# Adolescents' Reading Motivation: Which Dimensions?

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**Abstract:** *What lies behind reading behaviors? What dimensions form the construct of adolescent reading motivation, and how can these dimensions be measured? What is the role of the school library in recognizing, describing, and acting on these drives? A recent survey of 1,500 Italian students led to the emergence of interesting perspectives from which to approach the topic, including the availability of a new psychometric scale for measuring reading motivation.*

**Keywords:** *Reading motivation, adolescents, survey, scale, field research*

## Introduction

### Who doesn't read in Italy, and why?

The foundations of this research work began with the analysis of the results of OECD surveys on functional illiteracy (Eleuteri, 2019) and the comparison of those results with statistical data on Italian readers and nonreaders.

In the last century, the world of libraries and education has focused on fighting illiteracy. Studies over the past few decades have reported an increasingly small number of people (especially in the Western world) who cannot read and write. However, these studies also have noted a growing phenomenon of transforming instrumental illiteracy into functional illiteracy. That is, the people who have learned to read and write and who can decode a text but who cannot grasp its deep meaning or make inferences about it and thus transform it into knowledge and critical thinking.

The neuroscientific knowledge available to us (Dehaene, 2007; Wolf, 2007) suggests that the only way to cultivate the ability to read is to reiterate the behavior, that is, to read.

For the transformation to take place, for decoding readers to become fluent readers, a great deal of effort by educational and cultural agencies, primarily libraries and schools, is required. The question arises then of whether there is a time in the lives of individuals when this behavior fails. The Italian data suggests that the time is late adolescence.

As can be seen in Figure 1, there is strong growth in the number of readers from ages 6 to 14, and then the number of readers slowly declines in adolescence and loses up to 20 percentage points at older ages. On average, only 40 percent of Italians have read at least one book in the previous year.

**Figure 1:** *Distribution of the number of readers over the years and by age group (ISTAT data).*
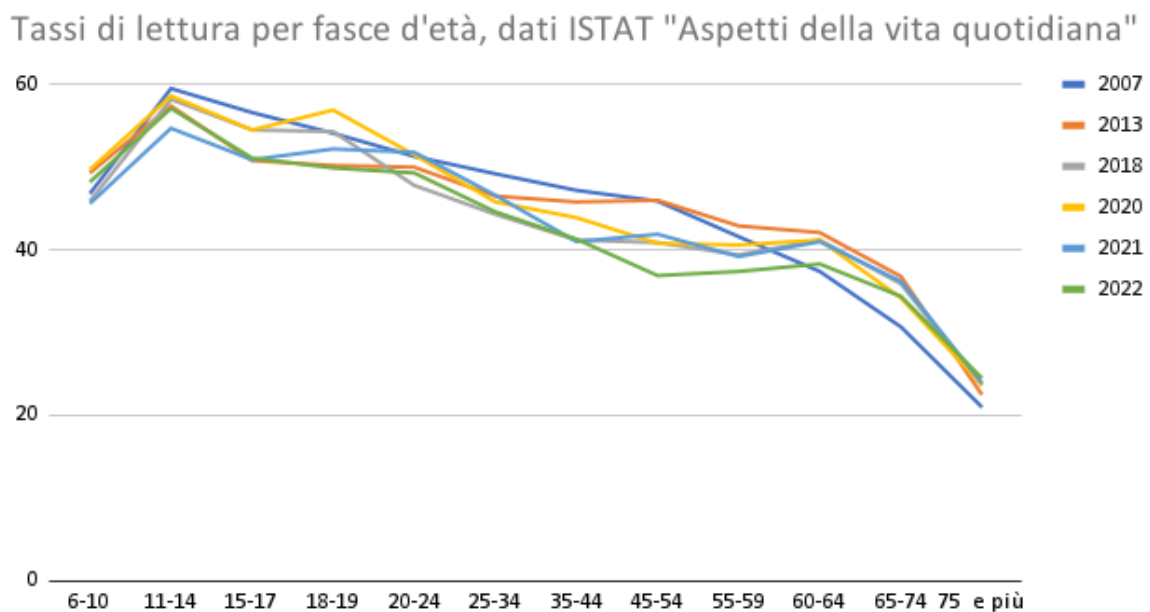


These data match perfectly with the PIRLS, PISA and PIAAC surveys regarding population outcomes in prose literacy and information literacy. Our role as librarians, and especially as school librarians, accompanying young readers towards an adult life among books, is crucial in trying to stop or at least mitigate this phenomenon. For this reason, it was essential to investigate more deeply the motivations that drive adolescents, the first age group to begin to stop reading,  to read or not to read.

