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# Teaching poetry in the EFL classroom

The motivational potential in  
the first two years of upper  
secondary education

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## *Introduction*

Numerous international studies have explored the efficacy of poetry teaching in relation to the language acquisition process, in particular in the EFL classroom. For instance, opinions and experiences with poetry of students and teachers of secondary education were investigated by Benton (1999), Gordon (2009) and Xerri (2013). Sigvardsson (2017) provided a systematic review of existing international literature on the subject, whereas in the EFL framework, studies by Shen (2009) and Çetinavcı, Tütüniş (2012) proposed a methodology to employ poetry as an instrument of language acquisition. Italian studies such as Delucchi (2012), Mauroni (2011) and Dall'Armellina (2004) accompanied with a theoretic premise their suggestions of activities focused on poetry for foreign learners.

Alongside the qualities that help learners memorise morphosyntactic structures and explore communicative devices, the focus of this study was the motivational potential of poetic texts: this arises from the pleasure given by poetry, which could derive from its novelty in the classroom, the challenge it presents and the variety that its style offers. Furthermore, an emotional and personal connection between readers and poetic texts could be established, creating a powerful channel that engages students in acquiring the language.

This study aims to investigate whether poetry teaching could indeed have a beneficial effect on motivation, even at lower levels of language competence; additionally, it also intends to examine the effectiveness of employing poetry outside the English literature curriculum, using it to improve language competence. Therefore, the subjects chosen for the study are EFL students of the first two years of upper secondary education,

who attend either the *liceo* or the *istituto tecnico*, to provide a comparison between the two different curricula.

The research question focuses on two possibilities: on one hand, introducing poetic texts in the *biennio* could prove to be motivating for teenage students, but on the other hand, its complexity could have a discouraging effect on less expert learners.

To answer that question, a questionnaire has been designed to collect the students' opinions and explore their notions on poetic texts in English, including song lyrics for their similarities with poetry and their motivational potential already proven by previous studies. Simultaneously, an interview has been planned for EFL teachers, to investigate their idea and their professional experiences with the use of poetry in English in the *biennio*.

To provide a theoretic framework to the research, the first chapter is dedicated to defining the main characteristics of poetic texts and presenting the potentialities and criticalities of poetry teaching, moving from the existing literature. Then, an overview of the main methods for poetry teaching is required: the historicist, structuralist and hermeneutic methods, taken from the frame of reference of literary education, are outlined. Lastly, the chapter intends to present the objectives of poetry teaching, as listed and analysed in Caon, Spaliviero (2015).

In the second chapter, the Italian context of poetry teaching in the EFL classroom is analysed, providing a profile for both teenage students and teachers of literature: particular attention is paid to motivation and to the structure of a Teaching Unit focused on poetry. Furthermore, the current regulations on EFL teaching in Italy are introduced, presenting the ministerial guidelines for the first two years of upper secondary education and the linguistic and cultural objectives that students should reach at this level.

The third chapter is focused on data collection, the instrument employed for this purpose and the analysis of the results: each item from the questionnaire is here explained and graphs are used to illustrate the answers to every item. The outcome serves as starting point for the fourth chapter, where a Teaching Unit thought for the students that compiled the questionnaire is outlined in all its phases, providing examples of activities that aim to motivate the language acquisition process and guide teenage students in the discovery of a new genre.

## 1. The Didactics of the Poetic Text

This chapter will firstly provide a definition of the main characteristics of the poetic text. It will then consider its employment in the language classroom, evaluating potentialities and critical points, and it will give an account of the methods to teach the poetic text in the framework of literary education. Lastly, the purpose of the didactics of poetry will be explained.

### *1.1 The poetic text*

According to Jakobson (1960) poetry is the literary genre where the *poetic* function of language is dominant: the focus of the communication is “on the message for its own sake” (Jakobson, 1960). The aesthetic aspect of poems is here highlighted, placing poetry in a different spot than other acts of communication. The language of poetry, as opposed to everyday language, focuses on itself and thus is not considered ordinary.

That a poetic text is extraordinary in nature is true not only from the point of view of linguistics, but also for the simple reason that it arises from specific choices made by its author to make it *literary* (Balboni, 2004). These choices may be: textual, concerning genre and its grammar; lexical and about figures of speech; morphosyntactic, often occurring in deviations from the norm; phonological and graphic, especially important in poetry where elements like rhymes, alliterations and verses are essential; pragmatic, sometimes moving away from a social use of the language.

All these choices determine the style of the literary text and set it aside from everyday writings. For poetry in particular, this divergence from common language may pose a challenge for its readers: it does not have a practical purpose and it cannot be employed in immediate communication (Delucchi, 2012).

As explained by Balboni (2004) a certain *expectancy grammar* is activated when the reader encounters a text of a certain genre for the first time, and this applies also to poetry. The literary conventions associated with poetry, examined by different theorists such as Culler and Groeben, are summarized in Peskin (2007) into three main expectations:

- a) *the expectation of multiple meanings*: poetic texts contain many layers of significance, which goes beyond the literal meaning of single words. The reader also knows that interpretation may differ from person to person and from time to time;
- b) *the expectation of “metaphoric content”*: the presence of metaphorical language to various extents is anticipated and looked for in the text by the reader;
- c) *the rule of “significance”*: the reader expects any poem to address an important theme, to offer an opinion about an issue or more generally to give a message. This means that poetry is looked at as a place to find a solution to the most common human problems and an interpretation of human experience; no poetic text is approached as superficial or meaningless.

This view of poetry as bearer of meaning is not a simple one, for it requires some specifications. T.S. Eliot spoke of the meaning of poems as something that may appear very different for each reader and that is sometimes quite distant from what was intended by the poet; personal experience plays an important role in interpretation, as does social and historical background. Moreover, meaning cannot be taken as something separate from the aesthetic form of the poem, especially from its *sound*: “the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning” (Eliot, 1942). This is an important aspect to bear in mind when considering poetry: since its origins, music and sound played an essential role in composition and delivery, making it a multimodal genre (Gordon, 2009).



It should be noted that the relationship between music and poetry is twofold. On one hand, it relates to the musicality of common speech, rooted in the prosody and rhythm of everyday communication and single words, linked together in the structure of the whole poem (Eliot, 1942). On the other hand, poetry is meant to be listened to in order to fully appreciate it (Gordon, 2009): sung poetry has a millennial history and it is often supposed to be accompanied by a musical instrument, making it a close relative to song writing (Balboni, 2004).

Therefore, when thinking of poetry nowadays, song lyrics should be taken into account, as they are in this research. It is less probable for young people to have read poems in an anthology, but almost certain that they have listened to their favourite songs paying attention to their words; they may look for the same meaning that one expects from a written poem and that is often carried by songs as well. Music and lyrics can serve as a bridge that brings to a fuller appreciation of any kind of poetic text (D'Armellina, 2004).

Even if poetry is often perceived as more complex than song writing, they share a common communicative purpose:

“while poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains, all the same, one person talking to another; and this is just as true if you sing it, for singing is another way of talking” (Eliot, 1942).

### *1.2 Potentialities and criticalities of the use of poetic texts*

All the characteristics of the poetic text that are mentioned before may become positive or negative points in the employment of poetry in the language classroom.

The first aspect to take into consideration when evaluating the use of poetry is the concept of *motivation* and the role that it plays in language acquisition (Balboni, 2015). Poetic texts may indeed offer numerous potentialities in this regard: by their creative use of language, poems allow

students to see how a message can be constructed outside of the logical consequentiality of the language they are used to memorize (Delucchi, 2012). This difference and originality in style and form capture the attention of the reader and highlights the possibilities of language use, motivating students to explore them in a more active process. Their engagement in the investigation of language mechanisms gives them a profound understanding of the grammatical rules learnt in a more traditional context, seeing them as a part of a more flexible system.

This kind of motivation, which arises from the variance of poetic language, is rooted in the *pleasure of variety* (Balboni, 2015): a poetic text may be employed as an unusual source of information about language rules, therefore captivating the students' attention with its unique form and style. If students are used to starting the language lesson from prose texts of different nature, poetry may offer new prompts of engagement, also appealing to the *pleasure of novelty* (Balboni, 2015): this makes the input more interesting for learners, who are more motivated to examine it and acquire the language. The same is true of the *pleasure of challenge* (Balboni, 2015), given by the opacity of poetry, which makes it similar to a puzzle that the reader must solve in order to access the meaning.

Moreover, poetry provides various examples of communication strategies that can enrich the learner's knowledge of the language: metaphors and others figures of speech, lexical choices and repetitions, together with all the deviances from common style, become recognizable in any other kind of text and expendable by the speaker in different contexts (Della Valle, 2014).

The *pleasure* of analysing a poetic text also comes from the encounter with the culture of the author: readers can immerse themselves into another world that is presented through the poem, with its cultural, social and linguistic implications. Poetry leans on emotion to engage and send a message, asking the reader to understand the reality it comes from,

therefore giving an opportunity to delve into the cultural aspect that accompanies language acquisition from a close perspective (Delucchi, 2012).

To summarise, the peculiarity in style and content of the poetic text serves as a potential instrument of motivation and engagement in the learning acquisition process.

On the other hand, this deviance from everyday speech could present some criticalities for the employment of poetry in the foreign language classroom.

The first and perhaps more obvious disadvantage is its language difficulty: being distant from common speech, the poetic style can evoke a feeling of confusion and diffidence in its reader, especially if written in a different language. This becomes counterproductive for the acquisition process, considering the danger of the *affective filter* raising in front of an input that is considered too difficult by the learner (Krashen, 1981, 1982).

However, these negative and instinctive reactions could be dealt with by introducing a series of activities before, during and after the reading of the poem, accompanying students in their own interpretation and giving them the means to explore language in its literary form. Indeed, this way it could be possible to work on poetry starting from the lowest levels of language competence, also thanks to rhythmic patterns and the mechanisms that make lexicon and grammatical structure easily memorisable (Ardissino, Stroppa, 2009).

Emotions such as the confusion that arises from linguistic complexity could be dangerous and have a negative impact on the acquisition process, but in the case of poetry, they can be employed as “a resource for meaning making” (Sigvardsson, 2017): if a passage in the poem seems unclear, it simply requires a closer examination and it could increase the reader’s curiosity.

Closely connected to linguistic difficulty is the opacity of poetry: in a single poem different levels of significance could be detected, but to find these meanings, a work of interpretation is required. This proves to be a challenging and sometimes frightening task for learners and it often comes with the misconception that the hidden meaning of poetry is only accessible to highly educated individuals or, in the case of the classroom, by the teacher (Xerri, 2013). For Xerri, this leads to a passive behaviour in accepting the interpretation given to the students through an *analytical approach* that is considered *objective*. Furthermore, any personal interpretation is prevented by the notion that the true meaning is the one explained by the teacher and no other response is valuable; for these reasons, students may feel embarrassed and not motivated to express their feelings about a poem read in class. On the contrary, “teachers need to withhold their interpretations if the students are to develop their own responses” (Sigvarsson, 2017).

A second criticality found in Xerri (2013) is the *assessment backwash*: the activity of analysing poetry in class could be greatly influenced by the pressure felt by both students and teachers to prepare for final assessments. For this reason, it may be difficult to let go of traditional lecture schemes that are less motivating for students and “pre-scripted responses to poetry” are likely to be presented to the class (Hennessy and McNamara, 2011).

It may be therefore beneficial to introduce poetry in the foreign language classroom in a stage where direct assessment of it is not required, allowing students to discover that poems can be enjoyable and helping them develop the critical skills that will make it easier to analyse poetry in the literature curriculum.

A distinct way of introducing the poetic text in the classroom, avoiding some of the criticalities before mentioned, is in the form of songs. As stated in the previous paragraph, songs and poetry share some

characteristics such as the musicality of language, their repetitive style and the presence of different layers of meaning. Therefore, song lyrics may be employed as a first step to the study of poetry and in Balboni (2008) these advantages are proposed:

- a) *musical and rhythmic memory* is activated by the repetitive structure of songs, without the monotony of other mnemonic fixation exercises (Balboni, 2008);
- b) *synchronic and diachronic language varieties* are introduced, especially the ones used by younger speakers, providing a sense of proximity to spoken language;
- c) the comprehension of *literality* is incited, by the analysis of those aesthetic elements that distance the lyrics from everyday texts, such as the use of metaphors, evocative language or figures of speech;
- d) *multimodality* may serve as a source of *motivation* and may inspire a series of activities that include the use of online resources, providing students with numerous options to work on the text and produce their own material;
- e) the *rhythmic* singing of the lyrics is that of a native speaker and listening to it, then mimicking the same rhythm when trying to repeat the song, students are able to maintain the same cadence as the native speaker's.

Even though songs still present difficulties for learners, motivation could easily overcome them and specific activities may be employed to guide students in the comprehension of the text, diminishing its opacity and making it an ally of language acquisition.

### *1.3 The principal methods for poetry teaching*

The theoretical framework where poetry teaching developed is literary education, a *formative process* that aims to teach how to *read* a literary text (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015). The didactics of literature, the methods, are

born out of the different approaches found in literary theory; the main criterion to define them is to determine what the focus of the approach is, whether on the author, the text or the reader.

In this paragraph, the main developments and differences between methods of poetry teaching that are outlined in Caon, Spaliviero (2015), will be summarised.

### *1.3.1 The historicist method*

At the end of the nineteenth century, during the Romantic period, literary education focuses on the author and the approach to the study of literature is historicist. This perspective has its foundations in two concepts presented by Francesco De Sanctis in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870-1871): the *historicist aesthetic* and the *philosophy of history*. According to the former, the value of a piece of literature is found in its level of *civil representativeness*, whereas the latter states that there is a reason behind the historical evolution of humanity (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015).

Manuals that follow this approach present notions in chronological order, giving encyclopaedic information about authors, historical periods and literary trends; texts are only used to exemplify the theoretical context and are never proposed in their entirety.

The historicist method moves from this approach and translates into a teaching practice that has as its centre the relationship between the author and the historical and cultural context of literary production. The teacher is the holder of knowledge that presents it to the class in a traditional unidirectional lecture, where students receive information passively and memorise content without critically analysing it.

In poetry teaching, this translates into a lecture that does not take into consideration the students' personal responses, making it difficult for them to form the critical thinking skill that allows them to formulate

judgments independently. Furthermore, textual analysis comes secondarily to the study of the context, creating a detachment from the text and its language.

Nonetheless, this method is still largely employed in literature teaching, especially for its interest in the historical background to texts, but it has been reduced to include the application of later approaches.

### *1.3.2 The structuralist method*

Structuralism in literary education develops in Italy between 1960 and 1975, and sees the shift from the *intentio auctoris* to the *intentio operis*: the focus here is on the literary work.

According to the structuralist approach, the text is a structure that can be analysed in its individual components and the aim of literary education should be to make students capable of autonomously examine and decipher a text from a linguistic and stylistic point of view. This analysis should be objective and scientific, detaching the text from the context of history and of literary trends.

In the classroom, this means that the teacher has the role of a technician, whose purpose is to offer students the right instruments of textual analysis, guiding them towards greater independence in the execution of exercises focused on language and style.

Therefore, poems are presented as an independent unit and their linguistic elements are the centre of the analysis, together with stylistic choices and the metrical pattern. Teachers do not provide their interpretation of the poem and students are active in their examination, developing critical behaviour towards the text.

Despite the advantage of the primary role given to students, this method also presents some criticalities, such as the extremely rational and scientific attitude that does not take emotions and psychological responses into account. For poetry in particular, analysing the difficult linguistic

form without exploring the broader significance of the poem, leaving personal relations to it on the side, may result in discouragement and lack of interest in the study of poetry.

This method is used nowadays in combination with the historicist method.

### 1.3.3 *The hermeneutic method*

From the Eighties, the centre of literary education shifts on the reader: literature is once again contextualised and linguistic analysis is maintained, but the focus is on the interpretation of the text by the reader. The aim is to find a meaning that is significant in the present and that has a personal value for readers, who should also be able to argue their critical judgment of the text.

The objective of the hermeneutic method is to consider the text: on a synchronic level, where the analysis of linguistic and stylistic features is carried out; on a diachronic level, that takes into account the intent of the author in their historical background, the message that the text carries in current times and the personal evaluation of the piece of literature.

Given the hybridity of this method, the structure of the lesson comprises both a transmission of notions and a dialogical part. The teacher guides the students in their personal interpretations, mediating the confrontation with the others and the exchange of opinions on a given text. For poetry teaching, this is particularly positive, because it encourages students to form a connection with the poem, motivating them to give an interpretation without feeling constricted by the teacher's explanation. At the same time, it still pays the right attention to language and style, two very important features of the poetic genre, and to the context, providing enough information to understand the author's intent.

On the other hand, this freedom in the interpretative process may lead to opinions extremely distant from the author's original intent or from other points of view. It is then important for the teacher to make sure that



students respect interpretations different from their own, being aware of them and considering them as valuable as their personal opinion. This way, a discussion in class may lead to finding a common ground that takes into consideration the range of meanings that the poetic text has for the students, for the author and his historic background and for the present world.

This method developed in the early 2000s, but still finds little application in literature teaching in comparison with the historicist and the structuralist methods.

#### 1.4 *The aims of poetry teaching*

In Caon, Spaliviero (2015), the aims of literary education are examined; these language teaching objectives can be applied to poetry teaching and will be presented in this paragraph.

The first purpose is the “recognition of the formal characteristics of the text” (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015): when reading a text, students should be guided into recognizing the features that are distinctive of the literary, and more specifically poetic, text.

Firstly, there is the *literary genre* and the internal rules that define it, which can be recognized as present or missing in the text, therefore helping students understand how to move in their analysis. For poetry, what usually indicates the genre is the *verse*, the first feature that catches the eye of the reader; then, if poetry is read aloud, the peculiar rhythm should be noted by the reader (Ardissino, Stroppa, 2009).

Then the *lexical aspects* should be noted: in poetry, every word has been chosen by the poet for a specific reason and therefore it is important to analyse their use and their significance in the text. Figures of speech are another essential lexical element that is largely employed in poems and that should be examined, to show students how meanings can be conveyed

in various and diverse ways; colloquial and refined expressions are also to be taken into consideration for their *sociolinguistic* component.

*Morphosyntactic elements* are the third feature that defines the literariness of a text: in poems, verb tenses or words declension contribute to the rhythm and structure of the whole unit and therefore should be meditated on by students.

Lastly, *phonological aspects* are of primary importance in poetry, since sounds are always carefully chosen by the author. In particular, figures of sound such as rhymes and alliterations are used to indicate what the reader should pay attention to, highlighting some concepts more than others and showing students how *form* may become *substance* in poetry (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015).

The second aim of poetry teaching is the *strengthening of linguistic competence*: by studying literature and in particular the poetic text, students are able to acquire a deeper knowledge of the language. Lexical, morphosyntactic and stylistic aspects are examined from the special point of view of literary language, which is more refined and varied and offers different examples of the expressiveness of the language. Moreover, abilities such as comprehension and production, as well as integrated ones, are developed by students when approaching the poetic text and when working with its language, looking at it from a new and peculiar perspective. This applies both to the analysis of poetry and to the manipulation of poetic language in an attempt to write original verses, a challenging task that on one hand can draw students closer to the mechanisms of language production, but on the other hand may be too demanding and discouraging in early stages of language acquisition (Benton, 2000).

The third objective disclosed by Caon, Spaliviero (2015) is *historical and cultural enrichment*. When analysing poetry, the context in which it has been produced cannot be ignored, because it offers an insight on the

language choices taken by the poet and the world behind the message sent to the reader. By reading poems, students access the culture of the foreign language they are studying from a privileged point of view, that of a native speaker's words, receiving information about the period when they were written, the literary trends of the genre, the ideology behind them and the implications for the reader in the present. This enrichment is part of the *pleasure* of poetry reading, since it makes students feel involved in the new culture they are studying and this is particularly important for the motivational element in language acquisition. It is also seen as an important resource in implementing the cultural heritage of present society (Ardissino, Stroppa, 2009).

The fourth aim is the development of *critical thinking*, an essential requirement for the appreciation of literature and of creative works in general. When reading poetry in the classroom, teachers should mediate a dialogue with the students to help them form and express their own judgment on the poem they read together, without feeling the influence of scholars' interpretations or of the teacher's opinion on it. They should be able to justify their thoughts on poetry coherently, giving reasons for their statements that can be connected directly to the poet's words. This way they develop the ability to evaluate any kind of cultural product they may encounter in the future more and more independently, developing their *aesthetic* and *cognitive* judgment abilities. Once critical thinking is acquired, it may and should be applied to other disciplines and more broadly to each phenomenon that requires the students' comprehension, allowing them to take their stance without blindly following mass culture opinions.

