

## Using Literature to Improve Writing Skills at B1 Level. A case study in Italy

Adriana Iacono\*

Cordoba University, Italy

Corresponding Author: Adriana Iacono, E-mail: [adrianaiacono@hotmail.com](mailto:adrianaiacono@hotmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

In the second language classroom, literature has been employed through different methodological approaches. Some of them view literature as a means for deepening language knowledge, while others regard it as a resource to raise multicultural awareness and critical thinking. The purpose of this article is to show that it is possible to enhance students' writing skills by using literary excerpts as language models. Moreover, in a holistic approach, literature can develop students' motivation by offering them emotions, reflections, and social contexts they can relate to for meaningful learning experiences. This is demonstrated through the results of a case study conducted with Italian high school students. The novelty of this research is a course syllabus designed for the purpose of using literary excerpts of several genres including articles and songs as a source of language to teach English.

**Key words:** Literature, Teaching English, Writing Skills, Preliminary B1, EFL

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### INTRODUCTION

If the purpose of everyday language is to achieve results and influence actions and attitudes (Wellek and Warren, 1956), the same can be said about literary language. Literary language is not just referential, it is expressive and conveys the tone and attitude of the writer to influence and persuade the reader (Wellek and Warren, 1956). Therefore, with this in mind, can we use it for didactic purposes as we do with everyday language? This article investigates the possibility of using literature as a tool to develop both the writing skills and the motivation of the learners of a second language (henceforth, L2).

As explained further below, past approaches have employed literature as a way of teaching an L2. For example, the grammar translation methodology used it as a means to develop reading and writing skills. In more recent years, literature has been used within the context of a more communicative approach. Furthermore, a distinction has been put forth between classic literature, which includes texts of great authors such as Shakespeare or Dickens and is referred to as literature with a capital L, and literature with a small l, which includes popular fictions, song lyrics and so on (McRae, 1991). In any case, whatever the approach and the kind of texts employed, there are many good reasons for using literature in L2 learning. First, literature is strictly connected with language and communication; and second, it has a high artistic, social, and historical value. Other good reasons for using literature in L2 classrooms can be connected to national school systems. Italian high school students, for instance, start studying literature in their third year, with extraordinarily little previous exposure to it. During the first school

years the focus of their language learning is mostly on grammar and vocabulary as learnt from textbooks, therefore they are not prepared when it comes to study literature. Another reason is that literature provides authentic and rich language, instead of the ready-made chunks and artificial dialogues provided by most textbooks that do not offer appropriate pragmatic models, as maintained by Kasper (2001). Hence, in order to give students adequate models of language, it is of paramount importance to expose them to unmanipulated literary texts.

To engage students in their learning process, choosing the right material is a crucial point, together with matching texts and authors with learners' interests, age, and levels of English. There are many writers whose style is known to be simple yet evocative. However, putting together a list of books to be used as teaching sources can be a challenging task. First, because of the huge literary production in English speaking countries; second, because it is not easy to please everyone; and finally, because it can be difficult to choose the right topics to attract teenagers' attention. Variety is important to satisfy the different reading preferences of the students and expose them to different kinds of style, tone, register, vocabulary, and also to different cultures. This can be done by selecting authors from different English-speaking countries and choosing a variety of genres. Another important consideration is the choice of quality multicultural literature as this is an excellent method to introduce students to cultural diversity (Salas, Lucido and Canales, 2002).

Following on from such premises, this article presents some preliminary findings from a study that has been

conducted within two “Liceo Classico” high schools in Italy, specifically in Sicily, with students learning English as an L2.<sup>1</sup> The study has been conducted with students of the second year to expose them to literature before it becomes the main focus of their studies. Besides, students in the first two or three years of high schools are usually at B1 level, which is a good starting point to expand writing skills. For this purpose, in the new course syllabus that was set up students were asked to read short literary excerpts and produce their own writing pieces, as further detailed below. The word literature is used here in a broad sense (both literature with capital L and with small l) and includes not only excerpts from novels, dramas, short stories, and poems but also articles, essays, and songs. The students were asked to use the excerpts as models for their own writing pieces. They were also given opportunities for self-reflection through a series of different activities, as described below. Regarding English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL), the Italian Ministry of Education states that students in their second year of high school should be at B1 level, therefore this is the most common level of English among this cohort of students. For this reason, in order to investigate the use of literary texts, a course syllabus was designed with the aim of offering students a series of lessons based on short literary excerpts drawn from several different books to be used for classroom activities. The excerpts included in this study are a mix of classical texts as in the national curriculum established for “Liceo” (Italian high schools where students study English literature) by the Ministry of Education, plus contemporary writers, best sellers, and teenagers’ favorite authors. As mentioned above, a novel point introduced by this study consists in proposing a course syllabus designed to use literary texts from different perspectives based on Clandfield’s definitions (TALO, TAVI, TASP). In addition to that, it is also suggested to develop further studies where the text could be used as a personal growth tool (TAP) for developing language skills, multicultural awareness, motivation, and personal growth, all at the same time. With this in mind, the main objective of this study is to verify whether it is possible to use literature to improve writing skills at B1 level.

The specific objectives of the research project reported here are the following:

- To investigate any improvements in writing skills, grammar and vocabulary in the students’ written production using literary excerpts as models. This investigation is carried out through quantitative analysis of the data collected.
- To investigate any improvements in motivation and personal growth in the students after having engaged with selected literary excerpts. This investigation is carried out through qualitative analysis of the answers given to a feedback questionnaire by both students and teachers taking part to the research project.

This article is structured as follows: after introducing the theoretical background, the methodology of the study is presented, followed by the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data collected. The article concludes that both

students’ motivation and writing skills can be enhanced by using literature as a source of language.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the past, the grammar translation method gave literary texts great relevance as a model of correct language, while the functional-notional method, on the contrary, disregarded literature as a source of authentic language (Llach, 2007). In 1963 a conference on education at King’s College in Cambridge highlighted the importance of literary texts as a useful tool to teach languages. Nowadays, many authors agree on considering literary language as real language that serves the purpose of communication (Llach, 2007) using a high concentration of metaphors and other technical devices. Despite this, however, the use of literary texts in the language classroom has remained ignored for a long time due to the impact of the communicative approach (Bobkina and Dominguez 2014).

