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BLENDED LEARNING/TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Though online language learning resources are easily available and getting more popular, the current generation of language teachers still base their lessons on coursebook packages. Recent linguistic publications prove that ICT is making great influence on teaching/learning languages in the 21st century. The concept of "e-learning" is ambivalent. It is often used to describe the "distant learning", i.e. a way of learning without regular contact with a teacher in the classroom. Another meaning is a part of the practice known as "blended learning", defined as the integrated combination of traditional face-to-face learning with online activities. This article focuses on the use of "blended learning" of English at university level. The study examines students' attitudes to integrating online activities into the traditional English language classroom. The respondents are students of two universities and of two different specializations who study English for their future profession. The frequencies of positive and negative responses to a specially designed survey are analyzed. Not all the students found e-learning enjoyable in spite of its advantages, which might be due to their individual likes and dislikes. Statistical treatment of the students' responses by a means of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) includes the computations of correlation coefficients, which indicate the strength of relationships and their statistical significance.

KEY WORDS: English for Specific Purposes, blended learning, face-to-face learning versus online learning.

Introduction

The 21st century learners, who are known as the Internet Generation, are well familiar with ITC and prefer to communicate by text-messaging rather than face-to-face. Having different values and needs different from previous generations, Generation Y are naturally more visual than textual and therefore show a reduced tendency to read (Reilly 2012). However, while ICT is making massive inroads into language classrooms in technologically advantaged countries, the coursebook package still has its place among teachers (Allen 2015), especially among those who are at the initial stage of their teaching career. Their more experienced in-service colleagues are, however, increasingly abandoning the coursebook in

favour of freestanding digital resources (Allen, ibid). Thus the question arises whether this abandonment of the coursebook in favour of digital tools is desirable, or blended learning, i.e. integrated combination of traditional face-to-face learning using coursebook packages with online activities is preferable. The answer may be found by surveying attitudes of the present-day learners to different modes of learning, which is the subject of the current research. **The aim** of the article is to determine the respondents' approach to the values of blended learning. In order to achieve the aim of the paper, the following objectives have been set: to prepare a survey on students' attitudes, to get statistic data and evaluate student's perceptions of online and face-to-face (F2F) class activities. The theoretical and empirical methods applied include analysis and evaluation of scientific literature and qualitative as well as quantitative analysis of the data of the survey. The research sample consisted of 105 students studying at Vilnius and Klaipeda universities.

Blended Learning for the 21st Century Learners

In the world of education, the term "blended learning" is no longer very new. According to P. Sharma (2010), it has been in use for almost 20 years and its meaning has been constantly changing during this period. The classic definition of the term is "the integrated combination of traditional, i.e. face-to-face (F2F) learning with web based online approaches" (Oliver & Trigwell 2005). Online learning involves the use of the Internet which offers a variety of ways for language learners to engage in communicative activities. Due to increased digital opportunities, apart from reading and writing online, speaking and listening activities can be included, such as chats on Skype, video conferences, etc. (Chinnery 2010). The use of computers in foreign language classrooms has greatly influenced how teachers teach and students learn and the ongoing development of the ITC will definitely continue influencing language teaching and learning in the future. In order to make online teaching successful, some conditions must be satisfied, such as opportunities for the learners to interact and negotiate the meaning, interact in the target language, be involved in authentic tasks, work in a friendly environment without stress or anxiety, and teachers have to provide feedback to learners on their success and achievements (Egbert *et al.* 1999). Technology is a literacy that is indispensable in higher education in the 21st century. As a matter of fact, it has already been integrated in every sphere of human activity, language classrooms included. However, language educators need to find a reasonable balance for integrating technology in their classrooms. Ultimately it is not about how many apps are integrated, but about providing students with the best access and opportunities to contemporary learning resources (Marcinek 2014). Besides, teaching students how to balance technology usage along with offline socializing and interpersonal skills is also very important. A much needed manual by D. Randy Harrison & Norman D. Vaughan on blended learning in higher education appeared in 2008. It clearly demonstrated how the blended learning approach embraces the traditional values of face-to-face teaching and integrates the best practices of online learning. The authors presented the foundational research, theoretical framework, scenarios, principles, and practical guidelines for the re-

design and transformation of the higher education curriculum. This approach has proven to both enhance and expand the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning in higher education across disciplines.

