Use of Authentic Materials and L1 in English Language Learning Classrooms in B&H

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Abstract: In the modern society people are exposed to English almost all the time and everywhere. English is heard on TV, read in books, people from different countries communicate with each other in this language. Therefore, it is not surprising that the need for studying the effects of the exposure to English on the developing of English language proficiency has arisen. This paper examines the exposure of Bosnian students to the English language outside of the classroom and provides a comparison between private and public schools, as well as between elementary and high schools. Another aspect of investigation is the perceptions of Bosnian teachers and students regarding the use of the mother tongue (L1) in EFL classrooms. With the switch from grammar-translation method to communicative approaches, the role of L1 in English language learning classrooms has become highly disputed, and the current paper attempts to shed light on this issue.

1. Introduction

Successful second language learning has two important dimensions: learning inside the classroom with a teacher and learning outside of the classroom with no teacher impact. Even though the main goal of learning a language is communication, i.e. language use, it is a surprising fact that language has almost always been taught as it will merely be used in classrooms within schools. With this focus on language in the classrooms, language is often described only in those circumstances, without taking into consideration outer events which might impact second language learners, in this case English language learners [1].

School books and other materials used by teachers have always appeared as crucial ways of learning a language and seemingly have been used as the only sources of language material. It seems like this approach might not always lead to one’s aims since it is those authentic materials that were created for real-life goals usually intended for native speakers, and the “English around us” that we believe aid the second language acquisition [2].

Furthermore, the predominant, if not exclusive, use of the target language (L2) has long been considered as an important principle of second language instruction and acquisition. However, the role of the mother tongue, the child’s native or first acquired language [3], should not be neglected. Although teachers are recommended to avoid using the L1 in the classroom, primarily with the aim of increasing students’ fluency, the actual use of L1 in the classroom might help develop students’ accuracy, since they mostly receive explanations of the difficult L2 notions in their L1.

The present study focuses on the analysis of the aforementioned issues in the context of Bosnian elementary and high schools. Taking only public schools into account would have considerably limited the research, thus the study focuses on both private and public schools. Firstly, the purpose of this paper is to investigate students’ and teachers’ perceptions regarding the use of authentic materials outside of the classroom. Furthermore, it attempts to explain whether there is any impact of learning opportunities, i.e. the use of authentic materials, outside of the classroom on students’ acquisition and achievement. Moreover, this paper aims to compare teachers’ and students’ perceptions about the use of L1 in the classroom, how they perceive its use, and what might be the reasons why students avoid speaking in English during English classes. The paper also strives to reveal whether and to what extent elementary and high school students in both public and private schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina are exposed to their mother tongue, how often and what for it is used: vocabulary teaching, grammar teaching, translation, etc. It will also show how useful the L1 is in the process of English language acquisition. With the growing body of evidence suggesting that extensive use of the target language in the classroom is essential for successful second language acquisition, it is a challenge to provide a rationale for the use of L1 in language classrooms.

2. Literature Review

Technology, the Internet (including social media), applications, and the media contribute to language learning and use in an authentic manner, especially in the case of English as a lingua franca. These new
learning opportunities are likely to offer a more interactive, social and multimodal communication, thus learners can communicate in English with anyone in any part of the world [4] [5]. Therefore, many researchers show the importance and advantages of internet language learning by emphasizing chat rooms such as Facebook, Messenger, Viber, etc. These chat rooms are contexts which are perfect for English use because they are stress-free [6]. The learners are not limited by their proficiency, nor do they feel anxiety related to making mistakes in front of their friends or teachers. Consequently, chat room communication results in successful comprehension and greater quantity of the target language production.

One of the oldest, but modern, way of using technology for language learning is television. Watching TV has been proven to support many aspects of language learning, including listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and cross-cultural awareness [7] [8]. A new approach to watching television series in terms of learning a language arises. It is a cognitive strategy called ‘resourcing’ which requires the learner to take notes on words or expressions they want to learn [9]. In order for them to do so, they use the subtitles in their L1. The learner then controls their learning, and they can pause a scene and replay it as much as they need.

However, learning a language only outside of the classroom often makes the learners have a formal gap in their knowledge. In these terms, different teaching methods have promoted different ways of using the L2. According to the earliest known model of language teaching, the grammar-translation method, teachers used only L1 in the classroom, which is one side of the extreme. On the other side of the extreme, there are communicative approaches which advocate for the use of L2 only [10]. Nowadays, experts mostly agree on one thing: using the L2 in the language classroom as much as possible almost always results in higher achievement in terms of language proficiency. Extensive use of the target language is a long-standing tenet of second language teaching [11].

