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**INFORMAL LEARNING THROUGH ICTS:  
GAUGING ITS LINGUISTIC IMPACT  
ON HIGH SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS  
AND ITS POSSIBLE APPLICATION  
IN FORMAL LEARNING**

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# ABSTRACT

The present study contributes to the research on the linguistic impact of informal out-of-school learning through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on EFL learners.

The aims of the study are, firstly, to determine to what extent, through what means and why high school Italian students are in contact with English outside school through technologies. Secondly, to find out their opinion about whether any kind of learning is taking place and what learning areas and skills it affects. Thirdly, students' use of learning strategies is investigated to test their level of autonomy, and finally, the use of technologies at school and the role of teachers are investigated as to try to bridge the gap between formal in-school and informal out-of-school learning.

Data were gathered through an online questionnaire completed by 350 Italian high school EFL learners.

Results show that the respondents are in contact with English outside school to a rather high degree, that there is a positive correlation between this exposure and foreign language proficiency in all language areas and skills. Moreover, a number of students adopt comprehension strategies but few students adopt memorization strategies.

Only a few technological practices are exploited by teachers, and even fewer steps are taken by them to try and bridge the gap between formal and informal learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

A life without passion is a life not worth living. English has been one of my greatest passions for several years. I have always felt inclined for English and never struggled with it throughout compulsory education, even though I was not so enthusiastic about it; until something happened in 1999. My cousin from Belgium had told me about this new boyband called The Backstreet Boys, and so I bought their album.

Shortly after, MTV was introduced on TV and the main international songs were for everyone to listen.

In that period, my then only greatest passion, music, merged with my future passion, English.

A similar thing happened some time later with my Pokémon videogame for Gameboy Pocket; I still remember the day I went to the toy shop to find out that only the English version was available. It was tough at the beginning, but the enthusiasm for the videogame was so strong I got over the difficulty of having to read foreign language texts all the time.

Yet at high school I was not able to transfer into the classroom the enthusiasm I felt while listening to songs and playing a videogame in English; yes, it was the same language I heard while listening to music and read while playing that videogame, but at school it was mainly about grammar on books, illustrated boys and girls moving to their relatives, meeting new friends, asking for directions, organizing an evening at the cinema and so on. It felt like two separate entities; me and English outside school and me and English inside it. Then university came, and not knowing what to do with my life, I decided to go on with languages and results were rather good, but there was not passion or enthusiasm in what I was doing, only the idea of getting a good job doing something I did not dislike. Then my greatest milestone, my greatest watershed happened; thanks to the development of technology, internet was at disposal, so I decided to browse it to look for something interesting to watch and I bumped into Chuck, an American spy-comedy TV series. There was no Italian dubbed version so I started watching it in English. I liked it so much that I wanted to understand every

single word. Therefore I used subtitles, but then I wanted to watch those episodes again and again, so I slowly took subtitles off. After watching those 91 episodes three times, I had unintentionally crossed the Rubicon and taken the qualitative leap. I was able to understand most of what people on YouTube and on other programs said, I started using new words and expressions with more ease day after day. Yet a very important role was played by my being a university student; this provided me with a critical, scientific eye for the language and so through the good metalinguistic awareness I had developed thanks to this institution, I was able to make the most of it and turn it into a life-changing experience.

I am not implying that everyone should do what I did to improve their English, I would just like to point out that the fire of passion for the English language was kept on by experiences outside school such as songs, videogames and TV series, but it turned into something practical thanks to education.

A synthesis between positive outside school experiences and positive inside school experiences is what I consider an effective way to learn a language.

Unlike in my childhood, technology now offers an astonishing number of opportunities for students to be exposed to English outside school, social sites and apps, Wikipedia and YouTube, only to name a few. If learning experiences at school are positive and somehow linked to these outside exposure, students are supposed to be learning a lot from both sources. This is what the present study is about, to gauge whether students are learning through this outside exposure and whether school embraces and exploits this exposure.

Another interesting topic I'd like to investigate is whether students can intake what they are exposed to outside school and then utilize it in other contexts for communicative purposes. This is what happens to me on a daily basis; not a day goes by without me using a word or an expression and linking it to a particular song or film scene.

# 1. FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

To understand what is meant by informal learning, two other concepts must be introduced, i.e. *formal learning* and *non-formal learning*.

*Formal learning* means learning in highly structured and organized environments “running from primary school through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programmes and institutions for full-time technical and professional training” (Fordham 1993).

Such kind of learning is intentional, has a set time and place, has set objectives and skills that learners are supposed to reach and develop, in addition to providing some kind of certification that proves these have been acquired (Ala-Kyyny 2012).

On the other hand, *non-formal learning* is defined as “any organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the [...] definition of formal education” (Krezios et al. 2010). More specifically, *non-formal learning* may take place both within and outside educational institutions and concern people of all ages. It may cover educational programmes aimed at improving adult literacy, working skills, education for out-of-school children or general culture (ibid.). Similarly to formal learning, it is an intentional kind of learning, but conversely to it, it has “no externally derived curricula” (Fordham 1993).

*Informal learning*, on the other hand, “refers to a wide range of learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions” (Ala-Kyyny 2012) through daily experiences and activities related to family, work, leisure, the mass media etc. (Ala-Kyyny 2012; Fordham 1993).

Informal learning is different from both formal and non-formal learning in that it is *not* time-restricted, organized or structured, and it is *not* necessarily intentional (Ala-Kyyny 2012). This feature is particularly relevant to the present study because people being not necessarily aware they are learning makes research in this field fairly complex and challenging, as stressed by Nyssölä (2002 in Ala-Kyyny 2012).

However, focusing on informal language learning for the sake of argument, even though informal learning “may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills” (Krezios et al. 2010), “these everyday practices can improve our language skills” (Ala-Kyyny 2012), and to confirm the validity of this claim will be one of the main objectives of the present study.

Despite constituting approximately 75% of all learning (Tuomisto 1998 in Ala-Kyyny 2012) and therefore being an integral part of human life (Ala-Kyyny 2012), informal learning has rarely been granted a prominent position by formal education and institutions. Nevertheless, its role has gained gradual recognition over the years, as confirmed by Nyysölä (2002 in Ala-Kyyny 2012) and Ala-Kyyny (2012).

One of the forefathers of the concept of informal learning is the philosopher and psychologist John Dewey, who, on the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, demanded a change in education, stressing that school should not be isolated and unengaging, but real life experience should be at its basis instead (Ala-Kyyny 2012).

A further step towards a proper recognition of informal learning was taken by UNESCO and its 1972 Faure report, which introduced the concept of *lifelong learning*, thanks to which “out-of-school education becomes as important as the formal system, and it was, at that moment, timely to move away both from the idea that education and schooling were one, and also that learning was or could be confined to particular places, times or age groups” (Fordham 1993).

Lifelong learning was further promoted by the OECD and the European Union in the following years and so informal learning came to constitute the basis for *lifelong learning* along with formal and non-formal learning (Nyysölä 2002 in Ala-Kyyny 2012).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 INFORMAL LEARNING AND ICTs

As previously mentioned, informal learning can refer to several spheres such as family, work and leisure, and can refer to any learning situation. This paper will focus specifically on the contribution in terms of language acquisition of English as a foreign language offered by information and communication technologies (ICTs) among young people *outside school*, and it could hardly have been otherwise.

Indeed, as Sefton-Green (2004) points out, “computers and other aspects of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) allow children and young people a wide variety of activities and experiences that can support learning, yet many of these transactions do not take place in traditional educational settings”.

He goes on to say that digital resources tend to be considered as leisure activities outside the realm of valued education by formal education establishments. Aittola (1998 in Ala-Kyyny 2012) seems to share the same view about the importance of ICTs and their being wrongly neglected by schools when, studying the Finnish society, he argues that “the main learning environments for Finnish youth are found *outside* (my emphasis) formal education [...], increasingly when using different kinds of media” and that “the world has changed so much that school has become outdated and can no longer offer young people the appropriate means [...] to effectively cope and participate in modern society”.

Because such a situation is not in line with the *lifelong learning* principle, “an interest in out-of-school informal learning is much more of a mainstream political concern now” and “learning in out-of-school settings needs to be accorded status and understanding as we seek to enhance the education system more generally” (Sefton-Green 2004).

Specifically, the technology-mediated informal learning that will be dealt with in this paper concerns the contact with English through songs, social sites and apps, videogames, videos, films, TV Series and articles. Sefton- Green (2004) rightly asks

himself; “How are children learning when playing computer games [and other technologies]? Why are they interested and engaged in using these technologies outside school? What can we learn from these activities that can help us in designing our approaches to formal education?”. This paper sets out to answer these and other interesting questions that will come up along the way.

## **2.2 THE PRESENCE OF ENGLISH IN ICTs AND ITS EFFECT ON ENGLISH LEARNING**

In the words of Ala-Kyyiny (2012), “for many non-native speakers, English is present in everyday life through television, music, Internet, and so on”. Even though there is little sign of English on the Italian TV, it could be nonetheless argued that thanks to the Internet, an average Italian young person can hardly avoid contact with English through songs, videogames, social sites and apps, films, TV series and articles, a claim whose validity will be tested further ahead in the paper.

Scholars maintain that there is a positive correlation between this kind of informal, out-of-school, technological exposure and foreign language proficiency (Olmedo 2015, Ala-Kyyiny 2012, Nyssölä 2008 in Ala-Kyyiny 2012).

Sandqvist (2009) investigated the effects of the exposure of English through English-medium sources on the vocabulary and oral proficiency of 80 ESL students aged 15-16 in Sweden and confirmed such correlation. The same goes for Kuppens (2010 in Olmedo 2015) and his study on 374 primary-school children, and the very same conclusion was drawn by Storz et al. (2012) in their 2010 study on 638 French-speaking university students.

## **2.3 REASONS FOR HIGH EXPOSURE AND ACTUAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Once the above correlation has been established, a number of questions arises.

1. What is it that contributes to such a high exposure to English language among young people out of school?

2. What is it that allows such exposure to turn into actual foreign language acquisition?

The first reason is undoubtedly what I personally consider the greatest source of motivation, i.e. *pleasure*. Young people listen to songs, watch films, play videogames etc. in English because they like them. Of course this does not necessarily mean they like the English language as well, but the pleasure provided by the product, be it a film, a videogame, a song etc. is strong enough to make a linguistic effort.

This is supported by Barbee's survey (2013) on 151 16-17-year-old Japanese EFL secondary education learners; the type of out-of-school contact with English was found to depend on how enjoyable the students considered the sources. And this has a direct impact on young people's language learning.

Indeed, according to Balboni's tripartite model of motivation (Balboni 2013), our actions towards learning in general are guided by three possible factors: duty, need and pleasure.

A motivation led by duty is often found at school, where pupils learn because they have to. This is mostly related to external factors such as teacher, parent and peer pressure and does not lead to a real acquisition, for, as pointed out by Balboni (2013), this kind of motivation activates an *affective filter* that causes the information to remain in the mid-term memory. This information can still be retrieved during tests, but it gets lost after a while.

A motivation led by need runs the risk of being rather ephemeral and to fade away as soon as learners feel they have satisfied their specific need, which may not coincide with an actual, long-term acquisition of the information.

Pleasure, on the other hand, is the determinant factor for a real acquisition to take place.

Secondly, in terms of English language learning and strictly linked to what has just been discussed, informal learning is not learning for the sake of learning, but is *functional* to something. Young people use English in social networks because they want to communicate, they use English in videogames because they have to follow instructions to complete it and so on; therefore, informal learning can be seen as an "*implicit learning*, [an] [...] effortless, unconscious way of acquiring regularities of

English through separate examples in complex media environments” (Ala-Kyyny 2012), which in turn clearly recalls Krashen’s *rule of forgetting*, according to which pupils are more prone to acquisition when they forget they are acquiring language.

In other words, English is not necessarily the main focus, but it can be a means to do something practical instead, and this is confirmed by Ala-Kyyny (2012) when she points out that “Nyyssölä [...] sees language learning from the media as representing a functional view of language learning, thus placing the emphasis on the learner’s own activity, pleasant learning environment, communication, and higher disregard for errors”.

The final part of this reference provides the link to a third important factor, i.e. the *lack of anxiety*. Anxiety is one of the affective variables leading students to raise an affective filter that prevents actual language acquisition from taking place. It can often be found at school, triggered by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation from teachers and peers and test anxiety (Horwitz et al. 1986, Dörnyei 2001). In an informal context, on the other hand, young people can manage their learning situation and their anxiety according to their needs, tastes and interests “in familiar contexts and environments” (Nyyssölä 2008 in Ala-Kyyny 2012). Gilbert, Fiske, & Lindzey and Beauvois in Mills (2011) further confirm that “studies suggest that computer-mediated communication [...] decreases [...] language learner anxiety”.

Furthermore, in such contexts young people are free to unconsciously choose their learning situation according to their personal amount and combination of *intelligences* and their *cognitivestyles*. Indeed, Gardner (Balboni 2013; Sigurðardóttir 2011) hypothesizes that there are eight different intelligences in each of us that are found in different amounts and combinations. These intelligences include musical, linguistic, spatial and intrapersonal intelligences, whereas cognitive styles are “the processes of acquisition of new information” (Balboni 2013) and include for example analytical vs. global, tolerant vs. intolerant towards language ambiguity and one’s own mistakes etc..

To sum up, so far pleasure, functionality, lack of anxiety and adaptability have been identified as key factors for young people to (1) have a high exposure of English language in an informal environment and (2) to turn this exposure into actual language acquisition.

However, there might be other, less direct, more general and more long-term motivating factors focused directly on the English language that lead young people to get in contact with English out of school, namely Gardner and Lambert's concepts of *instrumentality* and *integrativeness*. Instrumentality "is primarily associated with the potential pragmatic gains of L2 proficiency, such as getting a better job or a higher salary" (Dörnyei 2001), while integrativeness reflects "a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group" (Gardner and Lambert 1972 in Ushioda 2006).

In the last few years, however, Gardner and Lambert's social concept of integrative motivation has been taken up by scholars such as Lamb (2004) and Ushioda (2006), who felt the need to reframe and reconceptualise it because of a worldwide phenomenon that has occurred over the last few decades: globalisation (and, more relevant to this paper, the subsequent rise of English as a global language). Ushioda and Lamb argue convincingly that because of its current status as global language and lingua franca, English is no longer associated with particular Anglophone cultures. Therefore, with no specific target reference group of speakers, "the desire to integrate loses its explanatory power" (Lamb 2004). Ushioda's suggestion consists in expanding "the notion of integrativeness to refer to a generalised international outlook or attitudes to the international community at large" (Ushioda 2006).

This concept is closely linked to Yashima's concept of *international posture*, which denotes "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and [...] openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures" (Yashima 2002 in Ushioda 2006).

In this respect, technologies might offer young people a huge contribution towards being part of this international community, and English is of course a necessary means to do so. ITCs might help young people shape their idea of *future selves* (Dörnyei 2005) as proficient English users, might help them consider using English as an investment that "will enhance their cultural capital, their conception of themselves (or identity) and their desires for the future" (Norton 2000 in Ushioda 2006).

In practical terms, the idea of future self is acquired through *interactions with people* that leave a positive mark in individuals (Lamb 2007), therefore helping shape and

sustain their motivation, and through extra resources (Lamb 2007) like books, *films and videogames*.

Sefton-Green (2004) defines this “an emotional kind of involvement in the use of ICT, [...] described by researchers as young people using ICT-based activities as part of their construction of their own personal identity [...] in which learning to use the technology is not simply a process of acquiring useful skills, but strongly embedded in the young person’s immediate social world and instrumental for these individuals in maintaining and constructing a sense of self”. In this perspective, a positive future-self perception is therefore not only an incentive towards high exposure, but a constantly improving consequence of it, along with foreign language improvement.

Consequently, the combination of a constantly increasing positive future-self perception and of a constantly increasing foreign language proficiency might help young people develop their language learning *autonomy*, as confirmed by Carlson (2005 in Mills 2011) when he argues that this generation “thrives in independent and autonomous learning contexts [...] due to their ingrained habits of seeking and retrieving information from various online sources and media”.

Specifically, this constant seeking and retrieving of information from informal contexts might lead young people to develop *learning strategies* autonomously; in the words of Ala-Kyyny (2012), “learning strategies refer to learners’ own attempts to learn. Those might be techniques, specific actions, behaviours, etc. to improve competence. Simply guessing a word’s meaning from the context, or looking it up in a dictionary, are among examples”. As further pointed out by Ala-Kyyny, the presence of these strategies in a learner may be due to important factors such as motivation and positive attitudes, along with a general learning aptitude (*ibid.*).

Finally, it should be pointed out how some theories of learning simply seem to apply better to informal learning compared to formal learning as we know it.

*Constructivism*, for example, “suggests that by reflecting on their own experiences, all learners construct their own understanding of the world. Learning, in this theoretical framework, is seen as the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences” (Sefton-Green 2006). In this perspective, informal learning seems to provide more real life experiences compared to the often theoretical formal learning.

A similar theory is known as *situated learning*, according to which “we need to understand learning as a social process and to look closely at sociocultural context to make sense of learning. This approach emphasises the nature of the body and real experiences in real contexts” (ibid.). In this perspective too, experiences through social networks, films, videogames etc. provide a much more real, social and contextualized kind of learning compared to the fictitious situations often provided by textbooks at school.

Finally, *new literacy studies* deserve a mention (ibid.). They explore how meaning is distributed across semiotic domains such as the visual, aural and textual ones. In this perspective and as it will be dealt with later in the paper, the visual and the aural domains are more conducive to learning compared to the textual one, which in turn is at the basis of formal learning at school.

Therefore, in the words of Sefton-Green (2004), “understanding informal learning with ICTs is not just a question of filling in the gaps, it is much more an area of study which may shed new light on how we learn in the first place”. Furthermore, it would be extremely interesting to “know how learners transfer knowledge and other kinds of understanding learnt in these domains to other [...] experiences” (ibid.). With reference to the last point, this paper will not go as far as to gauge *how* this phenomenon happens, but rather *if* and to what extent it does so.

Albeit to different extents, all the main factors dealt with in this section will be further analysed in the paper, specifically in the five following sections, each of which will focus on one of the following practices: social sites and apps, online multiplayer videogames, - films, TV Series and non-music YouTube videos -, songs and, finally, Wikipedia and online articles.

## 2.4 SOCIAL SITES AND APPS

Through social sites and apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and Skype, just to name a few, students can read, write, speak and listen to English. Before focusing on the linguistic aspect, though, it is important to underline the positive effects of these practices on the concepts of *self* and *identity*. As pointed out by Thorne (2010 in Lomicka and Lord 2015), the use of social sites and apps shows “a desire to develop and maintain online relationships that lead to community building, self-expression and interaction with others”. Along similar lines, Slater (2002 in Mills 2011) argues that by using social sites and apps “you essentially become what you type”, or, in the words of Mills (2011), “you write yourself into being”.

In practical terms, “identity can be constructed virtually in these social spaces by posting, sharing ideas, media preferences, and news items” (Pempek et al. 2009 in Lomicka and Lord 2015).

Furthermore, social sites and apps are extremely functional, for they “expose students to current, real and meaningful language use for specific tasks” (Lomicka and Lord 2015), and, once again, it can be argued that this exposure leads to an improvement of students’ linguistic skills, as confirmed by Lomicka and Lord (2015) and Mills (2011). Specifically, “Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1996 in Lomicka and Lord 2015) holds that language development is brought about by person-to-person communication and the linguistic interactions that take place”, an interaction that, in the words of Mills (2011), “could include problem solving, requests for information, discussion of developments, information seeking and coordination, planning, or negotiation of meaning”. Also the findings of a qualitative case study carried out by Mitchell (2012 in Lomicka and Lord 2015) on 9 ESL Facebook users suggest that “students [...] [are] able not just to communicate with friends but also to improve their linguistic and cultural competency”.

What is more, while communicating through social sites and apps, students may use a certain degree of metalinguistic awareness, as shown in a study conducted on 17 French EFL college students by Mills (2011), who stresses that “when students were asked if they paid attention to grammatical accuracy and vocabulary choice [...] , 12 out of the 17 students responded affirmatively”.

Another benefit of using social sites and apps is the lower degree of communication anxiety compared to school, as stressed by Mills (2011) and Alfaki and Alharthy (2014), who argue that “social networks offer a chance for learners to get rid of the tension of classroom activities due to the fear of making mistakes”.

Moreover, social sites and apps provide a showcase to learn through observation, where “students can observe others, interpret their behaviours, and adjust their own styles of interacting” (Ryberg and Christiansen 2008 in Lomicka and Lord 2015). However, even though observation is certainly important, it nonetheless has to be accompanied by an active use of language that allows interaction to take place. Yet in this respect, social sites and apps seem to favour written interaction to the detriment of spoke interaction. Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, for example, rely heavily on the written form. This fact notwithstanding, chances for a spoken interaction can be found among social sites and apps as well; WhatsApp itself, for instance, offers users the chance to use voice messages, and Skype offers the chance to communicate live free of charge. According to a study carried out by Toffoli and Sockett (2010) on 222 EFL students, however, “in spite of the widespread use of VOIP [Voice Over Internet Protocol] technologies such as Skype, which provide easy and free access to videoconferencing or voice-conferencing, respondents very rarely avail themselves of opportunities for verbal interaction in English on the Internet. Indeed some 70% of students surveyed say they never use VOIP services in English”.

As Toffoli and Sockett (2010) interestingly argue, “we do not yet know whether learners choose this mode to increase thinking time in interactions and to hide any pronunciation difficulties they may have in oral communication, or whether they are simply replicating the habits of a generation more used to texting than to calling on the telephone even when the initial cost motivation behind such a choice is beginning to recede”.