In more recent times the use of literature in the L2 classroom has been adopted through different methodological approaches. Some of the most important approaches view literature as a means for deepening knowledge of the language, while others have regarded it as a resource to raise social and multicultural awareness as well as personal growth. In this regard, Wellek and Warren’s (1956) distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic approach to the study of literature can be useful. The intrinsic approach focuses on language, structure, vocabulary, and grammar, while the extrinsic approach focuses on other aspects such as philosophical and social issues, style, historical background, and biography. Maley’s (1989) approach, on the other hand, is mostly based on the analysis of the literary quality of the text, while Carter and Long’s models (1999, as cited by Savvidou 2004 p. 6) define a cultural, linguistic, and personal growth approach through literature.

Generally speaking, we can group the models available to approach literature into three main areas: linguistic, cultural and personal growth. In the *cultural* model a literary text is a source of information about the social, political, and historical background of the text itself. It can also be used to analyze literary movements and genres. The focus is not on the language and this model is usually used in a teacher-centered approach. The *language* model is more learner-centered. The focus is on the language in order to develop awareness of grammar and vocabulary or to analyze the text from a stylistic point of view. The *personal growth* model is also learner-centered as it encourages learners to pay attention to their own personal feelings, opinions and experiences in relation to the text. Teachers use literary texts in a different way depending on the model they choose (Clandfield, 2004). With this in mind, it is important to find a balance between content and methodology in developing a student-centered approach (Tomlinson, 1998). Literature can play a fundamental role in this respect, where students are responsible for their own learning experience while teachers are facilitators who offer guidance and strategies to support their learning trajectory (Smart, Witt and Scott, 2012). As Lak, Soleimani, and Parvaneh (2017)

say, the role of a teacher in a student-centered class is to help learners become the designers of their own learning. Furthermore, as Lynch (2010) claims, learners should develop knowledge through communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Rather than learning irrelevant materials, students should have the opportunity to learn from material that is relevant to their lives. As the teacher helps the students to discover the meaning of the texts, students become responsible for their own learning experience, something that is difficult to achieve with conventional textbooks (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014). Literature can be used as a source to enhance students' language skills while also giving them the opportunity to develop critical thinking about themselves and the world. Ehrman (1996) and Bandura (1997) state that emotions play an important role in the learning process, and can enhance learners' motivation and performance (Sturgeon, 2006). In this sense, quality literature can offer characters and social contexts that students can relate to, therefore, it can be the source material for meaningful learning experiences based on shared feelings and emotions; it can also help creating enjoyable learning with appropriate quality material, and interesting activities, combining second language learning with development of critical thinking. Furthermore, in our globalized world, classrooms are culturally and ethnically diverse, so it is important to develop tools to meet the needs of a variety of students, including those coming from marginalized groups and non-traditional homes, and high-quality literature can have a powerful role in this sense (Herring 2017). In teaching an L2 literature needs to be viewed as our ally rather than our enemy, as a source of unmanipulated language, written with a purpose that is not merely linguistic and can be exploited in many different ways. "The great advantage of natural, idiomatic texts over artificial 'methods' or 'series' is that they do justice to every feature of the language" (Sweet 1899: 177 as cited in Gilmore 2007 p. 1). According to Sweet, textbooks only use a limited and repetitive set of grammatical constructions and vocabulary, excluding other elements which are equally important or even more relevant. Language in textbooks is very structured and predictable and tends to focus on monologues or dialogues with not too much room for non-goal-oriented language, and for this reason students are not comfortable when facing the kind of talk used to establish relationships (Gilmore 2007). On the contrary, this kind of interactional non-goal-oriented language can be found in literary texts.

According to Lindsay Clandfield (2004), different L2 teaching approaches - grammar translation, audiolingual and communicative - deal with texts differently, according to the different needs of each approach. The author talks about three different ways of using texts identified by the acronyms: TALO, TAVI and TASP.

1. The first considers texts only from the linguistic point of view, as in the grammar translation method (Text As a Language Object, TALO).
2. The second uses text as a means to obtain information, as in the audiolingual method (Text As a Vehicle of Information, TAVI)

3. The third focuses on the text as a way to produce writing tasks, as in the communicative method (Text As a Springboard for Production, TASP).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, planning a typical L2 lesson should combine the three different ways of dealing with texts. Furthermore, in a holistic approach a further view of the text needs to be added, namely, a consideration of the Text As a Personal Growth Tool (TAP). In the study reported in this article, an attempt was made to include all three views of the text suggesting the possibility to add a fourth one based on personal growth (TAP).

## THE STUDY

As mentioned before, this study is based on a new syllabus that uses literary excerpts as models of real language instead of textbooks. In this research the word literature is used in a wide sense (including literature with big and small l) and the syllabus includes classic masterpieces by Shakespeare and Joyce, as well as popular songs and material from the internet. This article is based on the results of the first part of the syllabus (Module One). To measure effectiveness of the methodology, both quantitative and qualitative analyses have been used. Quantitative analysis has been used to evaluate the results of 411 writing pieces produced by the students attending the first part of the course, while qualitative analysis has been used to evaluate the answers of a questionnaire done at the end of the ten lessons.

## Context

The case study presented here refers to students of two high schools in Sicily involved in the project: 22 students from the high school "Liceo Politi" in Agrigento (Class A), and 27 students from the high school "Liceo Foscolo" in Canicatti, a town near Agrigento (Class B). The data collected so far include (i) the first ten writing pieces produced by the 49 students, who have completed Module One of the curriculum based on grammar and vocabulary, and (ii) the results of the entry test completed by the students, which included two different writing tasks of 100 words each, namely, writing an email (Task 1), and writing an article or a story (Task 2). Students were monitored throughout the lessons delivered by their teachers in a span of time equivalent to a semester.

The age range of the participating students is between 15 and 16, and the average level in English is B1 (this is usually the level for students of the second year in high school in Italy, as mentioned above). Before starting the course, students were given a questionnaire with questions about themselves (name, age, gender, town, self-assessed level of English or certifications) and questions focusing on their literary taste and writing skills. As will be shown later, both groups were comparable in many respects, however some differences emerged with regard to preparation and motivation.

## Methodology

The syllabus includes thirty lessons of thirty minutes each divided into three different Modules: Module One focuses

on grammar and vocabulary, Module Two on tone and register, and Module Three on personal growth. The course material also includes entry and final test, a questionnaire, and feedback survey, thirty detailed lesson plans with relevant literary excerpts, and a Cambridge B1 Preliminary new handbook with Assessment Criteria.

