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Young Adult Literature in the EFL Classroom: designing a digital social reading project with Actively Learn.

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Abstract

FL education has proven to be a resource for a successful access to the global society. Research in the field of EFL teaching has been trying to incorporate young adult literature and digital reading in language teaching. The present project aims at designing new EFL-high-school-activities addressed to the Diglit-project students to help them understand the value of English YAL and tech-tools in terms of personal growth and engagement in society. A questionnaire was used to investigate students' reading habits and preferences in terms of time dedicated to reading, preferred genres, topics of interest and device use. Results suggested that students feel attracted by books with dynamic plots and teenage protagonists: a general interest was found also for topics related to contemporary global issues. Data showed that students read mostly on paper or on smartphones. To conclude, as a product, a digital social reading activity composed of a set of pre-, while- and post- reading activities on "The Giver" by Lois Lowry was created on the Actively Learn platform.

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[1] See note in the text

Introduction

Research in the field of foreign language education and especially English as foreign language education has been focusing on the development of new methods to adopt with young students to potentiate their language skills. The CEFR recognizes foreign language education as one of the tools to empower students, helping them become active part of our societies, which are becoming more and more interconnected and multicultural. Current research studies have been trying to find a method to introduce literature in the language curriculum, making it more engaging, thanks to the use of modern technologies. Scholars in the EFL education field suggest that literature is a powerful resource for FL students: on the one hand, it can help them explore new linguistic features of the language (i.e. vocabulary, grammatic structures, styles of writing), on the other hand, it can also help them explore new themes and topics that they may reinterpret on the basis of their own life experiences. In other words, literature is a tool that encourages students to reflect on themselves and on the reality they live in. In addition, scholars (See Bowers-Campbell,2011; Rebora et al., 2021; Scharber, 2009) have underlined how in recent years digital reading, and consequently digital social reading, have been growing in popularity: young people, especially, are attracted by digital content and they spend more time than ever reading on digital devices. This is why the present work aims to explore new methods to combine Young Adult Literature (henceforth) YAL and digital reading to include them in the language curriculum. The idea is to transform the language classroom from a place where students learn grammar and vocabulary to a place where they can reflect on identity, culture, citizenship, and society. This research is part of a larger European project, the "Lit up your phones, DigLit – A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat social Inequalities in times of Covid 19 Crises", which involves three research hubs (University of Graz, University of Pecs, University of Venice) and which aims at bringing young adult literature and digital tools in high-school EFL classes.

The dissertation is composed of four sections. In the first section, we will provide an overview of the research carried out in the EFL/ESL field. Specifically, we will focus on the role of literature in foreign language education, on reading and learner autonomy, and on technology-based literature teaching. In the second section, the Diglit study will be introduced: this case study has been carried out with a sample of students from three high-schools from Austria,

Italy, and Hungary participating in the European project. Therefore, we will briefly introduce the project and its aims, then we will present the questionnaire that was administered to the students. Consequently, the data collected by means of the questionnaire will be presented. A brief discussion about the results will be included at the end of the second section. In the third chapter, we will describe a digital social reading activity that could potentially be carried out with the Diglit students. The activity has been designed around the "The Giver" by Lois Lowry using Actively Learn on the basis of the preferences that students expressed in the questionnaire. The chapter will present in order: the book, the platform, the learning activity with its pre-, while- and post-reading phases. A fourth and last section will summarize the whole work, including a brief analysis of strengths and weaknesses and possible improvements.

Chapter 1

Young Adult Literature and Digital Reading in FL classes

Contemporary research has been focusing on the importance of potentiating foreign language education by using literature in language classes and a thread inside this field of research wants to explore the possibilities of making literature reading digital to meet the needs of the new generations of students. The focus of the present research project will be on two main topics: the use of young adult literature in foreign language education and the adoption of digital tools in EFL classes to teach literature. The following chapter will discuss in order the followings: the role of literature in foreign language education; theories, and approaches in teaching literature; and how to teach literature through technology.

1.1 Literature in Foreign Language Education

Giving a precise definition of literature is a challenging task for scholars. Many theories have been developed to explain what can be considered as a literary text and how literary education and language education relate to one another. There is no univocal way to define literature: to explore the characteristics of it, we need to focus on intrinsic aspects, such as the genres and the main themes; and extrinsic aspects, such as the author or the social, cultural and artistic tendences of his/her times (Spaliviero, 2020). Despite scholarly debates, it is possible to identify some features that allow us to distinguish between a literary and a non-literary text. Jakobson (1985) supports the idea that literature is permeated by universal principles that never change. According to this author, literary language has some peculiar characteristics related to: the phonological aspect (figures of sound), the graphic aspect (peculiar structure of poetry), the morphosyntactic aspect (e.g., parataxis or hypotaxis) and the lexical aspect (figures of speech, neologisms). On the other hand, other scholars claim that each literary work should be analysed together with the social and cultural context where it was generated and be interpreted depending on the historical, social, and cultural background of the readers. In this sense, Di Girolamo (1978) argues that the readers are the ones who should decide whether to consider a work a literary text or not.

Research, starting from the 1980s, has been trying to identify the role of literature in language learning (Tehan et al., 2015). The use of literary texts in foreign language education is a matter

of debate among scholars since many seem to be the advantages and limits of such a praxis. As Tehan et al. (2015) explain, we may identify two different positions concerning the role of literature as part of language teaching programs. The first position is regarded as the "essentialist position": scholars supporting this view claim that the study of literature is essential to promote language learning and language proficiency and consequently also cultural awareness, critical thinking, and motivation. On the other hand, some researchers support a "non-essentialist position". The non-essentialist approach sees literature as having limited relevance in terms of language teaching and learning, since "literary texts have no essence that distinguishes them from other types of texts" (Yuksel, 2007 in Tehan et al., 2015, p. 46). Therefore, literature is not considered as an adequate tool to boost L2 proficiency.

In the following section, some arguments in favour and against the use of literature in language classes will be presented to provide a general overview of the main claims supported by academic research in this field.

1.1.1 Advantages and limits of using literature in Foreign Language Education

In the field of literary education, the very act of reading a text is considered as an act of communication which involves the addresser, usually the author, the recipient, the reader, and a mediator, the teacher (Spaliviero, 2020). In this type of communicational context, the reader is stimulated to get to know the message of the author using critical thinking. The reading process will coincide with a process of introspection. Therefore, in this case, the teacher would be an intermediary figure with the mission of facilitating the students' analytical process (Spaliviero, 2020).

Scholars have proven that literature and the reading process that learners undergo can have many positive effects on students. One of the positive effects of literature is related to linguistic benefits: when students are exposed to authentic materials, they can experiment with many styles, registers and adapt to many different stages of difficulty (Tasneen, 2010). Lazar (1993) pointed out that the use of literature as a source of authentic material can be a powerful stimulus during the language learning process since it promotes students' interpretative abilities and expands their language awareness. Similarly, Spaliviero (2020) suggests that literary education supports linguistic education. Thanks to literature, learners can improve their lexical and morphosyntactic knowledge and can develop strategies to tackle the literary text reading process.

Overall, the exposure to literary language could result in a general improvement in receptive skills, pronunciation, and critical thinking. In addition, as Spack (1985) points out, working with literary texts can help improving writing and composition abilities. Another aspect to take into consideration is that literary texts are polysemic and rich in content that may reflect students' life experiences. In this context, exposure to literary texts could have a general educational value (McKay, 1982). The texts provide learners with new knowledge about the world and can open their perspectives about various human conditions and situations (Ur, 1996). Therefore, texts can be the means through which students start a process of individual empowerment (Tsang et al., 2020). Readers can enter in syntony with the message and feelings that the author wants to convey: such final tuning can be a source of motivation since readers can feel a connection between the content of the text and their own lives (Tasneen, 2010). Hirvela (2001) states that when learners read a literary text, they have the chance to directly interact with the characters, comparing themselves with them and their experiences. What is more, during the reading process, learners are required to be critical and creative: they should be flexible to understand the style, the language, and the content, even in cultural terms. Reading requires the learner to use "his/her imagination in discussing literature, which, in turn, contributes to making learning a memorable and enjoyable experience" (Al Rabadi, 2015, p. 102). As Rosenblatt explains "the reader seeks in literature a great variety of satisfactions" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 36). Overall, literature can be a fun and enjoyable tool (Ur, 1996), which gives space to talk about personal emotions and feelings (Tehan et al., 2015). To conclude, the use of literary texts in EFL classes can also be related to an improvement in terms of intercultural communicative competence. The process of communication with the text may affect the way in which the reader communicates with others. Literature can give students the tools to engage in intercultural communication, which will help them redefine their own identity while at the same time develop tolerance and curiosity toward cultural differences (Gómez, 2011; Spaliviero, 2020; Tasneen, 2010). What Gómez (2011) underlines is that "second language learning should not only be effective communication, but the search for the understanding of cultural boundaries and the attempt to come to terms with those boundaries" (Gómez, 2011, p. 50). This means that when we talk about intercultural communicative competence, we are in fact dealing with two issues: language learning and culture learning. In this terms, literary texts are considered "ideal materials to promote meaning negotiation and the access to cultural knowledge" (Gómez, 2011, p. 52). While reading literary texts students can interact with what they find inside the text and negotiate meaning. This will help them develop a sense of tolerance and respect for diversity.

Many studies which collected students' opinions about reading have also provided evidence that literature for young adults can bring benefits. In a study that aimed at gathering data about learners' perception of literary genres, Tsang et al. (2020) found that learners refer specifically to language-related benefits and non-language related benefits. In the first category are included all the positive effects that the exposure to literary language can have on the four macro-skills, namely: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Tsang et al., 2020). In the second category, there are non-language related benefits, which include those related to the sphere of personal identity and of intercultural communication. On the basis of the study conducted by Tehan et al. (2015) about the students' opinions concerning the use of literature, the majority of the students interviewed agreed with the idea that literature is an essential part of foreign language classes. Of all the students involved in the study, 65% were convinced that literature classes should be mandatory. Similarly, Ivey et al. (2013) found that adolescents who had the chance to read books at school and outside language classes underwent a positive process of self-transformation. The opportunity to compare their own life experiences with the adventures of the literary characters was for them a source of strength: students learned new skills on how to handle relationships, were more actively engaged in meaningful connections with friends and family, and they also found that literature was a source of inspiration in the conversations with peers. Students could find in literature the strengthening contents and messages that they needed to overcome the difficulties that they were living in their own lives, to constructively reshape their own realities (Ivey et al., 2013).

On the other hand, there may also be some limitations in using literature in foreign language education. As we mentioned before, literary texts can be very rich and complex, both in terms of lexical choices and in terms of multi-layered meanings (Savvidou, 2004; Spaliviero, 2020). These aspects may be at times too difficult to handle for students, and a general sensation of frustration and overwhelm can prevent learners from getting in touch with the content of the texts. In the study conducted by Tasneen (2010) it was found that both teachers and students agreed on the fact that literature can be a powerful resource. This notwithstanding, some issues were recognized, especially the fact that the language level is sometimes too high, texts are sometimes too long and boring, and resources are sometimes lacking (Tasneen, 2010).

In this context, research shows that teachers' difficulties in dealing with literary texts may limit the efficacy of their use in classroom:

Because of the linguistic difficulty and the need to know about the culture of the target language, language teachers may be reluctant to benefit from the works of literature in the language classroom. Parallel to this idea, McKay (1982) states that one of the most common opinions against the use of literature for language teaching purposes is the structural complexity and unique use of language, which will not help the teaching of grammar." (Tehan et al., 2015, p. 47)

To summarize, literature can be difficult to include inside a language curriculum because of its complexity in terms of linguistic choices as well as content. However, there are some general aspects and guidelines that can be followed by teachers to take the most out of literature, in such a way to give the students the chance to benefit from it. Recently, renewed attention to literature has been given by the Common European Framework of Reference, which has been extended with some sections dedicated to the inclusion of literature in FL classes. In doing this, the Council of Europe wanted to underline the value of literature not only in foreign language teaching, but also within the socio-political context. Learning a foreign language and discovering more about its culture will affect people's behaviour in society: foreign language competences are tools to access knowledge and to express oneself. Knowledge and the ability to express thoughts and opinions are what gives citizens power to feel part of the community and act in society. These topics, which are one of the main points of the Council of Europe language policy, will be developed in detail in the next section.

1.1.2 Literature in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) provides a series of guidelines that can be used to classify the language proficiency of foreign language learners based on Common Reference Levels (A1 to C2). The CEFR guidelines are indeed part of a wider educational plan, which sees plurilingual education as "a way to promote democratic citizenship, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue" (CEFR, (2018, p. 27). This model states that language should be considered as "a vehicle for opportunity and success in social, educational and professional domains" (CEFR, 2018, p. 27): in other words, language is an instrument to master to participate in society. The focus of the CEFR guidelines are the learners' real-life communication needs: when students are learning a language, they need to learn how to use their knowledge to behave in concrete situations. Therefore, the CEFR guidelines are a series of pedagogic considerations which "propose an analysis

of learners' needs and the use of "can do" descriptors and "communicative tasks" (CEFR, 2018, p. 29). For the purposes of the present study, we will focus on the CEFR guidelines related to literature in the reding and writing domains.

Literature teaching in CEFR

Literature is now considered a useful resource that can provide students with the authentic learning material they need to learn the language, enrich their background knowledge about cultural diversity and boost their personal growth (Alter et al., 2019). Despite some improvements in the field, the use of literary texts in language classes still seems to be marginalized and dedicated only to students with higher levels of knowledge of the language (Jones, 2012). To contrast the tendency of the "marginalization of literature", the Companion to the Common European Framework of Reference (2018) has been updated with new content related to literary texts. The aim of this addition was to remark the importance of literature in language teaching: the model focuses on teaching as well as assessing literature competences. What is particularly relevant is that the "standardized competence descriptors help translate the concepts of literary competence delineated in the model into " "can do" statements." (Alter et al., 2019). Literature should not be included inside the program just for its sake, it should be a tool which enables students to re-elaborate the literature content and style by means of action-oriented approaches and tasks.

> [Literature] needs to have a clear learning pay-off which matches students' needs, particularly on a course where time is limited. The need for a pay-off suggests there is benefit in linking the use of literature to the CEFR, particularly as many courses, major English language exams and textbooks are now linked to these outcomes." (Jones, 2012, p. 74)

Literacies[2] such as reading and writing, but also cultural literacy, civic literacy, media and information literacy, disciplinary literacy (e.g. science, finance, health) and digital literacy, or critical literacy are the tools that give access to knowledge and self-expression, and they can be developed starting from literature. All these different types of literacies include sets of skills and abilities that students can use to navigate society, learn more about a given discipline, look for trustworthy information and news, use digital tools effectively or entertain relationships with people from other cultures.

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[2] Types of literacies: https://www.theedadvocate.org/what-are-the-13-types-of-literacy/ (accessed 22.09.22)

As reported in the 2018 Companion (2018), three new scales have been added to deal with the topics of creative texts and literature. They include "reading as a leisure activity", "expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature)" and "analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature)" (CEFR, 2018, p. 25). In this case "reading as a leisure activity" is part of the receptive skills, while the other two competences are based on production skills and the interaction between students and texts. With "reading as a leisure activity" the CEFR refers to reding-related competences and activities that can vary depending on: the length and variety of the texts, the types of texts (literary texts, creative texts, magazines or newspaper articles, blogs, biographies), topics (from everyday topics to abstract and literary topics), type of language (from simple to elaborated), ease of reading (from guessing the meaning using images to autonomous reading of a large variety of texts), depth of understanding (from understanding the main points to have a complete understanding of the multi-layered meanings) (CEFR, 2018, p. 58). This guidelines on possible types of readings and on reading-related competences address the issue of literature use in EFL classes: literature-like materials can be both a source of pleasure for learners and a source of knowledge to deepen the main language skills.

On the other hand, in terms of writing abilities, the CEFR refers to creative writing and "expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature)". Creative writing focuses indeed on description and narrative; therefore, it can benefit from knowledge derived by literary texts. The main aspects involved in creative writing are the content described (from every-day information to engaging experience description), the type of text (diary, short stories, poems up to well-developed and structured descriptions), the complexity of the discourse, and the use of language (from simple lexical choices and sentences to the style appropriate to the genre). To conclude, always from the perspective of production skills, working with literature in language classes is related to the abilities that students can develop at the oral level. The reference here is to the "analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature)": students are asked to use spoken language to express their feelings and thoughts about the content they read. To summarise:

> while the scale 'Reading as a leisure activity' mostly expands the text corpus that users/ learners are required to understand to include literature, 'Expressing a personal response' and 'Analysis and criticism of creative texts' get to the core of exploring works of literature for what they are: creative texts, purposefully constructed not merely to inform but possibly to entertain, to explore new worlds, to

paint pictures with words, to question perceived notions of being, to provoke—and
so much more. (Alter et al., 2019, p. 4)

To conclude, we may notice that the will to recognise literature as an essential part of an action-oriented language education is strongly present inside the 2018 Companion to the CEFR. It is a source that should be included in the language curricula to satisfy learns' needs. In the next section we will focus on how young adult literature in foreign language education can really become a tool that supports students in their path to becoming active citizens of nowadays society. We will see how literature content can help them explore global issues related to the UN 2030 Agenda.

1.1.3 Young Adult Literature

For the present research we will focus on a branch of literature, namely young adult literature (YAL). Young adult literature is composed specifically by literary content adapted to the needs and perspective of adolescents and it frequently focuses on topics and events that parallel teenagers' daily struggles: "writers of adolescent or young adult fiction typically present the struggle to grow up as a universally defining characteristic of adolescence, one with which all readers will resonate" (Beach, 2011, p. 26). When we talk about literature in young adult foreign language education two main tendences have emerged in the past. The first perspective sees literature as a "cultural ideal", while the second one sees it as a form of "cultural access". In the literature as "cultural ideal" perspective the role of literature is to support a cultural standard: the everlasting cultural value of classics should have the role to enhance rigor and discipline in learners. Following this perspective, no personal interpretations of literature are promoted. Opposed to this view, more recently, the idea of literature as 'cultural access' has been spreading: in this case, through literature students have the chance to develop cognitive, aesthetic, social and political capacities. They are in fact active protagonists since their literacy skills enable them to be part of a democratic society. This position supports multiple interpretations of literary meanings on the basis of the variations in the social contexts (Beach, 2011). Perspectives about the role of literature in education have changed with time, and so have the perspectives about the role of the reader. One of the turning points in this field is collocated between the 1970s and the 1980s, when the ideas of Louis. M. Rosenblatt (1995) "Literature as Exploration" became widely appreciated. She suggested to move away from the idea that there exists only one interpretation of literature and invited to embrace the idea that the role of the reader and of his/her interpretation is essential:

"The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings" (Louise M. Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 29).

