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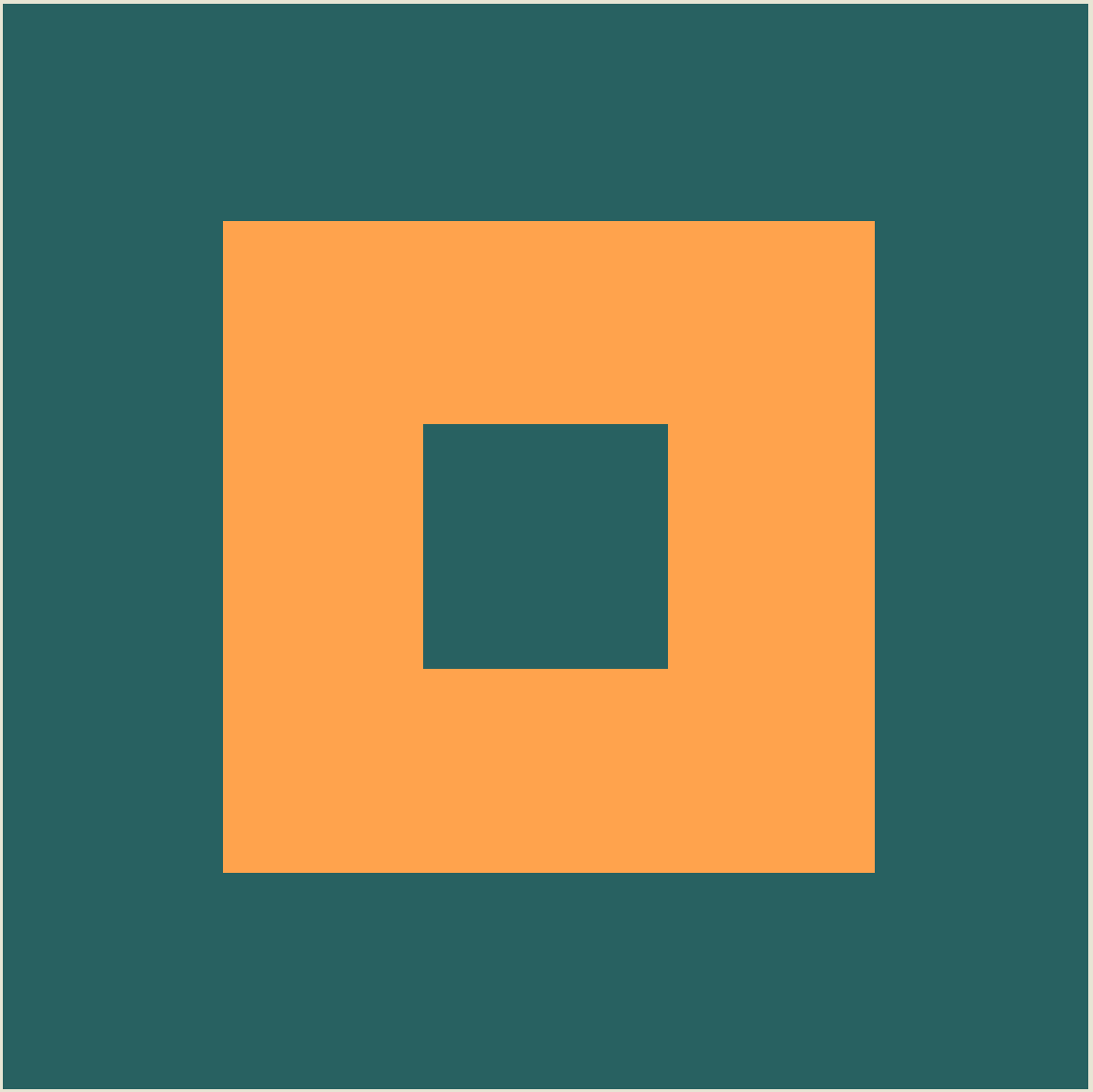

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MULTILITERACIES AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Introduction
Multiliteracies and Global Citizenship in Language Education: The Interplay of Young Adult Literature, Digital Social Reading, and Digital Storytelling

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In today's rapidly changing world, foreign language (FL) education faces significant global challenges that require innovative approaches to teaching and learning. As educators seek to prepare students for an interconnected future, the integration of multiliteracies (The New London Group 1996; Lütge, Stannard 2022) and multimodal practices (Pegrum, Hockly, Dudeney 2022) have become essential. These frameworks enable learners to navigate diverse forms of communication and expression, which are crucial in our increasingly digital landscape. In fact, while digitalisation in education is not a new phenomenon, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the urgency of exploring how to effectively and meaningfully

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incorporate digital tools in the language classroom. Educators are being challenged to re-imagine the FL classroom, considering how digitalisation, new literacies, and multimodal practices can be fully harnessed to create more inclusive, flexible, and effective learning environments (Kramsch 2023). At the same time, a re-imagined FL classroom is also one in which the current global challenges, including climate change, democratic crises, racism, and migration are discussed through engaging students in different types of activities around different types of texts. In this context, literature can play an important role in constructing a space where students contemplate different scenarios, challenge their beliefs, develop empathy, and learn to read critically to understand the interconnections between words, power, and culture (Bland 2018). However, how to engage students with literary texts both in and beyond the classroom is an open question, especially in light of the increasing presence of digital tools and media in our lives. Using literature in the language classroom today means to "promote dialogue, develop a curiosity towards other cultures, and encourage the sharing of different perspectives and interpretations" (Ludwig 2021, 209). To do so, learner-centred approaches that are deeply rooted in collaborative and socio-constructivist pedagogies are needed. These should include the use of digital tools and platforms that allow students to collaboratively work out the meaning of literary texts, share perspectives and opinions, and express their emotions and feelings in response to the texts. As Ludwig (2021, 210) claims, "digital media and print-based literature share two common, indispensable features: they are both inherently social and dialogic". In fact, it is now widely recognised that students need to be encouraged to establish a dialogue with and about the text, developing and sharing with others their own interpretations. Digital media can make this process more personal and creative (Lütge 2018). However, the use of digital media is still far away from being integral and common in the language classrooms (Ludwig 2021), especially in combination with literature. In order to effectively address this challenge, contributions from different disciplines are needed. It is in this context that the Erasmus+ project *DigLit: Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises*[1] was developed. Aimed at promoting students' multiliteracy (including digital, critical, and creative) and global skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through the reading of Young Adult Literature (YAL)

1 The full description of the project and its outcomes can be found at this link: https://diglit.narrativedidactics.org/. This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

and literature-based digital mediation tasks, the project involved three partner universities in Austria (University of Graz), Hungary (University of Pécs), and Italy (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) and three upper secondary schools in the same countries (Priv. Gymnasium und Oberstufenrealgymnasium des Schulvereins der Ursulinen in Graz, Austria; Babits Mihály Secondary School in Pécs, Hungary; IIS TronZanella in Schio, Italy). Through this partnership, researchers from different fields (literary studies, cultural studies and educational linguistics) and practitioners (English language teachers) worked together to design and evaluate learning paths that would turn students from simple readers into creators of new meanings through the combination of literature and digital media. Taking a multidisciplinary perspective, this collection aims at exploring the intersections of global challenges, multiliteracies, multimodality, and the transformative potential of literature and digital narratives, providing a comprehensive outlook on the future of language learning in a digital age. The researcher-practitioner collaborative nature of the interdisciplinary project is reflected in this monographic issue which does not only report the perspectives of the students and teachers involved in the project, but it also involves teachers as writers (see specifically the last article written by Reka Lugossy, Mónika Fodor, Laci Szeverics, Magdolna Lehmann). In this context, each article explores both didactic and research aspects that either informed the project or emerged from its collective experience.

The first article by Marcella Menegale is an examination of the significant changes occurring in education as a result of new social and cultural practices. It focuses on the impact of multilingualism and technological developments on learning and teaching and on the use of literature to not only foster reading motivation but also to encourage students to develop critical thinking, creativity, and empathy. Specific attention is paid to the role of literature-based digital mediation tasks, such as Digital Social Reading (DSR) and Digital Storytelling (DST), which were at the core of the project and of this issue for their powerful role in promoting students' deep involvement with literature and the world beyond it.

The second article by Fabiana Fazzi, Elisa Da Lio, and Sofia Guzzon delves into the results of the DigLit online book club in which Italian and Hungarian students were involved in the DSR of four Young Adult (YA) novels using different digital platforms. Specifically, students engaged in pre- and post-reading discussions on Moodle and reading discussions on Glose for Education, a mobile application which allows technology-mediated collaborative reading of two or more readers who can highlight, comment, and respond with emojis to the same virtual copy of a text (Thoms, Michelson 2024). Through the analysis of students' and facilitators' perspectives, the authors come to the conclusion that DSR, when carried out on longer texts and on a mobile device,

can have linguistic and affective affordances, such as increased reading comprehension and motivation in the target language, as well as cognitive affordances, such as the promotion of deep reading. However, the authors also highlight possible hindrances, both physical, such as eye-strain, and methodological, such as the need to promote linguistic skills and social presence to foster students' asynchronous online interaction and discussion around the literary text.

The third article by Nicole Haring explores the theoretical underpinnings of DST and then moves to present the DigLit method, which offers a framework for the use of DST in the language classroom as a multimodal response to YAL. The article starts with a review of the history of DST, with its origins in Joe Lambert and Dana Atchley's work in San Francisco, to then delve into its pedagogical considerations based on Paulo Freire's (1970) dialogical approach, bell hook's (1994) narrative pedagogies, and Henry Giroux's (1987) critical literacy approach. In the second part of the article, the author presents the step-by-step framework that was used in the DigLit project to guide students from reading YA novels to creating stories informed and inspired by the literary texts.

The fourth article by Maria Elisa Fina, Fabiana Fazzi, and Elisa Da Lio investigates how DST enhanced Italian upper secondary students' multiliteracy and mediation skills development in EFL, as well as how the students reflected on the global issues by means of multimodal rewriting. The thirteen digital stories (DS) produced by the Italian students at the end of the DigLit book club (see the article by Fazzi, Da Lio, and Guzzon, *infra*) are analysed multimodally through Visual Communication Grammar (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006), soundscape (van Leeuwen 1999), and remix strategies (Hafner 2015). This analysis is then complemented by a qualitative analysis of the students' reflective diaries and classroom field notes. The authors show that while DST can have multiple affordances, allowing students to develop critical thinking and creative skills in the target language, more time and opportunities for brainstorming and for technical support are necessary in order to help them become multimodally aware creators of meaning.

The fifth and final article of the monographic issue by Réka Lugossy, Mónika Fodor, László Szeverics and Magdolna Lehmann presents the results of a focus group aimed at exploring students' lived experiences with creating digital stories. Conducted with the Hungarian students that participated in the DigLit book club (see Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*), the results of the focus group show that through DST students were able to develop a deeper understanding of literature, despite some difficulties related specifically to the use of technology and the timeframe of the project. The article ends with an interesting reflection on the potential of YAL for imaginative engagement and dialogue in and outside the classroom and of DST as a potential tool for knowledge construction in several interrelated areas.

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Global Challenges in Language Education: Rethinking Curricula for Foreign Language Classrooms in the Digital Era

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Abstract This chapter examines key issues in contemporary research and explores their implications for the foreign language curriculum. After considering the role of global competence, multilingualism and global citizenship as educational goals for today's language learners, it discusses the impact of digitalisation on learning modalities and highlights the need to adopt multiliteracy-oriented approaches, integrating a renewed role for literature. Some conclusions will be drawn to contribute to ongoing reflection on the future direction of the field.

Keywords Curriculum development. Foreign language learning. Global competence. Multiliteracies. Digitalisation. Literature teaching.

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1 Introduction

> The only person who is educated is the one who has learnt how to adapt and change; the one who has realised that no knowledge is secure; that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security.
> Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn*, 104

Every historical period has brought its substantial challenges to education and announcements such as "the futures of learning are at a crossroad" (Lütge, Stannard 2022, 255) could reasonably have been made many times over the last centuries. Nonetheless, this is certainly one of those times. Contemporary trends in language learning and teaching call for transformative shifts in response to global issues. Among them are multilingualism and the need to preserve linguistic diversity, social inclusion connected to migration, rapid technology developments, globalisation and intercultural competence. Students, who feel and live globally connected through the internet and social media, are more and more aware of such international challenges and their worldview is shaped by such exposure. Their profiles are characterised by a consistent amount of diverse, transnational, multicultural and multilingual experiences. To adapt to this reality, changes in curricula are needed to reconceptualise educational frameworks that embrace the variety of student identities and backgrounds. Furthermore, world problems such as climate change, ecological issues, poverty, discrimination and gender inequality, technological disruption, and wars are becoming increasingly integrated into curriculum development, highlighting the need for education to address these pressing broader international challenges.

As a result, education in the twenty-first century must equip students with the necessary skills to navigate such a complex and interconnected global landscape. Given the massive circulation of information and the multiple learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, a synchronisation of formal education with informal and non-formal education and practices has to forge today's curricula, as socialisation and learning happen at all three levels at the same time (CoE 2019a). This is strictly connected to the evolution of the concept of 'literacy' that, due to the rapid and pervasive development of information and communication media, has completely transformed our society, from postmodern to liquid (Bauman 2006). Literacy has moved from a one language-one culture paradigm, with a single method of conveying information and educating, to embracing multilingualism, multiculturalism, multimedia, and a diverse range of information and educational approaches. Language education no longer pertains solely to language-related studies, such as the first language, second and foreign languages. Instead, it is increasingly regarded as integral to every school's mission and culture, extending to

all subjects. Within this integrated language curriculum and aligned with the learning of other languages belonging to students' linguistic repertoires, foreign language learning aims to foster critical thinking, multiliteracies skills, and global citizenship, contributing to holistic human growth. This goes in the direction of empowering students to effectively address challenges and contribute positively to society. Substantial aid can come from the use of literature, which has always played a key role in the foreign language classroom, both as a means of language instruction and as an opportunity to encourage students' intercultural understanding (Hall 2005).

Drawing on these premises, this paper will discuss to what extent global changes and challenges are impacting language education today. It will also examine the role of language in fostering the so-called 'transversal' or 'global' competence, essential across the school curriculum as well as in life beyond school. Acknowledging that this is not an easy task to tackle, we will seek to contribute to understanding the developments in the field through the analysis of some of the major issues that compel stakeholders at different levels to reshape language education practices. Specifically, we will adopt a perspective that integrates the key themes underpinning this monographic issue: the role of global competence as an educational goal for today's language learners; the importance of multilingualism and global citizenship education in preparing students for participation in a globally interconnected world; the value of multiliteracies pedagogy for supporting contemporary learning modalities; and the use of literary texts as a tool to foster reflection, mediation, critical thinking, and personal engagement in the digital age. The final conclusions aim to contribute to ongoing reflections on the future direction of the field.

2 Global Competence and the Language Curriculum

Scholars in curriculum development globally urge language educators to advance wider and more complex goals beyond mere language acquisition, including critical thinking, intercultural communication and empathy, creativity and innovation, independence, teamwork, ethics awareness, and emotional intelligence, besides other skills (Naji, Subramaniam, White 2019). These are referred to as 'transversal competences', 'soft skills', 'interdisciplinary skills', 'life skills', or 'global competence'. Another term that emerged in education policy in the latter part of the twentieth century is 'twenty-first century skills', reflecting the importance of preparing young people to face the rapid challenges of the modern world heading into a new millennium (CoE 2021). The recent redefinition of 'transversal' competences by the European Commission (2018), for example, lists literacy competence, language competence, personal, social and learning

competence, and cultural awareness and expression competence. Similarly, UNESCO (2015a) includes reflective thinking, interpersonal skills (such as communication and collaboration skills) along with media and information literacy.

In the field of foreign language learning, enhancing global competence means developing the ability to communicate effectively and interact respectfully with people from different cultural backgrounds, understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives, and being open to learning about and adapting to new cultural norms and global issues. Recently, a large study made on young language learners from 27 countries confirmed the positive relationship between foreign language learning and global competence, regardless of the specific cultural (individualist versus collectivist) background (Guo et al. 2024). This confirms the need for language curriculum to integrate the knowledge of the target culture and promote learners' ability to use the language to communicate across different social-cultural environments with ease.

In line with this is current research on 'transcultural' communication, which has emerged as an approach that builds upon and expands 'intercultural' communication theories by focusing on dynamic, fluid interactions across cultures and languages (De Bartolo 2023). Unlike intercultural communication, which emphasises interaction between distinct cultures, transcultural communication explores how individuals move 'through and across' cultural boundaries, creating blended cultural spaces and challenging clear-cut cultural distinctions (Baker, Sangiamchit 2019, 472). This approach highlights the complexity and fluidity of cultural and linguistic practices, where traditional borders become blurred, inviting new perspectives on global communication. For this to happen, specific attention to multilingual education and citizenship education is needed, as the following paragraphs will show.

2.1 Multilingual Education

In a foreign language curriculum, multilingual education directly supports the development of global competence by equipping students with the linguistic and cultural tools they need to thrive in a diverse, interconnected world. The proliferation of language policies aimed at promoting multilingualism and other related competencies in the last two decades certainly goes in this direction. Designing curricula where educational goals across all school subjects intersect with the specific objectives of each subject is particularly recommended. This notion is clearly expressed in a recent report of the European Commission (2020), evocatively titled *Education Begins with Language*:

> Mastering multiple languages is key to enhancing the life and work of all individuals […] in addition to promoting mobility, lifelong and innovative learning, and removing barriers to social inclusion. (1)

> The development of the language of schooling, foreign languages and pupils' home languages form an integral part of each subject at school. (19)

Literacy and multilingual competences are central here: increasing awareness and proficiency of languages that compose to the learners' repertoire, in all their forms (verbal and nonverbal), is pivotal to enable students' success at school and out of school. The values, areas of knowledge, and skills underlying the transversal competencies mentioned above are largely connected, either implicitly or explicitly, to language and culture. They include the ability to understand and use language for self-realisation and to foster positive, empathetic relationships with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This evolution represents a challenge to traditional classroom pedagogy, often rooted in antiquated ideologies that emphasised single-language, single-culture, and single-nation paradigms. A change is needed that requires a restructuring of thought to overcome narrow, self-referential views, a change in the mindset of policymakers and education practitioners, so that comprehensive language education policies are adopted, and innovative and inclusive language teaching methods and strategies are employed. In line with this, a recent cross-national study involving 298 experts in multilingualism and education from five European countries (Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain) examined the main perceived research priorities in multilingual education. Findings show that experts have identified an urgent need to discover effective ways to support multilingualism in mainstream education, as opposed to special classes. This need is closely tied to the priority of conducting further research on didactic approaches that align with how multilingual learners naturally use languages (Duarte et al. 2020). Furthermore, assessing plurilingual, intercultural, and democratic competences presents challenges in multilingual education due to the nature of the learning involved. While each of these competences involves specific knowledge elements (e.g., grammatical structures of the languages within an individual's plurilingual repertoire), they are also characterised by the development of metacognitive abilities, the expression of attitudes, personal traits, and underlying cultural values and beliefs (Borghetti, Barrett 2023), making them complex to evaluate.

Therefore, special attention should be given to 'translingual' and 'transcultural' competence (Kramsch 2010), which emerges through learners' language use, as young people are required not only to

apply their communication skills effectively in face-to-face interactions but also across a wide range of digital platforms and communication formats – such as social media, emails, and online forums – integrating different languages and semiotic systems. All this is critical for fostering global citizenship.

2.2 Global Citizenship Education

With the *Global education guidelines*, which is now at its third edition (CoE 2019a), a group of experts of the Council of Europe have conceptualised concrete methodological solutions on how to deal with literacy on global issues both in formal and non-formal education contexts. On a similar note, and closely connected to the new global 2030 Agenda (UNESCO 2016), is the pedagogic document titled *Global Citizenship Education* published by UNESCO (2015b), which sets forth a new, interdisciplinary approach to integrate across the curriculum topics such as migration, environment sustainability, genre issues, the dialogue between culture and religion, global economy, global governance structures, climate change, human rights, and social inequities.

Global citizenship education involves three key conceptual dimensions (UNESCO 2015b):

- Cognitive: To acquire knowledge, understanding and critical thinking about global, regional, national and local issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations.
- Socio-emotional: To have a sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity.
- Behavioural: To act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world. (15)

These dimensions are embedded in specific learning objectives to be achieved at the different educational stages, from pre-primary to upper secondary school level, through different types of teaching interventions (see UNESCO 2015b). As addressing global issues in the foreign language classroom is a way of transmitting content and teaching language simultaneously (Rascón-Moreno 2013), a growing number of experiences of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been recorded in the last years. CLIL, as a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language, has been increasingly used to promote language learning and global competences starting from relevant universal themes. Considering that both CLIL and global education reflect cross-curriculum approaches,

a mix of the two is regarded as a promising cutting-edge educational proposal among other teaching approaches (Coyle, Meyer 2021; Porto 2023; Viebrock 2015). Furthermore, CLIL is also effectively applied with minoritised indigenous languages to preserve linguistic diversity (see Menegale, Bier 2020; Banegas 2023), demonstrating that a holistic approach to ethnolinguistic vitality and intercultural citizenship may lead to inclusive and high-quality education geared towards ethnic equity.

Unquestionably, educational approaches vary across different contexts, and so do the responses of policy makers. There is, in fact, considerable dissimilarity in the way states decide to integrate educational goals within their national educational system. For this reason, the work done by intergovernmental agencies with mandate in global education policy, such as UNESCO and OECD, is fundamental to understand and monitor differences or communalities among the different countries. This continuous provision of data on the structure, finances and performance of education systems across the globe not only informs educational policy and their stakeholders, but also enables a continuous reflection on how educational output can be consolidated or improved, especially in times when digitalisation is profoundly affecting all spheres of language education.

3 The Impact of Digitalisation on Language Education

Digitalisation is significantly transforming language education, opening up new challenges and opportunities for reflection. The developments in information communication technology (ICTs), for example, have given rise to a stubborn digital divide with huge disparities of access to information within and across countries. Currently, one-third of the global population is without internet access (International Telecommunication Union 2021). On the other hand, in those parts of the world where digital tools are widely distributed and used, new opportunities but also novel threats to education have emerged. To start with, the proliferation in quantity and variety of digital written texts has rapidly changed the ways in which students read and exchange information inside and outside school. Unsurprisingly, data reports that young students' time per week spent on the Internet has enormously increased in the last few years **[fig. 1]**.

