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The Impact of Alternative Assessment on Adolescent Learners' Ability to Select and Implement Relevant Learning Resources

Abstract: Language learning and teaching are no longer aimed only at developing learners' linguistic skills and enhancing their communicative competence. Nowadays, in order to promote language learning as a life-long process, there is a growing emphasis in language classroom on non-linguistic aspects, such as motivation or learner autonomy. The latter can be fostered in the classroom by means of diverse teaching procedures, such as formative assessment or performance assessment. The aim of the research presented in the article was to investigate whether and to what extent the assessment method applied affects one aspect of learner autonomy — namely, learners' ability to select, apply and use relevant learning resources. The research was conducted in a lower secondary school, i.e. an educational environment rarely given attention in second language research studies. The study was based on mixed-methods research, comprising both quantitative and qualitative data elicitation tools, such as a questionnaire, monthly classroom observations and interviews with the learners. The results show that the assessment methods implemented failed to develop adolescent learners' ability to use learning resources effectively. The applied methodology helped to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact exerted by language assessment on the dependent variable and to analyse the results from a number of perspectives.

1. Introduction

Learning to learn, self-assessment and the development of self-reflective skills have become vital components of modern language education throughout Europe. A detailed description of general and communicative language competence provided by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR — Council of Europe 2001) aims to highlight the necessity to focus on both linguistic and non-linguistic elements of language teaching in the classroom. The recent national core curriculum for language education in Poland adopts this new stance, and emphasises educational objectives encompassing the need to develop non-linguistic skills to help learners engage in self-directed learning along with language

proficiency and communicative competence. If language learning is to become
a life-long process, and learners are to continue their education in non-institutional
settings as well, every attempt needs to be made to foster learner autonomy and
to instil in learners a sense of responsibility for their own learning. As Benson
(2001) indicates, learner autonomy can be interpreted as control over the learning
process, which involves control over learning management, cognitive processes
and learning content. This last component includes the learner's ability to establish
learning goals as well as to select appropriate methods, techniques and resources
to accomplish these objectives. Learner autonomy can be promoted in the class-
room by implementing purpose-designed classroom instruction and appropriate
pedagogical tools, such as formative assessment and performance assessment. This
article aims to investigate whether the introduction of different types of alternative
assessment, such as portfolio, project, observation and peer assessment, has any
effect on lower secondary school learners' ability to select, evaluate and use diverse
learning resources. The analysis is based on a year-long empirical study involving
both qualitative and quantitative research instruments, such as a questionnaire,
monthly classroom observation and interviews with learners.

2. Learner autonomy in the language classroom

The CEFR emphasises that in order to participate and succeed in a communicative
event, a language user needs to possess both communicative language competence
and a set of general competencies resulting from diverse experiences, not neces-
sarily connected with language learning. Apart from communicative language
competence, comprising linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components,
successful communication in a foreign language depends on the level of general
competencies, which encompass declarative knowledge, skills and know-how,
existential competence and the ability to learn. This last element "enable[s] the
learner to deal more effectively and independently with new language learning
challenges, to see what options exist and to make better use of opportunities"
(Council of Europe 2001: 106), and consists of learners' *study skills* and *heuristic
skills*, as well as their *responsibility for their own learning*. Study skills include,
among other things, learners' ability to take advantage of learning opportunities;
awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses; effective use of learning strat-
egies; the ability to set their own learning goals and find ways of implementing
them; collaborative skills and, finally, the ability to find, evaluate and use diverse
learning materials and resources compatible with the learners' own learning style
in independent learning. This description shows that the ability to learn, as defined
by the CEFR, can be interpreted as an element of learner autonomy, which, as
Little (1991) notes, constitutes a much broader notion pertaining to taking control

not only of self-management, but also of the learner's own cognitive processes responsible for the effective organisation of learning.