It was indeed during these years that Rosenblatt's "transactional theory" emerged: the meaning of the text exists in the transaction between literature reading and the reader him/herself. In 1994, the idea of the role of the reader was furtherly integrated. The New London Group proposed a new view of literature based on the idea of "multiliteracies" (Beach, 2011, p. 35): literature should therefore be a socio-political practice (Beach, 2011, p. 86) and learners are the real protagonists.

Even though in the past there were no books written specifically for young adults, in recent years the field of young adult literature has expanded significantly. Recent surveys (see teenreads.com[3] and The Young Adult Library Service Association - YALSA[4]) have shown that in fact young adults like reading, especially when it comes to magazines and comics (Beach, 2011) and many are the factors that contribute to what young adults read (for example what publishers offer and what the teacher provides or suggests) (Beach, 2011).

Using YAL in FL to raise awareness among students about the UN SDGs issues

The present thesis project aims at focusing on the role of language teaching, and especially on the role of young adult literature teaching, as tools to introduce students to global issues. In this section we focus on the role of literature, and especially of YAL, in supporting some of the issues brought up by the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

In order to give students the possibility to become active participants in their reality, English language teachers have been supporting projects to boost autonomy as well as team-work in the language curriculum (Maley et al., 2017, p. 5). Many projects have been developed by educators to tackle contemporary issues in the language classroom, see for example: IATEFL's Global

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[3] Teenreads website: https://www.listchallenges.com/teenreadscom-ultimate-reading-list (accessed 08.08.22)
[4] YALSA website: https://www.ala.org/yalsa/ (accessed 08.08.22)

Issues SIG[5], TESOL's Social Responsibility Interest Section [6]and JALT's Global Issues SIG[7]. The idea that language education is not just related to the study of language itself is nowadays paramount: language classes, and specifically English language classes, have an educational aim that goes beyond the grammar or vocabulary learning process. English classes are not required to deal with a specific subject matter, it is for this reason that EFL teaching should focus on bringing into the classroom issues related to our social, economic and environmental reality (Maley et al., 2017). The EFL classroom should therefore be a space where learners can find their own strategies to become active individuals in their societies (Maley et al., 2017). Contemporary issues cannot be fixed easily, but the role played by education and by teacher's commitment can help raise awareness and grow constructive and productive mindsets (Maley et al., 2017).

> Teachers' aims should be both functional and educational. Language teaching of all kinds – but my main concern will be foreign language teaching as practiced in general education – should develop competence for communication and interaction whilst stimulating critical thinking and action in the world. (Byram, 2013, p. 53)

Following Byram's (2013) theory of intercultural citizenship, language teaching and citizenship education should be integrated: "linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence in language, combined with intercultural competences in the discovery, analysis, comparison and critique of cultures" (Byram, 2013, p. 59). Students should receive an education oriented towards moral and ethical values; they should learn political literacy. Only in this way could they become active citizens.

At this point, we need to provide a definition of what the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are. They are 17 objectives articulated in 169 targets that have been developed in 2015 during the Sustainable Development Summit. These 17 objectives are aimed at gathering attention around some major global issues to promote concrete action and intervention. The main areas of concern are poverty, inequality, injustice, and climate change.

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[5] IATEFL's Global Issues SIG website: https://gisig.iatefl.org/ (accessed 08.08.22)

[6] TESOL's Social Responsibility Interest Section webpage: https://my.tesol.org/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=ca55369d-6da3-454c-a68f-68fbe03db770 (accessed 08.08.22)

[7] JALT's Global Issues SIG website: https://jalt.org/groups/sigs/global-issues-language-education (accessed 08.08.22)

See: United Nation Webpage on the Sustainable Development Goals[8].

What is essential to underline is that all SDGs are connected with one another in a sort of chain and tackling one problem may mean bring solutions and improvement also in other areas. However, dealing with these topics may be difficult since they can bring negative feelings, and a general sense of overwhelm. From this perspective, reading activities can be extremely helpful to give the students the possibility to elaborate themselves some suggestions and ideas on how to tackle these issues starting from their own small realities. In this context, young adult literature materials can be a door to knowledge and awareness for young students:

> Anthropologists tell us that storytelling is central to human existence, that it is a common feature of every known culture. From infancy, every human being learns that stories carry narrative meaning. Stories can engage readers emotionally, having an effect on both attitude and motivation (Day and Bamford, 1998, pp. 21–31). It is this emotional engagement which makes stories such an effective vehicle for the discussion of global issues. Stories are powerful; they engage us with the lives of individuals faced with problems. When we read them, they provoke the very human feelings of understanding and empathy. We experience the problems as the characters do. (Maley et al., 2017, p. 181)

The main goal in this case is to merge language and content by means of foreign language literature. Learners with an intermediate level of English could develop the abilities to interpret a text dense of meaning in the target language and can learn how to re-elaborate that meaning in order to, eventually, formulate their own thoughts and suggestions (Hoecherl-Alden, 2006). Through literature learners acquire experience (Rosenblatt, 1995). When students read, they are dying in the social context of a given text, this very act will allow them "defining the roles, norms, beliefs, traditions, and purposes constituting the meaning of characters' actions based on their knowledge of the historical and cultural forces shaping a world" (Beach, 2011, p. 12). Starting from the story they are reading they can extract a general "know-how" to extend the literary meanings to the concrete context they live in thanks to "text-to-world" connections (Beach, 2011, p. 13). Learning about the sustainable development goals and elaborating possible ideas to find concrete solutions should be part of school education. Indeed, social and aesthetic elements are one thing in literature, as (Rosenblatt, 1995) explained.

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[8] See the link about UN SDGs : https://sdgs.un.org/goals (accessed 29.09.22)

The literature teacher may not be primarily concerned with giving scientific information; yet it is his responsibility to further the assimilation of habits of thought conducive to social understanding. He shares with all other teachers the task of providing the student with the proper equipment for making sound social and ethical judgments. Indeed, the English teacher can play an important part in this process, since the student's social adjustments may be more deeply influenced by what he absorbs through literature than by what he learns through the theoretical materials of the usual social science course. (Rosenblatt, 1995, pp. 25–26)

The classroom environment should be the place where learners can find their own 'Self' and start thinking about themselves as protagonists of the historical period they live in.

1.2 Theories and approaches in teaching literature

Literature has already covered a central role in language teaching in the past, nevertheless is the approach to literature teaching that has significantly evolved over time (Al Rabadi, 2015). Literary texts were the core of language education during the period of the Grammar-Translation method, being them a primary source for grammar, vocabulary, and translation training. With the Audiolingual Method, however, literature became less relevant, and it continued to be marginalized for all the 1970s, coming back in vogue only in the 1980s. From this period, teachers started to reconsider the potential of literature in terms of source for authentic material, catalyst for communication, and example of properly written language (Al Rabadi, 2015). What is more, as we have already mentioned, the idea that literary texts can have only one correct interpretation gradually vanished, giving space to the idea of multiple possible interpretations of a given literary piece, with the acknowledgement of the role of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Following theoretical guidelines, literature teaching can be adapted to multiple different models (Savvidou, 2004). Some theoretical approaches are language-centred or structure-centred and leave no space to the analysis of content and meaning. One of these methods is the "language model" (Savvidou, 2004): this is an approach aimed at using the literary text to focus on linguistic content: exercises are used to teach grammar, vocabulary or figurative expressions, and no attention is paid to literary goals. A similar approach that focuses on the structural and linguistic aspects of the text is what Amer (2003) refers to as the "story grammar approach" which is aimed at helping students to focus on the text structure. The comprehension strategies that

students can adopt to read the narrative text, on one side, and the expository text, on the other side, may be different since the two text types are organized differently.

Other literature teaching approaches focus on the context in which literary works were produced. In this case, we may mention the "cultural model" (Savvidou, 2004): learners learn about the context in which the novel was written and focus on the historical period. This approach shares similarities with what Beach et al. (2011) define as "transmission theories", that is teaching methods that consider students "vessels to fill up" (Beach, 2011, p. 7) and where "the primary focus is on coverage of different literary periods, historical backgrounds, biographical information about authors, literary concepts, or genre characteristics, as reflected in literature textbooks" (Beach, 2011, p. 7). The limitation of this model however is that it tends to be teacher-centred and builds on the idea of "correct answers" (Beach, 2011; Savvidou, 2004).

Gradually, these teacher-centred approaches were abandoned to leave space to a type of literature teaching where students are the protagonists of learning. In "student-centred theories" (Beach, 2011), learners choose what they want to read. Savvidou (2004) talks about the "personal growth model": here students are asked to think critically, express their thoughts and emotions about the literary content, and develop the appropriate language to do so. Similarly, the "reader response approach" presented by Amer (2003) requires the reader to be active, to reflect on the content, to extrapolate meanings, and to re-elaborate the information. However, also student-centred approaches can have some limitations, namely the fact that they consider the learner as detached from other students and sometimes also from the learning environment. For this reason, together with the psychological theories of Vygotsky (1978), a "socio-cultural learning theory" has been developed (Beach, 2011). In this case, literature reading is seen as an activity that should best be done in groups. Students work on literature together with peers, bringing knowledge from the social and cultural background of the group (Beach, 2011).

To conclude, scholars underline how mixing teaching approaches could be fruitful. Some researchers suggest that literature teaching could be based on a mixture of cultural, linguistic and personal growth models in order to be linguistically, methodologically and motivationally complete (Savvidou, 2004). In this way students are introduced to a variety of text on various levels of linguistic difficulty, they learn appropriate strategies about how to approach a literary text and lastly, they find pleasure in doing it. In the next section we will summarise some of the suggestions given by scholars on how to plan the teaching and reading of literature.

1.2.1 How to structure literature teaching

Research has focused on how to plan and organize the use of literature in foreign language classes, before the very beginning of the planning process, it is essential that the teacher has clear in mind the curriculum goals. Once those goals have been established a series of steps can be taken into consideration. These are presented briefly below.

Text Selection

One of the first steps is to analyse the type of learners and readers that will participate in the activity. The teacher should consider their reading abilities and should base his/her choice of materials on the students' needs, preferences, and interests. The selection of the texts should take into consideration that learners are different from one another. In terms of text selection, Beach (2011) focuses on some characteristics that a text should have to be eligible:

> 1. Appeal and Involvement. Books should have a "lasting and universal" appeal, an attractive cover, and high degree of personal, emotional involvement.
>
> 2. Literary Quality. Books should be substantive and not "fluffy." They should offer unique perspectives and ways of thinking.
>
> 3. Characters. Characters should be old enough to understand the problems and concerns of teenagers. They should be realistic, compelling, and distinctive.
>
> 4. Content and Style. The subject matter should be relevant to teenagers, with good descriptions, vivid imagery, and an appropriate (not condescending) tone.
>
> 5. Plot. The plot should have a good blend of action and description with a satisfying (not necessarily happy ending).
>
> 6. Genres. The final list should contain many different genres on topics that appeal to a variety of teen readers.

(Beach, 2011, p. 92)

To raise interest for reading the teacher could promote different kinds of book genres giving students a considerable amount of time to read what they choose on their own ("sustained silent

reading"). As Guthrie (2004) (quoted in Beach, 2011, p. 120) claims, "The readers' sense of purpose often influences their degree of engagement with a text, as well as their investment in the activities that surround that text and influence their understanding of it". In the study conducted by Ivey et al (2013), teachers gave students the opportunity to decide on their own how and to what extend enter in touch with the literary texts provided by the school. Learners had the chance to choose the type of text to read. They received no pressure from the teacher and could take their own time to read the material they chose. The purpose was that of understanding how self-paced reading, autonomy in reading and personal relevance in text choice could have a positive effect in promoting reading in young students.

Reading tasks: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities

After the text selection it is important to think about how to structure the various reading steps and tasks, giving them a logical and sequential order, as students benefit from carefully structured and sequenced tasks (Harper 1988). Many scholars support an approach based on the use of three-phases: the pre-reading phase, the while-reading phase, and the post-reading phase (Al Rabadi, 2015; Barnett, 1988; Beach, 2011):

> […] pre-reading activities as brainstorming for appropriate background knowledge or imagining text content from a title or illustrations, activities while reading such as discussing word formation and word meanings in context, and post-reading global comprehension activities requiring student readers to summarize or get the gist of a text. (Barnett, 1988, p. 150)

Before starting, it could be useful to provide students with an explanation about the aim and the goal of the activity they will carry out, in such a way that they can be focused and aware. The first step at this point will be to provide students with the background knowledge and the specific linguistic terminology they will need to tackle the text: familiarizing with the content and the terminology can be very beneficial, since "linguistic competence affects the student's ability to read and comprehend" (Harper, 1988, p. 404). Teachers could also start working on the interpretative strategies. This would be essential to help students "acquiring general reading and response strategies" (Beach, 2011, p. 119).

> General process strategies include setting purposes; activating schematic background; decoding words; making personal connections; visualizing settings, scenes,

characters, events and ideas; summarizing and bringing meaning forward through-out a reading; predicting; asking questions; and monitoring comprehension and us-ing fix-up strategies as needed (Beach, 2011, p. 119).

Research shows that comprehension is facilitated when the students adopt a specific strategy to tackle a given text type (Taylor and Beach, 1984; Berkowitz, 1986; Wilkinson, 1999 in Amer, 2003). According to Cooper (1986), there are many elements that the student can identify inside the text, namely: the place and time of the story, the protagonists carrying out the actions, a problematic situation, and the events that can solve the problem. The literature teacher would need to select appropriate tasks and tools to give students the possibility to learn the analytical strategies.

While the learners are reading the text, some activities could help them understand the content step by step (Harper, 1988). Chen (2014) conducted a study investigating how literature can be used to acquire language in EFL classes. This study suggests that readers can benefit from both shared reading and independent reading.

> Shared reading refers to two or more people sharing the reading of a text. In an activity called echo or shadow reading, students are asked to read aloud along with the teacher. The teacher reads aloud at slow pace, but faster than the students can read by themselves. The students' reading should lag slightly behind the teachers. This helps with learning pronunciation and phrasing. This technique is helpful even for advanced students, because of the word pronunciation support. Resist the temp-tation to stop at each unfamiliar word. Students should begin to cluster meaning into chunks or phrases. (Chen, 2014, p. 234)

Another possible method that may be used to structure reading is what Chen (2014) calls a "variation of the think aloud protocol" (Chen, 2014, p. 235).

> Place a red dot or other symbol in the text periodically at strategic spots. When readers come to these markers, they must convey what they are thinking by speak-ing out loud or writing their thoughts down on a separate sheet of paper (Tierney & Readence, 2000). (Chen, 2014, p. 235)

While students are actively working on the task the role of the teacher should be the one of "showing students" how to engage in the task (and not "telling them what would be correct") (Beach, 2011, p. 52). Students need to be guided, they need to see that active participation is

the best option, and therefore they will benefit from the presence of an open-minded, flexible and tolerant teacher who gives value to every student contribution (Beach, 2011, p. 53).

At this stage, after having completed the reading task, students could focus on post-reading activities. Here, the aim is to help learners clarifying and digesting the content of the text. Harper (1988) refers to interpretation activities based, for example, on class discussions, role play, interviews to the characters, or rewriting activities (Harper, 1988, p. 406) and synthesis activities: "activities that permit the student to view the work as a unique whole, appreciate the interdependence of parts, experience and verbalize the effect of the total work, and unify what they have learned" (Harper, 1988, p. 407). Some example of synthesis activities could be individual of the group, the teacher could ask opinions, or ask to comment statements about the text, writing activities where students, such as essays or open questions where students can work on the topic of the text (Harper, 1988, p. 407).

1.2.2 Two major reading styles: Intensive and extensive reading

Scholars define two major types of reading styles that can be chosen based on the literary material students would have to work on. The first style is referred as intensive reading, while the second style is the extensive reading (see Barnett, 1988; Day et al., 1998).

Intensive reading

> Intensive reading involves learners reading in detail with specific learning aims and tasks. [...] Intensive reading activities include skimming a text for specific information to answer true or false statements or filling gaps in a summary, scanning a text to match headings to paragraphs, and scanning jumbled paragraphs and then reading them carefully to put them into the correct order." (British Council Intensive Reading webpage[9]).

Detailed analysis of the reading materials by intensive reading allows learners to master the language effectively (Mart et al., 2015, p. 85) Intensive reading is an activity where learners can work with smaller samples of language in very detailed way. This activity is frequently done in class under the guidance of the teacher. However, research shows that there could be the risk that the intensive reading activities become a mere exercise on grammar and that, after all, students would not be able to reuse this knowledge in new contexts (Mart et al., 2015).

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[9]British Council intensive reading webpage: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/intensive-reading (accessed 08.08.22)

Extensive reading

The extensive reading approach involves students reading long texts or large quantities for general understanding, with the intention of enjoying the texts. Students are allowed to choose the books they read depending on their interests, and there is not always a follow-up discussion or work in class. In this way students are encouraged to read for pleasure and should become better readers. (British Council Extensive Reading webpage[10]).

Extensive reading requires a large selection of books to be available, so in this case having a class library could be very useful. With extensive reading, since students can choose what they want to read, they are free to abandon one book and choose another one. Extensive reading can be also an activity that students do out of class, in addition to silent reading sessions at school. The goal of this approach is to enhance fluency, pleasure in reading and motivation. The teacher in this case can also decide to keep track of what each student reads and eventually recommend other books. Empirical studies suggest that learners of all proficiency levels benefit from the extensive reading approach (Park, 2020): L2 vocabulary will expand, and comprehension improves together with grammar (Mart et al., 2015).

However, extensive reading alone may be incomplete since students have less time to focus on specific aspects. Similarly, also intensive reading practice can be limited, as students might have no chance to focus directly on meaning and could be exposed to less literary material. It is for this reason that the combination of extensive and intensive reading could be the best option. Studies suggest that this mix of approaches:

leads to substantial proficiency gains in language learning process; while extensive reading aims at fluency, intensive reading aims at accuracy. […] a combination of extensive and intensive reading brought about desired outcomes, increased the efficiency of learning, fostered interest of the learners, and developed purposeful and positive attitudes towards language learning. Extensive reading allowed learners to become aware of how language items they studied in intensive reading function in sentences. (Mart et al., 2015, p. 85,89)

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[10]British Council Extensive Reading webpage: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/extensive-reading (accessed 08.08.22)

1.2.3 Learner autonomy in reading

One of the important aspects that has emerged in the last decades concerning language teaching is the concept of autonomy (Benson, 2011b; R. Smith, 2007). It was applied to the field of learning in the 1970s in France, when Henri Holec (1981) (see Benson, 2011a) pointed out that there was "the need for a term to describe people's ability to take charge of their own learning "(Smith, 2007, p. 395). It seems that language learners tend to have control of their learning process spontaneously, and in the case in which this ability is not present in a learner, it can be developed. This tendency of keeping track of one's own learning path seems to have positive effects, especially when compared with an assisted and less autonomous type of teaching (Benson, 2011b, p. 16). Following the description of the British Council:

> Autonomy means the ability to take control of one's own learning, independently or in collaboration with others. An autonomous learner will take more responsibility for learning and is likely to be more effective than a learner who is reliant on the teacher. Learner training in the classroom encourages autonomy and is an important element of language teaching. [...] An autonomous learner will set their own goals, reflect on their progress, and seek opportunities to practise outside the classroom. [...] Asking learners to keep diaries to reflect on the way they learn best and teaching them how to use tools such as dictionaries can encourage autonomy. Asking the question, 'could the learners do this for themselves?' about any activity planned for class will help create the conditions for the development of greater learner autonomy in class (see British Council webpage on Autonomy[11])

Autonomy varies a lot depending on the context and is multidimensional (Benson, 2011b, p. 16). Some scholars support the idea that there are many responsibilities that the learner should be able to handle. Some of them include setting the objectives, deciding the contents, define which language learning methods to use, keep track of acquisition and of what is being learned (Borg et al., 2012, p. 4). To conclude, learners could find it beneficial to understand how to engage with reading in an autonomous way, as this could help them tackle reading with less effort and expand their interest even outside the classroom environment.

