

## Reading aloud to address the double inequality\*

### Lettura ad alta voce per affrontare la doppia disuguaglianza

**Alessio Surian**

Professor (Associate) | University Of Padova | [alessio.surian@unipd.it](mailto:alessio.surian@unipd.it)

**Vanessa Candela**

Research fellow | University of Perugia | [vanessacandelak@gmail.com](mailto:vanessacandelak@gmail.com)

**Maria Assunta Rutigliano**

Research fellow | University of Perugia | [mariaassuntarutigliano@outlook.it](mailto:mariaassuntarutigliano@outlook.it)

#### ABSTRACT

The paper presents one exploratory single case study (Yin, 2018) involving the implementation of the Reading Aloud method in the Porta Palazzo district of the Turin municipality in North-West Italy. In general, formal education tests show 'migrant' pupils scoring worse than 'natives' in reading in most countries; this implies a double inequality that is particularly evident in Western European, Nordic, and North American countries where 'migrant' students in most countries have to deal with extra difficulties in both reading and subjective wellbeing (Wang, 2021). Through logbook analysis, specific attention is given to teachers observation of the effects of reading aloud practice and to ways to address reading test performance for Italian pupils with a migrant background that have shown to be significantly and consistently lower when compared with 'native' pupils. The narrative analysis of the teachers logbook observations provides evidence that reading aloud at school has a positive impact upon those children who are coming from families that are not used to read aloud to their children.

**Keywords:** reading aloud, literacy skills, cultural diversity

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**Corresponding Author:** Alessio Surian | [alessio.surian@unipd.it](mailto:alessio.surian@unipd.it)

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## 1. Introduction

In general, formal education tests show ‘migrant’ pupils scoring worse than ‘natives’ in reading in most countries. For example, this is the case with PISA 2018 scores. In such international student assessment programmes results, the ‘migrant’ population also reports lower life satisfaction, happiness, and wellbeing. According to Wang (2021) this implies a double inequality that is particularly evident in Western European, Nordic, and North American countries where ‘migrant’ students in most countries have to deal with extra difficulties in both reading and subjective wellbeing. It must also be noted that in these richer regions the migrant-native gaps are persistent.

PISA results show that the reading test scores for Italian pupils with a migrant background are significantly lower when compared with ‘native’ pupils, with an additional gap between ‘first-’ and ‘second-generation’ children (Catarci, 2018, p. 57).

As PISA scores concern the 15-year-old population, it is particularly interesting to explore ways to prevent such gaps in previous school years. Reading aloud to children is considered one of the most effective strategies for fostering literacy and a range of literacy skills, both at home and within contemporary classrooms. It benefits early vocabulary acquisition, it allows for enriched language exposure and the acquisition of emergent literacy skills – such as phonological awareness and word recognition – that are instrumental for further development in reading while fostering reading comprehension (Merga & Ledger, 2018). This is the subject of the Ad Alta Voce (Reading Aloud) programme that is being reviewed in this paper through one case study concerning Turin (Italy) schools.

The Italian formal education system for the 3-19-year-old population includes the following:

- Pre-primary / Kindergarten school (*scuola dell’infanzia*): for children between 3 and 5 years of age;
- First cycle of education lasting 8 years, including: (a) 5-year primary schooling (*scuola primaria*), for children between 5-6 and 10 years of age; (b) 3-year lower / first cycle secondary school (*scuola secondaria di I grado*), for children between 11 and 13 years of age;
- Second cycle of education including two different options: (a) 5-year Second cycle / upper secondary schooling (*scuola secondaria di II grado*), for students from 14 to 18 years of age (including high schools (*licei*), technical institutes, and vocational institutes); (b) 3-year or 4-year vocational training courses (IFP) (organized by the Regions).

Along with France, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy adopts a ‘common core-uniform integration system’ to address students’ diverse academic abilities, i.e., it provides a common core curriculum to everybody (until 14 years of age), and it manages students’ diverse academic ability by individualised assistance (Dupriez et al., 2008).

## 2. The Educational Context

This study presents one exploratory single case study (Yin, 2018) involving the implementation of the Reading Aloud method in the Porta Palazzo district of the Turin municipality in North-West Italy. The reading aloud method was developed by Prof. Federico Batini (University of Perugia — Chair of Experimental Pedagogy) and his team through field research and validation of experiences based on local, regional and national projects (Batini, 2021; Batini et al., 2022).

The case study focuses on the Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo project which was implemented between June 2020 and June 2022, at the Istituto Comprensivo 2 in Turin.