The course started in October 2019 and consisted of 15 hours of lessons, plus 45 minutes each for the entry test and for the final test and half an hour for the questionnaire and the general feedback survey at the end of each module. Step one includes course presentation and questionnaire. Step two is the entry test. The entry test is modelled on the new B1 Pet writing test sample in the Cambridge Handbook, where students are required to answer an email and then either write a story or an article (100 words each). Assessment is done according to the criteria stated in the Cambridge Preliminary Handbook (pp. 16 - 30). The final test is also modelled on a Cambridge B1 Pet sample. The questionnaire includes questions on personal details (age, city), school (state, private or both), English certifications and study abroad (if any), self-assessed English skills (from 1 to 5 marks), evaluation of school textbooks, favorite literary genre(s), favorite book(s) and writer(s). The written materials, entry test, final test and questionnaires produced by students were collected as electronic files and uploaded on a website. Grammar, functions, vocabulary, and topics are the ones defined by the *CEFR* for the B1 level syllabus. These are the three modules in the curriculum:

- Module One: improving grammar and vocabulary.
- Module Two: enhancing tone, register and style.
- Module Three: raising personal growth and multicultural awareness.

Texts and activities were chosen keeping in mind the perspectives given by Clandfield (2004) in which literary texts can be considered from the linguistic point of view (TALO), as a means of getting information (TAVI) or as an input for producing writing tasks (TASP).

### Course Content

The selection of writers for this curriculum includes classical as well as modern authors and a wide variety of literary genres. Before starting the course, a survey was given to a group of seventy students from both private language schools and state schools including the 49 students involved in the research in order to identify their favorite authors. The results of the survey show that J.K. Rowling is the most popular English writer among teenagers. She was mentioned by 15 students out of 70, followed by N. Sparks (8), J. Austen (7), S. King (7), O. Wilde (6), G. Orwell (4) and others selected by less than 4 students. This list could be useful when considering the literary taste of the students as a starting point for further studies. As for literary genres, fantasy is the most popular (20), followed by crime/noir (12), then thriller and horror (9 each) and science fiction (6). Considering that when the task lacks challenging components motivation can diminish (Alderman, 1999; Bandura, 1997; Calder & Staw, 1975, cited in Sturgeon 2014), a well-balanced list of authors

that includes some of the students' favorite authors can be more engaging and therefore more motivating for the L2 learners.

The syllabus of Module One, the focus of this article, is outlined below. In addition to the selected genre, the title of the text and the author, the list also includes the linguistic feature that is specifically dealt with in each lesson. The grammatical structures are a selection of those included in the B1 Preliminary Syllabus as specified in the Cambridge Assessment English handbook for teachers.

Module One Grammar and Vocabulary.

1. Poem/Song: *Shall I compare...* by William Shakespeare. Linguistic focus: Comparatives
2. Novel: *A Tale of Two Cities* by C. Dickens. Linguistic focus: Superlatives
3. Novel: *Americana* by D. De Lillo. Linguistic focus: Linking words – Idioms
4. Poem: *I wandered lonely...* by W. Wordsworth. Linguistic focus: Past Simple
5. Novel: *1984* by G. Orwell. Linguistic focus: Past simple vs Past Continuous
6. Song: *Thinking Out Loud* by E. Sheeran. Linguistic focus: Future with Will
7. Novel: *The Old Man and the Sea* by E. Hemingway. Linguistic focus: Past Simple, Past Perfect, Vocabulary
8. Novel: *The Grass is Singing* by D. Lessing. Linguistic focus: Passive Form
9. Poem/Song: *If you were coming...* by E. Dickinson. Linguistic focus: Second Conditional
10. Novel: *Ulysses* (Molly Bloom's monologue) by J. Joyce. Linguistic focus: Punctuation

### RESULTS

This section refers to the assessment of the 411 writing pieces produced by the 49 students after 10 lessons of the course syllabus. Class A and Class B students attended the course during their regular English classes at school, the lessons were delivered by their English teacher. After each lesson they would upload their writing through a link to be assessed. Assessment was carried out to answer the following questions:

1. Have students improved their writing skills?
2. Have students improved their grammar?
3. Have students improved their motivation?

To answer the first two questions, the result has been evaluated through quantitative analysis, while qualitative analysis was used to answer the last question of the research.

### Writing Skills

- *Assessment*

The writing pieces were marked according to the Cambridge Assessment Scale (as specified in the B1 Preliminary Handbook p. 25-26) which includes: Content, Communicative Achievement, Organization and Language. Marks for each subscale were allocated from 0 to 5 for a maximum of 25 marks in total for each piece of writing produced by the students. In the tables shown in this study,

marks have been reported in a scale from 0 to 10, to make them easier to read.

- *Pre-course questionnaire*

According to the results of the self-assessment questionnaire, Class A is the weaker of the two classes. In fact, the average mark in the self-assessment questionnaire was 3.02 out of 5, while the highest individual score was 4.30. Class B is the stronger one. The average mark in the self-assessment questionnaire was 3.80 out of 5 while the highest score was 4.20.

- *Entry test*

Overall, in the entry test both classes performed well in the first task (writing an email) while most students found the second task (writing a story or an article) more challenging. In Class A, 54% of the students were able to perform adequately getting a mark equal to 6 (satisfactory) or above 6 in the email, while only 40% of them managed to perform at the same level in the story or article task. As for Class B, 66% of the students performed adequately in the first task and 51% in the second one.

- *Written production*

The tables below show the results of the writing pieces produced by the students during the ten lessons of Module One of the syllabus. The lessons were delivered to the two high school classes by the students' teachers from October 2019 to March 2020. The first column presents the code assigned to the students: first letter(s) of their name(s) and

surname(s) plus F for feminine or M for masculine, followed by A or B to identify the class, and a number (1 to 22 for Class A and 1 to 27 for Class B). The next two columns show the marks of the entry tests (email plus article or story), while the ten columns show the marks of the writing pieces produced during the lessons (L1, L2...). Marks are expressed in decimals; results are presented in increasing order from the lowest to the highest.

Table 1 shows the marks of the entry tests and the ten writing pieces produced from Lesson one to Lesson ten. The last two columns refer to the average marks of the entry test and the lessons while the last column shows improvement (if any). In this class, 13 students out of 21 (with the exclusion of LMMA22 who was absent for most of the lessons as he spent a semester in a high school in Ireland) show improvements in their results, which corresponds to 62% of the total number of students. This improvement is calculated by comparing the average marks of the entry test with the average marks of the lessons. The class average mark in the test is 5.79 while the average mark in the written production is 6.13 therefore the average rate of improvement for the whole Class A is 0.34.

Table 2 shows the distribution of marks in the entry tests and the lessons in Class A, while Table 3 shows the students' frequency of improvement in detail.