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[11] British Council webpage on Autonomy: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/autonomy (accessed 08.08.22)

1.3 Teaching Literature through technology

The present thesis investigates the role of young adult literature and digital reading in foreign language teaching and learning. Recently, scholars have been studying how literature and reading are growing within the digital environment. In the following section we will introduce the concept of digital reading to see how it can be integrated inside language classes to promote literature reading. In contemporary society it is no more possible to consider literacy as the ability to read and write, since with the advent of technology, reading and writing is no more confined to paper. We access text via computers, smartphones, e-books and more. In these reading environments texts become more and more complex and multi-layered, consequently, "the literacies required to navigate, interpret, design, and analyse these texts also grows, in complexity. New technologies and a more global society require a rethinking of what it means to be literate in today's world." (Serafini, 2014, p. 26).

> The term multiliteracies or multiple literacies refers to the reconceptualization of literacy as a multidimensional set of competencies and social practices in response to the increasing complexity and multimodal nature of texts. Visual literacy, media literacy, critical literacy, computer literacy, and other types of literacies […]. (Serafini, 2014, p. 26)

One of the landmarks in this field is the work of The New London Group (1996). This group of experts published a manifesto which had the aim to present the idea of "multiliteracy" together with some pedagogical guidelines. They underlined how new technological devices have been changing the way in which we communicate, creating space for content that combines the use of text sound and images.

In the 1990s the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association developed the 21st Century Literacies Framework. In this framework it is stated that:

> Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to: develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology; Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought; Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes; Manage, analyse, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information; Create, critique, analyse,

and evaluate multimedia texts; Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments. (NCTE Executive Committee, 2008, p. 1).

Following this line of thought, the European Union has elaborated a Digital Education Action Plan (2020). This document specifies how education needs new types of training based on the use of technology. "Basic digital skills should become part of the core transferable skills that any citizen should have to be able to develop personally; engage in society as an active citizen; use public services; and exercise basic rights" (Digital Education Action Plan, 2020, p. 9). Education should embrace technology, since digital tools have the potential of providing better quality education in a more inclusive way, in an environment where equality would be guaranteed. The document states clearly that to achieve this goal there is the necessity to involve all parts of society, including educators, learners, scholars, families, private and public institutions.

> We are now so socially enmeshed in digital literacy practices that the concept of optional extrication from the digital world is not realistic, yet language and literacy instruction continue to resist digitized multimedia and multimodal literacy practices as optional or secondary to flat textual practices. (Lotherington et al., 2011, p. 239)

In other words, digital literacy has not only an educational, but also a political role (Chun et al., 2016). Thus, there is the need to raise awareness about how to approach them. Digital contents should be used in a critical way and students should be able to discern when they are biased or inappropriate (Chun et al., 2016).

For the purposes of the present research, we would focus on digital literacy and young adult literature to understand how digital tools and YAL can help students becoming conscious adults and citizens. In Italy, the Ministery of Education addresses this issue, and other issues connected with digital education in the Generazioni Connesse – Safer Internet Centre website[12] which is supported and founded by the European Union. Part of the Ministry plan is to include digital literacy training inside the school curriculum. In these terms, digital reading should be integrated in foreign language learning classrooms. In the next sections we will see more in detail what digital reading is and how it can assume a social dimension when used in class.

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[12] Generazioni Connesse – Safer Internet Centre website: https://www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/home-page/ (accessed 08.08.22)

1.3.1 Reading digital texts

With the growth of technology our way of reading has changed. In recent years, research has shown that paper-based reading and screen-based reading are two different practices since they require different skills, strategies and levels of concentration (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021). This difference tends to be widely accepted in reading research: "digital reading involves a different logic and set of practices governed by multimodality" (Rowsell et al., 2009, p. 106). Some researchers indeed suggest that the digital environment can be beneficial because it allows the reader to be the protagonist of the reading process.

Scholars agree on the fact that the reading process is difficult to describe in an univocal way, it is for this reason that many different theories have been developed trying to account for all the different dimensions of the reading process. Rosenblatt (1978) transactional theory still recovers an important role in the field: this theory is considered still valid when we switch from the printed environment to the digital one, since "readers, quite literally, craft unique transactions through the links they choose to follow in digital spaces" (Turner et al., 2020, p. 2). The creation of meaning that takes place between the reader and the very text s/he is reading is unique both when we deal with printed text and with digital ones. In addition, some researchers suggest that the reading process consists in a meaning-construction process, which is born from the combination of background information that the reader possesses and information that are derived from the text (see Kintsch, 1988; 2013; Perfetti & Staffura, 2014 in Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021). These ideas are considered valid to describe the reading process of a printed text but probably need to be integrated if we want to describe the digital reading process. Research suggest that digital reading is not opposed to print reading, on the contrary it is a sort of extension of it (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021):

> In print settings, 'typical text' usually refers to a single, linear text, written by an identified author, with a clear target audience, and produced by a team of professional authors, editors, and publishers. In digital settings, text is not so easily specified. It could be a single text or a network of multiple sources; in plain, hypertext or hypermedia formats; linear, semi-linear, or nonlinear in structure; the author(s) and target audience may or may not be identified; and quality and accuracy are not always guaranteed by authors, editors, or publishers. (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021, p. 4)

Scholars underline that the medium used to access written information and its features, have a role in influencing the behaviour of the reader that will approach that content. Digital reading is not to be interpreted as written material that shifts from paper to a screen, but on the contrary, as something that is much more interactive, requires a careful navigation and is non-linear in structure (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021). Adolescents of today have access to written material in both formats (Turner et al., 2020), but digital contents are easily available in larger quantity (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021), it is for this reason that learners need to learn how to deal properly with both mediums respectively. Some research indeed suggests that student notice how school-reading is mainly print-reading, while the leisure reading that they carry out outside school is predominantly on screen (Turner et al., 2020). Some data suggest that sometimes learners tend to avoid considering screen-reading as real reading (Duncan et al., 2016). However, digital literacy skills are more and more part of daily life, and they should receive space in education.

For the aim of this project, we would focus on adolescents that read texts in a foreign language, in our case English. This means that it would be appropriate to focus not only on what it means to read digitally, and how this type of reading can be beneficial, we should also consider that students would read digitally in a language which is not their first language. In the following paragraphs we will therefore focus briefly on L1 reading versus L2 reading, we will explore the main characteristics of the L2 digital reading environment, and we will sum up some of the main digital reading strategies that scholars suggest.

Firstly, we should consider that reading materials in a second language are more difficult to tackle for learners if compared with L1 texts. Some scholars suggest that L2 reading builds on L1 reading abilities due to a transfer phenomenon (see Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Hudson, 2007; Koda, 2005 quoted in Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021). On the other hand, other experts claim that reading skills are not confined to one language, they can be accessed when needed (see Swan & Walter, 2017 quoted in Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021). In general, however, L2 reading requires more effort because the knowledge of the L2 is more limited: learners know less words and need more time to recognise and understand them, and they may be lacking the background/cultural knowledge related to the context (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021). Reading comprehension is related to many factors indeed. What scholars have observed, in fact, is that reading comprehension is closely related to word identification and reading fluency in teenagers (Duncan et al., 2016). What is more, scholars argue that language learners

may find L2 digital reading more difficult because "digital environments may require working memory capacity that exceeds L2 readers' capabilities" (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021, p. 24).

In general, when we talk about digital reading environments, we should take into consideration some typical features. Firstly, in this environment, chances are high that digital material is authentic language. Secondly, the written text in digital environments can be organized in different ways depending on various needs, and this aspect requires the learner to be more active, flexible, and aware: "Digital texts can be completely linear (like printed texts), semi-linear (e.g., a pdf with glosses) or nonlinear (a hyperlinked network of texts). Higher degrees of nonlinearity seem to require more navigational skills and strategies."(Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021, p. 14). Another important characteristic is related with the format and the layout: the presence of different fonts, colours and images seems to make the content more engaging, but it could also increase the chances to get lost in the page. If with a paper page it is easy to annotate, underline and highlight, it is not so easy with a webpage, nonetheless it is possible: while reading online on a screen it is possible to use some useful tools such as annotators or online dictionaries that can help the comprehension (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021).

Digital reading can also be challenging. Some scholars have found evidence that readers ""viewed" rather than "read" as they scanned digital texts very rapidly" (Li, 2020). This seems to support the idea that screen-reading is shallow and sometimes more superficial. It is for this reason that, when readers, and specifically second language readers, approach a digital reading environment they should be strong of some strategies and skills that will help them navigate digital texts (i.e. using hyperlinks, scrolling, choosing from the menus) (Li, 2020).

Some basic strategies that learners use while interacting with the printed text are: locating, synthesising, inferring, skimming, translating, writing notes, thinking about their own background knowledge, using bookmarks, making use of dog-eared pages, marginalia, sticky notes, underlining and highlighting (Li, 2020; Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2020), all strategies that are usually used in combination. In an online environment readers may adopt some of these tactics and integrate them with some new skills. Concerning that, Li (2020) developed SLORSI, the Second Language Online Reading Strategies Inventory, because they claim print reading strategies may not be enough for students when they approach a digital text. This work focuses on these aspects:

global (cognitive strategies using advanced planning and comprehension monitoring techniques), problem-solving (interactive strategies for dealing with difficult texts), and support strategies (basic decoding strategies and seeking out tools to aid comprehension). (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021, p. 7)

In general, some of the tactics that can be used by students in digital environments could be: trying to focus and avoiding distractions by using Ad Blockers, use reader view extensions, use online notebooks such as OneNote, Evernote, Google Keep, cloud-based bookmarking such as Diigo or Pocket, file management options such as Dropbox, Google Drive (Turner et al., 2020) or other platforms where it possible to actively work on the text such as eComma and Actively Learn. All in all, one of the most interesting aspects of working on a screen is that frequently it is possible to cooperate and make the reading "social".

1.3.2 Digital Social Reading

Reading activities can be carried out autonomously or in group, but eventually reading experiences tend to be enhanced when they are accompanied by an opinion-sharing process. One of the most important aspects of reading is related to the possibility that readers have, to share the content of what they read together with their opinions and considerations about it with other readers. Recently, scholars have been studying how the increasing use of technology can help readers in sharing their thoughts about what they read, making reading not only digital but also interactive and interpersonal.

Book clubs, for example, are not a recent invention (Bowers-Campbell, 2011; J. M. Smith, 2019), and with time they have been evolving, embracing new technologies. In recent years, reading communities have find a place in the world of media technology in various platforms such as Gooreads, Lovelybooks or Wattpad (Rebora et al., 2021). Research recently conducted in this field focus on two main possibilities: working directly on digital texts by means of apps, platforms or other digital tools that support annotations (eComma[13], Actively Learn[14], Glose

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[13] eComma: https://ecomma.coerll.utexas.edu/ (accessed 08.08.22)

[14] Actively Learn: https://www.activelylearn.com/ (accessed 08.08.22)

Education[15], Diigo[16] etc.), and sharing ideas by means of synchronous and asynchronous forums or post-sharing platforms (Moodle etc.). Scholars working in the field of reading research recognise now the importance of talking about "Digital Social Reading" (Rebora et al., 2021):

> In our study, we propose the term digital social reading (DSR) for shared reading experiences which happen either online or offline but involve some use of digital technology and media, either for reading or for sharing experiences elicited by books. While this label disregards some key aspects of the phenomenon (e.g., the extensive writing activity in DSR communities), it still catches the determinant role of social interactions around the experience of reading, which are visible through DSR practices and platforms. (Rebora et al., 2021, p. ii231)

Research can benefit from digital social reading, because, contrary to what happened when only print reading was possible, now there is access to a considerably large amount of data created by readers themselves on different platforms concerning their own reading experience, data which can be analysed and studied by experts who work in the reading research field (e.g. sentiment analysis investigations) to learn more about reading habits and their relationship with digital tools (Rebora et al., 2021). Social reading is a term that underlines the importance of considering reading as process that can indeed rotate around a community. Research shows that collaboration around a reading activity can boost motivation, corroborate interpersonal communication skills, promote deep-reading and help comprehension (Additionally et al, 2007; Eeds and Wells, 1989 in Bowers-Campbell (2011).

> The shared meaning making that occurs during literature discussions is indeed exciting, as students are given opportunities to ask questions, offer new perspectives, and engage with the text in new ways. In this way, literature discussions are reflective of Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) transactional theory. The interactions that occur between the reader and the text are further enhanced by the new perspectives and knowledge gained from each discussion. (Smith, 2019, p. 638)

Digital social reading could be one of the resources at the disposal of English teachers to work on young adult literary content with their students. Many studies about online book clubs have shown that learners can benefit from such activities in different ways. For example, studies which used Moodle (Scharber, 2009), Edmodo (J. M. Smith, 2019) or the eLearning Commons

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[15] Glose Education: https://glose.education/home (accessed 08.08.22)
[16] Diigo: https://www.diigo.com/ (accessed 08.08.22)

platform (Bowers-Campbell, 2011)) and forums have proven that such spaces, when strategically and carefully designed by teachers and librarians, are safe-environments where students can actively participate in both synchronous and asynchronous discussions about a text (Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Scharber, 2009). Learners may be divided in groups and have the opportunity to choose from an array of different books (J. M. Smith, 2019). In many cases students have the possibility to choose a book to read and then share their ideas about it by submitting a post or a comment on a platform. Since the interaction is online, students have the possibility to access or add themselves additional information regarding the book content via hyperlinks to useful webpages or videos. What is more, learners can decide to upload images or documents that are related to the reading task (Scharber, 2009). This would give students the possibility to re-elaborate and create connections on three levels: text-to-self level, when they are able to connect the text to their lives; text-to-text level, when they connect the message or scenes of one book to other texts they know; and text-to world level, when students adapt the message of the book on the reality they live in (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). In order to assure positive outcomes, scholars have underlined the importance of planning carefully online-bookclub activities by making sure to choose the appropriate platform, defining carefully the tasks, avoiding giving students limited option about what to read and giving precise guidelines about appropriate behaviour to guarantee safety (e.g. no hate-language).

To summarize, so far we have seen that reading is the praxis that give people access to knowledge that enable them to face problems and be active toward change. Reading is however no more confined to one medium but is spreading thanks to the technology that younger people see as part of their lives, and for this reason is changing.

In the next chapter, we will present an on-going case study, the Diglit project, which aims at investigating how English YAL can be successfully integrated in high-school-foreign-language classes thanks to the use of digital tools.

Chapter 2

The Diglit research project

2.1 The Diglit Project

In this section we will present a case-study that is currently being carried out at the University of Venice together with the cooperation of other two European universities. In this section we will therefore introduce the Diglit project and its aims, we will present the results collected thanks to the joint work of the three European universities, and we will finally analyse the Diglit data with the aim of understanding how they can be relevant to develop a digital reading activity.

The Diglit project is an Erasmus+ program project [17]founded by the European Union. It is a two-year long project (June 2021 - June 2023) and involves three partner hubs of research in the field of language education from three different European Countries. The Italian hub for this project is composed of two partners, Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the IIS TronZanella of Schio; the Austrian hub is composed of the Karl-Franzens-Universitaet Graz and the Priv. Gymnasium und Oberstufenrealgymnasium des Schulvereins der Ursulinen in Graz, and lastly the Hungarian hub which is composed by the Pécsi Tudományegyetem - University of Pécs and the Pécsi Tudományegyetem Gyakorló Általános Iskola, Gimnázium és Óvoda in Pécs. The three university research groups, in cooperation with the teaching staff of the three respective high schools, are collaborating to carry out a research experiment which involves directly some high-school language learners.

The aim of the project is twofold: firstly, gathering information about high-school language learners' thoughts and opinions about reading, literature, and technological devices, and secondly, based on the data collected, producing a Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classrooms to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid19 Crises. The product of the project will include a set of suggestion to support school use of the Diglit Toolkit, a Pupil Guide that will facilitate the application of the Toolkit, a collection of Young Adult Literature texts for EFL/ESL learners and a collection of media files to use in schools and community settings. This set of tools is being designed for both ESL/EFL teachers and pupils. The former group could indeed take

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advantage from the Diglit toolkit to embed digital education in foreign language classes to enhance awareness about social inequalities and support the fight for equality through the usage of young adult literature.

In this section, we will explain the methodology that has been used to design and administer the questionnaire, we will provide information about the participants, and we will briefly present the Diglit YAL collection. The data collected by means of this experimentation will be subsequently presented and finally analysed.