The fifth aim involves the students' *ethical growth*: poetic texts are often charged with moral messages and themes that readers should examine and confront with their personal beliefs. The confrontation with other ideas should open the students to different opinions on subjects that are relevant

in the present, starting a dialogue about them and therefore growing from the discovery of various points of view. By reading the poets' words, students are able to identify themselves with them and empathise with their experience, understanding that another person's ideas are supposed to be listened to respectfully. This ethical purpose of poetry teaching moves from the need to overcome prejudice by looking at the word from someone else's perspective, specifically by reading and listening to their message, debating one's opinions with other readers to broaden individual insight.

The sixth and last aim of literary education listed in Caon, Spaliviero (2015) that can be applied to poetry teaching is the individual *psychological* and *relational growth*. This objective is closely connected to the concepts of *pleasure* and *need* in literary education, as explained in Balboni (2004). The former involves the student's psychological satisfaction in engaging with a world distant from reality, identifying oneself with the author or the characters, as well as the pleasure provided by formal and aesthetic aspects of literature; the latter moves from the necessity of finding an answer to existential questions about life, love, death and other human experiences. In literature and poetry, students can explore solutions and opinions about major themes that influence how they approach everyday life dilemmas. When students experience literary pleasure and they discover the need for literature as a place where answers can be found, the two aims of literary education are fulfilled (Balboni, 2004).

Therefore, psychological growth develops from the emotional connection that readers establish with the text, which allows them to reflect upon themselves by relating with characters and subsequently discussing their considerations with others. In the process of analysing and comprehending the poet's point of view, relating it with one's own, the ability to investigate the meaning of existence is cultivated by students, who are

consequently able to lead their lives with a purposeful and attentive behaviour (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015).

In conclusion, the aims of poetry teaching can be identified with those of literary education and comprise (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015):

- a) the recognition of formal aspects of the poetic text;
- b) the strengthening of linguistic competence;
- c) historical and cultural enrichment;
- d) the development of critical thinking;
- e) ethical growth;
- f) psychological and relational growth.

Further objectives are the discovery of the *pleasure* and *necessity* of studying poetry, with particular attention to the students' own emotional connection with the text and its role in the intrinsic motivation to language acquisition (Balboni, 2004). In Balboni (2004) the importance of developing critical thinking is once again emphasized, and the ability to form an individual and independent judgment of the text is considered the principal aim of literary education.

Furthermore, in Caon, Spaliviero (2015) the acquisition of communicative competence is established as the “macro-objective that [...] represents the ultimate target of literary education”. In its linguistic component, it includes elements of linguistic, extra-linguistic, socio-pragmatic and intercultural competence (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015), together with socio-linguistic competence that is specific of literary education and analyses the characteristics of the linguistic varieties in literature. These competences lead to linguistic proficiency, in particular to two abilities: comprehension, which is mostly employed in literary education, and production, often neglected but essential in the development of the students' creative and expressive skills (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015). The target of communicative competence from this point of view is to enjoy and produce literary texts, poetic texts included.

Specific to literary competence are also historical, cultural and philosophical competences, which provide the students with the ability to contextualize texts in their historical background, place them in a cultural and literal tradition and expressing a critical judgment around them (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015).

In poetry teaching, this can be translated on one hand to the development of the before mentioned language abilities, in particular comprehension and production, implementing the creative and ludic aspect of the acquisition process, given the peculiar nature of poetic language and its distance from everyday speech. On the other hand, philosophical competence and in particular the aesthetic dimension of language is essential in the study of poetry, prompting students to form an explicit and conscious judgment, providing specific reasons for their enjoyment of the poetic text that are not dependent on external notions.

Communicative competence is therefore an essential target in poetry teaching and not something only subsequent to a literary analysis of poetry. Conversely, poetry cannot be neglected in a communicative approach to language acquisition: the *poetic function* is fundamental and disregarding it would make pragmatic competence incomplete, as avoiding the study of literature would leave language competence wanting of an important portion of textual production (Balboni, 2015).

Poetic language is not to be seen as too detached from common speech to be excluded from the language acquisition process, since it actively contributes to the development of abilities and competence expendable in everyday communication (Delucchi, 2012). The apparent linguistic complexity of poetry and the effort that it requires to be analysed are outcomes of the fact that “the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate” (Eliot, 1942).

## 2. The Teaching of English in the first two years of Italian Upper Secondary School

In this chapter, the landscape of English teaching in Italian secondary education will be analysed, taking into consideration students and their motivation on one hand, and the teachers' role in the classroom on the other. Then the indications of current regulations about the teaching of English in the first two years of high school will be summarised, with a focus on the differences between *licei*, *istituti tecnici* and *istituti professionali*.

### 2.1 *The teenage student of literature*

Balboni (2015) gives an overview of some psychological aspects typical of adolescents that may influence their attitude towards language education in particular, with a focus on the development of literary competence. Overall, in secondary school students should learn how to *read* literary texts, but it is highly probable that, at least in the last three years of high school, they are taught a history of literature instead, therefore not focusing enough on literary competence. Moreover, the study of literature is excluded from technical and professional institutes, preventing a large number of students to ever develop this *reading* ability (Balboni, 2004).

Freddi (cited in Balboni, 2004) warns from the danger of creating a sense of rejection in young students towards literature, when it is presented with a traditional historicist method that risks annihilating the students' natural predisposition to the enjoyment of literary texts. To avoid this risk, the motivation that arises from the *pleasure* and *need* of literature should be encouraged and maintained with some strategies that will be explained in 2.1.2.

### 2.1.1 Brain and mind

From the point of view of neurology, some changes develop in individuals between 11 and 18 years of age (Balboni, 2015):

- a) the *lateralisation* of the brain begins to settle and the two hemispheres show specific modalities of processing information: analytic for the left hemisphere and global for the right hemisphere;
- b) *metalinguistic analysis and definition abilities* strengthen and allow a deeper reflection on language and communication;
- c) *declarative* knowledge develops into *procedural* knowledge, allowing them to form increasingly complex mental schematisations:

These factors enable adolescents to develop a *competence on the use of language*, which is the ability to reflect upon the mechanisms that govern the language, and the natural approach should here be substituted by a more explicit study of grammar and metalinguistic definitions. However, repetitive exercises designed to memorise linguistic rules are not motivating for students, and literary texts are a valid alternative source that may inspire adolescents to make explicit considerations on language functioning (Balboni, 2015).

With regard to relationships, on the other hand, teenagers build a strong horizontal connection with their peers, becoming part of a group with its own values that does not depend on the adults for reference. Consequently, peer pressure and the need of being accepted by the other members of the group is what regulates the adolescent's behaviour; therefore, the *affective filter* can rise in situations where the risk of discrediting oneself is present (Balboni, 2015). Asking students to expose themselves in front of the classroom may lead to anxiety and be overall counterproductive in the language acquisition process. Moreover, students fear standing out from the group, either in a positive or negative way, and aim to remain in the average without risking the judgment of their classmates (Balboni, 2015).



Overall, the teacher's aim when planning an activity addressed to teenagers should be avoiding tasks that may compromise their image, refraining from negative or belittling comments when they make mistakes in order not to discourage them and make them feel discredited before the rest of the class.

Another essential point is the teenage students' refusal of receiving judgment from adults, in contrast with the need to correct their mistakes and improving their language competence. The solution to this obstacle may be leaving the discovery of these errors to students themselves and giving them the opportunity to turn to the teacher as a *technician* who is able to help them find an answer to their doubts (Balboni, 2015).

### 2.1.2 *Motivation*

Teenagers' craving for independence plays an important role in the motivation for the study of English: mastering this foreign language is seen as an opportunity and a way to explore the world autonomously, away from home and parental rules. However, a teenage student's level of competence does not reach proficiency yet and it still needs to improve before being considered appropriate to survive outside of the classroom. The motivation to improve cannot come from the teacher's judgment of their inadequacy, which on the contrary would bring the opposite effect in the student's mind: Balboni (2015) suggests the confrontation with native speakers of their same age or foreign students that cannot communicate in Italian, with the use of online resources or exchanges between schools. When the student receives a correction from a peer, it tends to be accepted more easily and they can confront their real abilities to communicate in the foreign language, also being motivated by the sharing of mutual interests and a different level of confidentiality that could never be established with the teacher (Balboni, 2015).

This *necessity* to learn English in order to gain independence in the world of adults can be reinforced by another important factor of engagement: *pleasure* is a powerful instrument that regulates the acquisition process and stimulates intrinsic motivation. It can be involved when dealing with literature in the foreign language and, as mentioned in the first chapter, introducing poetry and literature in a language classroom can be an effective way of engaging teenage students in the study of some formal aspects of the language. The elements of pleasure given by *novelty*, *challenge*, *attractiveness* and *functionality* of the input also come into play for adolescents, but a special focus should be placed on *psychological and social security*: the activity should not endanger the student's image before the class (Balboni, 2015). For poetry teaching, this could happen when a personal response is asked and students feel embarrassed by their own feelings or are afraid of giving a wrong interpretation; this is also felt when the input is considered too difficult by the student and discouragement appears (Delucchi, 2012).

For teenage students, another crucial point of motivation is the *need* for literature, which they should discover during their school years, letting it become an attitude that they will maintain for the rest of their lives. Existential problems that are particularly near to adolescent experience, such as questions regarding love, life, justice, sexuality and so on, are addressed in literature and particularly in poetry from a perspective that can be relatable for students despite the peculiar way of expression. This is especially true for song lyrics, as stated in the first chapter, since these are sensed as closer to the familiarity of everyday life (Dall'Armellina, 2004).

The risk with poetry teaching is that students often feel that the aim of the activity is to find the meaning of the poem, which is hidden behind language and that has only one true interpretation (Xerri, 2013). In this case, *duty* is what guides them in the textual analysis and the emotional

impact of the words is neglected, preventing students to discover the *need* before mentioned.

Moreover, adolescents already struggle to find validation to their issues in para-literary forms such as films or songs outside of school; they need to discover that literature presented to them in class has the same aim and can be employed in an equal journey of self-discovery (Spaliviero, 2015). This can happen if motivation is encouraged and maintained with some fundamental strategies that are here listed as found in Balboni (2004):

- a) *short* texts should be introduced, in order not to look unattainable by students;
- b) *paratextual* elements, such as images and explanatory notes, are important to help students access the text;
- c) *beautiful and meaningful* texts should be chosen, considering themes that are relevant to adolescents' need and interests, even if it means excluding some important pieces of the history of literature;
- d) being careful not to transform literature into a *duty*, a discipline that serves only in function of assessments, but always prioritizing students and their different *intelligences* and *cognitive styles*;
- e) organising activities in a proper teaching program, as will be explained in the second paragraph of this chapter.

In Bagherkazemi, Alemi (2010) poetry is cited as an example of short literary text that could be presented to students of English as a foreign language in order to reduce their anxiety and motivate them to express themselves.

## 2.2 *The teacher of literature*

The teacher's role in literature courses has changed over the years along with the different approaches that were used in literary education; in the traditional framework, literature teachers were deemed as the

“gatekeepers to meaning” (Xerri, 2013), an attitude that, as explained in the first chapter, is quite demotivating for students.

According to the most recent development in literature teaching, the hermeneutic method, teachers act as expert guides that mediate a debate in the classroom about texts and language (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015). Taking into consideration language education in general, teachers have transformed in the past century to experts who plan and mediate the acquisition process leaving students to a greater degree of autonomy (Balboni, 2015).

When it comes to poetry teaching, teachers’ emotions towards it often play an important role in activity planning: international studies have found that teachers often feel inadequate or insecure when drafting strategies to present poetry in an engaging and motivating way (Benton, 2000). These feelings often move from inexperience or from the preconception that students will naturally reject poetry as an interesting input; anxiety from assessment and the lack of time have also been listed as causes for self-doubt in poetry teaching. However, a study by Sigvardsson (2019) tries to locate some strategies that are used to teach poetry in the classroom to motivate students and develop their critical thinking. Teachers that have been interviewed for this research firstly *draw on personal engagement* and share some personal opinions and details to the class in order to inspire pupils and make them think of their own experience. Secondly, they believe that it is important to *reassure students on the accessibility of the text* by showing them that poetry is not an elite genre and it is meant to be read and understood by everyone. This is essential to lower the affective filter and present the poem as something interesting, near to their lives and not as frightening as they may have thought. The third theme close to teachers in this study is *creating a safe classroom atmosphere* in order to let pupils explore their emotions and reactions freely, without fearing their peers’ or the teacher’s judgment. Then, Sigvardsson mentions *scaffolding*

*pupils' interpretations and aesthetic experience*: it is considered essential that students derive pleasure from the text, but at the same time it may be difficult for them to put their reaction into words. For this reason, it is deemed important to dedicate some space to emotions and to encourage them by focusing on themes important to students or setting the words to music, continuously discussing sensations and reactions that may arise. After this focus on emotions, textual analysis is used to ground the pupils' interpretation in the words of the poem, paying particular attention to the poet's linguistic choices and their distance from common language.

These strategies may guide teachers in the planning of activities, preventing them from feeling discouraged and helping them find motivation to look at poetry as a new and interesting way of teaching language that could stimulate their enthusiasm and pass it along to students.

### *2.2.1 The director and the facilitator*

Teachers are the directors of the language acquisition process: they supervise every activity in the classroom and guide students from the *backstage*, without taking full control of their choices but making sure that they still follow a flexible itinerary that has been planned in advance (Balboni, 2015).

On the same level, teachers assume the role of facilitators on account of the fact that they mediate the distance between students and the language they are learning, assisting them in finding solutions to the problems that arise both on a linguistic and cultural level. Indeed, they are “the student's allies «against» the difficulties of the language” (Balboni, 2015) and as such they should not reduce to judging mistakes in a disadvantageous attitude. As facilitators, teachers provide learners with the means to connect with the foreign language on different levels, culturally but also

with telematics or international exchanges, giving students the possibility to develop linguistic competence independently (Balboni, 2015).

Teaching literature requires the same balance between accompanying students on a pre-designed path and leaving space to make autonomous choices in the approach to the text. A dialogue should be established to find a middle ground among the necessity to follow a scholastic program and the cultural interests of the class (Spaliviero, 2015). Two different routes are possible: avoiding teaching the text at all, hoping that the greatness of the literary text and the students' predisposition will be sufficient to develop a connection between them, or trying to plan a *reading* itinerary with the language teaching instruments possessed by the teacher. This last option would imply stimulating *interest* and maintaining *motivation*, aiming at the development of *critical judgment* and at the elaboration of an *ipertext* that takes context and background into consideration (Balboni, 2004).

### 2.2.2 *The Teaching Unit*

The main resource available to the teacher to plan an engaging and efficient literature course is the *Teaching Unit*, which constitutes and at the same time coincides to a certain extent with the *module* (Balboni, 2015). Modules are auto-sufficient portions of the curriculum and in the case of literature they can be structured around four different elements: theme, literary genre, author and literary trend. The two latter follow the traditional model, but are still presented through teaching units of work; the theme should be chosen for its significance to teenage students and should arise from a discussion built around the learner's interests. Lastly, the literary genre is less motivating, but could be addressed by employing genres familiar to students, such as movies or songs (Balboni, 2015).

These modules are articulated in *Learning Units* and each of them deals with a text. The phases to organize the itinerary to the reading and comprehension of a literary text are schematised in Balboni (2004, 2015). The first step is *motivation*, which should be established at the beginning of the module and therefore covers only a brief moment; the aim in this phase is to engage students in activities that activate the *expectancy grammar*. Brainstorming techniques are functional to the development of hypothesis on what will happen in the text, the vocabulary that could be present, the textual genre; this could happen as part of an informal dialogue on the topic of the text, where keywords should emerge and be noted down by students to help them in the comprehension task. Images may be used here to make clear important concepts that will be found in the text.

For poetry teaching, this phase could be essential in diminishing the wariness that poems in a foreign language could initially evoke in students, especially at lower linguistic levels. By reminding students of what they already know and guiding them towards the discovery of new linguistic elements in the text, teachers can here lower any affective filter that may accompany a difficult activity such as poetry analysis (Delucchi, 2012).

Then, as described in Balboni (2004, 2015), follows the *global perception* of the text, which moves from skimming and scanning techniques that serve to verify the socio-pragmatic hypothesis inferred from context in an earlier phase and the linguistic hypothesis based on grammatical knowledge. In addition, dominion of global analysis is the elaboration of metaphors and other figures of speech. Techniques that may be used in this phase are the association of words to images, multiple-choice and cloze-type exercises that aim to develop and verify the students' comprehension ability (Balboni, 2015).

These activities can be carried out by students individually or in groups of two or three, in order to stimulate a debate on the meaning on the text; moreover, it is here important the presence of paratextual elements that help students in the comprehension and prevent feelings of discouragement in front of the text.

Comprehension is the aim of this phase and in order to understand completely a poetic text, listening should come before reading: hearing poetry is essential for its interpretation, because a metric and accentuated reading conveys all the expressivity that is meant to be appreciated through figures of sound that are functional to meaning making (Ardissino, Stroppa, 2009). The Internet offers numerous opportunities to enjoy poetry read by illustrious actors or by poets themselves and these resources should be employed in the global perception phase. Moreover, students may appreciate the most the musical rendition of poetry, whether music serves as a companion to poems or lyrics and sound are woven together in a song (Ardissino, Stroppa, 2009).

In a study by Gordon (2009), pupils' responses to heard poetry were analysed and it was found that they tend to "interpret sound as integral to meaning": after having heard poetry, students have shown to remember those words that were highlighted by sound elements such as rhymes, pauses, accents or alliteration and this affected their interpretation of the text. The report also illustrated that:

"Hearing poems without corresponding printed texts seemed to engage pupils and stimulate diverse interpretations. Pupils were eager to hear poems again, asked to hear specific points replayed, and initiated debate about the meaning of particular details. It seemed, too, that they were willing to tolerate ambiguity and unresolved meanings in the aural mode, seeing texts as open to interpretation rather than expressions of unified, closed meaning." (Gordon, 2009).

The same acoustic attention paid to certain words can be found in songs: music is functional to assigning meaning, since it can accentuate some words more than others, create a repetition of similar sounds that carry the



same concept or convey and highlight the emotions expressed in the text with notes. Songs “possess the same potentialities as lyrical poems while being more attractive for young adults” (Di Martino, Di Sabato, 2014).

In English as a foreign language, phonology and musicality are especially important aspects of the use of poetry for language teaching, since hearing poetry may help students improve pronunciation through the assimilation of rhyming words and their sound (Di Martino, Di Sabato, 2014).

The third phase is the *analytic perception* or *intensive reading* of the text and sees the teacher as a guide who poses some questions to encourage a reflection on some textual aspects and to lead students into a discussion on them. Different interpretations are here presented by the class and some specific morphosyntactic elements are enlightened by the teacher.

Here, the distance between poetry language and common speech should be noted and highlighted: all the linguistic elements that are distinctive of poetic style could be found and analysed with the guidance of the teacher, who should help students understand the mechanisms behind the language and how they deviate from the norm. This kind of analysis provides knowledge and awareness of the morphosyntactic functioning of the language and shows how grammar rules could be employed in original and different ways in everyday communication in order to “produce a particular meaning” (Akyel, 1995).

The fourth moment is the *critical synthesis*, which comprises the contextualisation of the text in relation to other texts of the same author or period, the extension to texts analysed previously in class or that are in the module and the confrontation between them. Subsequent is the *emotional and existential synthesis*, a moment for students to express their critical judgment of the text and justify it: what the reading has meant to them and how it relates to their personal experience should be object to their deliberation. These two synthesis phases are intertwined with one another

and see an exchange between the emotions of the right hemisphere with the reasoning of the left one (Balboni, 2004).

At this moment, especially when the linguistic level is low, debating the interpretation of the text in a coherent way may be difficult and therefore frightening for students, who would not put themselves in a position of vulnerability in front of the whole class. Di Martino and Di Sabato (2014) recommend that the conversation is kept informal and friendly, focusing on “sensations and reactions” in the first place; at the same time, teachers should choose poems with a vocabulary known by students or at least near to their everyday experience.

This model of *Teaching Unit* can be applied to analysis of poetic texts as well and some of the techniques that are suggested in Balboni (2004, 2015). These can be divided into:

- a) Techniques of analysis *of* the text;
- b) Techniques of analysis *beyond* the text.

The first group consists of activities that aim to highlight a specific characteristic of the text, underlining it or inserting it in templates; the examined elements could be lexical, phonologic, morphosyntactic or narrative. With this task, the structure of a poem could be investigated and understood by students through its breakdown.