In an attempt to account for the complex nature of learner autonomy, Benson (2001) interprets it as three interdependent levels of control: control over learning management, cognitive process and learning content. Control over learning management involves the learner's decisions concerning planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning process. Autonomous learners are capable of construing their own learning system and employing learning strategies that help them to succeed in subsequent stages of learning. Control over cognitive processes involves the learner's mental involvement in the learning process. A learner needs to be able to reflect on all stages of learning and to be ready to introduce any necessary modifications to enhance the effectiveness of their education. Finally, control over learning content is based on the learner's ability to establish learning goals as well as to select appropriate materials, methods and techniques to accomplish these objectives. This type of control is subject to social interaction and negotiations with teachers or peers concerning goal-setting and depends on whether the learning environment enables the learners to exercise freedom of independent choice (Benson 2001).

Little (2003) stresses that although autonomy cannot be taught directly, appropriately selected classroom procedures can enhance the emergence of diverse self-directed behaviours. The success of autonomy training largely depends on both the teacher's and learner's cooperation and willingness to renounce their traditionally ascribed roles. The transfer of power and responsibility for learning from the teacher to the learner, which is necessary for autonomous learning to take place, requires a new approach to teaching. The teachers' task is to raise the learners' awareness of the learning process by presenting a wide array of learning strategies, materials and resources. The learners, on the other hand, need to accept this responsibility and take control of different dimensions of their learning.

Autonomy training can be facilitated in the classroom by purpose-designed classroom instruction and implementation of appropriate pedagogical procedures. Assessment is an important element in fostering autonomy, provided that it becomes an integral part of teaching practice and is viewed as a prospective tool in the classroom and not only a retrospective one (Dam and Legenhausen 1999). In recent years, a shift from the culture of testing to the culture of assessment can be observed in language classrooms, as teachers tend to apply a wide range of assessment procedures, ranging from standard tests to more communicative tasks, such as a project or an interview (Fox 2008). Traditional tests tend to focus on highly theoretical knowledge, whereas unconventional assessment methods deal with communicative language competence, comprising not only grammatical but also strategic, discoursal and sociolinguistic elements (Birenbaum and Dochy 1996). Authentic forms of assessment promote self-reflection on the learning process, enable L2 learners to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, and emphasise the

process of learning, as opposed to solely the product. Consequently, the paper-and-pencil tests commonly applied in language education can be supplemented with meaningful, authentic and communicative assessment tasks, smoothly incorporated into ongoing classroom practice. Many of the elicitation tasks can be conducted in cooperation with peers, which improves collaborative skills and develops a sense of responsibility for one's own work. The learners become active participants in the assessment process, sharing responsibility in the classroom, reflecting on their own learning and assessment, and collaborating with the teacher and their peers. As alternative methods aim at developing motivated and self-regulated learners, capable of taking more responsibility for their own learning, they are claimed to have a positive impact on the development of autonomy (Fox 2008; Shohamy 1995).

Alternative assessment emphasises different areas of language competence from those found in traditional tests. Learners are not asked to merely reproduce declarative knowledge and engage in receptive tasks, but are encouraged to use their resources creatively and effectively in meaningful activities. The practical application of multiple skills in task completion involves higher-level thinking, i.e. problem-solving, decision making, analysing, interpreting as well as developing a critical approach to learning resources. For this reason, it seems important to determine whether the application of diverse methods of assessment affects one particular aspect of learner autonomy — namely adolescent learners' ability to select, evaluate and apply relevant learning resources.

The subjects of this study, i.e. lower secondary school students (aged 13–15), are undergoing rapid emotional and physiological changes. Being aware of their own needs and capable of independent thinking, they are ready to become conscious participants in their education. Although developing autonomy at this age is difficult and requires teachers to adjust their teaching to the learners' cognitive needs, it can serve as a motivational factor and facilitate the learners' personal and social development. Moreover, it seems important to investigate language learning at this level of education as there is a shortage of research concerning this age group (Jarząbek 2008).