In Table 2 the first two columns refer to the mark range from 0 to 10, the second column reports the number of

**Table 1.** Results of the Entry Tests (T) and Module One Lessons (L) for Class A (N/A was assigned to absentees)

|         | T1  | T2  | L1  | L2  | L3  | L4  | L5  | L6  | L7  | L8  | L9  | L10 | Average test | Average Lessons | Improvement |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| FRMA1   | 5   | 3   | N/A | 3   | 2   | N/A | 4            | 2.50            | -1.50       |
| LPMA2   | 3   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 6   | 4.5 | N/A | 5.5 | 4   | N/A | 5   | 6   | 2.50         | 4.75            | 2.25        |
| RCFA3   | 7.5 | 6.5 | 5   | 4   | 5   | 5   | 5   | N/A | N/A | 5   | 5   | 4   | 7            | 4.75            | -2.25       |
| DSMA4   | 4.5 | 5   | 3   | 4   | 6   | 5.5 | 6   | N/A | 5   | 5   | 6   | 4   | 4.75         | 4.94            | 0.19        |
| EBMA5   | 5   | 3   | 4   | 4   | 5.5 | 6.5 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 6   | N/A | 5   | 4            | 5.28            | 1.28        |
| MPFA6   | 6   | 5.5 | 2   | 5   | 4.5 | 7.5 | 6.5 | N/A | 6   | 5   | 6.5 | 6.5 | 5.75         | 5.50            | -0.25       |
| FAMA7   | 5   | 4.5 | 4   | 5   | 6.5 | 7   | 6   | 6   | 6   | 5   | 5   | 5   | 4.75         | 5.55            | 0.80        |
| EFFA8   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 6.5 | 6   | 4.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 5   | 6   | 5   | 6   | 4.50         | 5.85            | 1.35        |
| MAFA9   | 7.5 | 6   | 6   | 6   | 6   | 7.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 5   | 6   | 6.5 | 6   | 6.75         | 6.25            | -0.50       |
| CPMA10  | 7   | 7.5 | 7.5 | 6   | 6.5 | 4   | 7.5 | 7.5 | 6   | 7   | 6.5 | 5   | 7.25         | 6.35            | -0.90       |
| SMMA11  | 6.5 | 5.5 | 5   | N/A | 8.5 | 6.5 | N/A | 3   | 6.5 | 6.5 | 8   | 7   | 6            | 6.38            | 0.38        |
| BAFA12  | 4.5 | 5.5 | 4   | 4   | 8   | 9   | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 7   | 7   | 5            | 6.50            | 1.50        |
| GSFA13  | 7.5 | 6.5 | 7.5 | 7   | 8   | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7   | 6   | 6   | 7   | 6   | 7            | 6.75            | -0.25       |
| ALFA14  | 7   | 5   | N/A | N/A | 7.5 | 8   | N/A | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6   | 6   | 7   | 6            | 6.79            | 0.79        |
| SRMA15  | 8   | 6   | 6   | 6   | 8   | 7   | 6.5 | 8   | 6.5 | 7   | 5   | 8   | 7            | 6.80            | -0.20       |
| GFFA16  | 7.5 | 8.5 | N/A | 7   | N/A | 7.5 | 7.5 | 7   | 6   | 6   | 6.5 | 7   | 8            | 6.81            | -1.19       |
| JDFA17  | 5   | 5   | 7.5 | 4   | 6.5 | 8   | 7.5 | 8.5 | N/A | 6   | 6.5 | 7   | 5            | 6.83            | 1.83        |
| CEFA18  | 6   | 6.5 | N/A | 6   | 7.5 | 6.5 | 7   | N/A | 8   | 7   | 7   | 7   | 6.25         | 7               | 0.75        |
| CLMA19  | 7   | 7   | 7   | 8   | 8   | 5.5 | 7   | 7   | 8   | 8   | 8   | 8   | 7            | 7.45            | 0.45        |
| FCFA20  | 6   | 6   | N/A | 8   | 9   | N/A | 7   | 9   | 7   | 6   | 7   | 7   | 6            | 7.50            | 1.50        |
| MVFA21  | 6   | 8   | 6   | 7   | 9   | 9   | 9   | 9   | 8   | 9   | 9   | 7   | 7            | 8.20            | 1.20        |
| LMMA22  | N/A | 9   | 9   | 9   | 8   | N/A          | 8.75            | N/A         |
| Average |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 5.79         | 6.13            | 0.34        |

**Table 2.** Class A Students distribution according to marks range in the entry test and in the lessons

| Marks range |     | Entry test | Lessons |
|-------------|-----|------------|---------|
| 0           | 0.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 0.5         | 1   | 0          | 0       |
| 1           | 1.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 1.5         | 2   | 0          | 0       |
| 2           | 2.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 2.5         | 3   | 1          | 1       |
| 3           | 3.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 3.5         | 4   | 0          | 0       |
| 4           | 4.5 | 2          | 0       |
| 4.5         | 5   | 3          | 3       |
| 5           | 5.5 | 2          | 1       |
| 5.5         | 6   | 1          | 3       |
| 6           | 6.5 | 4          | 3       |
| 6.5         | 7   | 1          | 6       |
| 7           | 7.5 | 6          | 2       |
| 7.5         | 8   | 0          | 1       |
| 8           | 8.5 | 1          | 1       |
| 8.5         | 9   | 0          | 0       |
| 9           | 9.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 9.5         | 10  | 0          | 0       |

**Table 3.** Class A Students distribution according to improvement range

| Range |      | Improvement |
|-------|------|-------------|
| -5    | -4.5 | 0           |
| -4.5  | -4   | 0           |
| -4    | -3.5 | 0           |
| -3.5  | -3   | 0           |
| -3    | -2.5 | 0           |
| -2.5  | -2   | 1           |
| -2    | -1.5 | 0           |
| -1.5  | -1   | 2           |
| -1    | -0.5 | 1           |
| -0.5  | 0    | 4           |
| 0     | 0.5  | 3           |
| 0.5   | 1    | 3           |
| 1     | 1.5  | 3           |
| 1.5   | 2    | 3           |
| 2     | 2.5  | 1           |
| 2.5   | 3    | 0           |
| 3     | 3.5  | 0           |
| 3.5   | 4    | 0           |
| 4     | 4.5  | 0           |
| 4.5   | 5    | 0           |

students in any specific mark range according to the entry test results, and the last columns report the number of students

in any specific mark range according to the results of the lessons. Mark 6, which in the Italian education system corresponds to “satisfactory”, is taken as a reference value for the distribution of the marks. We can see that considering a total of 21 students Table 2 reports: 9 students under 6 in the test column and 8 in the lesson column, and 12 students above 6 in the test and 13 in the lesson column. From these details, we can distinguish 3 areas: the first includes the grade range from 4 to 5.5, where the table reports 7 students for entry test and 4 for lessons. The second area includes students in the mark range from 5.5 to 6.5, which includes 5 students for the entry test and 6 students for the lessons. Finally, the third area includes marks from 6.5 to 8.5, with 8 students for the entry test and 10 for the lessons. The results, therefore, suggest that after attending the lessons more students are likely to receive higher marks in their writing performances.