The second group includes all those techniques that originate a debate between groups of students about relevant aspects of the text. Some examples may be asking students to assume the role of *directors* in a theatrical transposition of the text or to reimagine the text as a film that could be divided into sequences with different framings; the same kind of transposition could be applied to music, if students are asked to find a soundtrack to the text. This way the text is seen as a whole and a discussion on its features and different interpretations arises among the class (Balboni, 2004).

In this instance, it is important to include language-teaching technologies into the project: for poetry in particular, audio resources are fundamental for the comprehension and appreciation of the genre (Balboni, 2015). The phonologic aspect of poetry would be neglected if students did not experience an authentic listening of the text different from the teacher's reading. Moreover, it has already been mentioned how music and poetry are strictly connected and therefore an activity that aims to match poems with a soundtrack or a song that conveys the same emotions would be recommended (Balboni, 2015).

Conversely, technology and music could be the beginning of the teaching unit, through the choice of presenting a song with lyrics close to the theme of the module, which can therefore be associated with poetic texts in a later moment (Dall'Armellina, 2004). The most advantageous point of this itinerary through songs and poems is motivation: by choosing themes that are close to teenage students' experience and an art form, the song, which is highly familiar to them, teachers can stimulate the engagement of learners and maintain it throughout the course of the language and literature module.

Overall, the main conquest of this method would be the development of critical thinking, which matures thanks to a continuous conversation between teachers and students on the topic chosen for the thematic module (Dall'Armellina, 2004).

### *2.3 The regulation of English teaching in the first two years of Italian upper secondary education*

In this paragraph the main guidelines for English teaching in the first two years of upper secondary education will be presented as described by the Ministry of Education in the "Indicazioni nazionali riguardanti gli obiettivi specifici di apprendimento" (2010). These dispositions will be different for the *licei*, *istituti tecnici* and *istituti professionali* and here they

are divided into guidelines about linguistic-communicative competence on one hand and knowledge of the English cultural universe on the other.

### *2.3.1 Linguistic and communicative competence*

The development of linguistic-communicative competence is listed in the objectives of English teaching in upper secondary education. In particular, this is described in the ministerial guidelines (2010) as the acquisition of these abilities:

- a) *comprehension* of written and oral texts of personal and scholastic interest;
- b) *production* of written and oral texts to relay facts, describe situations, argue and support opinions;
- c) *interaction* in the foreign language in a manner that is appropriate both to speakers and context.

For the *licei*, this competence is outlined in the first two years as the student's ability to globally comprehend written and oral texts about known topics inherent to personal life, as well as to create oral and written coherent texts to report facts and describe situations close to known environments and personal experiences. Furthermore, they should be able to communicate and participate in a discussion with native speakers suitably for the context. From the linguistic point of view, they reflect on the system in its phonologic, morphologic, syntactic and lexical aspects, as well as on the functions of language such as textual and stylistic varieties, always considering a comparison with the Italian language to find analogies and differences. Lastly, students should grow more and more independent in the acquisition of the language, becoming aware of learning strategies for the foreign language.

In the guidelines for the *Istituti Tecnici* and *Professionali*, two basic linguistic-communicative objectives in foreign language acquisition are equally described for all specialisations and courses: the use of English for

the main communicative and operative aims and the production of various texts in relation to different communicative aims. Moreover, English teaching is structured into knowledge and abilities; when planning activities, professors should remain consistent with the curriculum of study chosen by the students, making them experience actively the language through its constant application. It is therefore recommended the employment of multimedia and interactive resources; additionally, teachers should guide students into developing learning strategies that will help them make a conscious connection between English and Italian in an intercultural view of language education.

The acquisition of this competence is structured into knowledge and abilities. On one hand, students should know about:

- a) communicative, socio-linguistic and paralinguistic elements of oral production;
- b) grammatical structure, phonological system, rhythm and prosody, orthography and punctuation;
- c) strategies for the global comprehension of oral, written and multimedia texts about personal experiences, social and current topics;
- d) lexicon and idiomatic phrases about known topics and style varieties;
- e) written production of brief, simple and coherent texts of different typologies but appropriate for context.

Conversely, this knowledge translates into the ability to participate in brief conversations with native speakers on known topics and employing the right strategies in order to find the essential points of simple texts and understand them globally. Furthermore, students should use the right vocabulary to express basic everyday events and describe personal experiences, creating simple, short and coherent texts about themes near to their lives.

### 2.3.2 Knowledge of the English cultural universe

The second greater purpose of English teaching in the first two years of upper secondary education is to learn about the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.

In the *licei*, students should pay special attention to social aspects associated with English culture and make a comparison between the foreign culture and their own. This should also happen thanks to international exchanges, even virtual, and through the constant use of the foreign language.

It is also interesting to note that to gain this cultural knowledge the analysis of literary texts is recommended: these should be simple and are listed with other textual typologies such as articles, films, videos or oral products and images.

For *Istituti Tecnici* and *Professionali* the guidelines mention an intercultural approach to the language sustained by the employment of authentic multimedia texts and the continuous confrontation between socio-cultural analogies and differences of the English and Italian universe.

Overall, the study of literature in the first two years of English is only mentioned in the *licei* guidelines, whereas for the *istituti* the focus is on the topic of texts that could be used, which should be of personal interest for students. This does not exclude poetry, since, as was mentioned before, it conveys relatable themes near to everyday experiences in a teenager's life. Moreover, an intercultural approach would be promoted by the analysis of English poetry, which allows students to encounter the foreign culture from the exclusive point of view of the native poet's words. This is valid both for the *licei* and the *istituti*, because the development of a literary competence is expected in the mother tongue and in the curriculum of the following years and introducing literature in English from the beginning would only be beneficial. The reasons why the study of poetic

texts in earlier stages of language acquisition could be advantageous has been analysed in the first chapter and should not be neglected in a purely communicative approach to language teaching. This could indeed turn out to be restricting and, even though literary and poetic texts require a deeper analysis and interpretation, they are instrumental to the acquirement of less explicit but equally essential linguistic mechanisms (Spagnesi, 2011). Poetic texts could therefore be employed as brief written texts about personal topics that offer an intercultural view of the English language at all levels of proficiency, as long as the right activities are planned to help students in the comprehension. Similarly, song lyrics are the kind of multimedia texts that are mentioned in the guidelines for the development of comprehension and production abilities.

### 3. The Study on the Employment of Poetic Texts

This chapter will present the study that was conducted on high school students and teachers of English, with the purpose of understanding the current employment of poetic texts in the first two years of the *licei* and *istituti tecnici*. A questionnaire was proposed to students, studying their opinions on poetry in general and their experiences with its use in English learning. Moreover, teachers were briefly interviewed on their attitude towards the introduction of poetry in the first two years of upper secondary education and were asked about some examples from their professional experiences. The purpose of the study and its outcome will be here analysed.

#### *3.1 The aim of the study*

The research question that guided this study was whether the use of poetic texts would be motivating or discouraging for EFL students in the first two years of upper secondary education. Specifically, the aim was to investigate firstly students' beliefs and opinions about poetry in general, in order to understand if their attitude towards it would be open to the challenge it presents, intimidated by language difficulties or simply uninterested. This was essential to determine whether poetry could be effectively employed in language teaching, taking advantage from its more motivating characteristics such as novelty, challenge and potentiality of being considered relatable. However, the risk that students could find poetry an insurmountable obstacle at such an early level of language proficiency was taken into account; if poetic texts were to be considered discouraging, any activity constructed around them would be potentially worthless. The criticalities investigated in this research were also examined in studies by Xerri (2013), Çetinavcı and Tütüniş (2012) and Sigvardsson (2019).



Secondly, the students' experiences with poetry teaching were examined: here the aim was to explore the methods they were presented poetic texts with in the foreign language and determine which of these they had found more engaging. In this regard, their experience and opinion on the use of songs was also to be studied, since it has been considered an effective way of introducing poetic language in the English classroom (Griffiths, 2012; Saricoban, Metin, 2000; Shen, 2009). However, the focus of the research stayed on poetry and songs were only taken into consideration with the purpose of presenting poetry in a form that could be more motivating to teenage learners.

Another aim of the research was to interview EFL teachers and learn whether they employed poetry in the first two years of language teaching and if not, the reasons that lead them to this choice. The interviews were essential to verify some concerns mentioned in other studies, such as Sigvardsson (2019) and Benton (1999), about the reserve that many teachers have said to feel when dealing with poetry.

### *3.2 Data collection*

A questionnaire was chosen to collect behavioural and attitudinal information about EFL students in the first two years of Italian upper secondary education. The research was qualitative in nature, since the main interest was on the opinions and sentiments that accompany poetry teaching in the foreign language, from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. Indeed, being the focus on motivation and the perception of poetry from the learners' point of view, a quantitative analysis would not have been appropriate. The students' feedback is useful to understand where poetry teaching could fail or succeed and which methodology could be employed to better engage teenage students.

The questionnaire was submitted online, both for a necessity created by the closing of schools in the Covid-19 pandemic, but also because it was

deemed time effective and left the participants with some freedom to complete it whenever they felt ready. The second method of data collecting employed, the interviews to the teachers, was performed on the phone due to the emergency state restrictions on live meetings; the conversations were not recorded, but notes were taken on the most salient answers.

### 3.2.1 *Participants*

The questionnaire was completed by 73 students aged between 14 and 17. They attended the first and second year of the same high school, but in different courses, divided respectively into a first and second year of two *licei* and a first and second year of an *istituto tecnico*. As stated in the ministerial guidelines, at the end of the first *biennio* students should acquire linguistic competence and knowledge equal to the B1 level on the QCER; the participants, therefore, possessed a pre-intermediate or intermediate proficiency in the English language.

The choice to focus on classes from the first two years of upper secondary school originated from the wish to understand the potentiality of poetry teaching for language acquisition at an early stage, therefore examining it outside of the literature curriculum that is expected in the last *triennio*. As seen in the previous chapter, the ministerial guidelines do not mention the study of literature as one of the objectives in the first two years of *licei* and *istituti tecnici*; however, comprehension and production abilities are mentioned in relation to short and simple texts, giving space to the introduction of poetic texts as an opportunity to reflect on language mechanisms.

Moreover, being the research centred on motivation, the aim was also to investigate whether a lower language proficiency could be a reason for discouragement when dealing with poetry in English or if, presented with the proper methodology, it could still be found engaging by younger

pupils. The risk was that negative preconceptions towards poetry could endanger all the positive effects that the study of poetic texts could bring to the language acquisition process; in particular, the notion of poetry as a highbrow and unreachable genre could potentially demoralise students.

On the other hand, introducing poetry in the *biennio* presents some potentialities such as familiarising students with a literary language and helping them develop the strategies that will be useful when dealing with textual analysis in the last three years. Moreover, from the motivational point of view, poetic texts in this stage could still be seen as a novelty, something different from the usual language lesson, and not as a duty as could happen when integrated in the literature curriculum. The fear of assessment (Xerri, 2013) does not weight on the activity and a detailed historic contextualisation, which could be found uninteresting by students at this stage, is not necessary. The focus can be on the playfulness and creativity of the language, engaging learners in a discovery of new ways of expressing themselves and looking at the mechanisms of the foreign language from a new perspective.

An additional set of participants to the research were the teachers of the chosen classes: three English teachers were interviewed on the phone and asked about their experiences with poetry teaching in the *biennio*. The aim here was twofold: firstly, to understand to what extent poetry in English is employed nowadays in the first two years of upper secondary education, and secondly to collect a professional opinion on the feasibility of the idea.

### 3.2.2 *The instrument for data collection*

The main instrument chosen to collect data was the questionnaire, built taking Dörnyei (2003, 2011) as reference to write the items, and then submitted to students online. Given the qualitative nature of the research, which focused on the students' opinions and feedback, and the current emergency state that excluded any field study, the questionnaire was a

valid resource to gain behavioural and attitudinal information about poetry teaching in the EFL classroom.

The electronic format of the questionnaire allowed a quick and straightforward exchange between the recipients and the researcher; teachers served as a medium, ensuring the delivery to all the students involved. The questionnaire items were all written in Italian, to avoid any misunderstanding or ambiguity given by language difficulties.

The restitution was automatic through the software chosen for the compilation of the questionnaire. The answers were automatically analysed by the software and later schematised in graphs, providing a clear instrument for the evaluation of the outcome.

It is important to specify that all questionnaires were compiled anonymously, granting the neutrality of the participants' answers, which were not influenced by the need to impress the teacher, and respecting the privacy of all those involved.

The items used in the questionnaire were close-ended and included:

- a) *rating scales*, that analysed the frequency and intensity of certain activities but also the students' opinion on them;
- b) *multiple-choice items*, to which was added the option to specify or add an answer;
- c) *checklists*, used here to determine the methodology the students were acquainted to;
- d) *open-ended questions*, to give students the opportunity to add a personal comment.

The questionnaire was not divided into sections, but the questions followed an internal logic that divided them into different topics.

The first five items investigated the participants' experience with poetic texts in general, at school and in their free time, and their feelings towards them. In this section potential negative opinions on poetry were explored, such as the belief that poetry is accessible only at a higher level of

education and the sentiment of discouragement or disinterest that one could feel in front of a poem. On the other hand, a possible interest in poetry could have also been detected from these items, proving its motivational potential.

Each item, as it was presented to students, is displayed in Appendix 1.

Item 1 aimed to gain some general information on the participants' experience with poetry teaching; given their level of education, it was assumed that they had encountered poetry in the past, even if they had not had the chance yet in high school. The "never" option was included nonetheless.

Item 2 asked students to express their feelings when they find themselves in front of a poetic text, and gave them a wide range of emotions to choose from, from discouragement to enthusiasm. Even though the question was quite general in nature, it was important to assess right from the beginning if the prevailing sentiments were negative or positive, in order to determine the impact that poetry could have on motivation and consequently on the language acquisition process.

The next item was a frequency scale that investigated the participants' personal interest in poetry, asking whether they read poetry outside of school: this would be beneficial to the effectiveness of poetry teaching, but at the same time the lack of it does not exclude a later-found interest in it when dealing with poems in class.

Item 4 concerned the idea that students could see poetry as a cause for reflection upon everyday issues, tracing back to the idea of the *need* for literature (Balboni, 2015). Indeed, teenagers should discover that they could relate to poems and find in them a new way of looking at their experiences, drawing from the poet's words a message that could be relevant to their personal life. Their opinion on this topic was considered influential to plan any activity surrounding poetry.

Item 5 was constructed around the notion of poetry as a highbrow genre, which requires a higher level of education to be understood; through a scale, students had to express their agreement with this belief, potentially verifying or demystifying one of the most common concerns about poetry teaching at lower levels. This item was inspired by a previous study (Peskin, Wells-Joplin, 2012) that investigated the development of *poetic literacy* and found that students as young as 11 already possessed symbolic thinking abilities, even if they did not show any knowledge of the genre conventions. However, the same studies, together with Pike (2000), show that “in the first and middle years of secondary education students [...] read poetry quite literally” (Sigvardsson, 2017); personal interpretation could therefore be a critical point for younger pupils, but should not be considered unattainable.

Items 6 and 7 explored the students’ feedback on poetry in English. The former asked if they had ever encountered a poetic text in the foreign language, giving them at the same time the option in the answers to express their feelings about the idea: indeed they could have never dealt with English poetry but be interested in it or on the contrary had experienced it in a negative way. Here it was not essential to understand their familiarity with poetic texts in English, but rather to probe their potential fascination with them: whether or not participants had had past experiences with poetry, they could have still shown an interest in it, proving that introducing poems in English may increase motivation in pupils and consequently improve their language learning skills.

Similarly, item 7 explored the students’ self-confidence when dealing with poetry in English: their lower proficiency level could either discourage them and make the study of poetic texts seem impossible, or be seen as a minor difficulty that did not stop them in front of a new challenge. Motivation is still taken into consideration, especially for the risk of the affective filter rising in front of a difficult activity; teachers would here

play an essential role in lowering it, dissipating any feeling of anxiety at the beginning of the Teaching Unit.

Then followed a series of five questions regarding methodology. Participants were asked in item 8 to identify what has been in their experience the focus of poetry teaching; as mentioned in 2.2.2, literary modules could be centred on either the author, the genre, the historic background or focus on a specific theme. Here, possible answers also included stylistic analysis, translation and personal interpretation. Participants could choose more than one option, allowing a more complete overview of their experiences.

Item 10 asked students to check all the different media through which poetic texts had been presented to them, also giving the possibility to add another options. Answers included more traditional methods, such as texts written on paper or read by the teacher, but also technologies and online resources; the use of music and images to accompany the text was also taken into consideration.

The effectiveness of the different methodologies was tested in items 9 and 11, which asked for the participants' feedback on the options investigated by the two previous questions, giving the opportunity to choose more than one preference or to add their own. Both items aimed at tracing a possible path to poetry teaching at this level of education, highlighting the students' preferences in the focus of a Teaching Unit and the media that helped them more in understanding poetic texts. In particular, hearing poetry was deemed important to include, since previous studies such as Gordon (2009) show the benefits that listening has to the comprehension of poems, given the significance played by sounds in this genre. Music could also be an interesting way to present poems: it was mentioned in 1.1 how music is the natural companion to poetry and this provides a powerful resource to give students access to the poet's words when the language is an obstacle. Accompanying the text with sounds or even images could

equally help pupils in the comprehension process, also providing a needed variety of media that could facilitate the different cognitive styles present in the class. This item aimed to prove this idea, letting participants voice their personal preference and therefore providing a useful map of resources to employ in the Teaching Unit.

Item 12 still focused on methodology and asked a judgment on a *line-by-line* textual analysis, a process that could have been considered uninteresting by some students and very useful by others. Studies have indeed shown that an excessive focus on analysis could lead to disengagement on the pupils' hand (Sigvardsson, 2019). The purpose here was not to discourage teachers from providing a close analysis of the text, which could be essential to introduce a reflection on language, but to understand the pupils' opinion on it and to adjust the methodology accordingly, giving it more or less space in the Teaching Unit and ensuring to make it as engaging as possible.

The next two items explored the influence that assessment could have on poetry teaching; in the participants' case, poetry should not be object of direct assessment, therefore any negative feeling towards it could be easily avoided. However it was important to determine if this really was a critical point that could create anxiety in students and to understand the extent of its influence on teaching, both in a positive or negative direction. Indeed, it was hypothesised in item 14 that the lack of assessment could lead to a disinterest in those students who are not personally inclined to poetry.

Item 15 presented a quote taken from Sullivan (2005) about one of the most common preconception on poetry teaching, the view of teachers as those who hold the only solution to poetic texts, which are here seen as obscure riddles. This notion would discourage students from forming their own interpretation and prevent an authentic enjoyment of the poetic experience, and accordingly it would have to be eradicated from the beginning through an open dialogue with the class.



Item 16 still focused on interpretation and in particular on the participants' feelings towards expressing their judgment on poems; it was not specified if this would happen in front of the all class or in a smaller group, since that would have added a different value to the question. This item was in a way connected to the previous one, because it still took into consideration the possibility that a student could feel inadequate to comprehend the meaning of a poem and would prefer to accept the teacher's judgment as the only right one. Discomfort was one of the possible sentiments considered in the answers, which would lead to the rising of the affective filter and compromise the effectiveness of the activity. Establishing a safe environment is therefore essential, because teenagers' fear of judgment from their peers could only be reduced by a feeling of security; poetry may evoke very personal responses that students would not express to the rest of the class if they were worried about losing face.

The following item was the only one to mention poetry writing and again asked for the students' opinion on it; in a survey conducted by Benton (1999), poetry writing has been defined as an effective way to explore language and use it creatively, allowing students to express themselves while discovering new forms of communications. However, in the same survey, some feelings of anxiety were detected: creativity cannot be forced and the playfulness of the task could be overshadowed by embarrassment and lack of confidence. Here, this fear is taken into consideration, but poetry writing is still considered a promising instrument to play with the language; the students' opinion was important to determine whether this activity held some potential to be motivating.

Item 18 to 20 explored the participants' attitude towards the analysis of song lyrics; as stated before, music was not the centre of the research, but it was seen as a powerful instrument to introduce poetic language at an early stage. Consequently, students were asked in item 18 the frequency

to which they looked for lyrics of English songs in their everyday life; this attitude could be useful to language acquisition and would ensure their interest in doing the same in class. Items 19 investigated their experience with this kind of texts at school, whereas item 20 asked for their feedback: if the idea intrigued them, then this activity would be very promising from the motivational point of view.