3. Research design

The core curricula for language learning implemented in Poland after the reform of the education system in 1999 have emphasised the importance of both linguistic and non-linguistic components of language learning. Consequently, developing learners' ability to cooperate with others, use learning strategies, engage in self-assessment and to search and implement a variety of resources has become an indispensable element of language education. Additionally, the new core curriculum introduced in 2009 advocates the use of different assessment and self-assessment methods, such as portfolio assessment or project work. The document also stresses

the need to develop the ability to use diverse learning resources, such as dictionaries or information and communication technology. In the light of these curricular objectives, the research project reported in this paper aimed to determine whether the implementation of alternative methods of assessment (portfolio, project, observation and peer assessment) affects adolescent learners' ability to select, evaluate and use diverse learning resources. Different assessment methods were introduced in hopes that this would enable the researcher to establish which type of assessment has the most influence on the use of resources in this age group. Three research instruments were employed with the aim of collecting data concerning the types of resources used both in the classroom and self-study situations, as well as the frequency with which such additional resources were utilised. Additionally, the researcher intended to identify the agents and factors affecting the choice and the variety of additional resources used by the subjects in the language learning process. The subjects were also asked to express their attitudes toward the language course book used at school.

3.1. Sample selection

The school in which the quasi-experiment was conducted is located in a town with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants and is the only school of this type in the area. The school is non-selective — i.e. it is open for all students from the town and the adjoining villages; as a result, the learners come from different social settings and the school environment is very heterogeneous. At the time of the research, English was the only foreign language taught in the school, with three hours of lessons weekly in all grades.

A total of 116 first- and second-year learners took part in the experiment. The third-year students were eliminated because the results could be distorted by the washback effect that was likely to occur as a consequence of preparation for the external examination in a foreign language at the end of the final year of lower secondary school. Moreover, there are significant maturational differences, both affective and cognitive, between the youngest and oldest learners at this stage of education. The first- and second-year learners represented the elementary and pre-intermediate levels of language competence, respectively. All the groups used the same course book series at the appropriate level and were subjected to identical assessment procedures agreed on by all the English teachers at the school.

3.2. The research instruments

In order to accomplish the research objectives, a quasi-experiment involving mixed-methods research was carried out. The use of both qualitative and quantitative research instruments in one study ensures the validity of the research results and helps to overcome weaknesses and biases that may arise when only one method

is applied (Dörnyei 2007; Olsen 2004). The research was predominantly longitudinal, as it aimed to gain insight into the process of developing learners' ability to select and implement relevant resources over a period of one year.

Three research instruments were used in order to collect the data: questionnaires, monthly classroom observation and interviews with the subjects. Pre- and post-questionnaires were implemented at the beginning and end of the school year with the intention of observing the development of learner autonomy with regard to the following aspects of this construct: the selection and implementation of relevant resources, collaboration with peers, the ability to establish learning aims and objectives, engagement in outside classroom learning, the learners' ability to evaluate their own learning process, the implementation of appropriate learning strategies and the learners' attitudes toward teachers and their role in education. The questionnaire was based on descriptions of autonomous behaviours presented by Dickinson (1992), Legutke and Thomas (1991), Boud (1988), Sheerin (1997), Breen and Mann (1997) as well as a number of existing questionnaires used in previous studies (Michońska-Stadnik 2000; Pawlak 2004; Skrzypek 2004). Although the questionnaires also dealt with other aspects of autonomy, for the purposes of this article, only the subscale pertaining to learners' use of learning resources will be analysed in detail. The answers to the questionnaire items were graded according to a Likert-type scale in which 1 indicated 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree.' The means of the results obtained were further analysed according to a scale developed for the purposes of this research:

— mean above 4.21: very high level of autonomy,
— mean 3.41–4.2: high level of autonomy,
— mean 2.61–3.4: moderate level of autonomy,
— mean 1.81–2.6: low level of autonomy,
— mean below 1.8: very low level of autonomy.

The quantitative data was further subjected to statistical analysis: a dependent t-test was computed for the subscale referring to the use of resources as well as for individual questionnaire items within this subscale to investigate whether the differences between the results obtained in the pre- and post-questionnaires are statistically significant and can therefore be attributed to the experimental treatment the subjects were exposed to. The statistical calculations were conducted using SPSS 14.0 software.

In order to supplement the statistical analysis with qualitative data, once a month the researcher conducted observations of lessons in all the investigated groups. The observations involved a variety of classroom situations: language instruction, practice, production and assessment-related procedures. The observation of the assessment process aimed at scrutinising such procedures as setting assessment standards and criteria, carrying out tasks to be assessed, discussing the results of tests or other assessed exercises. Moreover, the researcher had a chance to observe ongoing classroom activities and classroom interaction. The observation

notes were made according to a purpose-designed observation sheet that corresponded with the questionnaire.