**Preliminary Studies**

The first exploratory study started in May 2018 in three schools in Rome (100 students, aged 11 to 21). The methodology adopted for the study was an innovative qualitative inquiry tool, the use of debate as a means of facilitating the expression of opinions, concepts and beliefs about reading (Eleuteri, 2021). This methodology offered the possibility of incorporating inquiry as an integral part of the curricular offerings which facilitated collaboration with teachers and at the same time offered students the opportunity to experience a new and stimulating mode of teaching. The meetings were presented to the students as "a rhetoric workshop." After a brief presentation of the *ars rhetorica* and its applications, the debate topic was presented in a collective brainstorming session. The students were asked to divide into groups to challenge each other in a debate on the pros and cons of reading. Each group was asked to prepare to defend both positions, with arguments gathered from all team members.

The use of this method made it possible to collect rich and deep data, both through the arguments drawn from the written notes and brainstorming and through the analysis of the debates, which also took into account the nonverbal components of the arguments expressed. This debate methodology was repeated in Florence in 2021 and in Milan in 2022, resulting in a sample of about 300 boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 25. The data were collected into recurring categories, which in turn were divided into 5 factors (Table 1).

**Table 1:** *Motivations to read (or not to read) from the preliminary debate studies*

| | **Preferences** | **Psychological experiences** | | **Cognitive Experiences** | **Logistic** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Personal and emotional sphere** | **Social sphere** | | |
| P R O S | Hobby  Importance/duty  Free choice | Emotions/pleasure  Engagement/ mediated experience  Creative protagonism | Emotional intelligence  Sharing | Lexicon/ language/ writing  Knowledge  Exercise/is good for your | Endurance/ practicality  Usefulness Accessibility |

| | | Anthropopoiesis (the process of self-building and cultural acquisition) | | brain | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C O N S | Other preferences/ lack of interest<br><br>Inapt or obsolete medium<br><br>It takes too much time / it's a waste of time | Boring/ I don't feel like doing it<br><br>Bad influence/illusion | Isolation<br><br>Obligation/ anxiety /stress<br><br>Social context | It hurts/ makes you feel bad<br><br>Tiring/difficult/ complex | Uncomfortable / heavy<br><br>Too expensive/ waste of paper<br><br>Collateral effects |

The comparison between the motivations that emerged from the debate data and the data collected by ISTAT (through questionnaires with pre-established items) led to the emergence of themes previously unseen, though not unknown to insiders. For example, some motivations for non-reading that emerged from the debate data included the feelings of isolation and delusion, the state of anxiety and obligation, and social pressure. On the other side, the pro-reading debate data highlighted the motivations of readers (primarily emotional involvement, creative protagonism, and individual pursuit). Together, these themes provided a more complete framework for planning activities for promoting reading.

From these first five themes or categories, a more extensive quantitative survey was structured in order to measure and analyze motivations with a larger sample of Italian adolescents and to relate these motivations to other influencing factors such as access to books and other texts and access to cultural behaviors and activities.

**Construct Definition**

In the beginning, an approach as open and flexible as possible was adopted, in order to suspend any pre-existing definitions and to accommodate those proposed by the young debate participants. In structuring the later development of the research, precise definitions of the constructs being investigated were required, in order to facilitate reflection on the constructs.

First of all, what is reading? When we think of reading, thanks to the marvelous associative mechanism that is our brain, the first mental images to appear to us will probably

be those of a book and someone intent on reading it, perhaps in silence, in a setting that is highly dependent on the past experiences we have had with reading. For some, it will be an anonymous time to be read while hunched over a flat and uncomfortable desk; for others, an adventure book that keeps us awake under the covers; and for still others, an interesting essay to be read comfortably sinking into an armchair.

This little picture that we title 'reading' and of which each of us has a personalized version, in itself involves several definitional problems. Do we focus on the book object, on the person reading it, or on the invisible action that is taking place between the two? From what disciplinary approach should we observe it?