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The project took place in the Porta Palazzo district which has one of the largest immigrant population in the city. It was supported by the Compagnia San Paolo's 'Riconessioni - Educazione al futuro' fund and by Fondazione per la Scuola. It was designed and implemented by the FISSUF Department (Philosophy, Social, Human and Education Sciences – Chair of Experimental Pedagogy) of the University of Perugia under the supervision of Prof. Federico Batini.

The project offered daily and intensive reading aloud practice by teachers for children and young people. The activities intended to:

- promote inclusion and foster integration in the school and social context;
- fostering learning and mastery of the Italian language through exposure to narratives;
- promote equity and cognitive democracy (Batini & Giusti, 2022);
- improve children's relational skills and overall wellbeing;
- facilitate cognitive, emotional, psychological and identity development processes.

The Istituto Comprensivo 2 includes 4 different school sites:

- the Infanzia Via Beinasco Kindergarten (for children aged 3-6 years);
- the Aurora and the Parini Primary Schools (for children aged 6-10 years);
- the Morelli First Cycle Secondary School (for kids aged 11-13 years).

A total of 20 experimental classes (in which intensive daily read aloud training was carried out) and 7 control classes (which did not carry out any read aloud training) were involved in the project. 31 teachers participated in the project, and a total of 536 pupils from all school grades were involved:

- for pre-school (kindergarten): 4 classes, 6 teachers, 83 children participated;
- for primary school: 12 classes, 20 teachers, 291 children.
- for first cycle secondary school: 4 classes, 5 teachers, 162 children.

A large group of parents of the children have nationalities other than Italian, for a total of 29 different nationalities: Moroccan (25%), Chinese (8.58%), Senegalese (4.48%), Romanian (6.53%), Nigerian (11.01%), Egyptian (12.13%), Tunisian (2.61%), Italian (11, 19%), Filipino (0.56%), Peruvian (1.68%), Bengali (9.33%), Indian (0.19%), French (0.37%), Ecuadorian (0.56%), Albanian (0, 75%), Venezuelan (0.19%), Argentinean (0.19%), Algerian (0.37%), Somali (0.19%), Macedonian (0.19%), Ivorian (1.68%), Armenian (0.19%) Pakistani (0.56%), Syrian (0.19%), Brazilian (0.37%), Cameroonian (0.19%), Polish (0.19%), Congolese (0.37%), Moldovan (0.19%) (Fig. 1a-1b).