Item 21 left space for participants to make any kind of comment or addition to their questionnaire and this was considered essential, given the importance that was put on opinions and feelings through the whole study.

Items 22 to 25 concerned personal information: age, gender, year and course of study. It is important to note that gender was a potentially influential data, since previous studies such as Benton (1999) had found a variance between male and female participants: boys were thought to enjoy poetry less than girls did, or at least to have more preconceptions about it. It was a minor aim of this research to verify this belief, especially considering the time gap between the two studies.

Overall, all the items considered the possibility that students may not have had any experience with poetry in English in the past and were formulated to allow them to express their opinion on it either way.

A secondary methodology used in this research was the interview, aimed at the three English teachers of the classes that participated in the study. Given the low number of those involved, the opportunity to have a conversation and ask them some open questions seemed the ideal way to collect their opinions on poetry teaching.

The questions thought for the interviews, as reported in Appendix 2, aimed to explore the actual position that poetic texts hold in the English teaching landscape, especially in the *biennio*, where the use of poetry is a choice that is left in the hands of teachers. Therefore, the first question asked whether or not the participants ever employed poetic texts to teach the

language in the first two years of upper secondary education. Depending on the answers received, the following question looked for the reason behind the teacher's choice. In particular, had the answer been negative, some possible concerns found in studies by Benton (1999), Xerri (2013) and Sigvardsson (2019) would have been addressed: time pressure, the notion of poetry as an obscure genre and the pressure of assessments were some of the elements taken into consideration.

If the answer had been positive, following questions explored the methodology chosen to present poetry and the students' perceived reactions to it. Song-lyrics were also included as an object of the interview, as a valid alternative to poems: methodology and students' feedback were investigated here as well.

### *3.3 Data Analysis*

The questionnaire was completed by a total of 73 students and their answers were automatically schematised in graphs by the software chosen for the completion.

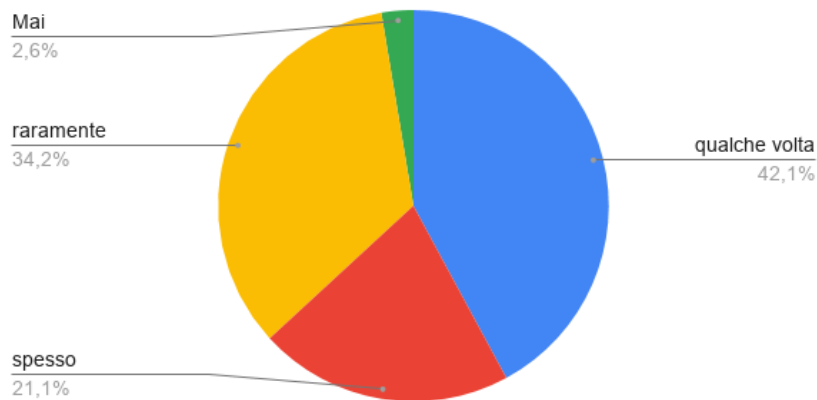
This paragraph will look at the participants' answers dividing them between those who are attending a *liceo* and those who attend the *istituto tecnico*, in order to better organise data and make the comparison between the two curricula clearer. Indeed, given the absence of a literary curriculum for the English language in the istituti tecnici, even in later years, a different outcome could be expected.

#### *3.3.1 Licei*

Overall, the students from the first year of *liceo scientifico* and the second year of *liceo delle scienze umane* that completed the questionnaire were 39, divided into 13 boys and 26 girls.

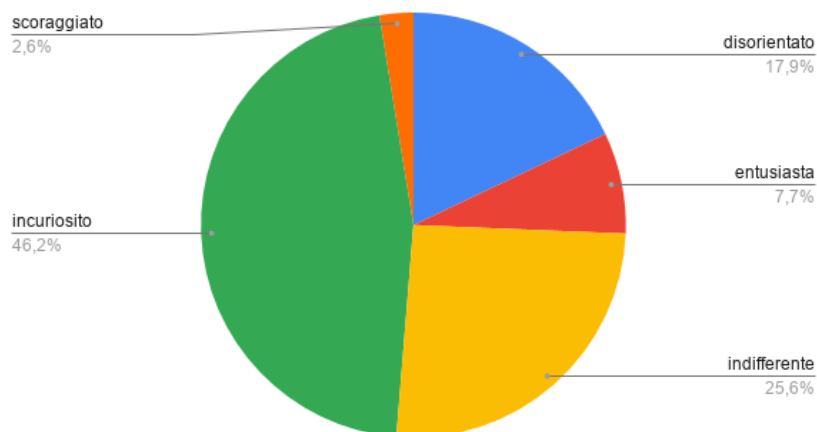
The answers will be here analysed item by item.

1- Nella tua carriera scolastica, quante volte hai affrontato un testo poetico?



In the first item, participants were asked about their previous experience with poetic texts in general. As shown by the graph, 41% of the respondents had dealt with poetry *sometimes* in their scholastic career; 35.9% had encountered it *rarely*, 20.5% *often* and 2.6% had *never* dealt with it before. It is important to note how poetic texts are familiar to the majority of the participants, whereas only 5 students out of 39 had never approached poetry in the past.

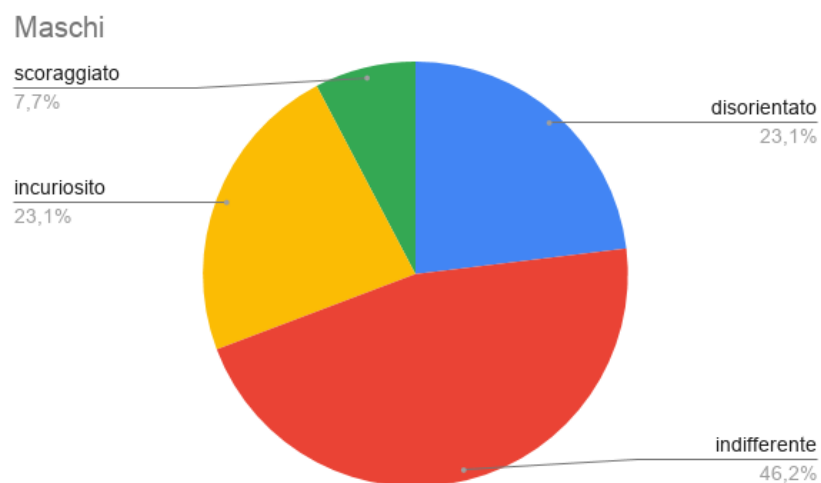
2- Quando ti trovi davanti un testo poetico, ti senti:



Item 2 investigated the participants feelings in front of a poetic text. Here, the outcome was generally positive: 46.2% declared to feel *intrigued* when they are presented a poem and 7.7% experiences *enthusiasm*. On the other hand, 25.6% feels *indifference*, whereas the 17.9% said they feel *disoriented* and the 2.6% is *discouraged* by poetic texts in general. Overall, more than half of the respondents from the *licei* usually respond

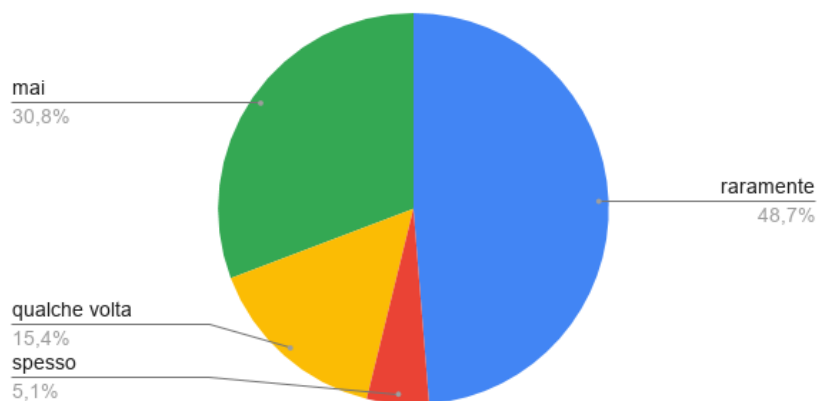
positively to poetry, but the percentage of students that expressed concern on their experience is not to be neglected. Indifference was also a prominent response and this also could be an obstacle to these students' motivation to deal with poetry.

Here it could be useful to analyse the boys' answers separately, to verify the claim that male pupils are more inclined to think of poetry as something superfluous or uninteresting (Benton, 1999).



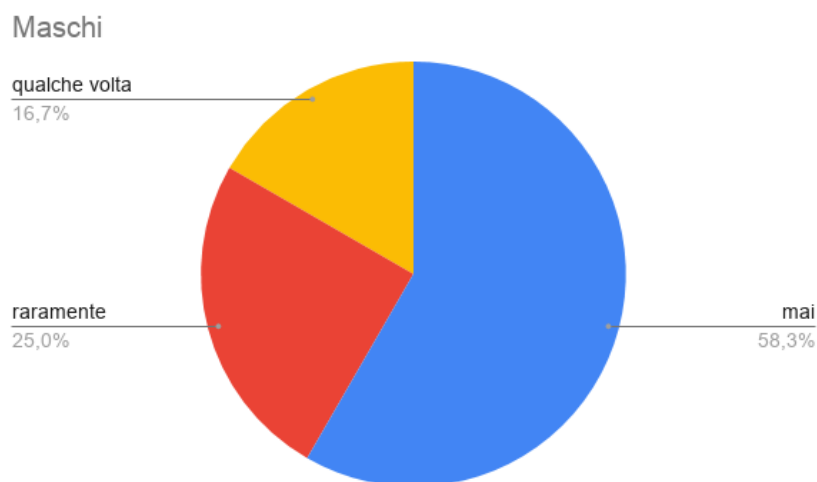
When looking exclusively at the boys' results, the outcome is different. The 46.2% feels *indifferent* in front of poetic texts and 23.1% is *disoriented*; moreover, 7.7% feels *discouraged*. The positive results are lower, with only a 23.1% of male participants that declared to feel *intrigued* by poetry and the absence of any *enthusiast* response. This data seem to align with previous research, verifying the hypothesis that boys generally hold negative prejudices towards poetry or view it with contempt and indifference (Benton, 1999).

3- Quante volte ti capita di leggere un testo poetico al di fuori della scuola?



Item 3 asked participants how frequently they read poetic texts outside of school; being a question about personal interest, it was expected that many answers could be negative. Indeed, 48.7% selected *rarely* and 30.8% answered *never*, constituting the majority of responses. However, there still was a promising 15.4% of students who *sometimes* read poetry outside of school, and 5.1% who read it *often*. This smaller section of participants shows that teenagers are not completely detached from poetry; moreover, the lack of a personal interest does not necessarily mean that students could not discover their enjoyment of poetic texts with the teacher's guidance.

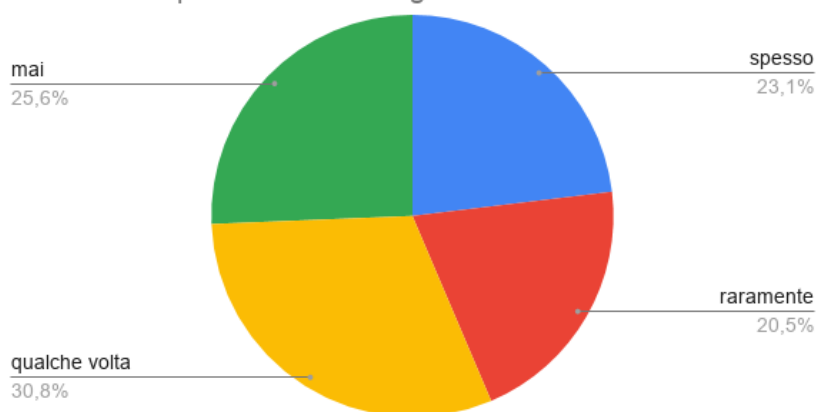
Once again, the boys' answer show a slightly different outcome.



It was expected that the great majority of boys would not read poetry on their own, both according to previous research and from their answers in

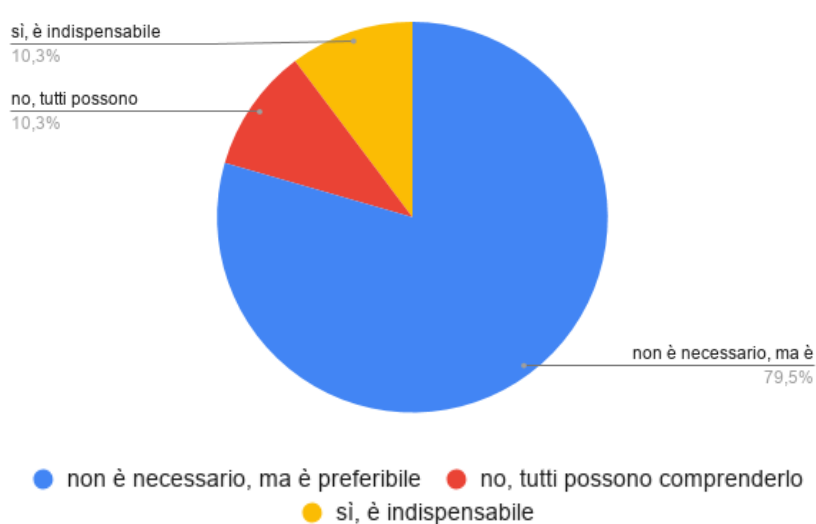
the questionnaire. However, even though 58.3% of male students selected *never*, the remaining 41.7% responded *rarely* or *sometimes*, answers that denote at least to some extent an interest in poetry.

4- Hai mai pensato alla poesia come luogo dove trovare spunti di riflessione per la vita di tutti i giorni?



Item 4, which aimed to understand whether teenagers perceive the *need* for poetry as a cause for reflection on everyday issues, gave the following results: 30.8% *sometimes* thought of poetry in these terms, 25.6% *never* had this idea, 23.1% thought of it *often* and 20.5% *rarely*. The percentage that had never considered poetry as related to common experiences is comparatively small, leaving space to delve into this opinion and demonstrate its possible application in class.

5- Pensi che per comprendere un testo poetico sia necessario un livello alto di istruzione?



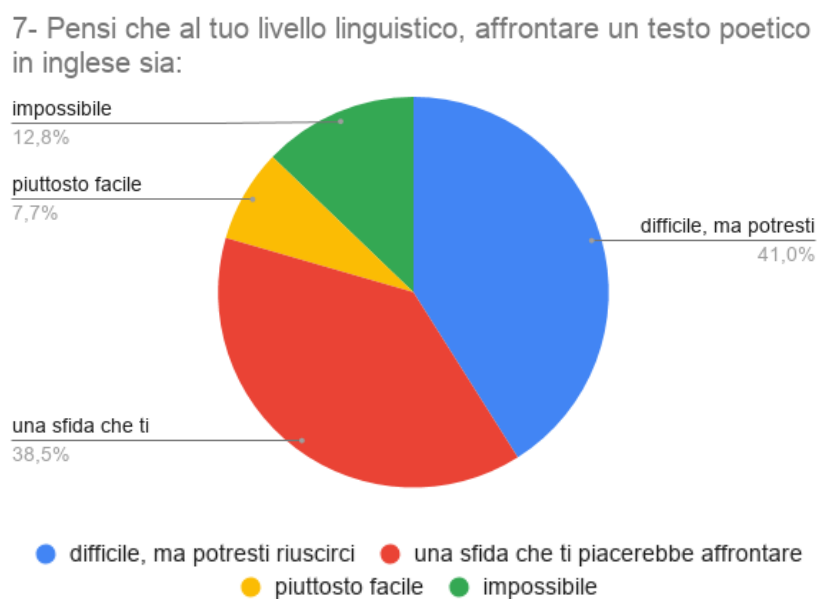
Item 5 investigated the notion of poetry as a genre reserved to higher levels of education; the great majority of respondents, 79.5%, agrees with the fact that it is *not necessary but preferable* to be highly educated in order to understand poetry. The remaining 20.6% was equally divided into two opinions: a half believes that education was *essential*, whereas the other half thinks that *everyone could understand* a poetic text. In terms of motivation, it is positive that only a minor percentage has shown doubts that poetry could be enjoyed at every level, so it would be essential to dissipate any discouragement and reinforce their self-confidence.



Item 6 aimed to understand the participants experience with poetry in English; at the same time, it gave the option to express their opinion on it. Given the age of the students', it was expected that their encounters with poetic texts would be few in number; as predicted, the 48.7% declared *never* to have dealt with poetry in English, but expressed *hope* to do it in the future. Another 23.1% did *not* have experience with it, but are *not* even *interested* in the idea, whereas 23.1% had encountered it and *hopes* to do so again. Lastly, 5.1% did *not* like their experience with poetry in English. This data is one again promising from the motivational point of view, since the majority of students would find pleasure in exploring poetic texts



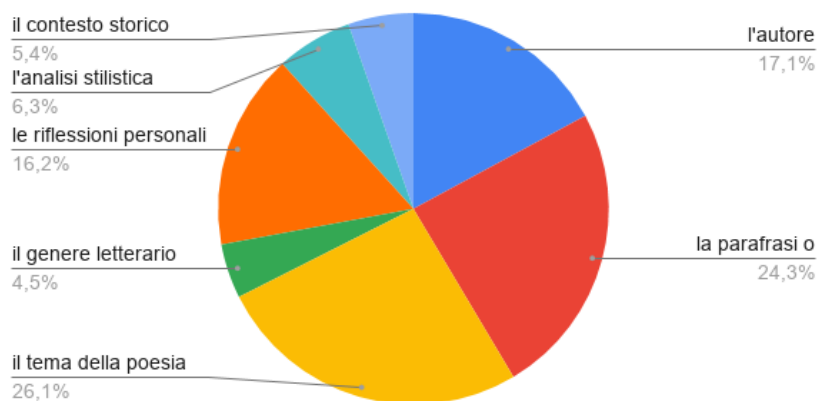
in English; moreover, any negative experience could have been influenced by elements that may be easily avoided or corrected in the future with proper communication between teacher and students.



Item 7 was similar to item 5 in nature, but focused on the students' proficiency level in English and its relation to the enjoyment of poetry in the foreign language. Here, 41% of respondents believes that dealing with poetry would be *difficult* for them, but at the same time they are *willing to try*; similarly, 38.5% deems it a challenge that they would like to accept. On the contrary, 12.8% thinks it impossible to face at their level and 7.7% believes it could be quite easy to deal with poetry in English.

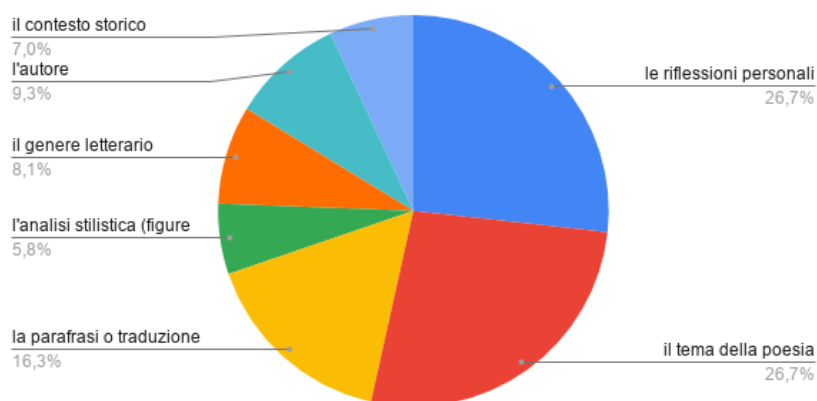
It is especially positive that poetic texts could be presented as a *challenge* to the class, since this could be a major element of motivation that could help the language acquisition process. At the same time, the majority of positive answers weakens the belief that poetry should be left to later stages of language learning, being too difficult or discouraging for students.

8- In classe, quando ti presentano una poesia in inglese, solitamente si concentrano su:



Item 8 focused on methodology: students chose one or more options between possible elements of English poems that, in their experience, have been more emphasised by teachers. Data indicate that the *thematic* module has been the most employed one, with 26.1% of picks; *paraphrase and translation* occupied the 24.3%, the focus on the *author* the 17.1% and *personal reflections* the 16.2%. The less popular ones were *stylistic analysis*, which occupied the 6.3%, *historical context* with the 5.4% and *literary genre* with the 4.5%. It is important to remember that students at this level have not encountered an English literature curriculum yet, therefore it was expected that elements such as author or historical background would be likely neglected. As predicted, paraphrase and translation were quite frequent, since the limited language knowledge would require the aid of the mother tongue to understand poems. The common choice to focus on the theme rather than on stylistic analysis could be beneficial in terms of engagement, as well as eliciting personal responses in students from this early stage.