Advantages and (some) Disadvantages of Blended Learning

Communication activities on the Internet have been traditionally divided into receptive or interactive. In the context of aural/oral skills, receptive activities involve listening. In receptive communication, students access information in various forms of audio and video recordings. For receptive communication activities, there are websites that include ready-made exercises, e.g. True/False, matching words and definitions, gap filling, or multiple-choice questions. In addition, the use of technology allows students to do a listening activity with today's news in the language classroom or at home from a website such as the BBC's, which will add a dimension of immediacy to a lesson (Sharma&Barret 2007, p. 11). Nonetheless, language practitioners know that there are several benefits and limitations to using receptive computer-mediated communication online (Chinnery 2010). Theoretically, these materials are available at any time and from anywhere, so long as a computer with Internet access is available. This access provides a virtually endless and free supply of current and authentic materials. However, audio and video technologies have some limitations if the Internet connection is not fast and stable. Slow download speed of materials or any other technical difficulties discourage both students and teachers (Lafford P. & Lafford B. 1997), Despite possible problems, many students prefer to study using electronic books or Internet searches, while educational institutions have widely adopted interactive whiteboards offering a long list of possibilities to stimulate effective learning (Nicholson 2014). Another e-learning tool widely used for blended learning at schools and universities is Moodle. The statistics of Moodle websites and users keeps changing every day and it is hard to get the data without subscription, but currently Moodle platforms seem to be the most popular learning management system to follow assignments from teachers (Gonzales 2015). Another recent trend in assisting blended learning is incorporation of social networking websites such as Facebook (Zafar 2014), which is especially popular among students. By combining Facebook or Twitter with other online or F2F activities, language teachers can enhance students' motivation, interest and interactions in learning. Thus advantages of the digital age include flexibility, i.e. students can choose the most convenient time for studying, which makes them more autonomous in their learning. Nevertheless, they are provided with an opportunity to get guidance, support, advice and feedback from their tutors in the comfort of their home or any other location they choose. Apart from educational support, they are also able to benefit from social contact with their teachers and colleague students. On the other hand, teachers save a lot of time and expense of photocopying by posting course materials on virtual learning environment for learners, course materials saved on interactive whiteboards can be reused with another group, so any preparation time can be worthwhile (Sharma, Barret 2007, p. 11).

Challenges for Students and Teachers

Being aware of the differences of Generation Y, language teachers have to pursue an understanding of their nature and adopt teaching strategies that respond to their academic needs (Reilly 2012). Teachers have to make extensive use of online resources and participate in computer-mediated communication, which consequently creates a need to acquire new competencies both for language teachers and learners. P. Redmond (2011) presents different researchers' views on the role of the online teacher. Beside good content knowledge, effective online teachers need a range of skills and knowledge in the areas of management, pedagogical approaches, facilitation and assessment of the course, ability to support the social and emotional well-being of the students, and technical skills. To enhance learning and teaching through technologies in education, it is important to understand the perspectives of moving from face-to-face teaching to online teaching. According to Horspool and Lange (2012), student online learning and satisfaction can be enhanced by peer-to-peer interaction. Instructors can benefit by designing activities to increase student engagement with each other and build students' community Agosto (et al. 2013) also claimed it was important for instructors to promote collaboration and conversation in online environments. Increased student interaction leads to greater engagement and deeper and more critical thought (Zach & Agosto 2009). Instructors who are not effective at promoting communication and interaction in online courses can make students feel isolated, bored, and even over-loaded. S. Young and H. E. Duncan (2014) presented research findings into 8,000 students' attitudes to F2F versus online learning. Their overall goal was to examine differences of student ratings of instruction in online and F2F higher education courses. Eight independent samples of statistical *t-test*s were used to compare the F2F and the online ratings in the following areas: Organization and Planning, Communication, Faculty/Student Interaction, Grading, Instructional Methods, Course Outcomes, Student Effort, and the Overall Evaluation. A thorough analysis indicates that students are more satisfied with traditional F2F courses compared to online courses. The most likely explanation is that instructors were very effective in the traditional, i.e. F2F environment. Online teaching was quite different, and it involved skills that are relatively new in higher education. Less positive evaluations for online courses may be explained by difficulties in communicating, creating positive teacher/student interactions, establishing agreeable and fair grading criteria, influencing student beliefs about their own learning, encouraging student efforts, and finding effective online teaching strategies.