Librarianship will answer that that is its field. Its five basic laws are designed specifically to allow the scene to unfold, that is, to bring book and reader together as efficiently and spontaneously as possible.

Cognitive psychology and neuroscience will want to step in to say that for the encounter not to remain an end in itself, there is a need for the subject (the person) to have acquired certain skills and familiarity with the object; reading is a complex process and it is not enough to place book and human together for it to happen.

Sociology and anthropology might also come in at this point, objecting that it is not even enough for the subject to be able to read, it is needed for his sociocultural context to lead him to consider reading as a rewarding activity, and ... at this point narratology, semiotics, statistics and a whole other sequel of disciplines would burst in, each with its own specific perspective on how the picture should be painted, which subject is most important and what it takes to make it happen.

Talking about reading, in any of its forms, implies a whole series of assumptions that each of us has internalized in our human experience: a series of categorizations of what is meant by reading, book, reader, libraries, which changes, sometimes by a great deal, between individual and individual, building a dense web of imaginaries and expectations that we often fail to take into account when chatting about the subject (Eleuteri, 2020).

For this study, we chose to define the construct of reading with an approach that looks at the phenomenon from various vantage points and condenses it into three words:

technology, ability and behavior. All three, like the corners of the Aristotelian rhetorical triangle (ethos, logos and pathos), belong to separate but interacting realms in the relationships that individuals establish with the act of reading.

**Reading is a technology** by functional expansion of its counterpart, writing, invented as a means of enhancing human abilities in communicating, storing, preserving and transmitting in time and space information and knowledge. This characteristic of reading results in its continuous evolution from the point of view of writing systems, media and ways of approaching written text in its myriad variations; in short, it creates diversification and an infinite potential for combinations.

**Reading is a skill** because we are not born to read. Our bodies do not have a designated area for reading. We have only been reading for 5,000 years! We have to learn to do it through exercise and explicit teaching. Every time an individual learns to read, he or she makes connections between brain areas designated for various other functions (e.g., visual, phonological, associative). This involves a similar process but at the same time the process is customized for each individual's neuro-specificity. We all start from scratch and advance, each in his or her own way, in the skills of reading and comprehension but this process is neither taken for granted nor automatic and, above all, it can suffer setbacks and even regression (as is the phenomenon of return illiteracy). Therefore, the task of educators and librarians is not only to teach reading but to enable individuals to maintain this skill and implement it in order to enjoy it to its full potential.

Finally, **reading is a behavior** because one cannot know how to read without reading, and it is this behavior that is the object of our promotion practices, which acts on the other two characteristics, directing them toward different types of evolution. As we know, all human (and animal) behavior is enacted under the influence of different drives, also called motivations.

We come, next, to the construct that is the subject of our study: reading motivation. Motivation stands out as a crucial component when investigating reading behavior (McGeown et al., 2015; Schaffner & Malik, 2016; Schiefele et al., 2012), especially among children and adolescents. Because of this, studies have multiplied over the years, trying to find a shared definition of what appears to be a multidimensional construct, without,

however, finding a definitive agreement (Conradi, Jang & McKenna, 2014). Nevertheless, we can generally define reading motivation as:

> *A drive (intrinsic or extrinsic) to repeat reading behavior more or less intensively and frequently depending on certain personal, environmental and functional variables.*

This definition gives rise to the need to thoroughly investigate precisely those variables, or factors, that influence reading behavior, conditioning individuals' choices in this regard.

**Research goals and theoretical framework**

The categories that emerged from the qualitative studies formed the basis for the theoretical formulation of the subsequent survey. Comparison of the factors that emerged with those theorized by other international research (Guthrie & Klauda, 2015; Henk, Marinak & Melnick, 2013; Kingston et al., 2020; McKenna, 2012; Pitcher et al., 2007, Schutte & Malouff, 2007) on the measurement of motivation to read led to the framing of the study within three main theories:

- **Self-Determination Theory** (Ryan & Deci, 2018). This theory posits that the fundamental factor for motivation is the individual's ability and degree of freedom of choice. The hypothesis is that, as the degree of free choice decreases, the level of individual motivation and its appropriation as an identity trait of reading-related practices and habits decreases, and vice versa.

