

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.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Literature Review. – 2.1 Mobile Reading and Extensive E-Reading. – 2.2 Digital Social Reading. – 3 The Study. – 3.1 Research Context. – 3.2 Pedagogical Design. – 3.3 Participants. – 3.4 Data Collection Procedures. – 3.4.1 Students' Questionnaire and Focus Groups. – 3.4.2 Facilitators' Focus Group. – 3.5 Data Analysis Procedures. – 4 Analysis. – 4.1 Quantitative Analysis of Students' Closed Questions. – 4.2 Qualitative Analysis of Students' Open-Ended Questions and Focus Groups. – 4.3 Analysis of Facilitators' Focus Group. – 5 Discussion. – 6 Conclusion.



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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 ‘multi-tasking’, 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	<i>We Were Liars</i> (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	<i>The Maze Runner</i> (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	<i>The Hate U Give</i> (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	<i>Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe</i> (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 Education³ (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].

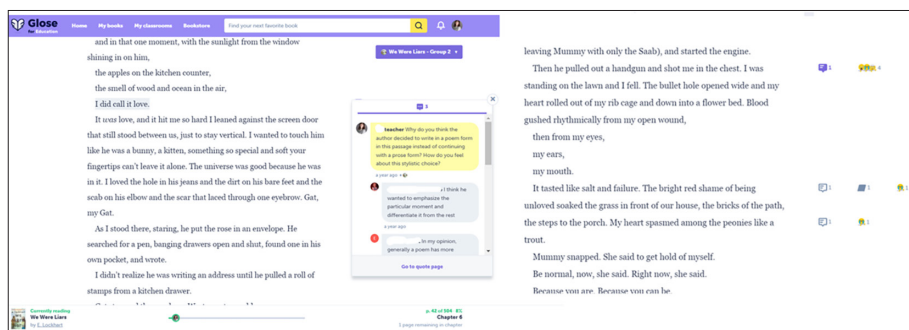


Figure 1 Screenshots of activities on Glose for Education

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 thematic 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 DSR⁵ 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 Pinanzola 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 Piazola 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	☐	☐	☐	☐

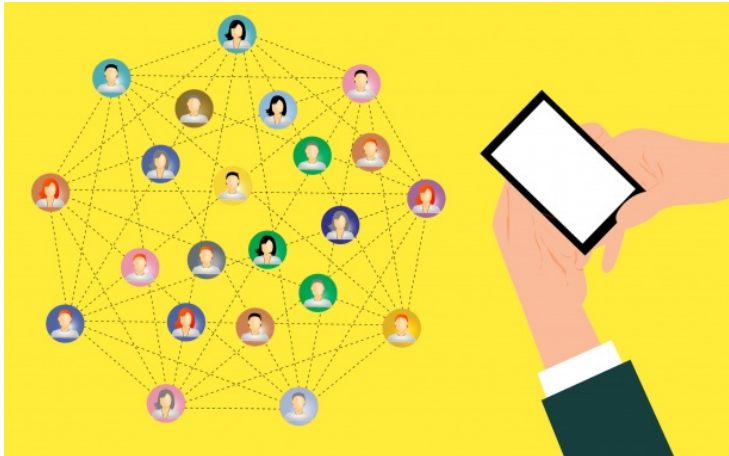
5) What aspects did you enjoy the **most** about the DigLit Book club? *

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 useful 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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