Although disputed, the issue of L1 use is central in teacher training and development. Some maintain that the use of the L1 enhances the L2 learning process and advocate its careful, limited incorporation into classroom practice [12] [13] [14] [15]. Cook (2001) examines possible justifications for the use of L1 and describes different ways in which the L1 may be used positively by teachers and students. Other researchers are more reserved in embracing L1 use. Some claim that teachers already use the L1 and need encouragement to increase their L2 use [16]. Additional support for this position comes from research that provides concrete suggestions [17] [18] for teaching more exclusively in the target language.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the language classroom is a multilingual community in which monolingual native speaker norms should not be imposed. Consequently, teachers should see their students as developing bilinguals or as ‘multi-competent’ users [19] [20] whose extensive L1 knowledge complements their growing L2 knowledge. Here, L1 can be seen as something learners carry all their lives which helps them collect their experiences, later contributing to their L2 learning. It is believed that learning in general relies on the ability to use information from previously encountered tasks to enhance the learning of new tasks, provided that they are similar in nature. When applied to language, the relevance of prior linguistic knowledge depends on the relationship that can be established between the learner’s L1 and L2. Consequently, the presence of similar (in form and/or function) linguistic elements in the L1 should facilitate the acquisition of these elements in the L2 (positive transfer) because people naturally look for similarities before they look for differences [21]. In other words, if something is similar in the L1 or the L2, the learners are likely to acquire that structure/language utterance faster. On the other hand, if L1 and L2 elements are substantially different along some relevant parameters of a given L2 feature, this may create an interfering effect (negative transfer), which manifests itself in persistent and systematic errors [22]. This L1 as an initial system operates in discourse situations which allow the learner to make full use of extra-linguistic information in their first analyses of the verbal material of the new language, as they try to understand and make themselves understood [23].

The usage of L1 can also often be linked to students’ inner feelings and thoughts, for example they often use L1 when afraid of using the target language because they are not sure it is correct, or perhaps because they fear the thought of being laughed at. Whatever the case might be, foreign language students often avoid using the L2. Actually, the term willingness to communicate (WTC) can be used here to denote this subject [24]. The main factors that affect WTC are learner beliefs [25] [26], international posture [27], classroom environment [28], silence [29], motivational strategy [30], communication confidence [31] and communication apprehension [32] [33]. Other researchers too have pointed to motivation [34] [30] [35] [36] and perceived competence as key points in second language (L2) acquisition [31] [37] [38] [28] [39]. However, most of these studies were conducted without actual student voices and the perspective of actual students is still needed, thus that is what this paper provides.

It is not difficult to find examples of students who managed to fluently and accurately speak a foreign target language taught in the classroom with the help
of their L1. However, learners who use additional materials outside of the classroom without explicit teaching and no L1 translations are the ones who make it interesting to investigate. In view of the expanding range of opportunities and resources today’s foreign language learners have, out-of-class learning has never been easier. Therefore, similar studies containing new information and perspectives on out-of-class learning, the use of authentic materials, and the role of L1 in the classroom are highly required for the development of second language acquisition studies and they offer new insights and suggestions on how L2 learning and teaching can be developed for the benefit of learners.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Participants in this research were students from both public and private schools from five cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Sarajevo, Travnik, Visoko, Zenica and Živinice. Four elementary schools and six high schools were included. Two of them were private schools, while the rest were public schools. The grade range was varied: the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grades from elementary schools participated, while from high schools all four grades were included. In total there were 440 participants. Unfortunately, due to this large number of participants and the impossibility of monitoring every survey, some analysis included a smaller number of participants due to them skipping some statements, therefore not providing an answer. In the two charts below, the number and percentage of participants both in private vs. high and public vs. private schools are presented.

Furthermore, the collected data showed that 131 (31%) of the respondents attended, while 292 (69%) did not attend additional classes. Additionally, 164 (44%) of the respondents had the grade 5 (excellent), which is the majority of them, while 76 (20.4%) had 4 (very good), 74 (19.8%) had 3 (good), 59 (15.8%) had 2 (sufficient), and none of the students failed their English class.