- **Self-efficacy theory** (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 2005). This theory posits that the fundamental factor for motivation is an individual's perception of competence regarding a certain task, especially at adolescence, which in turn depends on the internalized concept of intelligence (dynamic or static) and learned coping strategies. The hypothesis is that, as the individual's perceived degree of competence (actual or potential) about his or her reading and learning skills decreases, so does the individual's level of motivation to repeat reading behaviors, regardless of their degree of freedom, and vice versa.

- **Somatic marker theory** (Damasio, 1995). This theory predicts a very close integration between bodily emotional states and mental schemas of the individual, who, based on interactions and experiences, creates "markers," i.e., switches that associate a concept or action with a certain anticipatory emotional state as a learned schema from the positive or negative outcome of a choice. The hypothesis is that, as positive experiences related to the act of reading decrease (reinforcers of internal origin, such as emotions, sense of efficacy and fulfillment of epistemic curiosity) or external origin (such as family, peer group or social organs' cues such as school), the

level of influence and establishment of somatic markers suitable for the avoidance of reading behavior increase, and vice versa.

Building on this framing, research goals were further delineated, refining the original question (why do adolescents read or not read?) into four empirical objectives:

1. Theorize which factors make up the "reading motivation" construct
2. Create an instrument that can measure the overall construct and its dimensions
3. Establish whether motivation and reading behaviors have a correlation relationship
4. Hypothesize intervention strategies to enhance motivation and/or its factors

The ultimate goal of the research work was to obtain data and intervention hypotheses useful for conscious and concrete action in the cultural field by librarians, teachers and school librarians.

**Goal 1:** *Theorize which factors make up the "reading motivation" construct*

The comparison and intersection of the three theories related to the field of reading-writing, was combined with macro-categories that emerged from the exploratory investigation, which, together with the analysis of selected pre-existing scales, led to the theorization of a five-factor psychometric scale, each dimension related to the initial macro-categories: From Preferences comes the factor of Self-Determination; from Personal and Emotional Sphere, that of Propensity; from Cognitive Experiences, that of Self-Efficacy; from Social Sphere, that of Social Recognition; from Logistics, that of Utility. The latter two mostly fall in the domain of Extrinsic Motivation; the first two, in that of Intrinsic Motivation. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, straddles the two domains.

- **Self-Determination**: When reading becomes a foundational component of individual identity, so much so that it responds to the need for self-actualization and generates feelings of pride, experiencing a need for the reiteration of reading behavior also in an anthropopoietic (self-building) and self-affirming key.

  On the other hand, the exclusion of the appellation of reader and the perception of reading as something foreign from oneself and for which one experiences a type of feeling that may lie on a continuum ranging from indifference to contempt.

- **Propensity**: When one experiences an inner drive toward reading that influences one's attitude toward it, arising from the association between the experience of

reading and the experience of positive emotions. Conversely, an association of the act of reading with emotional experiences of discomfort, boredom and stress denotes the establishment of somatic marking of a negative sign, which affects the degree of interest and may lead to avoidance or even phobic behaviors toward reading.

- **Self-Efficacy**: When one perceives oneself as competent in reading and able to improve one's reading skills through commitment and reiteration, driven by one's need for autonomy and supported by adequate self-esteem, perceiving text, even complex text, as a stimulus to improve and a challenge that one is able to meet, and then derive satisfaction from it. Self-efficacy rate is strongly correlated with a model of intelligence as a dynamic factor and with an attribution of successes and failures to variables that can be manipulated by the individual. Self-efficacy can be formed through comparison with others, through scholastic evaluation and on the basis of experiences had with the written medium, defining the possibilities and strategies for improvement that the individual thinks he or she can and knows how to adopt.
  Conversely, an attribution of success to external causes independent of one's own actions and a static model of intelligence, combined with frequent failures and excessive competition, may lead to perceiving the act of reading as requiring excessive effort, thus generating a feeling of anxiety that could create learned helplessness.