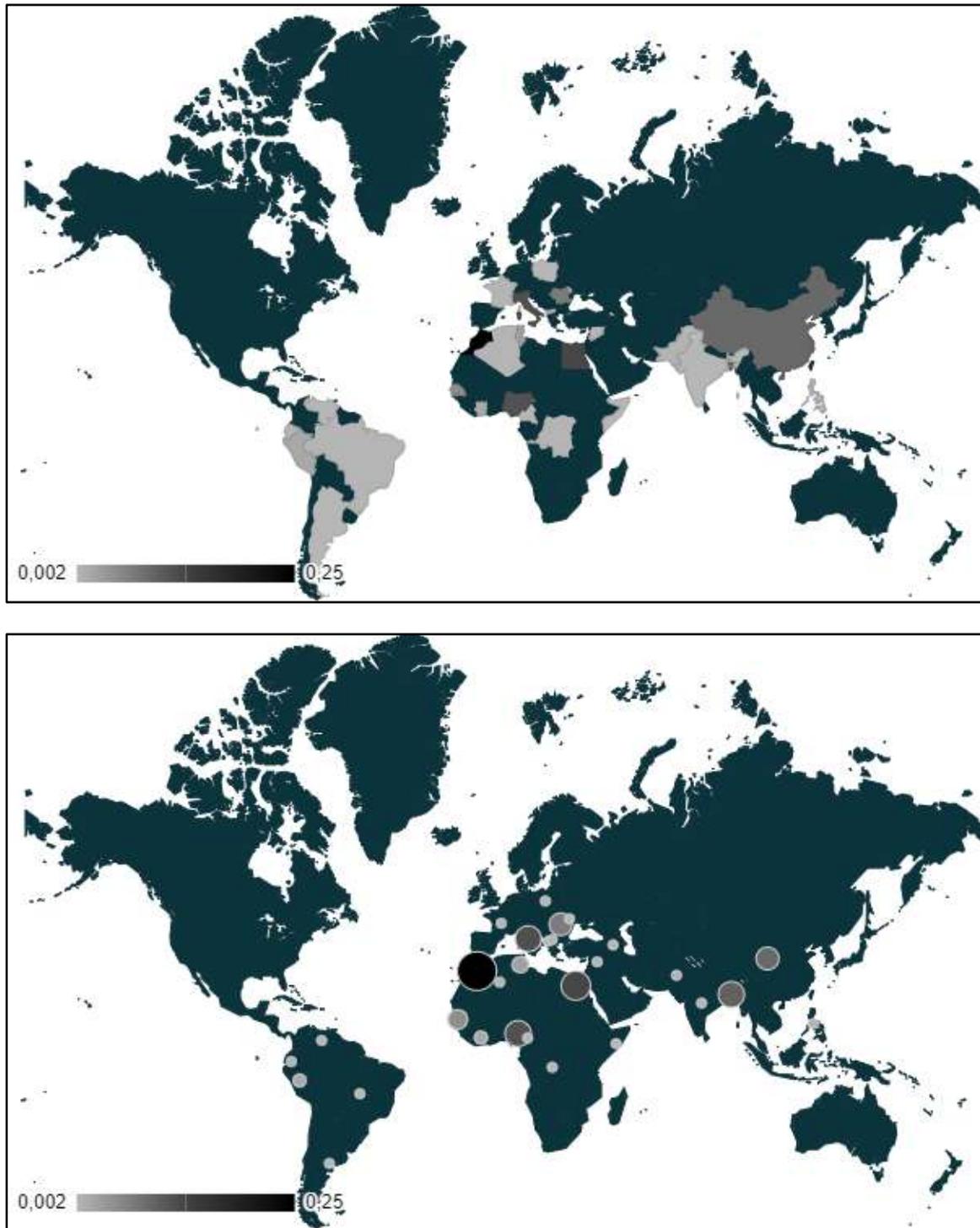


Figure 1a-1b. Distribution of nationalities of pupils participating in the project

In Kindergarten 85.54% (71) of the children's' parents are of non-Italian nationality and 14.46% (12) of Italian nationality; in Primary School 94.50% (275) are of non-Italian nationality and 5.5% (16) Italian; in Secondary School 80.25% (130) are of non-Italian nationality and 19.75% (32) Italian. With reference to the total sample of the classes participating in the project, 88.8% (476) of the children's' parents are of non-Italian nationality and 11.2% (60) Italian.