2.1.1 The Diglit Young Adult Literature Collection

The Diglit YAL collection has been devised firstly to carry out the research project and secondly to provide teachers and students with a reading list that could be used in class and outside class and become part of the Diglit toolkit. The collection was created thanks to the joint effort of the three research hubs. The catalogue of the texts can be found online on the YAL website. When accessing the website, the user is presented with a link to a user guide. All the texts
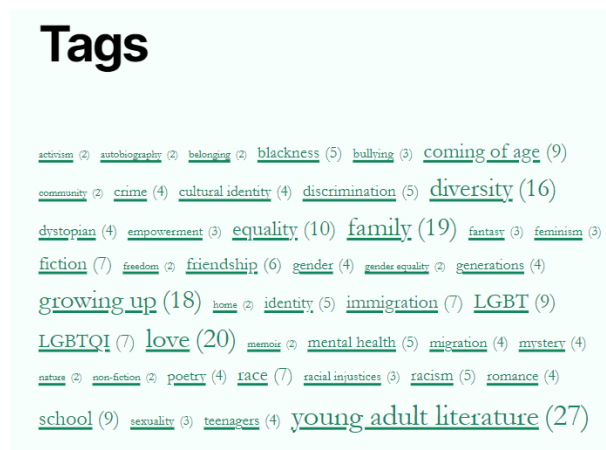
Figure 1. TAG search inside the Diglit website

Figure 2. Category search inside the Diglit website

that are included inside the YAL collection have been grouped into categories based on: genre, topic, format, year of publication, language, language level, target audience, length. There is also the possibility to look for a text using a search bar and inserting a keyword. Each text has indeed
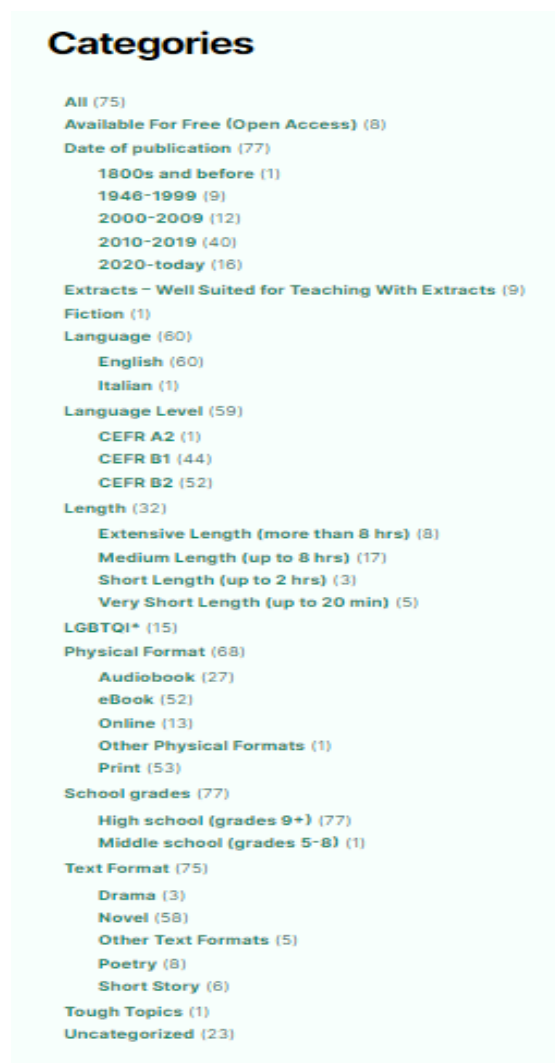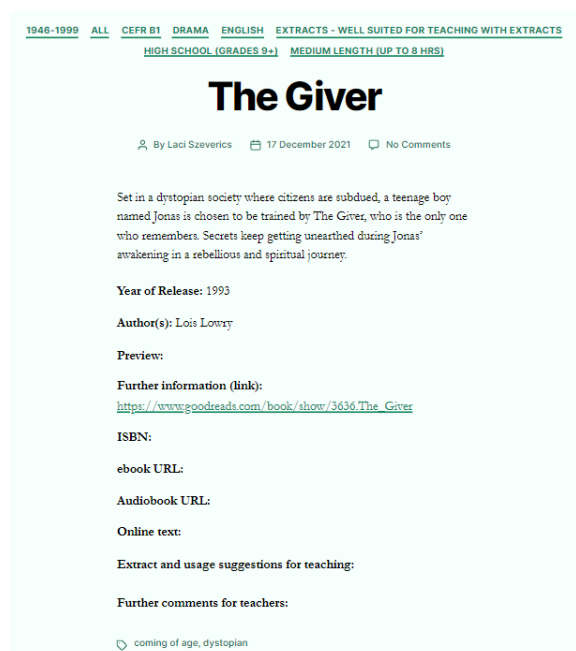
been tagged with tags that relate specifically to its content, therefore it is possible to look for inspiration in the tag cloud.

It is possible to select the page of every single book to find some information about the text. The book section contains a summary of the book, the year of release, the author, the ISBN, and links about where to find the book in audiobook/ ebook version. When possible, some extracts and usage suggestions for teaching are included. Here is the example of the page of the book "The Giver" by Lois Lowry.

Figure 3. An example of book entry inside the YAL website

This collection is designed to support further extensions and to grow thanks to additions made by users themselves. It is indeed possible to add an entry by means of a post directly from the WordPress admin panel. The books should be written for a teenage target audience and should address issues that are related to personal growth and adolescence. The aim of the collection is indeed to provide learners with texts that focus on topics that they themselves can find relevant for the moment in life they are living. The books should support students in their coming of age and should help them deal with topics such as diversity, cultural identity, equality, sexuality, love, mental health and more. Some of these texts would probably help readers growing up and becoming more conscious about themselves. Other books address brother issues that are deeply connected with society, so reading them may help increasing awareness about the complexity of the reality we live in.

To conclude, in addition to the YAL collection, on the website there are also references to other collections of books which follow the same trend. Some examples are: Reedsy prompts[18], FanFiction[19], Oxford Owl[20], Common Sense Media[21].

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[18] Reedsy prompts link: https://blog.reedsy.com/short-stories/ (accessed 17.08.22)
[19] FanFiction link: https://www.fanfiction.net/ (accessed 17.08.22)
[20] Oxford Owl link: https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/ (accessed 17.08.22)
[21] Common Sense Media link: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-lists (accessed 17.08.22)

2.2 Methodology

The Diglit research group has been focusing on two main aspects in this research, namely: the usage of Young Adult Literature texts in EFL/ESL classes and the incorporation of digital tools in FL education to work on literary contents. The first part of the project is aimed at gathering data directly from the high-school EFL learners of the three countries, to understand more about their reading habits in terms of amount of time dedicated to reading, preferred genres, topics of interest and device used. The second part of the study will consist in classroom experimentation: students will use their own smartphones to work on the YAL collection.

The present Master's thesis project will use the data collected from the Diglit study as a reference to understand high-school students reading habits and needs with the aim of designing a tailor-made classroom activity which incorporates digital reading and young adult literature. We will therefore use the data collected by means of the Diglit questionnaire to answer our first research questions:

1. What are students reading habits?

2. What are students' perceptions about the YAL collection developed within the Diglit project?

Our hypothesis is, on the bases of previous research carried out, that students will be open toward literature, especially when books deal with topics, plots, and characters that learners find stimulating, relevant and connected with their own life experience. We may also suggest that students will welcome digital reading and will be open toward the use of technological devices.

2.2.1 Participants

The participants involved in this study are high-school students from the three schools that take part in the project: the Priv. Gymnasium und Oberstufenrealgymnasium des Schulvereins der Ursulinen in Graz, the Pécsi Tudományegyetem Gyakorló Általános Iskola, Gimnázium és Óvoda in Pécs, and the IIS TronZanella of Schio. The sample was composed by a total of 115 high-school English language learners: 38 students from Austria, 38 students from Hungary and 39 students from Italy. The age of the participants ranges between 13 and 19 years old.
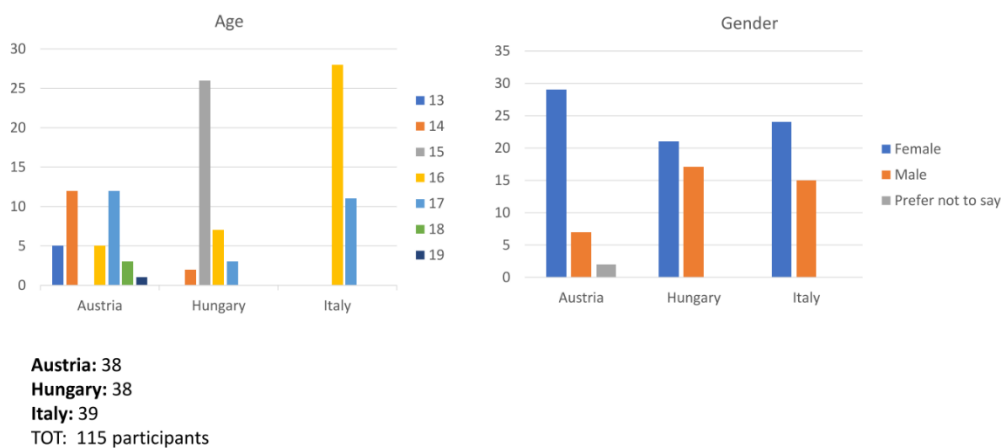
Figure 4. Participant sample (age and gender)

Austria: 38
Hungary: 38
Italy: 39
TOT: 115 participants

In all the three groups the number of females was higher than the number of males. Two students preferred not to state their gender.

2.2.2 The Questionnaire

The sample of students selected for the project have been asked to fill in a questionnaire designed on purpose to gather information about students' reading habits and preferences. Before administering the questionnaire to students, each high-school English language teacher delivered an introductory session where students were introduced to the Diglit project and had the chance to go through the list of suggested readings which are part of the YAL Diglit collection.

The YAL collection introductory activity was articulated in three steps. During the first phase students were involved in a warm-up activity where they had to talk in pairs about their reading habits. The guiding questions were: 1) Do you like reading? 2) Why/Why not? 3) Where do you like reading? 4) How often do you read? 5) What do you like reading? 6) Which language/languages do you read in? These questions had the aim of introducing students to the topics they would have found later in the questionnaire. The second phase consisted in a group work: students had to go inside the Diglit Project website, click on the YAL collection and explore it, helping themselves with the category sections and with the tags. They were asked to choose three texts they were interested in and provide an explanation for their choice. During the third step students had to express their preferences using Padlet (a video tutorial [22] on how to use Padlet was shown beforehand). For this part of the activity guidelines were provided, explaining what should have been added in the Padlet entry: provide the title of the text, the

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[22] Padlet Tutorial for Students - How to Join and Participate: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=delW1Jtoq_w (accessed 17.08.22)

reason why they chose it, write their names, and add a special feature (logo or quote) for each group.

Students where then asked to fill in a questionnaire created with Google Form. Participants were given the possibility to complete the questionnaire either at home or at school, using a computer or their smartphone. The questionnaire was in English, and students had the chance to decide whether to use their first language or English to answer the open questions inside the questionnaire. In the three countries the questionnaire was administered in different months: in Austria and Italy in February 2022, in Hungary in March 2022.

The questionnaire consisted of three different sections. An introductory section included a text which presented the questionnaire to students: the structure and content of the questionnaire was presented briefly together with the aim of the questionnaire. The first section was meant at gathering data about each participant. Here students had to give information about their country, school, class, age, and gender. The second section of the questionnaire focused on reading preferences and was composed by 6 questions. Those questions were aimed at gathering information about students' literature preferences, reading habits (such as how often they read), favourite text genres, device preference, interesting topics they would like to explore, and to conclude, whether they like to share what they read and how. The third part of the questionnaire focused on the Diglit book list: students were asked to name the YAL books they considered more interesting and less interesting to read and to motivate their answers (either in English or in their L1).

As for the structure of the questionnaire, most of the questions had a multiple-choice structure or provided a scale. In the last section open questions were included. This type of structure allows researchers to conduct quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the data collected. Numerical data was useful to understand the general tendencies and trends, while written answers provided an insight in each student's opinion.

The data collected have been analysed together with the Diglit group members. The quantitative data were analysed using Excel, while the qualitative data were analysed through Content Analysis (Dörnyei 2007) using Maxqda Analytics Pro, a software for qualitative analysis that allowed to extract graphs, which give the chance to eyeball the key concepts and ideas expressed by students in their answers.

2.3 Results

In this section we will present the data collected by means of the questionnaire. The preliminary data analysis and visual data presentation of this section have been provided directly from the Diglit equipe.

The first question (see figure 5) focuses on learners reading habits, specifically on the frequency with which they read. Answers to this question were compared between countries. More than half of the sample including the three countries, read at least once or twice a month. More specifically: 37 people stated that they read once/twice a month and 38 stated that they read once or twice a week. Among the whole group of learners 23 affirm to read every day. In Austria students who seem to read quite often (from once a week to everyday) are 23 out 38, in Hungary 17 students out of 38, in Italy 21 students out of 39. In general students' reading frequency seems to be quite homogeneous across the three countries, having Austria as the country with less students who hardly ever read (3 students) and Hungary as the country with most students who read hardly ever (8 students).

Question 1: How often do you read on your free time?
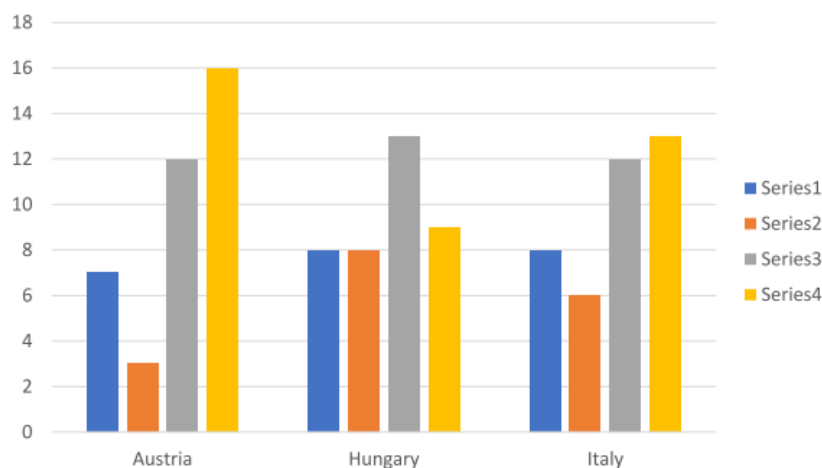
Country	everyday	hardly ever	once/twice a month	once/twice a week	Grand Total
Austria	7	3	12	16	38
Hungary	8	8	13	9	38
Italy	8	6	12	13	39
Grand Total	23	17	37	38	115

Figure 5. Student reading frequency

The second question (see figures 6 and 7) focuses on the type of reading material that learners read more frequently. When it comes to the types of text, most of the students say to prefer social media (176 votes) and novels (132 votes). After these two types are newsmedia (92 votes) and short stories (66 votes). The genre that seems to attract less attention is the one of plays with only 14 votes. From this preliminary analysis we may notice that social media and news-media together have collected 298 votes out of 712 votes, so more than one third of the votes address types of texts that can be read exclusively thanks to a technological device. By comparing the votes expressed in each country, we may observe that no statistical difference can be found. In all the three countries social media and newsmedia are the two kinds of text that attract most the attention of students.

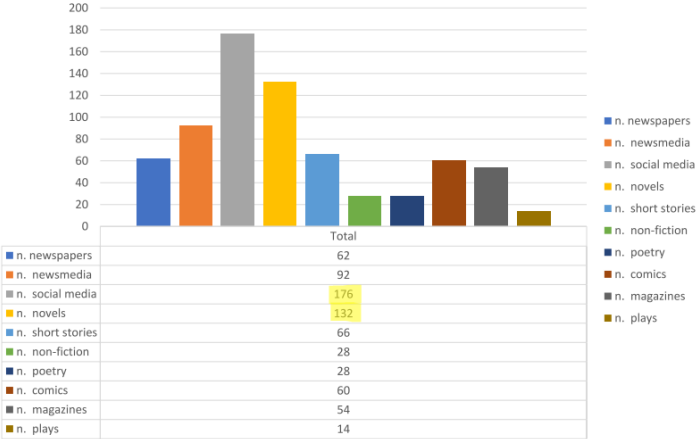**Question 2: What kind of texts do you read most? (you can choose more than one option)**

	Total
n. newspapers	62
n. newsmedia	92
n. social media	176
n. novels	132
n. short stories	66
n. non-fiction	28
n. poetry	28
n. comics	60
n. magazines	54
n. plays	14

Figure 6. Text genres preferred by students

What kind of text do you read most? (you can choose more than one option) (by country)

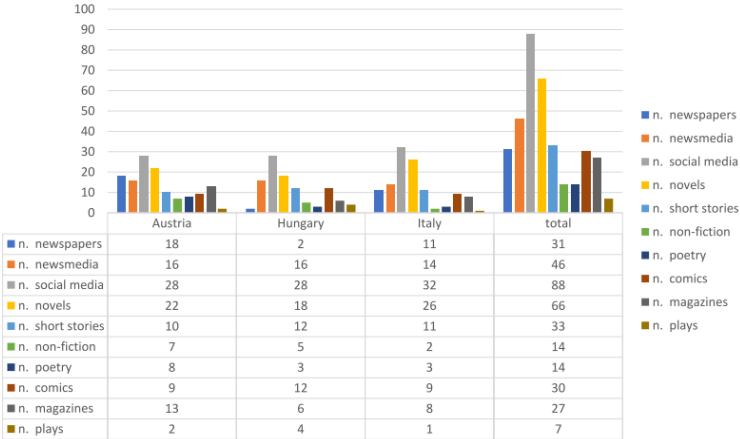|	Austria	Hungary	Italy	total
n. newspapers	18	2	11	31
n. newsmedia	16	16	14	46
n. social media	28	28	32	88
n. novels	22	18	26	66
n. short stories	10	12	11	33
n. non-fiction	7	5	2	14
n. poetry	8	3	3	14
n. comics	9	12	9	30
n. magazines	13	6	8	27
n. plays	2	4	1	7

Figure 7. Text genre preferences by students by country

The third question (see figure 8) was about the device on which learners usually read. The type of reading support that students seem to prefer is still paper, with 59 votes of 115. However, 44 votes out of the total were in favour of the use of the mobile phone. We may take into consideration that most of the genres that have been provided in the multiple-choice answer are mostly available on paper, while only social media and newsmedia can be accessed only by means of a technological device. It seems that students do not like reading on a PC or tablet, since only 7 participants stated that they use these types of devices. Only 5 students out of the total use Kindle.

Question 3: You read mostly
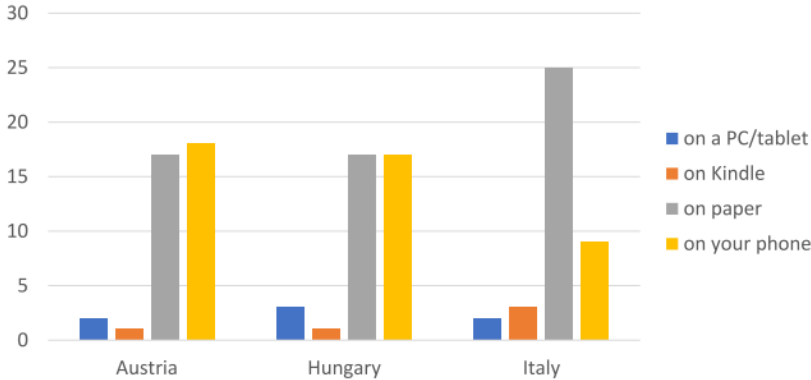
Country	on a PC/tablet	on Kindle	on paper	on your phone	Grand Total
Austria	2	1	17	18	38
Hungary	3	1	17	17	38
Italy	2	3	25	9	39
Grand Total	7	5	59	44	115

Figure 8. Reading devices preferred by students

The fourth question (see figures 9 and 10) was about the story and was more oriented towards literature. The types of stories that have more success among students are: fantasy stories with 66 votes, detective stories with 63 votes, adventure stories with 62 votes, and romances with 58 votes. Horror, gothic and dystopian stories have sensibly less votes. Other possible genres and categories that have been suggested from students are:

- Thriller (3)
- Technothriller (1)
- Historical fiction (3)
- Novels that tackle current events (2)
- Youth (1)

- Sport (2)
- Fishing/Nature (1)
- Self-help (1)
- Classic novels (1)

(Data provided by the Diglit equipe)

What we may notice is that students seem to be open toward a wide variety of genres. This could be a good starting point to engage them in a reading project. By making a comparison between countries, we may notice that no statistical difference was found. Austrian students tend to prefer romance (25) and fantasy or adventure (20 votes respectively). Hungarian students are oriented toward fantasy (25) and adventure (24). Italian students seem to prefer detective stories (31) and fantasy or romance (21 votes respectively). Overall, the fantasy genre seems the favourite one among the students of the sample.