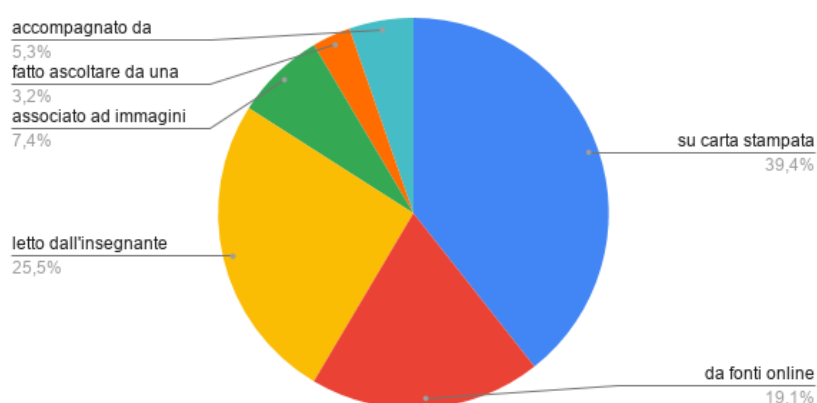
9- Tra le opzioni della domanda precedente, quali hanno suscitato/susciterebbero maggiormente la tua attenzione?



The answers to item 9 were essential to understand which type of module could be more beneficial to the students' motivation when dealing with English poetry. Between the options of the previous items, 53.4% of the students equally gave their preference to *personal reflections* and the *theme* of the poem, showing how these elements could be employed to effectively engage the class. *Paraphrase and translation* were still quite popular, being chosen by 16.3% of respondents, whereas the other elements were picked by a minority: the *author* by 9.3%, *genre* by 8.1%, *historical context* by 7% and *stylistic analysis* by 5.8%.

These results seem to verify the hypothesis that the motivational potential of poetry resides in the personal connection between the reader and the poet's words; moreover, the preference given to the theme requires a careful analysis of which topics could be more interesting for teenagers.

10- Seleziona tutte le modalità con cui ti è stato presentato il testo poetico nella tua esperienza:

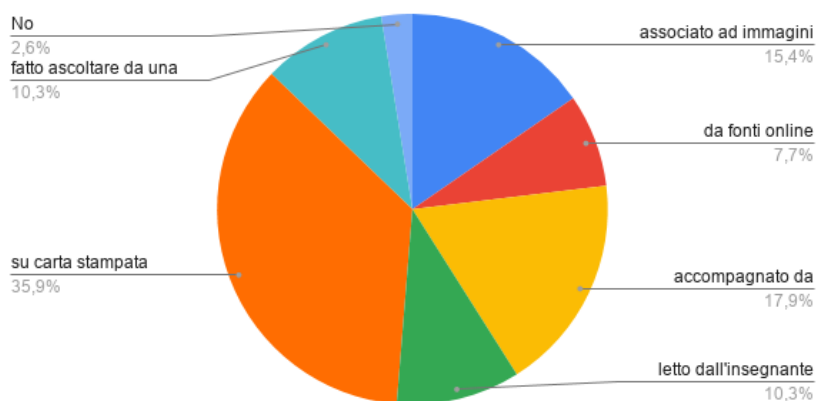




Item 10 focused on media through which poetry could be presented; as in item 8, students could choose one or more options, according to their experience. It can be seen from the graph that the most used instrument is the *printed text*, which occupied the 39.4% of answers; 25.5% of the times poetry is *read by the teacher*, whereas *online resources* are used for the 19.1%. It seems less frequent that poems have been *accompanied by images*, the 7.4%, or *music*, the 5.3%; lastly, the less employed way of presenting poetry is through a *recorded reading* of it.

It is here important to note that one option did not exclude the other, therefore it was possible that the same student had experienced poetry through different means. It is also promising to see how online resources occupy a significant portion of the graph, showing how technologies are being integrated into poetry teaching. It was also expected that the printed text would be largely employed, remaining an important source of distribution for poetry.

11- Tra queste modalità, ce n'è una che ti ha aiutato o pensi di aiuterebbe a comprendere meglio il testo poetico?



Item 11 showed the students' preferences between the media presented in item 10. In particular, 35.9% of participants believes that reading poetry from the printed text was what could help them the most to understand it; this choice could be traced to the students' lower proficiency level and to the reassurance that the written text could provide them. Accompanying

*music* to words was the second most chosen answer, whereas *images* were deemed helpful only by the 15.4% of respondents.

It was surprising to notice how instruments that have been thought to be more motivating for students, such as *online resources*, *hearing* it from the teacher or a recorded reading (Gordon, 2009), occupied the lower percentage of answers, from 10.3% to 7.7%.

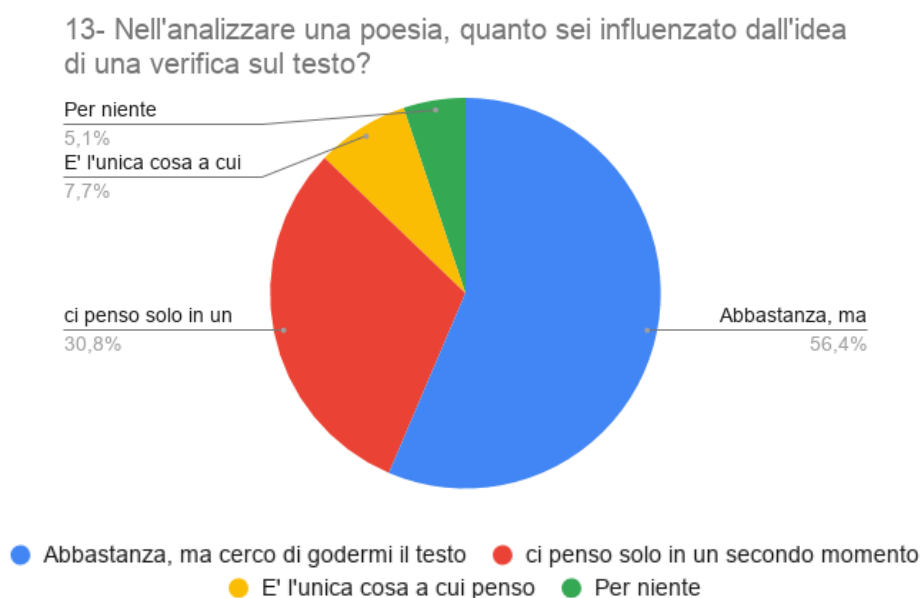
Two factors may have influenced this outcome: either the great variety of options caused a dispersion in the answers, or the low level of language knowledge brought students to believe that any option different from the written text could prove to be too difficult to manage with their abilities. This notion was probably caused by their inexperience and could be proved wrong by showing them how these are actually powerful resources when dealing with any kind of text.



Item 12 asked students their opinion on *line-by-line* analysis of poems in English. Results went against the hypothesis that this activity could be disengaging for students (Sigvardsson, 2019): indeed, 56.4% declared that it *helped* understanding poetry better. Even a great portion of those who deem it *boring*, the 30.8%, still think it *necessary*; only the 7.7%

considers it both *boring* and *useless* and the 5.1% believes that it made the text even *more complex*.

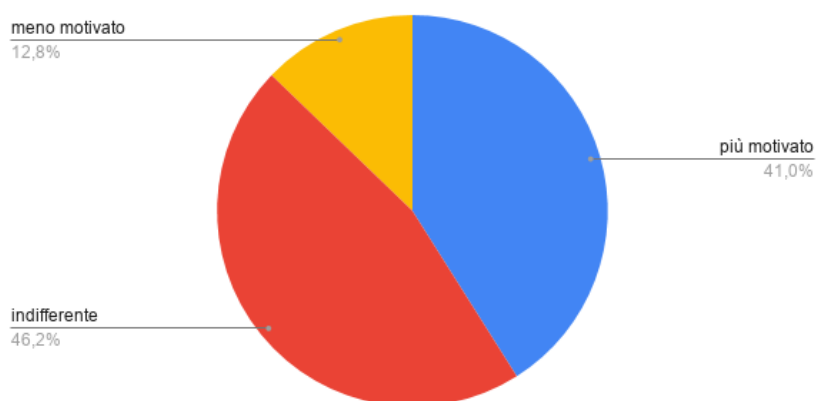
Overall, even if some restraint towards this type of analysis is still present, results proved that at this language proficiency level it could be beneficial to look at the text closely, in order to make it clearer for the readers. However, this should not be the only purpose of poetry teaching, but only an instrument from which a reflection on the language mechanisms could move.



Item 13 investigated the fear of assessment hypothesised by Xerri (2013), which could be easily avoided in the *biennio*. 56.4% of participants from the *licei*, said to be *quite influenced* by the idea of a test when dealing with poetry, but they try to enjoy it nonetheless. For 30.8%, the thought of assessment comes only at a later moment, whereas 7.7% thinks exclusively of that; only for 5.1% of students this is never a concern.

Overall, the results do not show an excessive anxiety at the thought of assessment and this is beneficial for students to enjoy the text without worrying about memorising notions about it; this was especially important to determine in the *licei*, where students would potentially be tested on poetic texts in the last three years of upper secondary education.

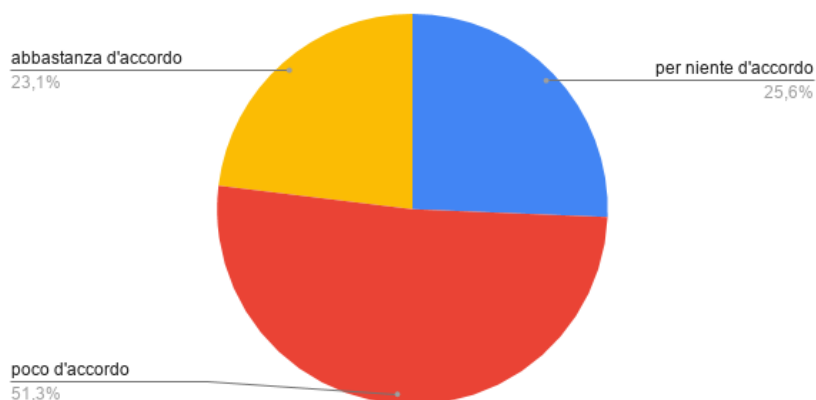
14- Se invece il testo poetico non fosse oggetto di verifica, come ti sentiresti?



Item 14 was closer to the students' current experience, since it hypothesised their feelings towards poetic texts when these were not object to assessment. As the graph shows, 46.2% of participants declared to feel *indifferent* towards this option; 41% feels *more motivated* and 12.8% feels *less motivated*.

It was important to prove that the lack of assessment did not influence engagement negatively: students have shown that the absence of the *duty* to study poetry influenced their feelings only to a lesser extent, and even partially increased their motivation towards the activity.

15- Quanto sei d'accordo con l' affermazione: "La poesia è un indovinello e l'unica risposta esatta è in mano all'insegnante"?



Item 15 explored another common preconception around poetry; it was found that 51.3% of students slightly agrees with the sentence "poetry is a riddle and the only right answer is in the hands of the teacher". The

25.6% disagrees completely and 23.1% agrees almost completely with the quote.

This notion found resonance in the participants, even though at a lesser extent; since this was one of the concerns shared by a number of researchers, it was expected that only a minority would completely disagree with it. However, it was promising to discover that the agreement is only partial and with some reserves, leaving space for the teacher to disprove it.



Item 16 aimed to explore the potentiality and criticality of personal interpretation; it was expected that this could be an engaging element for teenagers, but the low proficiency level and the risk of exposing themselves in front of the class were significant factors.

Results went against the prediction, showing that 43.6% of students feels *indifferent* at the thought of expressing their judgment on poetry; 38.5% feels *motivated*, whereas 17.9% feels either *inadequate* or *uncomfortable*. The outcome was not completely negative, given the significant portion of participants that expressed *motivation*; however, *indifference* was predominant, but this attitude could still be transformed by the right approach to the activity. It was essential that negative feelings were limited, since they could cause damage to the language acquisition process more than indifference.

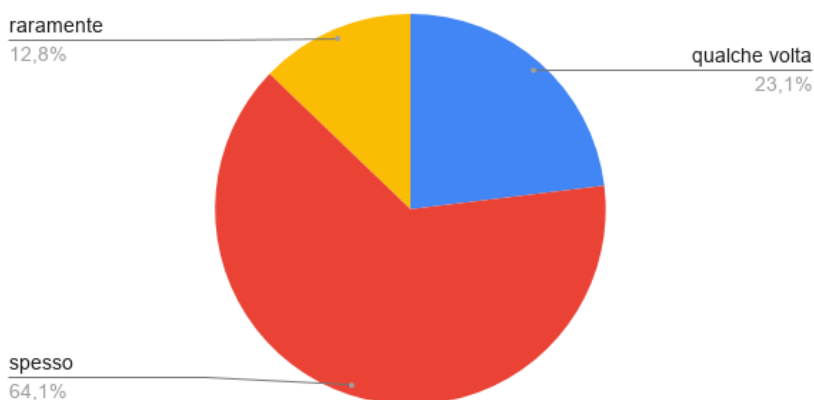


17- L'idea di provare a scrivere dei versi in inglese:



Item 17 was the only one about poetry writing; as the graph makes clear, a large portion of respondents, 46.2% said they are *scared* at the thought of writing poems in English. This was expected, especially given their low confidence with the foreign language and the personal nature of the activity. On the contrary, a significant portion, 33.3%, is *intrigued* by the idea; 12.8% deems it *boring* and 7.7% said they would *like to try*.

18- Ti capita mai di cercare e leggere il testo di una canzone inglese?



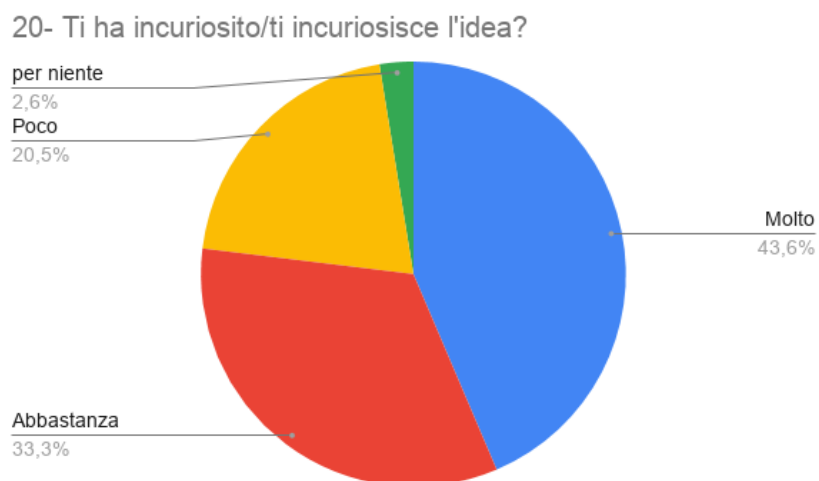
Item 18 introduced the topic of song lyrics analysis; 64.1% of students said they *often* read texts from English songs on their own, 23.1% *sometimes* read them and 12.8% *rarely* do so.

These answers prove the motivational potential of English song lyrics: indeed, even though a smaller number of students have a personal interest

in poetry, songs appeal to the great majority, therefore being a powerful instrument to introduce pupils to poetic language.



Item 19 still focused on English song lyrics, but in the school environment. 43.6% of students has *sometimes* analysed a song in class, whereas 33.3% has *rarely* done it. A significant portion, 17.9%, has *never* dealt with English songs and 5.1% has encountered them *often*. The outcome shows that the analysis of song lyrics in class is a familiar one for the majority of students, an element that could offer them safety and reassurance.



Item 20 asked a feedback on the analysis of English song lyrics; here the responses were largely positive and proved once again the potential of this activity. The idea intrigues 43.6% of participants *very much*, 33.3% *quite*, 20.5% *a little* and 2.6% *not at all*. Despite some restraint from a minority

of participants, song lyrics have been proven to be an engaging instrument for language acquisition and for the familiarisation with poetry.

Item 21 left some free space for students to add any comment; the only addition made was by one student, who wrote that they had analysed only one poem in the first year of *liceo* and now they often dealt with song lyrics.

### 3.3.2 Istituti Tecnici

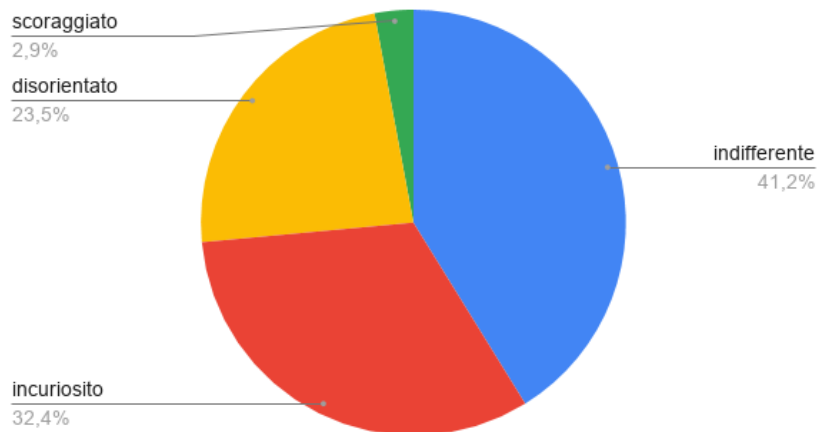
The first and second year of Istituto Tecnico, specifically Turistico, that participated in the questionnaire were composed of 34 students, divided into 27 girls and 8 boys.

The results from every item will be here analysed and where necessary a confrontation between male and female respondents will be made.



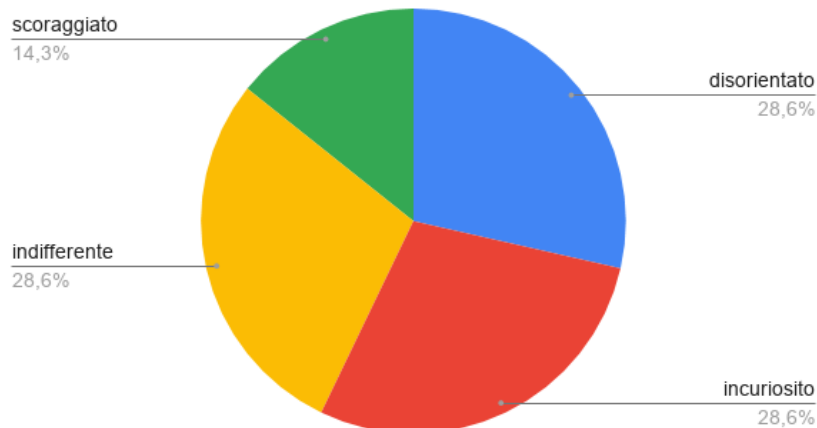
The graph for item 1 shows that 55.9% of students from the istituto tecnico had dealt with poetry *sometimes* in their school career, 17.7% encountered it *rarely*, 14.7% *often* and 11.8% had *never* dealt with poetic texts before. It can be deduced from the results that poetry is familiar to some extent to the great majority of students.

2- Quando ti trovi davanti un testo poetico, ti senti:



Item 2 asked participants to express their feelings when confronted with poetic texts: 41.2% feels *indifferent* in front of poetry, 32.4% feels *intrigued*, 23.5% is *disoriented* and 2.9% is *discouraged*. It is important to notice that negative feelings towards poetry are limited to a smaller portion of participants, whereas the predominant sentiment is indifference; this should not be viewed as a negative factor, since a proper motivational phase in the Teaching Unit could awake an interest in the activity.

Maschi

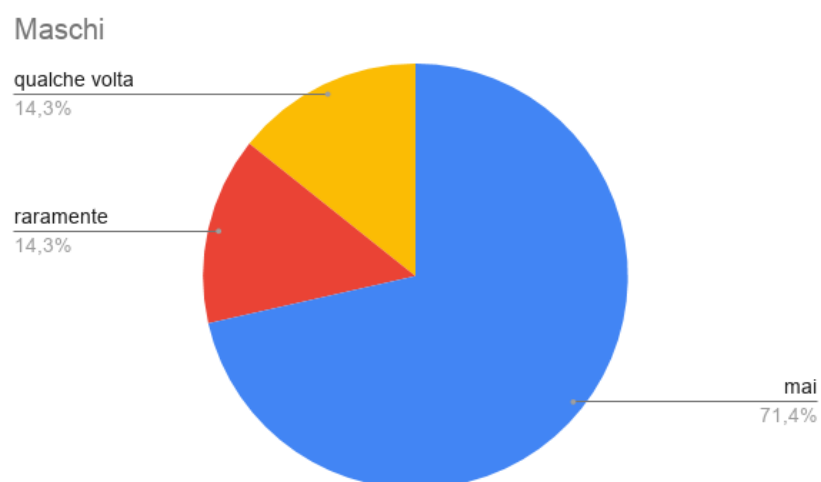


The boys' responses showed an almost equal distribution between answers; it was expected that male respondents showed more negative feelings towards poetry, as in Benton (1999). Boys here demonstrated to be equally *intrigued*, *indifferent* and *disoriented* when dealing with poetic texts. Only 14.3% feels discouraged, but overall it could be said that the percentage of responses that demonstrated discomfort was slightly bigger

than the others, and this would require some particular effort in order to eliminate distress in male students.