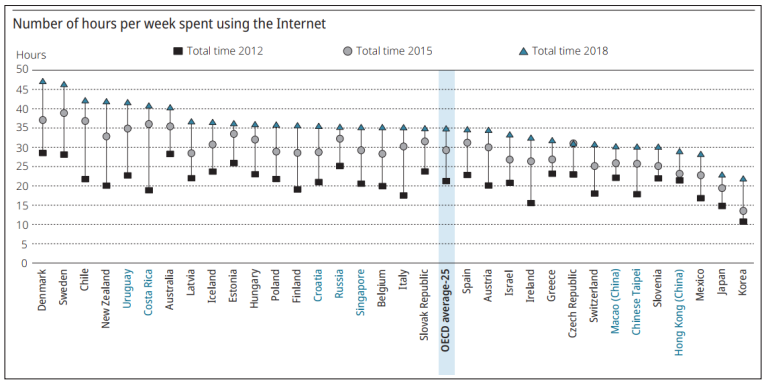

Figure 1 Time spent on the Internet in 2012, 2015 and 2018 (OECD 2021, 21)

However, the literature indicates that inequities arise from how technology is utilised rather than the frequency of its use. In fact, as affirmed by the digital divide theory (Van Deursen, Van Dijk 2014), effective ICT usage, not just access, is crucial for academic success. In other words, without well-prepared educational infrastructure (first-level digital divide), it is impossible for individuals to integrate ICT into learning and teaching. If individuals do not frequently use ICT in the classroom (second-level digital divide), technology will fail to empower them, even with fully established digital infrastructure.[1] Moreover, if teachers do not effectively teach students how to use ICT, or if students do not follow teachers' instructions, individual empowerment will be difficult to achieve (third-level digital divide) (Yu 2018).

This has prompted experts in education policy to continuously search for solutions and produce guidelines to assist educators in integrating ICTs in their work and teaching learners essential skills for 'digital' citizenship education (UNESCO 2019a; 2019b; 2024). Digital citizenship is, in fact, part of the global competence now required to understand the world and being an active and responsible member of today's informational society. According to the *Digital Citizenship Education Handbook* of the Council of Europe (2019b):

> A digital citizen is someone who, through the development of a broad range of competences, is able to actively, positively and responsibly engage in both on- and offline communities, whether

1 Interesting findings on gender, migration and social-background disparities in digital reading and navigation skills come from a recent cross-national study, which examined PISA 2012 computer-based data from sixteen European countries (Azzolini, Schizzerotto 2017).

> local, national or global. As digital technologies are disruptive in nature and constantly evolving, competence building is a lifelong process that should begin from earliest childhood at home and at school, in formal, informal and non-formal educational settings.
>
> Digital citizenship and engagement involves a wide range of activities, from creating, consuming, sharing, playing and socialising, to investigating, communicating, learning and working. Competent digital citizens are able to respond to new and everyday challenges related to learning, work, employability, leisure, inclusion and participation in society, respecting human rights and intercultural differences. (11-12)

It can be concluded that for students to achieve digital citizenship competences, some preconditions are needed, such as access to ICTs and basic functional and digital literacy skills, without which individuals are unable to access, read, write, search for information, express themselves digitally to actively engage in their community. Indeed, the array of new literacies to be incorporated into curriculum development necessitates a critical reexamination of literacy through the lens of multiliteracies. This approach underscores the importance of equipping students with a diverse set of skills that enable them to thrive in various contexts and adapt to the demands of globalisation.

4 Rethinking Literacy Through Multiliteracies

The introduction of the 'multiliteracies pedagogy' by the New London Group in 1994 advocated for the incorporation of diverse linguistic, cultural, communicative, and technological perspectives and tools to better equip students to efficiently live and communicate in today's world. Multiliteracies intersect with multimodality, as they promote the use of various modes to make meaning in different forms of expression. Indeed, the availability of different technologies and communication channels enables individuals to express themselves by employing different modes. However, the multiliteracy pedagogy goes beyond tools, procedures and micro-knowledge to embrace the process, competences and socio-meta-cognitive strategies needed to analyse, elaborate, produce and exchange meaning.

Traditionally,

> schools have emphasised teachers as experts, learners as novices and learning as the reproduction of disciplinary knowledge and skills. What is observed here is a significant pedagogical shift, in which students are positioned to think and design collectively and creatively within a community of practise. The production of new media-based texts draws upon the collective, specialist and

> transdisciplinary expertise in open-ended engagements with new media design. This is the nature of new workplaces. (Mills 2011, 2)

In this context, the emphasis on collaborative and creative practices in multiliteracy pedagogy aligns with the principles of critical literacy and critical digital literacy, which advocate for a deeper understanding of power dynamics, social justice, and the critical analysis of digital texts and contexts.

4.1 Critical Literacy and Critical Digital Literacy

In order to cope with such complex and multilayered communication, language learners need to be guided in understanding that texts are not neutral, that any form of communication is a social and political action capable of influencing people and leading to social change. This is what 'critical' literacy pursues, providing opportunities for readers to determine their ability to discern the purpose of texts as well as their capacity to identify ideologies presented in the texts. Furthermore, developing critical thinking also presupposes becoming active participants of social change, as advocated by global citizenship education (see section 2.2). However, given the extensive multimodal information that learners usually process in their daily lives, their cognitive capacity may be overwhelmed, potentially resulting in cognitive overload and consequently superficial interaction with the text (Mayer, Moreno 2003). What is needed is, therefore, the development of a 'critical digital' literacy, through practices that lead to the use and creation of digital texts that question issues of power, representation, and agency in the world and, at the same time, critically interrogate digital media and technologies themselves (Bacalja, Aguilera, Castrillon-Angel 2021).

Yet, for all this to find its place in a renewed curriculum, we need to look at the wider picture. What the digital turn has brought is much more than just technological revolution. Rather, it has put forward an actual 'anthropologic transformation', represented by a new form of human intelligence (Ferri 2013). Indeed, it appears that certain brain areas undergo more development when digital media are used regularly, activating a process that reprogrammes our minds (Koizumi 2005 cited in Ferri 2013, 76). Stemming from the 'analogic' intelligences coded by Gardner's (1983), neuroscientists have thus hypothesised the existence of a new intellectual quality, the "digital intelligence" (Ferri 2013, 78), which is the sum of social, emotional, and cognitive abilities that enable individuals to face the challenges and adapt to the demands of life in the digital world. There are research fundings showing that digital culture requires a distinct cognitive effort from our brains, as it processes hybrid codes of written

and visual languages. In a meta-analysis of more than 50 studies exploring how new media affect neural dynamics, Greenfeld (2009) concludes that every medium develops some cognitive skills at the expense of others: for example, using a computer for many hours, even for playing video games, enhances our spatial-visual intelligence and gets us accustomed to following more multiple (language) cues simultaneously. Consistent with this, it is believed that digital intelligence can positively influence other intelligences, such as social and interpersonal intelligence and linguistic intelligence.[2]

4.2 Artificial Intelligence Literacy

All this strongly affects language education today and will likely affect it in the future too. The new developments in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) make it clear to what extent we are constantly expanding our dependence on technologies and related digital literacies. Although a comprehensive definition of 'artificial intelligence' literacy is currently lacking, what is commonly acknowledged in the literature is that it presents a promising frontier in education, offering personalised learning experiences tailored to individual learners (Yi 2021). However, despite its potential benefits, challenges related to academic integrity, security and privacy concern educational stakeholders at different levels (Marsh 2023).

As to foreign language learning and teaching, although Internet applications and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) of various kinds have widely been used for several decades both inside and outside formal learning contexts, until today only a small number of products have advanced characteristics of intelligent adaptive systems. Blume et al. (2017 cited in Schmidt, Strasser 2022, 166) analysed 50 current foreign language learning programmes and showed that many of them provide inadequate feedback, offer exercises primarily focused on grammar and vocabulary practice, and often lack flexibility in exercise selection and sequencing. Individualisation and adaptivity, which require AI methods, are not yet commonly provided by most programs. In conclusion, while there is a plethora of CALL resources available, truly Intelligent CALL (ICALL) options remain scarce.

More recently, there has been widespread discussion on Generative AI and its applications (such as Bing, ChatGPT, Chatsonic, Google Gemini, Jasper, Microsoft Copilot, Perplexity, and Youchat) that involve AI systems based on Large Language Models (LLMs). These systems can generate human-like text and respond to user prompts,

2 See Ferri 2013 for further details.

creating content, engaging in conversation, and providing personalised responses. This means that, in a language learning context, they can offer dynamic, interactive, and personalised language experiences through conversational engagement and content generation. Although the positive impact of AI technologies on language learning and teaching (for a literature review see Qiao, Zhao 2023), further research is needed to better understand learner-machine interactional processes and actual overall learning achievements. Findings so far suggest improvement in pronunciation and fluency through speech recognition and editing tools, with high potential found in instant feedback. A trend of research has now moved on the use of chatbots for more personalised language learning experiences, including text-to-speech and speech-to-text conversion, pronunciation checks, translation, and conversational practice (see Zou et al. 2023).

4.3 Emotional Literacy

If we acknowledge that AI tools can support language education from many perspectives and thus deserve high consideration by curriculum developers, we must similarly acknowledge that concerns about the impact on human interaction and socialisation skills should also be carefully evaluated. Although AI can provide students with access to a wide range of information and resources, it cannot replace the advantages of conversing with a human teacher or partner. The value of human interaction in language acquisition cannot be overstated. This is confirmed by the role that interpersonal and intrapersonal skills have in the learning process, especially in language learning. In his categorisation of forms of intelligences, Gardner (1983) defined intrapersonal intelligence as the ability to understand one's own emotions, and interpersonal intelligence as the ability to have a good relationship with others. From here, Mayer and Salovey (1990) theorised the existence of an 'emotional intelligence' made of four hierarchical types of abilities: i) the ability to access or evoke feeling so as to facilitate cognitive processes, ii) the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, iii) the ability to control emotions, and iv) the ability to nurture emotional and intellectual development. When emotional intelligence operates with an ethical compass, 'emotional' literacy is applied. We report here Steiner's (2003) definition:

> To be emotionally literate is to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power and improves the quality of life for you and – equally importantly – the quality of life for the people around you. (15)

Therefore, along with the development of knowledge, understanding, and reasoning, education aims at raising awareness of personal emotions and sense of empathy.[3] Emotional engagement and feelings play a role which is more and more central in education in general, and foreign language learning is no exception (Bigelow 2019).

In the language classroom, emotional literacy, as well as other types of the aforementioned literacies, can be encouraged through literature, which is regarded by many teachers as the possible solution to further engage students with meaningful language learning. In the following part of our contribution, we will seek to demonstrate how the use of literature in the foreign language classroom can represent a solution to combine many of the educational challenges discussed so far. The use of literature may provide students with opportunities for tackling global topics, while working on learning tasks that reshape the learning process towards knowledge creation and meaningful application, also by using multimedia and digital tools and resources that facilitate and accelerate the process of deep learning.

5 Reorienting the Role of Literature for Language Learning

After a period in which literary texts were relegated to a peripheral role, in favour of more communicative input such as dialogues and conversations (considered as more practical and connected the real-world situation language models), we have recently witnessed a "resurrection of literature as an input for language classes" (Khatib, Rezaei, Darakhshan 2011, 201). In fact, the role of texts in foreign language education for teaching literature and teaching language through literature has evolved with new facets and dimensions. Before proceeding in our reasoning, however, it is important to clarify that we are not interested in discussing approaches for teaching literature here. Instead, what will guide our examination is the intention to understand how to rethink literary competences and communication-related skills in the foreign language classroom. Our interest is therefore in literature-based language teaching and learning rather than literature education, although certain goals and applications of the two areas certainly overlap.

The use of literary texts in language learning has changed significantly in several ways, beginning with their multimodal nature. Literary texts are now frequently presented in various formats, including digital editions, audiobooks, and interactive e-books, which enable learners to engage with the material through multiple sensory

3 See the three dimensions of global citizenship education in section 2.2.

modalities and learning styles. A substantial body of literature has emerged regarding the cross-platform characteristics of contemporary narratives, transmedia navigation, and storytelling.[4] Additionally, there is extensive research on the multimodal and participatory ways in which young people engage with and create various types of texts, especially in digital formats (see Beavis 2013). However, while literary texts are viewed as having the potential to encourage independent thinking, interpretation, and creativity, younger students need texts that are motivating, accessible, and relevant to their lives to engage effectively. This raises their involvement with the narrative, their emotional response, and, at the same time, their language competence, particularly if sustained by means of interesting and motivating activities that improve the text experience (Henning 1993 cited in Di Martino, Di Sabato 2014, 5). Literary texts in a foreign language (as in L1) have the potential to promote emotional skills by offering indirect emotional experiences that shape the brain circuits involved in empathy (Ghosn 2001). This is because literature provides a rich array of examples of emotional life, with authors capturing emotions that resonate across generations of learners (Oatley 2004 cited in Roohani 2009, 41).

This said, it is evident that written texts alone do not convey full meaning to the reader; instead, the reader interprets them through the lens of their background information, knowledge, emotions, and culture, or schemata, which impart different meanings to the text. This means that what is crucial to make the reading experience meaningful is, first, aligning to students' reading preferences and habits, and second, developing mediation competences. These two aspects will be discussed further below.

5.1 Students' Reading Preferences

One way to foster students' interest in reading in the foreign language is to allow them to select their own text, the content, level of difficulty, length and, considering technological developments, the format too. "Students who choose their own texts are, in effect, also providing their own appropriate background knowledge for understanding the text" (Carrell, Eisterhold 1983, 567). Indeed, research has widely supported the theory that having autonomy to choose materials according to interest levels is likely to positively influence language learning in several ways (see Green, Christopher, Lam 1997; Menegale 2019; Wolf 2013). Fazzi's (2023) analysis of recent studies on EFL students' reading preferences reports that learners engage

4 For references see Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*; Fina, Fazzi, Da Lio, *infra*; Haring, *infra*.

in reading both inside and outside the classroom, that they find more accessible and appealing literature with a teenage narrator or teenager characters, that (if they have the option) they read both digitally and on paper, and that print and digital literacies are deeply intertwined in their life. Furthermore, they find pleasure in discussing what they have read with friends and in using social media platforms to discover new books and gather information about them. This data is consistent with recent PISA findings (OECD 2021) on L1 reading preferences and habits. Just to cite a few:

- Students who reported reading books more often in paper than digital format perform better in reading and spend more time reading for enjoyment in all participating countries.
- Compared to students who rarely or never read books, digital-book readers across OECD countries read for enjoyment about 3 hours more a week, print-book readers about 4, and those who balance both formats about 5 hours or more a week after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic background and gender. (15)

In order to cultivate a love for reading in students, the curriculum should embrace a wide range of works, formats, and genres that students find engaging, rather than solely relying on classic literary works. In the same line, a diverse mixture of media and modes of communication should be contemplated. To wisely accompany this change, systematic research is needed on how new texts and topics such as global citizenship, migration, human rights, and sustainability impact on teaching language through literature. Young adult readers are attracted by texts that mirror the realities of their lives, as long as false optimism and didacticism are avoided (Too 2017), and biased views or force-feeding opinions are eschewed (Divéki 2020). These preferences find evidence in several studies. Students expressed appreciation for texts addressing issues that directly or indirectly impacted them, as, for instance, mental health (Fazzi 2023; Jensen 2018; Manutscheri 2021) – a problem that has precipitously exploded amongst adolescents around the world after the COVID-19 pandemic (Pieh et al. 2021). In her study on EFL adolescents' reading habits, Fazzi (2023) also found that, while interest in topics such as racism and global conflicts was evident, LGBTQ+ issues received mixed reactions. Commenting on the list of young adult literature books proposed by the researcher, students reported preferring more implicit approaches to sensitive themes such queering, rejecting stereotypical or explicit portrayals.

Thus, if novels are to be used to foster the agenda for global competences, as also UNESCO (2014) points, text selection and teaching methods should aim at addressing controversial issues in a

multidimensional, critical, and unbiased manner. Especially when targeting younger learners, literature-based language teaching and learning is expected to support students in increasing their language proficiency and, at the same time, in identifying multiple and alternatives perspectives on a subject, developing their critical and intercultural skills which are part of global competence (Divéki, Pereszlényi 2019, 71). To help teachers integrate all this in their lessons, some contribution may come from the interpretation of 'mediation' as recently proposed by the Council of Europe (2020).

5.2 Literature and Mediation Competences

The latest improvements formulated by the Council of Europe to its well-known first version of CEFR (CoE 2001), all included in the Compendium Volume (CV) (CoE 2020), explicitly consider aesthetic and literary aims in language education and propose scales and descriptors for them. Being our interest here to focus on the literature as a language learning opportunity, tools like these proposed by the Council of Europe are extremely relevant to understand the potential of literature as a medium or a method of language instruction and, at the same time, a way to promote critical thinking, empathy and intercultural knowledge and awareness.

More precisely, in the CEFR-CV the use of literature is seen as beneficial to the development of mediation competences. Mediation is, in fact, one of the four modes of communication identified in the CEFR, together with reception, production, and interaction. While interaction stresses the social use of language, mediation encompasses and goes beyond that by focusing on the construction of new meaning (in the sense of new understanding, new knowledge, new concepts) and/or enabling communication beyond linguistic or cultural barriers. Both types of mediation rely on collaborative processes (CoE 2020). While in the first version of CEFR mediation was presented as a technical facilitation of communication involving two languages, that approach has been notably extended in the CEFR-CV. More consideration has been given to plurilingualism and to learner's capacity to use all the varied communicative resources that characterise their linguistic repertoire to construct new meanings. For this purpose, mediation tasks may ask students to draw information from texts that combine multiple modes, such as digital texts, videos, blogs, etc., to produce multimodal texts in the foreign language on various topics, again working across languages and/or different types of texts (CoE 2023). Evidently, mediation combines languages at different levels with the aim of softening linguistic and cultural gaps in the communication process.

> Cross-linguistic and cross-modal mediation, in particular, inevitably involve social and cultural competence as well as plurilingual competence. This emphasises the fact that one cannot in practice completely separate one type of mediation from another. (CoE 2020, 91)

Yet, mediation is not only a matter of doing something but also of how somebody does it. Indeed, the new approach to mediation now explicitly encompasses a dimension related to a personal quality:

> A person who engages in mediation activity needs to have a well-developed emotional intelligence, or an openness to develop it, in order to have sufficient empathy for the viewpoints and emotional states of other participants in the communicative situation. (CoE 2020, 91)

In other words, emotional intelligence is seen as a "prerequisite" of mediation processes (Leung 2022, 83). To understand to what extent emotional intelligence is considered in the level descriptors and assessed in the 'can-do statements', Leung analyses the occurrence of the terms 'emotion' and 'emotional' throughout the CEFR-CV. Apart from two occurrences found in passages where the term is used to explain its meaning, the other six mentions appear in connection with one of the three new scales that regard the use of literature for language learning. The three scales of the CEFR-CV relevant to literature are (CoE 2020):

- Reading as a leisure activity (65),
- Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature) (116), and
- Analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature). (117)

While the first scale appears among reception activities (specifically, in the 'reading comprehension' section), the second and the third pertain to mediation activities (specifically, those regarding 'mediating a text') and relate to learners' interaction with a creative text, with 'can do statements' such as 'can relate', 'can explain', 'can describe', 'can critically appraise', and 'can evaluate'. Emotional intelligence has been found to be explicitly related to the second scale, "Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature)". In explaining how these two mediation scales were conceptualised, North and Piccardo (2016, 20) wrote:

> There was some discussion as to whether one should regard expressing reactions to literature as mediation. Clearly one mediates when explaining or giving a view on a work to another person.

> Because responses to and criticism of literature was at the borders of the concept of mediation developing in the project, however, it was decided to put descriptors for this area under 'Mediating a text' together with Listening and Note-taking.

Alter and Ratheiser (2019) stress that these two literature-related mediation scales delve into the essence of exploring literary works as they are: creative texts written not only to inform but also to entertain, to deal with new realms, to evoke imagery through language, to provoke thought, and much more.

> Also, in many cases, when we use language it is not just to communicate a message, but rather to develop an idea through what is often called 'languaging' (talking the idea through and hence articulating the thoughts) or to facilitate understanding and communication. Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature) reflects the approach taken in school sectors and in adult reading circles. The scale focuses on expression of the effect a work of literature has on the user/learner as an individual. Analysis and criticism of creative texts, (including literature) represents the approach more common at an upper secondary and university level. It concerns more formal, intellectual reactions. Aspects analysed include the significance of events in a novel, treatment of the same themes in different works and other links between them; the extent to which a work follows conventions, and more global evaluation of the work as a whole. (CoE 2020, 35)

To effectively leverage literature for creative purposes, it is important to create a context in which young people "expect to be actively involved in the textual, digital world, as both consumers and producers" – essentially as "readers/viewers/players and creators" (Beavis 2013, 245). This can be achieved by involving students in literature-based digital mediation tasks.

5.3 Engaging Students Through Literature-Based Digital Mediation Tasks

Narrative texts may offer the three basic conditions for language learning set forth by Willis (1996), which are exposure, use, and motivation: by incorporating stories into foreign language classrooms, students are exposed to the language, practise language usage, and find motivation through the interest and curiosity that narrative texts inspire (Wajnryb 2003).

Nonetheless, students' levels of motivation and imagination vary, and many will certainly benefit from activities aimed at raising

empathy towards the characters or the situations narrated in the stories. An important question of recent research has been to understand to what extent digital reading experiences are different from print reading practices from a cognitive, social and emotional point of view. Taking a step further, some scholars are studying the types of interactional and mediation processes (reader with text and reader with other readers) promoted through reading happening on digital social platforms. In fact, given that reading increasingly occurs on online platforms, especially for younger generations, a lens has been put on how readers connect over and in what they read, and how they interact and form communities around texts. According to Zhu et al. (2020), a way to foster the potential of digital social reading in the language classroom is to ask learners to collaborate to critique literary texts, highlight important points, ask questions, organise ideas, predict, express opinions, save instances of grammar for practice, connect to external sources, link text to their own lives, consider other viewpoints, and interact with peers, teachers, and others (see the pedagogical experimentations of digital social reading practice reported in Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*). In a similar line, other studies have concentrated on how multimodal production (e.g., digital storytelling) in response to literature can be a logical, subsequent learning phase of the reading process, in that it supports language students' development of mediation skills, creativity and critical thinking (Horne 2021; Fina, Fazzi, Da Lio, *infra*; Haring, *infra*; Lugossy et al., *infra*).