Additionally, towards the end of the experiment, randomly selected subjects from all the groups were interviewed with the intention of obtaining more insight regarding the variety of resources used by the subjects in and out of the classroom. The data elicitation tool applied here can be referred to as a semi-structured interview, as it allowed the researcher to obtain answers to the questions included on the interview sheet as well as to ask for clarification or more detailed information.

3.3. The research procedure

The subjects were divided into four experimental groups and one control group. Apart from being assessed on the basis of the assessment procedures and criteria used by all the English teachers in the school, throughout the duration of the research the subjects in each experimental group were additionally involved in one alternative assessment method (a project, portfolio, peer assessment or observation). The control group was not subjected to any additional assessment. This intervention in the routine assessment procedure was conducted with the aim of observing the emergence of changes in the learners' ability to use diverse learning resources.

Because neither project, portfolio, peer-assessment nor formal observation had been used in this school prior to the experiment, the teachers who agreed to take part in the research were first provided with relevant literature on language assessment and then given training sessions about different types of language assessment, forms of feedback and practical aspects of implementing various assessment methods in the classroom. Moreover, throughout the experiment, the researcher offered the teachers ongoing guidance on the format and the content of assessment as well as a wide array of assessment-related resources and ideas that would be beneficial at different stages of classroom practice. The researcher did not participate directly in the instruction process.

3.4. The research findings

This section is devoted to presenting the results of the research. First, the results of the pre- and post-questionnaires on the use of additional resources are presented, along with the relevant statistical calculations. The second subsection focuses on the data collected on the basis of the qualitative tools, i.e. monthly classroom observations and interviews with the subjects.

3.4.1. Quantitative research

The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire results aimed to determine whether the differences in scores obtained before and after the experiment were statistically

significant and could therefore be attributed to the applied experimental treatment. Figure 1 illustrates the mean results obtained by the research groups in the subscale dealing with the use of learning resources before and after the experiment. All the research groups apart from Group 4 showed an increase in the mean values in this subscale; in Group 4, a decrease was observed. However, the calculation of dependent t-tests for each research group revealed that the difference in mean results before and after the experiment was statistically significant only in Group 1.[1] Additionally, this group reported statistically significant differences in the results for questionnaire item 2 (t_{obs}=-2.658; p=0.013), which shows that learners wanted to have a bigger say in the choice of course book, and item 30 (t_{obs}=-2.114; p=0.044), which indicates increased use of learning resources in solving language problems at the end of the experiment. These results indicate that portfolio assessment exerts a positive impact on learners' ability to select and implement relevant learning resources. No other statistically significant differences were observed in the remaining groups.
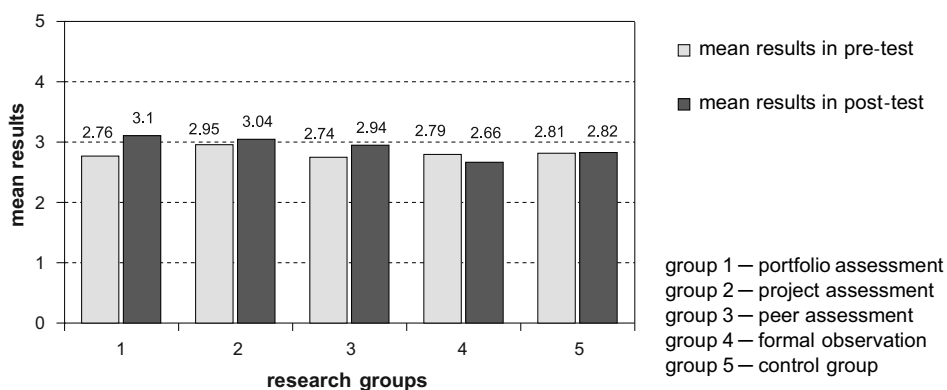

Fig. 1. Mean results obtained before and after the experiment on the subscale regarding the ability to select and implement relevant sources

According to the scale applied for the purposes of this research, the total scores for the investigated subscale both before and after the experiment indicate that the subjects' ability to select and implement relevant resources could be described as moderate. It should be indicated here that the results for this subscale are relatively lower in comparison with the subscales referring to the learners' ability to collaborate with peers, learning strategy use and attitudes toward teachers and their roles in education.