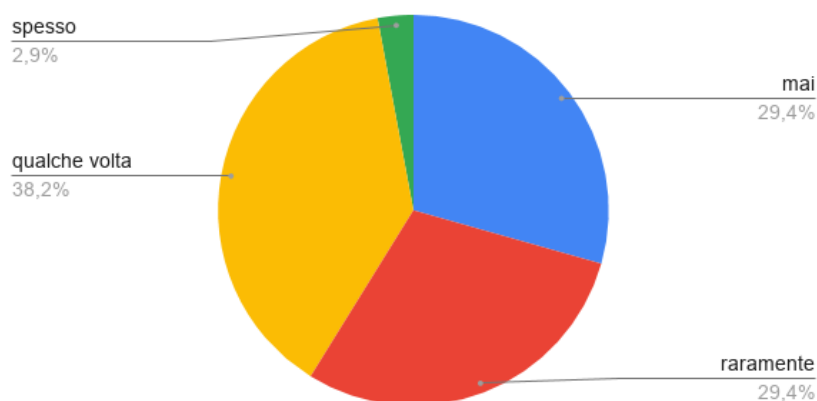
Item 3 investigated the students' personal interest in poetry: the graph clearly shows that more than a half of respondents *never* reads poetic texts in their private lives, 35.3% reads it *rarely* and 5.9% *sometimes*. An attitude to read poetry would have helped in any activity surrounding it, especially from a motivational point of view; however, as for item 2, the lack of an inclination for poetry does not lessen its potential when it is presented to students in class.



The boys' answers indicate an even greater distance from poetry, with 71.4% of participants that *never* reads it outside of school. As predicted, male students are generally less interested in poetry, but their disinterest

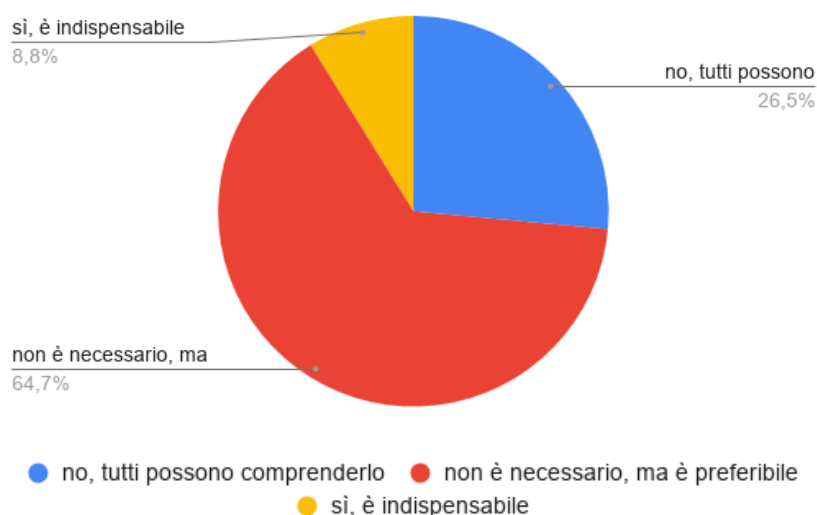
comes mostly from lack of familiarity with the genre, an attitude that could change with experience.

4- Hai mai pensato alla poesia come luogo dove trovare spunti di riflessione per la vita di tutti i giorni?



Item 4 introduced the idea of poetry as a place to find cause for reflection on everyday issues; 38.2% of participants *sometimes* thought of this concept, 29.4% *rarely*, 29.4% *never* thought of it and 2.9% *often*. The need for poetry would be a great source of motivation for teenagers and it is promising to see that it is already a notion near to a portion of the students.

5- Pensi che per comprendere un testo poetico sia necessario un livello alto di istruzione?

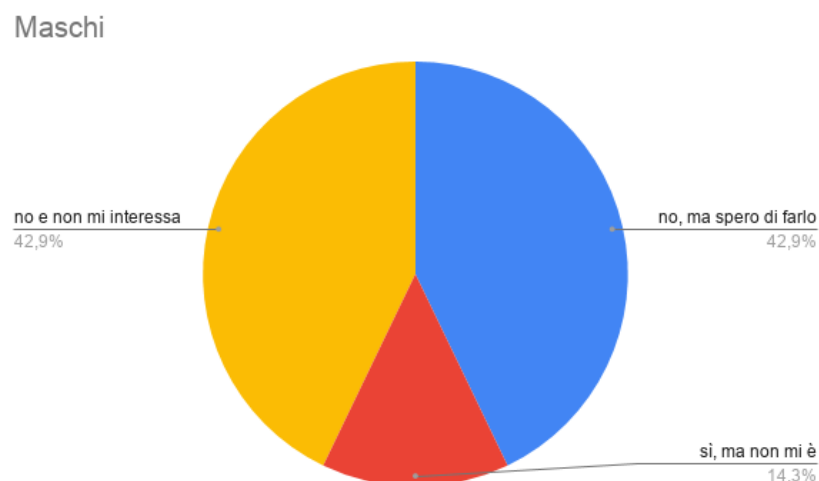


The graph for item 5 shows that the great majority of students, the 64.7%, thinks that a high level of education is *not necessary, but preferable*, to understand poetry; 26.5% believes that *everybody* could understand poetic texts and 8.8% deems *necessary* to be highly educated. The outcome is

positive from a motivational point of view, since students in the biennio could have been discouraged by the lower level of education, turning poetry analysis in a vexing and disengaging task.



Item 6 investigated the participants' experience with poetry in English; 41.2% did *not* deal with English poetry in the past and are *not interested* in it, whereas 38.2% did *not* have any experience but *hopes* to encounter poetry in the future. 14.7% had dealt with poetic texts but *did not like* the activity and 5.9% *hopes* to study more poetry in the future. The negative outcome of this item shows that poetry in English would be more difficult to introduce in the *istituto tecnico*, given the low interest demonstrated by students; however, the percentage that would be intrigued by the activity is significant, showing that the idea of English poetic texts could still appeal to teenage students of the *tecnicisti*.



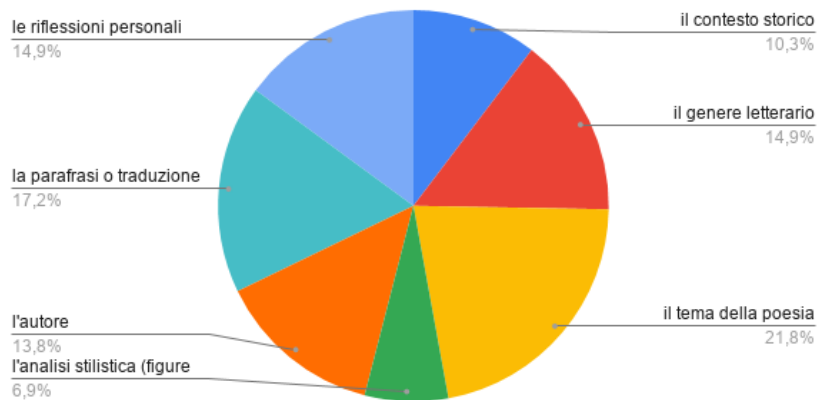
Male respondents are almost equally split into a negative or positive attitude towards poetry in English: the percentage that hopes to deal with English poetry is higher than the general outcome, 42.9%, and even though it is still in minority when compared to the answers that expressed disinterest or dislike for the activity, it still goes against the prediction. Boys could potentially be equally or more interested in English poetry than girls, subverting the results from item 3.



Results from item 7 show that 55.9% of students believes that dealing with poetry in English at their level of proficiency would be *difficult, but manageable*; 29.4% thinks it would be a *challenge* they would like to confront, 8.8% considers it *impossible* and 5.9% *useless*. Overall, the outcome shows that students are quite confident in their abilities and would not be discouraged by an activity that could be considered too complex. Moreover, the motivational potential that comes from the view of poetry as a *challenge* is significant.

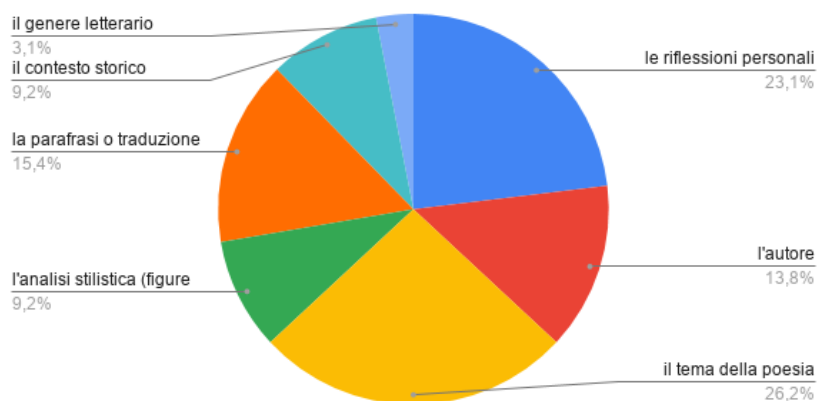


8- In classe, quando ti presentano una poesia in inglese, solitamente si concentrano su:



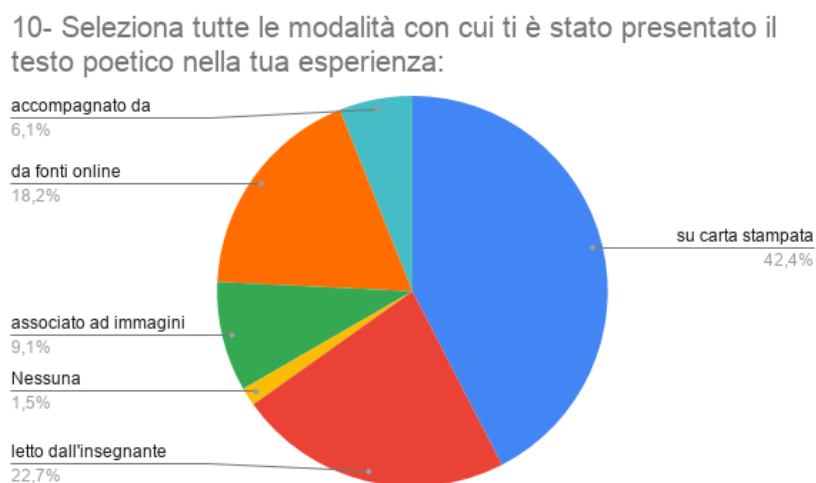
Item 8 investigated some elements that could be at the centre of a poetry in English Teaching Unit; in the students' experience, the *theme* has been mostly the focus of poetry teaching, occupying the 21.8% of answers. *Paraphrase and translation* occupy the 17.2%, *personal reflections* and *literary genre* both represent the 14.9%, 13.9% the *author*, 10.3% the *historical background* and 6.9% the *stylistic analysis*. It is important to remember that students at this level have not dealt with English poetry in a literature curriculum.

9- Tra le opzioni della domanda precedente, quali hanno suscitato/susciterebbero maggiormente la tua attenzione?



Item 9 asked the participants about their preferences in the options from item 8; the *theme* represents once again the bigger percentage of picks, 26.2%, being what could stimulate the most the students' attention according to them. *Personal reflections* were chosen by 23.1%, *paraphrase or translation* by 15.4%, the *author* by 13.8%, *historical*

*context* and *stylistic analysis* both by 9.2% and *literary genre* by 3.1%. This result shows that focusing on the theme of the poem and on the personal reflections that it awakes in the students could potentially engage their attention more than anything else; the *biennio* leaves freedom not to dwell on history and the author's biography, providing the opportunity to test the potential of the elements chosen here.



Item 10 focused on the media through which poetry could be presented to the class; in the students' experience, the *printed text* has been the most common one, representing the 42.4% of picks. The *teacher's reading* occupies the 22.7%, *online resources* the 18.2%, the *association with images* the 9.1% and with *music* the 6.1%. Here the possibility to *listen from a recorded reading* of the text was not experienced by anyone of the participants.



Between the modalities that were presented in item 10, the one that was considered more helpful by students was the printed text, chosen by 32.4% of participants. This could depend on the need that learners at this proficiency level feel to have the text clearly written in front of them, in order to analyse it with more confidence and at their pace. The *teacher's reading* is considered helpful by the 29.4%, the *association with images and music* respectively by the 14.7%, *listening to a recorded reading* by 2.9%. It was expected that online resources would be more popular between teenage students, but results show that only one participant believed that these could help them in the comprehension activity.



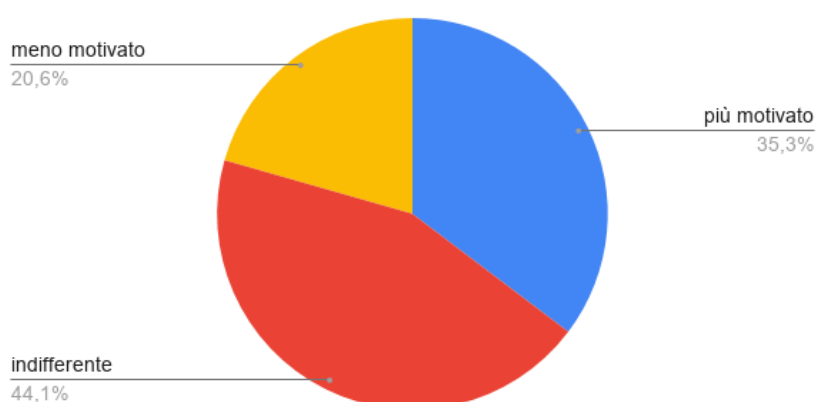
Item 12 investigated the students' opinion on the analysis of poems *line-by-line*, an activity that has been considered discouraging by researchers. Here, 47.1% of students said that it helps them understand poetry, demonstrating that for poetry in English a closer textual analysis could be beneficial for less proficient students. This activity is considered *boring but necessary* by the 41.2% and *boring and useless* by 8.8%, whereas for 2.9% it makes the text even *more complex*. From the motivational point of view an activity that is considered boring could be dangerous, however the lack of it could in this case lead to confusion towards the text.

13- Nell'analizzare una poesia, quanto sei influenzato dall'idea di una verifica sul testo?



Item 13 investigated the effects that assessment may have on poetry teaching; 44.1% of respondents said that they *only* think of assessment *later*, 20.6% is *quite influenced* by it but they try to enjoy the text nonetheless, 17.6% is *not at all influenced* by it and another 17.6% thinks *only of that*. Assessment does not seem here to be of a great influence on students, but this could depend on the fact that they do not have any experience of assessment on poetry in English.

14- Se invece il testo poetico non fosse oggetto di verifica, come ti sentiresti?



The results from item 14 show that the idea of the text not being object of assessment is *indifferent* to 44.1% of students; 35.3% would be *more motivated* by the possibility and 20.6% *less motivated*. It is important to remember that for students of the istituti tecnici, an English literature

curriculum is not expected in the last three years; this means that any anxiety derived from assessment could be here avoided, and the motivational potential that this choice has is shown by the outcome of this item.



Item 15 presented the quote “Poetry is a riddle and the only right answer is in the hands of the teacher”; 35.3% agrees *almost completely* with this notion, 32.4% *slightly* agrees, 23.5% does *not agree at all* and 8.8% agrees *completely*. The results show that this preconception is shared to various extents by the majority of students, representing an obstacle to motivation in students; it would be essential to dismantle this belief through dialogue.



Item 16 explored the motivational potential of the personal interpretation of poetry; expressing a judgment of poems makes 50% of participants feel *indifferent*, 23.5% *motivated*, another 23.5% feels *discomfort* and 2.9%

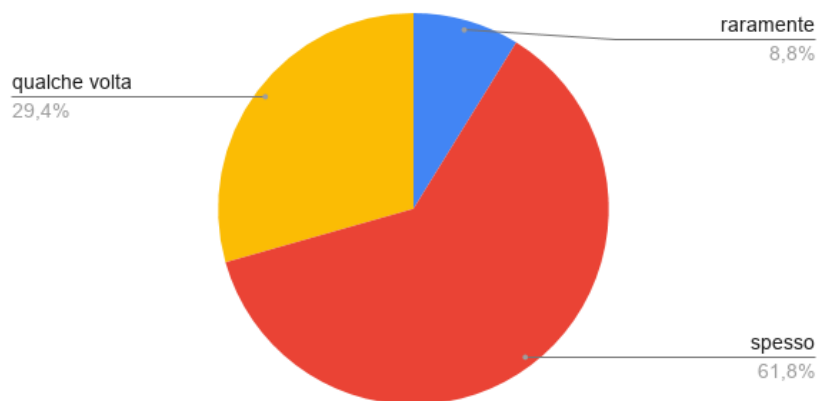
feels *inadequate*. Results went against prediction, since indifference was the predominant feeling expressed by students and it was expected that this activity could be more engaging for teenagers. The risk that students at this level of education and language proficiency could share feelings of discomfort and inadequacy was predicted, and these sentiments were more common than motivation in this item.



Item 17 focused on poetry writing; 41.2% of students is *scared* at the idea of writing their own verses, the 38.2% is *intrigued* by it, 17.6% considers it *boring* and 2.9% would *like to try*. It was expected that poetry writing in English could be discouraging for students of the *biennio*, given their lower confidence on language abilities; moreover, being a highly personal activity, it could awake the fear to lose face in front of the class.

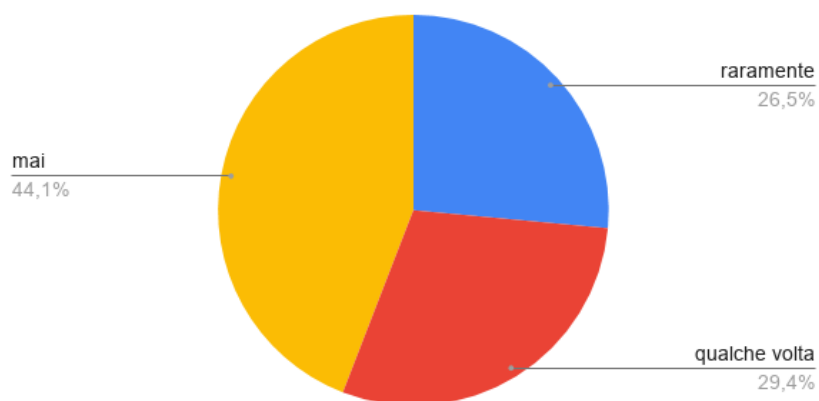
It is surprising to note that a significant percentage of students would be intrigued by poetry writing, providing the possibility to try this playful approach to language acquisition that is only effective if anxiety does not arise.

18- Ti capita mai di cercare e leggere il testo di una canzone inglese?



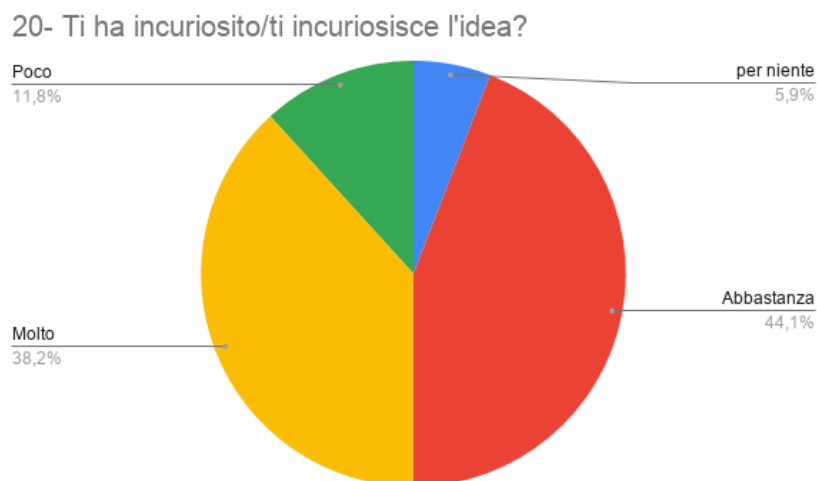
The results of item 18 clearly show that the habit of reading lyrics of English songs is common between students; 61.8% does it *often*, 29.4% *sometimes* and 8.8% *rarely*. The difference with the outcome of item 3 is evident, demonstrating the high motivational potential that song lyrics analysis has for language acquisition and for the introduction of poetic language to students.