## 2.5 ONLINE MUTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES

As Stanley and Mawer (2009 in Da Silva 2014) point out, “playing video games is one of the most common leisure activities in current days worldwide”, and “trends show that people are spending more time playing computer games in their leisure time, at the expense of television viewing and cinema attendance”.

The interest in this medium as a learning opportunity has grown hand in hand with its popularity (Sefton-Green 2004), and despite the current interest in educational software, the literature has shown that “products do not need to be educational to support learning in practice” (ibid.). In other words, standard videogames “might develop learning in round-about ways” (ibid.).

Narrowing the focus to second language learning, and even more so with the recent development of Massive(ly) Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), players can easily “interact in and with foreign languages” (Cornillie et al. 2012 in Da Silva 2014). Indeed, the all-round nature of videogames is stressed by Da Silva (2014) when he argues that “video games offer opportunities for the development of receptive skills (namely reading and listening) and expressive skills (writing and speaking)”.

In practical terms, thanks to the internet, players can not only read and listen to instructions or to what non-player characters say in English, but they can also interact in written or spoken form with other people from all over the world who are playing the very same game.

In this context, if a study carried out by Rankin et al. (2006 in Da Silva 2014) argues that players internalize the new words to which they are exposed even in the simple interaction with non-player characters, the huge benefits of interacting with real people in English cannot be emphasized enough.

But why are players supposed to internalize words? Why would they feel the need to memorize words and expressions while playing videogames? The answer lies in the practical nature of videogames.

In the words of Da Silva (2014), “video games excel where many schools do not - in the use of learned content in action. Video games involve *doing something* (my emphasis)”. In order to make progress in a game, a common effort is required, and

linguistic comprehension is essential for this common effort to take place. Whether it comes from a non-player character or an online player, “[a] transmitted message is an advice, which may interfere with the progression of the game in case the player does not take it seriously. This discourse leads, then, to action. Not understanding this message may result in negative consequences, as far as the game is concerned. Even beginner video game players are usually aware of this, and, as a result, will be motivated to understand the message [...]”(ibid.).

Another important factor of videogames that is conducive to language learning is language being situated, “which means that the meaning conveyed by the characters cannot be separated from its context of production or the speaker”. As Gee (2008) points out, “video games are good at putting language into the context of dialogue, experience, images, and actions. They are not textbooks full of words and definitions. They allow language to be situated. Furthermore, good video games give verbal information just in time - near the time it can actually be used - or on demand, when the player feels a need for it and is ready for it”.

Vintetjärn (2008) conducted two interviews with 5 16/17-year-old students, who “agreed that their language proficiency had increased because of their gaming. This, they say, is highly connected to the fact that you have to be able to communicate in the game”.

Finally, a consequence of this kind of learning that cannot be emphasized enough and that is valid for all the media analysed in the present paper is the ability to apply the linguistic aspects learnt in a media in different contexts. This is stressed by Vintetjärn (2008) when he argues that “language learnt from playing video games, could be applied on domains outside of the game, i.e. implicit learning in terms of using a foreign language when communicating with other players can become tacit knowledge that the learner can apply on settings outside of the game”.

## 2.6 FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS

Before focusing on the learning aspect of this medium, it is useful to make a brief mention of the use of dubbing and subtitling in European countries. As pointed out by Toffoli and Sockett (2010), European countries can be broadly divided into two groups; Scandinavian, eastern countries and some other countries such as The Netherlands and Portugal broadcast films and TV series in their original versions with local language subtitles, whereas countries such as Germany, France, Spain and, relevant to the present study, Italy, dub them systematically into the local language. It goes without saying that the former situation allows people to be heavily exposed to the English language from an early age and on a daily basis, whereas the latter does not.

This discriminating factor cannot but have a huge impact on the foreign language skills of listeners, as confirmed by a study carried out by Rupérez-Micola et al. (2009 in Toffoli and Sockett 2010), which demonstrates “the superiority in English listening comprehension skills of adolescents in those countries in which subtitling is used”.

The divide between these two opposite situations, however, has been partially bridged by the internet and the chance Italian young people now have to watch original material thanks to YouTube and file-sharing websites.

That dubbing is no longer an impassable barrier is confirmed by Toffoli and Sockett’s survey (2010) carried out on 250 French university students, which shows “an increase in the quantity of English heard on a regular basis, thanks to the use of recent un-dubbed and un-subtitled material from peer-to-peer networks”.

Another interesting finding of the said study is the effect of this exposure on the watching habits of students. In the words of Toffoli and Sockett (2010), “anecdotal evidence from students suggests that having begun to watch programmes in the original language, they find the dubbed versions, when they later appear, less authentic and less dramatically convincing, and often continue to watch downloaded original language versions of their favourite programmes even when the dubbed versions later appear”.

If this aspect is borne out by further research, the divide between subtitling and dubbing countries will hopefully be reduced.

As for language learning, some interesting questions arise: why is this medium motivating and why is it conducive to learning?

First of all, pleasure or interest is at its basis; young people watch YouTube videos to enjoy the performances of and keep updated with their favourite singer, sportsperson, dancer etc., they watch films and TV series because they love them and they are entertained by them, and consequently, this medium “makes the language learning process more entertaining and enjoyable”(Donaghy 2014).

Moreover, apart from going abroad, this medium is the closest young people can get to real life language, as stressed by Donaghy when he argues that this medium “exposes students to natural expressions and the natural flow of speech. If they are not living in an English-speaking environment, perhaps only film and television can provide learners with this real-life language input”.

Films and TV series are especially conducive to learning because they are highly contextualized, just like videogames but perhaps even more because of their strong narrative structure. Events follow a precise sequence, they are all linked to one another, and the viewer is therefore given the chance to have multiple constant encounters with the way of speaking of characters and with the same words used in different contexts and situations as the story develops. This is stressed by Toffoli and Sockett (2010) when they point out that “the subject matter is supported by a narrative structure, in a theatrical context where unity of setting and characters dominate, over many episodes or even an entire series” and “audiences tend to be faithful to their series, becoming familiar enough with characters and plotlines to be able to successfully predict reactions and outcomes to varying situations”.

The importance of context for language learning is confirmed by Gendreau (2013), who points out that “countless studies on the human brain have shown that we remember things in context and not isolated facts”, and, by the same token, Balboni (2013) argues that our brain can decode, store and retrieve words properly only if they are put into a context.

However, words can be retrieved even more easily if the context is accompanied by an image; Gutierrez(2014) and Lampariello (2012) argue convincingly that “one of the easiest ways to ensure that learners store information in their long-term memory is to pair concepts with meaningful images” an effort that learners can do extremely easily

while watching films and TV series because the image is already available on the screen. The invaluable help of the visual context is further highlighted by astonishing data provided by several scholars; according to Gutierrez (2014) and Elmore (2014), 65% of the world population is visual learners and our brain processes visual information *60,000 times* faster than text because “our brain is mainly an image processor, not a word processor” (Kouyoumdjian 2012). The importance of hearing something and having a visual support at the same time is also stressed by Balboni (2013), who argues that “you remember 10% of what you see, 20% of what you hear and 50% of what you see and hear” (my translation).

As if this was not convincing enough, there is also a more direct practical advantage of the visual context given by the fact that it “assists the learners’ comprehension by enabling them to listen to language exchanges and see such visual supports as facial expressions and gestures simultaneously. These visual clues support the verbal message and provide a focus of attention” (Donaghy 2014).

Finally, it must be pointed out that context is a feature present in all the media analyzed in this paper and, likewise, the presence of a visual context can be found also in videogames, in the videos of songs and in social sites and apps, where a comment is often accompanied by a picture. This fact notwithstanding, I have found it particularly fitting to deal with the above topics in this section because of the simultaneous presence of context, sound, image and a narrative structure, which makes this medium one of a kind for the purpose of language learning.

## 2.7 SONGS

With the coming of internet and the absolute supremacy of the English language in the music market, it is virtually impossible for young people not to be exposed to English songs.

In the words of Crystal (2003 in Ala-Kyyny 2012), “no other single source has spread the English language around the youth of the world so rapidly and so pervasively”, and this is confirmed by a large-scale national survey on English in Finland carried out by Leppänen et al. (2011 in Ala-Kyyny 2012), which stresses that “97 % of the Finns aged 15-24 listen to English-language music at least once a week”.

This is due not only to the fact that music is everywhere, but also to the fact that music is intrinsically likeable.

As often happens with informal learning practices, therefore, pleasure is undoubtedly a strong factor in the realm of music listening.

What is more, music is strictly intertwined with feelings and emotions; as stressed by Roberts et al. (2001 in Sigurðardóttir 2011), “most young people use music [...] to control their mood and enhance emotional states like loneliness or distraction from their troubles” and they “can relate to music through the lyrics, as most songs are about things that people experience in life such as love, pain, joy, loneliness and happiness” (ibid.)

On a more social level, songs can also affect identities, creating a sense of belonging to a particular group of people that share the same music taste as stressed by Ala-Kyyny (2012) when she points out that “music genres are a powerful way of dividing young people into subculture groups: metal fans, dance fans, punk fans, and so on tend to form their own code of conduct. In many cases, the English language is an essential value symbol shared by the performers of these subcultures. Thus, social relations, at least in Western countries, are often determined by music taste”.

As for language learning, however, a number of reservations have been expressed about the positive effects of this medium. According to some scholars, “lyrics are rarely processed for meaning” (Toffoli and Sockett 2010) because, lacking the inherent narrative structures of films and TV series, the need to understand them is not

pressing, and so songs “can be just background music” (Ala-Kyyny 2012). Moreover, songs do not involve any kind of communication, “they lack the interactive quality requirement” (ibid.) of social networks or online multiplayer videogames.

These facts notwithstanding, because music can be argued to be the main source of English language exposure among young people, “for many, some part of that listening must be attentive, [...] [which means that] lyrics are heard, and in some ways processed (ibid.). In other words, “constant exposure to English language music must have some consequences to our learning, and that information could be further used to enhance language learning” (ibid.). Even more so because “even if songs may seem somewhat disconnected entities, they usually take the form of a story” (ibid.). Ala-Kyyny (2012) further strengthens her point stressing that context is offered by the storyline and above all by the accompanied video on channels such as YouTube, with all the benefits that visual clues can offer to language learning (see the section on films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos).

Furthermore, memorization is key to language learning, and “multiple encounters with a lexical item” (Pavičić Takač 2008 in Ala-Kyyny 2012) are one of its building blocks; the melody that accompanies the lyrics allows for a pleasant encounter with the same lyrics over and over again, because the more we like a song, the more we want to hear it. Moreover, “songs offer opportunities for encountering English vocabulary over and over again in different semantic contexts in different songs. Besides, popular song lyrics are not usually full of specialized terminology, but instead tend to please large audiences, and therefore the same words seem to appear fairly frequently in them. This, in turn, could help learners in achieving a basic vocabulary”.

As if this pleasing reiteration was not beneficial enough, research suggests that music “tends to leave a deep trace in our memories, which is possible due to the fact that it is related to factors that are affective [...]” (Mora 1999 in Sigurðardóttir 2011). Indeed, “most people learn song lyrics faster than words, and melodies tend to store easier in the memory even though the meaning of the words might not be clear” (Sigurðardóttir 2011) because words, which are processed by the left hemisphere of the brain, are processed simultaneously with melody, which in turn is processed by the right hemisphere, the same hemisphere in which emotions are also processed.

Therefore, song lyrics can be learnt easily because they activate both hemispheres of our brain; in the words of (Sigurðardóttir 2011) “sound waves come into our ears and from there they transform into nerve impulses. These impulses are then sent out to areas in the left and right temporal lobes for processing. The functions that are used to process music and singing are stored in the brains with other functions that include emotion, memory and language”.

That music is not only about listening passively, but also about learning actively and consciously is confirmed by Ala-Kyyny (2012) when she stresses that “some listeners are so interested in song lyrics that they actually translate them by using dictionaries or other sources. There are ready-made translations on the Internet for a great deal of songs, too. Others may memorize song lyrics and if this was still done without any actual awareness of the meaning contents, then at least it might enhance their pronunciation”.

As regards all the topics concerning songs covered so far, a study carried out by Ala-Kyyny (2012) on 97 students aged 16-20 has offered the following results, all relevant to the present study:

- The vast majority of the respondents listened to music *on a daily basis* and spent roughly *2-4 hours* on listening *every day*
- The majority of the respondents stated that they *often* paid attention to song lyrics
- The respondents were directly asked to estimate how much English-language music had impacted their language skills. Most respondents chose either of these two alternatives: *moderately or very*, and thereby gave English-language music recognition in language learning.
- The answers concerning the level of impact on different areas of language skills revealed that the respondents estimated the impact *fairly high on pronunciation, vocabulary, expressions and listening comprehension*, while the impact of English-language music on grammar did *not* gain much recognition among the respondents.
- The respondents of the present study were not just passive listeners, but the majority often paid attention to English language lyrics, and even felt

that they understood the contents fairly well. Indeed, many of them checked the lyrics in a written format.

- Some respondents really seemed to recognize the benefits of music in language learning and actively utilize it to improve their skills.

The last point provides the chance to stress once again one of the main focuses of the present study, i.e. to gauge the ability of young people to use what they learn from informal learning in different contexts and situations. Songs, for example “are full of phrases and expressions that will prepare children for using genuine language” (Sigurdardóttir 2012).

## 2.8 WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES

The massive changes regarding the search for information brought about by the internet are before our very own eyes on a daily basis. Not until long ago, the only sources of information were paper documents such as books and newspapers. Information searching was usually a long process, often requiring people to go to libraries to consult encyclopedias. Today, a great deal of information can be easily found on the Internet with the touch of a finger or a click of a mouse thanks to search engines such as Google.

Launched in the Internet in 2001, the user generated online encyclopedia called Wikipedia, created with the aim of “compiling the sum of all knowledge and encouraging collaboration for the greater good” (Simonite 2013 in Kennedy 2016), is now “one of the most frequently accessed websites on the internet” (Alexa 2011 in Bernhardt 2012).

The benefits of this incredible tool are stressed by Toole (2010) when she argues that Wikipedia provides instant, relevant, basic information in a huge number of languages about any topic in terms understandable to anyone, in addition to providing direct links to all references made during the explanation.

For the scope of this study, this means that students have at an excellent tool at their disposal that allows them to have contact with the English language whatever the topic they are inquiring about.

Possible reasons for preferring English articles to Italian articles for Italian students may be a greater quality and a greater deal of information provided, both of which can happen because of the world status of English as lingua franca, which makes it anything but rare that people from all over the world write in English regardless of their mother tongue. By doing their research, students are supposed to have multiple encounters with English words in context, and specifically with expressions and linguistic constructions that may improve their writing skills as confirmed by Vetter (2015), when he points out that “because the encyclopedia showcases productive writing processes in radically transparent ways, Wikipedia enables rich opportunities for students to observe, practice, and learn about writing”.

## 2.9 BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

With such an astonishing number of benefits for foreign language learning, it is reasonable to expect that educational institutions have somehow integrated the informal technology-based world of young people into their formal environment and exploited it to the greatest extent possible.

However, as Lefever (2009 in Sigurdardóttir 2012) points out in his study on Icelandic education, “teachers seem to be reluctant to try new teaching methods and tend to stick with methods that are more traditional such as the use of workbooks, which leaves very little space for activities that allow more creativity”. In his study, “the methods that teachers most frequently rank as receiving little or no emphasis in their teaching in most classes are the use of songs, games, [...] and computer and/or Internet use” (ibid.). Basing on my personal experience, I would argue the general situation is no different in Italy.

This is of course a pity, not only if we consider all the benefits of informal learning analyzed so far, but also if we consider that the teacher’s repetitive way of teaching and the use of irrelevant material are two of the major demotivating factors in the classroom environment (Dörnyei 2001).

Consequently, that “in-school and out-of-school contexts are like different realities for teenagers” comes as no surprise, as Pitkänen-Huhta and Nikula (Ala-Kyyny 2012) stress in their study on Finnish teenagers’ perceptions of their everyday practices with English.

What are teachers supposed to do to try and bridge this gap?

The first, obvious step seems to bring the outside informal world of young people into the classroom, as confirmed by Sefton-Green (2004), who argues that “teachers and other educators just simply need to know a lot more about children’s experiences and be confident to interpret and use the learning that goes on outside of the classroom”. Along similar lines, Dörnyei (2001) addresses the teacher-reader as follows: “find out what your students’ goals are and what topics they want to learn about, then build

these into your curriculum as much as possible. This makes sense: students will not be motivated to learn unless they regard the material they are taught as worth learning". This is perfectly in line with Schumann's input-related motivation (Balboni 2013), according to which when our brain receives an input, it makes an appraisal of what it wants to acquire following certain factors among which there are novelty and attractiveness.

In so doing, teachers provide pedagogical positive learning experiences at school that further motivate students to be exposed to English through technologies outside school to an even greater degree, a boost that, in turn, will foster students' development towards autonomy.

However, "even when learners have plenty of resources available to use in the FL [outside school], they may not be aware of the potential ways of using them to acquire the language effectively". Therefore, in addition to practically and pedagogically exploiting informal practices such as social sites and apps, videogames, films and songs in the classroom, teachers are also expected to teach learning strategies, in other words, to teach students how to make the most of their informal learning experience, which is a need confirmed by scholars such as Lamb and Nunan (Olmedo 2015). Furthermore, in the words of Toffoli and Sockett (2010), "students might share strategies they use with each other; teachers might present strategies that they may be less familiar with (such as predicting, selective attention, self-monitoring, inductive & deductive inferencing, etc.) and have students test them out on their own to see if they have positive impact on their leisure activities".

The teacher's task, therefore, is to make sure students develop a *reactive autonomy* (Littlewood 1999 in Spratt et al. 2002), "whereby learners engage in fruitful independent study once given a direction to follow and a reason for following it". By activating this reactive autonomy in students, they will gradually build their own *personal learning environment* and they will gradually become *self-regulated learners* (Dabbagh and Kitsantas 2011).

Possible implementations and benefits of informal technology-based practices in a formal environment include:

- Social sites and apps: exploiting the friendly layout to get students to create self-descriptions and to engage in self-expression tasks (Lomicka and Lord 2015), analysing real posts and comments to promote metalinguistic awareness of language structures and sociocultural aspects of language use (Lomicka and Lord 2015; Toffoli and Sockett 2010), engaging in distance learning with twinning classes through posts, instant messaging or videoconferencing (Toffoli and Sockett 2010).
  
- Online multiplayer videogames: realistically, a direct application of online multiplayer videogames in a current Italian classroom is hard to envisage; many classrooms lack direct internet access, let alone the equipment required by this kind of practice. However, in the words of Da Silva (2012) “game design may be implemented in classrooms. This is not to say that every class has to be built around video games, but some characteristics that are present in such media, i.e. language understanding that consequently leads to predetermined actions can be transferred to the English class setting. This approach is called gamification”.
  
- Films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos: a film sequence or a YouTube video can be used to practice listening and, in the case of films and TV series, to practice also reading thanks to subtitles. Moreover, by exploiting all possible combinations offered by original soundtrack, original subtitles, dubbed soundtrack and translated subtitles, and analysis of the dubbing can be carried out by students with the help of the teacher. Videos can also spur discussions and debates on social issues (Donaghy 2014 and Balboni 2013).
  
- Songs: enhancing students’ listening, for instance by handing out song lyrics with some of the words missing. Songs can be also used to increase students’ vocabulary and their grammar awareness; if teachers are interested in the vocabulary of a specific field or in a specific grammar

topic, they can find songs that contain those features and get students to notice them and take them in. Furthermore, students can make skits from new vocabulary, thereby putting it in context and in practice and using their imagination in the process. Through music, also cultural aspects, different accents, figurative language and metaphors can be taught. Furthermore, students can improve their speaking skills as well by discussing together the topic and their interpretation of the songs (Sigurdardóttir 2012).

- Wikipedia and online articles: to improve students' vocabulary and reading skills, to improve their writing skills by focusing on formal aspects of language.

### 3. THE STUDY

The present study contributes to the research on the linguistic impact of informal out-of-school learning through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on EFL learners.

The aims of the study are, firstly, to determine to what extent, through what means and why high school Italian students are in contact with English outside school through technologies. Secondly, to find out their opinion about whether any kind of learning is taking place and what learning areas and skills it affects. Thirdly, students' use of learning strategies is investigated to test their level of autonomy, and finally, the use of technologies at school and the role of teachers are investigated as to try to bridge the gap between formal in-school and informal out-of-school learning.

In order to achieve the said aims, the following research questions have been created:

1. *To what extent* are students in contact with English through ICTs outside school?
2. *Through what means* are students in contact with English through ICTs outside school?
3. *Why* are students in contact with English through ICTs outside school?
4. Do they feel they are experiencing any kind of learning through these means?
5. What kind of learning do they feel they are experiencing? (vocabulary and expressions, pronunciation, grammar, oral comprehension, oral production, written comprehension, written production)
6. Do they find what they are learning useful in order to understand and use English in other contexts?
7. If they use any, what learning strategies do they use?
8. Does school bridge the gap between formal in-school and informal out-of-school learning?

This study draws mainly from quantitative research. In order to answer these questions, non-linguistic, attitudinal and behavioural data were gathered through an online questionnaire created with Google forms and completed by 350 high school EFL learners in Italy. The total anonymity of the questionnaire does not allow for a territorial mapping of the answers, but most students can be argued to live in the north-east of Italy, the area where I live. This is so because the link to the questionnaire has been spread through the grapevine through personal means strongly relevant to the present paper such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Moreover, the total anonymity of the questionnaire and the questionnaire not being submitted at school does not guarantee that 100% of the respondents are actually current high school students, but it can nonetheless be argued that there is little point for someone to fill in a 15-minute questionnaire if they do not feel directly involved in the project. I selected high school students as respondents because they are supposed to possess a sufficient degree of maturity and language proficiency in order to answer the questions and because it is the generation that is perhaps more familiar with technology.