Despite the clear potential of literature-based digital mediation tasks to enhance foreign language learning together with a long list of global competence-related skills and literacies, their consideration in pedagogical manuals and handbooks is still very limited. The CEFR-CV itself, although recognising novels, short stories or biographies as types of texts to be mastered by language learners at some proficiency levels and through different kinds of communication modes, does not specify in what ways they can be integrated into an 'action-oriented approach' (Piccardo, North 2019). The feeling is that the "resurrection of literature as an input for language classes" (Khatib, Rezaei, Darakhshan 2011, 201, see above) is not yet fully accomplished or, as we would prefer to believe, that the CEFR is a work-in progress developmental project open to further improvements and that in a recent future action-oriented approach will also consider literary text-based tasks.

6 Concluding Remarks and Open Issues for Research

Provokingly, Goldwin-Jones (2019) depicts three scenarios for the future of language learning. In the first, language learning is no longer needed, as technological advancements will bring the quality of machine translations and other mediation tools to such a high quality that the convenience of using them will raise doubts about the practical necessity of learning additional languages. In the second scenario, language learning is needed, but not formal instruction: in fact, the abundance, affordability, and appeal characterising today's multilingual digital resources (e.g., audio-video streaming) and online communities (e.g., social media platforms, online gaming) might obviate the necessity to learn a foreign language in a classroom setting. In this case, language learning would occur, even unintentionally, through authentic use or communication practice. The third scenario envisioned for the future of language learning entails a mix of formal instruction with online resources, in line with the practices of the flipped classroom or blended learning. Goldwin-Jones goes on further specifying how the balance of instructed and self-regulated learning may be determined considering the level of learning autonomy possessed by language learners and the extent of availability of digital tools and resources. This last scenario is, overall, the most credible.

Indeed, a tailored combination of formal and informal learning opportunities aligns with the challenges connected to the diverse 'educational turns' discussed in this paper, namely, the 'multilingual turn', the 'digital turn', the 'multiliteracy turn', and the 'emotional turn'. To make hybrid settings possible, the first aspect to consider is the extent to which the implementation of a comprehensive language learning system is achievable, assessing both technological feasibility and teacher readiness. Data and trends indicate that educational institutions worldwide are increasingly adopting hybrid learning models to meet the demand for flexible learning options. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated this process, prompting increased investments in technological infrastructure to support the development of online learning platforms. However, data also reveal that teachers often lack the necessary digital competences, and both initial and in-service teacher professional development programmes generally do not include standardised competence frameworks (OECD 2023). The scenario is further complicated by the dynamic and evolving nature of hybrid language learning environments, which require continuous updates to digital knowledge and adaptation of curricular approaches and materials.

Assuming that the educational system will manage to find proper and systematic solutions to these weaknesses, another critical consideration pertains to the integration of various types of input, tools

and settings within a comprehensive language learning system. This integration seeks to make foreign language learning more intrinsically meaningful for students and to promote their agency and autonomy in language learning. In the twenty-first century, to be regarded as 'meaningful', language education should emphasise the skills needed for the future workplace (e.g., digital literacies, critical thinking skills, and collaboration skills) as well as the ways of living in society and as an individual (e.g., personal wellbeing, citizenship, and social awareness) (Mercer et al. 2018). From a language ecological perspective, this implies redesigning tomorrow's language learning environments, exploring new relations among advancing technologies, classroom spaces, and students' multilingual and multimodal forms of communication (Mills 2011), also looking at experiences occurring in leisure time and at home. Further research is needed to increase awareness among policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, and students of how learners use language learning environments outside school, the types of interactions and relations they establish with and across different learning settings, and the way they exploit the human and non-human resources (Benson 2022), especially in light of recent AI developments.

To date, many of the global challenges that have characterised these 'turns' in language education have found only partial solutions. Curricula proposals and promising practices that have been put forward in these last years by key stakeholders are often not integrated into comprehensive curricula review processes. Nonetheless, if we consider global citizenship and multiliteracies as goals for foreign language learning, we cannot ignore the significant inequity in the distribution of environmental resources for language learning, both inside and outside the classroom. This inevitably raises political and economic questions beyond language-related challenges, especially when considering major/international and minor/regional languages in the digital era. All things considered, it appears that the background and foreground of our scenario for the future of language learning still need to be harmonised.

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The Affordances of Extensive Digital Social Reading for the EFL Classroom
Analysis of the DigLit Book Club Project

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Abstract Research has shown that extensive reading (ER) can promote students' reading skills and motivation to read in an additional language. However, different pedagogical designs exist also including the use of technologies. In this article, we particularly look at the application of Digital Social Reading (DSR) to the extensive reading of Young Adult Literature (YAL) in English as a Foreign Language (FL). In our study, EFL students from Italy and Hungary were engaged in pre-, during-, and post-reading activities based on the preferred novel on two digital platforms, Moodle and Glose for Education. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the students and the facilitators participating in the project to investigate their perceived affordances and challenges of extensive DSR and mobile digital reading. Results show that DSR can lead to positive gains in terms of motivation to read, comprehension, and deep reading. Furthermore, the study has revealed that mobile reading has both advantages and disadvantages that still need to be fully understood. Hence, pedagogical implications are drawn.

Keywords Extensive reading. Digital social reading. Mobile reading. Young Adult Literature. EFL.

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1 Introduction

Extensive reading (ER) is an approach that is intended to promote both students' reading skills and motivation to read in the target language. Defined as "reading in quantity and in order to gain a general understanding of what is read" (Day, Bamford 1998, 6), it is based on a number of principles including students reading as much materials as possible of their own choice within their linguistic abilities. Several pedagogical designs have been suggested to enact ER, also through the means of digital technology and practices (Smith 2019; Pianzola, Toccu, Viviani 2022; Kajder 2018). Each of these pedagogical designs requires different literacy skills and leads to different affordances which still need to be fully explored.

In this context, our article aims to report the results of an ER pilot project through a pedagogical design commonly referred to as Digital Social Reading (DSR). DSR is "the act of sharing one's thoughts about a text with the help of tools such as social media networks and collaborative annotation" (Blyth 2014, 205). Unlike online platforms for book reviews (e.g. Goodreads) in which users normally post comments after they have finished reading a text, in digital annotation platforms (e.g. eComma, HyLighter, Perusall, etc.) users interact with each other directly on the text by highlighting, sharing written, audio, and multimodal comments, and viewing and responding to other readers' comments, depending on the features of the specific platform (Thoms, Michelson 2024). In such a context, the reading experience passes from being linear and individual to being multimodal, social, and collaborative (Kress 2003) transforming reading comprehension into a socially constructed process (Law, Barny, Poulin 2020). Studies have shown that DSR can have multiple affordances for language students, including linguistic, affective, and social (Thoms, Poole 2017, 2018; Solmaz 2020; Kalir et al. 2020). However, there is a paucity of research on extensive DSR carried out through a mobile device (Ng, Cheung 2024). Our study aims to fill this gap by exploring students' and facilitators' perceived affordances and challenges of a six-week extensive DSR project in English as a foreign language (EFL). The project was carried out within the Erasmus+ project *DigLit: Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises*[1]

Although the research was carried out jointly by the three authors, Fabiana Fazzi wrote §§ 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, and 5, Elisa Da Lio wrote §§ 3.4.1, 3.5, 4.1, and 6, and Sofia Guzzon wrote §§ 1, 2.1, 3.4.2, and 4.3.

1 To learn more about the Erasmus+ project *DigLit: Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises*, co-funded by the European Union, please visit the project website at the following link: `https://diglit.narrativedidactics.org/`.

involving three universities and three upper secondary schools from Austria, Italy, and Hungary. Specifically, the pilot project involved 46 upper secondary school students from the partner schools in Hungary and Italy with a B1 to B2 language level in EFL. Both schools are well known for their academic excellence and devote particular attention to the teaching of English. The facilitators were two English teachers from the school partner in Italy and two researchers from the university partners in Italy and Austria, all selected based on their availability.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Mobile Reading and Extensive E-Reading

Print reading, traditionally associated with social prestige, deeper comprehension, and longer information retention, offers tactile experiences and ease of navigation that provide the reader with a coherent mental map of the page and the text (Shimray, Keerti, Ramaiah 2015; Sorrentino, Lauer 2019). A very different experience is offered by mobile reading, which is defined as "the act of reading and consuming digital content on mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, PCs, e-readers, etc., which covers e-books, e-newspapers, e-magazines, and mobile cartoons" (Shimray, Keerti, Ramaiah 2015, 367).

Although it is a very prominent and contemporary method in education, e-reading poses several challenges which contemporary research has addressed. For example, vertical scrolling can reduce reading pleasure and cause disorientation (Pianzola 2021; Sorrentino, Lauer 2019), making it harder to create a cognitive map of the text. Also, digital readers are engaged in hyper-reading (Blyth 2014) that is they are exposed to an information-dense and highly-stimulating environment which requires the ability of 'multi-mediating' (i.e. moving across contexts and media) (Coiro 2020). Therefore, in mobile reading, readers read more selectively by scanning, skimming, keyword spotting and one-time reading (Chaudhry, Al-Adwani 2019; Chen, Chen 2014; Ferguson 2018) eventually training the brain in such a way that deep reading is progressively lost (Wolf 2018 in Ferguson 2018). In addition, e-reading is characterised by 'multitasking', both outside the digital reading environment (i.e. external notifications) and within it (i.e. the 'business' of the platform) (Pianzola 2021), negatively affecting concentration (Guikema, Williams 2014). Finally, longer time eye movements and high focusing and positioning demands (Shimray, Keerti, Ramaiah 2015) of e-reading have been proven to cause eyestrain, sleeplessness, visual fatigue or neck pain (Sorrentino, Lauer 2019), especially when carried out on a smartphone. Despite these limitations, online mobile reading has

been shown to have a number of advantages:[2] it suits students' individual learning needs as it provides a highly customizable reading experience (i.e. font and size) and good navigation options (table of contents, search function); it is portable; it is more interactive, promoting participation and socialisation; it increases reading motivation and engagement thanks to gamification; it is cost-effective as it provides access to a large variety of reading materials.

Mobile reading has been explored also in relation to the promotion of ER. For example, Morgana and Pavesi (2021) conducted a study to investigate the effects of extensive e-book reading on a smartphone on lower secondary EFL students in Italy. Their results show that e-reading increased students' vocabulary learning and motivation to read in the target language, although students claimed to prefer reading paper books to e-books. In another study, Al-Jarf (2021) investigated the impact of collaborative mobile e-book reading with struggling college EFL readers and found that the experimental group which carried out extensive collaborative e-reading demonstrated improvements thanks to student centred activities, active participation and practice, interaction, safe environment, and support from teacher and peers. Similarly, Khubyari and Narafshan (2016) found that the experimental group carrying out EFL reading on mobile phones showed better comprehension of the materials due to the device's portability and accessibility. However, when focusing on L2 extensive e-reading on mobile devices, research has shown that teacher guidance is essential to start implementing the right reading strategies from the beginning to exploit the potential of digital technology (Nardi 2018). Students need time to familiarise themselves with the digital tools and they should be assisted to develop digital reading skills (Chen, Chen 2014; Lan, Sung, Chang 2013). In this context, teachers should show students how to self-regulate their digital reading by reflecting on how to exploit the different features of the platform (e.g. dictionary, markup, and notes in the margins), and showing examples of how reading can be customised in a digital setting (Nardi 2018).

2.2 Digital Social Reading

The transition towards digital literacies is transforming individual practices into social ones (Kress 2003). It is the use of digital platforms that helps to blur the line between formal and informal conversations around the text, even when this has been assigned by the

2 Huang 2011; Khubyari, Narafshan 2016; Pianzola 2021; Shimray, Keerti, Ramaiah 2015; Cote, Milliner 2019.

teacher, creating a sense of community, companionship, and kindness (Pianzola 2021). The group work using DSR is a way to "divide and conquer" the text (Blyth 2014, 220). Collective annotations of texts provide mutual scaffolding in the learning environment (Thoms, Poole 2018) and give the possibility to analyse the reading behaviour of the group (Blyth 2014). Digital annotation tools aid comprehension and retention, and foster critical thinking (Chen, Chen 2014; Nor, Hamat 2013; Sorrentino, Lauer 2019). For example, Thoms and Poole (2017) investigated the use of HyLighter in an advanced university-level Spanish poetry class and found that students used digital annotation to comment on the meaning of words or sentences (linguistic affordances), share their interpretation of textual elements (literary affordances) and express their opinion about the text or about their peers' comments (social affordances).

Other studies have found that DSR can promote language students' engagement with different perspectives (Kalir et al. 2020) and social learning (Thoms, Sung, Poole 2017; Solmaz 2020). For example, in Turkey, Solmaz (2020) analysed EFL university students' digital annotations and reflections carried out during a DSR project employing SocialBook. His analysis shows that by engaging with DSR, students co-constructed meaning through collaboration and socialised through multiple discourses and genres. In the context of secondary education, Kajder (2018) studied the effects of a DSR project using Glose on students attending two different schools and collaboratively reading a Young Adult (YA) novel (*All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds). At the end of the project, students claimed that peer annotations and the multimodal affordances of the app increased their motivation to read and made them feel part of a community of readers.

Additionally, a few studies have focused on teachers' perceptions. For example, Blyth (2014) interviewed four university teachers working in different FL contexts in the United States to explore their perceived pedagogical affordances of using eComma with their students. Two of the instructors noticed that the collaborative nature of the tool supported the comprehension of both beginner and intermediate students of French. According to the instructors, students were in fact able to share their insights of the poems, discussing both linguistic and literary features, and come to a deeper understanding than what would be afforded by individual reading alone. Blyth also notices that the collaborative nature of DSR allowed instructors to guide the reading process "in a moment-by-moment fashion" (Blyth 2014, 221) and to create a solid basis for post-reading discussions. Similarly, Yi and Choi (2015) conducted a study to investigate teachers' perceptions about incorporating multimodality in language education and found that among 25 participating teachers, 23 teachers welcomed multimodal practice.

It is important to underscore that, apart from Kajder (2018), the majority of the studies briefly presented above have mainly taken into

consideration the implementation of DSR with FL students at university level and have focused on the intensive reading of short texts (poems, articles, or short stories) using a computer application. There is thus a paucity of research on the extensive DSR of novels carried out in the secondary EFL context through a mobile application (Ng, Cheung 2024), such as Glose for Education. Our study aims to fill this gap by investigating the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are EFL students' and facilitators' perceived affordances and challenges of an extensive DSR project?
RQ 2: What are EFL students' and facilitators' perceived affordances and challenges of using mobile devices for EFL extensive e-reading?
RQ 3: What pedagogical implications can be drawn?

3 The Study

3.1 Research Context

Conducted within the Erasmus+ project *DigLit: Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises*, the extensive mobile reading project (henceforth DigLit book club) involved upper secondary students (see § 3.3), studying in the school partners in Italy and Hungary. The school in Hungary is affiliated with the University of Pécs and is characterised by a strong academic curriculum. The school in Italy is a grammar school (liceo scientifico) located in the Veneto region (Northern Italy). Both schools offer curricular and extracurricular activities to strengthen students' EFL competences. The participating students were engaged in the extensive DSR of four different YA novels. These novels were chosen by the students themselves during the previous phase of the project because they addressed global issues that they considered important (see Fazzi 2023). Based on their reading preferences and interests, students were divided into four different groups, each one reading a different novel and dealing with a different global issue **[tab. 1]**.

Table 1 Description of the YA novels and topics dealt with in the reading groups

Group	Description of the YA novel
Group 1	*We Were Liars* (2014) by Emily Lockart is a psychological horror novel that tackles mental health and wellbeing, specifically portraying the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as the pressure and expectations that come with wealth and privilege.
Group 2	*The Maze Runner* (2009) by James Dashner is a book that explores the importance of memory for both the individual and society and the difficulties of growing up.
Group 3	*The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas is a novel that was written following the killing of a 22-year-old African American by the police and that deals with police brutality and racism.
Group 4	*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) by Benjamin Alire Sáenz is a coming of age novel that tells the story of two young teenage boys grappling with self-discovery, especially in relation to their ethnic identity and sexuality.

In organising the reading groups, an effort was made to have a balanced mix of Italian and Hungarian students to foster international interaction and collaboration. Each international reading group was assigned a member of the project team as the facilitator (see § 3.3). The facilitators were responsible for guiding and giving feedback to the pre- and post-reading discussions, assigning the weekly reading chapters and prompts (see § 3.2), encouraging interaction during the reading phase, and offering support to students as needed.

3.2 Pedagogical Design

The DigLit book club lasted six weeks and students were engaged in asynchronous pre-, during- and post-reading activities using Moodle and Glose for Education[3] (henceforth Glose). Moodle is one of the most well known e-learning platforms, based on pedagogical approaches grounded in constructivism, learner-centeredness, and collaboration. In our project, Moodle was used to mainly manage the course (e.g. organising the materials, sending announcements and reminders) and to hold students' pre- and post-reading discussions through the forum feature. Both Italian and Hungarian students were already familiar with this platform as they used it for their school work. On the other hand, for the during-reading activities, we used Glose. This application, which was new to all the students, allows to read short or longer texts on a mobile device (smartphones or tablet) and has a variety of

3 As of June 2024, Glose for Education has been closed. However, the sister reading app Glose.com is still operational.

annotation features, such as highlighting using different colours, reacting with emojis to text passages, posting comments using different multimodal texts (e.g. verbal, audio, hyperlinks, and images), and an in-app dictionary that offers definitions and translations of single words and text passages. Glose also allows users to personalise their reading experience by changing the style and dimension of the font (including a dyslexia font) and the colour of the background. In our project, each of the four facilitators created a classroom (a reading group) and invited students to join the classroom and respond to weekly reading prompts on the margin of the chosen novel **[fig. 1]**.

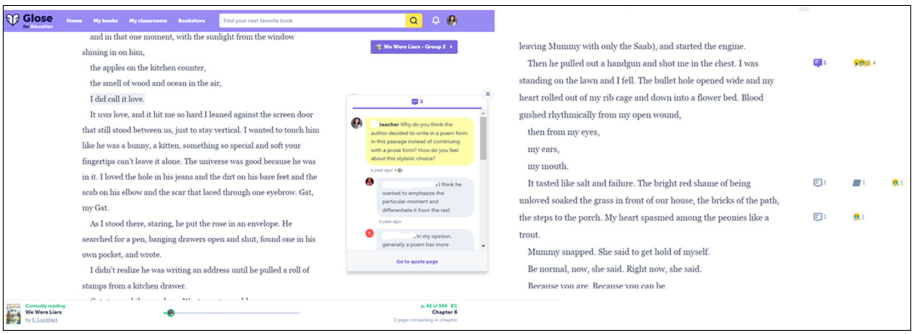


Figure 1 Screenshots of activities on Glose for Education

Each classroom had an activity page where all students' and facilitators' contributions were visible and the facilitator also had access to students' statistics (e.g. reading time, number of pages read, and number/types of annotations).

In the first week, the aims and structure of the project were introduced through an online synchronous meeting via zoom. Students received a short technical training on the features of Moodle and Glose and on the reading strategies to implement to better sustain their digital reading. In the second week, students were divided into the international reading groups and were asked to participate in an asynchronous warm-up discussion on Moodle that aimed at introducing the topic and getting them interested in the book. Each reading group had their own dedicated forum discussion. In the third, fourth, and fifth week, students were assigned a selection of chapters from the chosen book to read on Glose (no more than 30 pages per week) and to answer to both general and specific in-text reading prompts each week. The goal of both types of prompts was to promote students' discussion of the plot, characters, themes and stylistic features of the literary text in line with the new literature scales of the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020) and with Global Citizenship Education (UNESCO 2015) **[tab. 2]**.

Table 2 Examples of general and specific prompts for week 3 (Group 1)

General prompts	In-text specific prompts
Hello readers! Please read chapters 1-11 and do the following: • post at least two annotated questions or comments; • react with at least two emojis to parts of the text that make you feel some sort of emotion (surprise, sadness, anger, etc.)	• What message is Cadence trying to convey here? Share links to songs, videos or other resources that you think capture the mood of this passage. • Why do you think the author decided to write in a poem form here instead of continuing with a prose form? How do you feel about this stylistic choice? • Do you agree with what Cadence's mum says to her here? Is 'silence' really the best solution when someone feels hurt or upset?

Thus, in the last week, students were engaged in a post reading discussion in their dedicated discussion forum on Moodle, in which they had to describe their understanding and reaction to the chosen book and explore avenues for action and for their reflection.

3.3 Participants

The participants involved in this study were 46 upper secondary school students from the two partner schools located in Hungary (n=8), and Italy (n=38), aged between 16 and 17 years old, with a B1 to B2 language level in EFL. Students were selected based on their teachers' availability to participate in the DigLit book club. The results of a background questionnaire conducted prior to the start of the reading project revealed that the majority of these students did not read often, both in their first language (L1) and in English, preferred reading paper books in their L1 and used e-books/materials mainly when reading in English. Only one student out of four already used social reading networks/applications, such as Wattpad and Goodreads.

With regard to the facilitators, they were all new to the experience of conducting a DSR project. Two of the facilitators were the English language teachers of the Italian partner school, while the other two facilitators were the researchers from the partner universities in Italy and Austria.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

3.4.1 Students' Questionnaire and Focus Groups

The main tools used to collect our data from the students' perspective were an online questionnaire and two focus group interviews. The questionnaire (see Appendix) was drafted in English but students were free to choose to reply in the language they felt most comfortable with. It consisted of an initial introduction, containing a brief presentation of the research project as well as some indications for the completion of the questionnaire itself, followed by three sections. The first section aimed at collecting respondents' personal data (e.g. country, gender). The second section focused on the overall project through both likert scales and open ended questions. Finally, the third and final section investigated the students' experience with the digital platforms used in the project through likert scales, closed and open questions. The questionnaire was administered online, at the end of the DigLit book club (December 2022) via Google Forms, and a total of 46 responses were collected (Hungary, n = 8; Italy, n = 38).