Table 3 reports the students’ range of improvement in the first two columns and the number of students in any specific improvement range in the last one. Considering a total of 21 students, we can see that 4 students have worsened their performances (between -2.5 and -0.5), while 7 students do not show any significant changes in their performances (between -0.5 and 0.5). The remaining ten students show improvements ranging from 0.5 to 2.5. The results report that 10 students (47.61%) show significant improvements in their performances.

The results of Class B are reported in the tables below.

Table 4 shows the marks of the entry tests and the ten writing pieces produced from Lesson one to Lesson ten in Class B. In this class, 19 students out of 26 (with the exclusion of EFFB1) show improvements in their results, which corresponds to 73% of the total number of students. The class average mark in the test is 6.51 while the average mark in the written production is 7.32, therefore the average rate of improvement for the whole Class B is 0.81.

Table 5 shows the distribution of marks in the entry test and the lessons in Class B. Table 6 shows the frequency distribution of improvement in class B.

In Table 5, as in the case of Table 2, mark 6 is taken as a reference value for the distribution of the marks. As shown, considering a total of 26 students. The table reports 9 students under 6 in the test column and 0 in the lesson column, then 17 students above 6 in the test and 26 in the lesson column. Using this information, we can distinguish 3 areas according to the mark range: the first includes marks from 3 to 5.5, where the table reports 6 students for entry test and 0 for lessons. The second area includes students in the mark range from 5.5 to 6.5, with 8 students for the entry test and 2 students for the lessons. Finally, the third area includes marks from 6.5 to 10, and in this area there are 12 students for the entry test and 24 for the lessons. Therefore, regarding class B, as in Class A, the results suggest that after attending the lessons more students are likely to achieve higher marks in their writing performances.

Table 6, with regard to the distribution of the students, the range of improvement shows that, considering a total of 26 students, 7 students have slightly worsened their performances (between -1.5 and -0.5), while 3 students do not show significant changes in their performances

**Table 4.** Results of the Entry Tests (T) and Module One Lessons (L) for Class B

|         | T1  | T2  | L1  | L2  | L3  | L4  | L5  | L6  | L7  | L8  | L9  | L10 | Average test | Average Lessons | Improvement |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| EFFB1   | N/A | N/A | 4   | N/A | N/A | 6   | 6.5 | 6.5 | N/A | N/A | 7   | 6.5 | N/A          | 6.08            | N/A         |
| VZFB2   | 8.5 | 2.5 | 6   | 6   | 5   | 8   | N/A | 6   | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7   | 5.50         | 6.39            | 0.89        |
| GFFB3   | 5.5 | 0.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 | N/A | 7   | N/A | N/A | 6   | 6.5 | N/A | N/A | 3            | 6.50            | 3.50        |
| EMFB4   | 5.5 | 6.5 | 6   | 7   | 6   | N/A | N/A | 7   | 6.5 | 6   | 7   | 7.5 | 6            | 6.63            | 0.63        |
| AMFB5   | 5.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 6   | 6.5 | 6   | 6.5 | 7   | 7   | 6.5 | 6.50         | 6.65            | 0.15        |
| ELFB6   | 5.5 | 0.5 | 7.0 | 5.5 | N/A | 6.5 | 6   | 6.5 | 7.5 | 7   | 7   | 7.5 | 3            | 6.72            | 3.72        |
| VCFB7   | 5.5 | 4   | 7   | 7   | 6   | 7   | 7   | 6.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 4.75         | 6.75            | 2.00        |
| FMMB8   | 6   | 5   | 6   | 5.5 | 7   | 7   | 6   | 5   | 8   | 9   | 8   | 7.5 | 5.50         | 6.90            | 1.40        |
| CGFB9   | 6.5 | 5   | 7   | 7.5 | 6   | 7   | 7   | N/A | N/A | N/A | 6.5 | 7.5 | 5.75         | 6.93            | 1.18        |
| KFFB10  | 5.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 | N/A | 7.5 | 6.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 7   | 7   | 8   | 6            | 6.94            | 0.94        |
| STMB11  | 6   | N/A | 6   | 6.5 | N/A | 6   | 7   | 8   | 8   | 6.5 | 7   | 7.5 | 6            | 6.94            | 0.94        |
| ACFB12  | 8.5 | 7.5 | 6.5 | 4.5 | N/A | 7.5 | 8   | 7.5 | 7.5 | N/A | 7.5 | 8   | 8            | 7.13            | -0.88       |
| FCFB13  | 5.5 | 4.5 | N/A | 8   | N/A | 6.5 | 8   | 6.5 | 7.5 | 6.5 | N/A | N/A | 5            | 7.17            | 2.17        |
| ACFB14  | 8.5 | 7   | 7   | 8.5 | 8.5 | 7   | 7   | 8   | 7   | 7   | 6   | 6   | 7.75         | 7.20            | -0.55       |
| ATMB15  | 8   | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 8   | 7.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 | N/A | 6.5 | 7   | 7.25         | 7.28            | 0.03        |
| GPFB16  | 5.5 | 5   | N/A | 8.5 | N/A | 6   | 7   | 7   | 7   | 7.5 | 8   | 8   | 5.25         | 7.38            | 2.13        |
| BBFB17  | 6.5 | 4   | 8   | 8   | 7.5 | 7.5 | 8   | 7   | 7.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 7   | 5.25         | 7.40            | 2.15        |
| DTMB18  | 7   | 5   | 7   | 7   | 7.5 | 7.5 | 8   | 8   | 7   | 8   | 7   | 7   | 6            | 7.40            | 1.40        |
| FFFB19  | 8.5 | 8.5 | 8   | 8   | 7   | 8   | N/A | 7   | 8   | 7.5 | 7   | 7.5 | 8.50         | 7.56            | -0.94       |
| VPFB20  | 9   | 9   | 7.5 | 8   | 7   | 8   | 8   | 8   | N/A | 6   | 8   | 7.5 | 9            | 7.56            | -1.44       |
| IGFB21  | 7.5 | 5.5 | 6   | 8   | 8   | 7.5 | 7   | 8   | 8.5 | 8   | 8   | 7.5 | 6.50         | 7.65            | 1.15        |
| ASFB22  | 9   | 8   | N/A | N/A | 8   | 9   | N/A | 8.5 | N/A | 7.5 | 7   | 6.5 | 8.50         | 7.75            | -0.75       |
| EAFB23  | 8.5 | 7   | 8   | 9   | 7.5 | 9   | N/A | 8   | 7.5 | 7   | 7   | 7.5 | 7.75         | 7.83            | 0.08        |
| AFMB24  | 7   | 5.5 | 7   | 7   | 7   | 9   | 8   | N/A | 8   | N/A | 9   | 8   | 6.25         | 7.88            | 1.63        |
| EBFB25  | 7.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 8.5 | 7   | 8.5 | 8   | 7.5 | 7   | 8   | 9   | 9   | 7            | 7.90            | 0.90        |
| GLFB26  | 9   | 10  | 7   | 9   | 8.5 | 9   | 9   | 8.5 | 9   | 9   | 9   | 10  | 9.50         | 8.80            | -0.70       |
| BRFB27  | 10  | 9.5 | 8   | N/A | 10  | N/A | N/A | 9   | 9   | 9   | 9   | 10  | 9.75         | 9.14            | -0.61       |
| Average |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 6.51         | 7.32            | 0.81        |