Since 1996, more than a thousand empirical studies of online learning have been identified by a team of researchers (Means *et al.* 2009), who screened these studies to find those that (a) contrasted an online to a face-to-face condition, (b) measured student learning outcomes, (c) used a rigorous research design, and (d) provided adequate information to calculate an effect size. As a result of this screening, 51 independent effects were identified that could be subjected to meta-analysis. The technique of meta-analysis comprises statistical methods for contrasting and combining results from different studies in the hope of identifying patterns among study results, sources of disagreement among them, or other

interesting relationships that may come to light in the context of multiple studies. The meta-analysis found that, on average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction. The factors affecting student satisfaction with online learning were studied by Drennan et al. (2005): students are found to be satisfied with getting flexible learning material, being autonomous and using innovative learning styles. These results suggest that student satisfaction is influenced by positive perceptions toward technology and an independent learning mode.

However, some students prefer traditional face-to-face instruction. A study of the factors that often lead most learners to opt for face-to-face rather than online activities has revealed that resistance towards the online mode is mainly due to cultural and logistic factors (Manca *et al.* 2003). Reasons to choose online learning mainly lie in students' personal interest and motivation. G. Kavaliauskienė and D. Valūnas (2012) examined perceptions of e-learning of 164 respondents of 5 different university specializations. Students' views on various aspects of e-learning were found to be different and depended on their chosen specialization. However, as blended learning is acceptable to majority of students (Kavaliauskienė 2011), it is recommended to combine traditional face-to-face instructions with online activities.

Empirical Research

A qualitative and quantitative research was carried out by surveying students' attitudes to online and face-to-face (F2F) activities, the processing of the responses by a means of the SPSS (Software Package for Social Sciences), and analyzing students' perceptions in learning tasks. The design of the administered survey (Appendix) conforms to the accepted standards (Dörnyei 2010). Traditionally, the responses were rated on a 5-point Likert's scale from 1 to 5: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The research covered 3 samples of respondents and was carried out in 2015. The respondents were the students specializing in Linguistics and Law at Vilnius and Klaipeda Universities and studying English for their future profession. There were the following samples of respondents: 38 students of Linguistics and 37 students of Law at Vilnius University (VU) and 27 students of Linguistics at Klaipeda University (KU). Their level of English proficiency assessed at the start of the course was from upper- intermediate (B2) to advanced (C1). The instruction time in L2 environment was 4 hours per week for 2 semesters, which amounted to 128 hours of English language teaching.

Results and Discussion

This part of the article reports on the findings of the survey (Appendix) and the analysis of the key points. For the sake of brevity in the further data display, the usual approach is applied: the positive responses, i.e. (4) agree and (5) strongly agree, and negative responses, i.e. (1) strongly disagree and (2) disagree, are added up. The findings are presented in percentage, and neutral responses are automatically accounted for in the statistical computing of the Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between the responses. The

survey statements are reproduced below for simplifying the understanding the graphical information in the following charts:

1) I prefer to read authentic professional texts printed on the paper, not on the screen.
2) Understanding CD recordings in the classroom is easier than authentic online recordings.
3) Face-to face exercises (Open-ended Questions, True/False, Synonym Match, Gap-Fill) after listening activities are useful for comprehension.
4) Similar online exercises after listening are useful for learning new vocabulary.
5) Interactive speaking activities online are more enjoyable than F2F speaking tasks in the classroom.
6) My performance in online tasks is better than in F2F activities.
7) I like online activities more than F2F activities.