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[1] With dt=26, alpha decision level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ and $t_{crit} = 2.056$, $t_{obs} = 2.541$ (p = 0.017).

3.4.2. Qualitative research

Classroom observation

In most cases, the monthly observations failed to reveal any considerable differences in the use of additional resources in the course of the experiment. It appeared that in all the observed classrooms the learners were required to possess only the obligatory learning resources, i.e. the course book, workbook and notebook, and the teachers did not encourage learners to use any additional learning resources or create their own materials. Although the learners seemed to be well acquainted with the structure of the obligatory resources and frequently referred to the picture dictionary without the teacher's guidance, the grammar and self-study sections of the course book were entirely neglected. The assigned homework tasks were based wholly on the course book or workbook and did not necessitate the use of additional resources. Moreover, the possibility of enriching the learning process with extra materials was not discussed with the learners during the experiment, except for a few situations when the teachers briefly suggested different sources necessary to prepare tasks that were assigned as part of a new assessment method implemented in the experiment, for instance project or peer assessment.

In the group subjected to portfolio assessment the only additional learning tool was the learners' portfolio containing obligatory tasks assigned by the teacher along with various additional materials prepared by the subjects of their own volition. Both the additional and the obligatory elements of the portfolios exceeded the content of the course book and compelled the learners to look for information elsewhere, e.g. on the Internet, in encyclopaedias or dictionaries. It is important to emphasise that a small percentage of learners failed to submit their portfolios on the appointed date, while a few subjects ignored the new assessment method and did not have portfolios at all.

Apart from the obligatory course book and workbook, the learners in Group 2 had easy access to bilingual dictionaries that were always displayed on the teacher's desk. Despite being frequently encouraged to look words up in the dictionaries, the learners used them unwillingly and preferred to ask the teacher for help. The only situation in which the subjects exhibited the use of additional resources occurred when they were asked to prepare a project — they looked for visual materials and some factual information on the Internet, in encyclopaedias or glossy magazines. The extent and the quality of the selected materials varied: some learners clearly used a wide range of content-rich sources to prepare their projects, while others limited their work to searching for some visual materials to illustrate their work. Additionally, in some cases the subjects' collaborative skills turned out to be rather ineffective, as some of them failed to contribute to the final product of pair or group work and did not bring the resources necessary to complete the task to school.

The only time when the subjects in Group 3 were observed to refer to sources other than the obligatory books were two tasks in which they were to prepare

a poster about a music group or a map of Great Britain to be peer-assessed in the classroom. When asked by the teacher about the sources of data, the learners reported that they used the Internet to find relevant information for these tasks.

Neither the teacher nor the learners in Group 4 (the group exposed to formal observation) used additional materials in the classroom; the same was true of Group 5 (the control group). An interesting observation, however, was made on one occasion in the control group. One of a few exercises assigned as homework necessitated the use of an encyclopaedia or the Internet to look for specific factual data. Interestingly, although the learners did the remaining exercises, not a single subject attempted to do the task forcing them to refer to additional sources of information. Still, instead of encouraging the learners to do this activity once again, the teacher provided correct solutions to the task.

Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews conducted with the subjects at the end of the study aimed at providing an overview of the interviewees' use of and approaches to the learning resources utilised in language education. The subjects' responses concerning the use of resources in the classroom confirmed the data collected by means of monthly observations — apart from the obligatory course book and workbook, at school the learners used bilingual dictionaries; however, this occurred only rarely. More frequent use of dictionaries was reported in Group 2 — the dictionaries were placed on the teacher's desk and the learners were encouraged to use them on a regular basis. Additionally, in the groups with portfolio and project assessment, one or two lessons were conducted in a computer lab and aimed at presenting the content of a CD-ROM that accompanied the course book. Before their regular achievement tests, the learners in Group 3 were given handouts with additional materials, containing mainly revision exercises prepared by the teacher. No other resources outside of the course book were used in the classroom by the learners or the teacher.

