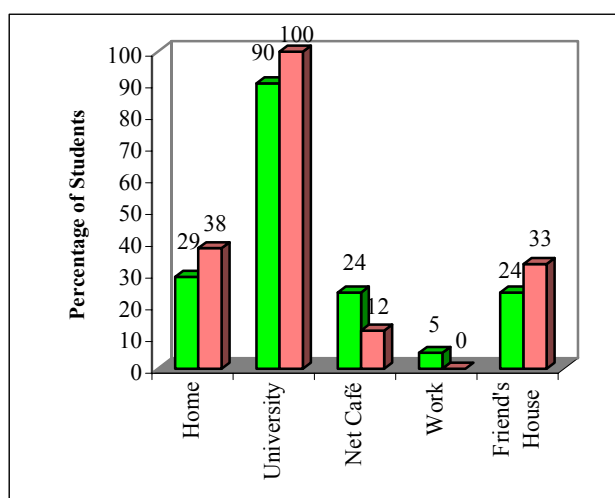


**Figure 1.** Access to the Internet.

The frequency of respondents logging on does not vary much and is presented in the bar figure 2. Similar percentage of learners – about 25% – gets online once or twice a week (first two double columns in this figure), and 25% and 38%, respectively, every day (the last double column in the figure).
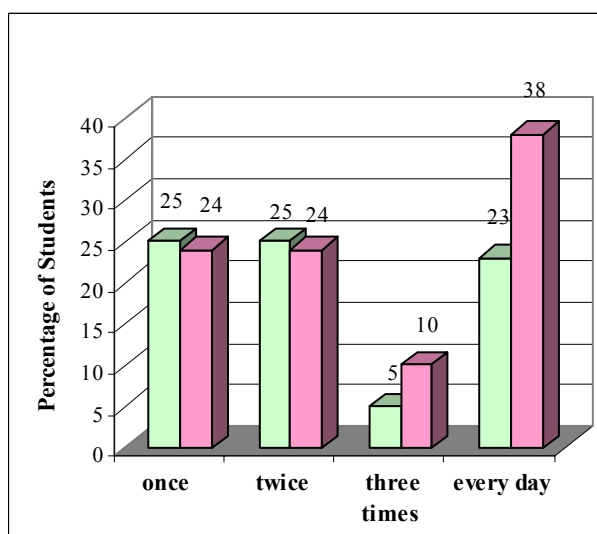


**Figure 2.** Frequency online per week.

On average, about half of learners in both groups spend online 2 hours a day. This is shown by a double column in the middle of the figure 3. A close percentage of respondents get online for an hour, and a small minority – for 3 hours – the first and third sets of columns in the same figure.