An Italian questionnaire was submitted but an English version is available at the end of the paper. The questionnaire consists of mainly closed questions, in which respondents choose from ready-given alternatives, though a few open-ended questions were included in order to let respondents give more in-depth opinions.

The questionnaire is divided into 9 sections.

The first section is dedicated to the respondents' background information; age, sex and type of school attended.

The second section contains a number of general statements to which students are asked to give a number ranging from 1 to 5 according to their degree of agreement using a Likert scale. The statements concern students' attitudes towards the English language, the English culture, the importance of the English language for their future career and their future in general, their future-self perception as English speakers and the way English is taught at school.

In the third section, using the same five-point Likert scale, students were asked to state their degree of contact with the English language through 5 practices, namely (1)

songs, (2) online multiplayer videogames, (3) social sites and apps, (4) films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos and (5) Wikipedia and online articles.

This section was created because the questionnaire is rather long and time-consuming; therefore, students at this point are asked to focus on the three practices that have ranked higher in this section according to their habits and to complete only the following sections dealing with those three practices, leaving the other two untouched. Sections from 4 to 8 focus each on one of the five above practices and have roughly the same structure:

1. Frequency of contact (multiple choice)
2. Reasons for contact (checkbox)
3. General impression on language impact (Likert scale)
  - Specific impact on
    - 3.1 New words and expressions
    - 3.2 Pronunciation
    - 3.3 Grammar
    - 3.4 Listening
    - 3.5 Reading
    - 3.6 Speaking
    - 3.7 Writing
4.
  - 4.1 Frequency of words, expressions or grammar structures recognized in both reading and listening thanks to previous contact with the practice (Likert Scale)
  - 4.2 Frequency of words, expressions or grammar structures used in both writing and speaking thanks to previous contact with the practice (Likert Scale)
5.
  - 5.1 Comprehension and communication strategies adopted (checkbox)
  - 5.2 Memorization strategies adopted (checkbox)
- 6.

6.1 Use of the practice at school and teacher's contribution  
(checkbox)

6.2 Suggestions on how to use the practice at school if not used  
(open-ended question)

Finally, in section number nine, students can add any further comment about the questionnaire topics (open-ended question).

The questionnaire was available for completion online from the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 to the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2016. The quantitative data were automatically analyzed and charted by Google Forms; therefore descriptive analysis has been used in order to summarize the data.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### 4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

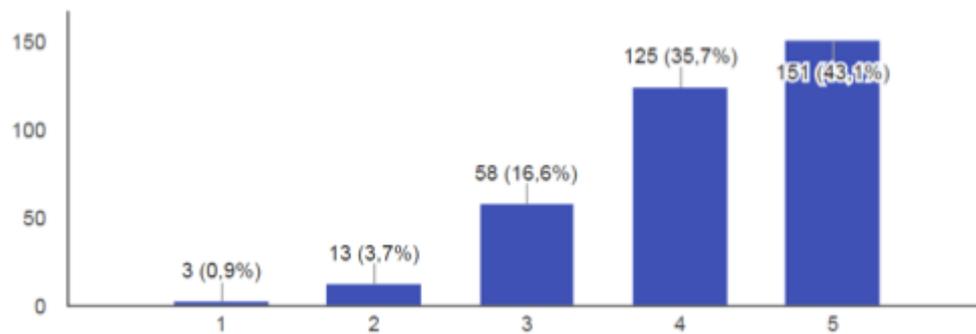
The age of the respondents varied from 14 to 20 and was distributed as follows:

- 3.4% were 14
- 12.6% were 15
- 25.8% were 16
- 19.8% were 17
- 20.9% were 18
- 14.3% were 19
- 3.2% were 20

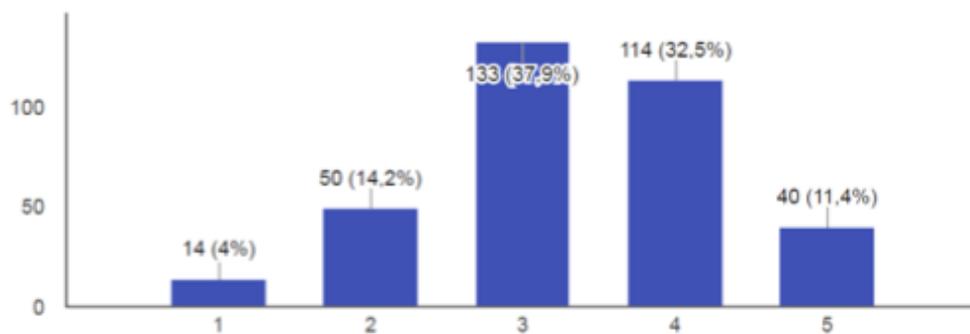
The mean age was 16.9. Moreover, 64.3% were female respondents and 35.7% were male respondents. 66.4% of the respondents attended a *Liceo*, 24.2% an *Istituto Tecnico* and 9.4% attended an *Istituto Professionale*.

## 4.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE, ENGLISH CULTURE AND ENGLISH AT SCHOOL

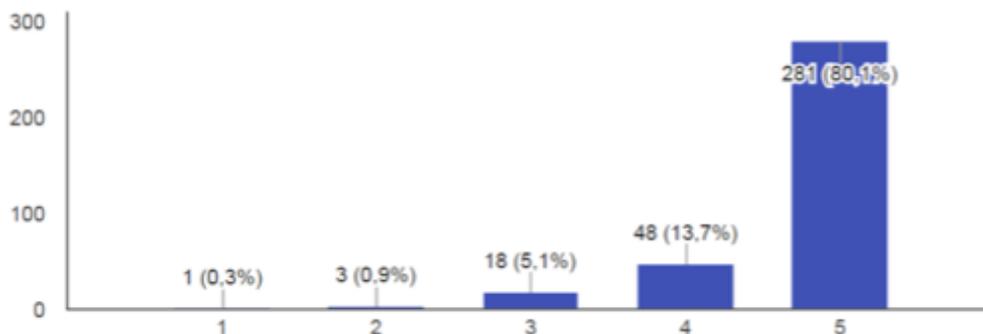
### I LIKE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE



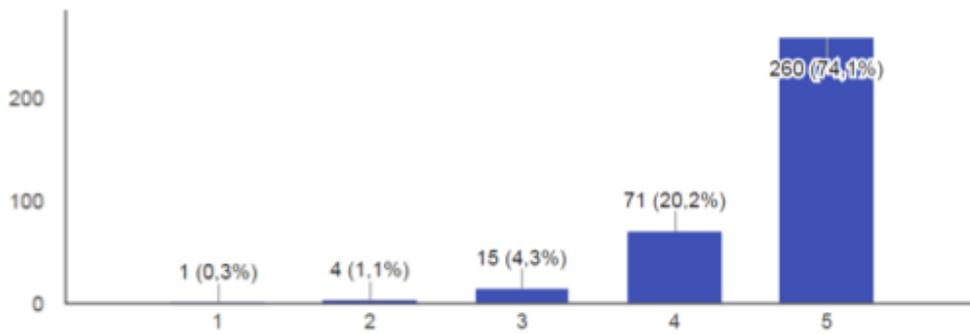
### I LIKE THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CULTURE



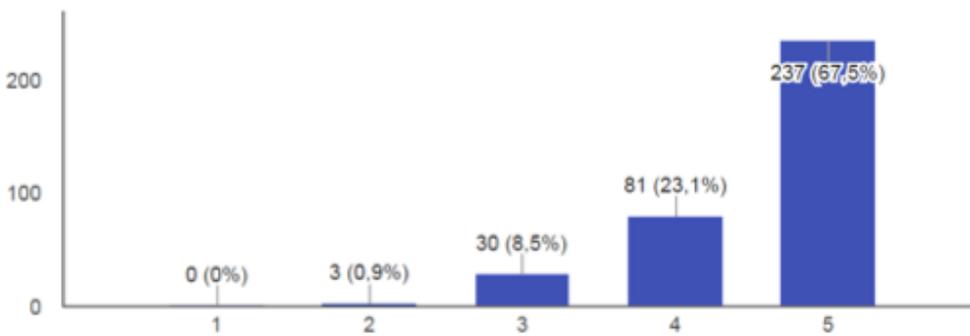
### I'D LIKE TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK ENGLISH FLUENTLY AS AN ADULT



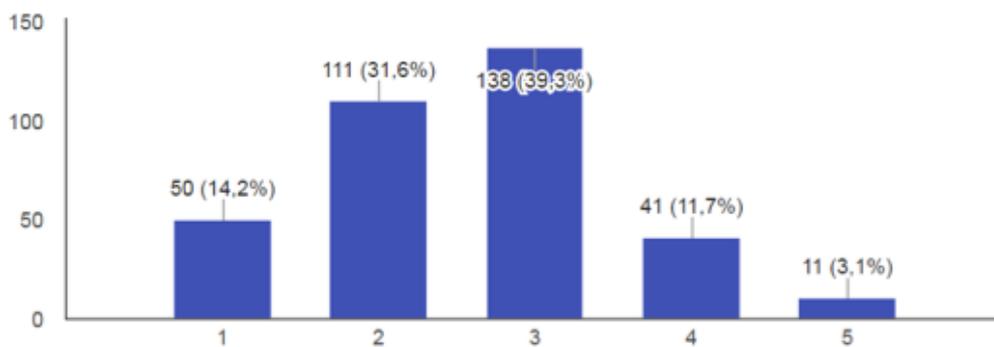
### ENGLISH IS IMPORTANT FOR MY FUTURE



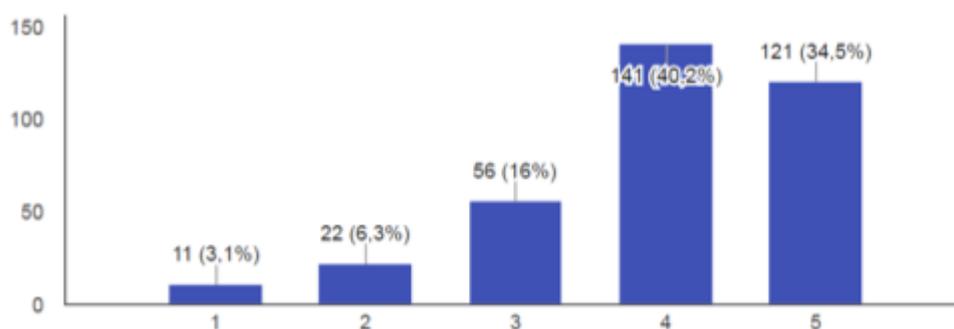
### ENGLISH IS IMPORTANT FOR MY FUTURE CAREER



### I LIKE HOW ENGLISH IS TAUGHT AT SCHOOL



### I WOULD LIKE ENGLISH MORE IF IT WERE TAUGHT DIFFERENTLY

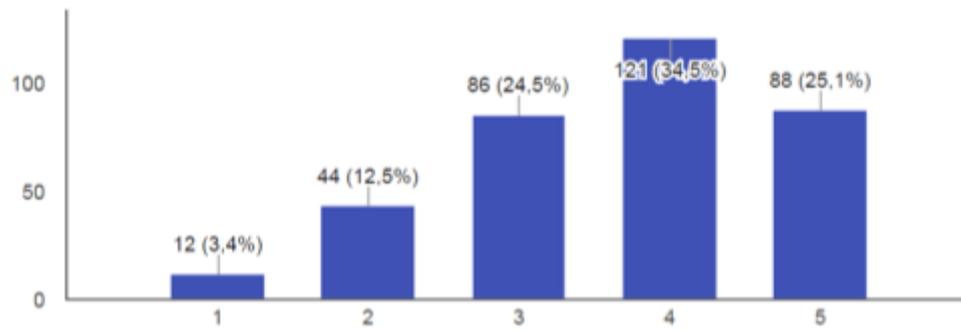


One of the statements a huge number of students strongly agree with concerns the importance of English for their future career. This shows that they are fully aware of this aspect and that instrumentality may have a higher impact compared to integrativeness.

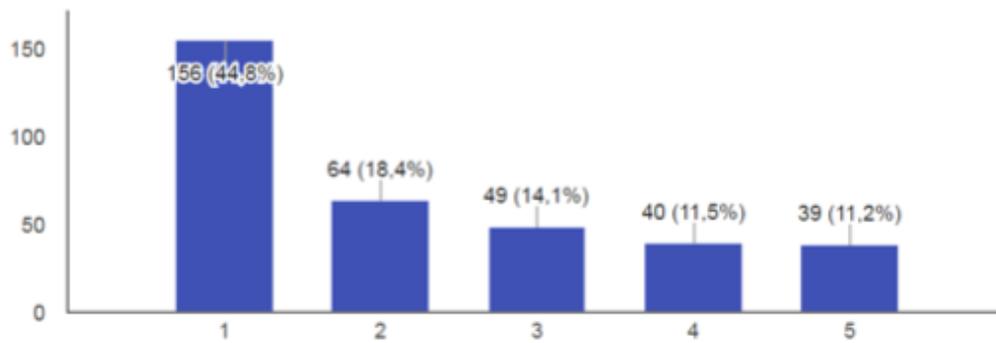
However, the statements the greatest number of students strongly agree with are the ones concerning the awareness that English is important for their future life in general and their desire to be fluent adult speakers of English, which confirms Yashima's concept of international posture and shows a positive future-self perception as English speakers. All of this despite the fact that the enthusiasm for the way English is taught at school can hardly be said to be among the highest and a different way of teaching would be welcomed by a good number of respondents.

### 4.3 AREAS AND DEGREE OF CONTACT WITH ENGLISH OUTSIDE SCHOOL

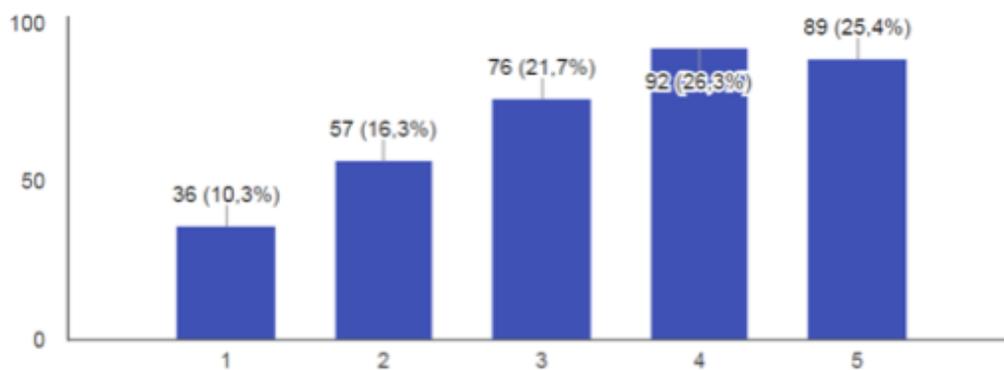
#### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



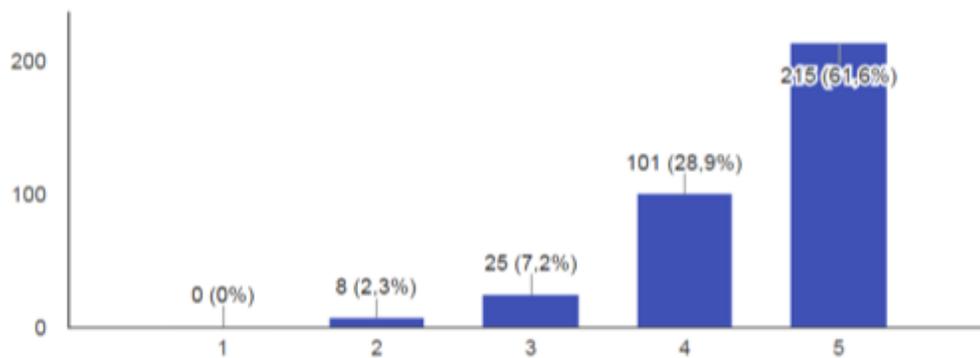
#### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



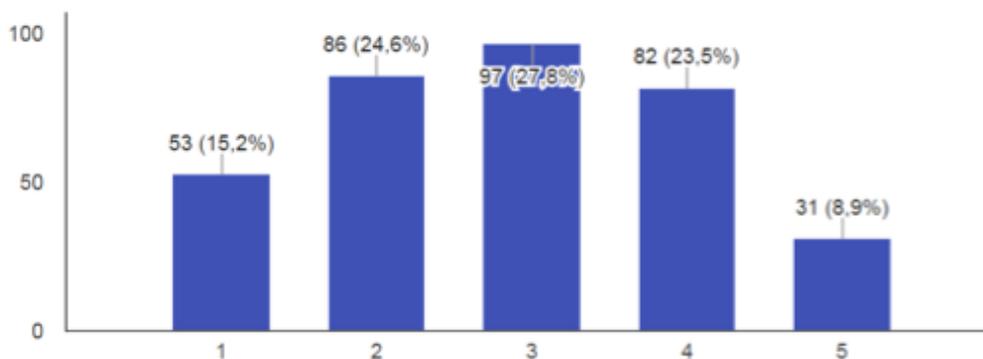
#### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



## SONGS



## WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



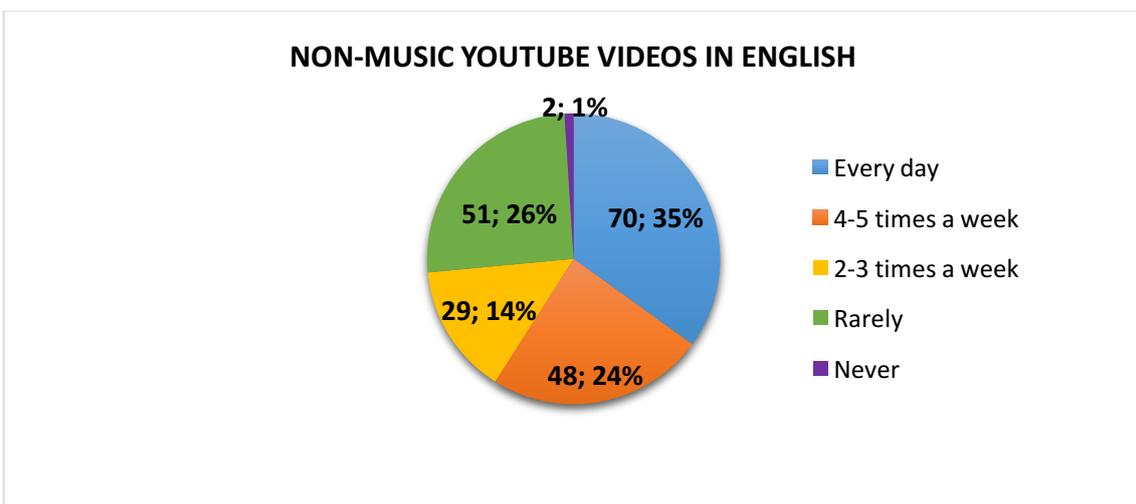
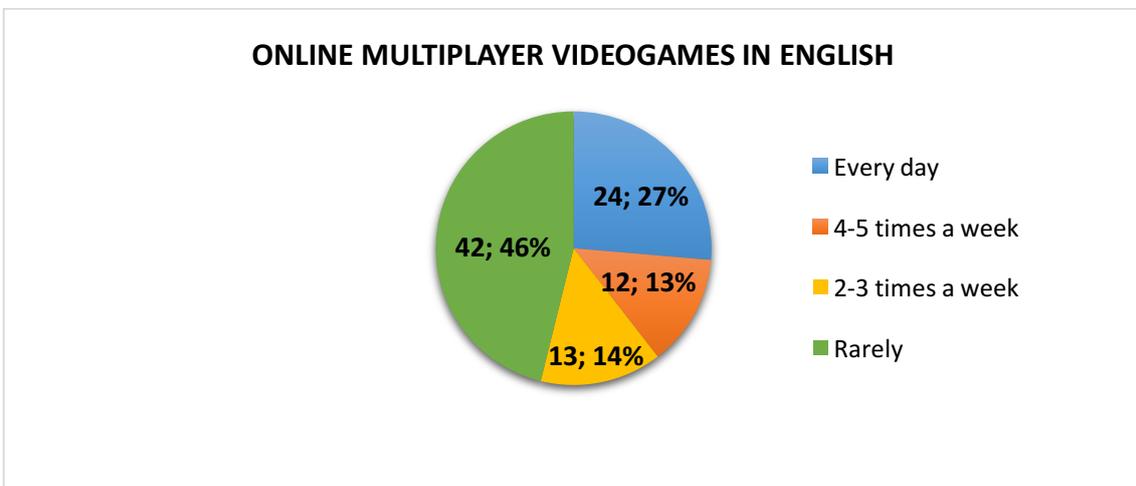
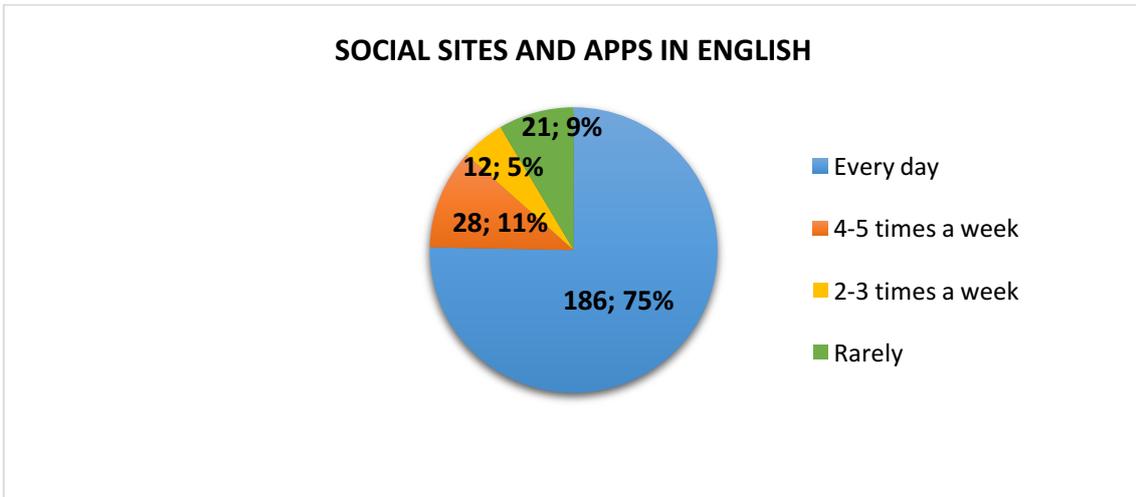
The most conspicuous chart is by far the one regarding songs; an astonishing number of students has a constant contact with songs in English. Social sites and apps on the one hand and films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos on the other seem also important means for students to get in contact with English; Wikipedia is used, but not to same extent of the above practices, and multiplayer videogames provide clearly the lowest contact, though this may be due to the fact that I have focused students' attention on a specific typology of videogame and not on videogames in general.