- **Social Recognition**: When there is perceived general acceptance, esteem and interest from reference figures and peer group with respect to reading and status as a reader, responding to needs for security and belonging, which require a certain degree of gratification and reinforcement, especially in individuals with a low level of intrinsic motivation and a strong need for recognition and attention. The degree of perceived social recognition interacts strongly with social practice, sharing behaviors, and feelings of esteem and trust, which are therefore influenced by others' judgments about the act of reading. A strong need for social recognition associated with a positive perception of reading facilitates the reiteration of the behavior.
  Conversely, the perception of negative judgment and alienation of the practice from the values promulgated by family, society, and peer group (especially through direct observation) could generate feelings of shame and embarrassment, perhaps leading to reading avoidance behaviors and to ostracism (in some cases, bullying) of readers.

- **Utility**: When one considers reading or even just the status of being a reader as a useful means of obtaining benefits external to the act of reading itself, such as success in school or work.
  On the other hand, there is a conception of reading as a useless and obsolete activity of low priority or even detrimental to the achievement of one's goals.

These initial five factors were expected to measure the construct of reading motivation, considering intrinsic drives as more powerful and stable than extrinsic ones. However, they were subjected to large-scale item-pool and validation (n=1579), and the factor analysis performed on the results led to their recombination with interesting implications.

The factors of Self-Determination and Propensity underwent convergence when the item-pool was skimmed by a panel of experts expressing the degree of relevance to the theorized factors. The factorial analysis of the initial 94 items confirmed the convergence, and Self-determination and Propensity were combined into a single first factor, titled **Disposition to Read** ($\alpha$= .938). Disposition to Read defines the propensity to read that influences attitudes toward it, arising from the association between the experience of reading and the experience of positive emotions such as pleasure, a sense of escapism, tranquility, and the satisfaction of one's epistemic curiosity to the point of experiencing flow. The full presence of the factor determines the embodiment of the reader's habitus as a foundational component of individual identity, so much so that it responds to the need for self-actualization and generates feelings of pride. A need for reiteration of reading behavior is also experienced from an anthropopoietic and self-affirming perspective. The term "disposition," which is slightly different semantically from propensity and attitude, was chosen in place of self-determination to emphasize the gradualness inherent in it, as a continuum ranging from slight propensity to full establishment as readers (self-determination) and therefore explicit at the behavioral level as a positive, neutral or negative disposition toward the reading object, taking a cue from the definition of "attitude" given by McKenna's model (McKenna, 1994). Related to the categories that emerged in exploratory investigations, "disposition" contains "psychological experiences" (emotions, pleasure), "creative protagonism" (imagination, impersonation) and "Anthropopoiesis."

At the opposite end of the Disposition to Read spectrum is the exclusion of the appellation of reader and the perception of reading as something foreign from oneself and for which one has a type of feeling ranging from indifference to contempt. Relative to the categories that emerged in the exploratory surveys, it contains "I prefer other/not interested" and "boring/not feeling like it." This attitude should be investigated further by relating it to the other scales.

The factor of **Self-Efficacy** ($\alpha$= .809) is the most solidly delineated in the international literature and remained unchanged, while Social Recognition and Usefulness, which came out well-marked from the item pool, underwent a reshuffling in factor analysis that is a source of interesting reflections. From the initial two factors, three were in fact delineated, each with specific characteristics attributable to the peculiarities of the adolescent world.

The first novelty introduced by the factor analysis was the amalgamation of part of the items associated with Social Recognition with part of the items that were part of the original factor Utility. The factor of Social Recognition split into two parts: recognition by adult figures (family and teachers) and recognition by peers, isolating the latter part into a factor of its own and converging the family and school component toward the factor of Utility. This creates a novel factor, in which the usefulness of reading behavior is judged by the entire social context represented by the educational figures inside and outside the family circle: Social Utility.

**Social utility** ($\alpha$= .789) falls within the realm of extrinsic motivation and can therefore be defined as a perception of reading behaviors as effective in obtaining external rewards in terms of qualifications, family and school recognition, improvement of one's position as an individual embedded in an evaluating society (e.g., child, student, worker, and so on). Reading or even just the status as a reader is seen as a useful means of obtaining benefits external to the act of reading itself. There is a general perceived acceptance, esteem and interest by reference figures with respect to reading and status as a reader, meeting needs for security and belonging, which need a certain degree of gratification and reinforcement, especially in individuals with a low level of intrinsic motivation and a strong need for recognition and attention.