19- In classe hai mai analizzato il testo di una canzone inglese?

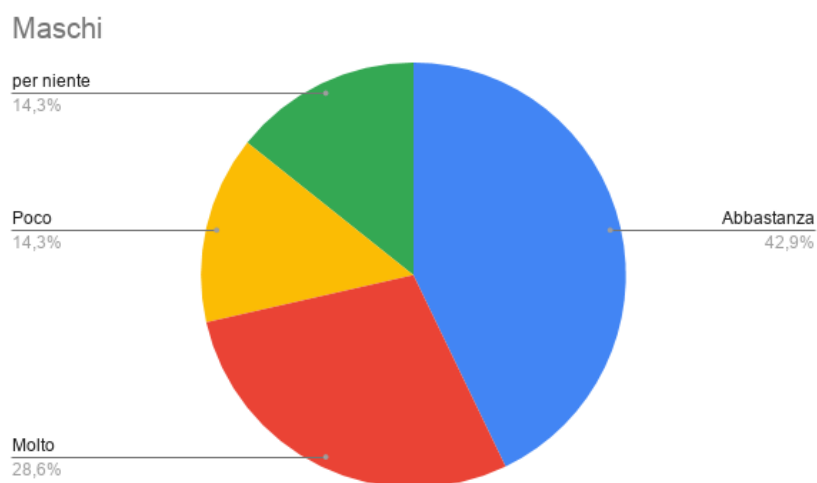


Item 19 investigated the students' experience with the analysis of song lyrics in English; 44.1% *never* dealt with this type of texts, 29.4% dealt with these *sometimes* and 26.5% *rarely*.

The lack of experience shown by students should not be considered a criticality, given the promising results of item 18.



Item 20 asked students if the idea presented in item 19 would be intriguing for them; 44.1% is *quite* intrigued, 38.2% *very* intrigued, 11.8% *a little* and 5.9% *not at all*. Overall, analysing song lyrics could be motivating for students, who demonstrated here their interest in the idea, whether they had already tried it or not.



Even for boys, who were less interested in poetry, song lyrics appear to be quite motivating: 42.9% of them is *quite* intrigued by the activity, 28.6% *very* intrigued, 14.3% *a little* and 14.3% *not at all*. Even though the results are slightly less positive, the appeal of lyrics is evident for male participants as well.

Item 21 collected one comment by a student who said that even though poetry is not dealt with often, it is not as boring as it seems.



### 3.3.3 *The teachers*

The interviews with the teachers were successful in gaining an insight on English poetry teaching in the *biennio*.

All the questions used to guide the interview can be found in Appendix 2. The first element investigated was frequency; poetic texts such as nursery rhymes and song lyrics were often employed in the *licei*, whereas for the *istituto tecnico* poems were hardly ever used. The texts were usually chosen for their sound properties, to help students practice their translation skills, to analyse a certain morphological aspect of the language or to develop their mnemonic abilities. The few poems employed had to have a captivating structure, such as Roger McGough's *40 Love*, or a narrative value, as for instance the poems of the Spoon River Anthology by Edgar Lee Masters. To present poems, images are often used or the text is written by the teacher on the blackboard.

Song lyrics were considered a valid and motivating instrument that is always successful between students and is generally appreciated more easily than poems at this level of language competence. Songs were also used in special occasions, such as Christmas, creating enthusiasm in students.

For the *licei*, however, poetry is generally left to the curriculum of the last three years; on the contrary, in the *istituti tecnici* the *biennio* may be the only occasion to introduce poetry, since the last three years are occupied with the study of micro languages that is sometimes anticipated in the first two years of high school. Here, poetic texts are hardly ever employed not only because of the lack of language competence, but also for the time pressure that prevents even activities that involve song lyrics. The only instance that may promote the use of poetry in the *istituti tecnici* is a collaboration with the teacher of Italian literature, who might introduce some English author whose texts may be analysed in the original language by the English teacher.

### 3.4 *The results*

The data analysis on the questionnaires compiled by students of the first two years of *licei* and *istituti tecnici* provided an overview of the participants' opinions on poetry and consequently allowed an evaluation of its motivational potential for language acquisition.

The first finding was that students have little experience with poetry, inside and outside of school, and that could become a potential element of engagement if poetic texts are presented as a *novelty*. The *need* for poetry could also come into play, since a significant number of students have thought of poetry as a cause for reflection on everyday issues. This *need* is not shared by everyone, making it essential for teachers to choose a text that could be near to teenagers' experiences, to help them discover how relatable poems could be for them.

The idea of dealing with poetry in English has been mostly successful even if students do not have much experience of it; in the *licei*, the interest towards poetry was prevailing, whereas in the *tecnici* the majority showed indifference at the idea. Here, song lyrics were much more successful and could be a valid option to introduce poetic texts in English.

Another positive finding was the lack of concern for language competence and level of education, which were not considered an obstacle that could hinder the students' motivation: on the contrary, poetry is seen as a *challenge* in both courses, proving its ludic and engaging potential for younger students.

As for methodology, overall students expressed their preference for a Teaching Unit that focuses on the theme and on their personal reflections; the printed text was considered the most helpful resource, but also hearing the poem and seeing it accompanied by images or music were popular options. Online resources were not considered useful in either courses, but this could depend on the students' lack of experience on this methodology.

Students of both the *licei* and the *tecnici* considered *line-by-line* analysis very helpful, proving that, even though it may seem unappealing, this activity is quite important at this level of language competence. Given that poetic texts would be used here to reflect upon the language and its mechanisms, it is important that students recognise the need for a linguistic analysis of the text and are not disengaged by it.

Assessment was considered by students a secondary element that did not influence the activity to a great extent. However, especially for the *tecnici*, the *biennio* proves to be the opportunity to explore poetic texts without any anxiety to memorise notions on the author or on the historical background in view of a test.

Another critical point that proved to be less influential than expected was the preconception of poetry as riddle and of teachers as the holders of a solution: this was more common in the *tecnici*, but the notion was shared only to a lesser extent.

An activity that was not too successful between students was expressing a personal judgment on poetry; especially for the *tecnici*, motivation towards it was not predominant. Therefore, it could be introduced later in the Teaching Unit, guiding students to formulate their personal response perhaps without asking them to extensively use the language, which could be discouraging, or to expose their thought in front of the whole class.

On the contrary, an activity that was more popular in the *tecnici* was poetry writing: a significant portion of students would like to try it, but considering that fear was also a common feeling towards it, it would be better to discuss it with the class and understand its potential with that particular group of students.

Lastly, the idea of analysing song lyrics is more appealing to students than the study of poetry; songs are more familiar to them and, as witnessed by teachers, they are usually very successful among students. Given the higher level of indifference towards poetry that has been found in the

*istituto tecnico*, songs could be used to introduce students to texts that employ the same devices of poetry, expanding their language and communication repertoire. This is useful in the *licei* as well, where lyrics could represent the first step towards the appreciation of the poetic language that they will study more closely in the last *triennio*, getting them acquainted with a new way of employing the language they are studying. Overall, poetic texts proved to be a potential instrument to motivate students in the language acquisition process, appealing to learners for their *novelty* and for the *challenge* they pose. When planning any activity surrounding poetry or song lyrics, it should be remembered that students are interested in a theme than could be close to their experience and could evoke a personal response; they should also feel confident in their ability to understand the text, and looking at it closely on paper was considered a valid method to ensure this.

In summary, this study seem to prove that introducing poetry in English in the first two years of upper secondary education, whether through poems or through lyrics, could be more motivating than discouraging, given that students were not found to be scared or disheartened by the idea. The risk that the language of poetry could be considered too difficult did not emerge in the results, opening younger pupils to the opportunity of enjoying poetry, at the same time improving their language abilities in the process.

#### 4. The Teaching Unit

The answers from the questionnaire compiled by students of the first two years of upper secondary education will be used in this chapter to outline a Teaching Unit that focuses on poetry in English. In particular, the aspects that were considered more motivational by students will be included, such as song lyrics, the use of images to accompany the text and the attention paid to the theme of the poem.

To build the Teaching Unit, guidelines as explained in chapter 2 will be followed; Teaching Units by Delucchi (2012) and Mauroni (2011) will be used as reference to choose materials and methods that are considered proper for the teaching of poetry and song lyrics in the foreign language. For this Teaching Unit, two texts were chosen: a poem, *The Swing* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1913) and a song, *Seven* by Taylor Swift (2020). These texts were chosen for the following qualities:

- a) the *vocabulary* had to be *simple* and concerning common aspects of *everyday life*, as indicated in the ministerial guidelines for the language objectives in the *biennio*;
- b) the poem had to be *short*, not to make the first visual impact negative for students and therefore discourage them (Balboni, 2004);
- c) the song, although not popular yet, was released *in 2020* by a *famous pop singer* that students could be used to listening to on the radio in their everyday life, consequently it could potentially capture their attention from the beginning;
- d) the two texts had a clear *thematic similarity*, providing a good opportunity to let students reflect on the subject; the results from the questionnaire were here important to choose the theme as the focus of the Teaching Unit;

- e) the topic of both texts, childhood, should allow students to exercise their ability to *describe personal experiences* and talk about their life using basic vocabulary, as required by the ministerial guidelines;
- f) both texts had *clear imagery* regarding *known subjects*, avoiding the risk of discouraging students by proposing them difficult and obscure lines that would require an extensive interpretation, excessively demanding at their level;
- g) the *rhythmic pattern* is well structured in both the poem and the song, providing numerous instances of *poetic devices* such as rhymes, assonance and repetition.

The choice to include both a poem and a song derived from the great motivational potential that lyrics showed in the questionnaire, appealing to the great majority of students from both the *licei* and the *istituto tecnico*. As proposed by Dall'Armellina (2004), songs can successfully be included in a module on poetic texts; here, the analysis of lyrics will be limited to a comparison with the poem, to show how the song can be used as a motivational element to engage the students' attention and to make the analysis of the poem more effective for language acquisition. As stated in Shen (2009),

“using English songs in EFL classrooms can successfully bring about affective learning through providing a harmonious classroom atmosphere, reducing students' anxiety, fostering their interests and motivating them to learn the target language” (Shen, 2009).

Moreover, since the motivation phase will present some lines from the song, it would make the Unit incomplete if these were to be neglected in the other phases.

However, the song will not be analysed in its entirety but only the first verse will be presented to students, being the one with more similarities with the poem. It would be advisable to expand the activity into different

units in order to better analyse both texts and create a thematic module that could cover various linguistic objectives (Dall'Armellina, 2004).

The main objective of the Teaching Unit will be communicative, in particular it will focus on the description of familiar elements and personal experiences; comprehension abilities will also be exercised in the global perception of the texts. The linguistic objective of the activity is the review of morphosyntactic elements present in the texts, that include the present simple, the modal verb *can* and qualitative adjectives. Given that the linguistic level of the students is A2/B1, these should all be known by students but will be employed in a communicative perspective.

Both texts will be given to students printed on paper: indeed, the items in the questionnaire that investigated methodology showed a preference for this approach, perhaps dictated by the lower competence level and the need to have the text clearly written in front of them in order to feel safe and understand it better.

Students have also indicated that listening to the text helps them in the comprehension; therefore a YouTube video of a reading of the poem by a native speaker will be used and it will be subsequently read aloud by the teacher. Listening to the texts will be essential to help students recognise the rhythmic and phonetic devices used by the author, familiarising them with poetic terminology and structures.

Another popular choice in the methodology was the use of images to accompany the text: it will be therefore useful to make the vocabulary present in both texts clear by displaying some images that represent the elements described in the poem and in the song.

The images will be taken from Google and showed to the whole class.

Lastly, the line-by-line analysis of the text was considered quite essential by students in the questionnaire: therefore a moment of the Teaching Unit will be dedicated to assuring that there are no unclear elements in the texts, both from a morphological and lexical point of view.

#### 4.1 Motivation

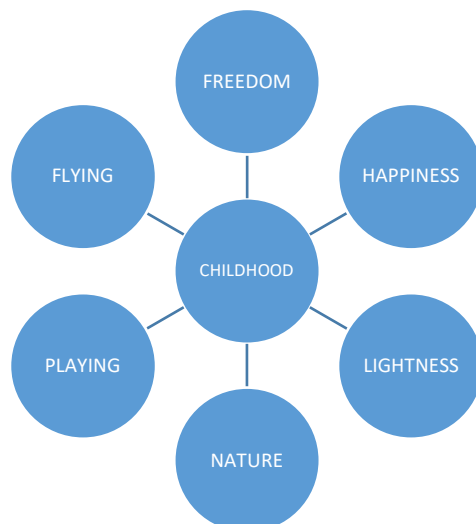
The first moment of the Teaching Unit is dedicated to motivation: the aim is to engage students in what will be the topic of the Unit and introduce the vocabulary that they will need to carry out the activities planned for later.

Firstly, the teacher could show the class a picture that represents what will be described by the poem and the song: a child on a swing, surrounded by nature (Fig.A).



Figure A

The teacher could start a conversation asking students to express what they first think about when they look at the picture. The main answer that should emerge is childhood, the theme of the Unit, but other related possibilities are happiness, freedom or nature and all these answers should be written down on the blackboard in a diagram that could be represented as such:





In this phase, students think of their personal experiences and relate the theme of the Unit to their lives, creating a connection with the text that will be presented later on.

Then, they could be asked to recognise the elements in the picture and some essential vocabulary should emerge in this phase: the main element is the swing, but other naturalistic features could be included, such as trees, grass, river and sky. All the words that are proposed will be written on the blackboard by the teacher and will add to the vocabulary of the Unit.

A third activity that could be presented in this phase is a game: the class, divided into two teams, has to decide if the lines that are showed to them by the teacher belong to a Taylor Swift song or to a 1913 poem. The lines would be showed to them one by one and each time the two teams would have to guess the author; the correct answers would be revealed at the end of the game.

In this phase, it is not important that students understand the meaning of every word in the passages; examples could be:

	TEAM 1	TEAM 2
Please picture me in the trees		
Up in the air I go flying		
Feet in the swing over the creek		
Do you like to go up in a swing?		
Are there still beautiful things?		
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing		

The aim of this activity is twofold: firstly, to engage students by challenging them and taking advantage of the competitive nature of a game to make them reflect on some textual features, even if only superficially. Secondly, it should help them understand that poetry is not as highbrow and distant from reality as they may have thought: results in the questionnaire show that 72.6% of students think that it would be preferable, even if not necessary, to have a high level of education in order to understand poetry. This notion should be discarded from the beginning, to avoid any anxiety that would compromise the language acquisition process; this game shows students that a poem written in 1913 could be easily mistaken for a pop song released in 2020 and vice versa, demonstrating that poetry is more accessible than they would have imagined.

#### *4.2 Global perception*

In this phase, a written copy of both texts should be handed to students; the choice of immediately providing the written text was guided by results in the questionnaire: having the printed text was considered useful by 34.2% of students and at this level of language competence, it could help students feel safer in the comprehension activity.

However, before asking the students to look at the texts, they will listen to them first: a reading of the poem by a native speaker (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DC67ttLr0mc>) will be played twice. Then, the teacher will read it again and will ask students if they have noticed anything in the sound of the poem: the terms *rhyme* and *repetition* should emerge and if necessary, the teacher will read the poem again to demonstrate how these work. It is essential that students, who do not have experience with poetic texts in English, familiarise themselves with the most common figures of sound and understand how they are employed by the poet to convey a certain feeling or message. The teacher

should guide them in this process, providing a technical explanation for these devices and helping students hear how they affect the tone of the poem.

For the comprehension, as a first exercise in this phase it could be useful to present the text as a simple *cloze*: as suggested by Mauroni (2011), the omitted words should be in a phonetically relevant position, such as rhyming words, and they should be common vocabulary. Students will complete the text by listening to the YouTube recording; the recording could be played twice or more if necessary.

<p style="text-align: center;">The Swing</p> <p>How do you like to go up in a (<i>swing</i>), Up in the air_so blue? Oh, I do think it the pleasantest (<i>thing</i>) Ever a child can do!</p> <p>Up in the air and over the (<i>wall</i>), Till I can see so wide, (<i>Rivers</i>) and trees and cattle and all Over the (<i>countryside</i>)—</p> <p>Till I look down on the garden (<i>green</i>), Down on the roof so (<i>brown</i>)— Up in the air I go flying again, Up in the air and (<i>down</i>)!</p>
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The aim of this activity is to exercise comprehension abilities with a task that is challenging in its nature and does not rise the affective filter, since it does not require special written production abilities; moreover, it allows to discuss the vocabulary in the text and gives the students the opportunity to auto-correct themselves while listening.

Given that proposing a cloze for the song following the one for the poem could be repetitive and boring for students, the lyrics could be provided in their entirety beside the poem; the first verse is the one taken into consideration and would therefore be the only one written down.

The Swing	Seven
<p>How do you like to go up in a (<i>swing</i>), Up in the air so blue? Oh, I do think it the pleasantest (<i>thing</i>) Ever a child can do!</p> <p>Up in the air and over the (<i>wall</i>), Till I can see so wide, (<i>Rivers</i>) and <u>trees</u> and <u>cattle</u> and all Over the (<i>countryside</i>)—</p> <p>Till I look down on the <u>garden</u> (<i>green</i>), Down on the <u>roof</u> so (<i>brown</i>)— Up in the air I go flying again, Up in the air and (<i>down</i>)!</p>	<p>[Verse 1] Please picture me in the <u>trees</u> I hit my peak at seven Feet in the swing over the <u>creek</u> I was too scared to jump in But I, I was high in the <u>sky</u> With Pennsylvania under me Are there still beautiful things?</p>

The verse would be played at first twice; for the third listening, the teacher asks, as for the poem, to recognise any sound pattern in the song. The answer that should emerge is that the sounds [i:] and [aɪ] are repeated in the lyrics; the teacher could explain that this figure of sound is called assonance and help students reflect on its difference with the rhymes that they had found in the poem. While listening to the verse, students should highlight the syllables that cause this sound pattern, reflecting on how the same pronunciation is given by different spellings.

The second activity could include the association of images to words, which was considered useful to understand the poem by students who

compiled the questionnaire. The exercise could be structured as such: students are presented with some images that represent elements from both texts belonging to the countryside, such as river, tree, cattle, roof, wall, garden, creek, sky.



C \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

C \_\_\_\_\_

Individually, they associate the images to underlined words in the text; this part should not be too challenging, given that most words are very common in use, except for *cattle* or *creek*, for which the first letter could be already provided as a suggestion. In couples, they check their answers and doubts are cleared by the teacher.

Then, each couple is given a table divided into three columns as such:

Blue	_____	_____
Sky	_____	Roof
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Their task is to complete the first line with the remaining colours present in the poem, green and brown; in every column, they insert the elements that they think are of that colour choosing from the underlined words in the texts, following the example “blue → air”. The word *roof* has already been inserted as a suggestion for the colour brown. Then they discuss the

results with the teacher and the rest of the class, answering any possible question. This activity, like the cloze, aims at testing the pupils' comprehension abilities and at expanding their vocabulary, helping them visualize the elements by providing images and associating them to their colour.

As an expansion to this activity, the association of images to words could be applied to vocabulary that describes the elements of the city, as opposed to the countryside: images of skyscrapers, cars, streets and traffic lights could be proposed and students could have a list of the words that they have to pair with the pictures. This activity, which contains new vocabulary, could be carried out in couples and students could confront their answers with the rest of the class, coming together to a solution: this way, the anxiety that could be given by unknown elements should be avoided.

#### *4.3 Analytic perception*

The third phase of the Teaching Unit provides students with the opportunity to reflect more closely on the language; this poem does not focus on a single morphosyntactic structure, but nonetheless it offers different starting points to review some grammar elements known by students. Moreover, since *line-by-line* analysis was considered useful by participants of the questionnaire, this could be the occasion to read the texts together and explain any unclear meaning or language structure. If any doubt arise about a morphosyntactic element, this could become the centre of the following activities.

An example could be the modal verb *can*; the teacher could ask students to find the modal verb in the texts and then write the occurrences, "I child can do" and "I can see so wide", on the blackboard, assuring that the class recognises that *can* is followed by the infinitive.