The frequencies of positive responses in percentage versus the survey statements (1 to 7) are shown in Chart 1. The 1st cylinders represent the responses by the students of Linguistics at VU, the 2nd cylinders – by the students of Law at VU, and the 3rd cylinders – by the students of Linguistics at KU. It can be seen that the positive responses to the survey statements 1, 3, 4 and 7 are very similar in all three samples, i.e. they do not depend significantly on the respondents' future specialization. However, as far as the negative responses (Chart 2) are concerned, no such similarity has been revealed. In other words, a number of respondents selected neutral responses 'not sure', which are accounted for in the statistical computations.

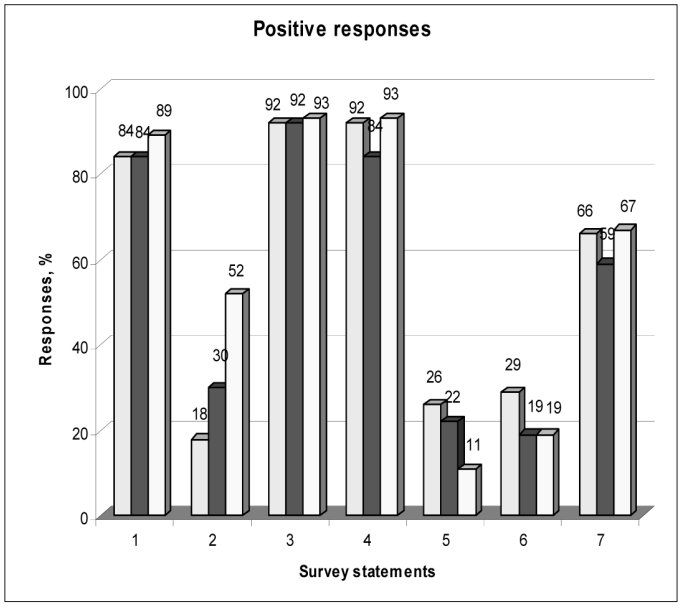

Chart 1. **The frequencies of positive responses to the survey statements. The 1st cylinders display responses by the students of Linguistics (VU), the 2nd cylinders – by the Law students (VU), the 3rd cylinders – by the students of Linguistics (KU)**

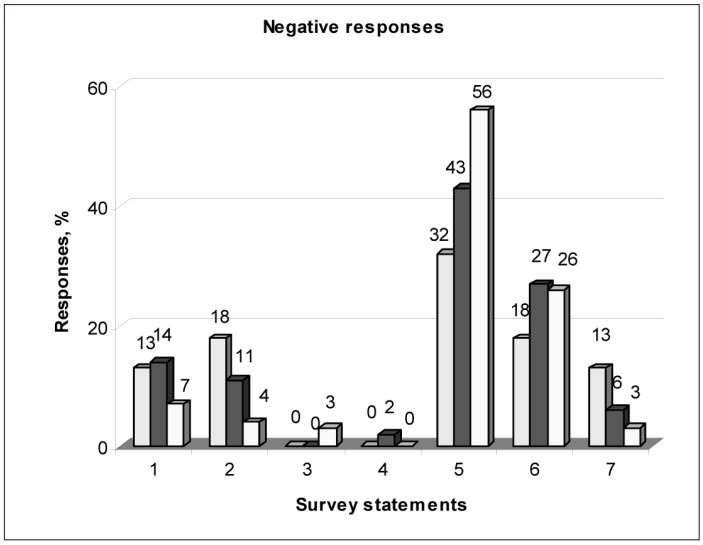

Chart 2. **The frequencies of negative responses to the survey statements. The 1st cylinders display responses by the students of Linguistics (VU), the 2nd cylinders – by the Law students (VU), the 3rd cylinders – by the students of Linguistics(KU)**

The frequencies of negative responses in percentage versus the survey statements (1 to 7) are shown in Chart 2. The 1st cylinders represent the responses by the students of Linguistics at VU, the 2nd cylinders – by the students of Law at VU, and the 3rd cylinders – by the students of Linguistics at KU.