Learners' activities online are presented in the figure 4. Respondents' preferences for sending e-mail messages and searching for information are obvious – first and third sets of bars in this figure. Slightly more than half of learners – 52% and 63%, respectively, read newspapers online. Playing games is more popular with learners in a second group. However, a quantitative difference between groups cannot be viewed as significant due to a fewer number of respondents in the new data.
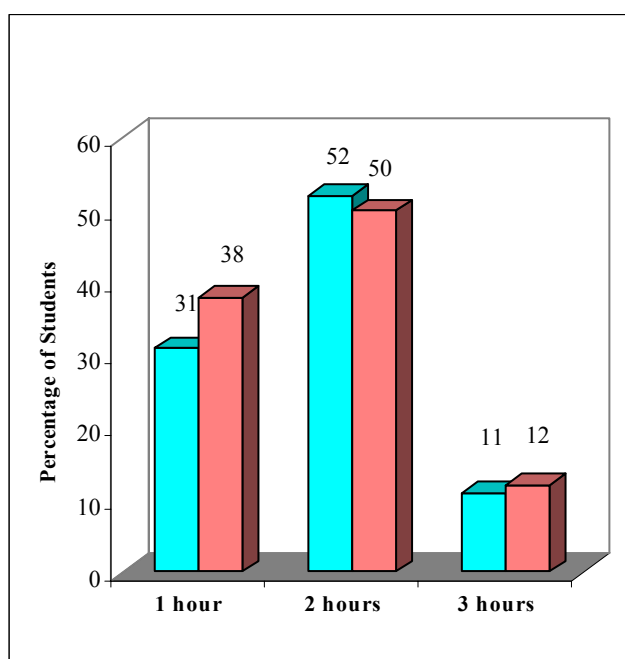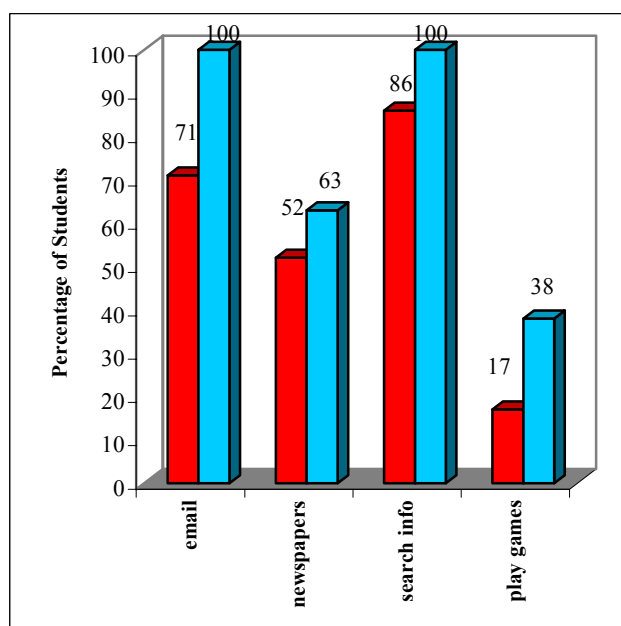


**Figure 3.** Time online per day.



**Figure 4.** Activities online.

Summing up this part of research into respondents' attitudes to using the high-tech, it is worthwhile to emphasize that the data provide essential information: conditions for learners' interactive activities using the Internet are favourable.

## 2 Analysis of E-mail Messages

Students were allotted five weeks to prepare their presentations via e-mail negotiations with e-partners they have never met before. It was a content-based, asynchronous online communication outside the classroom activities. The purpose of e-mail communication between key pals was the exchange of information and negotiation of content and choice of material for the final stage of the project – delivery of presentations.

Having no opportunity to meet face-to-face learners had to plan their final product of the project – a Power Point presentation. Learners could enjoy full independence in use of information sources, choice of material, frequency of e-mail correspondence. E-mail provided students with an opportunity to interact with their key pals in the 'specialist' language, thus increasing their fluency in writing on professional topics. Teachers have been able to monitor learners' progress in preparation of their presentations via e-mails forwarded to them. There has been no teachers' interference into students' activities.

52 e-mail letters were exchanged by the participants of the project in the allotted period. However, the frequency of correspondence between partners differed greatly. The most active learners communicated on regular basis sending 15 e-mails, whereas one group of learners sent only 3 letters.

Every letter dealt with some kind of information or data on the chosen topic, very often with attached files of information dealing with a specific question. Thus, e-mailing between key pals performed a referential function. The most typical scenarios of correspondence were as follows:

a) introducing;
b) suggestions on the plan for the presentation on the selected theme;
c) exchange of information, website addresses;
d) negotiating the content of the presentation, agreeing or disagreeing on the chosen material;
e) discussing the delivery of the presentation, technical aspects, possible difficulties with Power Point software.

The most challenging aspect of the e-mailing between key partners from two groups of different specializations was students' autonomy and collaborative responsibility in decision making process. All collaboration and e-negotiations proceeded in the learners' spare time at their own convenience.