Then, in couples, students could briefly answer the question: “What can the child in the poem see from the swing? And in the song?”. In the answers, vocabulary from the previous activities should be employed, together with the affirmative form of the modal verb. This brief discussion serves as an introduction for the following activity: each student receives a series of different pictures that may represent urban or rural scenes. Staying in couple and taking turns, they try to guess what their classmate’s picture represents asking each other what they can see on their sheet; answers could be positive, “yes, I can see it”, or negative, “no, I can’t”. The vocabulary for this activity is taken from the exercises of image-word association. Some ambiguity could be given by elements such as trees and houses, which could belong to both environments, making the activity more challenging.



*Countryside*



*City*

The aim is to practice the use of the modal verb in its affirmative, negative and interrogative forms and to include the new vocabulary into oral production; the activity has a challenging and ludic nature, since students are asked to reflect and make assumptions on their peer’s picture based on the answers they receive, as in a guessing game.

A second activity could be built around the theme of the texts, childhood, and the lines “I do think it the pleasantest thing/ ever a child can do!”. Students could be asked to choose a picture from the previous activity; in couples, they should pose to the other the question: “Can a child \_\_\_\_\_ here?”, completing it with any action from a list of known activities that is given to them. These could include: go to the park, climb the trees, go

to the cinema, swim in the river, ride a skateboard or run up the hills. They should associate these actions with the urban or rural scene and answer whether a child could or could not carry out that activity accordingly. Once again, the modal verb is used in all its forms, this time accompanied by different verbs that, to make the activity less complex, are already provided by the teacher. Students still have to pay attention to the fact that *can* governs an infinitive and to the structure of the interrogative form.

#### *4.4 Synthesis*

The fourth moment of the Teaching Unit is dedicated to the theme and to personal reflections, two elements that the participants of the questionnaire considered motivating in the approach to poetic texts. Therefore, it would be important to dedicate more time to this last phase, where oral and written production abilities are exercised to express opinions on the texts and to explore their shared theme, childhood.

In the questionnaire, some insecurities emerged when students were asked how expressing a judgment on poetic texts would make them feel; overall, the answers were positive, but it is important to bear in mind that the lower language proficiency level could discourage pupils. Therefore, it would be better to avoid activities that require higher production abilities, such as long written texts or a formal discussion of the theme. At the same time, it could be difficult for teenagers to expose themselves in front of their peers, consequently asking them to express their ideas without providing any guideline could lead to the fear of losing face and spoil the whole activity.

One way of lowering the affective filter in this phase could be dividing the class into small groups of three or four, in order to create an informal environment for the discussion and to let students develop their opinion without external pressures.



The first activity is focused on a comparison between the two texts: analysing how a theme could be developed in different texts is one of the objectives of the critical synthesis phase, where pupils should start developing the ability to critically read a literary text (Balboni, 2004). Considering that the students in the first two years of upper secondary education have only encountered literary and poetic texts a few times, if ever, as the results from the questionnaire showed, it could not be expected that they would move independently in this activity. Therefore, the teacher could already provide some guidelines to help them in the comparison between texts, highlighting the aspects that they should focus on and giving examples of possible answers.

To carry out this activity, the teacher could write on different notes some minor themes connected to the main one that could be present in the texts; some of them may have already been mentioned at the beginning of the Unit in the brainstorming activity. These could be positive or neutral, such as happiness, freedom, curiosity, but also negative, such as nostalgia and fear. Then, a member of each group would pick a note and the teacher would explain what they have received: since the beginning, the swing has reminded them of childhood, which could be considered the thematic centre of the texts, but some minor related aspects could also be identified. Each group has been assigned one of these and their first task is to highlight all the elements in the texts that they think refer to that theme; they should note that they may not find correspondence in both the poem and the song, for instance with the concept of fear. The teacher should also make sure that everyone understands the meaning of the word they have been given.

Then, groups have to compile a table where the two texts are put in direct comparison, answering to the question in the left column regarding the theme they have been assigned. After reading the questions together and assuring that their meaning is clear for everyone, students should listen to

both the reading of the poem and the first verse of the song once more, in order to have a better understanding of the differences in the two texts. Then they can start working in groups on the analysis.

	THE SWING	SEVEN
Is the theme present in the text?		
Do you think the theme is presented directly in the text?		
Do you think this theme is the centre of the text?		
Is the theme reflected in the sound of the text? Why?		
The theme is connected to the subject of the text, the swing. Can you explain why?		
In your opinion, is this theme related to childhood? Why?		

These questions are examples of elements that could help students understand how a single theme could be developed by two different authors and how it relates to the rest of the text and its main subject. The answers should not be long and complex and could be at first produced orally and in a later moment written down briefly, focusing on the keywords that emerged during the discussion. The result should be a group effort and each member should contribute with their opinion on the

questions; the teacher would here be the mediator that occasionally helps students and assures that the conversation flows equally between them.

At the end, each group could present their theme to the rest of the class: the answers could be read aloud and additional questions could be asked by the teacher or other students, creating a dialogue with interventions from the whole class. The aim is to give students the possibility to reflect on how language can convey a concept in different ways, communicating the same feeling employing different strategies that may also include phonetic devices.

The second element that is central in the synthesis is emotion: students should reflect on their personal response to the text, how it made them feel and the changes that it brought to their way of thinking (Balboni, 2004). An emotional connection with the text is one of the factors that could motivate pupils in the language acquisition process, but it is also essential from an existential point of view: teenage students should discover the *need* for literary texts as a source to explore their own emotions and life experiences with a new awareness taken from the text.

For these reasons, a final activity that would include a discussion of the students' emotions was considered essential. This could be carried out in couples, asking students to reflect on some simple questions and to discuss their answers with a peer; it is important for the teacher to provide space for the students' individual responses without influencing them by expressing an opinion on the texts (Xerri, 2013).

To make students build and formulate their judgment on the texts, some questions could help them reflect upon the different tone in the poem and in the song and their personal response to it: the poem is overall happy and carefree, whereas the song has a more nostalgic and contemplative timbre. Students could be asked simple questions such as:

- a) The poem and the song describe a childhood memory, but with a different tone. Which one is happy? Which one is more nostalgic?

- b) When you think of your childhood, how do you feel? Happy or nostalgic? Why?

More straightforward questions could be investigating whether students liked the texts and considered them in any way relevant:

- a) Did you like the poem *The Swing*? Why? Why not?
- b) Did you prefer the poem or the song? Why?
- c) Do you usually listen to songs of the same genre as *Seven*? If not, what kind of music do you like?
- d) Would you listen to this song again at home?
- e) Did one of the texts make you think of your childhood? Why?

Another question that could move the conversation could be about the students' personal experience: according to the poet, going in the swing is "the pleasantest thing/ ever a child can do"; students could narrate briefly to their peer what was their favourite thing to do when they were children. Indeed, being able to describe and narrate personal experiences in English is one of the objectives outlined in the ministerial guidelines for the first two years of upper secondary education and the communicative aim of this Teaching Unit.

From the point of view of language acquisition, the activities carried out in the synthesis phase help students develop their comprehension and oral production abilities. Given their language competence, students are not expected to give long or complex answers to the questions about the texts; the conversations should also be as informal as possible, and the focus should be on communicating feelings, opinions and experiences as well as one can do, without fear of making linguistic mistakes.

From the perspective of poetry teaching, the aim of the activities should be to guide students into building a personal judgment of the text and to make them reflect upon the connection that it has with their lives and their experiences. If the texts did not leave any impact on them and if they did not inspire any reflection in pupils, the whole Unit would lose its

motivational potential and its importance for the students' intellectual growth.

#### *4.5 Final Considerations*

The Teaching Unit was built to be found motivating by teenage students of the first two years of upper secondary education. It was centred on the theme, which guided the choice of the two texts and the activities of the critical and emotional synthesis.

From a linguistic point of view, vocabulary about nature was presented in the texts and further activities deepened the students' knowledge of the rural and urban environments. The object of the analysis phase was the modal verb *can*, but the texts offer opportunities to vary that activity and focus on the interrogative form, the simple past, the auxiliary *do* and adverbs of place; the choice could depend on the language competence of the class and on the possible need to review some of these structures.

Overall, the main aim was to introduce poetry in English to students that have not dealt with it in the past, helping them discover this genre. It was important to dismantle some negative preconceptions that have emerged from the questionnaire, such as the feeling of inadequacy in expressing an opinion on the texts or the view of poetry as a highbrow genre. Creating a safe and relaxed environment was fundamental and the motivation phase was built to lower the affective filter and make poetry seem more familiar and accessible to students.

The choice to include the song had the same objective, to engage students and make poetic texts more appealing for them. Moreover, it provided the opportunity to establish a comparison between two different texts, guiding students into an analysis of the textual and thematic elements that differentiated them; it also offered more examples of poetic features such as rhymes and assonances. Lastly, both texts were instances of how figures

of sound could be used to convey feelings and emotions, setting the tone of the poem and the song with different devices.

To test the effectiveness of the Teaching Unit, this should be presented to the students of the classes that compiled the questionnaire; it would be useful to see whether they find the Unit motivational or not, and to collect once again their opinion on poetic texts to see if it would change in any way. Indeed, this new experience could provide a deeper insight to their answers and could help defining which activities were more useful and which were less engaging.

## *Conclusions*

The research question that guided this study concerned the motivational potential of poetic texts in the EFL classroom, focusing on the first two years of upper secondary education. Both the theoretic and practical analysis of the theme referred to two possibilities anticipated in the premise of the study: the introduction of poetry in earlier levels of language competence could either motivate students or discourage them, given the multifaceted nature of this textual genre.

An answer to the first hypothesis, which assumed that poetic texts could motivate students and improve the language acquisition process, was provided theoretically in the first chapter. Here, the unique style employed to communicate in poetry and song lyrics emerged as one of the beneficial qualities that this genre holds, together with a peculiar rhythmic and phonetic pattern that is useful to memorise language structures and a close insight on the foreign cultural universe.

However, the second option, the idea that poetry could be discouraging for younger students, was also examined and some criticalities were taken into consideration, especially the complexity of the language, the opacity of the meaning and some preconceptions that view poetry as an indecipherable riddle, accessible only to highly educated readers. All these disadvantages had been investigated in previous research and were here reported.

It was also important to have clear the profile of the teenage students that were chosen as the subject of the research, examining the context of Italian EFL education; this was outlined in the second chapter. The elements that could prove to be motivating for this target were analysed and the main point that emerged was the need to create a connection between teenagers and literature, specifically poetry; *need* and *pleasure* were the keywords that sustained this idea. Some qualities of poetic texts, such as their

shortness and their association with personal experiences, were also considered congenial to the objectives listed in the ministerial guidelines: by analysing poetry, students could exercise their ability to comprehend and produce short texts, written or oral, describing common aspects of everyday life.

To answer the research question, a practical study was also conducted: the positive and negative points that the existing literature presented were incorporated in items of a questionnaire, in order to collect the students' personal opinion on them and verify their influence on the learners' motivation.

The outcome from the questionnaire mainly confirmed the potentialities theorised in the first chapter: students had little experience of poetry in English, but they were nonetheless intrigued by the idea of employing it in class. What should be noted is that song lyrics gathered unanimous preferences, whereas poems met more resistance: students hardly ever dealt with them, but a significant portion of respondents was nonetheless intrigued with the idea, especially in the *licei*.

It was positive to note that the majority of participants did not share dangerous preconceptions surrounding poetry recorded in previous studies; these included the idea of poetry as a highbrow genre and its complexity in language. It was indeed an aim of the research to understand whether a lower level of proficiency would cause discouragement towards poetic texts, but the results proved that motivation should not be endangered by the peculiarities of the language used by this genre.

Furthermore, preferences on methodologies and instruments that could be used to introduce poetry emerged from the questionnaire; here, a discrepancy with the ideal methodology theorised in chapter two was recorded. Indeed, online resources were theoretically considered more engaging than the printed text; however, participants preferred the latter over the former. This was thought to be determined by the lower language



competence and the insecurity that students could feel without a clear transcription of the text. The same could be said of *line-by-line* analysis, which was surprisingly popular among respondents, against predictions and previous research.

Alongside the questionnaire, interviews to the teachers revealed the current situation of English poetry teaching in the *biennio*: time restrictions and language competence were identified as the main obstacles to the introduction of poetic texts. Specifically, the curriculum outlined in the ministerial guidelines seems to leave little space to explore literary texts at this stage. Moreover, in the *istituti tecnici*, these were considered irrelevant given the absence of a literature curriculum in the following years; indeed, this notion was mirrored by the results of the questionnaire, which showed lower interest in poetry than the *licei*. According to the teachers, this is determined by a greater interest in the micro languages that are the focus of the curriculum; the outcome of the questionnaire partially confirmed this, yet a relevant percentage of students declared to be intrigued by the idea of dealing with poetry in English.

The solution to this dichotomy was identified in song lyrics: teachers considered them as a valid instrument that is used successfully with students to analyse morphosyntactic elements. They were thought to provide an element of novelty and variance to the lesson plan and therefore to be usually welcomed by younger pupils. In the questionnaire, even students of the *istituti tecnici* were unanimous in showing their approval and personal engagement with the activity.

Song lyrics also provided an answer to the question raised by previous research regarding a different approach to poetry in male and female students: it has been proved also by this study that boys show lower interest in poetic texts in general. However, this imbalance was not displayed when students were asked about song lyrics: these were

considered appealing by male pupils, proving once again their potential for the introduction of poetic texts.

Methodology was also investigated in the interviews: in the theoretic chapters, the importance of para-textual elements was stated and teachers confirmed that images and music are often chosen to accompany poetic texts. Moreover, the choice of the poem for the class is also guided by elements that were recurrent in the existing literature: visually appealing texts were preferred to capture the students' attention and sometimes a narrative structure was selected for its engaging value.

The answers on methodology from both the interviews and the questionnaire were included in the Teaching Unit proposed in the fourth chapter, which was thought to engage the students that participated in the study. Here, song lyrics and poetry were employed simultaneously to provide a motivational source for all recipients, serving a starting point to exercise the pupils' comprehension and production abilities, alongside a review of morphosyntactic elements.

Unfortunately, the emergency state subsequent to the Covid-19 pandemic prevented the trial of the Teaching Unit with the students; it would be ideal to test it in class eventually, once the conditions allow doing so.

Nonetheless, by outlining the Unit in the final chapter, the aim was to provide a series of possible activities to introduce poetic texts in the *biennio* of the *licei* and *istituti tecnici*, taking into consideration the linguistic competence at this stage and the students' needs. Indeed, here these do not include a deep knowledge of the author or the historic background, but a discovery of the genre and its potential appeal. It is also important to note that the analysis of the texts would not be object of assessment, an element that in the questionnaire has proven to make the project more motivating; this is achieved more easily in the *biennio*, where an English literature curriculum is not expected by the Ministry.

Overall, poetic texts have proven to be a powerful resource for language acquisition, even at an early stage: their unique style offers an exceptional vantage point on language mechanisms, providing students with a clear example of the fact that the language they are studying is not a static and rigid system, but a dynamic and flexible one. The poet shows readers that phonetic and morphosyntactic elements could be manipulated in order to communicate a message or an emotion in the most effective way: indeed, grammar and syntax become instruments at the speaker's service. This playful and lively side of language use could prove to be motivating to students of all ages: poetry was not considered inaccessible by participants of this study and was employed widely in existing literature as a source for a reflection on language in all grades of secondary education.

This study wanted to explore the possibility of introducing poetry in English outside the literature curriculum: from a theoretical viewpoint, its outcome confirmed the potentialities hypothesised for poetry teaching in the existing literature and at the same time downsized its criticalities. From a practical perspective, the responses collected from students and teachers and the model of Teaching Unit could become useful resources for EFL teachers to build thematic modules to employ in Italian secondary schools, familiarising younger students with poetry in English with an effective and motivating method. This way, not only their language competence would improve, but it would also open their mind to literacy: for teenagers especially, poetry could have a relevant impact on everyday life issues and experiences, but they have to be taught to read it critically in order to understand this.

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## Appendix 1 – Questionnaire Items

1. Nella tua carriera scolastica, quante volte hai affrontato un testo poetico? \*

- Mai
- raramente
- qualche volta
- spesso

2. Quando ti trovi davanti un testo poetico, ti senti: \*

- scoraggiato
- disorientato
- indifferente
- incuriosito
- entusiasta

3. Quante volte ti capita di leggere un testo poetico al di fuori della scuola? \*

- mai
- raramente
- qualche volta
- spesso

4. Hai mai pensato alla poesia come luogo dove trovare spunti di riflessione per la vita di tutti i giorni? \*

- mai
- raramente
- qualche volta
- spesso

5. Pensi che per comprendere un testo poetico sia necessario un livello alto di istruzione? \*

- sì, è indispensabile
- non è necessario, ma è preferibile
- no, tutti possono comprenderlo

6. Hai già affrontato un testo poetico in lingua inglese? \*

- no e non mi interessa
- no, ma spero di farlo
- sì, ma non mi è piaciuto
- sì e vorrei studiarne altri

7. Pensi che al tuo livello linguistico, affrontare un testo poetico in inglese sia: \*

- impossibile
- inutile
- difficile, ma potresti riuscirci
- una sfida che ti piacerebbe affrontare
- piuttosto facile

8. In classe, quando ti presentano una poesia in inglese, solitamente si concentrano su: (una o più risposte) \*

- il genere letterario
- l'autore
- il tema della poesia
- la parafrasi o traduzione
- il contesto storico
- l'analisi stilistica (figure retoriche ecc)
- le riflessioni personali della classe

9. Tra le opzioni della domanda precedente, quali hanno suscitato/susciterebbero maggiormente la tua attenzione? (una o più risposte) \*.

- il genere letterario
- l'autore
- il tema della poesia
- la parafrasi o traduzione
- il contesto storico
- l'analisi stilistica (figure retoriche ecc)
- le riflessioni personali della classe

10. Seleziona tutte le modalità con cui ti è stato presentato il testo poetico nella tua esperienza: (puoi selezionarne più di una) \*

- su carta stampata

- letto dall'insegnante
- da fonti online
- fatto ascoltare da una
- registrazione accompagnato da
- musica associato ad immagini
- altro: \_\_\_\_\_

11. Tra queste modalità, ce n'è una che ti ha aiutato o pensi di aiuterebbe a comprendere meglio il testo poetico? \*

- su carta stampata
- letto dall'insegnante
- da fonti online
- fatto ascoltare da una registrazione
- accompagnato da musica
- associato ad immagini
- Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Trovi che l'analisi della poesia verso per verso: \*

- renda il testo ancora più complesso
- sia noiosa ed inutile
- sia noiosa, ma necessaria
- ti aiuti a comprenderla meglio
- sia indispensabile

13. Nell'analizzare una poesia, quanto sei influenzato dall'idea di una verifica sul testo? \*

- per niente
- ci penso solo in un secondo momento
- abbastanza, ma cerco di godermi il testo
- è l'unica cosa a cui penso

14. Se invece il testo poetico non fosse oggetto di verifica, come ti sentiresti? \*

- meno motivato
- indifferente

più motivato

15. Quanto sei d'accordo con l'affermazione: "La poesia è un indovinello e l'unica risposta esatta è in mano all'insegnante"? \*

- per niente d'accordo
- poco d'accordo
- abbastanza d'accordo
- completamente d'accordo

16. L'idea di esprimere un tuo giudizio su una poesia ti fa sentire: \*

- a disagio
- inadeguato
- indifferente
- motivato

17. L'idea di provare a scrivere dei versi in inglese: \*

- mi spaventa
- mi sembra noiosa
- mi incuriosisce
- mi piacerebbe poiché lo faccio già in italiano

18. Ti capita mai di cercare e leggere il testo di una canzone inglese? \*

- mai
- raramente
- qualche volta
- spesso

19. In classe hai mai analizzato il testo di una canzone inglese? \*

- mai
- raramente
- qualche volta
- spesso

20. Ti ha incuriosito/ti incuriosisce l'idea? \*

- per niente
- poco
- abbastanza
- molto

21. C'è qualcosa che vorresti aggiungere?

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### Informazioni personali

22. Età \*

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23. Genere \*

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24. Classe frequentata \*

- Prima
- Seconda

25. Indirizzo di studio \*

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## Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

- 1- Do you employ poetic texts in any way during your lessons?
- 2- If you do, do you think students are motivated by them? Why?
- 3- Which techniques do you use to motivate students when using poetic texts?
- 4- Is there something that could be done differently to motivate them?
- 5- Do you use song lyrics in class? If you do, what do you mostly use them for?
- 6- Do you think students are more or less motivated by them?
- 7- If you don't employ poetic texts, what is the main reason for your choice? (For example: time restrictions, the curriculum, the students' preferences.)
- 8- Do you think poetic texts could be introduced effectively in the *biennio*? Why?