Considering that each student was supposed to complete only the three sections of greater contact out of five sections and that the questionnaire has been completed by a total number of 350 respondents, it is useful to stress that:

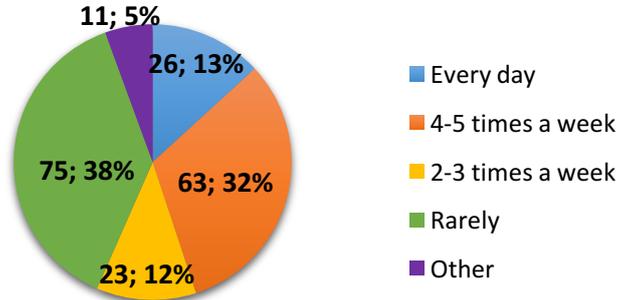
- the section on songs has been completed by 325 students
- the one on social sites and apps by 247 students
- the one on films, TV series and non-musical YouTube videos by 201 students
- the one on Wikipedia and other online articles by 107 students
- the one on online multiplayer games by 91 students.

Some items of the various sections have been skipped either intentionally or unintentionally by the respondents.

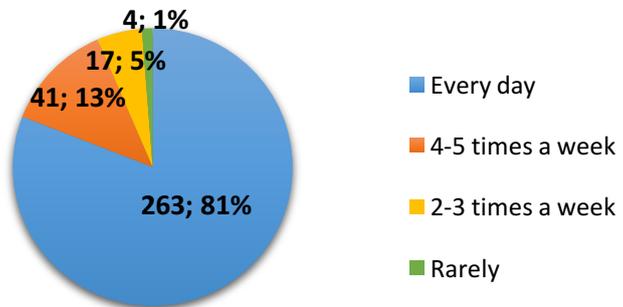
#### 4.4 SPECIFIC FREQUENCY OF CONTACT WITH ENGLISH OUTSIDE SCHOOL



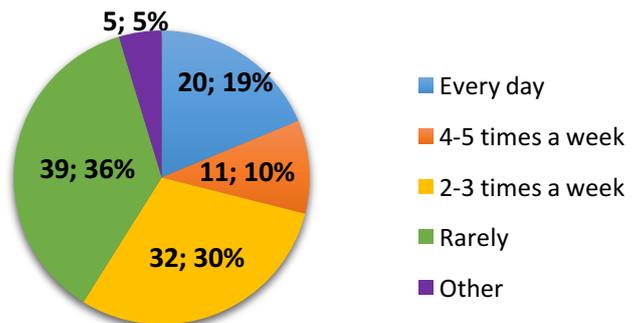
### FILMS AND TV SERIES IN ENGLISH



### SONGS IN ENGLISH



### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES IN ENGLISH



81% of the respondents listen to songs in English every day, whereas only 1% do it rarely.

On a daily basis, 75% of students use English in social sites and apps, 35% watch non-musical YouTube videos in English, 27% are in contact with English while playing online multiplayer videogames, 19% read articles in English on Wikipedia or other websites and only 13% watch films or TV series.

These results are only partially in line with a similar study carried out by Olmedo on 89 Spanish secondary school students .

That songs are by far the most common source of English exposure for students is confirmed by Olmedo's study (2015), who further highlights how her results are "in accordance with previous research (Barbee, 2013; Kuppens, 2010; Lindgren & Muñoz, 2011; and Sundqvist, 2009)".

Similarly to the present study, in Olmedo's study students frequently engage with social sites and apps, but unlike in the present study, articles and videogames rank very high.

As stressed before, that videogames do not rank very high in this study may be due to the fact that that I have focused students' attention on a specific typology of videogame and not on videogames in general.

Another similarity between this study and Olmedo's is films and TV series being the least used resource among students; especially, what strikes the most in both studies is the discrepancy between the frequency of contact with YouTube videos on the one hand and films and TV series on the other.

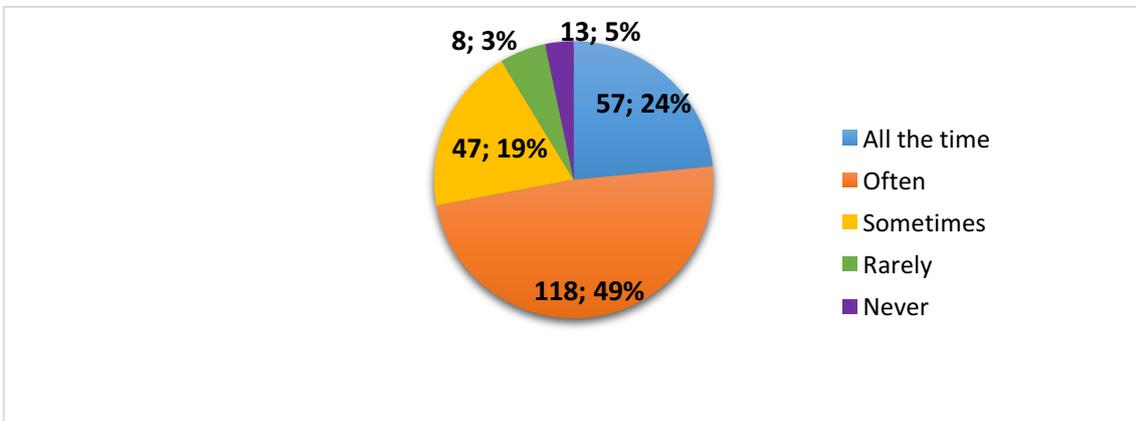
The possible reason is explained by Olmedo (2015) when she points out that watching films "is more cognitively demanding than the other activities, that is to say, it requires literacy skills and a good level of English to read the subtitles and/or understand the soundtrack". She goes on to stress that "secondary-school students are most often engaged in activities [...] that do not involve spending a large amount of time (which explains, for instance, why watching videos is more common than watching films)" (ibid.).

## 4.5 TYPE OF CONTACT IN SOCIAL SITES AND APPS AND IN ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES

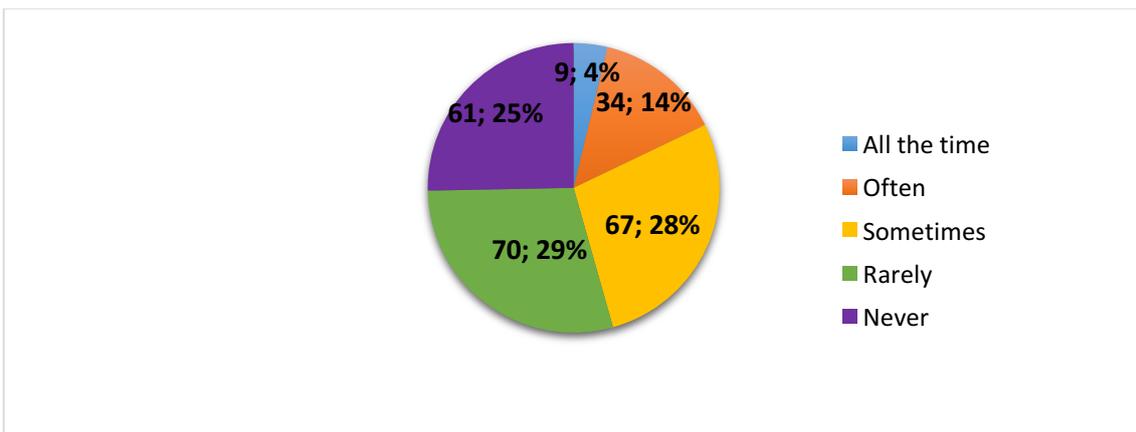
Potentially, social sites and apps on the one hand and online multiplayer videogames on the other allow students to use all four skills in English; reading, writing, listening and speaking. It is therefore interesting to gauge the extent to which these take place. Let us focus especially on the “all the time” and “often” areas as we move through the charts.

### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS

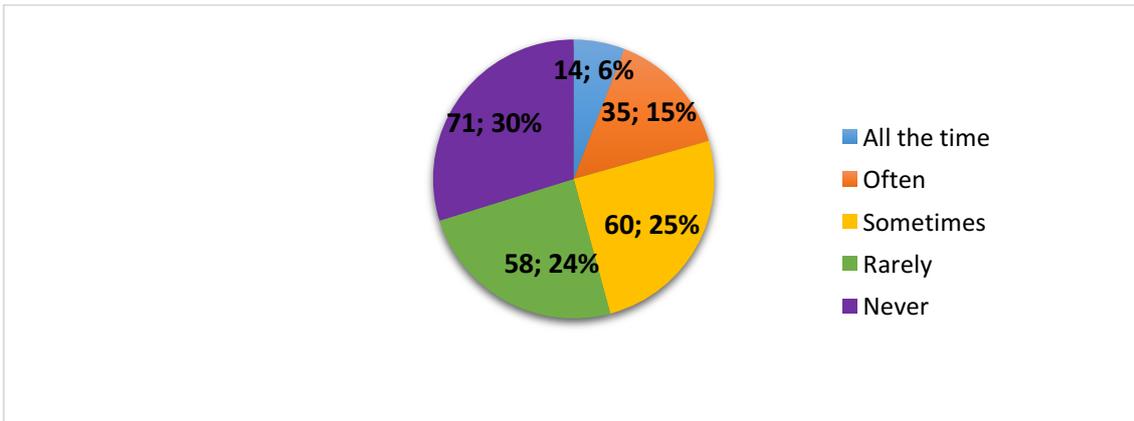
#### I READ THE POSTS AND COMMENTS OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE I FOLLOW



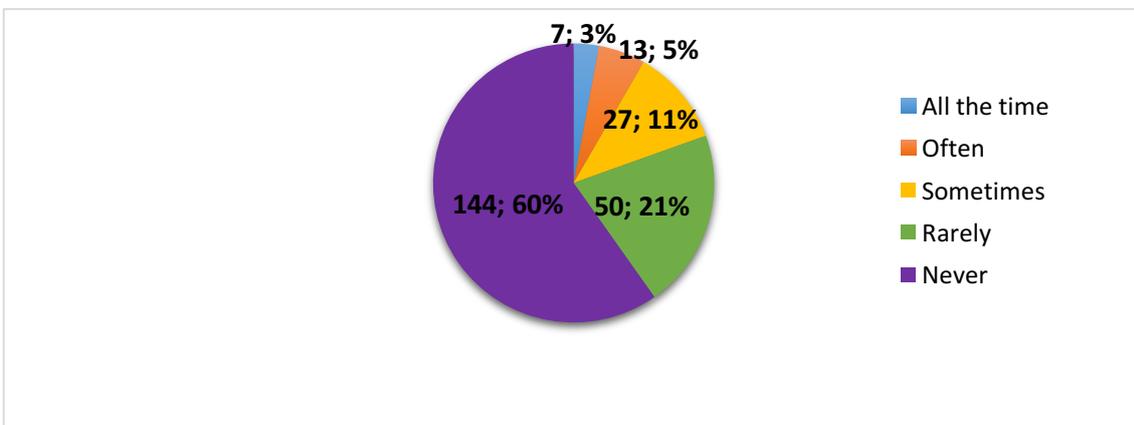
#### I COMMENT IN ENGLISH ON THE PHOTOS AND POSTS OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE I FOLLOW



## I EXCHANGE INSTANT MESSAGES IN ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH-SPEAKING FRIENDS



## I SPEAK IN ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH-SPEAKING FRIENDS ON SKYPE OR SIMILAR WEBSITES AND APPS

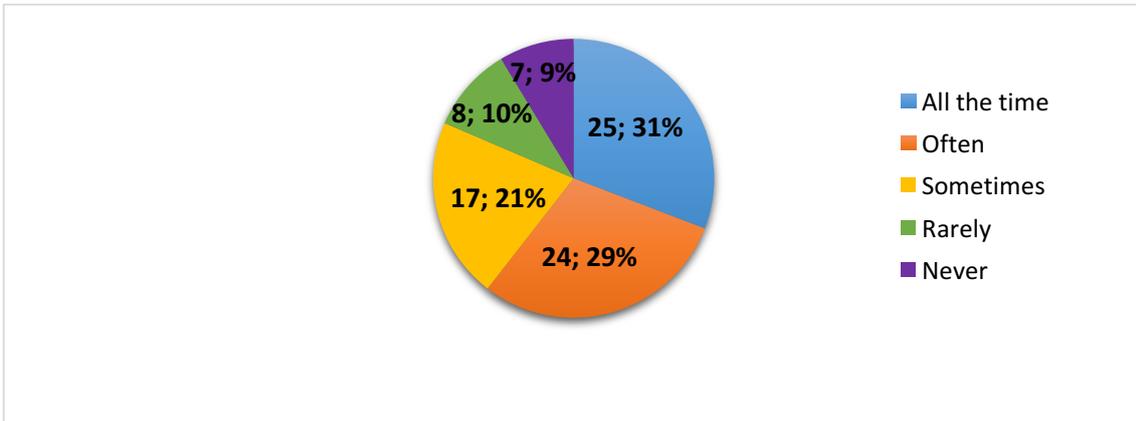


The results are rather shocking if we focus on the “all the time” and “often” areas; as long as social sites and apps are used to read what other people write, they are used “all the time” or “very often” by an extremely large number of students; however, the moment we shift our focus from the receptive written skill to the productive one, the percentage of “all the time” and “often” drop drastically, and it drops even more when it comes to communicating with others through Skype or similar means. 60% of the students using social sites and apps never speak with other people in English, a percentage that is very similar to the 70% identified by Toffoli and Sockett’s study (2010) on 222 EFL students. To say that this is a real pity is an understatement;

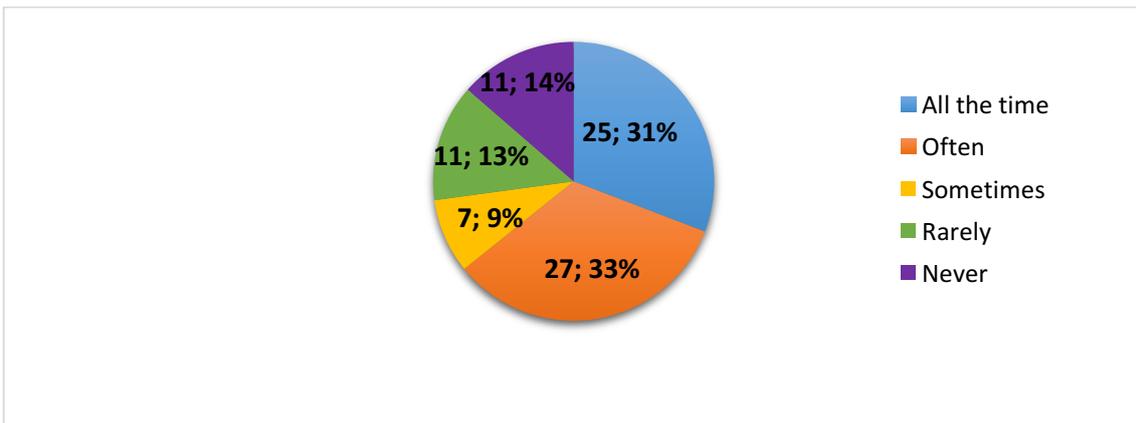
students are exploiting only a small portion of the possibilities at their disposal to improve their English.

## ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES

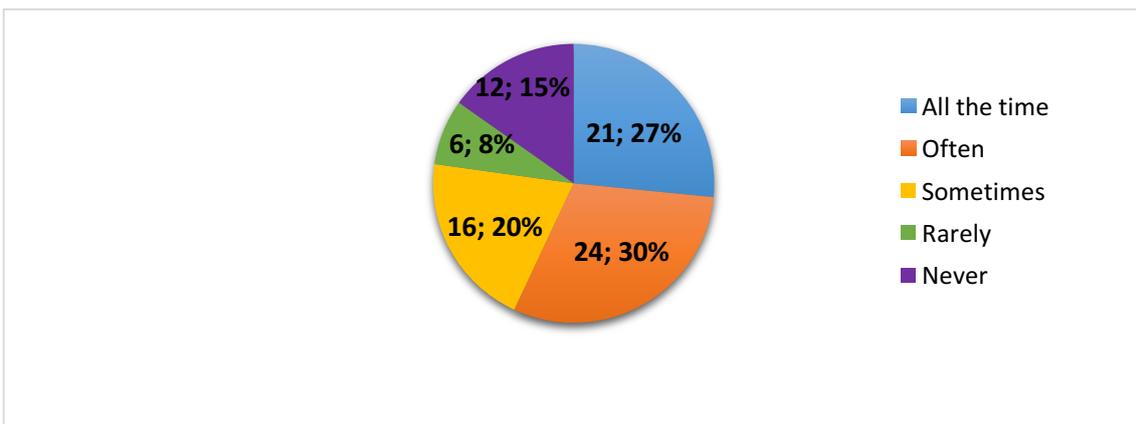
### I READ THE GAME-GENERATED ENGLISH TEXT THAT APPEARS ON THE SCREEN



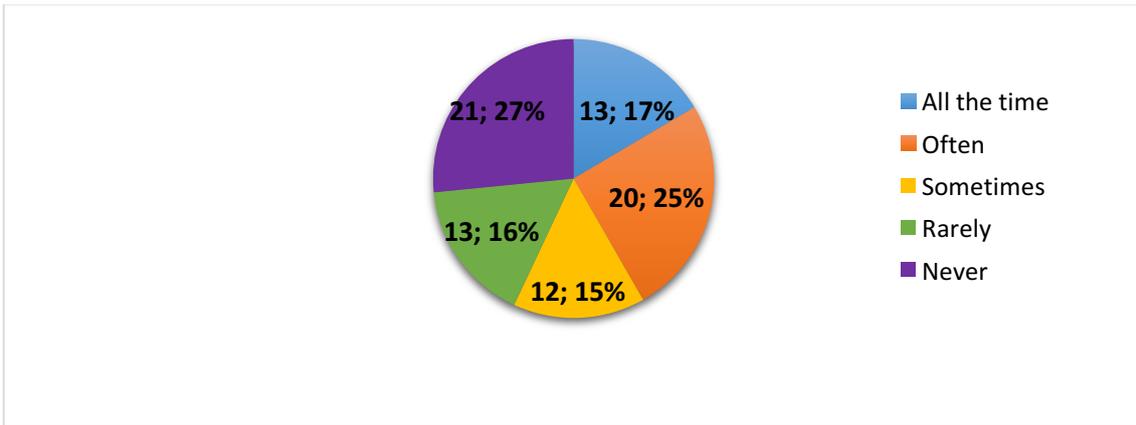
### I READ OTHER PLAYERS' ENGLISH COMMENTS WHILE PLAYING



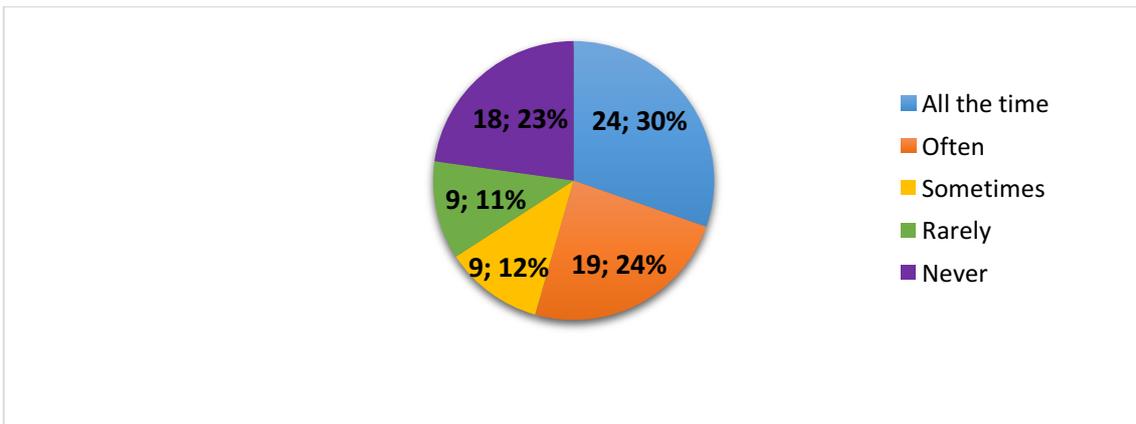
### I LISTEN TO ENGLISH GAME-GENERATED SPEECH



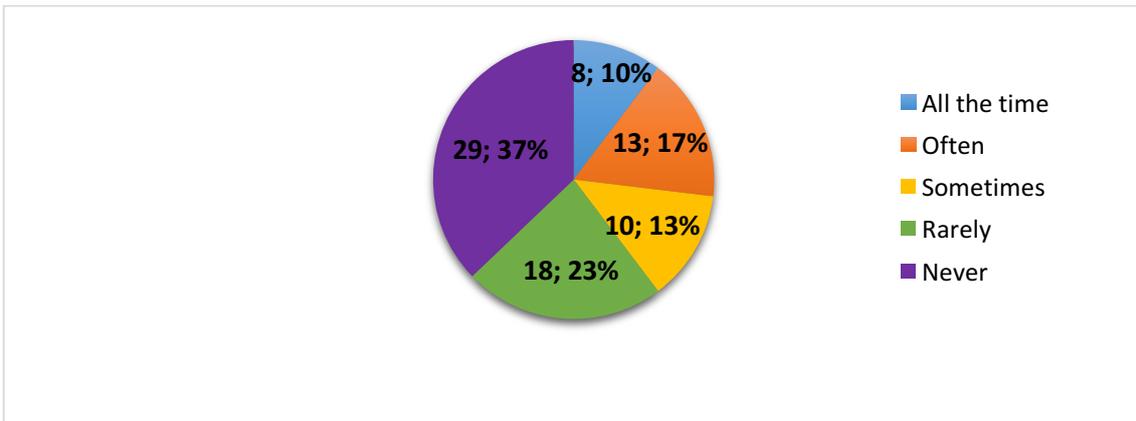
### I LISTEN TO OTHER PLAYERS' ENGLISH COMMENTS WHILE PLAYING



### I WRITE IN ENGLISH TO OTHER PLAYERS WHILE PLAYING



### I SPEAK IN ENGLISH WITH OTHER PLAYERS WHILE PLAYING



Receptive skills rank pretty high, and so does writing. Similarly to social sites and apps, however, students do not speak very often with other people.