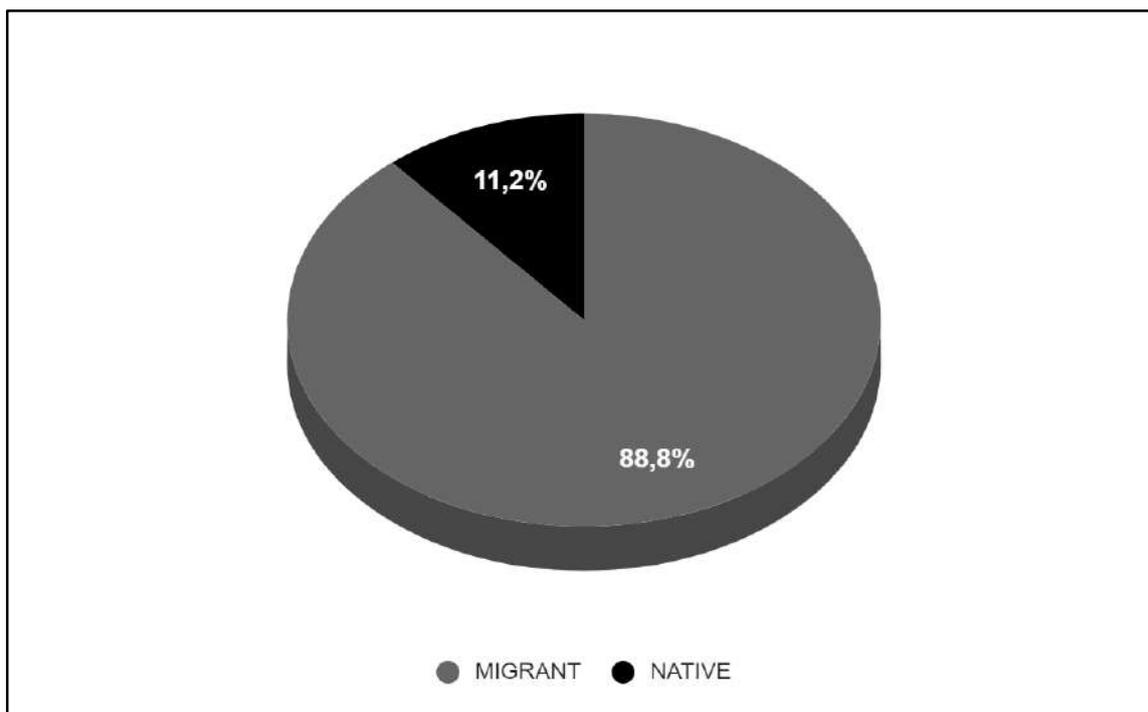


Figure 2. Percentage of 'foreign' pupils in participating classes

The planning phase of 'Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo' started in 2020. Initially – between June and July 2021 – the staff involved in the project (educators, teachers, contact person) underwent specific training.

Between July 2021 and June 2022, bibliographies dedicated to the project were compiled, and updated, and handed over to the teaching staff.

Between 11 and 15 October 2021, the pupils involved in the project participated in the ex-ante surveys carried out in the schools by the research team.

Since October 2021, educators and teachers from the experimental groups shared weekly logbooks with the research team.

Since November 2021, online monitoring meetings were scheduled, with the research team supporting the project participants by addressing difficulties the participants encountered and by providing practical reading aloud teaching-learning tools.

Since November 2021, LaAV (Lettura ad Alta Voce) and Associazione Nausika volunteers supported the project with online and in-presence meetings on reading aloud.

Ex-post surveys were carried out between 28 and 31 March 2022.

Between March and June 2022, project dissemination events were held and prizes were awarded to participating classes and teachers.

### 3. The Ad Alta Voce / Read Aloud Method

The Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo project envisaged the inclusion of reading aloud by volunteer educators or teachers as a daily practice in every school order and grade.

The practice of reading aloud involves 10 key elements (Batini, 2018, 2021, 2022b):

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- *Continuity*: reading is carried out by teachers in school every day;
- *Intensity*: the duration of individual reading sessions gradually increases to one hour of daily reading;
- *Graduality*: starting with illustrated, short, simple stories with accessible language and content close to the experiences of the children's target audience. It then continues with longer, complex stories, with fewer pictures, more articulate language and content not necessarily linked to the pupils' immediate experience;
- *Book-diversity*: this encourages the importance of choosing quality books and knowing how to vary choices and proposals with flexibility, starting from themes and language close to the target audience with whom one is working;
- *Socialisation*: the practice includes moments of discussion during or at the end of the reading session;
- *Student-centredness*: there is an incentive to always take the students' point of view into account. Students have the right to choose, to ask not to complete a reading, to express themselves freely and to provide an interpretation;
- *Assessment-free*: the pleasure of reading is encouraged as a moment not linked to school assessment activities;
- *All teachers participation*: reading should not be superimposed on literature and is not the responsibility of a specific teacher;
- *Systemic approach*: reading takes place in an organised framework that adheres to the reading method proposed during the initial training;
- *Logbook*: the logbook constitutes the weekly report of the reading activities and is filled in by the teachers/educators who read to the class. The diary is a monitoring tool that makes it possible to document the narrative training, to detect any criticalities and to keep track of the path taken and the gains made with their children and students.

## 4. Research tools

The effects of reading aloud were assessed through ex-ante and ex-post surveys carried out by the research team. Cognitive and emotional dimensions were investigated in the different age groups by means of specific instruments administered both before the start of the reading training period and at the end of it. A comparison of performances at the beginning and end of the training was carried out and where possible a comparison between experimental and control groups. This made it possible to detect any improvement in the test scores and thus in the abilities associated with those assessment dimensions. By comparing the scores obtained from the experimental group and the control group, we identified differences related to the effects of exposure (or lack of exposure) to reading aloud.

Specific tests were chosen for the specific age groups and the different types of school involved in the project. In particular, the TEC (Test of Emotional Comprehension; Albanese & Molina, 2008) and the TOR (Test of Oral Text Comprehension; Levorato et al., 2007) were administered to kindergarten children; the TOR (Test of Oral Text Comprehension), the WISC-IV Verbal Comprehension Index (Orsini, Pezzuti & Picone, 2012), the MT tests (Cornoldi & Candela, 2015) and the INVALSI tests were administered to primary school pupils; the CAS-2 (Taddei et al., 2005), the MT tests and the INVALSI tests were administered to first cycle secondary school pupils. The analysis of the results of the testing activities are the subject of a different paper and therefore they are not addressed in this article which is focusing on teachers' observations. Overall, they show that the literacy skills of children with parents of non-Italian nationality scored significantly lower than "native" children at the start of the project while this gap was remarkably lower after 14 weeks of reading aloud practice.