Question 4: What kind of stories attract you most? (You can select more than one option)

	Total
n. fantasy	66
n. horror	25
n. romance	58
n. detective	63
n. gothic	8
n. dystopian	19
n. adventure	62
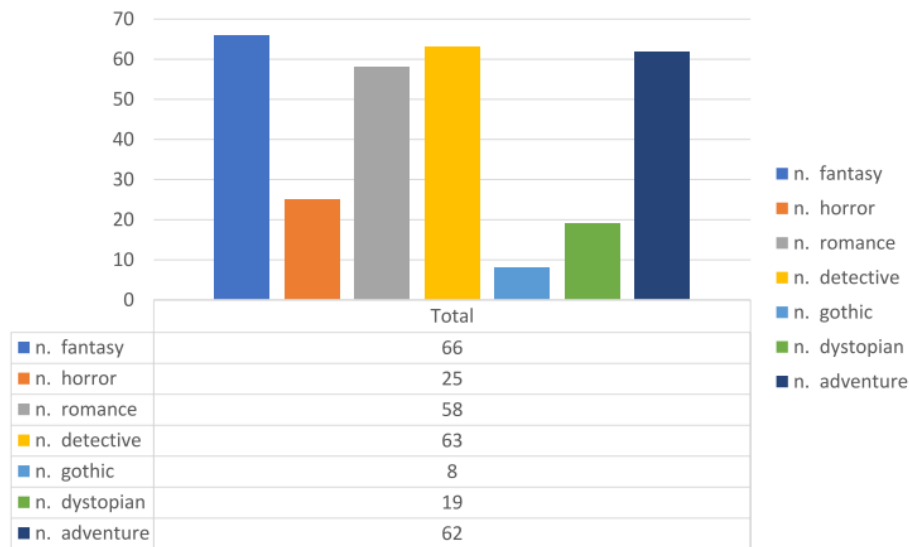
Figure 9. Types of stories preferred by students

	Austria	Hungary	Italy
n. fantasy	20	25	21
n. horror	10	10	5
n. romance	25	12	21
n. detective	18	14	31
n. gothic	1	4	3
n. dystopian	7	1	11
n. adventure	20	24	18
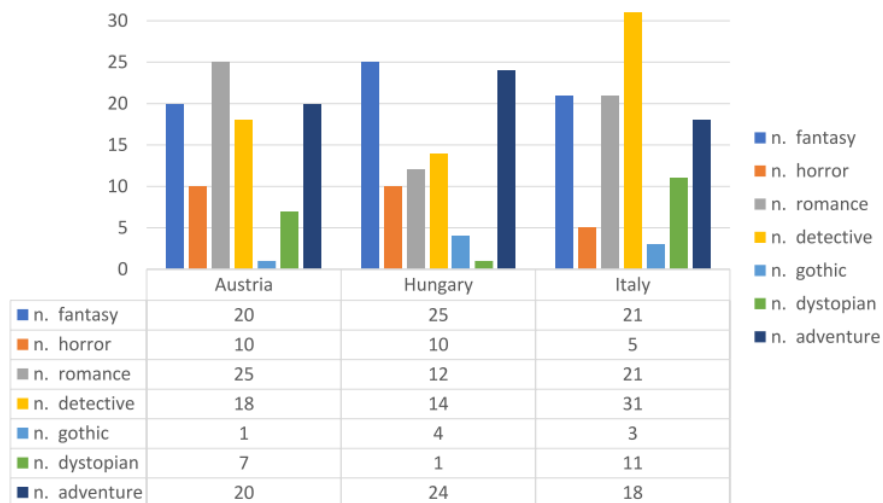
Figure 10. Types of stories preferred by students by country

The fifth question (see figure 11) was about the tendency of students to share what they read with other people. Also, in this case students had the chance to choose between three options: never, sometimes or often.

Overall, 79 participants out of the total chose "sometimes" as option. This tendency is homogeneous in all the three countries, since the option "sometimes" collected 25 votes in Austria, 23 votes in Hungary and 31 votes in Italy.

Question 5a: Do you like to share what you read?

Country	no, never	often	sometimes	Grand Total
Austria	5	8	25	38
Hungary	9	6	23	38
Italy	2	6	31	39
Grand Total	**16**	**20**	**79**	**115**
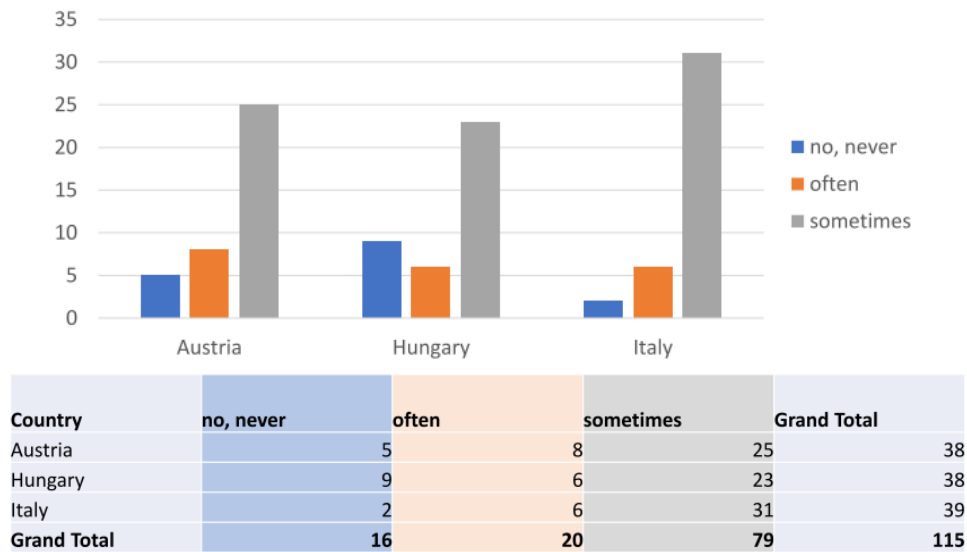
Figure 11. Students' tendency to share what they read with others

For the students who stated that they like to share what they read an additional question has been added, regarding the way in which they prefer to share what they read (see question 5b and figure 12). The answer that was preferred by students in this case was "talking to friends" (with 100 votes), followed by "talking to family" (10 votes) and "through apps" (with 7 votes). The option "posting on social media" is the one which received less votes, only 6 across countries. In general, no differences in preferences have been found across countries. From these data we may conclude that students consider sharing the books or stories that they read as something personal, and perhaps private enough not to be shared in social media environments. It is also possible that they consider social media as the wrong place where to share the content of what they read.

Question 5b: If you answered "sometimes" or "often" to question 5a, how do you normally like to share what you read? (you can choose more than one option)
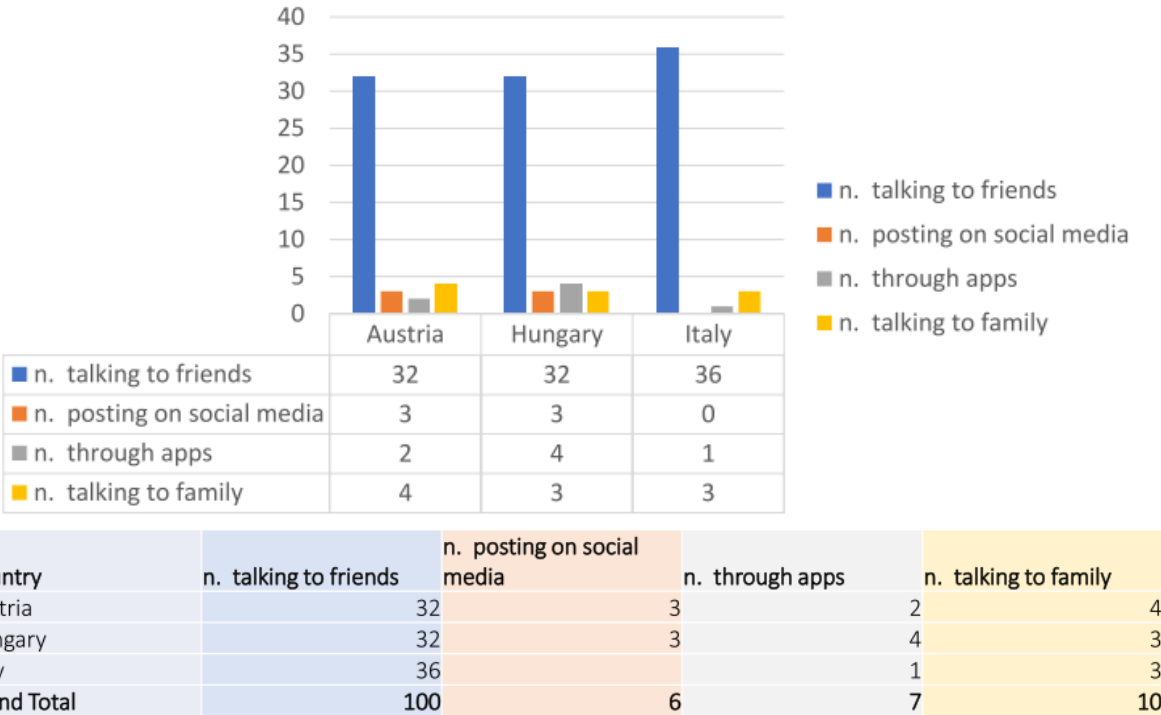
	Austria	Hungary	Italy
n. talking to friends	32	32	36
n. posting on social media	3	3	0
n. through apps	2	4	1
n. talking to family	4	3	3

Country	n. talking to friends	n. posting on social media	n. through apps	n. talking to family
Austria	32	3	2	4
Hungary	32	3	4	3
Italy	36		1	3
Grand Total	100	6	7	10

Figure 12. Modality used by students to share what they read with others

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Question 6a (see figure 13 and 14) was aimed at gathering information about topics that could attract learners' interest. The four topics suggested were: human relationships, the advancement of science, climate change, social problems. By observing all the data from the three countries, students chose "social problems" and "human relationships" as topics that literature should deal with. Advancement in science and climate change received, in general, lower rates. No statistical differences were found between countries. In general, no one of the four topics has been underrated.

Question 6a: What themes do you think literature today should deal with? Rate each theme in terms of importance (1=not at all important; 4= very important)

Human relationships	
Country	Grand Total
Austria	2,842105263
Hungary	3,184210526
Italy	3,358974359
Grand Total	**3,130434783**

Climate change	
Country	Grand Total
Austria	2,921052632
Hungary	2,868421053
Italy	2,948717949
Grand Total	**2,913043478**

Advancement of science	
Country	Grand Total
Austria	2,184210526
Hungary	2,710526316
Italy	2,846153846
Grand Total	**2,582608696**

Social problems	
Country	Grand Total
Austria	3,105263158
Hungary	3,368421053
Italy	3,512820513
Grand Total	**3,330434783**

Figure 13. Importance given by students to different text-related topics
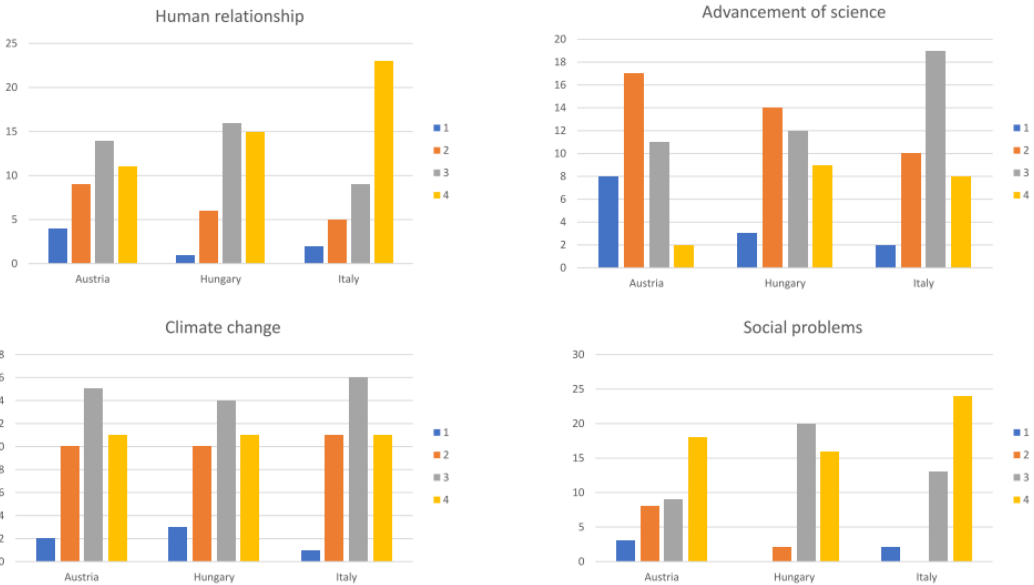
Figure 14. Importance given by students to text-related themes by country

Thanks to the question 6b (see figure 15) students had the chance to add some topics that were not included in answer 6a. Some major topics that emerged thanks to the Maxqda Analytics Pro 2020 refer to Global issues (8 votes), equality and discrimination (15 votes) and mental health (13 votes). Together with these broad categories are some more specific example. Some topics may be associated with the theme of youth, growth, and mental health such as self-discovery;

emotions; everyday problems; teenage problems; future life; family problems and relationship with parents; bullying; school rules; social media or travel. In this case students have mentioned issues that relate to the stage of life they are going through. However, students showed the will to find in literature the appropriate content to face social issues as well, such as: disability; ethnicity and racism (e.g. black lives matter movement); gender equality and violence against women or LGBTQ+ issues. Inside the list are also included broader themes connected with global events such as: climate change, migration, food insecurity, global economy, multiculturalism, or war. One also mentioned the topic of "modern heroes" and a couple of participants were interested in exploring the topic of "lessons from the past". Interestingly this topic was brought up in Hungary, where the questionnaire was completed after the conflict in Ukraine started, direct mentions to the war in Ukraine were made, reaffirming that learning from past mistakes should help avoiding making the same mistakes in the future.

These data are particularly relevant because they signal an interest from students themselves toward themes on two main levels: inward-level themes with which students have a personal connection due to the stage of life they are living, and, on the other hand, outward- level themes, those that are related to contemporary issues (which are also included in the UN 2030 Agenda). From the suggestion collected we may notice a certain level of awareness among students about the importance of growing "inside", cultivating their personality, and "outside" as citizens that are responsible of what happens around them. The fact that students mentioned topics related to both spheres may suggest that they consider the two spheres complementary one with the other. Overall, their topic suggestions show the hope to find in literature a tool to face life challenges.

Question 6b: Add other themes to the list if need be and give a reason why you think they should be added.

Added themes	Mentions
Self-discovery	2
emotions	1
Social media	1
GLOBAL issues	8
climate change	1
migration	1
food insecurity	1
global economy	2
importance of multiculturalism	1
war	1
lessons from the past	2
School rules	1
Travel	1
Family problems	1
relationship with parents	1
Future life	2
modern eroes	1
EQUALITY & DISCRIMINATION	15
disability	1
black lives matter	1
racism	6
LGBTQ +	2
gender equality	4
violence against women	2
bullying	1
MENTAL HEALTH	13
every day problems	2
teenage problems	1

Figure 15. Additional themes suggested by students

In question 7a (see figure 16) students were asked about the Diglit reading list. They had the chance to express their preference on the basis of the texts included in the YAL collection.

The title suggestions given by students were related to the genres that they themselves suggested. More specifically they said to prefer books which talk about racism ("To kill a mockingbird" with 16 votes and "The 57 bus" with 8 votes), coming of age and identity (" The rest of us just live here" with 7 votes, "The giver" with 8 votes, "Trees" with 7 votes), mental health ("We were liars" with 19 votes and "Don't call me crazy with 15 votes), gender equality and LGBTQ+ ("I am Malala" with 7 votes, "Red white and royal blue" with 8 votes).

Question 7a: What texts from the Diglit Reading List would you be MORE interested in reading? Name at least three.

TEXT	Mentions
Percy Jackson (Greek mithology)	6
The rest of us just live here (fantasy, coming of age)	7
Trees (poetry, identity)	7
I am Malala (biography, gender equality)	7
The 57 bus (non-fiction, racism)	8
The giver (dystopian, coming of age)	8
Red white and royal blue (romance, LGBTQ+)	8
The Short Knife (historical fiction, migration)	8
Howl's moving castle (fantasy)	15
Don't call me crazy (non-fiction, mental health)	15
To kill a mockingbird (fiction, racism)	16
We Were Liars (fiction, mental health)	19
The hunger games (dystopian, war)	22

Figure 16. Texts students considered more interesting to read from the YAL collection

Question 7b (see figure 17) gave the students the possibility to provide an extended answer to motivate their previous choices. A graph with key ideas extracted from their written answers have been provided. The content analysis was carried out using Maxqda Analytics Pro. We may suggest that other external factors could have had a role in influencing the preferences expressed by students, for example the notoriety of the title, in other words, whether the book is considered a classic (see for example "To kill a mockingbird") or whether the title of the book can be associated to a movie or a series of movies that participants may have already heard about (See for example " The hunger games", "Howl's moving castle", "The giver" or "Percy Jackson"). The genres included in this title selection are quite varied and it is not possible to identify a single trend toward a specific genre.