3.2. Instruments

Two instruments were used while conducting the research. Firstly, surveys were given out to students. The survey consisted of twelve questions related to their English language classes, the use of L1, the use of L2, and their learning outside of the classroom. The survey also helped in learning students’ background information related to the English language, and thus it included questions related to their average mark and whether they attended additional classes or not. All the questions were in the form of a Likert scale consisting of points 1 to 5, where 1 stood for ‘completely disagree’, while 5 stood for ‘completely agree’.

The second instrument used was an interview with teachers, which was helpful in finding out more in depth information. Namely, the first part of the interview consisted of questions related to their education, English language acquisition and experience so far. The second part of the interview contained questions about their teaching methods; they were asked whether they use English exclusively regardless of the students’ age, grade and level of knowledge. Also, they were asked whether they had any problems from the side of students, parents or school administration regarding their use of English. Lastly, they were asked to explain for what they use L1, i.e. Bosnian, in their lessons, whether it is for explaining rules, translating words, or for vocabulary in general, or for classroom management. All of their responses were recorded and later analyzed in the descriptive, qualitative, part of the research. The interview was semi-structured and was also used for comparing public with private schools and elementary with high schools.

In this research, we used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. When it comes to quantitative method, we have administered a survey consisting of 12 questions about the use of English language outside of the classroom and about the use of the L1, in this case of Bosnian language, in the language classroom. Since we have also interviewed teachers from elementary and high schools, we have also collected the data qualitatively.

3.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study has six research questions:

RQ1: Does the use of authentic materials impact students’ achievement, i.e. their grades?
RQ2: Do elementary and high school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina use authentic materials outside the classroom? What are their and teachers’ opinions regarding this use?
RQ3: Are students more exposed to written or spoken English outside of the classroom?
RQ4: What is the mother tongue used for?
RQ5: What are students’ perceptions about the use of mother tongue in the classroom? How often should it be used?
RQ6: Why do students avoid speaking the L2 in the classroom?

Derived from the above research questions, the study aims to six eight hypotheses:

H1: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the use of authentic materials and marks.
H2: Elementary and high school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina often use authentic materials outside of the classroom.
H3: Students are more exposed to written than to spoken English outside of the classroom.
H4: The mother tongue is most often used in classrooms for grammar explanations and vocabulary learning.
H5: Students think that the mother tongue should often be used in the classroom.
H6: Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina avoid speaking in English in language classrooms because they lack confidence in their language and they fear they will be made fun of.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Survey Results

The first hypothesis strives to investigate whether the use of authentic materials, namely music and programs in English, outside of the classroom impacts students’ achievement.
H1: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the use of authentic materials and marks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. The correlation between authentic materials and marks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authentic materials</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mark</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correlation between the use of authentic materials and marks tends to be high (*r*=.607, *p*=.001) (Cohen et al., 2003) as we can see from the data displayed in Table 1, which means that the use of authentic materials outside of the classroom positively impacts students’ grades. The more the students use authentic materials for (incidental or intentional) learning, the better their grades seem to be. Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed, which adds on previous similar research mentioned in the literature review part where most researchers claim that authentic materials both in and out of the classroom help students better acquire the given language. Additionally, these results were supported by the interviewed teachers of whom many emphasized the importance of reading books, which they often give as homework, watching movies, or even listening to music, especially for improving comprehension and accent. A teacher from a public high school said: “I often use authentic materials in the classroom because I think it considerably helps in language acquisition. Usually I use music, videos, texts, and sometimes watch movies with students who have higher grades who can understand better.” Another teacher, a public elementary school teacher, said that “despite being limited, incorporating CDs that come with the book shows some improvement in students’ comprehension and later accents.” Private school teachers mentioned that they “give books in English for homework because it helps students expand vocabulary.” Such efforts of using authentic materials should be encouraged in any, especially foreign language contexts where exposure to the target language is limited. In addition to that the background questionnaire showed that much more participants did not attend any additional classes of English, which might have served as further useful exposure to the target language. Therefore, teachers should encourage using the easily accessible authentic materials whenever possible.