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5. Teacher Observations

In order to gather (experimental classes) teachers’ observations and reflections about the project, each of them was invited to keep a logbook and to use it as a monitoring tool of the reading activity, by compiling it at the end of each reading training week and to share it with the research team.

The following paragraphs review some of the observations that emerged from the analysis of the logbooks. As it can be observed, the time devoted to reading aloud practice increased progressively (Fig. 3):

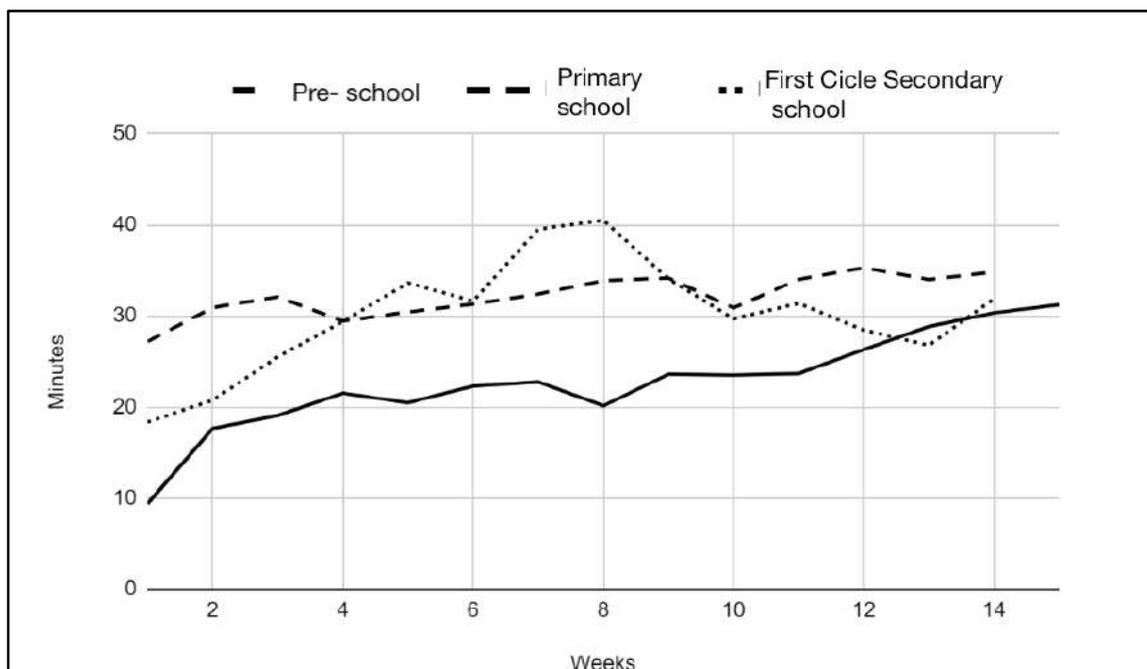


Figure 3. Average weekly reading time per grade: Pre-school - Primary School - First Cycle Secondary School

The graph shows the average reading times divided by grade: pre-school, primary school and first cycle secondary school. Logbooks were collected during the first 14 weeks from Primary and First Cycle Secondary teachers and during the first 15 weeks from kindergarten educators (Tab. 1):

Table 1. Average reading time by grade

Pre-school	T0	T1
M	9,3	31,2
Primary school	T0	T1
M	27,1	34,7
First Cycle Secondary School	T0	T1
M	18,3	31,8

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In the logbook, the teachers noted their school, the class, the reference week, the teachers who read, the reading mode, the daily reading time, the average level of children's perceived enjoyment, the children's signs of interest in the reading activity, the frequency of verbal contributions, the type of verbal contributions, the types of criticalities encountered, the level of enjoyment of the books read by the educator/teacher, the type of the educator/teacher's emotional state during the reading, benefits and/or gains related to the reading activity, a general evaluation of the weekly experience, commentary on the weekly experience, commentary by the children on the weekly experience.

The logbooks were used by the research team during the training phase to monitor and to respond to any critical issues that arose (via e-mail or the monitoring meetings with educators and teachers).

At the end of the reading training period, the research team analysed the teachers' observations in the logbooks.

The answers were analysed on a numerical scale (Likert scales), in order to assess the trend over time of certain variables (e.g., reading time during the project and attention span).