As for the two focus group interviews, they were both conducted in Italian on the university zoom platform in March 2023 and involved a total of 10 participants, six in the first meeting and four in the second one, from the Italian partner school.[4] In both sessions, after welcoming the participants, we proceeded by recording the meeting, and then by briefly contextualising what would be discussed. The questions that followed complied with a pre-prepared questioning route (see below), proceeding with some introductory questions before focussing on the main issues, namely, students' perceptions of mobile reading, the affordances and challenges of DSR using Glose, and their perceptions of the pedagogical design in addition to any other possible questions that could emerge from the discussion. The questioning route is provided below:

- Before this study, did you ever use technological applications to read English texts online? If so, what applications did you use? How were they helpful and/or motivating?
- What did you enjoy most about the DigLit book club? What did you find difficult or challenging?
- Explain how Glose enhanced or hindered your: motivation to read in English, comprehension in English; understanding and interpretation of the novel.
- What benefits did you see in using Glose rather than traditional/print-based texts in relation to learning English?

4 The Hungarian students were unable to participate due to availability constraints.

- What challenges or difficulties did you encounter in using Glose? How did you overcome them?
- Given the chance, would you participate in another DigLit book club in English using Glose or another DSR application?
- In what way, if at all, did participating in the DigLit book club help you learn (about), reflect (about), and discuss taboo/controversial topics?
- With this discussion, we wanted to explore your opinion about the DigLit book club. Considering everything we talked about, what expectations were not met? How would you improve the reading experience of the book club?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Each meeting lasted an hour. The recorded video files, which were automatically saved on the Ca' Foscari owned Google Drive, were converted into audio tracks, which were then transcribed, analysed and coded following the procedures presented in § 3.5.

3.4.2 Facilitators' Focus Group

In February 2023, all four facilitators were invited to participate in a focus group aimed at exploring their experience of the DigLit book club. The discussion was conducted in English and lasted an hour. It included a reflection on the DSR experience and their role as facilitators, a comparison between digital and print reading, an evaluation of the digital platforms and prompts, and a discussion of students' interaction. The questioning route is provided below:

- In your opinion, how was the experience of digital reading compared to paper reading?
- From 1 to 5 (1 = bad; 5 = excellent) how would you rate your experience with Moodle and Glose? Briefly explain why.
- The groups were created based on students' reading preferences. Do you think all groups were balanced and worked well?
- How would you describe the interaction between students throughout the reading?
- How was your role as a facilitator? Mention potential and limits.

The audio recording was automatically saved on the Ca' Foscari university owned Google Drive and later transcribed, analysed and coded following the procedures presented in the section below.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

After data collection, students' quantitative results were transferred to an Excel file to be able to proceed with descriptive type analyses, based on frequency and percentage distribution (Dörnyei 2007). For reasons of space, the analysis was not carried out for every single question but in an aggregated form to give an overall picture of students' satisfaction with the different aspects of the project. These results were then further enriched through the qualitative results, analysed following Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) thematic analysis using the software Maxqda Analytics Pro 2020. Specifically, we first analysed students' open ended questions in the questionnaires through a start list of possible themes (e.g. increased comprehension and motivation through DSR, ubiquitous reading thanks to the mobile application, etc.) derived from the literature presented in § 2. In this first phase of coding, we also identified some emerging themes (e.g. lower interaction than expected, workload, technical problems, etc.), which we added to the start list, before reading through and coding students' focus groups. Once finished with the first-type coding, we proceeded to understand the relationship between the different themes, searching for patterns and making contrasts and comparisons. Finally, we named the patterns and identified their corresponding constructs, forming more abstract thematic categories which were used to structure the analysis in § 4.2. A similar procedure was followed for the analysis of the facilitators' focus group (see § 4.3). In reporting participants' quotes, students were anonymised with a code in which the first letter signals the country (e.g. 'I' for Italy and 'H' for Hungary) followed by 'S' (standing for Student) and a number. On the other hand, the two English language teachers from the Italian partner school are referred to as F1 and F2, and the two researchers as F3 and F4.

4 Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Analysis of Students' Closed Questions

In this section, we present an overview of the quantitative findings from students' closed questions in the questionnaires. Of the 46 replies obtained from the administration of the questionnaire, 82.6% came from Italian students and 17.4% from Hungarian students. As for the gender of the respondents, 63% of them were female, while 34.6% were male with one person that chose not to express their gender. In response to question 1a, the students rated the DSR project 3.85/6 (likert scale 1 = very negative; 6 = very positive), with 41.3% of them selecting 4. As for the students' degree of satisfaction with the

different aspects of the DSR experience (question 2), they appeared to be the most satisfied when it came to how the project was presented (3.3./4) and to the support they received from the facilitators (3.3/4, with 45.7% selecting 4 = very much), while the most critical aspect concerned the interaction between peers (2.5, with 41.3% selecting 2 = very little). Regarding the themes covered (question 3), the respondents believed that the DigLit book club allowed them to reflect (3.15/4), discuss (2.9/4) and learn (2.8/4) something new about them (likert scale 1 = not at all; 4 = very much). The plot, topics and language level of the book they read (question 4) were met with a medium level of satisfaction, since all the aspects obtained very similar scores, on average close to 3 points ("somewhat satisfied") out of 4 ("very satisfied"). The overall experience on Moodle and Glose obtained similar responses as well: Moodle (question 7a) was evaluated with an average value of 4.3/6 and the most common scores were 5 and 6 (likert scale 1 = very negative; 6 = very positive). As for Glose (question 9a), the overall experience was evaluated with a 4.6/6, the most common scores being 4 and 5 (likert scale 1 = very negative; 6 = very positive). The usefulness of both platforms (question 8 and 11), however, obtained lower scores, and the most relevant features when it comes to Glose appeared to be the dictionaries while the least useful one concerned the possibility of highlighting. After the DigLit book club, 23.9% of the respondents said they already read e-books before the project and would continue to do so, 34.8% said they were sceptical but now saw their potential, while 41.3% said they preferred paper over e-books and their idea remained unchanged (question 12).

4.2 Qualitative Analysis of Students' Open-Ended Questions and Focus Groups

As for the qualitative analysis of students' open-ended questions in the questionnaire and focus groups, this will be structured around three categories: (i) Affordances of DSR, (ii) Digital mobile vs print reading, and (iii) Positive and negative aspects of the pedagogical design.

Affordances of DSR

The analysis of the open-ended questions and of the focus groups shows that students perceived several affordances of DSR as related to the linguistic, affective, social, and cognitive dimensions of learning. As regards the linguistic dimensions, students claimed that the translation feature of Glose increased their comprehension in English promoting their confidence and enjoyment in reading:

Excerpt 1 Students' focus group 2

IS1: Well, I liked the fact that I could translate on the spot and therefore read more fluently than having to stop every two seconds and look in the online dictionary.

As regards the social and affective dimension, the opportunity to view their peers' highlights, comments, and reactions, as well as to share their own thoughts and feelings about the novel, helped students perceive the story as 'alive', increasing their motivation to read:

Excerpt 2 Students' open-ended questions

HS4: I absolutely loved the idea of sharing what you're currently reading, your thoughts and feelings about a book, and being part of a community.

HS8: Having the possibility to interact with other readers was entertaining and pushed me to read more and enjoy the reading because I could share impressions and have the feeling that the story was 'alive'.

As regards the cognitive dimension, students said that the collaborative nature of DSR allowed them to focus on aspects and passages of the text they had not paid attention to and reflect more deeply on their meaning and importance:

Excerpt 3 Students' focus group 1

IS1: As IS4 said before, perhaps you read some parts in a superfluous way, and instead maybe you see that someone there has underlined something, and you also ask yourself why they underlined that, and you also focus more on parts that you had left out and therefore it also makes you like the book more, reflect more on all the various parts.

Digital Mobile vs Print Reading

In analysing students' closed questions, we found that the majority of them expressed negative perceptions towards reading on their smartphone for an extended period of time. Various reasons were provided in the open-ended questions to explain these viewpoints such as the small dimension and blue lights of the screen and the difficulty of setting reading goals and of connecting with the book. As for the small dimension of the mobile screen, students felt it had

caused them eyestrain, headaches, and general physical discomfort. The same negative perception was reiterated in the focus groups:

Excerpt 4 Students' focus group 2

IS1: Yes, because from my smartphone, I wasn't able to concentrate that much [...] you still get notifications there, or even the fact of reading on a small screen... I don't know, I don't concentrate as much, compared to maybe the computer which is large, so you feel more comfortable.

Some of the students also argued that with paper reading it is easier to both set reading goals (for example, in terms of pages per day) and connect with the book more deeply. On the other hand, students also identified positive aspects of digital mobile reading, such as the possibility of reading everywhere and whenever they wanted or had a spare moment, giving them the feeling of having the book 'on their fingertips'.

Positive and Negative Aspects of the Pedagogical Design

In evaluating the pedagogical design underpinning the DSR project, students were generally positive about the two digital applications used in the project. As regards Moodle, both Italian and Hungarian students perceived it as a good and easy to use platform where to hold the pre- and post-reading discussions, despite having an 'old' interface. On the other hand, Glose was described in both students' questionnaires and focus group discussions as simple to use, with a nice interface and good features, especially the interactive ones as well as the dictionary. However, some issues were highlighted, mainly relating to the app's operation, which sometimes struggled to load pages or made it difficult to navigate through the book. In evaluating the book read in their respective reading groups and the reading prompts, while some enjoyed the book and perceived the prompts as catalysts for stimulating discussions, others expressed dissatisfaction with the chosen book, due to personal preferences, and felt that the prompts had disrupted the fluidity and immersive quality of the reading experience. Furthermore, both Italian and Hungarian students indicated that the demanding timeframe, compounded by the heavy academic workload during the project period, posed challenges in effectively reading and responding to the prompts. In the focus groups, the Italian students also claimed that they wished to have had more opportunities to meet and discuss the book synchronously. Indeed, they agreed that students' interaction on Glose had been lower than expected. However, some of the students also ventured

to suggest that some students might prefer to engage in a more solitary manner, such as through highlighting text passages and reacting with emojis rather than posting and responding to others' comments.

4.3 Analysis of Facilitators' Focus Group

In this section, we present an overview of the findings from the facilitators' focus group structured around three categories: (i) Developing digital literacy and pedagogical skills, (ii) Digital mobile reading vs print reading, and (iii) Positive and negative aspects of the pedagogical design.

Developing Digital Literacy and Pedagogical Skills

When asked about their own perceptions of the DigLit book club, all four facilitators agreed that it gave them the chance to learn about and experiment with new digital tools and strategies to motivate and support students' reading. For example, one of the researchers said that the project made her think about the ways in which digitalization can support reading as a multimodal practice. On the other hand, lack of familiarity with Glose also emerged as an important theme, especially for the two teachers. In fact, they claimed that they would have liked to have more time to learn how to use Glose before the start of the project.

Digital Mobile vs Print Reading

During the focus group, the facilitators discussed at length the difference between digital and print reading. Mobile reading emerged as a more contemporary form of reading and as a more cost-effective and inclusive practice able to bridge the social divide. However,the facilitators acknowledged that extensive e-reading on smartphone devices can cause eyestrain and headaches for students.

Positive and Negative Aspects of the Pedagogical Design

In discussing the positive and negative aspects of the pedagogical design underpinning the DigLit book club, the facilitators noted that employing two distinct digital platforms presented challenges for both themselves and the students. While Moodle demonstrated advantages in organising materials and facilitating pre- and post-reading discussions, it was deemed as a very formal tool. As regards

Glose, facilitators' perceptions mostly confirmed those of the students, viewing it as an user-friendly and engaging platform despite some technical shortcomings. The discussion also unveiled insights concerning the utility of the prompts and the facilitator's role. While facilitators acknowledged that the prompts were efficient in guiding students' reflection and discussion on textual elements, they also posited that a reduction in the number of the prompts coupled with synchronous discussions would have likely enhanced student engagement and connectivity.

Excerpt 5 Facilitators' focus group

F4: Some of them were good at making them think about certain aspects [...] I just wonder if maybe we should have guided the interaction with the text a little bit more. But that goes back again to the fact that it was just the asynchronous discussion. So, there was no physical interaction that could have started from their responses to the prompts and extended them in the classroom.

Additionally, one of the researchers suggested that involving students in activities around mediation strategies could have made students more confident in engaging in online discussions around the YA novels. Finally, the facilitators also discussed their role in mediating students' interaction. In the excerpts below, for example, both F1 and F4 express their uncertainties regarding their 'presence' in Glose discussions and their struggles in motivating student participation without interrupting or interfering with students' reading experience.

Excerpt 6 Facilitators' focus group

F4: Sometimes I wanted to reply to the students, but I stopped myself because I didn't want to interfere too much. I wanted them to interact more with each other. So I thought if I start interacting too much, maybe they feel like I'm over present. But I realised after a while that they kind of liked me coming in and acknowledging that they contributed to the discussion, furthering what they were saying, but I don't know if this was me and if you guys [the other facilitators] felt the same

Excerpt 7 Facilitators' focus group

F1: Like F4 I wanted to be there, but the problem is that I was also the teacher of the Italian students. And so I didn't want, you know, to stop their interaction [...] F4 and I have this sort of double role in this project, and so we are always those who give them marks in a way, so of course you know… it's different

5 Discussion

Our first research question investigated EFL students' and facilitators' perceived affordances and challenges of an extensive DSR extensive project. As regards the affordances, students recognised that the collaborative nature of reading on Glose positively affected their motivation to read in English. The technological features of the DSR application acted as both "amplifiers" (Bruner 1966 quoted in Michelson, Abdennebi, Michelson 2023, 602) of meaning making and of comprehension. In fact, through sharing and reacting to text passages and to each other through multiple means (e.g. comments, highlighting, and emojis), Glose turned reading from a silent, solitary endeavour into a multifaceted, multimodal activity, transforming the text into a "participatory space" (Kajder 2018, 10). On the other hand, the possibility to use the in-app dictionary supported students' reading speed and comprehension, increasing students' confidence and enjoyment in reading (Day, Bamford 1998). Additionally, students also said that reading and responding to their peers' comments and annotations also promoted their deep reading (Kalir et al. 2020). Facilitators agreed with these perceptions, arguing that engaging students with DSR tasks allowed them to "re-conceptualise traditional notions of literacy" (Thoms, Poole 2018, 55) in line with the demands of an increasingly digitised world (Kress 2003; Guikema, Williams 2014). These findings confirm previous research on the affordances of DSR[5] and e-reading (Sorrentino, Lauer 2019; Morgana, Pavesi 2021). In line with Kajder (2018), they also show that engaging in DSR can support teachers' digital literacy skills development alongside that of their students. However, both students and facilitators underlined that students' level of interaction was lower than expected. Our findings suggest this may have been caused by the following aspects. First, a low level of social presence, which is "the ability to perceive others in an online environment" (Richardson et al. 2017). As the project was mostly asynchronous with only one synchronous meeting at the beginning, students had hardly any opportunity to get to know their peers and share their common interests, which seems to have negatively influenced the construction of peer rapport and thus students' participation and motivation to engage in online discussions around the YA novels (Winget 2013 quoted in Pianzola 2021, 16). Second, students' personal differences and experiences with digital technology and with DSR specifically. According to Barnett (2015), the type of conversations that happen on the margin of e-texts might be bothering some people. On the other hand, students might have different reading speeds, which might delay the

5 Thoms, Poole 2017; Solmaz 2020; Blyth 2014; Law, Barni, Poulin 2020.

timing of the responses, and thus lower students' motivation to participate (Thoms, Sung, Poole 2017). Finally, the students had very limited familiarity with the type of reading and literacy skills required in DSR environments and would have benefitted from more technical training. The facilitators also noted that students lacked specific linguistic skills to mediate asynchronous online discussions. Third, students reported a demanding school workload, making it difficult for them to keep up with the reading prompts within the tight schedule. Fourth, the presence of adult facilitators, including the teachers of some of the students, might have been seen as an interference by the students who might have preferred "an intimate space for reading where they do not feel judged by persons with institutional roles or think they know better than them" (Rebora et al. 2021 quoted in Pianzola 2021, 16). However, in the questionnaires, students expressed general positive attitudes towards the support offered by the facilitators. Also, in the focus groups, the facilitators claimed they perceived their contribution as an added value to the discussion, at least in certain situations. More research is certainly needed to explore the role of the teacher-facilitator and its impact on students' discussion in the context of extensive DSR with teenage students.

Following the first RQ, we were interested in unravelling students' and facilitators' perceived affordances and challenges of using mobile devices for EFL extensive e-reading (RQ2). Our findings confirm previous research, which has highlighted that mobile reading can have both advantages (e.g. portability and ubiquity of mobile devices, availability of a wider range of FL resources) and disadvantages (e.g. eyestrain and physical discomfort, distractions due to notifications from social networks and instant messaging) (Guikema, Williams 2014; Sorrentino, Lauer 2019; Morgana, Pavesi 2021) and that paper books are far from being obsolete (Nardi et al. 2023). Indeed, the belief that young students prefer the consumption of e-books when it comes to leisure reading could not be further from the truth (Alexandrov 2020). Studies are showing that the paper format is still the preferred medium, especially by young generations, when reading longer, complex, cognitively, and emotionally demanding texts (Nardi et al. 2023), including literature. Yu et al. (2022, 239) go as far as to say that "it is premature to abandon hardcopies'' in the EFL context. However, while our findings might suggest the superiority of the paper format, at least when applied to the reading of fiction, we should not haste in any conclusion but rather reflect on the actual reading practices and preferences of students and how to leverage them for FL learning. More research is needed to understand how paper and digital reading, also using smartphones, can complement each other in supporting students' development of digital and print literacies (Nardi et al. 2023). Further research is also needed in exploring how more familiarity and

proficiency with mobile reading can positively impact students' attitudes towards mobile reading (Yu et al. 2022).

Our third research question explored the pedagogical implications of the DigLit book club. Our findings show that students and facilitators identified both positive and negative aspects of the pedagogical design. For example, not all students enjoyed responding to the reading prompts, and the tight schedule was challenging to follow due to their existing school workload. Also, the limited opportunities for synchronous discussion and socialisation and the limited availability of technical and linguistic pre-training were seen as a hindrance to the potential affordances of online asynchronous discussions. These results, together with those of RQ1 and RQ2, lead us to propose three main implications. First, the design of extensive DSR reading projects should consider ways in which the asynchronous discussion on the selected digital platform(s) is integrated in the physical or online classroom through synchronous discussions, enhancing both students' social presence and facilitators' ability to support students' reading experience. Second, students' workload should be reduced by for example giving them time to read in the classroom or extending the timeline of the book club. Third, facilitators should give students ample time to practise digital reading strategies (Nardi 2018) and to build the linguistic skills necessary to engage in the online asynchronous discussion (Council of Europe 2020) afforded by DSR platforms. They should also find ways to complement digital and print reading in a way that supports students' reading of longer texts from both a cognitive and physical perspective.

6 Conclusion

The educational potential of applying DSR to the reading of fictional texts is an extremely underexplored topic (Pianzola 2021). Our study has contributed to address this gap by investigating students' and facilitators' perceptions of an extensive DSR project carried out on a mobile application. From this perspective, our findings also confirm current research on the controversial use of smartphones to read e-books in the context of EFL learning. More research is needed in understanding how to leverage the affordances of DSR to develop both EFL students' motivation to read and mediation skills, including mediation of a creative text (Council of Europe 2020) within a reading ecosystem where paper and digital formats complement each other.

Appendix

Questionnaire post-DigLit book club

Dear Student,

This questionnaire aims to understand your perceptions of the DigLit book club project. It consists of 15 questions and it will take you about 15-20 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers. Simply say what you think! Your opinion is very valuable for the success of the project.
If you have any questions, please refer them to:

Thank you,
The DigLit Team

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Write the NICKNAME you used in the pre-questionnaire. If you didn't fill in the pre-questionnaire, then create a nickname that you'll keep using in future activities and questionnaires *

Your answer

Country *

- ◯ Hungary
- ◯ Italy

Gender *

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Prefer not to say

The overall project

1a) How do you rate your experience of the **DigLit Book club**? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Positive

1b)Why? *

Your answer

2) To what degree are you satisfied with: *

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	Very Much
The presentation of the project	○	○	○	○
The workload (amount of reading per week)	○	○	○	○
The discussion activities provided by the facilitator	○	○	○	○
Support and feedback provided by the facilitator	○	○	○	○
Instructions on how to use Moodle	○	○	○	○
Instructions on how to use Glose Education	○	○	○	○
Peer interaction	○	○	○	○
Interaction with the facilitator	○	○	○	○

3) To what degree did the DigLit book club allow you to: *

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	Very Much
Learn more about controversial themes	○	○	○	○
Reflect on controversial themes	○	○	○	○
Discuss controversial themes	○	○	○	○

4) To what degree are you satisfied with the **book** you read in terms of: *

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
The story	○	○	○	○
The topic(s) dealt in the book	○	○	○	○
The language level of the book	○	○	○	○

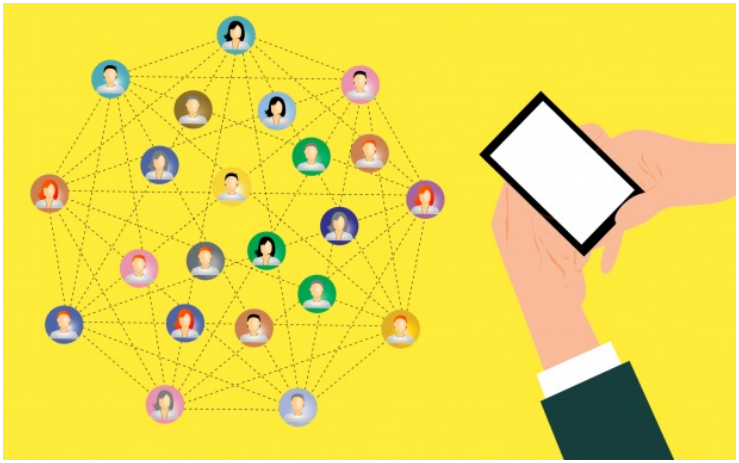
5) What aspects did you enjoy the **most** about the DigLit Book club? *

Your answer

6) What aspects did you enjoy the **least** about the DigLit Book club? *

Your answer

Digital platforms



7a)How do you rate your overall experience on **Moodle**? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Positive

7b) Why? *

Your answer

8)To what degree do you think **Moodle** was <u>useful</u> in terms of: *

	Not at all useful	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
Supporting the initial discussion of the book and of the related controversial themes	○	○	○	○
Supporting the final discussion of the book and of the related controversial themes	○	○	○	○
Acting as a repository of materials	○	○	○	○
Providing technical support during the project	○	○	○	○

9a) How do you rate your overall reading experience on **Glose Education**? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very Positive

9b) Why? *

Your answer

10) To what degree reading on **Glose Education** : *

	Not at all	Little	Somewhat	Very much
Increased your motivation to read in English	○	○	○	○
Supported your reading comprehension in English	○	○	○	○
Helped you reflect on your reading	○	○	○	○
Helped you share your reflections and reactions with your fellow readers	○	○	○	○
Helped you be part of a community of readers	○	○	○	○

11) In relation to the aspects included in Question 10, how useful did you find the following features of **Glose Education**? *

	Not at all useful	Not useful	Useful	Very useful
Highlighting	○	○	○	○
Reactions (i.e. emojis)	○	○	○	○
Annotations	○	○	○	○
Dictionary (show translation)	○	○	○	○
Dictionary (show definition and add bookmark)	○	○	○	○

12) Which one of the following conditions applies to you according to your experience with **Glose Education**? *

- ○ Before the project, I already read e-books and I will continue to do so
- ○ Before the project, I was skeptical about e-book reading but now I see the potential
- ○ Before the project, I preferred to read on paper and I haven't changed my mind after this experience
- ○ Other:

13) What were the **positive** aspects of reading on **Glose Education**? *

Your answer

14) What were the **negative** aspects of reading on **Glose Education**? *

Your answer

15) Are there any other things that you would like to share and that we haven't asked you?