When asked about their self-study, apart from bilingual dictionaries used both in a traditional and an online form, the subjects in all the groups also mentioned other resources: grammar reference books (containing only theoretical explanations) and other course books (e.g. those used in primary school, by other family members or in the course of private tuition). Among the less regularly used resources the interviewees mentioned CDs for English learners given away by newspapers and *Repetytorium Gimnazjalne* (a book of revision exercises for students preparing for the external exams at the end of the third year). A small number of subjects reported using the Internet: consulting online versions of dictionaries, looking for grammar exercises, searching for song lyrics and translations of them. Some individual learners also mentioned creative techniques such as running a computer spell checker on their work to verify their spelling or consulting Wikipedia pages in both Polish and English with the aim of finding equivalent

foreign-language words or phrases. Very few learners stated that they used the CD-ROM provided with the course book in the revision process or in practising listening skills. None of the respondents used the companion website containing supplementary materials to their course book. One alarming tendency was observed in almost all the groups: a few learners resorted to online translation tools to prepare written tasks and to translate texts aiming to elicit reading comprehension. Moreover, when a written exercise was assigned, one learner confessed to seeking ready texts uploaded on the Internet.

Most of the learners referred to additional materials before a test or when they encountered problems at school, e.g. when they had to make up for an absence, do their homework or prepare additional tasks. Apart from these school-related activities, some learners reported that they used diverse materials because they wanted to improve their own language competence or because they liked the subject. Some learners browsed through old course books or surfed websites in English when they were bored. Only one learner who frequently used materials from a distance learning course explicitly stated that she got involved in outside-school learning to overcome overall problems with the language, improve listening comprehension skills and enhance her ability to communicate.

In selecting supplementary resources the learners relied on their own judgement or, if they attended additional classes, asked their private tutor for help. Some respondents said that their parents or other members of their family served as sources of information about learning resources. Except for incidental situations, the learners did not ask the school teacher for help in finding additional learning aids, and only a few of them recalled their teachers occasionally making suggestions concerning materials necessary for preparing a project or tasks to be placed in their portfolios.

When asked to evaluate their school course book, the subjects in all groups generally praised it for interesting topics, diversity of information, colourful layout, clear instructions and detailed presentations of grammar structures. The most frequently mentioned drawbacks pointed out by a small number of learners were the difficult exercises and the lack of instructions in Polish. Despite the problems they perceived, only three respondents wished to find a new course book, but only one person was able to suggest a specific title of an alternative book.

3.5. Discussion of the results

Let us now interpret the results obtained by means of all the research instruments. As mentioned earlier, the mean values in the autonomy questionnaire administered before and after the experiment increased in all the research groups except for Group 4, but the results of the dependent t-tests for each research group revealed that the difference was statistically significant only in the group subjected to portfolio assessment. The positive impact of portfolio assessment might result from the

fact that the subjects had to make a variety of independent decisions concerning the execution of both the obligatory and supplementary items included in the portfolio, whereas in the other assessment methods all the tasks as well as the materials used were imposed by the teacher. As almost all the portfolio assignments required input beyond the material discussed in the course book, the learners were compelled to look for information in other sources in order to complete the tasks.

Both the monthly observation and interviews indicated that the main learning resource learners relied on both in the classroom and in self-study was the course book. Although bilingual dictionaries were the second most frequently mentioned resource used by the learners, no instruction on how to use this aid efficiently was provided throughout the experiment. The tasks selected for the purposes of the classroom practice and homework were in most cases taken from the course book or workbook and the completion of such exercises did not require the learners to use any additional materials. The incident described earlier when the learners in the control group failed to complete a homework task requiring them to look in outside sources for some specific facts indicated their incompetence in looking for relevant information in other sources and the tendency to desert a task when a problem arises. The teacher's response to this situation did not promote the development of autonomous behaviour, but rather consolidated his position as an authority and the only source of information in the classroom.

The teacher's dominant position in the classroom was confirmed by the learners in the questionnaires. Both before and after the experiment, the responses to item 5 ("It is the teacher who should tell me what exercises to do and what books to use") indicated that the subjects considered school teachers to be responsible for the selection of materials and the choice of exercises; but in practice they hardly ever consulted their teachers about learning resources. It appears that learners chose materials on their own, and only a few subjects mentioned their parents or private tutors as sources of knowledge about diverse learning tools.