(between -0.5 and 0.5). The remaining 16 students show improvements included between 0.5 and 4. The results show that 10 students (38.46%) have not improved after the lessons while 16 of them (61.54%) show improvements in their performances.

### Linguistic Features

As mentioned above, Module One focuses on grammar and vocabulary, specifically on the following linguistic features: comparatives, superlatives, idioms and linking words, past simple and vocabulary, past continuous, future with 'will', past perfect and technical words, passive, second conditional, punctuation/recalling past events.

The tables below show the results of the assessment of these linguistic features as produced in the students' writing pieces. Three marks were allocated: 0 for no improvement, 1 for some improvement, and 2 for strong improvement. Zero improvement means that in the written production of the student, there is no sign of the linguistic elements that are the focus of the lesson: for instance, the lesson is based

on the passive voice, but the students do not use it in their written production. Light improvement (1 mark) means that the grammatical point of the lesson is correctly used at least once. Strong improvement (2 marks) means that the linguistic feature is correctly used more than once.

The next table presents the improvement in linguistic features achieved by Class A. As mentioned before, this is the weaker class. This is confirmed by the fact there is only one lesson that has no zeros, namely, the lesson focusing on if-clauses. On the other hand, the lessons that show weakest improvement are the ones focusing on past simple vs continuous and past perfect where there is a majority of marks 1 only.

Table 8 presents the improvement achieved in linguistic features by Class B.

In Class B, the stronger of the two, we can see that there are three lessons that show no zeros, namely, the lessons focusing on comparatives, idioms, past simple, and if-clauses. The lessons with the highest rate of zeros are future with 'will' (five zeros) while all the other lessons have an average of few zeros.

**Table 5.** Class B Students distribution according to marks range in the entry test and in the lessons

| Marks range |     | Entry test | Lessons |
|-------------|-----|------------|---------|
| 0           | 0.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 0.5         | 1   | 0          | 0       |
| 1           | 1.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 1.5         | 2   | 0          | 0       |
| 2           | 2.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 2.5         | 3   | 0          | 0       |
| 3           | 3.5 | 2          | 0       |
| 3.5         | 4   | 0          | 0       |
| 4           | 4.5 | 0          | 0       |
| 4.5         | 5   | 1          | 0       |
| 5           | 5.5 | 3          | 0       |
| 5.5         | 6   | 3          | 0       |
| 6           | 6.5 | 5          | 2       |
| 6.5         | 7   | 2          | 8       |
| 7           | 7.5 | 2          | 7       |
| 7.5         | 8   | 2          | 7       |
| 8           | 8.5 | 1          | 0       |
| 8.5         | 9   | 2          | 1       |
| 9           | 9.5 | 1          | 1       |
| 9.5         | 10  | 2          | 0       |

**Table 6.** Class B Students distribution according to improvement range

| Range |      | Improvement |
|-------|------|-------------|
| -5    | -4.5 | 0           |
| -4.5  | -4   | 0           |
| -4    | -3.5 | 0           |
| -3.5  | -3   | 0           |
| -3    | -2.5 | 0           |
| -2.5  | -2   | 0           |
| -2    | -1.5 | 0           |
| -1.5  | -1   | 1           |
| -1    | -0.5 | 6           |
| -0.5  | 0    | 0           |
| 0     | 0.5  | 3           |
| 0.5   | 1    | 5           |
| 1     | 1.5  | 4           |
| 1.5   | 2    | 1           |
| 2     | 2.5  | 4           |
| 2.5   | 3    | 0           |
| 3     | 3.5  | 0           |
| 3.5   | 4    | 2           |
| 4     | 4.5  | 0           |
| 4.5   | 5    | 0           |

The results of Tables 7 and 8 are represented in percentages in this last table (Table 9) which shows that throughout the ten lessons Class A has a percentage of 12.50% of zeros

while Class B has 8.30%. Furthermore, in terms of writing pieces, Class A has 75 writing pieces that received 1 as a mark (corresponding to 40.80%), while Class B has 82 (corresponding to 36.12%). More importantly, Class A has 86 writing pieces that received 2 as a mark. (corresponding to 46.70%), while Class B has 126 (55.50%). So, the total general improvement in linguistic features for each class adding the writing pieces that received 1 and 2 is 87.50% for Class A, and 91.62% for Class B.

Overall, it can be said that there have been improvements both in the writing skills as well as in the selected linguistic features. It must be noted that both classes have shown signs of improvement despite the fact that towards the end of this module Italian schools had to shift to online teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As reported by the teachers, the unexpected and stressful change had an impact on students' motivation, especially in Class A.

### Motivation

In order to assess motivation, at the end of Module One students were asked to give general feedback about the lessons. In the feedback survey all students said they were satisfied by their progress in grammar and vocabulary as well as in their writing skills in general, and mentioned they expect further improvement by the end of the course. All of them, but one, gave positive feedback about the course and hoped to continue with a similar experience in the future as well. Furthermore, some students underlined the fact that Module One gave them the chance to experience insight of self-awareness, as shown by the following comments:

"I also found out that I love writing, it makes me relax and think about what I am feeling in that moment, so thank you for everything you are making me discover about myself!"