Your answer

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Digital Storytelling and Young Adult Literature: A Methodological Combination for the Language Classroom

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Abstract Digital Storytelling (DST) originated in the 1990s as a narrative technique highlighting 'ordinary voices' in order to contribute to the public media discourse. Soon it was picked up by education to capture the diverse lived realities of students. This paper presents a methodological development in the form of a combination of DST with extensive reading of Young Adult Literature in the English classroom. A scaffolded methodological approach is outlined where DST is used as a post-reading activity which can be enhanced in any foreign language classroom.

Keywords Digital storytelling. Young Adult Literature. Extensive reading. Foreign language classroom.

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1 Introduction

Contemporary classrooms across Europe offer the opportunity to engage with a variety of lived experiences that are constantly changing and adapting to the global issues of our interconnected world. Hence, experimenting with new methods and approaches of critical pedagogies are of the utmost importance to value these unique circumstances and its participants. bell hooks reminded us already in the 1990s to aim for a teaching to transgress by which she highlighted particularly the engagement within the classroom on a narrative and dialogical basis. To do so, the individual stories and the dialogue between them are seen as the key essence of any successful teaching. Coming from a Freirean approach of participatory education, hooks' urge to create space for the individual experience of the people within the eco-chamber of an educational classroom has remained salient in our contemporary teaching.

Following these critical notions, Digital Storytelling (DST) as a life-narrative technique aligns with hooks' premises by focusing on the individual stories and experiences of the narrator. Developed in community-arts projects, DST soon entered the educational sphere by offering an easy way to combine narrative skills with digital elements to showcase diverse lived realities and also strengthen language and rhetorical skills (Lamber 2013). Additionally, the creative component of the method allows students to engage fully in their own imagination and aspirations (see Fina, Fazzi, Da Lio, *infra*). This is a crucial benefit for the language classroom. As a result, DST proves to be versatile.

In order to advance the current scholarship and methodological arenas of DST, this paper will showcase how DST can be combined with extensive reading of contemporary Young Adult Literature (YAL). Our aim is to think with bell hooks' and Paulo Freire's ideas of critical pedagogies to value and engage with the diverse lived experiences present in the classroom. Therefore, contemporary YA fiction proves to be a suitable tool that allows, on the one hand, a literary engagement with a fictional text to contribute to the readers' language skills. On the other hand, these literary works offer the possibilities to reflect the students' realities with all their complexities and ambivalences. Hence, the methodological combination of reading YAL and DST allows to creatively bridge competences of reading, speaking and listening whilst at the same time locating their individual realities within structural circumstances. This particular methodological combination can contribute significantly to the juxtaposition of the individual and the collective realities.

Therefore, this chapter will present a methodological development from the Erasmus+ project DigLit[1] that contributes to the vast scholarship on digital storytelling in education by promoting an expansion of the traditional digital storytelling procedures by introducing a combination of DST with the extensive reading of YAL in the English classroom. The paper will outline how a scaffolded methodological approach to YAL in combination with digital storytelling as a post-reading activity can be enhanced in any foreign language (henceforth FL) classroom.

Although, the chapter will present a method designed explicitly for the language classroom and specifically for the English foreign language (FL) classroom in the European context, it is not the aim to engage vastly with aspects of language learning with regard to the method.[2] However, it is the aim to contribute how the combination of extensive reading of YAL and DST aligns with critical pedagogical premises derived from hooks, Freire and Giroux to engage with global issues within the language classroom by juxtaposing the individual lived experiences with greater structural circumstances. This will also demonstrate how the method can be fruitful for global citizenship education in our changing times (see Menegal, *infra*). Additionally, existing scholarship on using DST in the language classroom has not yet shown how DST can be used as a post-production method for reading and working with YAL (see Fina, Fazzi, Da Lio, *infra*). Hence, this paper aims at contributing to closing this gap and offering a methodological combination of reading YAL and DST.

2 Digital Storytelling: Coaxed Life-Narratives and Ordinary Voices

Originated in the 1990s, DST is a narrative method that implies that the narrator tells a personal story and turns it into a short, two to five minutes long, multimedia clip by combining it with photos or videos. The materials for this short story are predominantly from the narrator's archive and are based on personal experiences and memories. Through storyboarding and scripting, they are turned into a multimedia narrative using mobile phone applications or computer software that combine the storyteller's spoken words with memorabilia found in their personal archives, such as photographs, music and

1 The Erasmus+ project DigLit: *Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises* was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and the findings of this project are presented in this paper (https://diglit.narrativedidactics.org/).

2 See Fina, Fazzi, Da Lio, *infra* for more on language learning through the use of YAL and DST in the FL classroom.

sound. Ultimately, these are turned into digital stories in the form of short clips that can be screened on computer, TV or the internet.[3]

The method was allegedly developed by Joe Lambert and Dana Atchley who founded the San Francisco Digital Media Center in 1994 as a counter-reaction to the growth of Silicon Valley and its technological advancements. Lambert (2013, 37) describes DST as a "movement dedicated to de-centering authority". It was a period of rapid growth in digital media research and education where digital storytelling coming from community arts and oral history traditions emerged as an activist method to provide a voice for communities (Gubrium, Turner 2011, 474; Flottemesch 2013, 54; Lambert 2013, 36-7).

An important development in the digital storytelling movement was the *Digital Storytelling Cookbook* (Lambert 2010) that became the first curriculum and manual for workshops. The increasing opening of relatively cheap and user-friendly digital video technology fostered an expansion in participatory approaches to new media production and furthered the success of DST (Hill 2010, 126-8). Two significant projects contributed to this success as well: the British Broadcasting Corporation's *Capture Wales* project as well as the *Australian Centre for Moving Image*. Both engaged in highlighting community stories by using digital storytelling and were broadcasted on national television in the early 2000s (Davis 2011, 528; Lambert 2013, 35-6).

Building upon these developments, Lambert's Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) developed a particular style of it which is based on three distinct pillars: collaboration between facilitator and storyteller, literary voice and style, and form of the digital story. Additionally, seven components are prominent in the style of CDS digital storytelling: (1) self-revelatory, (2) personal or first-person voice, (3) lived experience of the author, (4) still images, (5) soundtrack (music or other sounds to support the voiceover), (6) length and design (under five minutes and minimalistic), and (7) intention of the story relies on the process and not the product per se (Lambert 2013, 37-8). Combining these three pillars and the seven components, CDS digital storytelling is generally a process of creating a short story that is guided by the storyteller and supported by a combination of spoken text and still images, often with the intention to create community building (Fields, Diaz 2008; Davis 2011; Lambert 2013). Therefore, as a multimodal approach, as Flottemesch (2013, 54) sums up, digital storytelling "brings the ancient art of telling stories to life using technology".

Typically, multiple partners are involved in the digital storytelling process. The relationships and interactions of the individuals within this process determine the success or failure of the method (Davis 2011, 531). Thus, Flottemesch (2013, 54) describes it as "a

3 Davis (2011, 528-52); Gubrium, Turner (2011, 470); Poletti (2011, 78); Lambert (2013, 47).

participatory nature in the process of emerging stories, which builds the relationship between the storyteller and listener". As a workshop-based process in which 'ordinary people' narrate their lives and create their own short autobiographical clips, digital storytelling can be seen not only as a media form but also as

> a field of cultural practice: a dynamic site of relations between textual arrangement and symbolic conventions, technologies for production and conventions for their use; and collaborative social interaction (i.e., the workshops) that takes place in local and specific contexts. (Burgess 2006, 207)

Since its beginning, Lambert (2013, 207) has referred to digital storytelling as a 'movement' which is "explicitly designed to amplify the ordinary voice" and dedicated to "finding an authoritative self-definition" (Burgess 2006, 37). Poletti (2011, 73) adds to this by highlighting the unique possibilities of the method for ordinary people to share their stories from and about their lives. Therefore, digital storytelling can be seen as an example of 'coaxed life narrative', which encourages us to view the very act of narrating life experiences as ordinary.

The explicit pedagogical nature of digital storytelling and its potential for teaching practices aligns with Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogical considerations of dialogical exchange. Additionally, the use of stories of lived experiences as a way to understand and challenge oppression amplifies how narrative techniques can contribute to a diversified understanding of complex lived realities (Gubrium, Turner 2011; Macleroy, Shamsad 2020). As Macleroy and Shamsad (2020, 485) outline, digital storytelling can be seen as counteracting how educational institutions oftentimes force children and young adults to "chase after a fixed standard literacy that seems distant from their own rich and noisy experience of language". Hence, when listening to collective issues and themes, specifically within a classroom, people have the opportunity to publicly present their experiences through a creative, multimodal media form that may evoke greater illocutionary force by offering up an "array of visual, oral, textual, and aural ethnographic empirical material for analysis" produced by the storyteller (Gubrium, Turner 2011, 470-4). As a result, a powerful framework of connecting media with stories into critical educational practice may be provided (McLellan 2006, 26).

Building on the Freirean dialogical approach, scholars such as Hartley (2009) have pointed to digital storytelling's potential to contribute to the democratization of media. The explicit focus of bringing voices of ordinary and marginalized people in the public sphere and sharing their stories on the internet has been seen as a response to the changing political and social environment (Poletti 2011, 81). Hence, digital storytelling draws on what Burgess (2006) names a

"vernacular literacy", which are skills and competencies that are not solely learned through education, but are built up through everyday experience and mass media consumption. Thus, digital storytelling shows democratic potential by crossing the line between formal and informal learning. It remediates a "vernacular creativity in new media contexts" by telling personal narratives with personal images remixed with textual idioms of film and television, and ultimately transformed through digital tools into publicly accessible culture (Burgess 2006, 209-10).

Nevertheless, a crucial consideration when working with digital storytelling is the awareness that production processes are not neutral activities but rather a process influenced by economic structures and ideological meanings. Hence, Hill (2010) urges to view digital storytelling as a media-making process through the premises of ethnographic practices and their ethical issues. Similar to forms of ethnography, a production of a text is involved and thus an investigation of the power dynamics, social, cultural, and historical contexts, as well as the dimensions of difference at play is necessary to carefully reflect on the subtleties of privileging and silencing voices as the digital storytelling process unfolds (Hill 2010, 128). In this context, Davis (2011, 528) has warned to view digital storytelling as an "unmediated and direct window on life experiences", as it is always influenced by compromises of technology, institutional and cross-culture mediation, which determine the success and limitation of the process. Moreover, Poletti (2011, 77) highlights that "stories are often told in the service of relationships" which are in the case of digital storytelling partly pedagogical (Hartley 2009) and partly social (Burgess 2006).

Considering these elements when carrying out DST and within scholarly engagement of this particular participatory method, DST provides the means for dialogical and interactive approaches within the classroom and beyond. Although Lambert and his team from the Center for Digital Storytelling have developed a specific style, over the years variations of this DST approach have emerged due to technological developments and the growing interest in participatory media methods. Some transgress the core definition of digital stories and others simply expand the concept by strengthening the interactive and collaborative component of the method by including interviews, conversations, and/or exchanges within the digital story. This paper will contribute to these expansions as well by outlining how digital storytelling can be used as a post-reading production and a meaningful way to process extensive reading of YAL.

3 Young Adult Literature (YAL): From Coming-Of-Age to Social Justice Issues

Until the late 1930s, young adults fell into the category of children and thus the literary productions aimed at them were not explicitly called "Young Adult Literature" (henceforth YAL) but rather "Children's Literature". New debates about this particular category of humans sparked eventually the interest in writing for adolescents which was also the result of a significant development in the acknowledgement of youth culture, as Cart (2016, 9-10) has outlined in the history of YAL. Soon, publishers realized the interest of "older children" in reading books specifically addressing issues relating to their lives and hence, the branding of YAL began. This branding began with categorizing them into 'girls' and 'boys' books by differentiating the content as 'sentimental' and 'adventurous', which still lingers with us today (Cart 2016, 10). In the following decades, the market began to grow and more publishers engaged with labeling literature that was defined as a ladder between children's and adults' books as YAL. Testing the boundaries and narrating the complexities of growing up, the 1960s and 1970s were a pivotal era for the development of YAL and are today called the "first golden age of young adult literature" (Cart 2016, 34).

With its uprising in the 1970s, YAL today can be defined as consisting of texts produced specifically for young adults within the age range of twelve and eighteen that feature predominantly first-person narration and addresses independence of young adults (Nilson, Donelson 2012). Typical themes are romance, loss, search for identity and bullying and various formats such as novels, graphic novels, audiobooks, and prose fall into this category (Boyd, Darragh 2019; Cart 2016). Thus, Glasgow (2001, 54) has early on highlighted the benefits of YAL by stating that "young adult literature provides a context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations".

Starting out with portraying classical middle-class white youth coming of age, in recent decades YAL has become widely popular and more sophisticated. Additionally, the imperative of growth has been neglected and more and more books simply highlight storytelling to address their young readers (Coats 2011, 320). As a result, the topics and representations within its literature have expanded and the latest texts are more inclusive, addressing pressing contemporary issues of equality, diversity, and oppression. Protagonists are from diverse ethnic, racial, class, and gendered backgrounds and the topics align with contemporary global debates, such as mental illness, police brutality, discrimination, and climate change. With a growing body of works on race, ethnicities, gender identities and sexual

orientations, YAL has transgressed its old image as "too White" (Larrick 1965; Boyd, Darragh 2019, 13-14). As a result, the themes and topics addressed by contemporary YAL reflect global issues that align with principles of global citizenship education to "bring the world into the classroom" through literary texts whilst at the same time aiming to deconstruct problematic aspects of *us/them* and *here/there* (CoE 2019, see Menegale, *infra*).

Another crucial aspect worth mentioning is the emotional component of contemporary YAL, which contributes to its success. As research has shown over the past decades, young adults think differently than children or adults due their use of a different part of their brain, namely their amygdala. This part of the brain is considered the emotional reaction centre, whereas adults rely on the frontal cortex of the brain which relies more on calculating risks and moral considerations. Hence, additionally to rapid hormonal fluctuations, teenagers' physical and mental coordination is hindered by a growing cerebellum which results in physical clumsiness and instability of emotions. Therefore, emotional issues within YAL resonate ideally with the developmental stage of young adults (Spinks 2002, quoted in Coats 2011, 321).

Moreover, YAL plays a significant role in negotiating the individual lived experiences through a narrative level (Pölzleitner, Schumm Fauster 2022). Thus, Alsup (2010, 13) argues that

> teens whose subjectivity is not consistent with those who control society's economic and cultural structures have an even more difficult time creating a sustainable identity than teens who belong to dominant social, ethnic, or racial groups.

As a result, YAL can function as a medium to fill the gap of this representation and provide the possibilities to see individual disenfranchisement through a literary lens in order to develop a critical literacy (Giroux 1987) which helps to navigate the individual lived experience within social relations. YAL can contribute to the significant part of maturation of

> seeing one's personal subjectivity as part of a larger system of social relationships which often become politicized, thereby seeming to disconnect individual identity from the objectives of the larger social group. (Alsup 2010, 13)

Hence, the teaching of YAL in secondary school has been marked by conceptions of identity and responses to such through the engagement with young adult texts. In this context, Lewis and Dockter (2011, 82) outline that "the teaching of literature has always been and remains tightly connected to readers' identities' as it seeks to

influence the 'making' of particular kinds of people and particular kinds of readers". Therefore, not only reading but also interpreting these texts becomes an "act of negotiation of shifting and slippery identities as readers re-imagine and re-identify themselves past, present, and future, and experience new self-possibilities in the process", as Lewis and Dockter (2011, 83) continue to outline. This process is specifically interesting for the language classroom where YAL can represent global issues in line with global citizenship education (CoE 2019) and simultaneously contribute to the strengthening of various FL learning skills. Hence, the potential of allowing the students to read and engage with YAL provides an authentic language engagement that fosters critical literacy (see Fina, Fazzi, Da Lio, *infra* and Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*).

Moreover, as contemporary YAL attempts to cater to the growing literary market of diversity literature, it encompasses a wide range of representations of marginalized groups. Noteworthy Anglophone authors here are Elizabeth Acevedo *(Poet X*, 2018; *Clap When You Land,* 2020), Angie Thomas (*T.H.U.G. – The Hate You Give*, 2017), Kacen Callender (*Felix Ever After,* 2021) and Cherri Dimaline (*The Marrow Thieves*, 2017). In their writing all of them aim to address topics close to young adults' lived experience whilst highlighting the complex interrelated issues of our contemporary world including climate change, growing inequalities, border regimes and unequal distribution of wealth. Through these diverse narratives, a critical literacy can be practiced where the individual young adult "recognizes the overriding importance of a fair and just society that respects the rights of all over the individual needs of one" (Alsup 2010, 13). As a result, they also contribute to the premise of global citizenship education by providing a literary narrative of pressing global issues (CoE 2019, see also Menegale, *infra*).

4 From Reading to Storytelling: The DigLit Method

As the discussion of both digital storytelling and YAL has shown thus far, both emphasize a critical literacy which aims at amplifying the localization of the individual identities and lived experience within social relations. Therefore, the methodological combination of the two follows the same critical literacy approach as outlined by Henry Giroux in his introduction to Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World:*

> The issue of literacy and power does not begin and end with the process of learning how to read and write critically; instead, it begins with the fact of one's existence as part of a historically constructed practice within specific relations of power. That is, human

> beings (as both teachers *and* students) within particular social and cultural formations are the starting point for analyzing not only how they actively construct their own experiences within ongoing relations of power, but also how the social construction of such experiences provides them with the opportunity to give meaning and expression to their own needs and voices as part of a project of self and social empowerment […] To be able to name one's experience is part of what it meant to 'read' the world and to begin to understand the political nature of the limits *and* possibilities that make up the larger society. (Giroux 1987, 5; italics in original)

Thinking with these negotiations of Giroux on critical literacy not only as the result of knowing how to read and then to read, but as a crucial aspect of seeing one's lived realities in relation to structural circumstances provides the grammar for the methodological combination of reading YAL and digital storytelling.

As research on reading in the foreign language classroom has shown, the activities involved are crucial to enhance a successful outcome. Moreover, the DigLit methodology based on these critical approaches follows the pedagogical lens of reader-response theory, as introduced by Louise Rosenblatt and Robert Probst. Guided by the belief that the reader of any text brings knowledge to it and that their response "are mostly valid products of personal experience in combination with textual representation" (Alsup 2010, 7), reader-response theory highlights that personal responses are essential to understanding any literary texts and are thus seen as a valid component to any reading, specifically in educational settings (7). Furthermore, research has shown that when reading YAL with students within the foreign language classrooms and then encouraging a personal response by the students to the text, a more positive reaction towards the overall reading experience is provided by the individuals involved, as Alsup (2010) proclaims.

Guided by reader-response theory, the DigLit methodology[4] provides a scaffolded approach of combining extensive reading of contemporary YAL with digital storytelling as a post-reading production. Based on the two simple, yet intriguing steps of, firstly, reading a contemporary young adult literary text with students in the foreign language classroom, and then doing a DST workshop afterwards, the DigLit method proposes to see the process of these two parts as the most crucial component rather than the outcome of the digital

4 The DigLit methodology was developed in the Erasmus+ project DigLit: *Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises*, which was co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

storytelling. We are aligning here again with Lambert's (2013) idea of the storytelling process as the central focus in any workshop despite the common urge to focus on the final product of the digital story. Hence, the engagement with contemporary YAL begins to set the scene for the unfolding of the methodology (Bergner et al. 2023).

Step 1: Selecting Contemporary YAL

The DigLit method encourages educators to select together with their peer group an ideal text for the extensive reading. This selection of literature can be done using various ways. However, it is crucial that the process is based on a democratic participatory principle where the educator and the students have an equal say in the decision (see also Fazzi 2023). Principles from participatory research in education drawing back to Freire (1970) are crucial to understand that agency of the individuals involved in the process enables a better outcome of the method. To cater to this paradigm, the DigLit project has provided an online selection of contemporary YAL accompanied by tags and keywords, which can be used to start the selection process and to equally involve the students and educators in the selection (YAL Collection DigLit project 2023). Making use of the developed digital collection may support the research process for both the educator and the students where the tags and keywords are helpful posts to find texts more efficiently. In addition, the collection is also built to function as a blog, where everyone can add to the list and thus, create an interactive archive of contemporary YAL texts.