The interviews showed that the learners used a wide variety of sources at home, which were employed mainly for school-related purposes: when the learners had to do their homework, revise before a test or when a language problem occurred. Interestingly, some learners referred to additional resources in English because they liked the language or when they were bored, which indicates a positive attitude towards the subject. The resources enumerated by the learners show that they made a conscious effort to find different means that would help them to solve language problems. Still, the variety of materials used implied that they were mainly interested in developing language accuracy, while communicative skills were largely neglected. For instance, using grammar reference books devoid of practical exercises is hardly likely to help learners use a given structure in a meaningful context or enhance their communicative competence. Although the Internet was recognised as an important learning resource, its use was limited to accuracy-oriented tasks and none of the learners used it as a source of authentic

audio or visual materials. Moreover, the respondents seemed to be unaware of the richness of websites devoted to language learning or the possibility of online communication with other L2 users around the world. Such limited use of learning resources and a lack of knowledge of numerous available options was also observed among upper secondary school learners (Pawlak 2008). Moreover, the use of additional resources was incidental and did not constitute a coherent plan aiming at achieving a significant language gain. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the use of such resources would be more efficient on the condition that the learners were given incentive or guidance on how to plan their individual learning. Finally, an alarming tendency was reported in a few groups: namely the learners often translated reading comprehension or written tasks using online translating tools. It may indicate that these learners misjudged the usefulness of some resources, and that they were not aware of the nature and the quality of such translations.

The research revealed that the learners tended to utilise more additional materials and resources when they were involved in alternative forms of assessment, e.g. when they were requested to prepare a project, portfolio or (less often) a task to be peer-assessed. The process of preparing a project or an exercise subsequently subjected to peer assessment necessitated the use of visual materials, such as pictures or maps, as well as some factual information. In order to complete additional tasks, the subjects were forced to use resources not commonly employed in their classrooms, e.g. the Internet or encyclopaedias. Still, it was not observed that the ability to select and implement resources, so evident in carrying out a task for assessment, was also applied in other areas of language learning, either in the classroom or in self-study situations. Consequently, as indicated also by the quantitative data (apart from the group subjected to portfolio assessment), the application of diverse assessment methods failed to change the learners' attitudes toward and use of additional resources in language education.

4. Conclusions

The research presented in this article aimed to determine whether the application of diverse assessment methods would enhance lower secondary school learners' ability to select and use different learning resources. The results of the year-long experiment suggest that the alternative methods of assessment applied do not affect the way lower secondary school learners approach learning resources. The statistical analysis revealed that the ability to select and use resources increased in the group subjected to portfolio assessment; still, the qualitative data does not fully support this claim. Although the subjects in this group had to select and utilise diverse materials in order to prepare their portfolio entries, they failed to use additional resources in other tasks. It can therefore be assumed that the subjects' use

of extra materials was task-specific and limited to exercises involving alternative assessment methods. It appears that the application of an alternative assessment method does not suffice to encourage L2 learners to use learning resources in a self-directed and efficient way. Alternative assessment methods such as project assessment, portfolio assessment or peer assessment involved using additional materials; the teachers, however, did not encourage the use of additional materials in other classroom activities.

It must be emphasised that the language classrooms observed in the study were principally teacher-centred, and learners were viewed as passive recipients of knowledge. The teacher, as the central person in the classroom, was considered to be responsible for all elements of language teaching, i.e. instructional planning, administration, evaluation and feedback. Consequently, most learners believed that it is the teacher that should provide all the materials and resources. The study highlights a pressing need to plan comprehensive strategy training in L2 learning that would consistently develop learners' ability to select diverse materials and would help them both in the classroom and self-study learning. The ability to select and use learning resources efficiently should be developed as an element of extensive autonomy training starting from raising learners' awareness of their learning process and the effectiveness of the strategies and learning resources they use. Such a self-reflective stance would eventually enable language learners to apply learning aids adjusted to their actual language problems and transfer newly acquired skills to other areas of education as well.

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