Question 7b: For each text, please say why
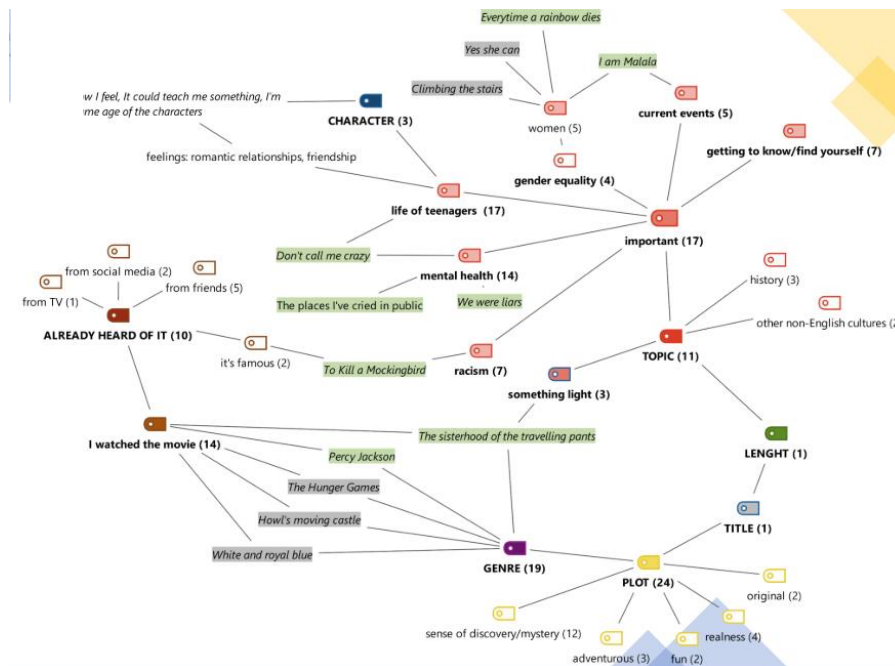
Figure 17. Analysis of students' book-preference motivations

In question 8a (see figure 18), students were asked to express their opinion about the list entry that they considered less interesting. In this case, the titles that appeared to be less interesting for students belong to different genres and deal with many different topics. From the data collected it is not possible to observe a trend in the answers given, since no category and no topic has been completely discarded by students. We suggest that the characteristics of the descriptions of the books provided inside the YAL website may have played a role in influencing students' choices. We hypothesise that richer and more catching descriptions could have sound more interesting.

Question 8a: What texts from the Diglit Reading List would you be LESS interested in reading?

TEXT	Mentions
Birthday (LGBTQ+, romance)	8
The last one: a novel (LGBTQ+)	2
We were Liars (mental health)	4
Unbroken-13 stories starring disabled kids (disability)	2
Frankly in love (romance)	11
My brother's name is Jessica (LGBTQ+)	5
Climbing the stairs (cultural identity)	2
The sisterhood of the traveling pants (friendship)	2
Eleanor & Park (coming of age)	4

Figure 18. YAL collection texts considered less interesting to read.

Also in this case Maxqda Analytics Pro has been used to carry out the qualitative analysis of the written answers provided by students.

The content analysis carried out on students' written answers revealed some interesting details about their perspectives (see question 8b, figure 19). As we can see from the diagram, students focused on topic and plot, explaining that in some cases the topic of the book seemed boring (9 responses), or too distant from what they would prefer to read (not real (2), trivial (4), too much drama (3)). Some explanations also mentioned the genre, expressing no interest in romances or poetry for example. A topic that receives quite many critiques if compared to others was "LGBTQ+" (17 mentions), some participants seemed not to be interested in this theme: they do not recognise themselves in the character, do not relate with these issues and consider the topic overrated. In some cases, other motivations were provided: some students did not want to read the book because the film was disappointing. In some other cases, they did not consider the website book description as appropriate.

Question 8b: For each text, please say why
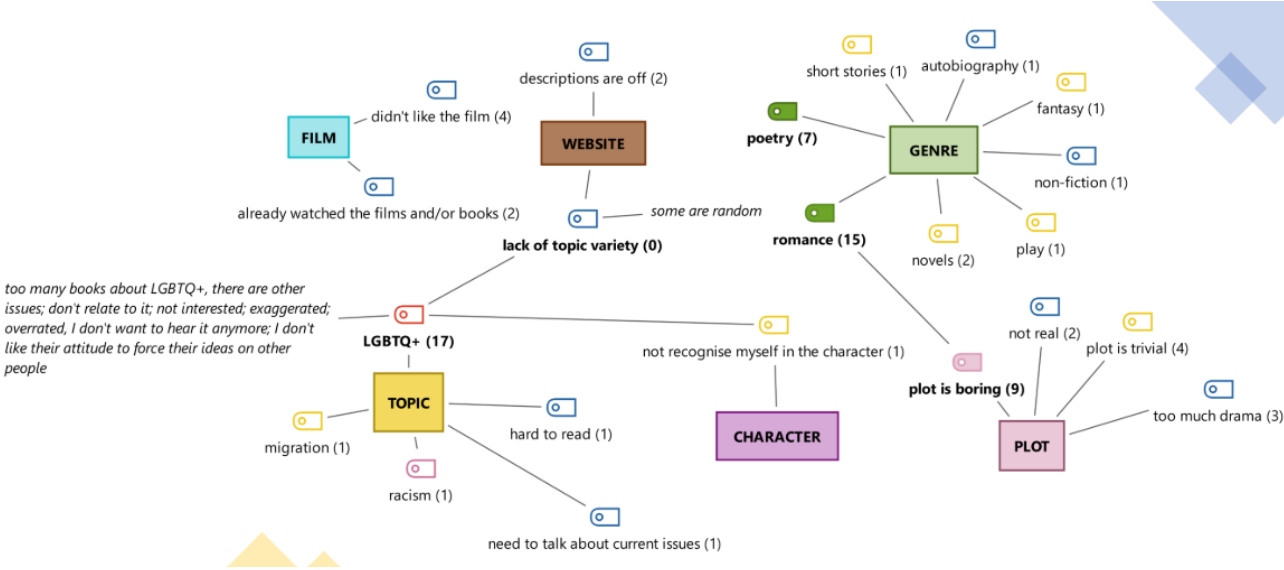
Figure 19. Analysis of student less-interesting-book-choice motivations

With question 9, students had the chance to add their own title suggestions to help expanding the Diglit collection, in Figure 20 there are the most popular titles appeared across countries.

Many titles suggested across countries by students belonged to the genre of crime stories or dystopian stories. A classic was also mentioned, "1984" from George Orwell. Some book titles had also a counterpart in films, such as Harry Potter.

The data analysis carried out in the following section will help designing a digital reading activity that could fit with the habits and interests of the students. The questionnaire has provided the chance to collect reliable and useful data. Overall, we may notice that opinions expressed by students across countries tend to be homogenous: students are confident in using technological devices and seem to know it is essential not to neglect reading. They seem to be open to quite a wide range of themes that relate both to their daily life experience, and to broader issues.

Question 9: It's your turn to contribute to the Diglit Reading List! Write down the title and author of a text that you think should be added to the list and that responds to the themes of the project and to young people's interests.

Harry Potter	7 across countries
The Hate U Give (black lives matter movement; racism)	6 across countries
Born a crime (coming of age)	7 across countries
One of us is next, One of us is lying, One of us is next (series; murder mysteries)	Several mentions across countries
1984 (G. Orwell) (dystopian)	5 across countries
Maze runner (dystopian)	5 across countries
The fault in our stars (heartbreaking love)	3 across countries
Sherlock Holmes (crime)	2 across countries

Figure 20. Book titles suggested by students

2.4 Discussion

In the present section we will discuss the results collected by means of the Diglit questionnaire. The data will help us answering our initial research questions related to students' reading habits. Our research questions are:

1. What are students' reading habits?

2. What are students' perceptions about the YAL collection developed within the Diglit project?

From the data collected we can say that our hypothesis is partially confirmed. In general students have demonstrated to have a positive attitude toward literature and reading in general. They have shown to be interested in many different literary genres. From the data collected on their reading habits, we can notice that they consider paper the main device for reading, but they are used to utilize their smartphones as well. From the written answers they provided, it seems that students consider literature as a space where they can explore personal as well as societal and global issues.

The first aspect that we will take into consideration in our discussion is the preference in terms of genre and type of story. Students have expressed a wide range of preferences demonstrating

to be open towards many genres and many different plots and themes. These findings are consistent with previous case studies conducted in the field of language education (see Ivey et al., 2013; Tehan et al., 2015; Tsang et al., 2020): such results highlight the importance of guaranteeing students a certain degree of freedom in choosing what they want to read, providing them with many different reading suggestions. The fact that each student has the chance and feels free to express his/her own preference in terms of book choice is essential. As we have discussed in the first chapter, scholars suggest that having a school or classroom library can turn out to be a powerful resource. A student-centred approach has to provide students with the freedom to choose among a variety of materials. Students will indeed feel more involved and motivated and will see literature reading not as an obligation but as a source of pleasure (see Ivey et al., 2013; Tsang et al., 2020).

The second aspect that we will take into consideration is the type of device used to read and, connected to it, the tendency of the students to share what they read with other people. The data collected suggest that students still considered literature reading as an activity connected to paper. However, their answers suggest that they spend time reading on their phones. What is more, many of the sources that they read can be accessed via technological device, see for example social media and newsmedia. We may conclude that students may find it stimulating to read pieces of literature on their phones. As Reiber-Kuijpers et al. (2021) suggested, digital reading is not opposed to print reding, it is complementary to it. From the answers that we collected, it seems that students are aware of this fact. This is also consistent with what students expressed by means of the questionnaire, the first two types of texts preferred by students were social media and novels, two types of contents that match the device preferences that they expressed (phone and paper). These data are also in line with the idea expressed by Turner et al. (2020), who pointed out that students are aware of the fact that school reading is mainly printed, while leisure reading that they carry out on their own is mainly on screen. The fact that students like sharing ideas about what they read with friends and family is a good starting point. Having the possibility to share opinions about the literary contents is part of making reading a social activity. What is more, as research suggest, digital reading is a social phenomenon. In recent years online book-clubs and forums have been spreading and digital social reading has been acquiring increasing relevance (see Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Scharber, 2009; Turner et al., 2020).

The third aspect that we will consider in our analysis relates to student book preferences inside the YAL collection. As we may deduce from the data collected, the choices that students made

are consistent with what is suggested by scholars (see Beach, 2011): students prefer texts where protagonists share some characteristics or life experiences with them, where the plot is interesting and relevant for teenagers. Students are interested in adventurous stories that include some mystery and are original. They are interested in narrations that will help them finding themselves and at the same time deal with current events. We may also notice that books that have more catching and accurate descriptions on the website resulted to be more interesting for students. From their preferences we see that there is a tendency to prefer invented stories. They also tended to gravitate toward titles that were already familiar to them or texts they heard about through social media, movies, or friends. The books that students were less interested in reading were connected to "boring" topics or topics students did not feel any connections with: in these terms the LGBTQ+ topics have received multiple mentions because students that do not feel to belong to this community struggle in acknowledging the importance of talking about such issues. Students pointed out that the descriptions of some of the books inside the YAL collection were not interesting to them.

The last aspect which is worth mentioning are the themes that students reputed important and the types of books that they suggested. Even in this case the data collected tend to confirm previous research. In answering question 6a students have shown to be interested in all the areas suggested. The areas of "social problems" and "human relationships" captured their attention most. This may suggest that they would like to find in books content which can be related to society and its functioning and interpersonal relationships, perhaps to understand better how to handle them in their everyday life. From the answers that students provided, they demonstrated to be conscious about the fact that literature can become a tool to discuss about current issues related to society, economy, climate, equality, freedom, or health. We may therefore suggest that a literature-based activity which connects them to real personal and societal issues would be much appreciated. As Jones (2012) pointed out, there is the need for literature to have a clear pay-off. Literary texts should not be read exclusively for literature's sake, but also to learn more about life. In their answers students underlined how gender equality, the fight against discrimination, mental health issues and global conflicts are issues that afflict our society, specifically learners referred to discrimination in terms of race and gender, to mental issues among teenagers after the Covid 19 crisis and to global conflicts such as the war in Ukraine. Students have expressed the desire to find a space at school were to talk about these issues, and we may suggest that the language classes could be one place where to start (see Maley et al., 2017) To conclude, students were also asked to provide some examples of book titles that can be included

inside the list, and, as we may notice, their suggestions are in line with the titles of the YAL collection both in terms of genres and in terms of themes. This is an additional element which demonstrates, as previous research suggested, how young learners like reading and how they recognise the value of literature (see the analysis conducted by The Young Adult Literary Service Association – YALSA). These aspects will therefore be taken into consideration in the choice of the book for our activity and in developing the activity itself.

Overall, we may notice that students look for stories that are not perfect copies of reality. They look for content which has some surreal elements but that can, at the same time, offer the opportunity to reflect on problematics that affect the time in which we live. Another key element is the necessity to find a point of reference in the main character(s): students may learn from the actions that book characters perform and may find in literature a source of help to overcome their own struggles.

In the following section we will present a digital reading activity based on one of the books of the YAL collection. Students' answers will guide the choices in designing the activity.

Chapter 3

Transforming a Diglit-YAL-collection book into a digital reading experience

This chapter aims at presenting a proposal for an English language classroom activity that could potentially be developed inside the Diglit Project. The idea is to develop an activity on one of the Diglit-Young-Adult-Literature Collection books using a digital reading platform, with the hope to help students understand the value that literature and reading can have, both in terms of personal growth and in terms of societal-and-global-issue awareness. We will therefore try to device an activity starting from the following questions:

- How can a digital reading activity be designed based on students' preferences?

- How can digital reading activities on a YAL book help students reflect on their personal growth and on broader social and global issues of our time?

To create an activity that fits the needs of the students we will take their preferences into consideration. The activity that we are going to present in this chapter has been based on Lois Lowry's book "The Giver" and on the use of Actively Learn as the digital reading platform.

In the next section we will briefly present the methodology that has been used to device the classroom activity, talking specifically about the materials needed to design this activity.

3.1 The YAL Book

The book chosen for the classroom activity is "The Giver" from Lois Lowry. This book was published in 1993 and is considered nowadays a modern classic in the field of young adult literature. It is composed by a total of twenty-three relatively short chapters and is perfect for students at B1+ level of English as we will see in the next section.

"The Giver" tells the story[23] of a young boy, Jonas, who lives in a community which is apparently perfect and with no problems. People know how they must behave, and they firmly respect the rules. Jonas lives in his family unit with his sister Lily, his mother and his father, a nurturer who brings home Gabriel, a newly born child who needs extra care. Gabriel will need to meet

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[23] Summary of the book: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqhALo6K-ww&t=509s

the standards and grow accordingly, otherwise it will be released. Jonas does not know what "being released" means but everybody knows that it involves living the community and be sent to Elsewhere. The important day arrives, and Jonas and his family participate at the Ceremony of Twelve, the ceremony where boys and girls are assigned a job and a role as adults in society. Jonas has been chosen to recover the most prestigious position; he will become the "receiver of memory" of his community. The protagonist does not know what the future holds, but he immediately starts his training with a special tutor, who wants to be called "The Giver". This elder man is the only person inside the community who holds the memories of generations. People inside the community have indeed no knowledge about the past. The goal for this society is to achieve Sameness: their plan is to have a uniform geography, a uniform climate, and no differences between people. Sameness involves eliminating freedom of choice, emotions, and colours, which can lead to mistakes and pain. When Jonas gradually begins his training, he starts receiving all the memories about the past and he realises how his society is imprisoned and subjugated. The former girl who was meant to become the receiver was the daughter of the Giver; she left the community for Elsewhere because she could not bear the situation that now Jonas is experiencing. Once she had escaped, all the memories that she had learned came back to the community. Jonas continues with the training and learns that "release" means death and that the little Gabriel will be killed. Jonas decides to figure out a plan together with the Giver to escape from the community, to give the people the chance to reconnect with their memories. Jonas decides to escape with Gabriel to the top of a hill. They will use a sledge to go down and reach Elsewhere, where Jonas hopes to find a new and worm world.

This story is rich of many themes and symbols that reflect the reality in which we live. One of the major themes is the control of memory which is manipulated to control people, memories of the past and history, especially negative ones, are in fact a source of knowledge and wisdom that could impact stability. Another important thread is the conformity and the lack of individuality or self-expression: no difference means no conflict, no discrimination nor competition. A total control of climate indeed, following this way of reasoning, will lead to a predictable and safe life. A final important element is the need of security which is achieved by depriving people of their freedom.

This book is rich of themes and symbols, and it displays many different layers of meaning. Some of the elements that are included inside the book could be a source of inspiration for students to understand better themselves and the reality they live in. We will see all the threads in more detail in the activity section.

3.2 The digital reading platform: Actively Learn

Since the present project aims at bringing digital reading inside the English language classroom, a platform for digital reading that could be easily accessible via mobile needed to be found. The platform that will be used for the activity is Actively Learn. It displays a series of resources (articles, poems, books and more) that can be used to create digital classroom activities. The materials available are related to ELA, science, and social studies. For this project we will refer only to the ELA section.

Actively Learn is a platform that has been devised for English native speaker students, for this reason it is a perfect source of authentic material. There is the possibility to choose the grade of your classroom and the Lexile level. The Lexile framework [24] is a tool that has been devised to quantify the reading ability of the reader and the level of difficulty of a text. This framework includes two types of measurement: the Lexile reader measure, which measures the readers' ability, and the Lexile text measures, which describes the difficulty of a text. Both scales are composed by a number and the letter "L". This framework will be helpful to find out the right correspondence between the level of the reader and of the book. It is possible for students to take a reading test, linked to the Lexile framework, so that students will know the value to associate with their ability (e.g. 940L). The difficulty of the text is scientifically calculated taking into consideration the sentence length and the word frequency in each text. The books that will fit the student's level belong to a range of about 50 Lexile above and 100 Lexile below the student's Lexile level result.

TABLE 4. COMPARISON OF STUDENT (LEARNER) AND TEXT RANGES

CEFR Level	Student Aggregate Range	Graded Reader Text Aggregate Range (IQR)
A1	Below 0L to 620L	230L to 340L
A2	180L to 910L	425L to 715L
B1	705L to 1210L	588L to 860L
B2	1000L to 1370L	598L to 993L
C1	1290L to 1400L	760L to 1200L
C2	1405L to 1595L	

Figure 21. Lexile student and text ranges associated to the CEFR levels

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[24] See An Introduction to The Lexile Framework® for Reading
video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUznnqghDAE (accessed 30.07.22)

To make the search easier, a Lexile book database [25]has been created, where it is possible to enter all information (the student's Lexile level and the topics of interest) to obtain a list of suitable books. All in all, this framework is also useful to monitor progress.