"We have had also the opportunity to express ourselves and our thoughts with stories in a wonderful language."

"I think this work has helped me so much to develop my imagination."

"I think the work done during this year was important because it allowed me to write without any fear of making mistakes."

"I think the work I have done has been very useful for me both to broaden my vocabulary and to acquire some competence on how to write an English text and more importantly to find a place where I can express myself."

"I would like to be more creative by the end of the year".

Both teachers also expressed satisfaction about Module One. According to the teacher of Class A, although the class suffered the consequences of the pandemic lockdown (general stress, difficulties in rearranging the lessons, adapting to online mode), the results were satisfying. "Generally speaking, students showed interest in the course. Most of them improved their writing skills. During the pandemic though, since we had to continue online, the organization of the lessons became more difficult and some lost motivation. However, the overall results are satisfying."

The teacher of Class B also expressed satisfaction for the writing results of her students in the first ten lessons: "In my opinion, the largest part of my class has improved their

**Table 7.** Improvement in linguistic features in Class A

| Student | Comparatives | Superlatives | Idioms and vocabulary | Past simple | Future with will | Past simple and continuous | If-clauses | Past perfect | Passive form | Recalling memories |
|---------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| FRMA1   | N/A          | 2            | 0                     | N/A         | N/A              | N/A                        | N/A        | N/A          | N/A          | N/A                |
| LPMA2   | 1            | 1            | 0                     | 1           | 2                | N/A                        | 2          | 0            | N/A          | 0                  |
| RCFA3   | 1            | 1            | 1                     | 1           | N/A              | 1                          | 2          | 1            | N/A          | 0                  |
| DSMA4   | 0            | 0            | 1                     | 0           | N/A              | 1                          | 1          | 0            | 1            | 1                  |
| EBMA5   | 1            | 0            | 1                     | 1           | 1                | 0                          | N/A        | 0            | 1            | 1                  |
| MPFA6   | 0            | 1            | 2                     | 2           | N/A              | 1                          | 1          | 1            | 1            | 0                  |
| FAMA7   | 1            | 1            | 0                     | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 0            | 1            | 1                  |
| EFFA8   | 2            | 2            | 1                     | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 1            | 1            | 2                  |
| MAFA9   | 1            | 2            | 1                     | 1           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 1            | 2            | 1                  |
| CPMA10  | 2            | 1            | 1                     | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 1            | 1            | 1                  |
| SMMA11  | 2            | N/A          | 2                     | 2           | 1                | N/A                        | 2          | 2            | 2            | 2                  |
| BAFA12  | 1            | 0            | 1                     | 1           | N/A              | N/A                        | 1          | N/A          | N/A          | 2                  |
| GSFA13  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 1           | 0                | 1                          | 2          | 2            | 1            | 2                  |
| ALFA14  | N/A          | N/A          | 1                     | 1           | 2                | N/A                        | 2          | 1            | 2            | 2                  |
| SRMA15  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 1           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 2            | 2            | 2                  |
| GFFA16  | 1            | 2            | N/A                   | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 1            | 0            | 2                  |
| JDFA17  | 2            | 0            | 1                     | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | N/A          | 2            | 0                  |
| CEFA18  | N/A          | 0            | 1                     | 1           | N/A              | 1                          | 2          | 1            | 0            | 1                  |
| CLMA19  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 2            | 2            | 2                  |
| FCFA20  | N/A          | 2            | 2                     | N/A         | N/A              | N/A                        | 2          | 2            | 2            | 1                  |
| MVFA21  | 1            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 2            | 2            | 2                  |
| LMMA22  | N/A          | N/A          | N/A                   | N/A         | 2                | 1                          | 2          | 2            | 2            | 1                  |

**Table 8.** Linguistic Improvement in Class B

| Student | Comparatives | Superlatives | Idioms and vocabulary | Past simple | Future with will | Past simple and continuous | If-clause | Past perfect | Passive form | Punctuation |
|---------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| EFFB1   | 1            | N/A          | N/A                   | 1           | 0                | 1                          | 1         | N/A          | N/A          | 0           |
| VZFB2   | 2            | 0            | 1                     | 2           | 1                | N/A                        | 2         | 1            | 2            | 1           |
| GFFB3   | 2            | 2            | N/A                   | 2           | N/A              | N/A                        | N/A       | 1            | 0            | N/A         |
| EMFB4   | 2            | 2            | 1                     | N/A         | 1                | N/A                        | 2         | 2            | 2            | 2           |
| AMFB5   | 1            | 1            | 1                     | 1           | 0                | 1                          | 1         | 0            | 1            | 2           |
| ELFB6   | 2            | 1            | N/A                   | 1           | 2                | 1                          | 2         | 2            | 2            | 1           |
| VCFB7   | 2            | 1            | 1                     | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2         | 1            | 2            | 1           |
| FMMB8   | 1            | 1            | 2                     | 1           | 2                | 0                          | 1         | 1            | 0            | 0           |
| CGFB9   | 2            | 2            | N/A                   | 2           | N/A              | 1                          | 2         | 2            | N/A          | 2           |
| KFFB10  | N/A          | 1            | N/A                   | 2           | 0                | 1                          | 2         | 1            | 1            | 1           |
| STMB11  | 1            | 2            | N/A                   | 2           | 0                | 1                          | 2         | 2            | 2            | 2           |
| ACFB12  | 2            | 0            | N/A                   | 2           | 2                | 1                          | 2         | 1            | N/A          | 2           |
| FCFB13  | N/A          | 2            | N/A                   | 2           | 1                | 1                          | N/A       | 2            | 2            | N/A         |
| ACFB14  | 2            | 1            | 2                     | 1           | 2                | 1                          | 2         | 1            | N/A          | 2           |
| ATMB15  | 2            | 0            | 2                     | 2           | 1                | 1                          | 1         | 1            | N/A          | 2           |
| GPFB16  | N/A          | 2            | N/A                   | 1           | 2                | 1                          | 2         | 1            | 2            | 2           |
| BBFB17  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | 1                | 2                          | 2         | 1            | 1            | 1           |
| DTMB18  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | 1                | 1                          | 2         | 0            | 2            | 1           |

(Contd...)