Different categories (codes) were identified based on the relevance of the observation units (cases) in the corpus. Each case was grouped by thematic nodes that pertained to the identified categories. In this way, it was possible to assign a percentage value to each category and each thematic node based on the presence of cases.

The following three tables present the percentage of cases relating to the categories that emerged during weeks of read aloud training in the three schools.

The contents of the open-ended responses in the logbooks were also analysed, including: brief comments on the weekly experience, children's comments on the experience, other disciplinary benefits. Categories were identified on the basis of the frequency observed within the diary reports and the relative percentages calculated.

The responses to the categories, for each grade of school (pre-school, primary and secondary), were analysed with the support of the NVivo software.

Four ex post categories (Codes) were identified based on the relevance of the observation units (Cases) in the corpus: language skills; affective -relational skills; reading pleasure; cognitive skills.

Each observation unit was grouped by thematic nodes (Nodes). In this way, it was possible to assign a percentage value to each category and each thematic node.

The ex-post categories identified from the corpus of open-ended responses from the **Kindergarten** diaries show the presence of three main thematic nodes: affective-relational skills (5; 15%), reading enjoyment (20; 61%), and attention skills (8; 24%) (Fig. 4).

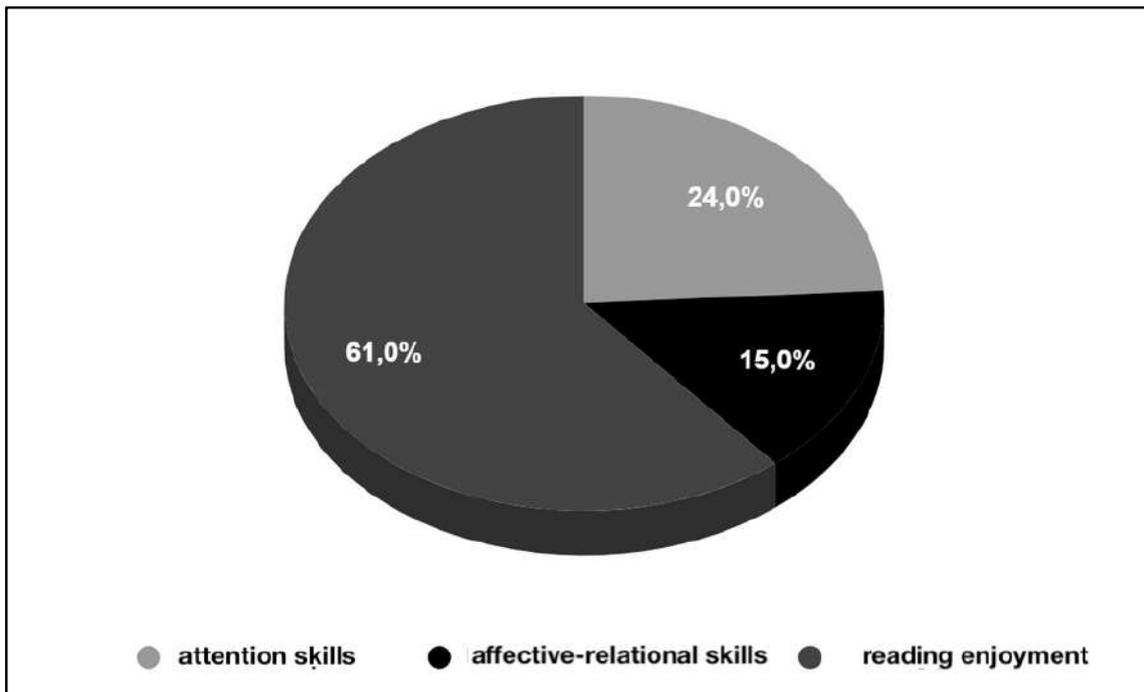


Figure 4. Categories that emerged from the analysis of the logbooks for Kindergarten

Table provides noteworthy excerpts from the logbooks in relation to the three most relevant thematic nodes.

Table 2. Kindergarten Themes and Quotes

CATEGORIES	Sub-categories/Thematic nodes	% Cases	Logbook excerpts
AFFECTIVE SKILLS	<i>Affective climate and well-being at school</i>	15%	<i>'Reading a book has become a necessary routine moment for the whole class. The children relax on the carpet and are curious to hear new stories'</i>
READING ENJOYMENT	<i>Interest in and appreciation of reading aloud</i>	61%	<i>'They are happy to listen to the stories and see the books. Children ask to read again the book or to read new ones'</i>
ATTENTION AND FOCUS SKILLS	<i>Attention</i>	24%	<i>'I have noticed that the attention span of the young children (3 years old) has increased, they can sit still and actively participate in the reading practice'</i>

In the logbooks the educators reported each week the observed and perceived benefits on different domains they could select.