How often students use those materials is investigated posing the second research question, and thus analyzing the hypothesis treating the students’ use of authentic materials outside of the classroom.
H2: Elementary and high school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina often use authentic materials outside of the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Use of authentic materials outside of the classroom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music in English (Q1)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>439</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>438</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results (see Table 2), students use authentic materials outside of the classroom relatively often, i.e. above average. Again, the scale used for measuring was Likert scale with five points. It is shown that students listen more to music in English (M=3.66), than watch programs without subtitles (M=3.21). Number 5, standing for ‘strongly agree’ was the most chosen answer for both of the questions. Namely, both questions show above average results and therefore we can conclude that the second hypothesis is confirmed. This means that students in Bosnia and Herzegovina use other out-of-class resources, perhaps only for fun, but for implicit language learning, as well. This suggests that with this above average interest in authentic materials, local teachers could be successful in incorporating more authentic materials in their classrooms and in
that way draw students’ attention which often implies better acquisition.

What kind of authentic materials are mainly used outside of the classroom is analyzed by the third hypothesis.

H3: Students are more exposed to written than to spoken English outside of the classroom

Table 3: Students’ exposure to English outside of the classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to spoken English (Q3)</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to written English (Q4)</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>430</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 3, students are more exposed to written – Q4 (M=2.93), than to spoken - Q3 (M=2.80) English outside of the classroom. There is slightly more variability at question 3, SD= 1.43, than at question 4(SD=1.42). A t-test was conducted as well in order to check whether there is a statistically significant difference between the two questions, i.e. their means. The t-test showed p=0.001, which means that there is a statistically significant difference between the two questions. All in all, the third hypothesis is confirmed.

According to the results displayed in Table 4 the mother tongue is very often used in Bosnian EFL classrooms for translating the lessons, translating vocabulary and providing grammar explanations. As can be seen from the results the L1 is most often used for translating vocabulary or unknown words (M= 4.16), while the rest of the questions also show a quite high mean. Important for this study is that the results show that L1 is widely used for the explanation of grammar rules, so we can conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed. The interviews with the teachers support these quantitative results.

Table 4. The use of mother tongue in the language classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesson translation (Q9)</th>
<th>Vocabular translation (Q10)</th>
<th>Explanatio of grammar rules (Q12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>438</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Deviation</td>
<td>1.481</td>
<td>1.327</td>
<td>1.417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results displayed in Table 4 the mother tongue is very often used in Bosnian EFL classrooms for translating the lessons, translating vocabulary and providing grammar explanations. As can be seen from the results the L1 is most often used for translating vocabulary or unknown words (M= 4.16), while the rest of the questions also show a quite high mean. Important for this study is that the results show that L1 is widely used for the explanation of grammar rules, so we can conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed. The interviews with the teachers support these quantitative results. Teachers who use L1 in their classes, i.e. mostly public school teachers, claimed that they use it for explaining new vocabulary, because students rarely understand definitions in English, and they also emphasized grammar explanations in L1, because students find it hard to understand it even in their mother tongue, let alone in English.

Since the research has implied that students tend to have positive attitude towards the use of mother tongue in the EFL classrooms we decided to investigate this issue in the local, Bosnian context. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis refers to students’ opinions whether the mother tongue should be used often in the classroom.

H5: Students think that the mother tongue should often be used in the classroom.
Table 5: Students’ opinions about mother tongue use (Q7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>1.359</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results (see Table 5) show that students think the mother tongue should be often used in English language classes (M=3.76). The most common number on the Likert scale was 5, which means that most of the students approve the use of L1 in their English classes. Therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed. Here, again we can take interviews with the teachers into consideration. Most of the teachers said that they wish to use English exclusively in their language classrooms, but they consider it impossible due to students’ lack of knowledge. Despite this great desire our teachers have, the results of students’ opinions confirm that they do want L1 use in the classroom, presumably because then they can follow and learn the lessons, instead of just unsuccessfully trying to understand.

The last hypothesis tends to investigate whether the major reason why students avoid speaking in English is because they do not have enough confidence and they fear they will be made fun of. H6: Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina avoid speaking in English in language classrooms because they lack confidence in their language and they fear they will be made fun of.