It may be argued that Italian students are afraid to communicate orally and prefer to play it safe, resorting to writing or avoiding to communicate at all.

## 4.6 REASONS FOR CONTACT WITH ENGLISH IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE

### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS:

- 53% ; 125 = I like to know what the English-speaking (famous) people I follow do and say
- 50% ; 118 = I like to use and practice my English in real contexts out of school
- 48% ; 113 = English is everywhere, it is inevitable to come into contact with it
- 46% ; 110 = They help me improve my English
- 39% ; 92 = I like to meet and keep in touch with people from all over the world
- 22% ; 52 = I have many foreign friends/contacts
- 21% ; 49 = I can express myself without the fear of making mistakes I have at school
- 3% ; 7 = They make me feel part of a group

### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES:

- 54% ; 38 = I like videogames
- 54% ; 38 = Everyone uses English in online games, it is inevitable to use it
- 49% ; 34 = Thanks to English I can communicate with players from all over the world
- 39% ; 27 = They help me improve my English
- 26% ; 18 = I can express myself without the fear of making mistakes I have at school
- 9% ; 6 = They make me feel part of a group

### NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS:

- 63% ; 116 = The famous people or experts of the activities I am interested in are English or speak English
- 51% ; 94 = They help me improve my English
- 18% ; 34 = I actually see only films or TV series, not YouTube videos
- 4% ; 8 = They make me feel part of a group

#### **FILMS AND TV SERIES:**

- 57% ; 107 = They help me improve my English
- 55% ; 103 = I like to experience them in their original versions without dubbing
- 43% ; 80 = I can watch them before the Italian version is available
- 7% ; 14 = I actually watch only YouTube videos

#### **SONGS:**

- 84% ; 272 = I like them
- 51% ; 167 = I like the artists that perform them
- 45% ; 145 = They help me improve my English
- 42% ; 138 = They are everywhere, it is inevitable
- 29% ; 96 = They convey strong emotions
- 26% ; 84 = They make me feel good
- 22% ; 72 = I identify myself with them
- 4% ; 12 = They make me feel part of a group

#### **WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES:**

- 74% ; 72 = I can find more information in English on the topic I am interested in
- 51% ; 50 = They help me improve my English
- 38% ; 37 = I think the quality of the information is better compared to Italian sources

Not surprisingly, pleasure, passion, interest - whatever one may call it -, ranks the highest or the second highest in all areas. Functionality, however, ranks very high as well where there is an urgent need to do something practical, such as in social sites and apps and online multiplayer videogames. Either way, the learning that takes place is implicit learning, there is no direct focus on the language as happens at school, with all the advantages connected to the rule of forgetting already analyzed in the paper.

The highest percentage we can find in the list above is once again by far the one regarding the relationship between songs and pleasure, as confirmed by Barbee's study (2013), in which the most frequent activity was listening to songs because it was the most enjoyable source according to the learners.

Another extremely interesting factor is the conscious choice made by students to get into contact with these practices with the aim of improving their English level, which ranks particularly high in most areas; this shows a high degree of autonomy. Specifically, and again not surprisingly, the highest percentage of students making this conscious choice regards films and TV series; these practices are cognitively demanding and require a high level of English, hence students exploiting them are supposed to possess a high degree of autonomy.

However, and this is further food for thought, even though online multiplayer videogame players require a high level of English and can even get involved in direct spoken or written interaction, they do not seem to consider the learning of English as a priority. This may be due to the fact that videogames are highly functional, and so users speak English because they have to but not necessarily because they like it, whereas watching films and TV series may denote a greater interest for the learning of the English language.

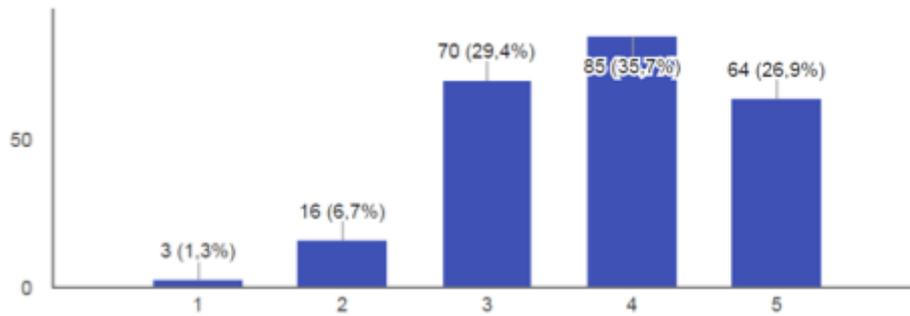
Where productive skills are required as well, namely in social sites and apps and in online multiplayer videogames, the incidence of the lack of anxiety does not seem to play such an important role.

The same can be said for the sense of belonging to a specific group of people, which ranks very low in all areas.

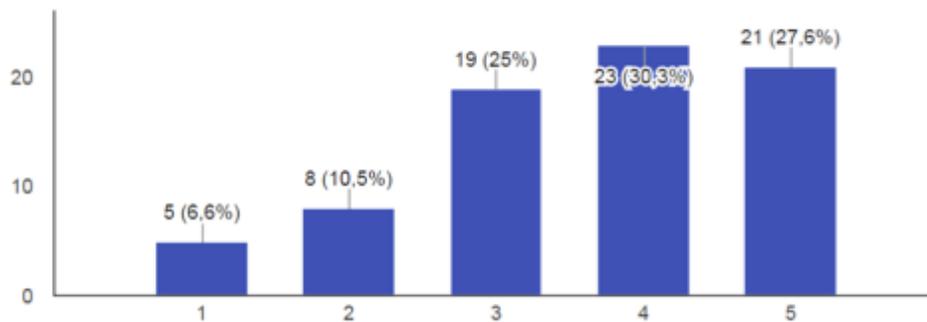
Finally, more than half of the respondents confirm they prefer the original version to the dubbed one, thus confirming the bridging of the gap that is taking place between subtitling and dubbing countries.

## 4.7 GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF POSITIVE LINGUISTIC IMPACT

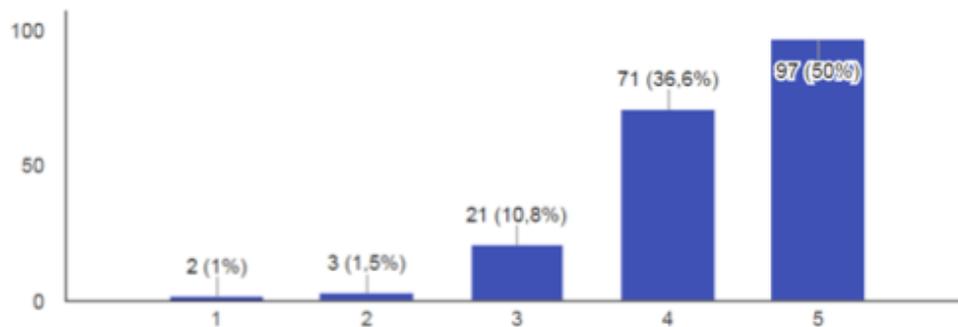
### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



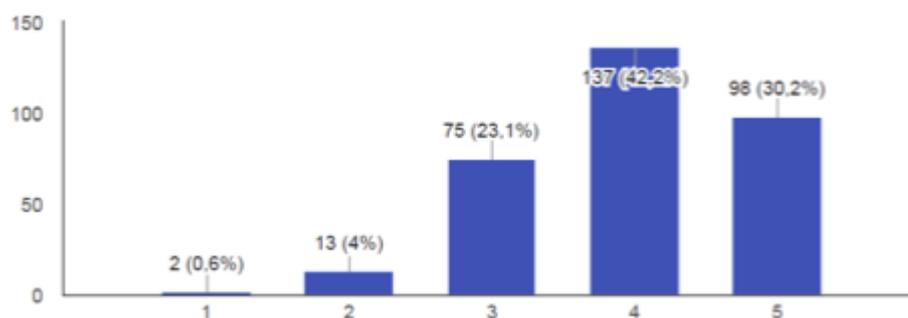
### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



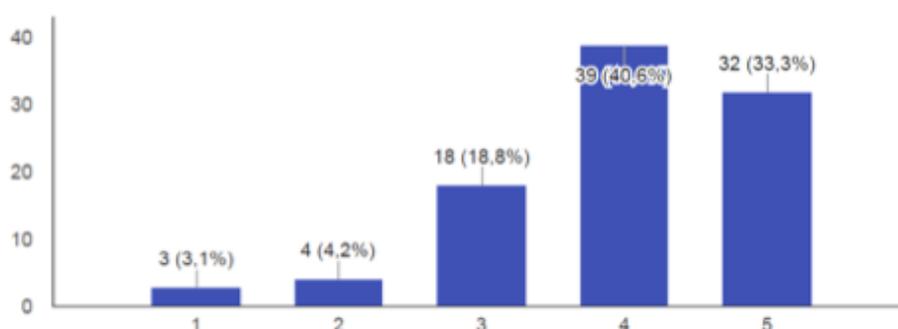
### FILMS TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



### SONGS



### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES

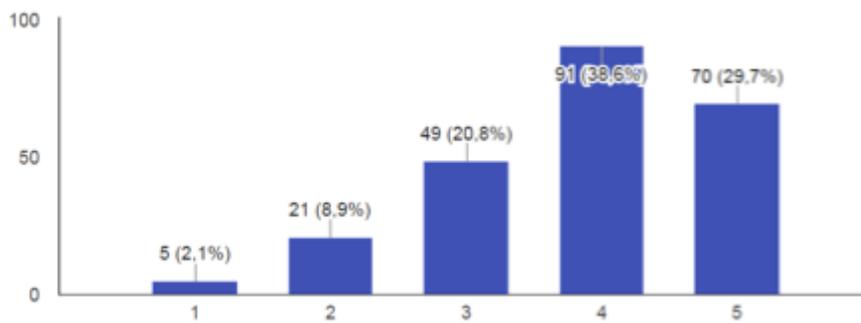


Results are all rather similar and, most of all, definitely positive. They confirm the positive correlation between informal, out-of-school, technology-based exposure and foreign language proficiency. Students confirm they feel they are learning English through their contact with these practices mostly to a high or very high degree. What is worth mentioning and what catches the eye is once again the situation regarding films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos. These practices are extremely demanding and require a good level of English and autonomy to be approached, but once students get the knack of it, the rate of improvement is supposed to be faster and more astonishing than any other practice.

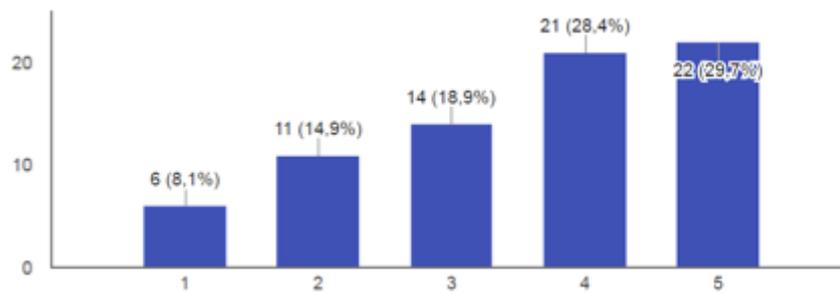
## 4.8 IMPRESSIONS OF POSITIVE LINGUISTIC IMPACT ON SPECIFIC AREAS AND SKILLS

### 4.8.1 VOCABULARY AND EXPRESSIONS

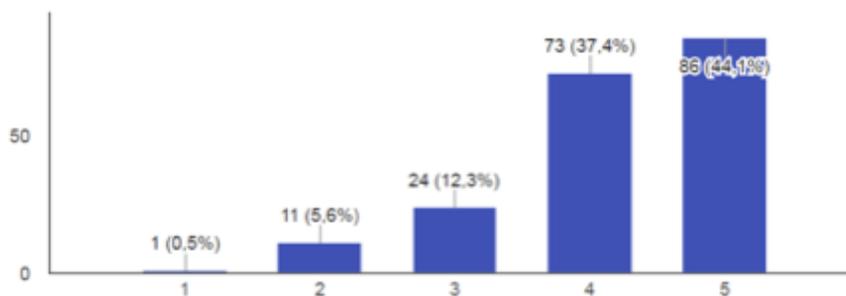
#### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



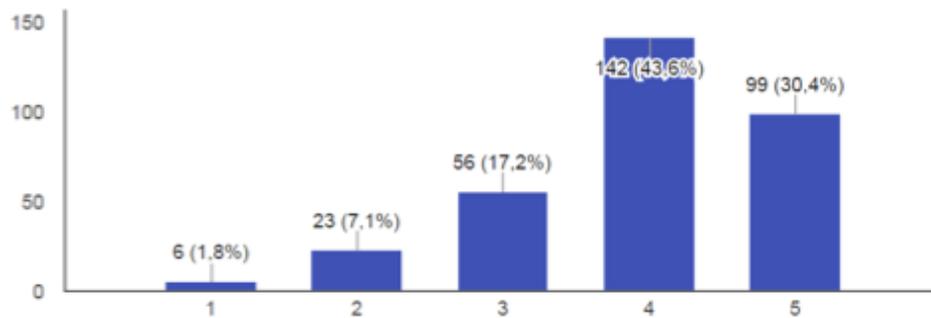
#### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



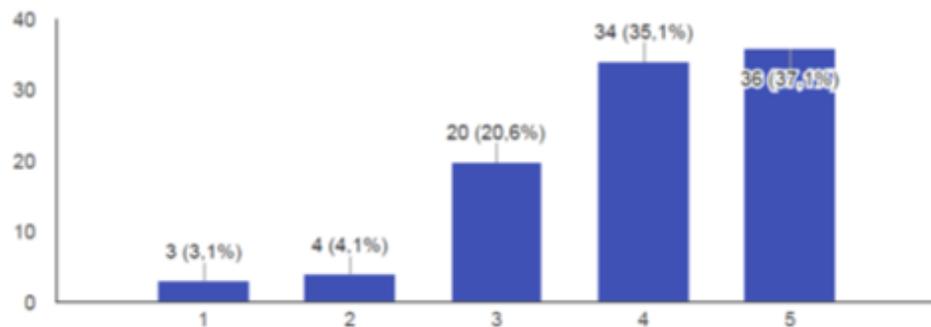
#### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



### SONGS



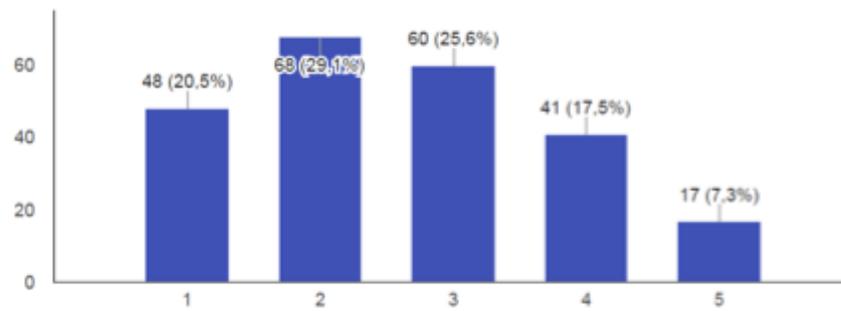
### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



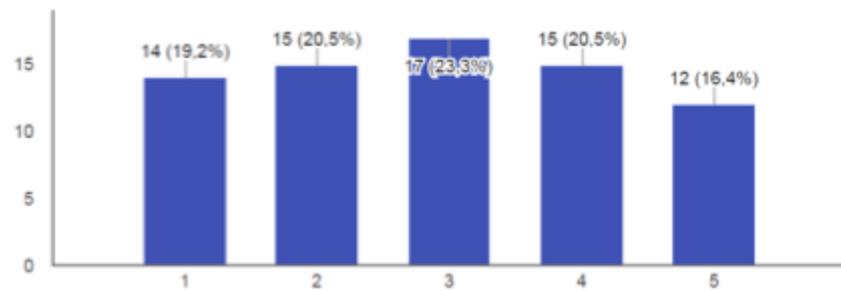
Results are once again all rather similar and, most of all, positive. As most research analyzed in this paper maintain, informal learning practices are conducive to vocabulary building. What catches the eye are the answers concerning films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos on the one hand and Wikipedia and online articles on the other, whose percentage of “strong impact” and “very strong impact” reach 81% and 72% respectively.

## 4.8.2 PRONUNCIATION

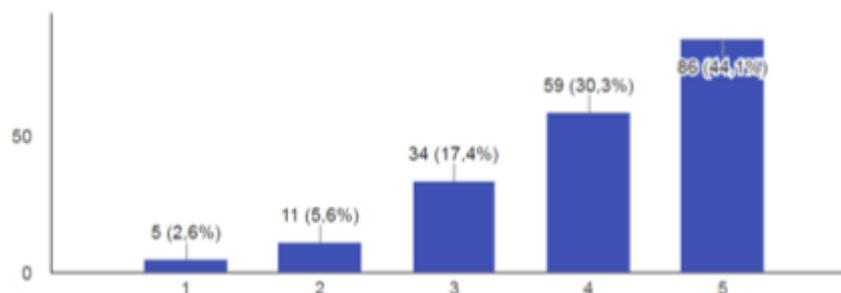
### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



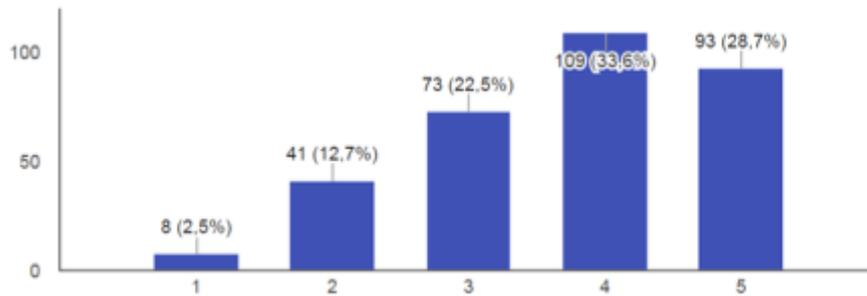
### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



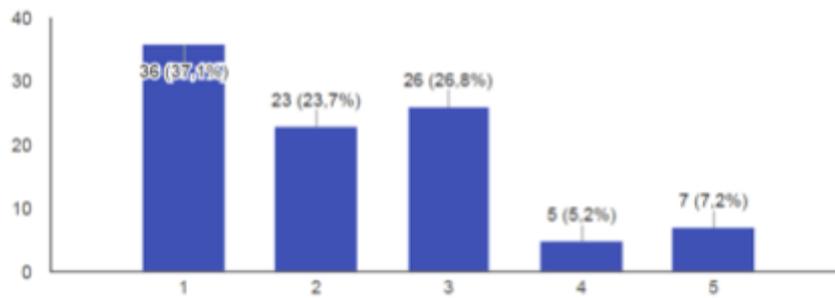
### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



### SONGS



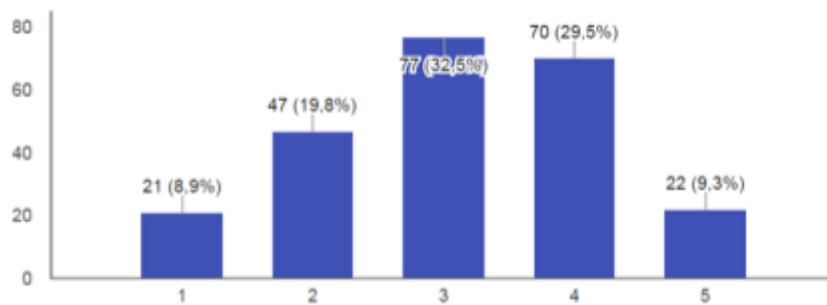
### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



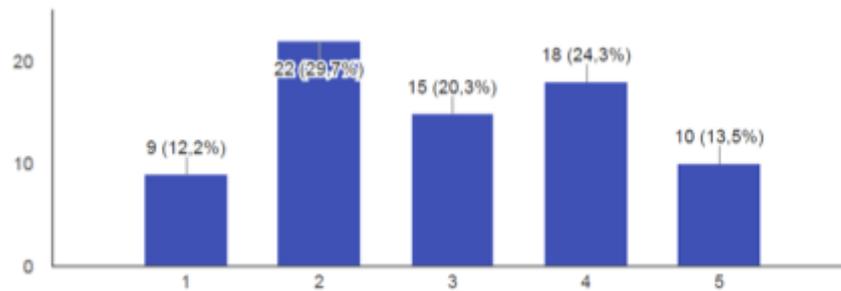
Because of the very nature of the practice, the impact of pronunciation on the learning of students dealing with Wikipedia and online articles cannot be anything but low. The same happens not surprisingly with social sites and apps after ascertaining that students tend to use the written channel to the detriment of the oral one. The results concerning the impact of pronunciation on online multiplayer videogame players are astonishingly homogeneous. This may be due to the fact that some players only read and write. Songs, on the one hand, with their pleasant reiteration and films, TV series and YouTube on the other, with their thrilling narrative structures, allow for an extremely high exposure of oral English that leads to an improvement of students' pronunciation.