The Social Utility factor also contains the individual's beliefs developed in relation to his growing environment and his value systems related to the activity of reading. School, family, and future work are conceived as contexts closely related to the educational figures who inhabit them (perhaps, at this age, still indistinguishable, as opposed to, as we shall see, the peer group) to the point of relating even individual abilities (such as speaking better or acquiring information) as a function of the people who value or recognize them as valuable.

Clues to this totalizing perception of the social context had already been detected by the prepositions that emerged from the exploratory surveys, making the macro-categories of "importance/duty" and "usefulness" part of the factor.

At the opposite end of the Social Utility spectrum is the perception of a clear disconnect between the educational narrative received and its application in the real-life context, or a family and school influence that does not reward reading. Related to the categories that emerged in the exploratory surveys, the Social Utility factor contains the category of "social context" (paternalism, elitism).

The other factor that breaks away from the original factor of Social Recognition to take the form of a dimension of its own is that of **Peer Recognition** ($\alpha=$ .687). In adolescence, the relationship with the peer group becomes increasingly important both for the development of what we used to call the "social brain" (Bainbridge, 2009; Steinberg, 2014) and for a growth function closely related to the contrast with the adult world and the experience of the liminal stage of adolescence (Aime & Pietropolli Charmet, 2014; Casoni, 2008). For this reason, the emergence of an independent factor measuring the degree of acceptance of reading behaviors by peers and their support in replicating these behaviors seems very fitting. The degree of perceived social recognition interacts strongly with social practice, sharing behaviors, and feelings of esteem and trust, which are influenced by others' judgments about the act of reading. Related to the categories that emerged in the exploratory surveys, Peer Recognition contains the macro categories of "Sharing" and "Social relationships."

At the opposite end of the Peer Recognition spectrum, a negative score for the factor may signify peer perceptions of indifference or even hostility toward reading behaviors, leading in some cases to feelings of shame and embarrassment, even prompting avoidance and ostracism behaviors toward reading, as it is considered an undesirable practice for being part of the group. Related to the categories that emerged in the exploratory surveys, Peer Recognition contains "Isolation" and "Anti-social".

Finally, the second novelty introduced by factor analysis was the isolation of a completely negative independent factor: **Social Disadvantage** ($\alpha=$ .732). This factor is projected toward the factor of Usefulness in external reality but without specific reference to

school and family contexts. Social Disadvantage takes the form of a perception of reading as a useless and obsolete activity, not only not useful but precisely counterproductive to the achievement of one's economic and social goals. Social Disadvantage also encompasses, among the categories that emerged from the exploratory surveys, "Isolation," "Uselessness/obsolescence," and "Waste" (of time and money).

**Goal 2:** *Create an instrument that can measure the overall construct and its dimensions*

The "School and Leisure" survey allowed the initial five factors to be tested and validated in the field, transforming them into the final five dimensions of the motivational scale. In fact, the construction of the scale (Eleuteri, 2023) was followed by its inclusion in a more extensive questionnaire consisting of four sections: Leisure; Interlude; Readers and Reading; and Economic, Social and Cultural Status.

- **Leisure**: The "Leisure" section contained five frequency scales, which collected items divided into categories of cultural activities (Movies and Theatre, Reading and Writing, Social Networks, Sports and Games, Music and Art) for which the respondent was asked to indicate the frequency of reiteration. After each category, an optional open-ended question was included in which the respondent was asked to suggest a specific type of cultural product (useful for both statistical and educational purposes). The scale categories were designed to include reading among other types of cultural enjoyment and media use, without diminishing the value of any of these. Within each category were different types of activities, ranging from a lesser degree of involvement (watching movies on TV) to a more active type of enjoyment (seeing a movie at the cinema) to full first-person involvement (creating audiovisual content). This made it possible to collect important data on the media diet of readers and nonreaders, both from the perspective of types of activities and the degree of engagement and application of creativity.

  The items on the frequency scale were designed to gather information on both the reiterations of the activities and their occurrence in and out of school: Never (specifying "not even in school"), Rarely (a few times during the year), Every so often (at least once a month), Often (at least once a week), Every day (at least once a day) and Only in school (or for school). A brief look at the results of the scale regarding reading offered interesting suggestions regarding the gender distribution in the different types of reading: girls, as reported by the ISTAT data, read more in general but, if one splits the types of reading, one realizes that this is true for traditional books and blogs, while it is boys who prefer comics and news magazines. Dismaying, on the other hand, are the data on library attendance (practically absent).