**Table 8.** (Continued)

| Student | Comparatives | Superlatives | Idioms and vocabulary | Past simple | Future with will | Past simple and continuous | If-clause | Past perfect | Passive form | Punctuation |
|---------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| FFFB19  | 2            | 2            | 1                     | 2           | 2                | N/A                        | 2         | 2            | 1            | 1           |
| VPFB20  | N/A          | 0            | 1                     | 0           | 1                | 1                          | 1         | N/A          | 0            | 1           |
| IGFB21  | 2            | 2            | 1                     | 2           | 1                | 1                          | 2         | 2            | 2            | 1           |
| ASFB22  | N/A          | N/A          | 1                     | 2           | 2                | N/A                        | 2         | N/A          | 2            | 0           |
| EAFB23  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | 2                | N/A                        | 2         | 1            | 2            | 1           |
| AFMB24  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | N/A              | 1                          | 2         | 2            | N/A          | 2           |
| EBFB25  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | 0                | 1                          | 2         | 1            | 1            | 2           |
| GLFB26  | 2            | 2            | 2                     | 2           | 1                | 2                          | 2         | 2            | 2            | 2           |
| BRFB27  | N/A          | 2            | N/A                   | N/A         | 2                | N/A                        | 2         | 2            | 2            | 2           |

**Table 9.** General Improvement in Linguistic Features in both classes in Module One

| Variations<br>Marks | Class A   |            | Class B   |            |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|                     | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| 0                   | 23        | 12.50%     | 19        | 8.30%      |
| 1                   | 75        | 40.80%     | 82        | 36.12%     |
| 2                   | 86        | 46.70%     | 126       | 55.50%     |
|                     | 184       |            | 227       |            |

writing abilities and they have boosted their vocabulary, also thanks to the materials and the resources shared like the lesson on punctuation and the list of new adjectives that were provided with the course.” In particular, the teacher noticed that students were able to offer insights into their feelings and thoughts. “Reading their thoughts written on the paper allowed me to discover hidden abilities and step-by-step I saw them taking courage and writing even longer compositions in which they exposed their fears, their creativity, their wishes and, sometimes, sad experiences of life.” Based on the feedback given by this teacher as well as by some of the students quoted above, we can see that learning a second language through literature can also start a passion for creative writing.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this research was to investigate the possibility to develop L2 writing skills, language features and motivation using literary texts as samples of real – and rich – language. To this effect, a new course syllabus that included a wide range of literary texts was devised. The first part of this syllabus (Module One) was trialed with two classes of Italian high school students.

### 1. Have students improved their writing skills?

Quantitative analysis shows that both classes have improved their writing skills after being exposed to ten literary texts and the relevant writing exercises. Using the information generated from above, we can see that 62% of the students (six boys and seven girls) improved in class A, and 73% (5 boys and 14 girls) in class B, with

a general 0.34 improvement rate for class A and 0.81 for class B. If we consider the distribution of marks of the entry test and we compare them with the distribution of marks of the lessons, the data show that fewer students are in the unsatisfactory mark range after the 10 lessons in both classes. In particular in class A there are 9 students in the unsatisfactory range before the lessons and 8 after the lessons, while in class B there are 9 before the lessons and zero after. On the other hand, if we consider the satisfactory mark range and above, there are 12 students in that range before the lesson and 13 after the lessons in class A, while 17 before and 26 after in class B. With regards to the frequency of improvement, in class A students are included in a span that goes from -2.5 to 2.5, with 10 students (47.61%) showing a significant improvement included between 0.5 and 2.5. In class B students are included in a wider span that goes from -1.5 to 4, with 16 students (61.54%) showing a higher significant improvement, between 0.5 and 4. The data confirm that, although in class B the improvement is more evident, we can see signs of significant positive change in the writing skill performance of both classes.

### 2. Have students improved their grammar?

Quantitative analysis reports improvement in the linguistic features that were the focus of the ten lessons. The total amount of writing pieces assessed in both classes during the course is 411 (excluding 79 N/A) the total amount of writing pieces that show improvement (marks 1 and 2) is 373 corresponding to 90.75%. On the other hand, the total amount of writing pieces that show no improvement (marked zeros) is 42, which corresponds to 10.21%.

### 3. Have the students improved motivation?

As for qualitative analysis, the feedback provided by the learners showed that the use of literary texts enhanced their motivation and personal growth. This mostly happened thanks to the fact that students could find several ways of connecting the texts to their own personal feelings, experiences and thoughts, and this personal connection triggered a process of critical thinking and self-reflection. This was also confirmed by the feedback of one of the two teachers as quoted above. However, it is also important to specify that the data reported in this article refers to Module One only,

which is just the first part of the syllabus. Further research is needed in order to confirm this positive outcome, especially when it comes to analyzing improvements in personal growth and multicultural awareness, which is the focus of Module Three.

As explained above, the choice of using literature was motivated by the necessity to use real language, so that the learners can be exposed not just to the language but also the style and the mood or thoughts expressed by the author. In this way students can learn by using the writers' patterns, vocabulary and idioms as models. In fact, as stated by Brown & Yule (1983: 52 in Gilmore 2007) students need to have realistic models of proficient users for them to learn how to manage conversation effectively in the target language, and the same can be said for writing skills.

Although the focus of this part of the syllabus was on grammar and vocabulary, the findings from this study show that learners exposed to literature develop some degree of self-reflection, and when facing their own written production they are more likely to be open and willing to share intimate thoughts and feelings, experiences, including happy memories as well as sad moments, insights of self-awareness, critical thinking about social and environmental issues, love and even traumas in some cases.

#### FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

As specified, the above mentioned results refer to the first part of the syllabus offered to 49 state school students. In this moment other data are being collected in a state school and in a private language school involving about 150 students. Since the last part of the syllabus focuses on motivation and personal growth, therefore, other results in this area will be analyzed in the near future. With this in mind, drawing on Wellek and Warren's (1956) classification, texts could be used in two different ways: either extrinsically, by asking specific students questions aiming at giving input for self-reflections and personal growth (e.g. do you think meditation can be good for you?) or intrinsically, by offering students texts where the characters cope with feelings or situations students could relate to (e.g. have you ever been in that situation? Have you ever felt this way?). In using literary excerpts, teachers should have a similar approach as in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) where non-linguistic subjects and foreign languages are learnt simultaneously. This process takes place not "in" but "through" the foreign language in an integrated model that uses language as a vehicle for information (Pavón, 2014) where teachers play their role as facilitators of the teaching and learning of content. The focus should be on the student as the main agent of content-related learning. As Maley (2012) says, students who are exposed to literature develop a more critical understanding of themselves and of others in a rapidly changing world.

#### END NOTE

1. In Italy, at the end of middle school (Scuola Media), students can proceed to specialized high schools. The high

schools that specialize in humanities and science are called 'Liceo'. Here the second language is part of the curriculum for five years. In the first two years the focus is on grammar while in the last three years the focus shifts to literature.

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