### 4.8.3 GRAMMAR

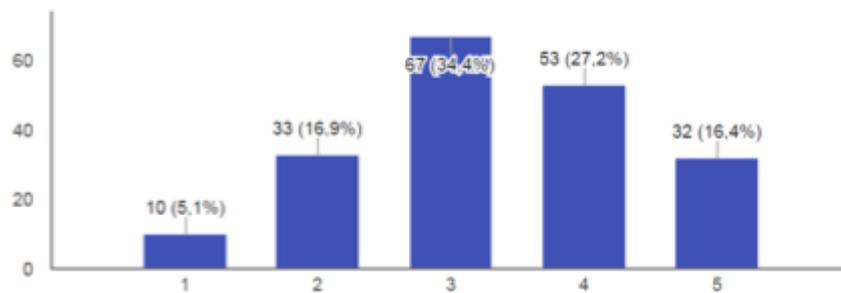
#### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



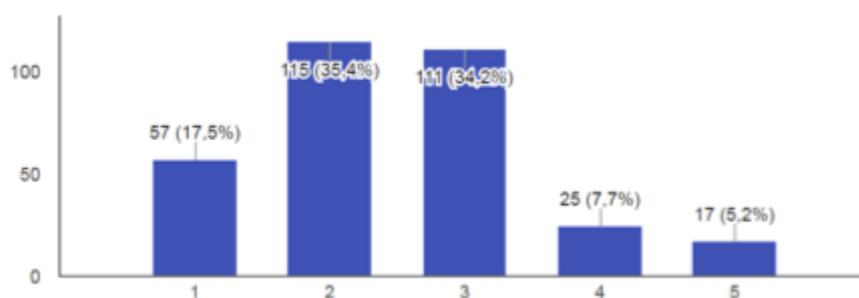
#### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



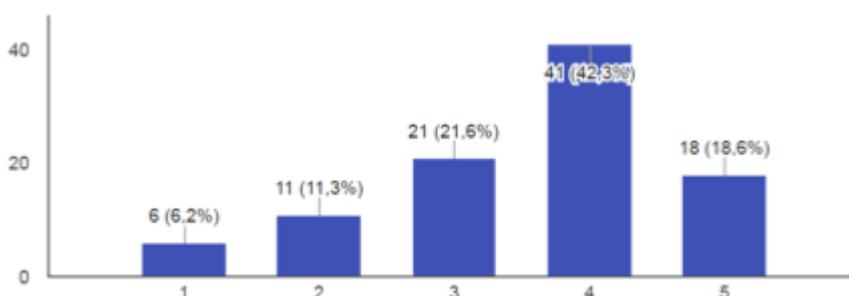
#### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



## SONGS



## WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES

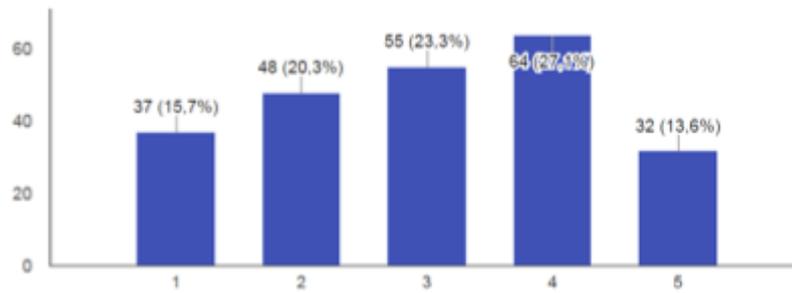


Being the closest to the mainly textbook-based world of school, it comes as no surprise that Wikipedia and online articles have the greatest language impact in terms of grammar compared to the other practices. As for the other practices, the majority of answers range from 2 to 4 points, which does not put grammar among the most immediate benefits of informal learning, but which seem to play a role nonetheless.

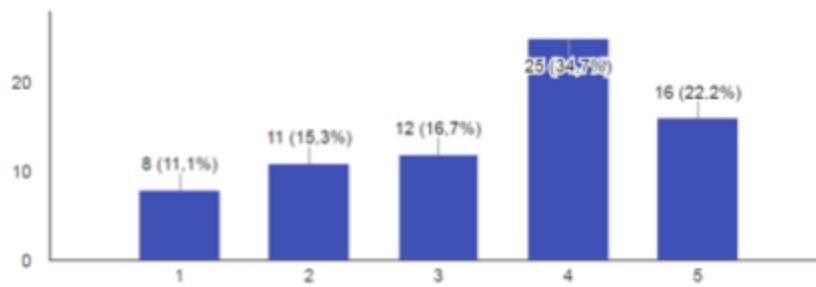
What catches the eye, and this is confirmed by previous research (Ala-Kyyny 2012), is that grammar and songs are considered two worlds apart by students. This is interestingly argued by Ala-Kyyny when she points out that “grammar, with its poor reputation, might be linked too tightly to rules and therefore seem like a distant factor in music” (ibid.). She further stresses that “the traditional way of learning grammar at school by memorizing rules might be intimidating to some learners and block them from seeing grammar in songs. Perhaps the teaching of grammar could use an update in formal education” (ibid). I cannot but agree with Ala-Kyyny’s opinion and suggest that songs can successfully be used to teach grammar (Sigurdardóttir 2012; Balboni 2013), thereby wiping off the idea that grammar has to be necessarily difficult, boring and based on exercises only.

## 4.8.4 LISTENING

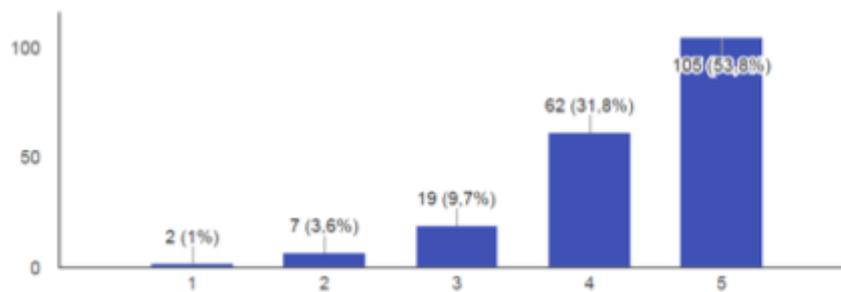
### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



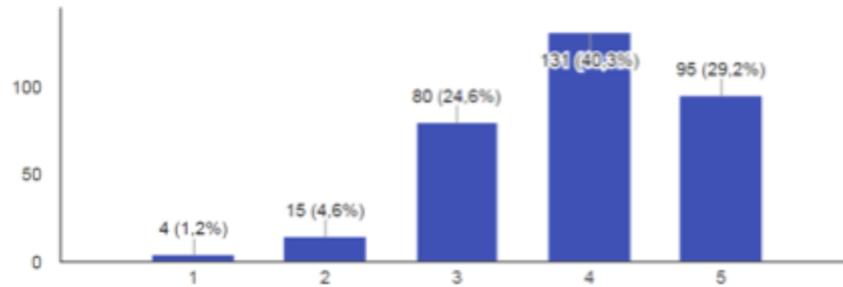
### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



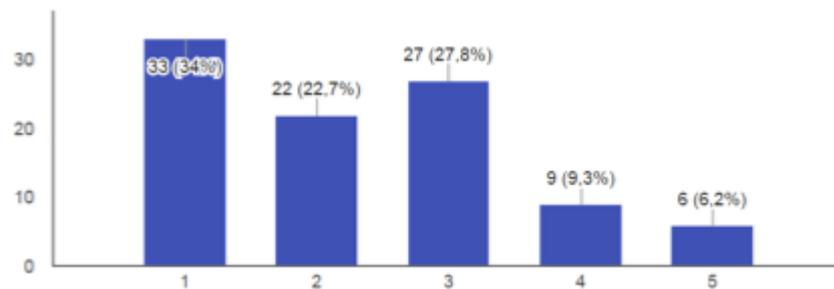
### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



### SONGS



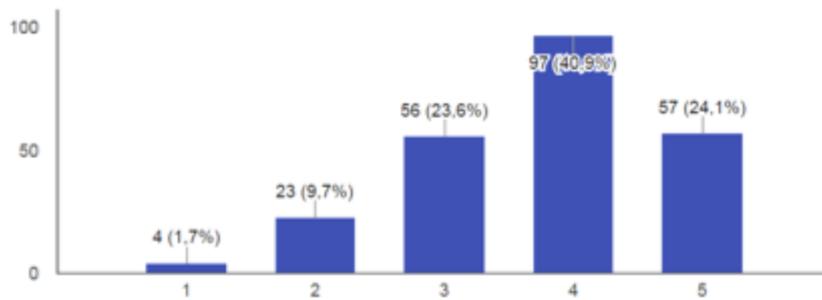
### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



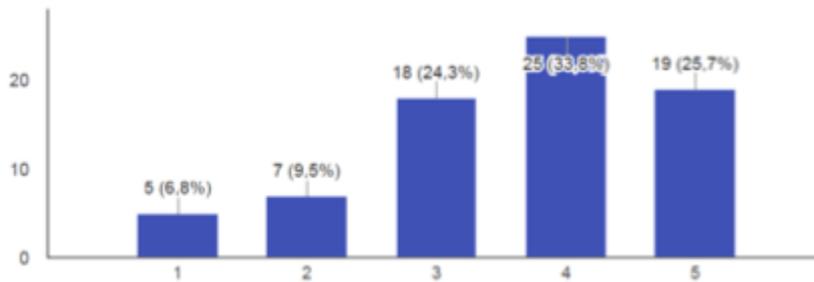
No other practices provide so much material to listen to as songs and films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos, therefore their taking the lion's share in this skill comes as no surprise.

## 4.8.5 READING

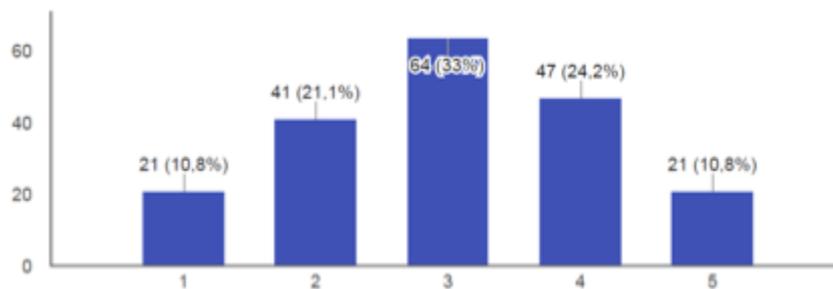
### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



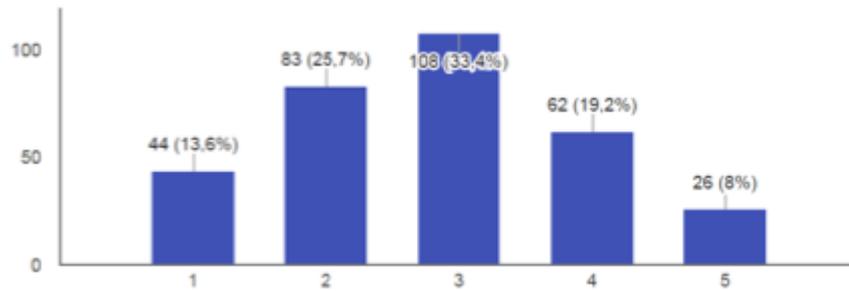
### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



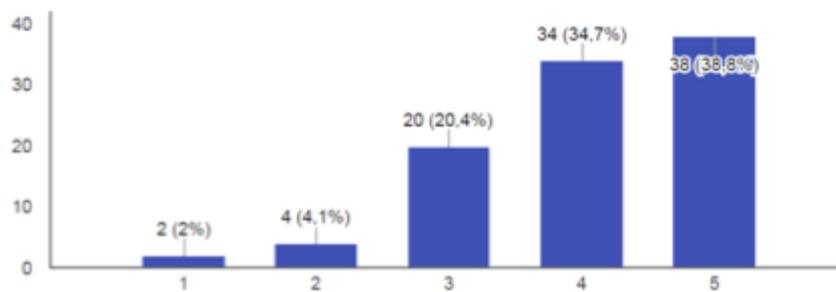
### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



### SONGS



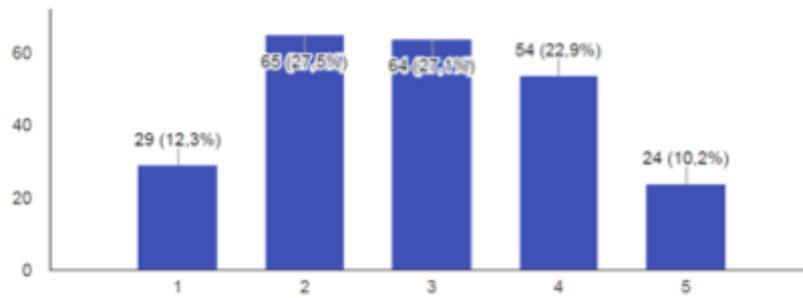
### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



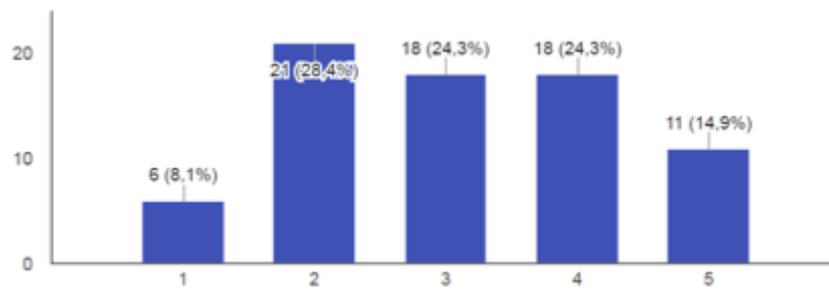
Unsurprisingly, Wikipedia and online articles are deemed by students to have the greatest impact on their reading ability. Because they strongly rely on the written form, also social sites and apps rank pretty high in this respect; online multiplayer videogames, on the other hand, might rank pretty high because students communicate with other players via the written channel.

## 4.8.6 SPEAKING

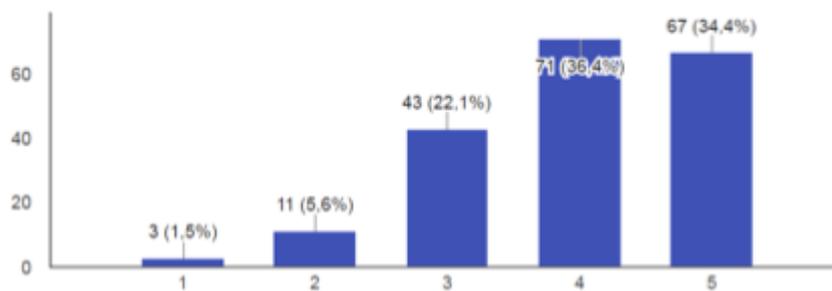
### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



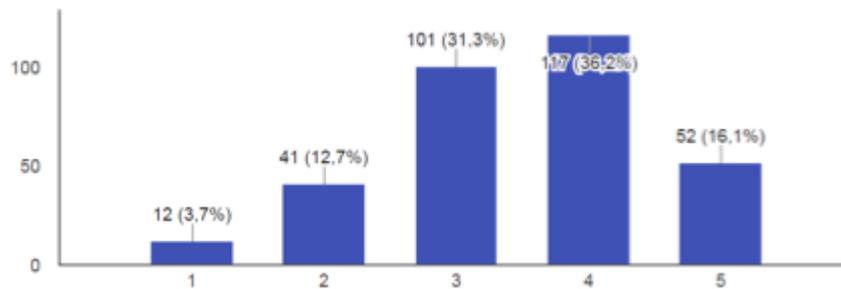
### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



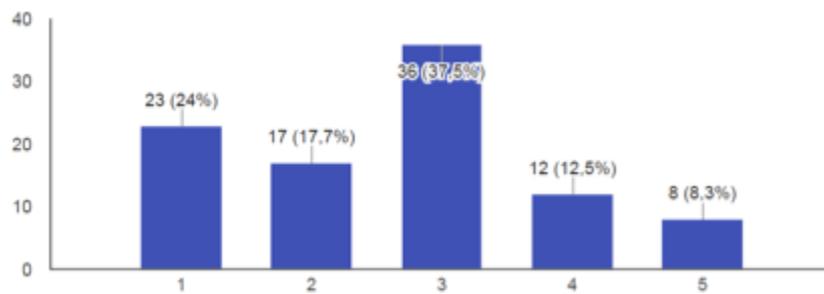
### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



## SONGS



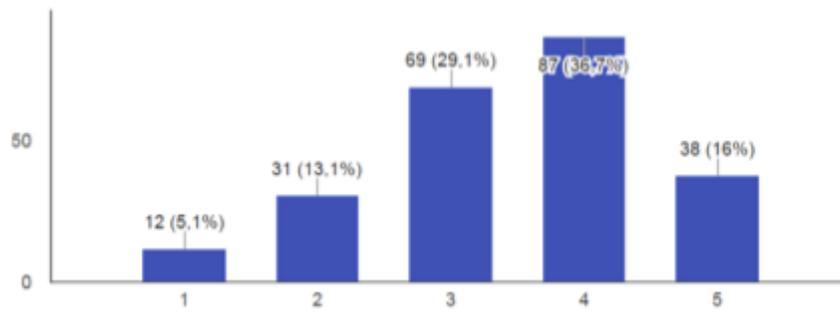
## WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



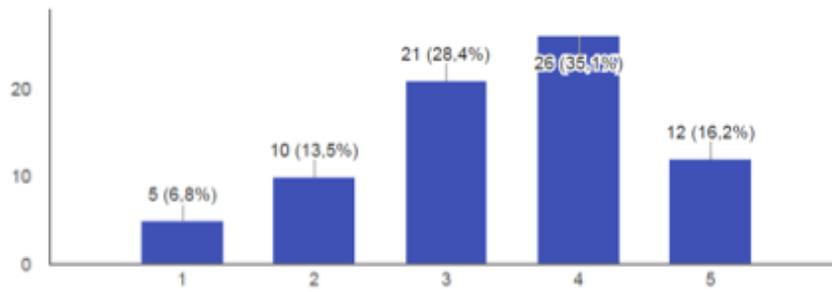
Even though they do not involve direct oral communication, the impact of films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos is recognized by students to have a direct, important impact on their speaking skills. Though to a lesser degree, the same can be said for songs, while the practices that offer direct oral communication such as social sites and apps and online multiplayer videogames seem to have a weaker impact on students, allegedly because of their preferring the written channel to the oral one.