## 3 Delivery of Presentations

There were six teams of four students who prepared presentations on the following themes: Computer-related Crimes, Money Laundering, Drug Trafficking, War on Terror, Smuggling, and Trafficking in Human Beings.

All the teams met the day before the formal presentations in order to practise using a laptop and a projector and to check the adherence to e-specification. Next day students delivered their presentations in front of the audience, and

their performance was video-taped. Presentation time for each team was limited to 20 minutes.

For majority of the students this was their first attempt of delivering a Power Point presentation. Such interactive communication for united aim was beneficial for both groups engaged in the project and enhanced students' ESP skills as well as their confidence in using ICT.

## 4 Self- and Peer-assessment

Learner self- and peer-assessment provides teacher with extensive first-hand information about student's anxieties and reactions to teaching techniques and materials. The major benefit of learner self-assessment is its impact on the learning.

After the stage of delivery, we conducted the self-assessment and peer-assessment session. Students were requested to self- and peer-assess their difficulties that they faced in preparation of presentations and performance during presentations.

The data on self-assessment of learners' difficulties are displayed in the figure 5. 23% of respondents had problems in searching for relevant materials, which is shown by the first bar in the figure. Only 5% of students found it difficult to coordinate their efforts in choosing the contents – this is revealed by the second bar in the figure 5. 18% of learners had problems in using Power Point software – the third bar in the same figure. Interestingly, only 9% of learners have admitted using Power Point for preparing presentations before this project. The vast majority had to master the technique in the process of preparing their presentations. Almost half of respondents (45%) had difficulties in delivering their presentation – it is depicted by the fourth bar in the figure 5.
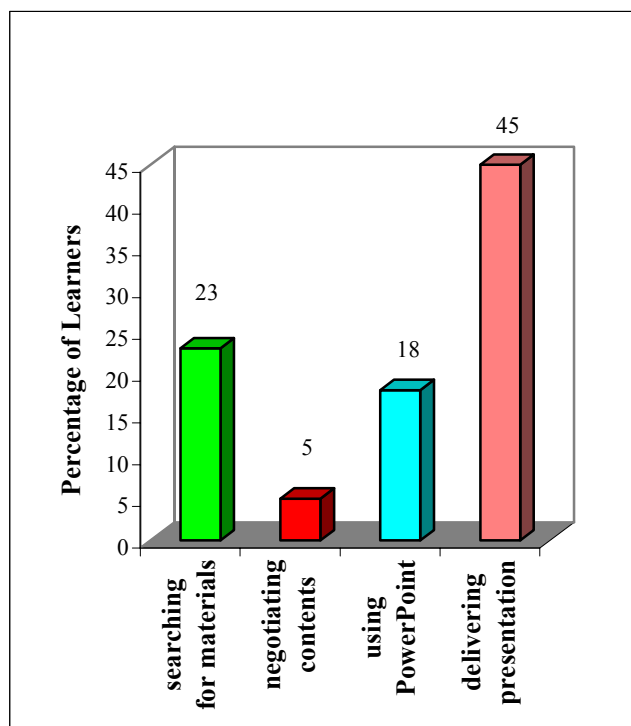


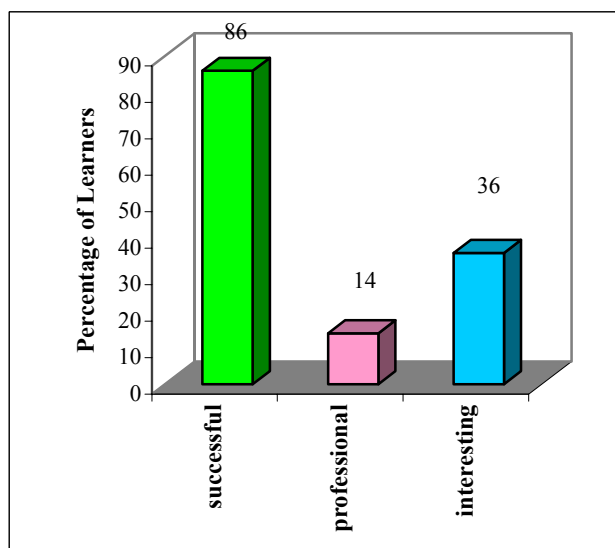**Figure 5.** Self-assessment of difficulties.