For the pre-school, 19.4% of the total diaries (61) sent by the educators reported an improvement in perceived attention, 11.7% an increase in vocabulary, 10.1% an increase in anticipation of words and sentences before educators reading, 14.1% an increase in concentration skills, 8.5% an improvement in memory skills, 4% an enrichment of symbolic and motor play, 4% an improvement in the cognitive

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development of the children, 16.1% an increase in attention and concentration time, 4.8% an increase in the ability to recognise one’s own and others’ emotions, 4.4% an increase in emotional awareness, 2.8% an improvement in the management of high-intensity emotions (Fig. 5).

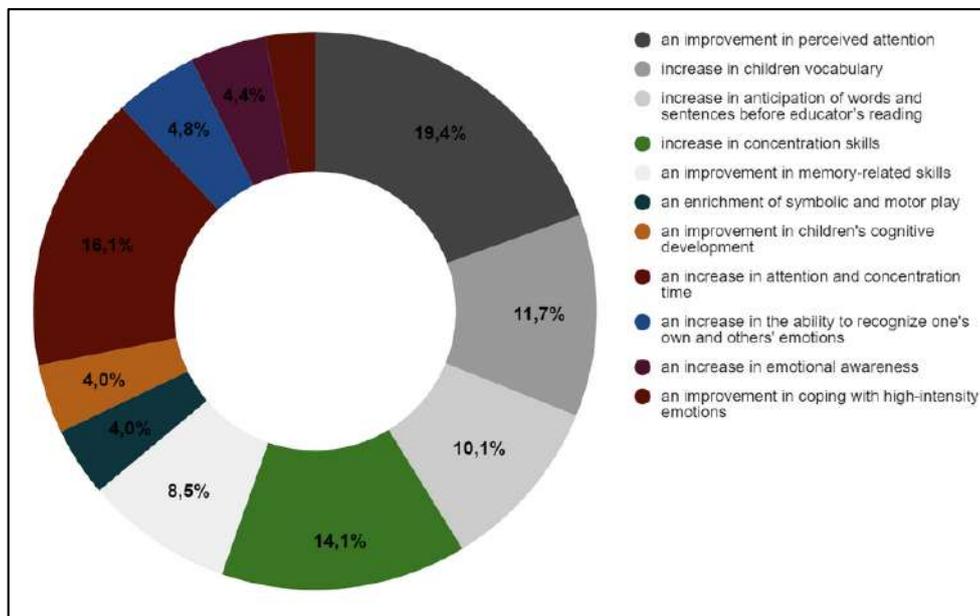


Figure 5. Benefits perceived by Kindergarten school educators

The ex-post categories identified from the corpus of open-ended responses from the **primary school** diaries show the presence of five main thematic nodes: reading enjoyment (32; 31%); emotional-relational skills (25; 24%), attention skills (24; 23%); cognitive skills (12; 11%); linguistic skills (12; 11%) (Fig. 6).