## 4.8.7 WRITING

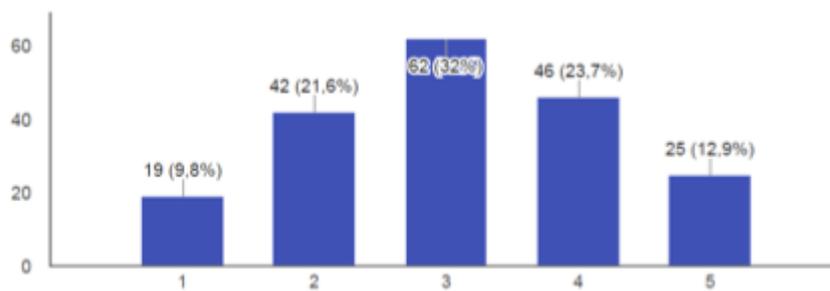
### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



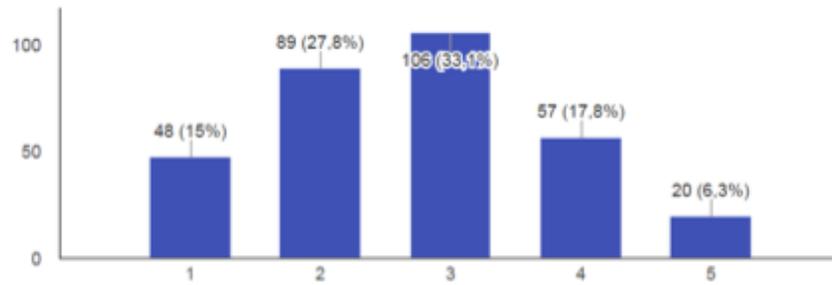
### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



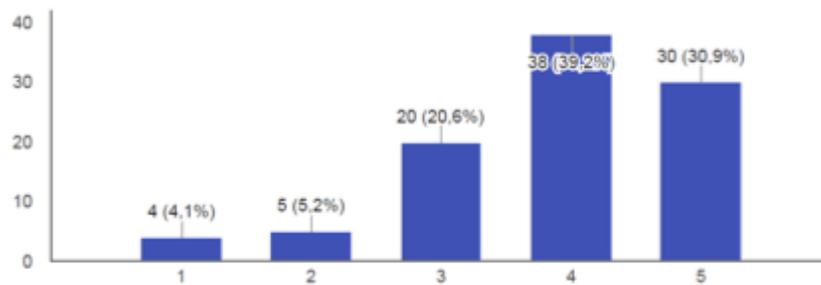
### FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



### SONGS



### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



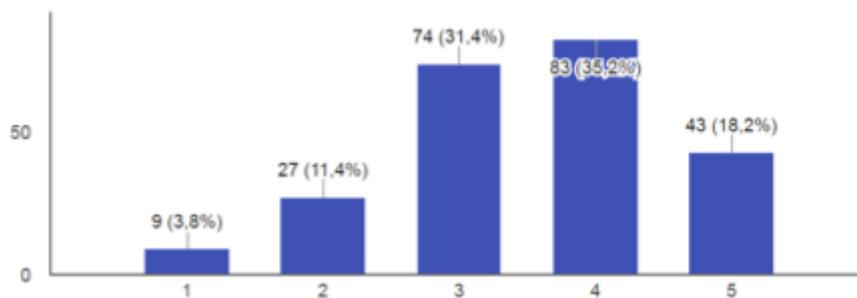
Because of what has just been argued, social sites and apps and online multiplayer are recognized by students to have the highest impact on their writing skills. Vetter's (2015) opinion that Wikipedia and online articles offer students rich opportunities to observe and learn about writing is confirmed by these results.

## 4.9 INFORMAL LEARNING IN OTHER CONTEXTS

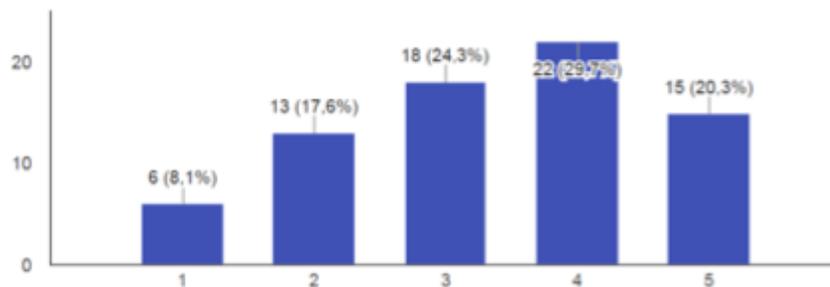
One of the aims of the present study is to ascertain the extent to which what students learn in the informal environment can be useful in all other contexts when they need to understand, say, or write something.

### 4.9.1 FREQUENCY OF WORDS, EXPRESSIONS OR GRAMMAR STRUCTURES RECOGNIZED IN BOTH READING AND LISTENING THANKS TO PREVIOUS CONTACT WITH THE PRACTICE

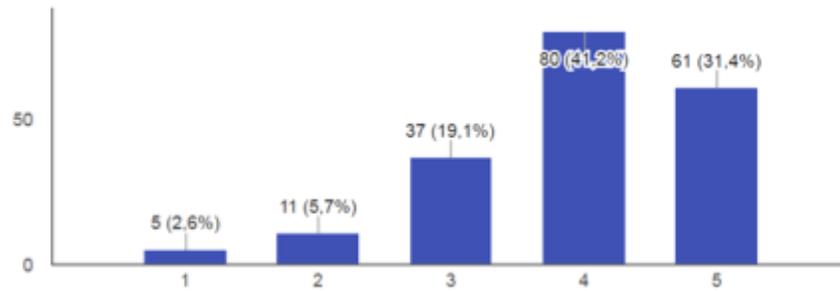
#### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS



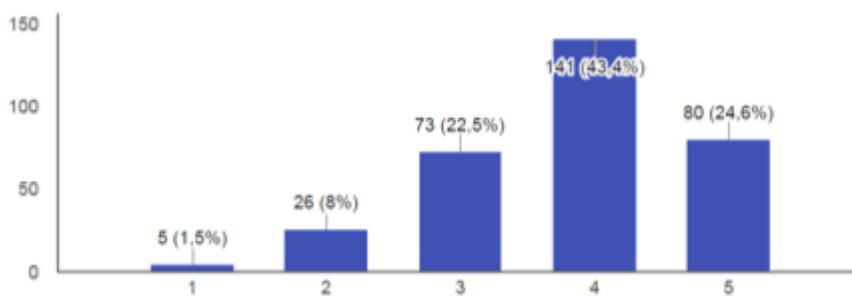
#### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES



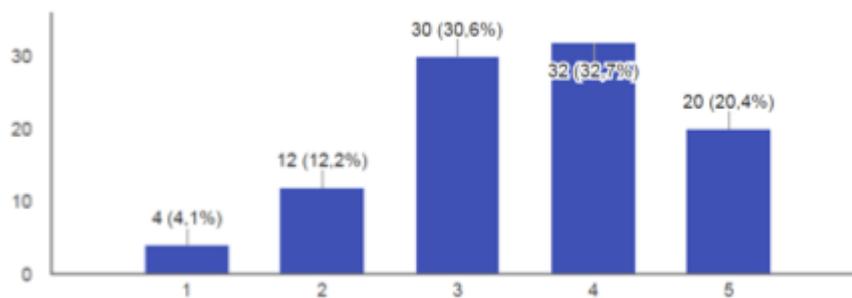
### FILMS TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



### SONGS



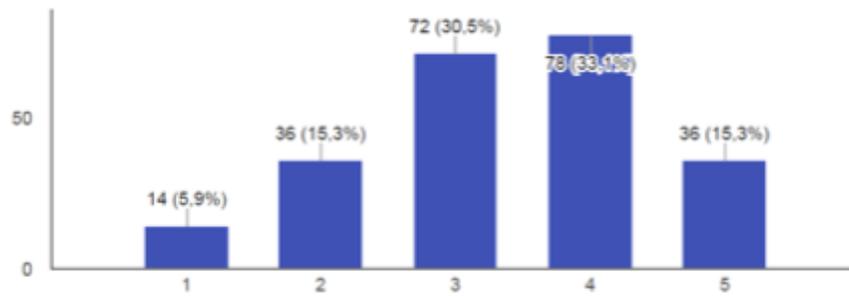
### WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



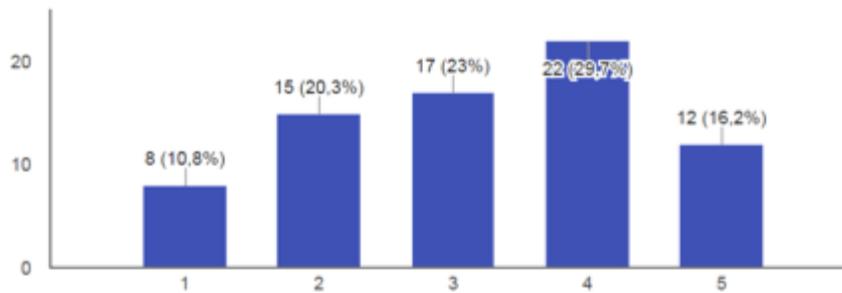
According to the results, the majority of students recognize words, expressions or grammar structures in reading and listening thanks to previous encounters through these informal practices to a modest or a high level. As has happened before, songs and films, TV series and YouTube videos rank the highest.

**4.9.2 FREQUENCY OF WORDS, EXPRESSIONS OR GRAMMAR STRUCTURES USED IN BOTH WRITING AND SPEAKING THANKS TO PREVIOUS CONTACT WITH THE PRACTICE**

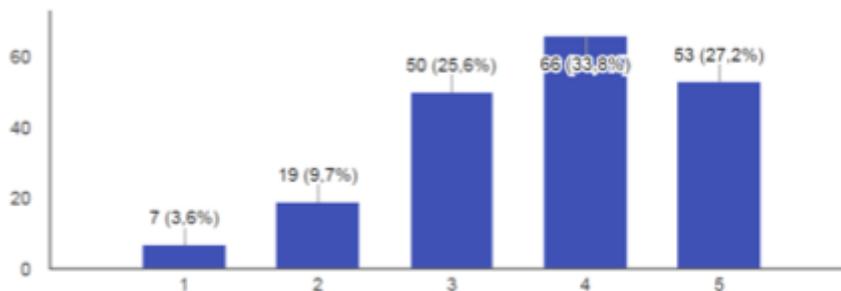
**SOCIAL SITES AND APPS**



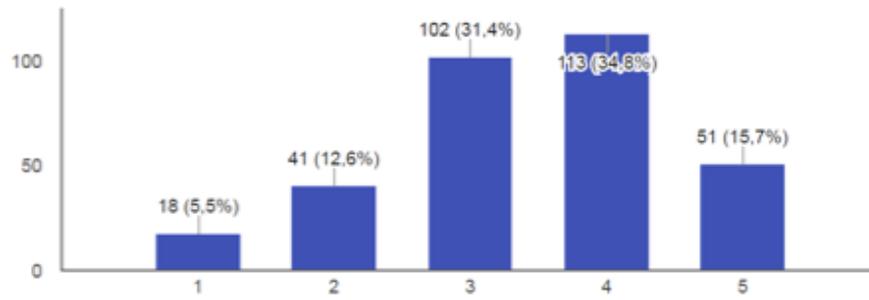
**ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES**



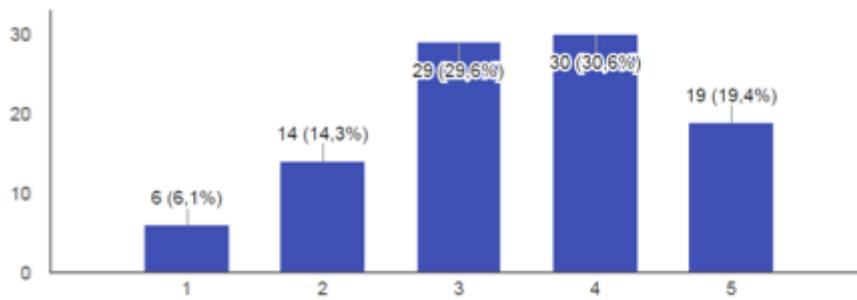
**FILMS TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS**



## SONGS



## WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES



Similarly, according to the results, the majority of students use words, expressions or grammar structures in writing and speaking thanks to previous encounters through these informal practices to a modest or a high level.

## 4.10 COMPREHENSION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS:

If I don't understand a portion of written text...

- 77% ; 180 = I try to infer it from the context
- 66% ; 154 = I look for its meaning on the internet
- 20% ; 44 = I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

If I want to communicate to someone...

- 60% ; 141 = I do it in the most simple way possible
- 9% ; 21 = I sometimes give up because it is too difficult

### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES:

If I don't understand a portion of game-generated written text...

- 73% ; 52 = I try to infer it from the context
- 32% ; 23 = I look for its meaning on the internet
- 24% ; 17 = I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

If I don't understand a portion of game-generated spoken text...

- 78% ; 54 = I try to infer it from the context
- 27% ; 19 = I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence
- 20% ; 13 = I look for its meaning on the internet, in forums or chat rooms

If I don't understand other players-generated written text...

- 62% ; 43 = I try to infer it from the context
- 32% ; 23 = I ask the player to rephrase the sentence

- 29% ; 20 = I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

If I don't understand a portion of other players-generated spoken text...

- 56% ; 37 = I try to infer it from the context
- 38% ; 25 = I ask the player to rephrase the sentence
- 30% ; 20 = I pretend I understood

If I need to write to another player:

- 68% ; 45 = I do it in the most simple way possible
- 40% ; 27 = I seldom find it difficult because I have a good general English level
- 18% ; 12 = I seldom find it difficult because I have been playing for a long time

If I need to talk to another player:

- 71% ; 47 = I do it in the most simple way possible
- 36% ; 24 = I seldom find it difficult because I have a good general English level
- 10% ; 7 = I seldom find it difficult because I have been playing for a long time

## **FILMS, TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS:**

(without subtitles)

If I don't understand something...

- 54% ; 38 = I try to infer it from the context
- 17% ; 12 = I add subtitles
- 11% ; 8 = I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

(with English subtitles)

If I don't understand something...

- 72% ; 63 = I try to infer it from the context

- 26% ; 23 = I look for its meaning on the internet
- 14% ; 12 = I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

#### **SONGS:**

- 59% ; 152 = I sing along
- 58% ; 189 = I pay attention to the lyrics
- 53% ; 172 = I try to infer what I do not know from the audio/visual context
- 49% ; 160 = I check the lyrics on websites or YouTube
- 48% ; 156 = I try to translate the lyrics to understand the content
- 9% ; 29 = I focus exclusively on the melody, because I do not understand the lyrics
- 7% ; 24 = I focus exclusively on the melody, because I am not interested in understanding the lyrics

#### **WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES:**

If I don't understand something...

- 80% ; 78 = I try to infer it from the context
- 70% ; 68 = I look for its meaning on the internet
- 19% ; 18 = I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

The positive trend is similar for almost all practices; the majority try to infer the meaning from the context of the sentence, a good number check the meaning on the internet and only a relatively small number go on without checking it. This shows that informal learning leads to a high level of metalinguistic awareness. Online multiplayer videogames players, however, display a high percentage of avoidance strategies such as not checking unknown words hoping they are not important or pretending to have

understood when they have not during communication. The results confirm that song lyrics are often processed for meaning and not simply heard.

## 4.11 MEMORIZATION STRATEGIES

### IN ORDER TO MEMORIZE NEW CONCEPTS...

#### SOCIAL SITES AND APPS:

- 70% ; 159 = I memorize them naturally by reading them and listening to them
- 43% ; 97 = I link them to the specific situation in which I read or heard them
- 28% ; 64 = I link them to my personal experience
- 14% ; 33 = I write them down in a notebook or in a file

#### ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES:

- 80% ; 53 = I memorize them naturally while playing
- 29% ; 19 = I link them to the specific situation in which I read or heard them
- 6% ; 4 = I write them down in a notebook or in a file

#### FILMS TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS:

- 48% ; 87 = I memorize them naturally while watching
- 26% ; 48 = I link them to the specific situation, image and context in which I read or heard them
- 11% ; 20 = I create an image in my head of the situation to which they refer
- 10% ; 18 = I write them down in a notebook or in a file
- 5% ; 9 = I link them to my personal experience

#### SONGS:

- 72% ; 229 = I memorize them naturally while listening
- 27% ; 87 = I create an image in my head of the situation to which they refer
- 24% ; 77 = I link them to the images of the song video

- 23% ; 72 = I link them to my personal experience
- 8% ; 25 = I write them down in a notebook or in a file

### **WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES**

- 61% ; 59 = I memorize them naturally while reading
- 51% ; 49 = I link them to the specific situation in which I read them
- 21% ; 20 = I link them to my personal experience
- 16% ; 16 = I write them down in a notebook or in a file

The majority of respondents maintain they memorize new concepts naturally by coming into contact with them. This is surely the most natural way of acquiring a language, which recalls the way in which children learn their mother tongue. Yet the level of exposure of the English language for Italian students can hardly reach the same level as their native Italian language daily exposure; hence the need to help the memorization process through learning strategies. Students seem to be aware of the power of context and image and occasionally make mental efforts to help memorization.

Yet few students make the physical effort of writing down new concepts in a file or in a notebook, a learning strategy that I have found extremely useful in my learning path; to aid the memorization of new words in films and TV series, for example, screenshots of the scene in which a new concept appear can be pasted in a file with the new concept appearing directly in the subtitles or written next to it. This way the word is linked to a specific context and a specific image, and it can therefore be more easily retrieved from the long-term memory. The same can be done with social sites and apps, where a screenshot of the comments of English speaking people can be made and saved in the blink of an eye. Interesting words might just be underlined and translated in Wikipedia articles and in song lyrics after pasting them in Word files and so on. As it has already been argued, this is one of the aspects in which school can play a major role.

## **4.12 INFORMAL LEARNING AT SCHOOL AND TEACHERS' CONTRIBUTION**

### **SOCIAL SITES AND APPS:**

- 73% ; 164 = The teacher does not exploit social sites and apps to teach English
- 18% ; 41 = The teacher invites us to get in contact with English in social sites and apps
- 17% ; 40 = Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits social sites and apps to teach English
- 8% ; 19 = The teacher explains how to make the most of social sites and apps to improve our English level
- 7% ; 16 = The teacher shows interest in our use of English in social sites and apps outside school

### **ONLINE MULTIPLAYER VIDEOGAMES:**

- 88% ; 57= The teacher does not exploit online multiplayer videogames to teach English
- 5% ; 3 = Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits online multiplayer videogames to teach English
- 5% ; 3 = The teacher invites us to get in contact with English in online multiplayer videogames
- 5% ; 3 = The teacher shows interest in our use of English in online multiplayer videogames outside school
- 2% ; 1 = The teacher explains how to make the most of online multiplayer videogames to improve our English level

### **FILMS TV SERIES AND NON-MUSIC YOUTUBE VIDEOS:**

- 61% ; 115 = Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos to teach English

- 40% ; 76 = The teacher invites us to watch films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos in English
- 33% ; 62= The teacher does not exploit films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos to teach English
- 23% ; 44 = The teacher shows interest in our use of films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos in English outside school
- 11% ; 20 = The teacher explains how to make the most of films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos to improve our English level

#### **SONGS:**

- 73% ; 232= The teacher does not exploit songs in English to teach English
- 24% ; 75 = The teacher invites us to listen to songs in English
- 16% ; 51 = Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits songs in English to teach English
- 10% ; 31 = The teacher shows interest in our relationship with songs in English outside school
- 9% ; 30 = The teacher explains how to make the most of songs in English to improve our English level

#### **WIKIPEDIA AND ONLINE ARTICLES:**

- 47% ; 44= The teacher does not exploit Wikipedia and online articles to teach English
- 40% ; 38 = Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits Wikipedia and online articles to teach English
- 31% ; 29 = The teacher invites us to read Wikipedia and online articles in English
- 23% ; 22 = The teacher shows interest in our relationship with Wikipedia and online articles in English outside school
- 6% ; 6 = The teacher explains how to make the most of Wikipedia and online articles in English to improve our English level

Social sites and apps, online multiplayer videogames and songs are seldom exploited by teachers to teach English. If the results about online multiplayer videogames were expected given the technological requirements of the practice, those concerning social sites and apps and songs are quite disappointing if we consider that songs and social sites and apps are the two practices most students are in contact with on a daily basis. However, almost half of the students completing the section on Wikipedia and online articles stated that their teachers exploit these practices to teach English, which is allegedly due to their textbook-like nature. Similarly, and this is great news, more than half of the students completing the section on films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos stated their teachers exploit these practices to teach English, which shows that most teachers recognize the incredible benefits of these specific practices.

The worst news, however, come with the specific teachers' behavior. Only 22% of all respondents stated their teachers invite them to get into contact with informal practices outside school, only 14% of all respondents stated their teachers show interest in their relationship with informal practices outside school and scanty 7% stated their teachers explain them how to make the most of them. In other words, few teachers try to light fire of curiosity outside school, fewer try to bring into the class the informal world of students and even fewer try to teach students learning strategies to make the most of their out-of-school experiences.

When asked about the possible use of the single practices at school, the following percentage of students whose teacher does not exploit them answered positively:

- 63% on the use of social sites and apps
- 46% on the use of online multiplayer videogames
- 88% on the use of films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos
- 90% on the use of songs
- 83% on the use of Wikipedia and online articles

This shows once again a positive correlation between songs and films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos on the one hand and a positive attitude and a strong desire towards learning English on the other.

Regarding how to use all these practices in class, the students who answered the open-ended question showed a high degree of maturity, mentioning all the possible uses already described in the theoretical part of this paper.

#### 4.13 SOME INTERESTING AND RELEVANT COMMENTS

Here are some interesting and relevant comments that do not require further comment students left (in Italian) at the end of the questionnaire.

*“I think that today schools should adapt to technologies, exploiting them to improve learning”*

*“I think that using new technologies at school would be useful, it would create a direct link between the class and English (intended not only as a subject, but as a necessity)”*

*“I’m convinced that schools do not exploit resources such as music and films enough, which could spur students to apply themselves more in the English language. Schools focus on grammar, but do not train us in the oral skills useful for our future; little conversation is done. A subject like English should not be studied and taught like other subjects. It has too little importance at school”*

*“I think too many teachers cling too tightly to the syllabus and in so doing, they detach completely from the real world where a totally different kind of training is required, a kind of training that could be at least partially reached through some original lessons”.*

*“In whatever institute they teach, English teachers never question their method of teaching. It looks like they are teaching English because someone forces them to do so and not because they chose to do so. They aren’t very worried about our future and if we don’t learn well it’s always our fault, whereas they are the ones at fault because they get us to create a wrong relationship with English. This is my personal opinion based on my personal experiences”*

*"I attend a Liceo. I think that here there is no real chance to get in contact with the actual English spoken all over the world. Indeed, English literature is still the main focus but I don't think it is fundamental; I think that a more direct approach with videos, films and songs would confer the subject a more modern and practical value that could allow young people to become part of a worldwide context more quickly".*

*"We should focus more on speaking in Licej; we study more English literature than the English people themselves"*

*"I attend an Istituto Tecnico per il Turismo, and during those rare times in which we try to have a conversation (on trivial topics), the majority of the class do not utter a single word. So, what I am saying is, good thing there are such things as social sites and apps and technology in general that allow us to listen to international music, otherwise we would know very little English"*

*"There should be more music and less true or false exercises at school"*

*"I have particularly liked English, especially ever since I started listening to a certain kind of music. Now that I am beginning to know it better, I'd like to know it more and more, to use it more and more, maybe at school. The means are there, teachers could use them, for instance starting from serious suggestions made by students themselves"*

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of the questionnaire, the practices with which students have the greatest general degree of contact follow this order: songs (1), social sites and apps (2), films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos (3), Wikipedia and online articles (4) and online multiplayer videogames (5). However, if the daily frequency of contact is analyzed per single practice, 81% of the respondents listen to songs in English, 75% use English in social sites and apps, 35% watch non-musical YouTube videos in English, 27% are in contact with English while playing online multiplayer videogames, 19% read articles in English on Wikipedia or other websites and 13% watch films or TV series every day. Unfortunately, however, practices such as social sites and apps and online multiplayer videogames, deemed as particularly interesting in the theoretical part of this paper because of their potential for direct written and oral communication, are exploited mainly as reading platforms; some students write in online multiplayer videogames, not many do so in social sites and apps, even less speak when using these two practices. Films and TV series may rank so low because of the large amount of time they require and because of the high level of proficiency they require to be savoured without too much effort.