It can be seen that on the whole there is a scatter of responses in both Charts. Therefore, a qualitative analysis of the findings is not productive, and it is essential to assess the data by using statistical processing by a means of SPSS, which can shed light on the significance of findings. Statistical processing allows evaluation how comparable and reliable the data are. The internal consistency reliability is usually estimated by computing Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Results are reliable if the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is at least .70 or higher, which is considered acceptable in most Social Science research situations (Bachman, Kunnan 2005). The second step in correlational analysis is to compute correlation coefficients, which are useful for understanding the degree of relationship between the data. Generally, a correlation coefficient can range between a negative one (-1.00) and a positive one (+1.00). Positive coefficients indicate direct relationships, while negative coefficients indicate inverse relationships. The larger the coefficient, whether positive or negative, the stronger is the relationship. Therefore, a correlation that is close to one, either positive or negative, indicates a very strong relationship, while coefficients that fall near zero indicate very weak relationships. In order to check whether a correlation coefficient shows a real relationship, it is necessary to determine the probability of its significance, i.e. the value of *Sig p*. Statistical significance with *p* values of .01 or .05 indicates that there is either 99% or 95% probability that correlation coefficients are meaningful. In this research, there are 3 variables, i.e. 3 samples of respondents. The computed value of Cronbach's Alpha is equal

to .985 for positive and .784 for negative responses. Therefore, the obtained results are reliable as a minimal acceptable value is .70. The normality of responses has been checked by computing Kolmogorov-Smirnov Tests, which demonstrated normal distributions. Thus, computation of Pearson's correlation coefficients (*rho*) makes sense. The computation results in the Table below demonstrate Pearson's correlations for positive responses (column 2) for statements that proved to be significant (column 1). The values of *Sig p* (2-tailed) and Significance Levels are shown in columns 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 1. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients and Sig. (2-tailed) levels for 3 samples of the positive responses shown in Chart 1. Four statements (1, 3, 4, and 7) are analyzed

Relevant Survey Statements	**Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (*rho*)**	***Sig.* p (2-tailed)**	**Significance level**
1. I prefer to read authentic professional texts printed on the paper, not on the screen.	.876*	.000	** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
3. Face-to face exercises are useful for comprehension.	.856**	.001	** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
4. Similar online exercises after listening are useful for learning new vocabulary.	.904**	.000	** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
7. I like online activities more than F2F activities.	.860*	.010	* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As the data in Table 1 reveal, for the survey statements 1, 3, and 4 correlations are significant at the 0.01 level, i.e. the probability is 99%, and for the statement 7 correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, i.e. the probability is 95%. It means that the findings can be extended beyond the studied samples in spite of the relatively small sample size. Statements 1 and 3 refer to F2F activities, while statements 4 and 7 – to online activities, and by supporting the 7th statement respondents express preference to online tasks. However, no significant correlations have been detected for other survey statements (2, 5 and 6), since the levels of significance exceed the value of 0.05 (the findings are not included in the table). Statement 2 concerns traditional classroom activities, while statements 5 and 6 refer to online tasks. In other words, in this case the probability is much lower than 95%, and these findings cannot be extended beyond the analyzed samples. In other words, students' perceptions of blended learning are divided between F2F and online activities, i.e. without distinct preferences.

Conclusions

The main goal of the current study was to determine the respondents' approach to the values of blended learning. Firstly, the results of this research support the idea that, though students' attitudes to F2F and online learning seem to differ, there are certain priorities.

The second major finding was that students' perceptions of blended learning are divided between F2F and e-activities. Thirdly, for some survey statements the direct relationships have been observed between the samples of different specializations with the probabilities either 95% or 99%, which are acceptable in the research of Social Sciences and may be extended beyond the studied samples. Finally, the negative responses of students seem to depend on their individual approaches to F2F and online learning and personal perceptions, i.e. resistance towards online learning might be due to their individual likes and dislikes. Taken together, these findings complement those of earlier studies and do support recommendations to use blended learning in language lessons at university level as well as outside the classroom.