Moreover, the inclusion of the students within the selection process of the literary text is crucial to enhance a better understanding of what content and genre appeals to the individual groups. Hence, Alsup (2010, 7-9) points out that when the YAL provides characters, settings, and/or situations familiar to the readers, young readers can readily identify and the narrative structures and plotlines can provide fruitful insights for them on how to make sense of the world surrounding them.

Step 2: Reading YAL

The selection of the young adult text is followed by reading it; ideally over a longer period of time to give the students and the educator enough time to engage with the text. Again, the DigLit method encourages a participatory pedagogical approach of including the students in defining what an accurate amount of time is necessary to finish the book. Through this active engagement, the reading process will be less stressful and the time frame for the individuals can be

considered in contrast to the educator providing it for them. Every step of the methodology follows a participatory and dialogical pedagogy, which is crucial for the project to work and to live by the principles of bell hooks and Paulo Freire aligning with a critical literacy.

This step can be done analogously where the students receive hard-copies of the chosen YAL or a digital social reading project can be realized. The DigLit method offers both approaches depending on the availability for the participants. Digital Social Reading relies on digital technologies where the students read the text on a digital device (e.g., smartphone, tablet, computer). Depending on the software or app, the participants have a variety of options to read, annotate, comment, and engage with the text digitally (see Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra* for more on digital social reading).

Step 3: Engaging with YAL

In order to engage with the literary text after the extensive reading period, this paper proposes one method as essential before the digital storytelling, namely the close reading of the text with the help of a catalogue of questions. This can be integrated when conducting a Digital Social Reading project or an analog reading project. As Alsup (2010, 10-11) points out, it is significant in working with literary texts with students to engage with the literary representation as a means to show the similarities and differences represented in the narrative and their own experience. Therefore, before moving to the storytelling process where the personal experience is in the center, the DigLit method proposes to include a thorough engagement with the text by using provoking questions as outlined in the following catalogue of questions:

a. Catalogue of Questions
b. How does the story begin?
c. How are the women, men and other gender identities shown? What are the characteristics of them? What are their social positions?
d. What kinds of relationships between women and men, and women and women are described (business, sexual, etc.)?
e. Are the relationships presented institutionalized, family wise or other?
f. What sort of conflicts arise from these relationships?
g. Where does the action take place? What happens when and where?
h. What or who influences the movement of the narrative?
i. What sort of situations are presented and how do the women behave in these situations?

j. In which stages of their lives are the women and queer people shown?
k. Which age groups and age differences are there?
l. Do the portrayed women and people from the LGBTQI+ community have choices within the framework of the story? Do they have the power to make decisions?
m. Do the women and people from the LGBTQI+ community change in the course of the story? Do they develop a different view of themselves and others?
n. How do they reflect these changes (perspective from within), how do others (outward perspective) evaluate these changes?
o. What kind of futures do the women and people from the LGBTQI+ community envision?
(Maierhofer 2017)

The aim of these questions is to stimulate critical engagement with the literary text by provoking the readers to look closely and adapt their reading strategies to find clues on how the narrative structure and the protagonists act. Additionally, the questions are following a critical feminist literary approach of pointing the readers towards unraveling the different and similar representations between gendered groups and how these allow an interpretation of the power dynamics and social relations within narrative constructions (e.g., Fetterly 1978; Bartky 1975; Rich 1979).

The simple questions may provide a starting point for the classroom discussion of contemporary YAL through the application of close reading strategies to interpret the text and find evidence for the individual readings within them. Thus, the categorical structure of the questions aims at guiding the students through their reading to eventually be able to relate their personal experience with the one represented in the text. Moreover, these questions aim at amplifying the "similarities and differences between the text and their own experiences" in order to create the "so-called educated imagination or the holistic reader – the reader who is able both to *experience* a textual world and to *view* it with distanced aesthetic awareness as a creation of the author's imagination" (Alsup 2010, 11; italics in original).

Step 4: Digital Storytelling

Following the reading and the engagement of the chosen young adult literary text is the digital storytelling workshop. The steps outlined before follow a scaffolded approach of selecting, reading and engaging with the text as the first crucial steps. However, the DigLit method emphasizes specifically on the post-reading production activity in the form of DST as a means to combine the extensive reading with

the engagement on a more personal level resulting in a storytelling process.

As a result, DST functions within the DigLit method as a creative counterpart to the reading process and aims at stimulating the students' imagination to create a short two-to-four-minutes-long video using their own narrative voice and videos or photos from their personal archives. The digital storytelling process follows Lambert's *Digital Storytelling Cookbook* premises by centring participatory and dialogical ideals within the classrooms. Students will go through the processes of brainstorming ideas for the digital storytelling, sharing them with their peers and then eventually writing the script for their digital story and recording it by using their own voice and materials.

Moreover, the DigLit method[5] encourages a narrative connection between the YAL and DST by amplifying the similarities and differences between the content of the read text and the lived experience of the students. Educators are invited to provide enough time for the students to brainstorm and find a suitable outlet for their experiences to be turned into a digital story. The content of the digital story can be freely chosen by the students and there should not be too much interference of the educators in order to leave enough room for creativity and personal engagement with the digital storytelling process (e.g., Lambert 2010; Macelroy, Shamsad 2020).

Eventually, the stories created will replicate a connection to the literary text in a personal and creative way that allows discussions on how extensive reading and critical close reading techniques can lead to a personal engagement with the topics, themes and narrations of the selected YAL. As outlined in detail before, contemporary Young Adult fiction aims at addressing the lived experiences of the youth and make thus the connection between the fictional level and their circumstances easily recognizable. At the same time, the crucial aspect is to find a way to tell the personal story within the realm of the digital storytelling method. Enough time for this production is therefore a crucial part of the process where the educators are in charge to democratically discuss with their students on how much time is necessary for this process in order to cater to individual needs.

Ultimately, the DigLit method encourages to organize a collective screening of the digital stories within the classroom to prepare a stage for the created products to be enjoyed collectively. This is a crucial step within the method and should not be neglected or underestimated. Following the principles of digital storytelling, collectively watching and discussing the digital stories at the end of the project contributes to raising awareness for different lived experiences and to showcase how the individuals involved engaged with

5 See Bergner et al. 2023 for a detailed description of the method.

the topics and themes of the readings (Lambert 2013). Additionally, it sums up the overall method by collectively and respectfully engaging with each other's stories as a means of valuing each other's participation and production.

5 Towards a Narrative Didactics: Conclusion

To conclude, the DigLit method aims at contributing to the continuous developments of digital storytelling and the use of contemporary YAL in the FL classroom. To do so, it provides a novel approach of combining the two aspects in the service of experimenting with participatory practices. The recent developments with regard to YAL which focuse more and more on social justice issues have provided an ideal terrain to explore how a person's engagement in the form of digital storytelling can be seen as a fruitful narrative approach to link the lived realities of today's diverse classrooms in Europe with FL learning. Hence, aligning with aspects of global citizenship education (CoE 2019). Engaging with critical pedagogies of participation, democracy, and engagement, the DigLit method practices how multimedia methods can be used to foster an awareness for the individual within a collective structure, where one's story can become a linkage to the world students are experiencing today. With all its limitations, DST and contemporary YAL nevertheless share the common goal of bringing personal experiences to life by experimenting with storytelling techniques that amplify ordinary voices. Thus, the methodological combination presented in this paper may contribute to critically engaging with the lived experiences of the individuals within our classrooms by reading fiction to spark their imaginations and make connections on how to better understand the world we are living in.

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Digital Storytelling as Multimodal Response to Young Adult Literature
Promoting EFL Students' Multiliteracies, Global Citizenship, and Mediation Skills

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Abstract This study examines how Digital Storytelling enhanced upper secondary students' multiliteracy and mediation skills in EFL and their reflections on global issues. Thirteen digital stories, created in response to Young Adult Literature, were analysed using Visual Communication Grammar and soundscape. This analysis was complemented by students' diaries and classroom field notes. Results show that students used different remix strategies to reinterpret novel themes, enjoying collaboration and fostering critical and creative skills but struggling with brainstorming, research, and editing.

Keywords Digital storytelling. Young adult literature. EFL. Analysis. Multiliteracies. Mediation. Global citizenship education.

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1 Introduction

Digital storytelling (DST) is defined as "short personal stories created with digital technology tools that are then shared with others in order to present information, ideas and opinions on a range of topics and themes" (Robin 2016, 19). This definition extends the original focus of DST on personal narratives to also include other genres, such as historical and socio-political documentaries, commercials, tutorials, or news broadcasts (Christiansen, Koelzer 2016; Oskoz, Elola 2022). These stories are not only meant as tools of personal expression but also, and mainly, of education (Gregory-Signes 2014). Also the range of technologies to create a digital story (DS) has dramatically changed, moving from computer-based to mobile-based applications, which have opened a whole range of other digital and multimodal affordances for learners as well as teachers (Lambert 2018; Kim, Yatsu, Li 2021).

In the context of language education, DST has been used with young students (Kim, Yatsu, Li 2021; Kim, Jia 2020) as well as university students (Oskoz, Elola 2014; 2016a), and in the context of different foreign languages (FL), showing the many affordances for both students' FL and multiliteracy skills development.[1] Also research has shown that DST can be an invaluable tool in promoting students' deeper understanding of difficult topics, self-reflection, and empathy (Kim, Jia 2020; Jiang 2022) in line with the premises of Global Citizenship Education (GCE; Unesco 2015). On the other hand, studies are showing that DST can also support language students' development of "mediation of a text" skills (Council of Europe 2020) when used as a multimodal response to literature (Horne 2021). However, more research is needed to explore how students combine different modes (Oskoz, Elola 2022) and use remix strategies (Hafner 2015; see § 3.4.1) to create new meanings that reflect their understanding and interpretation of the text, while moving beyond it (Dail, Vásquez 2018).

Our research aims to fill this gap by reporting on the multimodal analysis of thirteen digital stories designed by upper secondary students in response to the reading of Young Adult Literature (YAL) in English as a FL. The multimodal analysis is complemented by the qualitative analysis of the classroom observations and artefacts showing how DST is in line with both the principles and objectives of multiliteracies pedagogy and GCE, while also contributing to enhancing students' skills regarding the 'mediation of a creative text'.

Although the research was carried out jointly by the three authors, Maria Elisa Fina wrote §§ 3.4.1, 4.1, and 4.2, Fabiana Fazzi wrote §§ 2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4.2, 4.3, and 5, and Elisa Da Lio wrote §§ 1 and 6.

1 Abidin et al. 2011; Fu, Yang, Yeh 2022; Oskoz, Elola 2016a; 2016b; Yang, Chen, Hung 2020.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Digital Storytelling to Promote Multiliteracy and Global Citizenship Skills Development in a FL

Digital Storytelling is today a well-established pedagogical tool across different disciplines. Its popularity is due to the power of storytelling as inherent to human nature combined with the creative use of digital tools and resources with which students are somewhat already familiar. In fact, as Kim, Yatsu, Li (2021) point out, young students already engage with digital practices that underpin DST, such as selecting pictures and sounds, filming, and editing, when creating short videos on TikTok and Instagram. This is why using DST is believed to lower the distance between formal and informal ways of knowing and learning, promoting students' motivation and active engagement with content. In this context, studies have shown that when DST is employed in the FL classroom, it can lead to different gains for students, including the enhancement of listening (Abidin et al. 2011), speaking (Fu, Yang, Yeh 2022) and writing skills (Oskoz, Elola 2016a; Tanrıkulu 2022), the increase of motivation (Yang, Chen, Hung 2020; Hava 2021) and willingness to communicate (Huang 2023), as well as the development of digital (Wake 2012) and other 21st century literacy skills (e.g. research, critical and creative thinking, interpersonal; Yang, Chen, Hung 2020). For example, Huang (2023) used DST with EFL university students in Taiwan and demonstrated its efficacy in promoting students' development of speaking proficiency, including lexical and grammar use, pronunciation, and intonation. In fact, DST offers rich opportunities to practise, and re-record spoken words which encourage learners to refine their pronunciation and enunciation (Oskoz, Elola 2022, 264). On the other hand, Fu, Yang and Yeh's (2022) research also demonstrates that DST can promote students' fluency, intended as speech rate and mean length of utterances, because it involves them in authentic communicative tasks focused on specific topics. As regards writing skills, Oskoz and Elola (2014) found that university students engaged in DST in Spanish as a FL not only developed a wide range of stylistic devices, learning to differentiate between the language required in a more traditional essay and in a DS, but also experimented with grammar, to convey the desired tone and rhythm, and vocabulary, to evoke the intended emotions. Oskoz and Elola (2016a) confirmed these results by showing that DST can promote students' writing styles and manners. As Castañeda (2013, 46) claims, when creating a DS, students are primarily engaged in the crafting, revision, and narration of the story, rather than on the use of technology which is secondary. It is this focus on writing in the DST process that helps foster students' "personal creativity and practice with specific discourse structures" (Oskoz, Elola 2014, 197).

However, when creating a DS students are not only involved in traditional literacy practices (reading and writing) but also in new literacy practices which require a wide range of skills, including: taking advantage of technological tools and meaningfully interacting with them (technological literacy); finding, evaluating, and synthesising information on the internet (information literacy); effectively orchestrating different modes (verbal, written, visual, and auditory) for meaning making (multimodal literacy); and learning to know themselves, developing empathy, and working with others in a constructive way (socio-emotional literacy).[2]

In this context, research has shown that DST is in line with the aims and principles of multiliteracies pedagogy, which extends the notion of literacy to include "the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (The New London Group 1996, 61) and addresses the different forms of knowledge and practices that characterise our multilingual and multicultural world. When creating a DS, students "select and manipulate semiotic resources like images, music, transition effects, and narration" (Kim, Yatsu, Li 2021, 2) and use different remixing strategies (Hafner 2015; see § 3.4.1) to create new meanings and express deep emotions that would otherwise remain unexpressed through only using the verbal mode (Hafner 2015). It is this process of multimodal composing which helps students bridge the gap between in- and out-of-school experiences and develop their identity (Kim, Yatsu, Li 2021, 1).

In this sense, DST is also an effective tool in the context of Global Citizenship Education (GCE; Unesco 2015). By thinking carefully about what they want to say and finding their own perspective, DST has in fact proven to promote students' deep learning and self-reflection (Kim, Li 2021) as well as civic participation (Jiang 2022). For example, through using DST, the lower secondary students involved in Kim and Jia's (2020) study were not only able to develop a better understanding of mental health disorders, but also to connect with this difficult topic in a personal manner. The analysis of the stories developed by these students shows how they underwent deep interpretative and reflective processes which fostered their empathy towards people suffering from these disorders as well as the reflection on their own emotions and experiences. Finally, when DST is carried out in the context of GCE, it can also help transform students into 'activists' (Jiang 2022) as DS are always meant to develop different types of strategies to connect and share with an authentic audience (Hafner 2014).

2 Vuorikari Rina, Kluzer, Punie 2022-DigComp 2.2; Council of Europe 2018; Pegrum, Hockly, Dudeney 2022; Robin 2016; Menegale and Haring, *infra*.

Despite the affordances of DST briefly outlined above, research has also highlighted the challenges related to producing a DS in an additional language. Both students and teachers agree that DST is a time-consuming process that requires linguistic, research, and technical skills that need time to be developed and scaffolded (see Lugossy et al., *infra*). Additionally, while students might be familiar with the use of technology, they often lack the multimodal literacy skills necessary to successfully and critically orchestrate different modalities for meaning making (Pegrum, Hockly, Dudeney 2022; Oskoz, Elola 2022; Fu, Yang, Yeh 2022). Finally, dealing with difficult topics and encouraging students to become civic participants require well thought-out workshops that allow students a safe space of discussion and self-expression (Kim, Jia 2020; Jiang 2022) as well as of language development.

2.2 Digital Storytelling as a Multimodal Reader Response to Literature

A less popular, but rising, field of research is DST as a multimodal reader response to literature. The recent introduction of the new literature scales in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2020) has certainly increased both researchers' and teachers' interest in how to develop students' skills of mediating a text. These skills require language students to express different types of response to literature along an increasingly complex cognitive and linguistic continuum, which goes from being able to express the effect of a work of literature on them as individuals (e.g. engagement, interpretation) to being able to give broader and deeper interpretations of such a work (e.g. analysis, evaluation; see Menegale, *infra*). Multimodal composing has already been established as a powerful tool to promote these skills in the language classroom (Kress 2003). In Malta, for example, Camilleri Grima and Mantellato (2021) asked adult students of Maltese as a FL and language teachers to produce short videos in response to their engagement with a variety of creative texts, including literature. Their findings show that the use of multimodality "was definitely more effective in stimulating reflection and empathy than if they had to rely only on one mode of communication" (280). On the other hand, multimodal composing has also been proven to support learner-centred approaches to literary texts (Bland 2018), promoting dialogue and reading motivation, fostering the sharing of different perspectives and interpretations (Ludwig 2021), and creating robust responses that extend beyond the text while remaining grounded in it (Dail, Vásquez 2018; Horne 2021).

One multimodal type of composition is DST. For example, Horne (2021) engaged A1-A2 students of French as a FL in the reading of *The Outsider* (1942) by Albert Camus and found that students were

able to engage more personally in the analysis and interpretation of the novel, changing their reading posture. However, when analysing the stories closely, students appeared to have only concentrated on character's mental states, failing to incorporate post-colonial themes. In another study, Hirsch and Macleroy (2020) harnessed the affordances of DST to engage secondary multilingual students with poetry. Their findings show that using DST as a reader response encourages students to bring together "traces from personal stories, experiences, cultures and languages to construct new meanings" (Hirsch, Macleroy 2020, 54), while also helping them to connect and be more kind to each other. However, the two authors also highlighted the challenges encountered in the first few weeks as their students "struggled to grasp the concept that they would be making their own version" of a DS (50). Indeed, despite DST being widely recognised today as a valuable tool in the FL classroom, there is insufficient research on how students orchestrate and remix different resources to create meanings that reflect the text while also extending it (Oskaz, Elola 2022; Kim, Yatsu, Li 2021; Dail, Vásquez 2018).

In light of the above, our research questions are the following:

1. How did upper secondary EFL students orchestrate and remix across different modes and resources to creatively respond to YAL through DST?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of using DST in response to YAL in the EFL upper secondary classroom?

3 The Study

3.1 Description of the Digital Storytelling Process

The DST project reported in this article was part of the research carried out within the Erasmus+ project DigLit.[3] This project aimed at developing upper secondary students' multiliteracy and global citizenship skills in English as a FL through the reading of Young Adult (YA) novels and follow up design of a digital story (DS) inspired by the novel they had read. Specifically, in the reading phase of the project, the students selected the novel they were most interested in and engaged in pre-, during- and post-reading activities on two digital platforms (Glose for Education and Moodle) (see Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*). These activities (or better prompts) aimed to stimulate

3 The Erasmus+ project DigLit: *Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises* was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and the findings of this project are presented in this paper (`https://diglit.narrativedidactics.org/`).

them to reflect on aspects of the novel, draw connections between the text and themselves and between the text and similar events taking place in the world, and become aware of the thematic, structural and formal features of the novel. Each YA novel allowed the students to explore both global issues, such as mental health, LGBTQ+ issues, racism, and other themes related to teenagerhood, such as coming of age and friendship. After the reading, the students were guided to create a reader response in the form of a digital story through a mixture of online and in-presence sessions designed by the three authors and delivered with the support of the English teachers at the partner schools in Italy and Hungary. In the first online session, the students were introduced to digital storytelling and were encouraged to reflect on the characteristics of a digital story (Lambert 2018) through a guided multimodal analysis.[4] Specifically, they were asked to watch a few examples of digital stories and identify both macro features (e.g. length, theme and structure of the story, and the multimedia elements used in the story), and micro features (e.g. the style of English and prosody, the type of music and images used, and the emotions conveyed through their combination). In the follow up in-presence sessions, the students were asked to brainstorm ideas for their digital story by discussing the following questions about the YA novel they had read:

- What is the YA novel about? (themes, topics, characters, and moments);
- Which of these themes/topics/characters/moments might be of inspiration for your digital story?
- How can you relate them to your own experience?

As part of this brainstorming phase, the students also discussed what type of story (personal, realistic, imaginative) they wanted to create and what message they wanted to convey, how they would work (in group or individually) and what digital application they would use in creating the video. Thus, the students first wrote a script and then completed a storyboard[5] which they shared with the other groups through story-circles[6] (Lambert 2018). After completing the storyboard, the students collected or created resources, recorded the voice over, and produced the first version of their DS, which they showed in class to get feedback before working on the final version.

4 The multimodal analysis sheet can be viewed and downloaded at this link on the DigLit project website: `https://diglit.narrativedidactics.org/teacher-resources`.

5 The storyboard can be viewed and downloaded at this link on the DigLit project website: `https://diglit.narrativedidactics.org/teacher-resources/`.

6 Story-circle is an activity in which people share their stories before moving onto script writing or making a storyboard and receive feedback from their peers.

At the end of the project, a public event was organised in each of the two partner schools to allow the students to present their digital stories to the school community and their parents, before uploading them to the project website.[7]

3.2 Participants

While both the Italian and Hungarian students from the partner schools participated in the digital storytelling project, in this study we will only concentrate on the DS, DST process, and perceptions of the Italian students. These were 39 students aged 16-17 with a B1-B2 level in English as a FL and were new to the process of creating a DS. The students were selected based on their teachers' availability to participate in the project and belonged to two classrooms. During the DST project, the students worked in mixed groups of three to four people based on the book they had read.

3.3 Data Collection

The data included (1) the digital stories, (2) the students' reflective diaries, and (3) classroom observations and artefacts.

3.3.1 Digital Stories

The primary source of data for this study are the 13 digital stories produced by the Italian students in response to the reading of four YA novels:

- *We Were Liars* (2014) by Emily Lockart, a psychological horror novel that tackles mental health and wellbeing, specifically portraying the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as the pressure and expectations that come with wealth and privilege (three digital stories);
- *The Maze Runner* (2009) by James Dashner, a book that explores the importance of memory for both the individual and society and the difficulties of growing up (three digital stories);
- *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas, a novel that was written following the killing of a 22-year-old African American by

7 The digital stories produced by the students during the DigLit project can be viewed at this link: `https://unitube.uni-graz.at/portal/aufzeichnungen.html?epFrom=3b2170b7-b1b0-4d39-be47-a3456ebcc4ed`.

the police and that deals with police brutality and racism (four digital stories);
- *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, a coming-of-age novel that tells the story of two young teenage boys grappling with self-discovery, especially in relation to their ethnic identity and sexuality (three digital stories).