**Figure 6.** Self-assessment of performance.

This data are well harmonized with the findings shown in the column figure 6. Multitude of respondents (86%) feel their performance was successful – the first bar in the figure 6, and 14% – professional – the second bar. Over the third (36%) consider their talks interesting. None of the respondents ticked other choices like an unsuccessful, unprofessional, or boring performance. Nobody considered their performance faultless and perfect, although some of them were extremely good. Learners' modesty or shyness explains such responses.

In the questionnaire section of specifying one's responses about quality of performance, there were remarks about lack of allotted time for presentation, a necessity to contemplate and reflect on delivery, and anxiety and thrill during performance.

Peer-assessment allowed to identify the best presentation. It happened to be "War on Terror" as the most informative and picturesque. All participants expressed feelings of fulfilment at having accomplished their assignments.

## Conclusions

The research into language exchange activities via e-mail with the objective of preparing Power Point presentations has ascertained that inter-group collaboration:

1) fostered learners' autonomous learning;
2) improved writing and presentation skills;
3) encouraged students to master Power Point software;
4) demonstrated to learners the significance of the meaningful learning – learning subject through English;
5) developed learners' ability to negotiate and get the meaning across using high-tech;
6) allowed learners to experience sense of fulfilment.

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Galina Kavaliauskienė ir Vilhelmina Vaičiūnienė

**Tarpgrupinio susirašinėjimo elektroniniu paštu projektas: pranešimo rengimas, naudojant Power Point technologiją**

Santrauka

Informacinės visuomenės iššūkiai bei informacinių komunikacinių technologijų (IKT) vystymas skatina aukštųjų mokyklų užsienio kalbų dėstytojus ieškoti naujų mokymo metodų, atitinkančių besimokančiųjų poreikius.
Susirašinėjimas elektroniniu paštu siekia kelių kalbos mokymosi tikslų: skaitymo, rašymo, gramatikos, žodyno tobulinimo.
Prasmingas bendravimas tarp partnerių elektroniniu paštu sukuria erdvę autentiškam požiūrių pasikeitimui ir skatina besimokančiuosius bendrauti aiškiai ir suprantamai.
Šis straipsnis analizuoja tyrimo apie susirašinėjimą elektroniniu paštu tarp skirtingų specialybių studentų, kurie mokosi specialybės anglų kalbos, rezultatus. Svarbiausias tyrimo aspektas buvo ištirti partnerių gebėjimą susitarti dėl medžiagos pasirinkimo ir pranešimo profesine tematika turinio. Baigiamoji projekto dalis – pranešimas pasirinkta tema, naudojant Power Point technologiją.
Tyrimo rezultatai liudija, jog tikslingas mokymasis bendradarbiaujant skatina studentų savarankiškumą, vysto jų kalbinius gebėjimus dalykinės kalbos srityje, lavina įgūdžius naudotis šiuolaikinėmis technologijomis (IKT, Power Point, internetas) bei teikia pasitenkinimą atliktu darbu.

**The authors**

***Galina Kavaliauskienė***, dr., assoc. prof. at Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania.
*Academic interests:* ESP.
*Address:* Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities str, 20, LT-2057 Vilnius, Lithuania.
*E-mail:* gkaval@ltu.lt

***Vilhelmina Vaičiūnienė***, doctoral student, at Vytautas Magnus University and a lecturer at Mykolas Romeris University.
*Academic interests:* ESP.
*Address*: Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities str, 20, LT-2057 Vilnius, Lithuania.
*E-mail*: vvvaiciuniene@yahoo.com