Similarly, multiplayer videogames may rank the lowest because I have focused students' attention on a specific typology of videogame and not on videogames in general.

Results show that pleasure (especially regarding songs) and functionality (especially regarding social sites and apps and online multiplayer videogames) are the main reasons for this contact, whereas a conscious choice to improve their English is a particularly strong reason for students exploiting films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos, which is a clear sign of autonomy.

Students confirm they feel they are learning English through their contact with these practices mostly to a high or very high degree, thereby confirming the positive correlation between informal technology-based exposure and foreign language

proficiency. Specifically, students recognizing the greatest benefits from the exposure are those watching films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos in English.

Results reveal that, considering all five practices together, all the areas and the skills of learning analyzed in this paper (vocabulary and expressions, pronunciation, listening, reading, speaking and writing) are positively affected by the informal practices; each practice excels to a greater or lesser extent in one or more areas. Films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos along with songs, for instance, have a strong impact on vocabulary and expressions, pronunciation, listening and speaking, whereas social sites and apps have a positive effect on reading, Wikipedia and online articles on vocabulary and expressions, reading and writing and so on.

The only exception is grammar, for which students recognize only a modest impact, particularly in songs, allegedly due to the fact that grammar is linked to rules, which in the students' mind is linked to school.

Moreover, results show that the majority of students recognize words, expressions or grammar structures in reading and listening from other contexts and use them in writing or speaking in other contexts thanks to previous encounters through these informal practices to a modest or a high level.

As for learning strategies, a good number of students adopt comprehension strategies like inferring a word from the context or checking its meaning on the internet, which confirms that students use their metalinguistic awareness outside school. As for memorization strategies, however, most students claim they memorize lexical items naturally by getting into contact with them; few link them to a specific image and context or write them down in a file; this is surely a very natural way of acquiring language, but learning strategies are fundamental to help memorization if a person is not immersed in an English-speaking context 24 hours a day.

In the theoretical part of this paper it has been argued that the contribution that teachers can make is four-fold; teachers should incorporate this informal world into the curriculum as much as possible, show interest in the relationship of students with informal practices, invite students to use them outside school and teach students learning strategies to help them make the most of these out-of-school experiences. Results show that only Wikipedia and online articles on the one hand and films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos on the other are exploited by teachers, the other

practices are seldom exploited or not exploited at all. Furthermore, only 22% of students stated their teachers invite them to get into contact with informal practices outside school, only 14% of all respondents stated their teachers show interest in their relationship with informal practices outside school and scanty 7% stated their teachers explain them how to make the most of them.

These results confirm that schools have still a long way to go before being able to bridge the gap between the out-of-school, real life, technology-based informal learning and the in-school, often artificial, mainly paper-based formal learning.

If students have such a high exposure of English language despite the current general situation at school, it is reasonable to postulate that a change in formal learning would bring enormous benefits for language proficiency of students. To be more precise, not only for students' language level but also for students' future lives, if we keep in mind that most respondents deem English very important for their future and that they see themselves as English future speakers.

Therefore, a positive future self-perception as English speakers, positive informal experiences outside school and positive learning experiences at school would make for a perfect recipe towards autonomous, self-directed learners with personal learning environments.

The questionnaire confirms that all ingredients but one are already there; in the words of Sefton-Green (2004), "unless education policy makers can find ways to synthesize learning across formal and informal domains, our education system will become the loser in the long run", and unfortunately this could be true not only for education, but for students and their own future.

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# ENGLISH VERSION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

## Background information

Age

Sex

School

Istituto Professionale

Istituto Tecnico

Liceo

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## You and the English language

### What is your opinion about the English language?

Please state your degree of agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale, where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 you strongly agree.

I like the English language

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

I like the English-speaking culture

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

The English language is important for my future

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

The English language is important for my future career

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

I'd like to be able to speak English fluently as an adult

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

I like how English is taught at school

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

I would like English more if it were taught differently at school

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

## Areas of greater degree of contact with English outside school

Please state your degree of contact with the English language through the following practices on a five-point scale, where 1 means no contact at all and 5 a constant contact.

Songs (both in audio and audio/video format)

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Online multiplayer videogames

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Social sites and apps (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Whatsapp, Skype etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Wikipedia and online articles

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**ATTENTION PLEASE: Now pick and bear in mind THREE of the above areas with which you have a greater contact and complete ONLY the sections about these THREE areas. The two remaining areas are not to be completed. If you happen to have contact with the English language only through one or two of these areas, please complete only these.**

## You, the English language and songs

**ATTENTION:** Do not complete this section if songs are not among your areas of greater contact with the English language



### Frequency of use

How often do you listen to songs in English?

- Every day
- 4-5 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Rarely

---

If you chose "every day", how many hours a day do you approximately listen to songs in English?

- 8-9 hours a day
- 6-7 hours a day
- 4-5 hours a day
- 2-3 hours a day
- 30-60 minutes a day

### Why do you listen to songs in English?

Check all the statements that describe your opinion

- I like them
- I like the artists that perform them
- They make me feel good
- They convey strong emotions
- I identify myself with them

- They make me feel part of a group
- They help me improve my English
- They are everywhere, it is inevitable
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Your impressions

Please state your degree of agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale, where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 you strongly agree.

I feel that listening to songs in English has a positive impact on my English

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

### Especially as regards...

New words and expressions

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My pronunciation

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Grammar (verb tenses, modal verbs, some/any, comparatives and superlatives, the passive form, conditionals etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My listening skills

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My reading skills**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My speaking skills**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My writing skills**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**Generally, in my relationship with the English language...**

I happen to **RECOGNIZE** words or expressions or grammar structures I read or listen to because I have already come across them in a song

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

I happen to **USE** words or expressions or grammar structures while speaking or writing because I have already come across them in a song

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**On a practical level, while you are listening to your favourite songs in English...**

Check all the activities you usually do

- I focus exclusively on the melody because I am not interested in understanding the lyrics
- I focus exclusively on the melody, because I do not understand the lyrics
- I pay attention to the lyrics

- I can understand a good portion of the lyrics
- I try to infer what I do not know from the audio/visual context
- I try to translate the lyrics to understand the content
- I check the lyrics on websites or YouTube
- I sing along
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**And if you want to memorize new concepts...**

- I memorize them naturally while listening
- I write them down in a notebook or in a file
- I create an image in my head of the situation to which they refer
- I link them to the images of the song video
- I link them to my personal experience
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Songs in English at school**

**Check all the statements that describe the situation in your class**

- Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits songs in English to teach English
- The teacher does not exploit songs in English to teach English
- The teacher shows interest in our relationship with songs in English outside school
- The teacher invites us to listen to songs in English
- The teacher explains how to make the most of songs in English to improve our English level
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If your teacher does not exploit songs in English, would you be in favour of their use?**

- Yes
- No

If your teacher does not exploit songs in English, would you be in favour of their use?

- Yes
- No
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How would you use them?

## You, the English language and online multiplayer videogames

**ATTENTION:** Do not complete this section if online multiplayer videogames are not among your areas of greater contact with the English language



### Frequency of use

How often do you use online multiplayer videogames in which English is needed?

- Every day
- 4-5 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Rarely

If you chose "every day", how many hours a day do you approximately use online multiplayer videogames in which English is needed?

- 8-9 hours a day
- 6-7 hours a day
- 4-5 hours a day
- 2-3 hours a day
- 30-60 minutes a day

State the frequency with which you do the following activities in English while using online multiplayer videogames

I read the game-generated English text that appears on the screen

- All the time

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I read other players' English comments**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I listen to English game-generated speech**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
  
- Rarely
- Never

**I listen to other players' English comments**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I write in English to other players**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

### I speak in English with other players

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

### Why do you use online multiplayer videogames in which English is needed?

- I like them
- They make me feel part of a group
- Thanks to English I can communicate with players from all over the world
- I can express myself without the fear of making mistakes I have at school
  
- They help me improve my English
- Everyone uses English in online games, it is inevitable to use it
- Other

### My impressions

Please state your degree of agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale, where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 you strongly agree.

I feel that playing online multiplayer videogames in which English is needed has a positive impact on my English

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |
| <input type="radio"/> |

### Especially as regards...

New words and expressions

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My pronunciation

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Grammar (verb tenses, modal verbs, some/any, comparatives and superlatives, the passive form, conditionals etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My listening skills

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My reading skills

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My speaking skills

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My writing skills

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Generally, in my relationship with the English language...

I happen to RECOGNIZE words or expressions or grammar structures I read or listen to because I have already come across them in an online multiplayer videogame.

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

I happen to USE words or expressions or grammar structures while speaking or writing because I have already come across them in an online multiplayer videogame

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**On a practical level, while you are playing online multiplayer videogames in which English is needed...**

**If I don't understand a portion of game-generated English written text...**

- I try to infer it from the context
- I look for its meaning on the Internet
- I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence
- I usually understand most of it because I have been playing for a long time
- I usually understand most of it because I have a good general level of English
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If I don't understand a portion of game-generated English spoken text...**

- I try to infer it from the context
- I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence
- I look for its meaning on the internet, in forums or chat rooms
- I usually understand most of it because I have been playing for a long time
- I usually understand most of it because I have a good general level of English
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If I don't understand other players-generated English written text...**

- I try to infer it from the context
- I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence
- I ask the player to rephrase the sentence
- I usually understand most of it because I have been playing for a long time
- I usually understand most of it because I have a good general level of English
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If I don't understand a portion of other players-generated English spoken text...**

- I try to infer it from the context
- I pretend I understood
- I ask the player to rephrase the sentence
- I usually understand most of it because I have been playing for a long time
- I usually understand most of it because I have a good general level of English
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If I need to write to another player in English...**

- I do it in the most simple way possible
- I seldom find it difficult because I have been playing for a long time
- I seldom find it difficult because I have a good general English level
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If I need to talk to another player in English...**

- I do it in the most simple way possible
- I seldom find it difficult because I have been playing for a long time

- I seldom find it difficult because I have a good general English level
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please state the frequency with which the following events happen while you are using the English language playing online multiplayer videogames

**The player I am communicating to corrects my English, thus allowing me to improve it**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I correct the English of the player I am communicating to, thus allowing them to improve it**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**And if you want to memorize new concepts...**

- I memorize them naturally while playing
- I write them down in a notebook or in a file
- I link them to the specific situation in which I read or heard them
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Using English with online multiplayer videogames at school

**Check all the statements that describe the situation in your class**

- Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits online multiplayer videogames to teach English
- The teacher does not exploit online multiplayer videogames to teach

English

- The teacher shows interest in our use of English in online multiplayer videogames outside school
- The teacher invites us to get in contact with English in online multiplayer videogames
- The teacher explains how to make the most of online multiplayer videogames to improve our English level
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

If your teacher does not exploit online multiplayer videogames in English, would you be in favour of their use?

- Yes
- No
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How would you use them?

## You, the English language and social sites and apps

**ATTENTION:** Do not complete this section if social sites and apps are not among your areas of greater contact with the English language



How often are you in contact with English using social sites and apps?

- All the time
- 4-5 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Rarely
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

If you chose "every day", how many hours a day do you approximately use English in social sites and apps?

- 8-9 hours a day
- 6-7 hours a day
- 4-5 hours a day
- 2-3 hours a day
- 30-60 minutes a day

State the frequency with which you do the following activities in English while using social sites and apps

I read the post and comments of the English-speaking people I follow

- All the time
- Often

- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I comment in English on the photos and posts of the English-speaking people I follow**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I update my status in English**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I share songs, video and articles in English**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I write posts in English because i like it**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I exchange instant messages in English with English-speaking**

**friends**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I speak English with English-speaking friends on Skype or similar websites and apps**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I speak in English with my English-speaking friends via WhatsApp voice messages**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**I write and/or speak with my Italian friends in English for fun**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**Why are you in contact with English in social sites and apps?**

- I have many foreign friends/contacts
-

- I like to meet and keep in touch with people from all over the world
- I like to know what the English-speaking (famous) people I follow do and say
- They make me feel part of a group
- They help me improve my English
- I like to use and practice my English in real contexts out of school
- I can express myself without the fear of making mistakes I have at school
- English is everywhere, it is inevitable to come into contact with it
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### My impressions

Please state your degree of agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale, where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 you strongly agree.

I feel that being in contact with English in social sites and apps has a positive impact on my English

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

### Especially as regards...

Ner words or expressions

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My pronunciation

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Grammar (verb tenses, modal verbs, some/any, comparatives and superlatives, the passive form, conditionals etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My listening skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**My reading skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**My speaking skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**My writing skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**Generally, in my relationship with the English language...**

I happen to **RECOGNIZE** words or expressions or grammar structures I read or listen to because I have already come across them in social sites and apps

1 2 3 4 5

I happen to **USE** words or expressions or grammar structures while speaking or writing because I have already come across them in social sites and apps

1 2 3 4 5

**On a practical level, while I am in contact with English in social sites and apps...**

**If I don't understand a portion of English written text...**

- I try to infer it from the context
- I look for its meaning on the internet
- I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If I want to communicate to someone in English...**

- I do it in the most simple way possible
- I sometimes give up because it is too difficult
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**State the frequency with which the person you are exchanging instant messages with or talking to corrects your English, thus allowing you to improve it**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**State the frequency with which you correct the person you are exchanging instant messages with or talking to in English, thus allowing them to improve it**

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**And if I want to memorize new concepts...**

- I memorize them naturally by reading them and listening to them
- I write them down in a notebook or in a file
- I link them to the specific situation in which I read or heard them

I link them to my personal experience

Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Social sites and apps at school

Check all the statements that describe the situation in your class

Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits social sites and apps to teach English

The teacher does not exploit social sites and apps to teach English

The teacher shows interest in our use of English in social sites and apps outside school

The teacher invites us to get in contact with English in social sites and apps

The teacher explains how to make the most of social sites and apps to improve our English level

Other \_\_\_\_\_

If your teacher does not exploit social sites and apps in English to teach in the classroom, would you be in favour of their use?

Yes

No

Other \_\_\_\_\_

How would you use them?

## You, the English language and films, TV series and non-music Youtube videos

ATTENTION: Do not complete this section if films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos are not among your areas of greater contact with the English language



### Frequency of use

How often do you watch non-music YouTube videos in English?

- Every day
- 2-3 times a week
- 4-5 times a week
- Rarely
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What are they about?

- Music (interviews etc.)
- Videogames (reviews, tutorials etc.)
- Technology (reviews, tutorials etc.)
- Films (film sequences, reviews, actor interviews etc.)
- TV series (sequences, reviews, actor interviews etc.)
- Sport
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you watch films or TV series in English?

- Every day

- 2-3 times a week
- 4-5 times a week
- Rarely
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please write a couple of films or TV series you have watched in English

### Why?

Why do you watch non-music videos on YouTube?

- The famous people or experts of the activities I am interested in are English or speak English
- They make me feel part of a group
- They help me improve my English
- I actually see only films or TV series, not YouTube videos
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you watch films or TV series in English?

- I can watch them before the Italian version is available
- I like to experience them in their original versions without dubbing
- They help me improve my English
- I actually watch only YouTube videos
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### My impression

Please state your degree of agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale, where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 you strongly agree.

I feel that watching films, TV series and/or non-music YouTube videos has a positive impact on my English

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**Epecially as regards...**

**New words and expressions**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My pronunciation**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**Grammar (verb tenses, modal verbs, some/any, comparatives and superlatives, the passive form, conditionals etc.)**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My listening skills**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My reading skills**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My speaking skills**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

**My writing skills**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

### Generally, in my relationship with the English language...

I happen to RECOGNIZE words or expressions or grammar structures I read or listen to because I have already come across them in films, TV series and/or non-music YouTube videos

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

I happen to USE words or expressions or grammar structures while speaking or writing because I have already come across them in films, TV series and/or non-music YouTube videos

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

### On a practical level...

I mainly watch films, TV series and/or non-music YouTube videos

- Without subtitles
- With English subtitles
- With Italian subtitles

If you have checked "without subtitles", while you are watching films, TV series and/or non music YouTube videos in English...

- I usually understand most of what I hear because I have a good general level of English
- I usually understand most of what I hear because I watched lots of them in the past
- I add subtitles
- Before checking the meaning of something I do not understand i try to infer it form the context
- If there is something I do not understand, I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

If you have checked "with English subtitles" while you are watching films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos...

- I usually understand most of what appears on the screen because I have a good general level of English
- If there is something I do not understand, I look for its meaning on the internet
- Before checking the meaning of something I do not understand I try to infer it from the context
- If there is something I do not understand, I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence

**If you checked "with Italian subtitles", while you are watching films, TV series and non-music YouTube videos...**

- I focus exclusively on subtitles, not paying attention to what is said in English
- I pay attention to what I hear in English as well

**And if you want to memorize new concepts...**

- I memorize them naturally while watching
- I write them down in a notebook or in a file
- I create an image in my head of the situation to which they refer
- I link them to the specific situation, image and context in which I read or heard them
- I link them to my personal experience
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Films, TV series and non-music Youtube videos at school

**Check all the statements that describe the situation in your class**

- Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos to teach English
- The teacher does not exploit films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos to teach English
- The teacher shows interest in our use of films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos in English outside school
- The teacher invites us to watch films, TV series and YouTube non-music videos in English
- The teacher explains how to make the most of films, TV series and non-music videos to improve our English level

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If your teacher does not exploit films, Tv series and/or non-music YouTube videos in English to teach in the classroom, would you be in favour of their use?**

Yes

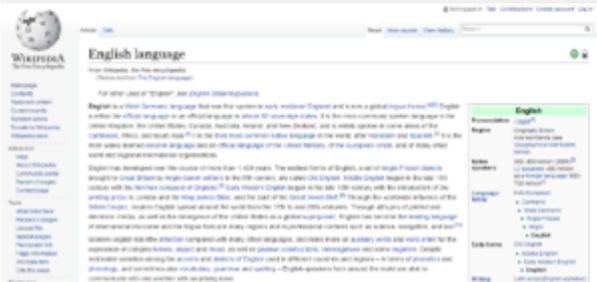
No

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**How would you use them?**

**You, the English language, Wikipedia and online articles**

**ATTENTION: Do not complete this section if Wikipedia and online articles are not among your areas of greater contact with the English language**



**Frequency of use**

**How often do you read information on Wikipedia or read online articles in English?**

- Every day
- 2-3 times a week
- 4-5 times a week
- Rarely
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**What are they about?**

- Music
- Videogames
- Technology
- Films
- TV series
- Sport
- Science
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If possible, please write a couple of topics about which you have**

recently read on wikipedia or online articles in English

### Why do you read information on Wikipedia or online articles in English?

- I think the quality of the information is better compared to Italian sources
- I can find more information in English on the topic I am interested in
- They help me improve my English
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### My impressions

Please state your degree of agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale, where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 you strongly agree.

I feel that reading information on Wikipedia and online articles in English has a positive impact on my English

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

### Especially as regards...

New words or expressions

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

My pronunciation

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>				

Grammar (verb tenses, modal verbs, some/any, comparatives and superlatives, the passive form, conditionals etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

**My listening skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**My reading skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**My speaking skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**My writing skills**

1 2 3 4 5

**Generally, in my relationship with the English language...**

I happen to **RECOGNIZE** words or expressions or grammar structures I read or listen to because I have already come across them in Wikipedia and online articles

1 2 3 4 5

I happen to **USE** words or expressions or grammar structures while speaking or writing because I have already come across them in Wikipedia and online articles

1 2 3 4 5

**On a practical level, while you are reading information on Wikipedia and online articles in English and you do not know a word or you do not understand a concept...**

- I try to infer it from the context
- I look for its meaning on the internet
- I go on even though it is not clear, hoping it is not important for the overall meaning of the sentence
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**And if you want to memorize new concepts...**

- I memorize them naturally while reading
- I write them down in a notebook or in a file
- I link them to the specific situation in which I read them
- I link them to my personal experience
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Wikipedia and online articles at school**

**Check all the statements that describe the situation in your class**

- Along with other instruments, the teacher exploits Wikipedia and online articles to teach English
- The teacher does not exploit Wikipedia and online articles to teach English
- The teacher shows interest in our relationship with Wikipedia and online articles in English outside school
- The teacher invites us to read Wikipedia and online articles in English
- The teacher explains how to make the most of Wikipedia and online articles in English to improve our English level
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If your teacher does not exploit Wikipedia and online articles in English to teach in the classroom, would you be in favour of their use?**

- Yes
- No
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How would you use them?