The videos were 3-5 minutes long and were created using a variety of digital applications (i.e. Canva, Capcut, Clipchamp, Filmora, and Imovie) that allowed the students to combine stock images and music, video clips, and self-created multimedia sources and effects.

3.3.2 Students' Reflective Diary

At the end of the DST process, the students were asked to fill in an online reflective diary aimed at collecting their perceptions of the benefits and challenges of designing a DS in English as a FL as well as giving a brief account of their design choices and motives, specifically relating the DS to the YA novel they had read. The online reflective diary was administered as a Google Form consisting of an introductory section, briefly explaining the objective of the diary, a request to indicate the title of the book that had inspired the DS and of the DS itself, and ten open-ended questions. These questions asked students to explain what they intended to communicate with their story, what aspects of the novel had inspired them and how the story related to them, the design process, the effects of DST on their language and multimodality skills, what they enjoyed, what they found challenging, and what they were most proud of.

The students were asked to complete the reflecting diary within two weeks from the end of the project. While the questions were in English, the students were given a choice to reply in whichever language (English or Italian) they felt most comfortable with.

3.3.3 Classroom Observations and Artefacts

Field notes were collected during the entire DTS process by the second and third author with the aim of recording the students' brainstorming and discussion of the YA novel, negotiation of design choices during storyboarding and multimedia collection/creation, and issues encountered. Audio recordings, photographs and storyboards were also collected to complement the field notes further enriching the understanding of the students' multiliteracy skills development during the DST process.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

3.4.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) has been used to analyse qualitatively the DS. Accepted modes of communication are writing, the static and dynamic image, sound, speech, gesture, gaze, and posture in embodied interaction (Jewitt 2013, 253).

These modes have been extensively theorised into analytical frameworks for multimodal discourse analysis. For the analysis of the DS produced by the students, we will refer to the model of soundscape (van Leeuwen 1999); for visual analysis, we will refer to the Visual Communication Grammar (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006).[8] A soundscape is a composite semiotic system made up of speech, music, and sounds. In the soundscape these elements integrate with each other (van Leeuwen 1999, 4) to define a "*meaning potential*" (van Leeuwen 1999, 10; emphasis in the original), which can be investigated by means of a set of parameters ('perspective'; 'time and rhythm'; 'interaction of voices'; 'melody'; 'voice quality and timbre'; 'modality'). As for the visual mode, in their Visual Communication Grammar, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) draw on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, Matthiessen 2004) to describe visuals in terms of three types of meanings. These are 'representational' meaning (the way aspects of the world are represented, and representation can be 'narrative' or 'conceptual'), 'interpersonal' meaning (the interaction between represented participants and interactive participants), and 'compositional meaning' (the way items are placed and composed in images).

Also relevant to this study is 'remix' as discussed by Hafner (2015) and Kim, Yatsu, Li (2021). In his study, Hafner (503-4) identifies four types of remixing techniques: *layering* (or 'mixing modes'), *chunking* (or 'mixing resources'), *blending* (or 'mixing generic resources'), and *intercultural blending* (or 'mixing cultural resources'). *Layering* is the integration of distinct modes of communication; *chunking* is the combination of students' multimodal artefacts with those created by others; *blending* is the combination of different genres to create a hybrid blend; *intercultural blending* is the combination of elements from both local and global cultures.

As far as the methodology is concerned, the DS produced by the students are so diversified that manual, non-software-aided

8 The analysis of gestures will not be carried out as it is not applicable to the DS. Indeed, the students never appear in the videos as characters of the story, with one exception only (DS *Learn from your mistakes*: `https://unitube.uni-graz.at/portal/aufzeichnungen.html?id=de6b1302-86bd-45d8-aa46-5349663e37e9`.

annotation was deemed the most useful method to identify how the different semiotic resources have been used and combined.

3.4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The reflective diaries and classroom field notes were analysed following Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) thematic analysis. We first compiled a start list of possible codes derived from the literature on digital storytelling (see §§ 2.1 and 2.2), focusing on the students' design choices as related to the development of their language, global citizenship, multiliteracy, and mediation skills as well as on their perceived benefits and issues of DST. Data was first coded using this initial list of codes, which was expanded to include emergent codes, such as 'difficulties in relating to the text'. During the second round of coding, we worked at a more abstract level, combining the codes identified during the first round into categories that represented theoretical constructs. The data collected through the students' reflective diaries and classroom observations were analysed by the second author and triangulated (Dörnyei 2007) with the multimodal analysis of the digital stories carried out by the first author. This helped us in our understanding of the data and discuss any discrepancies in our interpretation.

4 Results

We will begin the analysis by providing an overview of the main features of the DS focusing on narration modes and organisation of contents. Then, a few selected excerpts will be analysed in detail to show how the different semiotic resources are combined for meaning making. Finally, the qualitative analysis of the students' reflective diaries and classroom observations and artefacts will be provided.

4.1 General features of the DS

In all the DS, the narrators are the students with their voices alternating usually at turning points in the narration. In terms of remixing (Hafner 2015), all the DS are realised through layering, but a few also involve chunking and blending. The most frequent structure of the DS is the following:

- part 1: presentation of the topic and key points;
- part 2: development of the key points;
- part 3: call to action/conclusion.

In part 1, the topic is introduced by means of a general statement, which is then followed by a series of reflections upon the key issues that the students decided to narrate. At this reflective stage the inclusive 'we' pronoun is frequently used, plausibly because, being teenagers themselves, the students feel directly involved in the narrated themes and want at the same time to involve the audience. At the visual level, this introductory part is frequently supported by static pictures that semantically match the verbal message. The pictures can be associated with the representational meaning (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006) and are mostly narrative pictures, as they often contain participants carrying out actions in groups. In terms of interpersonal level, these groups of people sometimes gaze directly at the viewer, thus increasing involvement, while in others they do not. In part 2, the development of the key points raised in part 1 takes place in different ways. In a few cases, the students embedded YouTube videos in their DS (chunking). When dynamic pictures are not included, static pictures are used with more or less direct connections with the verbal message. In part 3, the conclusion usually involves a call to action in the form of advice, rhetorical questions or proposed solutions supported by the visual component. At this stage there is a clear – and probably conscious – intention to leave the viewer with some food for thought and to convey some practical intent.

At the verbal level, other features that have been noticed include significant quotes from the book, which in some cases appear on the screen and are read by the speaker, the use of rhetorical questions addressing directly the viewer (e.g., "Have you ever thought …"), the use of 'mental processes' (Halliday 2004), i.e. invitations that are not aimed at material action but that rather operate at the cognitive level (e.g., "Imagine waking up and not realising…").

As for soundscape, non-diegetic music[9] usually accompanies the narration. The preference is mainly for calm and melancholic piano music, but other genres sometimes are also involved depending on the emotions to be conveyed. Furthermore, specific sounds are used to produce emotional effects.

Expectedly, the DS are not flawless. The most common inaccuracies involve mispronunciation, excessive use of external material, filling the slides with the whole verbal message uttered by the speaker, music being too loud during the narration, or a non-relevance relation between the uttered verbal message and the visuals.

9 Diegetic music is used only in the DS *Could this be your story*, which relates to the novel *The Hate U Give*.

4.2 Multimodal Analysis of Selected Excerpts

Due to space constraints, the analysis will be focused on a selection of fragments from the DS that were deemed most representative of the students' multimodal response to YAL. Since we are interested in the students' *own* multimodal production, the excerpts of external videos that the students embedded in their DS will not be analysed.

4.2.1 Social Pressure – the Witch in Our Life

This DS relates to the novel *We were liars*, which is about post-traumatic stress disorder (see § 3.3.1).[10] The main character is Cadence Sinclair, the eldest grandchild of the wealthy Harris Sinclair, owner of Beechwood Island (off the coast of Massachusetts), where the Sinclairs spend their summers in a house called Clairmont. Although her family pretends to be perfect, her parents and relatives continuously bicker over inheritance. In the summer when she was fifteen, Cadence has a mysterious accident that causes her to have gaps in memory and gives her migraines. She spends the next two years trying to solve the mystery of what really happened to her that night. She finally remembers that she had persuaded her cousins and friends (the Liars) to start a fire to destroy Clairmont, but the Liars themselves died in the fire.

With chapter 16, Cadence begins interspersing fairy tales among the chapters. In the DS here analysed, the students have basically multimodally rewritten the fairy tale about the three children and the envious witch. Social pressure is visually represented by a witch that enters teenagers' lives and deceives them, leading them to mental health issues. Mental disruption is symbolised by a stylised dynamic picture of fire, which in turn refers to the fire set by the Liars in the book. The story is narrated by the voices of the three female students, who are non-diegetic narrators alternating at turning points in the story and voicing the witch by means of direct speech. The plot takes place as follows:

1. Introduction: the definition of social pressure is provided;
2. Exposition: three beautiful children are born, and they are gifted with virtues by fairies;
3. Rising action: the witch is introduced; she is envious of the three children and wants to take their gifts away;

10 DS *Social pressure – The witch in your life:* https://unitube.uni-graz.at/portal/aufzeichnungen.html?id=751b0903-8ab6-4a79-ba23-a480a9537b66.

4. Climax: the witch visits the children on their 16th birthday, and persuades them to set up fire. All their gifts disappear in the fire;
5. Falling action: call to action and advice.

Soundscape plays a key role in this DS. The sound of heartbeat is used throughout the DS and its pace changes according to the phase of the story. It is fast when the definition of 'social pressure' is provided – plausibly to emotionally convey the anxiety produced by pressure – and at the key moment of the climax (from 00:02:35), when the fire consumes the gifts of the children. In terms of perspective – i.e., the relative loudness of simultaneous sounds (van Leeuwen 1999, 23) – the heartbeat increases in loudness as the narrator lists the gifts that are being destroyed by the flames, thus increasing the emotional load. The moment at which the children are completely void of their gifts is marked by the sound of a flatline, which is commonly associated with clinical death.

Another interesting multimodal combination can be detected at the beginning of the climax. The static picture of the witch holding a sceptre with a raven on it – with the raven conveying an omen of death – matches the words uttered by the witch when she persuades the children to light the match. The repetition of "Go on, she said" for three times is meaningful here, as it stresses how disruptive social pressure is and conveys the feeling of anxiety that affects teenagers.

4.2.2 Friendship or Survival?

This DS relates to the novel *The Maze Runner*.[11] The story is set in a distant future, where a group of teens are mysteriously teleported into a giant, stone maze. Among them is Thomas, the main character of the story. The teens' memories have been erased, and they have no indication as to how to escape. To go back home, they must solve the maze, and this will involve them in difficult challenges and conflicts.

In terms of 'remixing' (Hafner 2015), not only layering but also chunking has been used here, as the students embedded YouTube videos containing excerpts from the book-related movie.[12] They decided to focus on the part of the story in which Ben has become dangerous for the safety of the group and a decision needs to be made about whether to banish him in the maze or save him (from 00:00:29). Dynamic pictures from the film were layered with a soundscape

11 DS *Friendship or Survival*: `https://unitube.uni-graz.at/portal/aufzeichnungen.html?id=93a5e13f-9ec2-4168-9229-d9bfcf071553`.

12 *Maze Runner* (2014), directed by Wes Ball.

characterised by 'plurality' in interaction of voices (van Leeuwen 1999, 84): suspense-generating, rhythmic music in the background and the students' voices in the foreground alternate in a dialogue that effectively symbolises the 'friendship or survival?' conflict. The students produced the dialogue script by themselves to impersonate two characters of the story: one wanting to save Ben, the other making the safety of the group prevail over friendship-related feelings. Thus, diegetic narration here increases emotional impact and viewer involvement.

4.3 Analysis of Reflective Diaries and Classroom Observations

The analysis of the students' reflective diaries shows that by producing digital stories, the students felt to have developed different literacy skills: language, digital, multimodal, and creative. As regards language, the students claimed to have increased their vocabulary, pronunciation, and writing, but also their confidence in speaking and engaging with media and resources in English. In fact, they stated that writing the script forced them to look for the right words to fulfil their communicative intention in the most accurate way possible, while recording their voice multiple times encouraged them to work on their pronunciation, which in turn helped them feel more confident in speaking in English. On the other hand, having to browse through resources and using tools in English also gave them the feeling they were using English authentically and not simply as a learning tool.

As regards digital and multimodal literacy skills, the students claimed to have increased their ability to use editing applications and combine different modes to construct a coherent and powerful story. Creativity was also among the positive outcomes identified by the students: many affirmed that both creating the script and producing the video required considerable experimenting to find effective communicative and technical solutions. For example, a student working on *Could this be your story?* claimed what follows: "We had to get creative in order to film the different clips because sometimes we messed up something little and we had to re-do all; about the speech we had to change our way of speaking depending on the character we were playing".

As for the positive aspects of the DST process, the students claimed to have particularly enjoyed both the collaborative and more technical aspects of the project. Working in groups and sharing their products with their peers and with the school/parent community were deemed as joyful and empowering moments. At the same time, reflecting on the topic/book and creating the videos were also seen as

important positive aspects of the project from the point of view of collaboration. Here are a couple of significant comments:

1. "I especially liked working in a group and collaborating with my classmates";
2. "I liked most the part when we all together saw the video".

As for negative aspects, students claimed to have encountered difficulties in the brainstorming phase to find the right idea to convey especially considering the short length of the video, as well as in the production phase, when searching for the right images and sounds and learning how to use the editing tools. Also, most students agreed that creating the DS was time-consuming and added to their study workload. However, the students were generally proud of their final product and of being able to tell a story "from beginning to end" with a strong emotional content delivered through the sensible orchestration of different modes and an original script. Several students, in fact, highlighted that their video was "completely" their doing, demonstrating a sense of ownership and empowerment.

The analysis of the classroom observations demonstrates that the DST process allowed the students to practise their mediation skills in line with the new scales relevant to creative texts and literature (Council of Europe 2020). In fact, in the pre-production phase, they engaged in long discussions about the main themes, characters, and episodes of the novels, and how these related to their personal experience. An exemplary comment is the following:

3. "Like the characters, we have to face difficult situations, we have friends, and we find ourselves in situations where we have to convince others of our opinion and step out of our comfort zone".

Furthermore, discussing important passages and extracting key-quotes was found to be a difficult process, too. In the field notes, the second author noticed that the students had at first a hard time remembering what the novels were about. This is due to the long break between the reading phase and the DST sessions, but also to the fact that the students did not have physical copies they could browse but only the digital versions uploaded on Glose for Education. The analysis of the classroom observations and of the DS (especially the storyboards) also shows the high level of critical reasoning behind every design choice. The student group working on *Social pressure – The witch in your life*, for instance, had a long discussion about the role of sound in their story and how the change in the pace of the heartbeat was important to signal the different phases in the story. As for the storyboards, while some of the first drafts were not very detailed, others appeared much richer in terms of visualising and defining the students' production process. Finally, during the DST sessions, the

students referred often to the guided multimodal analysis conducted at the beginning of the project showing an awareness of the different macro and micro features of a DS.

5 Discussion

Our first research question asked how upper secondary EFL students orchestrate and remix across different modes and resources to creatively respond to YAL through DST. Our findings demonstrate that students were able to structure their stories following Lambert's (2018) *story arc* (beginning, middle, and end) and including the main characteristics of a DS (Robin 2016). Students also creatively experimented across different multimodal genres (e.g. fairy tale, book teaser, documentary, poetry), effectively using and combining different multimodal resources to reflect the thematic, structural, and formal features of the novel as well as create new personal meanings. Many of the DS included important quotes from the YA novels (e.g. *Could this be your story?)* or reinterpreted a scene from the novel (e.g. *Friendship or survival*) or enhanced/transformed an aspect of the book to communicate their chosen message (e.g. *Social pressure – The witch in our life*). This demonstrates the potentiality of DST as a digital mediation task (Council of Europe 2018) that unlocks students' imagination and meaning-making through multimodality and transmediation.[13] In fact, students had to work across different sign systems to build their own interpretation of the novel, thinking carefully about the associations between the written text and the other modes, which is intensive design work (Kress 2003; Kesler, Gibson, Turansky 2016). In so doing, they also used a variety of remix strategies creating stories that (i) remain recognisable has having the assigned work of literature as its source material, (ii) alter/add to advance the story substantially by transforming the literature, (iii) take risks and push boundaries to present a creative product, (iv) integrate multiple modes of composition, and (v) communicate the message clearly (see Jenkins 2013 quoted in Dail, Vásquez 2018, 95). The use of these strategies shows how DST can provide a complex aesthetic experience, encouraging students to stay true to the text while also creatively playing with their interpretations, that integrate both personal and critical perspectives (Kesler, Gibson, Turansky 2016). In this context, working collaboratively on a DS transformed students into co-inquirers of topics, themes, and other issues dealt with in the novels in line with the mediation

13 Transmediation is "the translation of content from one sign system into another" and it "is fundamental to meaning-making" (Mills 2011, 56).

scales of the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020). Additionally, students creatively used different discourse features (e.g. "Who said talking isn't doing something?") in the target language as "rhetorical hooks" (Hafner 2014, 655) showing an understanding of how to use language to appeal to the intended audience. Finally, most of the stories presented a call to action, confirming that DST can encourage students to become civic participants (Kim, Jia 2020; Jiang 2022). However, students' DS were not exempt of problems, which highlights the need to offer them more opportunities to rehearse the script multiple times to both work on their pronunciation and enunciation skills (Oskoz, Elola 2016b), and develop digital and multimodal literacy skills to better orchestrate the different modes (Pegrum, Hockly, Dudeney 2022).

In response to the second research question (*What are the benefits and challenges of using DST in response to YAL in the EFL upper secondary classroom?*), our findings confirm previous research on the benefits of DST for language students in terms of developing language (Oskoz, Elola 2014, 2016a) and multiliteracy skills, including digital and multimodal (Wake 2012), creative and critical (Yang, Chen, Hung 2020), and socio-emotional (Council of Europe 2018). Indeed, one of the things that students most appreciated was the opportunity to work with their peers, which scaffolded their learning (sociocultural theory; see Oskoz, Elola 2022) and allowed them to overcome problems (Hirsch, Macleroy 2020) developing a sense of belonging to a community (socio-emotional skills; Menegale, *infra*). Students also appreciated the guided multimodal analysis carried out at the beginning of the DST process, confirming Pegrum, Hockly, and Dudeney's (2022) claim according to which students need guidance to understand how to exploit the affordances of different technological tools to create efficient multimodal ensembles. Interestingly, students also felt that working on the DST gave them the chance to use English authentically through engaging with both resources and digital applications in English (Christiansen, Koelzer 2016).

Our analysis of classroom observations and artefacts also shows that students developed their global citizenship and mediation skills. Indeed, students deeply reflected on and discussed aspects related to the global issues dealt with in the novels, building connections between the novel, themselves, and the world, examining relations of power, and learning to question and act (Bland 2018). At the same time, they also articulated their different responses to the YA novels, explaining what they liked about the literary text and what they thought were the most interesting aspects, describing characters, giving personal interpretations, and commenting on the form of expression and style (Council of Europe 2020). However, our findings also highlight some challenges, such as the time-consuming nature of DST and the difficulty to work on the digital formats of the novels.

Concerning this last issue, Pegrum, Hockly, and Dudeney (2022, 13) argue that when students are engaged in long-form reading, "it is easier to build a cognitive map of a text when turning the pages of a three-dimensional book than when scrolling on a flat screen, in part because information becomes encoded in memory along with its spatial location". As in the first phase students read digital copies of the novels (see Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*), locating relevant information in the text for the design of their DS might have proven difficult. More research is needed to understand the impact of reading digital copies on the DST process.

6 Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

Our study shows that DST can be an invaluable tool to promote both traditional and new literacy skills and to foster students' global citizenship skills in a FL. It also highlights some pedagogical implications. First, the importance of providing students with multimodal analysis workshops in which they have the chance to analyse different multimodal compositions and discuss how different modes are used to create new meanings (Gregory-Signes 2014). Second, the need to give students ample time to rehearse their scripts, working on their pronunciation and enunciation (Oskoz, Elola 2016b). Third, the need to offer them technical support with technology, without limiting their options in choosing the digital applications they want to work with (Christiansen, Koelzer 2016).

Our research also shows that students developed their mediation of text skills in the target language, using different remixing strategies (Hafner 2015) and genres to develop digital narratives that transmediated the source book. The use of DST as a multimodal reader response to literature is an interesting development and should be explored further especially in terms of how to guide students' transmediation process in line with the CEFR (Camilleri Grima, Mantellato 2021).

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From Readers to Creators Secondary Students' Perceptions of Creating Digital Stories: Challenges and Potential Benefits

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Abstract This study explores the benefits and challenges of creating digital stories as experienced by Hungarian secondary school students who participated in an international Digital Social Reading project and who translated their shared reading experience into a digital narrative. In pursuit of finding connections between the digital stories and their creators, a focus group was held to gain data regarding students' lived experiences with creating digital stories. The findings of this qualitative study may dispel some doubts about using digital narratives in the classroom and present the creation process in a way that makes it approachable for teachers and students alike. Some teachers find it difficult to take even small steps towards a more digitised classroom environment, so for those practitioners, deep-diving into this fully realised Digital Social Reading project and its outcome will prove useful as a resource.

Keywords Young Adult Literature. EFL. Digital story. Students' beliefs about themselves.

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1 Introduction

Providing vivid and meaningful contexts for language learning has been a continuing challenge for foreign language (FL) teachers across contexts. Classroom-based studies document that integrating narratives, particularly carefully chosen children's literature and Young Adult Literature (YAL) have the power to enhance students' cognitive and affective engagement and maintain their language learning motivation (Fazzi 2023; Lee 2013; Lugossy 2024; Sun 2021; 2022).