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Appendix. Survey of Learners' Perceptions of F2F and Online Activities

1) I prefer to read authentic professional texts printed on the paper, but not from the computer screen. 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) strongly agree
2) Understanding CD recordings in the classroom is easier than authentic online recordings. 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) strongly agree
3) Face-to face exercises (Open-ended Questions, True/False, Synonym Match, Gap-Fill) after listening activities are useful for comprehension. 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) strongly agree.
4) Similar online exercises after listening are useful for learning new vocabulary. 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) strongly agree
5) Interactive speaking activities online are more enjoyable than F2F speaking tasks in the classroom. 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) strongly agree
6) My performance in online tasks is better than in F2F activities. 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) strongly agree
7) I like online activities more than F2F activities. 1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) not sure 4) agree 5) strongly agree

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BLENDED LEARNING/ TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Summary

The article deals with a research into students' viewpoints on the usage of blended learning in studies of professional English. Universities are expected to follow contemporary trends of employing ICT for mastering foreign languages. Recent linguistic publications prove that ICT is making great influence on language classrooms. Currently, 'blended learning' is defined as the integrated combination of traditional face-to-face (F2F) learning with online activities. This article presents the findings on students' viewpoints on the priorities of traditional and e-learning forms. The analysis of the research data revealed that the respondents, who were students of linguistics and law, demonstrated readiness to be involved in various online and traditional classroom activities. The frequencies of positive and negative responses to a specially designed survey are analyzed. Not all the students enjoy e-learning in spite of its advantages, which might be due to their individual likes and dislikes. Statistical treatment of the students' responses by a means of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) includes the computations of correlation coefficients, which indicate the strength of relationships and their statistical significance. The findings showed that the students' attitudes to online learning seem to differ for different activities, but they are quite similar at the first sight. Moreover, direct relationships have been observed between the samples of different specializations with the probabilities either 95% or 99%, which are acceptable in the research of Social Sciences. It should be mentioned that negative responses of students seem to depend on their individual approaches to online activities and personal perceptions, i.e. resistance towards online learning might be due to individual likes and dislikes.

KEY WORDS: English for Specific Purposes, blended learning: face-to-face (F2F) learning versus online learning.

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MIŠRUSIS ANGLŲ KALBOS MOKYMAS (-IS) UNIVERSITETE

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamas paplitęs XXI amžiuje mišrusis mokymasis, kuris leidžia derinti internetinį bei klasikinį mokymą (-si) auditorijoje. Straipsnyje aprašomas tyrimas analizuoja studentų požiūrį į internetinių užduočių integravimą į anglų kalbos mokymo seminarus auditorijoje. Tyrimui parengtas specialus klausimynas pagal mokslinių anketų sudarymo metodiką, smulkiai aprašytą

literatūroje (Dornyei, 2010). Tyrime dalyvavę respondentai yra trijų skirtingų specialybių universiteto studentai, kurie mokosi specialybės anglų kalbos. Darbe pateikiami respondentų teigiamų ir neigiamų atsakymų dažniai, kurie analizuojami taikant statistinius metodus. Reikia pažymėti, kad ne visi studentai pozityviai vertina e-mokymą (-si). Tokiam respondentų požiūriui įtaką gali daryti asmeniniai polinkiai ir pomėgiai. Statistinis tyrimo duomenų apdorojimas, panaudojant socialinių mokslų statistinės analizės ir duomenų apdorojimo programinę įrangą (SPSS), leidžia nustatyti rezultatų patikimumą. Cronbach Alpha koeficientų reikšmės lygūs 0,985 teigiamų atsakų atveju ir lygūs 0,784 neigiamų atsakų atveju. Tai rodo, kad gauti duomenys yra patikimi. Pearson-o koreliacijos koeficientų skaičiavimai parodė, kad egzistuoja tiesioginiai ryšiai tarp skirtingų specializacijų studentų atsakų, ir jų tikimybės sudaro 95% arba 99% esant reikšmingumo koeficientų vertėms 0,05 arba 0,01. Tokie rezultatai yra priimtini atliekant tyrimus socialinių mokslų srityje, nes sutinkamai su statistikos dėsniais aiškiai demonstruoja, kad, nepaisant esamų palyginti nedidelių imčių dydžių, rezultatus galima taikyti esant didelės imties dydžiui.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: profesinė anglų kalba, mišrusis mokymas, tradicinis auditorinis mokymas.

Įteikta 2015 metų liepos 15 d.