- **Interlude:** An interlude was inserted before the motivational scale. The respondent was asked to read one or more of four fragments of literary texts before filling out the motivational scale. The texts were introduced to facilitate the emergence of feelings related to reading; therefore, no comprehension questions were asked about the texts. The texts were chosen taking into account the studies of the potential engagement arising from literary text characteristics, such as style, type of narrative, and point of view of the narrative (Balint et al., 2016; De Graaf et al., 2012; Konijn & Hoorn, 2005; Konijn & Hoorn, 2017; Kuzmikova & Balint, 2019; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2016). The order in which the texts were presented was not random: in first position were placed the most complicated and probably least known texts, and in in third and fourth positions were those theorized as being more appealing to readers (e.g., first-person narration, same age as the protagonist, expression of feelings/actions), especially considering the transmedia links that many children grasped. After the respondents had read one or more texts, the "Readers and Reading" section opened, which contained the motivational scale.

Once the scale was completed, respondents were asked to indicate which text(s) they had previously chosen and why. The respondents had the opportunity to go back and identify which and how many texts they had read (at least one, maximum four), based on whatever features of the text had attracted them: title, first lines, placement on the page, perceived length of the text, prior knowledge. The open-ended section provided space for optional comments.

This open-ended section of the questionnaire, in addition to providing a fresh reading experience suitable for a more likely compilation of the motivational scale, was intended to serve an implicit promotion function, giving students (and teachers) a way to learn about and be intrigued by unlikely texts to be encountered in school. It also gave interesting insights on the choice criteria of readers and nonreaders: readers (those who read at least three of the four texts) preferred the last two, giving reasons such as engagement, personal resonance and genre preferences, while nonreaders tended to choose the first two texts, reporting titles, length and position as choice criterias.

- **Readers and Reading**: this section contained the motivational scale, consisting in its final edition of 41 items, plus 4 control questions. Students were asked to respond by expressing a degree of agreement from 1 to 4 (not at all agree, slightly agree, fairly agree, very agree). The 41 proposed items were presented in a mixed order of factors (12 for Disposition to Read, 10 for Self-Efficacy, 9 for Social Usefulness, 5 for Peer Recognition, and 5 for Social Disadvantage).

- **ESCS:** The ESCS (Economic, Social and Cultural Status) section collected data on each respondent's self-perception, recent emotional experience, school life, family background, and the presence of cultural items in the home. In articulating this section of the questionnaire, the main component variables of the Index and other variables regarding the subject's mental/physical and relational well-being were taken into account, in addition to collecting demographic data such as gender and age for statistical purposes. A special question, a gradient scale designed to obtain data on subjects' self-perception in the individual and social spheres, was also added to the section so that data could be related to those obtained from the frequency scales and to verify or disprove biases regarding behavioral habits and personality of readers and nonreaders. This section, necessary in large-scale administration but not for application in smaller settings, has been greatly reduced in the published version of the questionnaire.

Seventeen educational institutions from all over Italy participated in the survey, with a total of 1764 questionnaires collected from students (915 girls, 638 boys, and 26 non-binary) aged 13 to 21, and this allowed us to validate the scales and to structure a useful tool for teachers and librarians: the S.T.Li.Mo.L.1.1 questionnaire (in English, S.Le.R.Mo., the School, Leisure and Reading Motivation questionnaire), soon to be available for scientific implementation in other countries.

**Goal 3:** *Establish whether motivation and reading behaviors have a correlation relationship*

Analysis of the survey results led to the collection of important and interesting data on several domains, such as refuting the stereotype of the sloppy and antisocial reader, surveying children's cultural behaviors and preferences, and testing theories of literary engagement. Most importantly, however, it made it possible to achieve the third of the survey's intended goals: to demonstrate the link between motivational factors and reading behaviors. Not only did motivation and reading correlate in all factors (except social disadvantage, as would be expected), but the higher one goes toward intrinsic types of motivation (such as Disposition to Read and Self-Efficacy), the higher the correlation index goes, as is clearly visible in Table 2:

**Table 2:** *Correction relationships between motivational factors and cultural behaviors (a relationship with r >, 3 is considered significant).*

| | | Cultural Behaviors | Music and Theatre | Reading and Writing | Social Networks | Sport and Games | Music and Art |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading Motivation Index | r | **,434** | ,270 | **,596** | -,074 | -,169 | **,315** |
| Reading Disposition | r | **,405** | ,223 | **,621** | -,142 | -,242 | **,307** |
| Self-efficacy | r | **,332** | ,223 | **,400** | -0,009 | -0,002 | ,185 |
| Social Utility | r | **,307** | ,21 | **,361** | 0,001 | -,055 | ,225 |
| Social Disadvantage | r | ,145 | ,100 | ,274 | -,128 | -,202 | ,150 |
| Peer Recognition | r | **,317** | ,217 | **,360** | 0,013 | -,053 | ,243 |

Thus, not only is motivation confirmed as an influential variable on reading behaviors, but also on cultural behaviors in general and on the Music and Art category, which is strongly related to the reading one (r=459).

**Goal 4:** *Hypothesize intervention strategies to enhance motivation and/or its factors*

Finally, the ultimate goal of the research was to be able to apply the constructed tool to a practical context so that it can be used by professionals in the field (especially within school libraries) for:

- Pre and post test use for reading promotion activities evaluation
- Students' reading motivation tracking through the years
- Students' motivation profiling in order to use reading education and promotion techniques matched with specific detected factors.
- Use of the interlude section to test different styles of engagement and stimulate curiosity

The first type of use was tested in some of the schools that took part in the initial survey and then volunteered for a second phase, consisting of testing the free reading hour as a strategy for promoting reading during school hours. Experimental classes were identified for each participating institution, and each experimental class was paired with a control class. The

teachers were required to include at least one hour of free reading per week in the classroom program. The free reading was to be conducted preferably in the school library or at least in a welcoming and comfortable setting other than the classroom. In Italy, students remain in the same class for all subjects, except P.E. and labs. The protocol also called for the use of tools such as the book-sharing shelf and the class reading journal, as well as adherence to the reader's decalogue ("the 10 rights of the reader") theorized by Daniel Pennac (2011) which prohibits evaluation or imposition of readings.

Despite the initial enthusiasm, a number of obstacles prevented the smooth running of the 6-month trial in all classes. In some, legislation related to the pandemic (recall that the trial took place at the turn of 2021-2022) did not allow students to have contact or use book sharing, in others it was not possible to use a space other than the classroom desks, and in still others reading was imposed by the teacher. Unfortunately, while it was not possible to follow the experiments in person, the data collected through observation sheets made it possible to be aware of the various case histories reported by the teachers. The data collected through the administration of the questionnaires before and after the experimentation, and their comparison with those of the control classes, reported encouraging mean differences for those classes that came closest to executing the protocol.

The free reading research will certainly need to be repeated in more favorable and controllable circumstances and environments. Nevertheless, the questionnaire proved to be a useful tool for measuring the changes that occurred in the classes and therefore would be usable for future experimentation. As for the other areas of focus, the tool will be released for free and public use (upon request) at the end of 2023, and data from the next few years are awaited to check its effectiveness and, if necessary, to implement improvements.

## Implications and Conclusions

This small contribution stands as a hopeful example of collaboration between library (as well as pedagogical and social) research and cultural action, in the belief that academia and the library world can increasingly improve dialogue both locally and internationally through the exchange of ideas, projects and data among professionals from around the world. This is why the annual IASL conference was chosen for presenting this research, giving an opportunity

for exchange of knowledge and debate among the various world realities in which the work of school libraries is carried on.

The S.T.Li.Mo.L. (or S.Le.R.Mo.) 1.1 questionnaire is the result of a need that is certainly local, since it stems from the recognition of a fragility of literacy peculiar to Italy, but it also aspires to stand as a useful tool for others in similar realities and as an contribution to the international conversation on reading motivation and its facets.

Motivation for reading is a meeting point between library sciences and human behavioral sciences (complementary but often not communicating in the academic world), a transdisciplinary sphere peculiar to the school library where pedagogy, psychology, sociology and librarianship meet in order to create new knowledge and devise new practices of reading promotion and reading education, through collaboration between information and educational agencies. Collaboration is important, not only to make S.T.Li.Mo.L. a useful tool for other countries and contexts, but especially to support transdisciplinary studies on reading, motivation, and education.

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