In this study, we focus on secondary students' multi-layered experiences with YAL, that is, with texts that target readers aged 12-18 and which typically explore themes that young adult readers would find relatable, such as coming-of-age, identity, relationships, and societal expectations (Bland 2013; Harrison, Ehlers 2024). We explore students' emic perspectives on creating digital narratives as a response to their readings in the framework of an international digital social reading project in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. During the project, the participating students read novels in English and created digital stories based on a chosen book. This study uses the term digital story to refer to short digital productions in which learners share their own stories or create a fictional narrative (Haring, *infra*; Lambert 2013; Kesler et al. 2016; Schuch 2020). In doing so, they also record their voices and add images or act the story out themselves.

In what follows, we overview some of the relevant literature on the role of narratives, mostly YAL in an EFL context. We discuss how engaging with relatable stories, including YAL and digital storytelling, creates an intrinsically motivating context for language learning and how it shapes learners' cognitive, affective, linguistic, and literacy development.

In the second part, we present findings gained from a focus group involving four Hungarian secondary-school students for whom English is a FL, and we explore how creating digital stories in English shaped participants' identities as readers and creators of stories, and as language learners.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Contextualising Narratives in Learning

Focusing on the role of relevant reading materials in children's personality development, Bettelheim (1976) argued that unlike textbooks, children's literature addresses the unsafe aspects of existence in relatable ways. Much in the same way, literature written for young adults addresses themes that resonate with the unique experiences and challenges faced by adolescents (Harrison, Ehlers 2024).

It deals with topics that open dimensions of experience in meaningful and emotionally relatable ways. Because of this, exposure to YAL promotes self-knowledge and a more discerning understanding of human relationships. It also nurtures interpersonal relationships and social and cultural participation (Vogrinčič et al. 2024).

Findings suggest that social-affective benefits result both from reading and listening to relatable stories, as well as from participants creating stories themselves. Creating verbal and visual narratives as responses to the YAL, as well as other deep impact narratives, adds depth to the reading experience by providing additional perspectives on the text, it increases students' willingness to communicate, while also cultivating a sense of community and connection among participants (Camilleri Grima, Mantellato 2021; King 1993; 2005; King, Nikolov 1992).

While improving young adult readers' emotional and psychological well-being (Mak, Fancourt 2020) and social relationships, YAL offers a relevant context for developing learners' language and literacy skills across languages. Research demonstrates that systematic engagement with texts in a foreign language promotes reading comprehension, supports incidental language learning, and provides opportunities for interaction (Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*; Krashen 2004; Menegale, *infra*; Vogrinčič et al. 2024).

With their focus on contemporary social, political, economic, and cultural issues experienced by a particular young adult person who often appears as embedded in a group, YAL texts have the power to make target culture more accessible in the EFL context. Reading YAL helps to acquire a dynamic understanding of culture and cultural phenomena, as it provides a complex framework and relatable contexts for facts that remain open for interpretation. In this sense, dealing with YAL may enhance the development of intercultural communication skills by developing awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences. While engaging with YAL texts, students can discover their own identities, including their cultural biases and can construct a sense of agency through topics that relate to the target language culture (Haring, *infra*; Savitz et al. 2021).

2.2 Digital Stories: Impact on Engagement, Language, and Literacy

Digital storytelling refers to the process of creating and sharing personal narratives by using digital technology. It combines multimedia elements including still images, music, sound effects, voiceovers (as narration or dialogue), and print to go beyond the traditional video format to tell a story (Kesler et al. 2016, 42). Lambert (2013) identified seven key features of digital storytelling, which explain how

multimodal meaning-making takes place. According to Lambert's frame, digital storytelling 1) is self-revelatory, 2) uses personal voice, 3) builds on scenes about a lived experience, 4) employs photos or still images, 5) goes with a soundtrack of music or ambient sound, 6) is short, something under five minutes, 7) builds on self-expression and self-awareness (2013, 37-8). Moreover, digital storytelling often experiments with non-linear narratives or even multiple outcomes inviting the audience to add their reading and participate actively in the meaning-making process.

Recent research reveals that this form of combining traditional storytelling with additional digital sources of meaning can be a powerful and engaging tool for learning in foreign language classrooms (Kesler et al. 2016; Robin 2008; Schuch 2020). First, digital storytelling encourages students' multimodal engagement and opens new channels of scaffolding language. Kesler, Gibson, and Turansky (2016, 43-6) have found that digital storytelling increases students' willingness to respond to historical fiction: according to their study, students' responses became more engaged and in-depth, while the activity system connected to digital storytelling generated collaborative zones of proximal development and opportunities to take on roles that shaped their identities. Studies also document that students' comprehension of literary texts also developed while using digital stories (Kesler et al. 2016). From a slightly different perspective, Tour, Gindidis, and Newton's study (2019) focuses on how experiential digital storytelling affects the teaching and learning of digital literacies as social practices, and they suggest that digital literacies are essential in students' successful participation in digital spaces in a foreign language they are learning.

Tour et al. argue that digital storytelling offers teachers new ways to engage their students "in complex transliteracies practices in which meanings shift and change over time, space, relationships, and resources" (2019, 1). Thus, digital storytelling emerges as a pedagogical technique to create a safe environment in which students can experiment with connecting technology, digital platforms, storytelling, and personal engagement in meaningful interactions. According to Tan et al. (2024), the classroom use of digital storytelling has brought significant changes in traditional teaching methods to facilitate more active student participation. Using a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis), Tan et al. (2024, 625-9) report that classroom-based research on the impact and challenges of digital storytelling has multiplied recently, including such topics as skills development, fluency development, vocabulary development, translanguaging, collaboration, metacognition strategies, problem-solving, analytical skills development, as well as emotional and behaviour management. To explore and use the full pedagogical capacity of digital storytelling and make its methodology

more broadly available to different educational levels and schools, digital storytelling research should continue to focus on classroom work, also in a longitudinal setting (Tan et al. 2024, 635-6).

3 The Study

3.1 Research Context and Pedagogical Design

The context of our study was the Erasmus+ project called *Lit. Up Your Phone: A Digital Toolkit for ESL/EFL Classroom to Combat Social Inequalities in Times of Covid 19 Crises* (DigLit), which aimed to support teachers in promoting secondary school students' digital literacy and their awareness of social issues while reading for pleasure in EFL. During the project, students from Austria, Italy, and Hungary were involved in a Digital Social Reading project relying on the use of Glose for Education (see Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*), an e-book reading application which allows users to read e-books, share annotations, and connect with other readers. As a follow-up task, students were also encouraged to create digital stories that reflected their perspectives or experiences related to the stories they chose to read.

During the digital narrative-based project, first contact was made between students and facilitators, the latter being EFL teachers from the schools involved in the DigLit project. The facilitators were not necessarily the English teachers of the students who participated in the project. Zoom-based workshops were organised by the partner university instructors to present students a framework for creating digital stories based on their readings. The fundamentals and building blocks of digital stories were showcased and templates were shared with participants, which served as scaffolding throughout the entirety of the project. By using these templates, key steps, such as brainstorming and storyboarding, were made more accessible for students, and helped them reflect on the production processes of digital narratives in a graphically organised manner.

3.2 Research Question

Having a smaller subset of students who participated in the project, encouraged us to narrow the scope of our research and place our interests on the participants' creative processes in digital storytelling. This would allow for more personal experiences to be recalled and later, understood better. This introspection into what went on behind the scenes when it came to producing their narratives would also make it possible for us, as researchers and teachers, to have a closer look at less apparent phenomena. To explore students' lived

experiences with producing digital stories, we asked the following research question:

> RQ: What are the students' perceived benefits and challenges while creating digital stories?

3.3 Participants

Altogether ten Hungarian students participated in the project, and four of them volunteered to participate in the focus group interview reported in the present study. All the participants come from the same secondary school, which is the partner school of the University of Pécs, typically attended by high-performing, socioeconomically privileged students who are motivated to pursue their studies in higher education. The school offers six tracks for specialised education, which means a more intensive approach to certain subject areas and increased number of classes. For the specialised English class, the number of English classes per week is five.

The four participants interviewed were tenth-grade girls (age 16) who attended the same class. They had enrolled in the project a year before the interview. All four participants had a B1-B2 level in English, they shared a passion for reading, and except for one aspiring filmmaker among them, they had no previous experience in producing films. To protect their anonymity, participants are referred to by the following pseudonyms: Anna, Dora, Olga, and Maya. The pseudonyms have been assigned randomly by the authors of the study.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

A focus group was applied to collect data about participants' experiences and feelings about creating digital stories as the end-product of the project. Similar to one-on-one interviews or group interviews, focus groups allow for the in-depth exploration of participants' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs, but unlike interviews, they rely on group interaction as a data collection method (Winke 2017), thus allowing participants to build on one another's responses and generate ideas.

The focus group involved the four students who volunteered for the discussion and the facilitator, who was also an English and IT teacher at the school where participants studied, as well as one of the authors of this study. The facilitator was not the participants' English or IT teacher, but he had previously worked with the students in the framework of the Digital Social Reading project. Familiarity with the place, with one another, and with the facilitator was meant to promote a safe environment and a relaxed atmosphere for the

participants, who were also assured that their real identities would not become public in this study.

The focus group lasted for 45 minutes, and it took place in the school library, after the participants' lessons were over for the day. The language used was English not only because students' high language proficiency allowed for this, but also due to participants' choice: they were happy to use English in an out-of-class situation. The focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed.

During the discussion, the facilitator relied on six pre-determined questions, while taking care to ensure the free flow of the discussion by stimulating participants' thinking and sharing of ideas. The questions, which were meant to elicit participants' experiences with creating digital stories, were the following:

- What were some of the challenges in the creative process of making your digital stories?
- How did you integrate the unique qualities of the book you read into your digital narratives?
- In what ways did creating your digital stories deepen your understanding of the book you read?
- What was your source of motivation when creating your digital narratives?
- In what ways did creating your digital narrative contribute to your personal development?
- What was your favourite part of creating your digital narratives and why?

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to get a deeper understanding of participants' underlying ideas and experiences related to creating digital stories. Based on Brown and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis, the focus group transcript was read several times to help us become familiar with the data. Then, codes were generated, and the transcript was coded for themes and patterns that appeared relevant to the research focus (Braun, Clarke 2006; Clarke, Braun 2013). Coding was done manually, working through hard copies of the transcript. Finally, the emerging themes were identified, defined, and discussed.

3.6 Results and Discussion

3.6.1 What Were the Challenges of Creating Digital Stories in the EFL Context?

Time Constraints

A major challenge identified by all four participants was the time-consuming aspect of digital storytelling. The opinions expressed by the participants of this study support existing research in that brainstorming ideas, outlining and coherent narrative, editing, and incorporating feedback at various stages require meticulous attention to detail and take time (Burgess, Green 2009; Harris, McKenzie 2016; Lambert 2013; Robin 2008). In what follows, we focus on some of the most time-consuming aspects of creating digital stories through the emic perspectives of the four participants.

For Anna and Maya, brainstorming for ideas and writing the script were among the lengthiest phases of the task. Anna invested time and thought in her digital story from the initial stages of the project: "I spent a long time thinking about the idea for the story. And we had to plan everything even before we started the work. Cos' I wanted to be sure that the pictures and everything match the story". While both she and Maya attributed the amount of time needed for brainstorming to their own lack of creativity (see discussion below), existing research also suggests that effective pre-production takes time, and it is mostly related to the complexity of the story told (Lambert 2013).

Besides brainstorming for ideas, Anna mentioned the need for repeated revisions as a laborious aspect related to scriptwriting:

> We checked the text to make sure there are no mistakes. And then we read it again, and we could see that not everything was clear. […] I mean, in our story. So we had to change those parts in the script. To write them again […] make it more understandable.

Anna's reflections highlight the time-consuming and meticulous nature of scriptwriting, requiring revisions and feedback loops before finalization (Robin 2008).

It must be noted here that all the participants found the project time-consuming due to their overloaded academic responsibilities and extra-curricular activities. They unanimously agreed to have experienced a sense of relief when they submitted their digital stories to their teachers. Ironically, Maya claimed that the submission stage was her "favourite part of the digital story project", while Dora believed it was "fun, but stressful" due to time constraints. These results underline the importance of time management when integrating digital stories in the curricula.

Students' Beliefs About Themselves

Three participants (Anna, Dora, Maya) believed that a major difficulty when producing their digital stories related to their own perceived lack of creativity. For example, Maya claimed that coming up with an engaging idea for the digital narrative, structuring it into scenes, and planning the visual elements for the scenes before the recording were the most demanding parts of creating a digital story because "these were the parts where [she] had to get creative, which [she was] not really good at". Similarly, Dora expressed her initial anxiety about not having "a good idea for the story" to start with, as well as her concerns related to the possible outcome of her work, saying: "In the beginning, I was afraid that I won't get an idea for the story at all, because I'm not a creative person. And then I was also worried that I can't find the right pictures and the right music" (Dora). Finally, Anna also found the scripting phase difficult for the same reason: she believed that producing a script demanded creativity as it required students to imagine how the story and the text would all sound in the framework of a short film. As she claimed, she was not convinced she would be up to the task.

All three participants quoted above seemed to blame themselves for not being creative enough and therefore for feeling apprehensive when it comes to writing a script and producing a digital story. Yet, as the interview proceeded, Maya and Dora highlighted the relationship between anxiety on the one hand, and prior learning experiences and unfamiliarity with the task, on the other hand. Maya expressed her preference for predictable tasks, where she "could not go wrong" and therefore could feel safe about "the right solution". while Dora pointed that her anxiety resulted from the fact that "doing a digital story was totally different […] not the kind of task we usually get at school" (Dora).

Data suggests that participants' beliefs about themselves as learners who lack creativity have been influenced by their lack of expertise with certain task types and skills demanded by digital story-making. Despite the variety of texts that students are required to produce in different styles and about various topics, script writing is rarely part of the requirements in Hungarian EFL classes, mostly because this genre does not figure as a writing task in the accredited language proficiency exams taken by Hungarian students. Therefore, teachers, who are held accountable for their students' results and language exams, usually opt for guided formal and informal letters, and occasional forum comments as writing tasks, which leave little space for the imagination. Classroom-based studies document Hungarian students' lack of confidence when it comes to tasks that require imaginative engagement, as well as their beliefs that tasks that are not outlined in the curriculum, and therefore not tested, are not worth

the effort (Hetesi 2022; Nikolov 2002). From a more general perspective, Bruner (1996) and Egan (1989) also point out that the dominant models that inform educational programs focus predominantly on the rational functions of the mind and tend to dismiss the value of imagination as a tool for learning. Imaginative and affective learning experiences, such as stories, for instance, tend to constitute the "educational margin or frills" (Egan 1989, 29).

We need to add that despite participants' lack of belief in their creative powers, their digital stories gave evidence of originality both in terms of verbal and visual narratives. When the interviewer pointed out the controversy between participants' beliefs about themselves and the successful outcome of their projects, Dora responded: "so… maybe the idea itself was hard".

Technical Difficulties

Two participants (Anna, Olga) discussed the technical difficulties posed by creating digital stories, showing that while some students of this age may excel in using technology, others may find it overwhelming (Robin 2008). Anna felt her "technical gaps" frustrating: "I was lost at this stage, and it's a good thing that I wasn't there alone to do it"). As Anna suggests, not having the necessary technical skills for creating digital stories may easily decrease motivation. Both she and Olga emphasised the role of peer support and scaffolding in creating their digital stories. The latter, resourcefully, asked for her brother's assistance in video editing, "because he knows all these things, and it was easier like this… I could cut down on time. And he actually taught me how to do it".

Students' experiences highlight the role of providing necessary training (Ohler 2008) as well as opportunities for cooperation while creating digital stories. As discussed by Menegale (*infra*), while diverse technologies and communication channels enable individuals to express themselves using different modes, multiliteracy pedagogy, including digital literacy, extends beyond tools, procedures, and micro-knowledge: it encompasses the processes, competencies, and socio-meta-cognitive strategies required to analyse, elaborate, produce, and exchange meaning. Along other studies (Robin 2008), our findings indicate that students need to be technically trained to navigate such complex ways of communicating meaning.

3.6.2 What Were the Benefits Perceived by Participants in Creating Digital Stories?

Digital skills development

All the participants reported various areas in which they improved, among which video editing emerged as a skill that was honed during the project. While for Olga, editing was a first encounter, Anna, Maya, and Dora refined their skills: Maya grew "more familiar with softwares," and Dora "got to understand how these things work… how you can create and atmosphere in a film" by relying on digital tools. Students' experiences underscore the importance of software proficiency and digital skills as critical factors influencing project success (Robin 2008).

Given that video editing is low on the priority list of IT curricula in Hungarian secondary schools, undertaking such a project leads students to take control of their education, even if on a smaller scale, and get ahead of often outdated syllabi to attain more applicable knowledge, especially in today's digitised environment. Students' experiences underline that digital storytelling can be a meaningful technique for integrating technology into students' learning experiences. Equipping EFL learners with the ability to utilize technology prepares them for future academic and professional environments where digital literacy is essential. Based on participants' reflections on the technical challenges they encountered (discussed above), educator support in helping students develop these competences is of key importance for the success of the project (Ohler 2008).

A Deeper Understanding of Literature

Our data suggest that creating digital stories contributed to students' literacy development by promoting a deeper and more nuanced understanding of literature. As shown in the discussion below, all four participants found it important to add their ideas on how incorporating multimedia elements helped them interpret literary texts. Dora claimed that her in-depth understanding of the book was supported by story-based discussions in the planning stage of their digital stories, as well as during the film itself: "because we talked about the story in the video, I could really… sorry, how do you say in English: *jobban fel tudtam fogni* [I could get a better grasp]? […] Yes… thank you… I could really comprehend it more". In this quote, the role of constructing meaning in interaction emerges both on the level of content and on the level of discourse. Dora refers to the importance of rephrasing and building on one another's ideas in making meaning of a narrative,

and in doing this, she is using a Hungarian term and asking for assistance to clearly express her thoughts. This example is interesting not only because it underscores the role of social interaction in creating meaning, but also because it provides evidence that participants found it important to reflect on their creative process in accurate terms. In a later part of the discussion, Dora also adds that she had a better understanding of the plot in the book she was reading because "in the video we... made questions and we answered them".

Students' experiences and reflections confirm the existing literature in this area. According to a study by Hirsch and Macleroy (2020), traditional pedagogical approaches may not always address students' needs, in the way multimodal practices do. Horne (2021) explores how digital narratives enhance students' engagement and comprehension when studying literary texts in a foreign language context and provides evidence that incorporating multimedia elements allows students to express their interpretation of texts. Our study also brings evidence that creating digital stories not only makes literature more accessible, but it also encourages deeper analysis and personal connection to literary texts.

Another way in which creating digital stories opened new dimensions in understanding the book included: recontextualising the story through new locations and creating an atmosphere that resonates with the book. Anna, who has cinematographic affinities went the extra mile in all aspects of her video. She wrote, starred in, and directed her own work, and she reported that she "tried to create the atmosphere with the locations...and with the music", too. She made efforts to find locations that fit the setting of *We Were Liars* (Lockhart 2014), the book she had read, enhancing authenticity by staying faithful to the source material. Olga "wanted to keep the mysterious vibe of the book", so she "chose pictures which had this vibe." Her digital story is a narrated montage, which captures and recreates the peculiar atmosphere of *We Were Liars* through visuals and music which reflect Olga's understanding and response to the story.

Finally, all participants tried to grasp their chosen characters' personalities and relate both to their verbal characteristics and to their thoughts, emotions, and aspirations in their digital stories. Assuming the role of a character, in any context, may lead to a deeper, more empathetic understanding of them. Dora said she "tried to talk with a style that was used by the character in the book". Besides adopting the verbal elements that make up the character, in her digital story version of the character, Dora also had to add nonverbal and paraverbal components based on her imagination. It appears that creating a digital story adds another layer to this process, by asking the creator to put vague characteristics into form. Anna, who acted out the plot herself, indicated a deeper understanding of her book by claiming that while acting, she "could feel all of the emotions and... have

an empathy with the character. Because I acted it out, so I had to really think with her mind". She then added, "we tried to recreate the video thinking from inside and outside."

4 Conclusions

This study highlighted that engagement with narratives can create a meaningful and relatable context for language and literacy development in the case of secondary school students. The four female students involved in the study believed that digital storytelling greatly improved their digital skills and promoted a deeper understanding of literature by adding new perspectives to the book they had read. In this sense, the findings are in harmony with theories and research that support the role of narratives in participants' knowledge construction (Fazzi, Da Lio, Guzzon, *infra*).

The analysis of the data also called attention to the challenges encountered by students while creating digital narratives. Some of the difficulties were of a technical kind, while others can be attributed to the very little time Hungarian students generally have for optional tasks and activities during the school year. Balancing academic tasks with digital storytelling constituted a challenge. This underscores the importance of time management when it comes to integrating digital storytelling in the curricula.

One interesting finding relates to participants' beliefs about themselves, namely their expressed fear of not being creative enough when it came to writing digital narratives. As suggested in the discussion, this belief may be linked to Hungarian students' lack of experience with tasks that encourage imaginative engagement and decision making in the classroom context. Yet, the good news is that results also indicated a discrepancy between students' explicit beliefs about themselves and what they can do on the one hand, and the outcomes, on the other hand. The digital stories reflected students' original and imaginative approaches to the task, and so did the accuracy and enthusiasm with which they discussed the processes they employed during the creative process.

This study has potential limitations stemming from the nature of qualitative methodology, where the aim is to work with few participants and provide thick descriptions of their specific contexts and perspectives (Mackey, Gass 2021). Due to the uniqueness of the context and participants' experiences, the findings of the study cannot be generalised. Yet, some of the main findings may be relevant for other contexts. Another limitation concerns the relatively short amount of time (45 minutes) that the participants had at their disposal for recalling and discussing their experiences. The author-facilitator partly attributed the brevity of students' responses in the focus group to

the lack of time to build a rapport that would have allowed students to express their views and beliefs in a more extensive way.

Despite the limitations discussed above, findings suggest the benefits of the systematic and principled integration of narratives in the curriculum, both as reading materials and as starting points for creating digital stories. In this study, reading YAL emerged as a strategy which learners can autonomously apply for developing their language skills, as well as a source of inspiration. Unlike most textbooks, YAL provided opportunities for imaginative engagement and dialogue in and outside the classroom, while digital storytelling emerged as a potential tool in knowledge construction in several interrelated areas.

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