Table 6: Reasons students avoid to speak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lack of confidence (Q5)</th>
<th>Fear of being made fun of (Q6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>1.163</td>
<td>1.338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table (see Table 6), the means are above the average. The means (M=3.67 and M=3.38) indicate that students tend to avoid speaking English in language classrooms because of the two named reasons: they are either unsure about their English language knowledge or they fear that their classmates might make fun of them. However, since the means are only slightly above the average (above point 3), this hypothesis is only vaguely confirmed and may require further research into the causes of avoidance. Generally, researchers and teachers emphasize the lack of confidence as a major reason why language students avoid speaking the target language, and it is the case here, as well. Despite that the interviewed teachers only briefly mentioned the lack of knowledge as one of the reasons their students do not speak in the classroom, they still tried to put the emphasis on the teachers’ duty to help their students disregard such feelings of anxiety, nervousness, fear, etc. They suggest that once the teacher has made a friendly and care-free environment, the students will feel free to start using the language.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the data collected from 440 students and 10 teachers, the aim of this research paper has been reached. All six hypotheses were confirmed.

Firstly, it has been confirmed that the use of authentic materials outside of the classroom is highly impacts students’ grades, which means that the more the students use authentic materials, in our case music and programs, the better their achievement, i.e. grade, is. There are many studies confirming these findings. MacIntyre conducted a study in 2007 and found out that chat rooms are a perfect context for English learning because they are stress-free, the learners are not limited by their proficiency and they are not afraid to make mistakes. Danan (2004) says likewise, showing that watching TV contributes to better listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Secondly, research has shown that students in Bosnia and Herzegovina often use authentic materials outside of the classroom and are more exposed to written English than to spoken English. Furthermore, the paper has shown that there is a difference between the use of L1 in language classrooms in elementary and high schools, and in private and public schools, as well. The higher use of L1 in elementary schools is associated with the competence of the students; at that age it is easier for them to rely on their L1 during the language acquisition, while high school students are more capable of switching to the English language in the language classroom. In private schools, English is used as a medium of instruction and students usually come from different countries of the world, so it is somewhat impossible to use the L1 in the classroom. Perhaps it is used only in the cases when the teacher knows the L1 of the student, and mostly for classroom management, but further research might investigate the exact occasions in which L1 is used in private schools. On the other hand, in public schools the group of students is more homogenous and almost exclusively consists of children from Bosnia and Herzegovina.
and Herzegovina, therefore the use of L1 is considered usual.

In the academic world, scientists are divided on this topic. Many researchers agree that extensive use of L1 only hinders L2 acquisition and brings nothing good to the language classroom. Turnbull (2001) says that teachers need encouragement to use their L2 more, while Chambers (1991) agrees and says that teaching should be exclusively in the target language. However, Vivian Cook (2001) presents the opposite view claiming that it is time to start using the mother tongue systematically in the classrooms. His study describes various ways in which the L1 could be used in favor of teachers and for students study describes various ways in which the L1 could be used in favor of teachers and for students.

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As the results show, teachers use L1 mostly for translations, both of lessons and vocabulary, and for grammar explanations. Teachers use the mother tongue because students cannot follow, nor understand easily, which is confirmed by their answers in the surveys where most of them agreed that their mother tongue should be often used in the classroom. Giacobbe (1992) confirms by his study that L1 can be very helpful in L2 classes. He says that the L1 can be seen as a prior system which allows learners to participate in foreign-language activities. This L1 system helps learners make full use of extra-linguistic information in their analyses of verbal materials in the new target language which they try to understand and make themselves understood. But as always, teachers frequently have a hard time making students speak or use the L2 in many manners. The results have shown that there are two possible reasons: the lack of confidence and the fear of being mocked by their peers. However, further research would be helpful in bringing more detailed information.

The results and the whole process of conducting this study have been extremely helpful for understanding the current situation in EFL classrooms in elementary and high public and private schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unluckily, according to the results and interpretations, the situation is not satisfactory. Despite learning the language for many years, most of the students still seek for clarifications of even the most common and easiest language aspects. Most of them can understand the teacher only with the help of their mother tongue. Unfortunately, the teachers are in no better situation. Every teacher’s wish is to have students who understand and acquire quickly and who have enough knowledge to offer the teachers a care-free classroom. Using L1 often and repeating already covered structures forbids teachers to have the freedom of organizing creative lessons. However, the solution might lie in the further encouragement of the use of authentic materials, easily accessible on daily basis. Incorporating them in the classes of English might significantly increase the exposure to English, considered limited in any foreign language context, might make the learning an interesting and challenging process in which both learners and teachers are equal partners, and might eventually make all participants in the process of education more satisfied, bringing about the desired outcomes.

6. References


[31] Fushino, K. (2010). Causal relationships between communication confidence, beliefs about group work, and willingness to communicate in foreign language group work. TESOL Quarterly 44, 700-724.