"The Giver" has a Lexile level of 760L, so it corresponds to a good B1 level for foreign language learners.
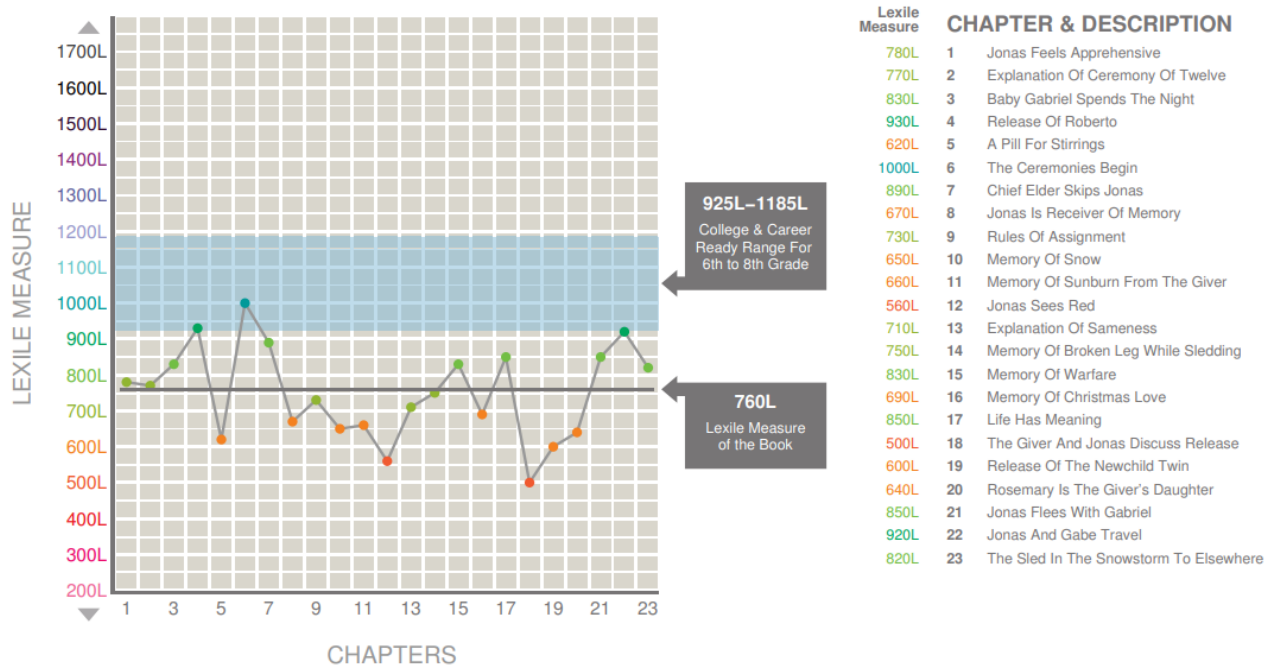
Figure 22. The Lexile measure of "The Giver" of Lois Lowry (see source link[26])

When the user enters inside the Actively Learn platform[27], it is possible to create a free teacher account that gives access to most of the materials in the platform. Once the teacher has created an account, they are free to create their virtual classrooms where all the assignments will go. Some of the services inside the platform are free others are reserved to teachers with a premium account that can be obtained only by the school.

The top bar in the homepage has a menu that the teacher can use to choose the materials based on the genre or on the theme.

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[25] See the Lexile Database website: https://hub.lexile.com/find-a-book/search (accessed 30.07.22)
[26] Source Link – Lexile Level of "The giver" from Lois Lowry: https://lexile.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-Giver_925-1185.pdf (accessed 30.07.22)
[27] Actively Learn: https://www.activelylearn.com/ (accessed 30.07.22)
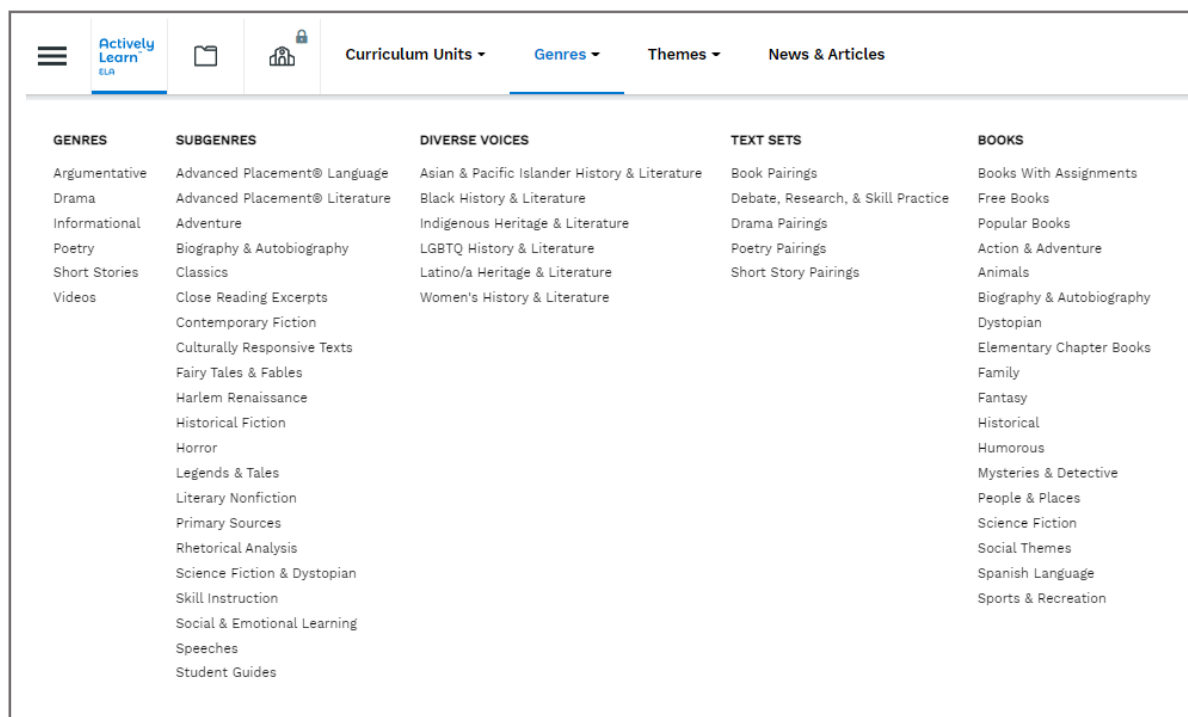
Figure 23. The Genre section in upper bar of Actively Learn
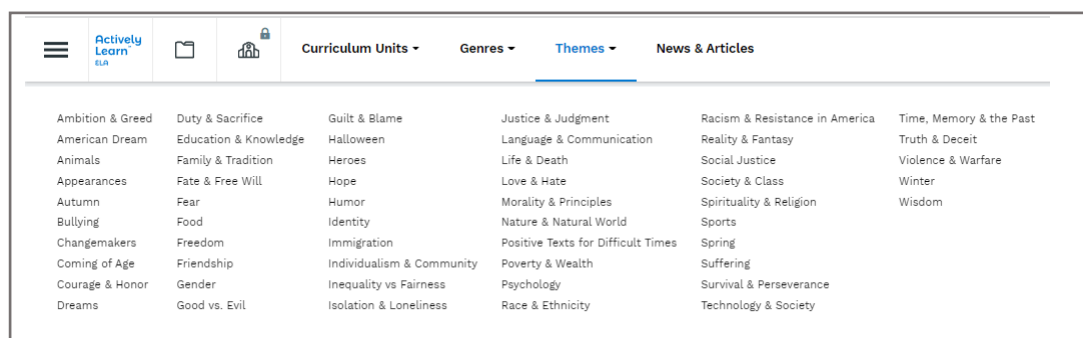
Figure 24. The theme section in the upper bar of Actively Learn

To create a digital classroom inside the platform, the teacher needs to click on the hamburger menu on the top left of the screen and select the "plus" button in correspondence of "classes". At this point a window opens, where the teacher can insert the name of the classroom (and can select the grade of the students).
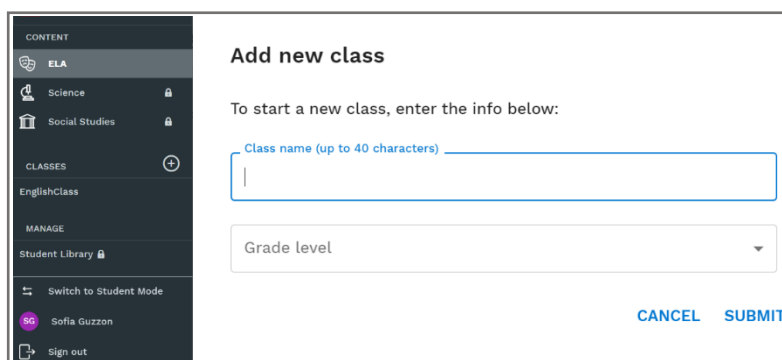
Figure 25. Panel to create a class in Actively Learn.

It is possible to add a text to work on inside the teacher workspace. Once the teacher has prepared the digital activity, they can assign the activity to the class they want by sharing the link and the class code with the students. To keep track of what happens inside the classes the teacher can access the roaster section and see the students and their work. Usually, when students enter inside the platform there is a short video tutorial that explains how Actively Learn works.
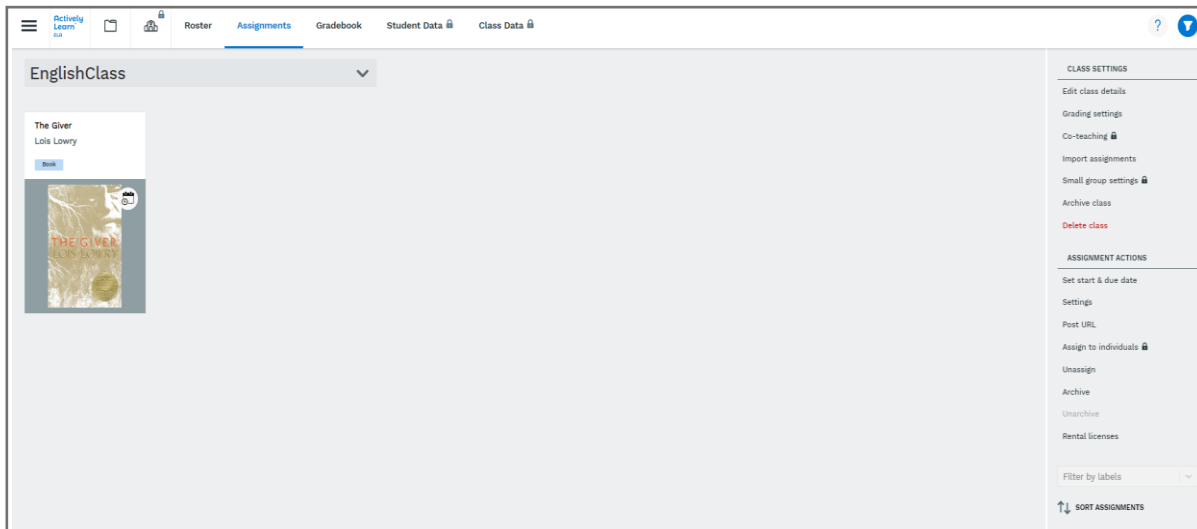
Figure 26. Class section in Actively Learn
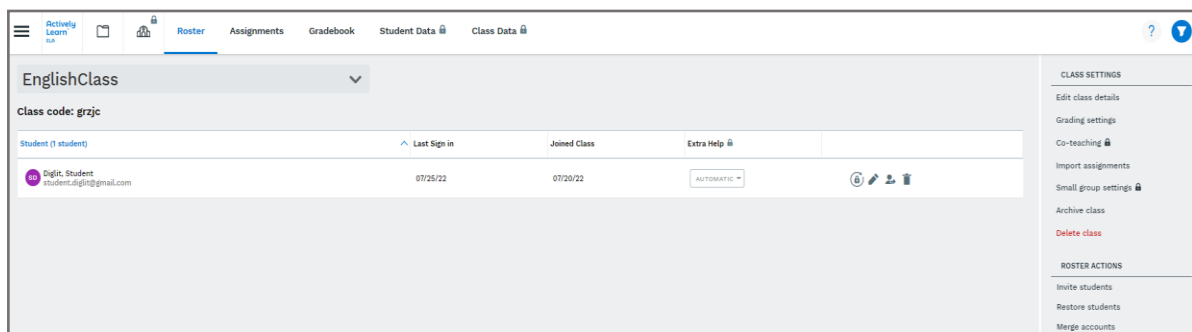
Figure 27. The roaster section of the English class

Figures 26 and 27 show how the class setting in Actively Learn looks like. It is possible to see all the assignments and all the students that have access to the activities. On the right, there is a panel which enables to assess some of the class features. Some of the options are available only with the premium account, such as the access to students' data and statistics.

When the teacher opens the book in Actively Learn a tool bar appears at the top. Here, it is possible to regulate the settings, share the text with a colleague, work on the questions and notes inside the text or search a particular word and access the table of contents. On the right there is a special button to see the student preview and it is also possible to have Actively Learn read

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the text out loud. It is possible to choose the colour of the background, the font (see the option for dyslexia), the dimension of the words, the page numeration and more. There is also the possibility to see all the questions and notes one after the other, and to move freely from one chapter of the book to the other.
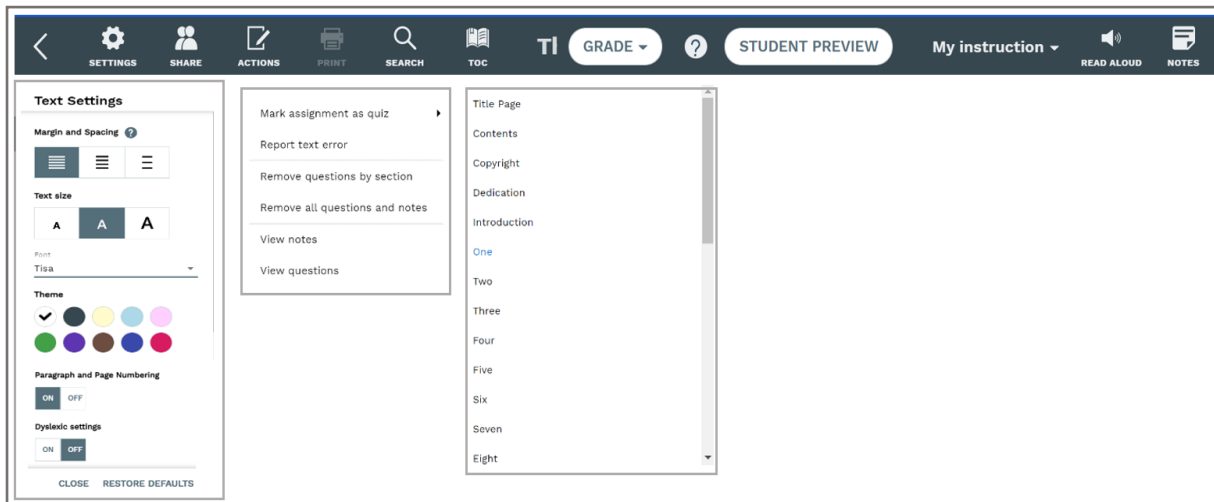
Figure 28. Editing the book – the upper bar

At the beginning of each chapter there is the possibility to add a box for the instructions and a box for a pre-reading question. Similarly at the end of the chapter there is a button to add a comprehension question. While reading the text students can highlight it with different colours, add comments and media, annotate the text, or answer the questions prepared by the teacher. The platform is designed to provide linguistic support, students can select a word and look for its definition or can select a sentence and see the translation. There is also the possibility to hear the pronunciation of the word. All in all, the platform design helps students using a series of reading strategies that can help them navigate the text and understand it (see Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021).

Questions can be added by the teacher as a note on the margins, where also media (link, photos, audios) can be added, or directly inside the grey question box inside the text.

This is how a note appears inside the text:
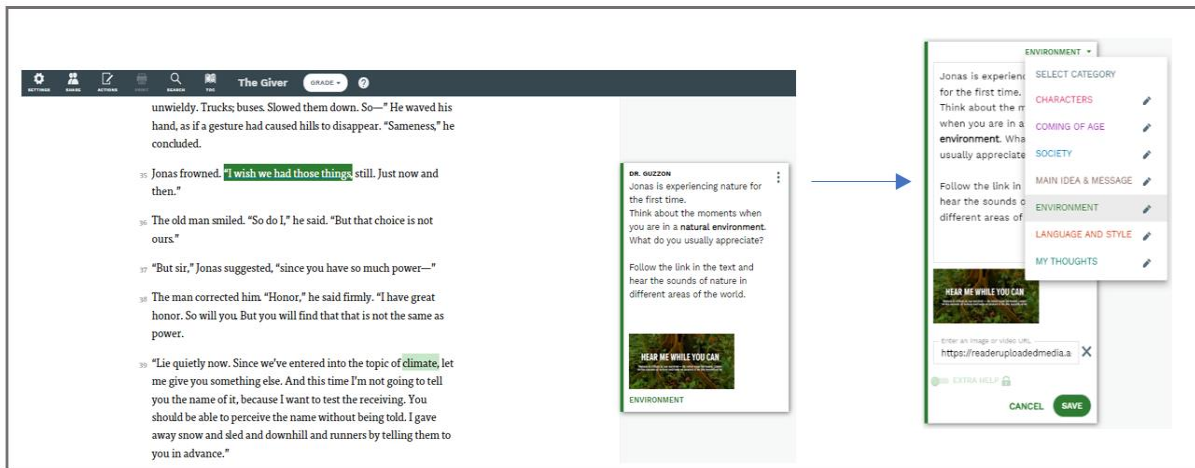
Figure 29. Creating a note connected to the text

To edit the note, it is possible to choose the category where it belongs (the categories are customizable and are associated to different colours). It is possible to add text, images, and links, that can be access directly from the main page, a small window reproducing the media will indeed appear.

This is how grey boxes inside the text appear:
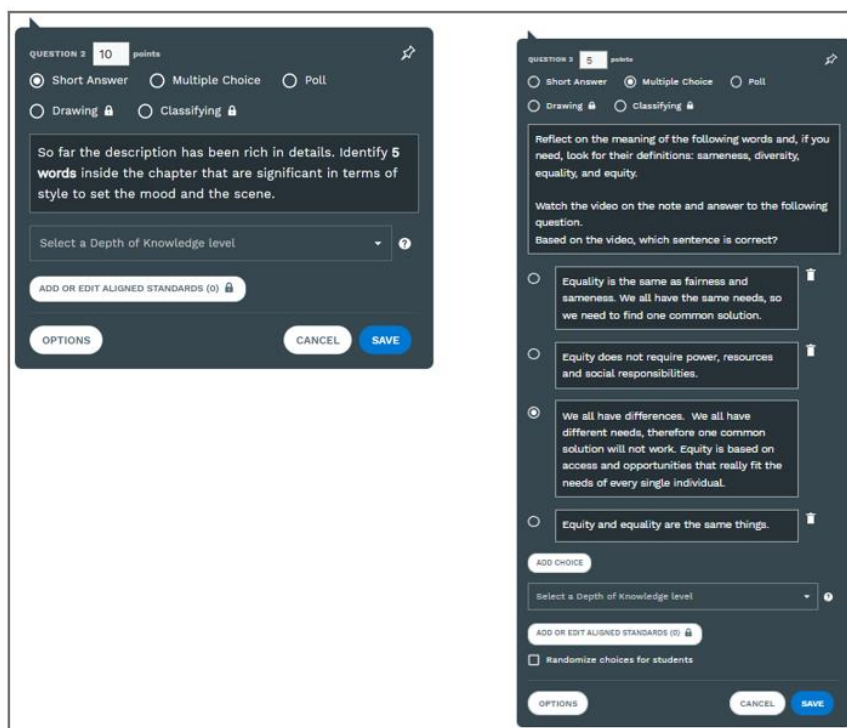
Figure 30. Question box inside the text

It is possible to select a word and add a note connected to it inside the text, a grey box will appear. The question could be a short-answer question, a multiple-choice question, or a poll. In general, it is also possible to select a word and insert a link to a webpage.

Students, when accessing the text, will have the chance to see all the questions and notes on the chapter. To move to the following chapter, they need to provide their answers. The aim in this case is to give the students the possibility not to lose the flow when reading. They can read the whole chapter and then go back to the parts that are highlighted to answer the questions or can answer straight-a-way. The idea is that reading should be linear, when possible, in order not to add difficulties in terms of text navigation. This approach will help the student focus on one chapter at time and will disincentivise shallow reading in favour of a more strategic and aware approach (see Li, 2020).

3.3 The digital reading activity

The activity that we will present is designed referring to the students who take part in the Diglit experiment. In the following section we will introduce the activity and we will provide an explanation for the choices made. The goal is introducing students to one of the main texts of young adult literature to help them understand that literature can be a tool which leads to personal growth and that provides ideas about the society and reality we live in. Student will have the chance to reflect on their own lives and their own path to become adults and will have the chance to learn more about global issues to develop a critical thinking approach towards them. The idea is to put into practice what Bowers-Campbell (2011) refers to as text-to-self level and text-to-world level of reading. While reading a text, students can undergo many different stages of investigation: the stage of the text-to-self level, focuses on introspection. It is a stage in which the text gives the students ideas and stimuli to reflect on themselves, on their personality on their emotions and on their values. Reading the adventures of the protagonist will evoque in students episodes, choices and situation of their own lives, and may help them finding solutions. In addition, student will experiment with the text-to world dimension: as the protagonist have choices to make and problems to solve in his society, so has the reader. The problems that affect the reality of "The Giver" are in part brought to an extreme for literary sake (e.g. birth control, roles in society, climate control, sameness), but they hint at real issues of our own societies, issues that students have to face and confront themselves with, trying to understand what's their role in the context where they live. We hope that our activity would promote a process of individual empowerment as Ur (1996) suggests. To conclude, students will have the chance to practice English language reading, potentiate their vocabulary, work on pronunciation and reflect on the text style: all aspects that will eventually help students with their writing abilities too (see Lazar, 1993; Spaliviero, 2020).

To create a class in Actively Learn an account was created using my personal email and a password. Subsequently a student account was created. The educator account was used to create the activity, while the student account was used to see how the activity would appear to the student and to make the activity visible to the people who have the credentials.

Inside the Actively Learn website the book "The Giver" was already available. however, due to copyright reasons, to have the access to the entire book it was necessary to buy a licence. So, a licence for one educator account and for one student account were purchased directly from the platform (cost of one licence 4,99 euros). The licence lasts three months and can be extended going to the platform section "rental licences", see figure 6. Once the teacher has purchased the licence, all the book is available to be edited. The book already contained a series of comprehension questions, but those questions were deleted since they did not fit with the aim of the activity.

3.3.1 The activity

When students read a text on actively learn, the text is interactive. In our case in each chapter of the book there were questions and resources that students could access via smartphone.

Following research suggestions (Al Rabadi, 2015; Barnett, 1988; Beach, 2011), we have decided to structure the activity in three parts: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. What has also been valued important is giving the students the chance to read autonomously without imposing rigid time constrains. The pre-reading and the post reading are designed to be carried out in class orally.

Pre-reading activity

The pre-reading activity, as suggested by scholars, will have the aim of providing students with some background knowledge that could result helpful during the reading process.

This activity could take place during the last day of school, to introduce the book for the summer vacations. It will last about an hour.

First, the students will be involved in a class brainstorming about the word "memory": the brainstorming can be carried out by using a blackboard or a digital whiteboard. Students will have to think about terms and ideas about this topic. This step will introduce them to the main theme of the book and will lead to the second part of the pre-reading activity. During the second part, students would be shown an interview to the author, who explains how the idea of the

book was born (Video "Lois Lowry's Inspiration for 'The Giver'": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gd0D-Lr0mkY by BUILD series). A discussion will follow to check students' comprehension of the video, then they would be asked to describe what the story of the book could be based on Lois Lowry's interview. In this phase students can work together in groups of 3-4 people and can think about a possible plot for the book. At the end there will be a moment (around 15 minutes) to share the various stories. To conclude, the book could be assigned as a summer reading, so that students will have the chance to live a social reading experience by entering in the platform and share their comments.

While-reading activity

The while-reading activity will develop during the summer period and will not have specific time constrains; students could have the possibility to read the book at their own pace. This method is in line with learner autonomy studies, learner should keep track of their work more independently and can use the prompts as guidelines (see Benson, 2011a, 2011b; Smith, 2007). What is more, the reading experience would become a social experience since students can see the entries of other classmates.

The while-reading activity will be composed by a series of questions, notes, and materials that students will find inside the text. In this way, they will have the chance to reflect on some of the relevant passages inside the book.

To create the activity all options have been used. The goal was to provide students with a couple of questions for each chapter connecting them with a relevant word or sentence inside the text. Seven main threads have been used to categorise the boxes on the margins. The categories are created on purpose to focus on the main threads inside the book. They are:

- Coming of age (purple): notes related specifically to the main character, Jonas. These notes want to make the student reflect on what is happening to Jonas, how he faces the challenges of his adolescence. Students are asked to reflect on what Jonas experiences and on what they will experience or do in similar situations. The notes boxes are shown below.

Seven

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *He would be an adult,*
>
> When do you think people become adults? Is there a need to "train" to become an adult?
> Do you think that in all countries reaching the majority is an event that happens at one and only chosen age?

Eight

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *the qualities.*
>
> Which are the qualities that you value most in a person? Which are your best qualities?

Ten

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *The books*
>
> Why do you think this community has no access to books?
> Why is reading important in our societies? Provide examples.

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *the memory*
> There are many types of memory.
>
> **TYPES OF MEMORY**
>
> **SENSORY** — Holding sensory info (e.g. sounds, smells) very briefly, ~1 second
> **WORKING** — Manipulating info and helpful in remembering details of a task
> **SHORT-TERM** — Allows us to recall a brief string of info (5-9 items) for ~30 seconds
> **EPISODIC** — Long-term memory of autobiographical info (e.g. events from childhood)
> **SEMANTIC** — Long-term memory for general knowledge (e.g. what words mean)
> **PROCEDURAL** — Long-term memory that helps us perform tasks (e.g. riding a bike)
>
> @POSITIVELYTHERAPY

Thirteen

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *If you gave some of it to me, maybe your pain would be less."*
>
> Why do you think Jonas wants to experience painful memories?

Sixteen

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *you."*
> What would be your happiest memory?

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *I was thinking, I mean feeling, actually, that it was kind of nice, then.*
>
> Why do you think people in this society do not know feelings?

Twenty

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *"The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared."*
>
> How has Jonas' way of thinking changed throughout the story?

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *The Giver would transfer every memory of courage and strength that he could to Jonas.*
>
> If you had the same opportunity that Jonas has, would you like older people to transfer you some knowledge?
>
> Think about a person in your life that you think could help you in the same way in which the Giver is helping Jonas.

> **DR. GUZZON** COMING OF AGE   **VIEW IN TEXT**
>
> ✏ *I can see that it was a dangerous way to live."*
> Do you think that feelings are always easy to handle? What do you do when you start feeling overwhelmed?
>
> Check out this Instagram
> page: https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ-HvQ-PfYC/
>
> **9 Ways to Cope with Big Emotions**
>
> THERAPY IN A NUTSHELL

Figure 31. "Coming of age" prompts

- Society (blue): these notes contain questions about the society Jonas lives in, these boxes are used to help the student reflect on the story and to connect the issues narrated in the book to real society issues.

Two

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *community,*

Who makes most of the decisions in this community, and how much freedom do people have?

Three

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *individuals.*

Why would this community not want to call attention to differences between individuals?

Six

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *interdependence.*

In your own words define what interdependence means here. Why is it important in this society?

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *Matching of Spouses*

Think about the society you live in. How are marriage and love seen in the country where you live?

What types of debates are there in your society about these topics? (think about religion, or gender issues, sexual orientation)

Thirteen

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *there had been a time when flesh had different colors. Two of these men had dark brown skin; the others were light.*

Why do you think there is no differentiation in skin colour in this society?

Watch the video and write down one idea that caught your attention. Add a comment down below.

Fourteen

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *The population had gotten so big that hunger was everywhere.*

What do you know about hunger in the real world?

Answer the question and watch the video.

Seven

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *The discipline*

Explain what discipline is in Jonas' world. In general, do you think that discipline is a positive or a negative concept? Explain why.

Twelve

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *Sameness.*

In your opinion what do they mean by "master Sameness"? What is their ultimate goal and why?

Answer the questions and then have a look at the video.

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *Apparently that's the way it was, once. Everyone had access to memories.*

Cultural Memory. Have you ever heard about it? What do you think it is?

Take a look at this video.

Seventeen

DR. GUZZON Society   VIEW IN TEXT

✎ *gesture.*

What do you think happens when one of these twins is released?

Figure 32. "Society" prompts

- Environment (green): These questions are about the Climate Control policy that has been adopted in Jonas' world. Learning about their attempt to control the elements and the climate is a good way to start thinking about how our planet is suffering because of climate change

Figure 33. "Environment" prompts

- Literary features (red): language notes are created to focus on vocabulary items and expressions to help students reflect on language. There are also references to images created by author with the use of descriptions.

Figure 34. "Literary features" prompts

- Characters (pink): this category has been inserted without creating any special note about it, students will have the chance to use it in their notes.

- Main idea & message (brown): notes belonging to this section usually underline some important symbol inside the book, or an especially relevant passage for the development of the story.

Figure 35. "Main idea and message" prompts

- My thoughts (dark green): created for students to give them the possibility to add their thoughts.

In addition to in-text notes, grey question boxes have been added. Usually, these boxes are positioned at the end of the chapter, in order not to interrupt the reading flow. These questions boxes usually refer to the videos that are suggested in the notes. The idea is to give the students the time to watch the video once or twice and reflect on it once they have reached the end of the chapter. Other boxes contain exercises that regard the whole chapter and focus on the language or on the plot.

Figure 36. End-of-chapter question boxes

All the while-reading prompts want to make the students reflect on themselves and on the reality, they live in. The videos, Instagram posts and pages, the links and images that has been chosen deal with topics that are related to society and are linked to the sustainable development goals. The questions and videos are not aimed at exploring one issue in detail, but rather they tackle many different topics with the hope that students could take inspiration from the book and the prompts and investigate one or more of these issues on their own. The main themes that have been brought up are:

- Mental health. especially with the theme of emotions and memory. Two interesting channels have been linked so that students, in case they want, could explore them, and find interesting posts or videos about the topic of mental health. (see the two links about mental health[28]). Another video focuses on cultural memory and its relevance in society under many different points of view (see the link about cultural memory[29]). These topics are strongly connected with the theme of memory inside the book and refer to Jonas' training and learning about emotions and experiencing them for the first time.

- Environmental issues and climate change. In this case a video about how to talk and think pro-actively about climate change and energy consumption has been provided. In addition, a link to an audio has been included: students' senses will be involved when they will start listening at the sounds of nature, this involvement may help them figure out their sensations and feelings about nature (see the links about the environment[30]). These themes reflect the Climate issues that affect Jonas' society: to achieve Sameness, the natural environment has been reshaped because it was not convenient and efficient, no more mountains, no more snow.

- Equity, equality, and racism. A video that talks about the importance of accepting differences inside society has been included, to point out the distinction between equity and equality. A second video focuses on the concept of "race" and how it has evolved in the years (see the links about equity, equality and racism[31]). Both videos relate to

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[28] Links about mental health:
https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ-HvQ-PfYC/ (accessed 30.07.22)
https://instagram.com/positivelytherapy?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y= (accessed 30.07.22)
[29] Link about cultural memory:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LYYxWNxYgs (accessed 30.07.22)
[30] Links about the environment:
https://www.conservation.org/hearme (accessed 30.07.22)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkZ7BJQupVA&t=10s (accessed 30.07.22)
https://app.wedonthavetime.org/?utm_source=wwwredirect (accessed 30.07.22)
https://www.earthhero.org/app/ (accessed 30.07.22)
[31] Links about equity, equality, and racism:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0N22PMdF1U&t=1s (accessed 30.07.22)

Jonas' adventures. His society wants to eliminate individuality and make everyone the same, differences are not accepted and people
that are born with difficulties of any kinds are sent away from the community or killed (see Gabriel). What is more, Jonas asks himself how a society where people can see different skin colours could be, hinting at racism problems that affect our societies.

- Hunger. One of the videos suggested focuses on the food crisis, explains how the food supply chain works and the major problems that can affect it (see the link about the food supply chain crisis[32]). This theme is directly linked to one of the memories form the past that Jonas receives, the one of hunger. His society does not know what it is. This is a thought that causes him pain and concern.

Other notes and materials require some imaginative work or involve the sense of sight and hearing. This may be useful to help the students visualise some images inside the book (e.g. Think about a possible soundtrack for this chapter. And share it here / What does the giver look like in you imagination? If you had to choose an actor to play his role, who would he be? Name one) or places (e.g. Choose the photo of one of the most stunning libraries in the world from the Instagram page[33]) and works of art they already know (e.g. The sledge, the hill, and the lights are important elements of the story. What do you think they symbolise? How do you imagine this scene? Find a painting that could be associated with the author's description and post it here). Some notes refer mainly to language and style and focus on the way a term is used or on which words are used to provide a certain description (e.g. We are deliberately not told what Stirrings are. What do you think they might be? / How is suspense created in this scene? / So far the description has been rich in details. Identify 5 words inside the chapter that are significant in terms of style to set the mood and the scene). The idea of creating prompts that contain images, videos and sounds is central to make the reading experience more stimulating and interactive.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=926PqQUOVOg&t=2s (accessed 30.07.22)

[32] Link about the food supply chain crisis: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YcvKvxWaCE&t=2s (accessed 30.07.22)

[33] Link to the Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/p/CfaoOMorQ_n/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D (accessed 30.07.22)

Post-reading activity

The post reading activity will be carried out once that all the students have completed the book. Ideally one of the first English lessons of the following year. The post reading activity will be carried out in class. Students will do the activity in pairs and should discuss three aspects of the book that they appreciated. At the end of this phase there will be a general discussion with the teacher, students will share their opinion about the book. The teacher can ask them to weather the links and resources have been useful and why.

To conclude, so far we have suggested one possible activity that could be carried out using an online digital reading platform and one young adult literature book. The aim was introducing students to literature showing how reading has a real value in personal and cultural terms. In designing the activity, we have tried to provide an answer to the two research questions presented at the beginning of the chapter.

3.3.2 Design choices

The present digital reading activity has been designed based on the preferences that students have expressed with the questionnaire. Firstly, the book, "The Giver," was chosen because it was included by students among their Diglit-YAL-collection book preferences. It is indeed a novel, which is one of the top-two genres preferred by students. In addition, the book satisfies many of the requirements and preferences expressed by students: it has an interesting, adventurous, and original plot, it includes dystopic and fantastic elements, and is rich of mystery and suspense. The main character is close, in terms of age, to the students of the project so they may identify with him. What is more, the story narrated inside the book frequently hints at many global issues that affect our societies, such as environmental issues, equality and freedom, hunger, mental health, or cultural and personal identity. Secondly, students' device preferences have been taken into consideration: students like digital reading but they prefer to read on their smartphone instead of using a PC or Kindle, for this reason, The Actively Learn platform has been chosen. This system can be accessed via computer or directly from the smartphone. It allows the teacher to create interactive and multimodal prompts to help the students work on the text. What is more, students said that they like to share ideas about what they read with friends, even though it is not always easy. With Actively Learn reading becomes social, students can add their answers and comments while reading the book and share them with the classmates, exchange ideas and opinions. Lastly, we also hope, that the easy access to the book, due to the

use of the smartphone, could increase the frequency with which students read in English during the week.

The digital social reading activities related to the text have been designed to help the students reflect on themselves and on the reality, they live in. Students can connect with the episodes of the main protagonist and reflect on what they would do or feel in similar situations. On the other hand, the world inside "The Giver" will help them reflect on their own world and on the issues that we are facing as a global society. The reflection is guided by multimodal prompts that involve reading, listening, and writing skills.

Some of the strengths that characterize this activity are the fact that students can decide to read anytime from their smartphones, they can see how other students are doing with the book, share ideas, find interactive content to work on themselves and explore social issues. Students can also practice with listening and writing and decide the pace that fits their needs. On the other hand, there could be the risk that students will approach the text in a shallow-reading mode, given the fact that multimodal prompts could distract their reading flow.

In the next section we will summarize the content presented so far analysing the present research.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

As scholars suggest, foreign language learning has an important value not only in the field of education, but also in society. Literature, in these terms, is considered as a powerful tool to boost student social interest and awareness. As scholars suggest, literature can be beneficial for language learning, but it can also stimulate readers to learn more about the reality that surrounds them. One of the aspects that may boost students' interest in studying a foreign language and reading more, is the type of device that they can use.

In Chapter 2 we saw that students tend to have a positive attitude toward literature and reading in general, and they have shown to be interested in many different literary genres. They consider paper the main device for reading, but they are used to utilize their smartphones as well, especially when it comes to leisure reading. From the written answers they provided, it seems that students consider literature as a space where they can explore personal as well as societal and global issues. These answers lead to the conclusion that literature and digital social reading can be successfully combined to become part of the language curriculum. Digital social reading is an innovative way to involve students: reading via smartphone and having the chance to share the reading experience with others can be beneficial in terms of engagement and understanding.

Based on these findings, in Chapter 3, we developed a digital social read activity around the book "The Giver" of Lois Lowry. The design of the activity included three phases a pre-reading phase, a while-reading phase and a post-reading phase. The pre-reading and the post-reading phases were designed to be carried out in class with the teacher, who would initially introduce the students to the platform and to the book, and who will guide a reflection on the book at the end. The while-reading phase has been designed to be carried out in autonomy, in order to give students the possibility to read the book at their own pace and carry out the multimodal activities autonomously.

The present research study has been carried out following a scientific approach, still, limitations can be found. In terms of methodology, the questionnaire could have been integrated with individual or group interviews to investigate students' ideas in more detail. Moreover, the ques-

tionnaire could be expanded to a larger sample of students. On the other hand, there are limitations also in relation to the Actively Learn activity. First of all, the activity has not been tested, so we have no data that can help us evaluate it and that can provide ideas on how to improve its design. A further limitation is that, being the activity accessible only by means of the educator account and the Diglit-student account, it is not completely clear how the social reading experience would be.

To conclude we think that this work could be expanded by means of a classroom experimentation. This further step could be helpful to understand which changes could be made to make the activity more suitable for students. The possibility to test the activity with students is a key element since research in EFL/ESL focuses especially on young generations.

We hope that new generations will develop a renewed mindset towards language learning, finding it engaging and useful. We hope that, thanks to new techniques and the advancement in research, language classes can become a place where students will find strength, motivation and where they learn how to prepare for the after-school reality. We hope that language classes could became a lab where students can grow personally and become active citizens.

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