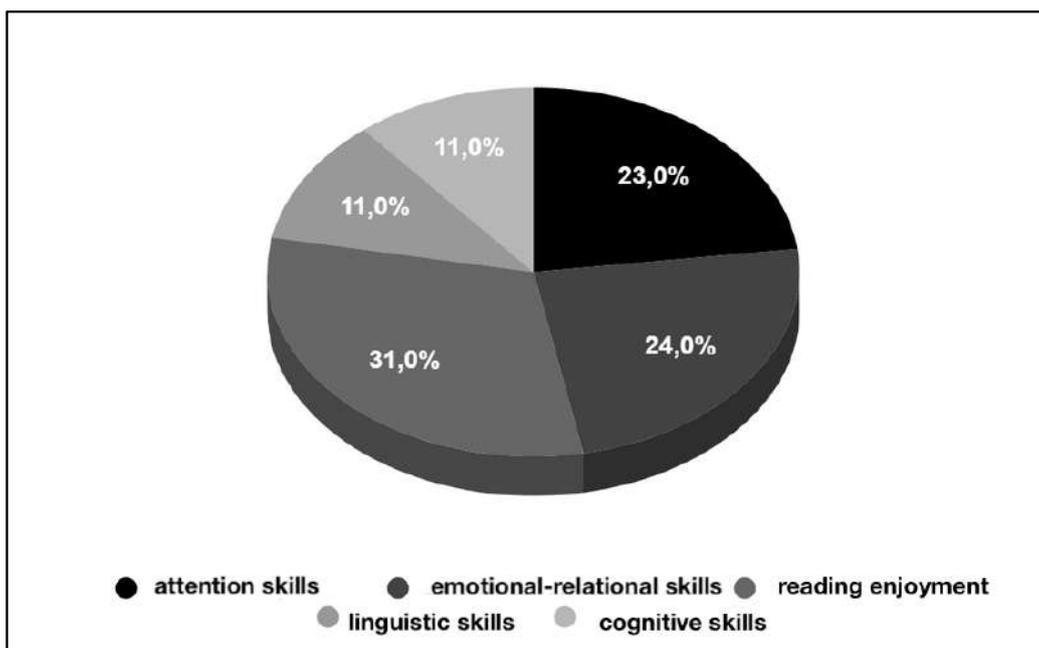


Figure 6. Categories that emerged from the analysis of the logbooks for Primary School

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For the linguistic competencies category, the following domains were identified: vocabulary development and communication skills (7%) and written production and textual competence (5%).

For the emotional-relational competence category the following domains were identified: empathy, emotion and involvement (9%) and affective climate and well-being at school (14%).

For the category reading pleasure the following subcategories were identified: interest in and appreciation of reading aloud (25%) and interest in continuing with independent reading (6%).

For the category attention skills the following sub-categories emerge: attention (15%) and interest and motivation (6%).

For the cognitive skills category, the following sub-categories were identified: curiosity and foresight (8%), imagination and problem solving (4%). Table 3 provides noteworthy excerpts from the logbooks in relation to the five most relevant thematic nodes.

Table 3. Primary School Themes and Quotes

CATEGORIES	Sub-categories/Thematic nodes	% Cases	Logbook excerpts
LANGUAGE SKILLS (11%)	Vocabulary development and communication skills	7%	"Acquisition of new terms (week II) They have learnt the names of some trees There are improvements in their verbal explanations: more children express themselves in more complex sentences using more precise vocabulary"
	Written production and textual skills	5%	"During the weekly writing exercises, the children, state that they have taken inspiration from the books they have read both in terms of the use of certain vocabulary and from a stylistic point of view"
AFFECTIVE SKILLS (23%)	Empathy, emotions and involvement	9%	"Reading aloud helps to 'see' better what happens to the protagonists of the story. The degree of empathy between listeners and characters increases significantly"
	Affective climate and well-being at school	14%	"Reading is a happy time because we can relax after moments of stress and fatigue They feel free, we are hearing them laughing heartily although they are in the school context They felt more connected to others"
READING ENJOYMENT (31%)	Interest in and appreciation of reading aloud	25%	"The children ask to read the books suggested by their peers. Some, having finished reading, ask to continue"
	Interest in following up with independent reading	6%	"Today a pupil asked me to buy a book from the same series"
ATTENTION AND FOCUS SKILLS (24%)	Attention	15%	"This week it was evident how attention spans and engagement improved, in fact we read a lot more when compared to previous weeks"
	Interest, motivation	6%	"Pupils are increasingly more motivated and interested"
COGNITIVE SKILLS (11%)	Curiosity and foresight	8%	"Children ask to know what the title of the chapter to be read the next day is in order to try to read ahead of time"
	Creativity, Imagination and Problem Solving	4%	"The few pupils that were present developed their problem solving skills, they empathised with the protagonists to the extent that they imagined how to overcome the difficulties that were outlined in the text"

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In the logbooks the teachers reported each week the observed and perceived benefits on different domains they could select.

For primary school, it emerged in 12.7% of the total diaries (157) sent by the teachers, an improvement in perceived class attention, in 15.2% an enrichment of vocabulary, in 6.3% an increase in concentration skills, in 12.4% an improvement in text comprehension, in 5.8% an increase in language skills, in 1.9% an improvement in writing skills, in 1.1% an improvement in learning time, in 3.6% a greater cohesion of the class group, in 4.7% an improvement in the climate within the class, in 2, 2% a greater involvement of children/young people who generally remain more isolated, in 0.6% a greater willingness to engage in new social situations, in 1.1% a greater understanding of the other, in 0.8% an increase in the level of empathic skills, in 2, 5% an increase in the ability to predict the reactions and behaviour of others, 1.9% an improvement in the relationship between teachers and pupils, 12.4% a more positive approach to books and reading in general, 8.8% a development of the pleasure of reading, 6.1% the possibility of working in an interdisciplinary manner (Fig. 7).

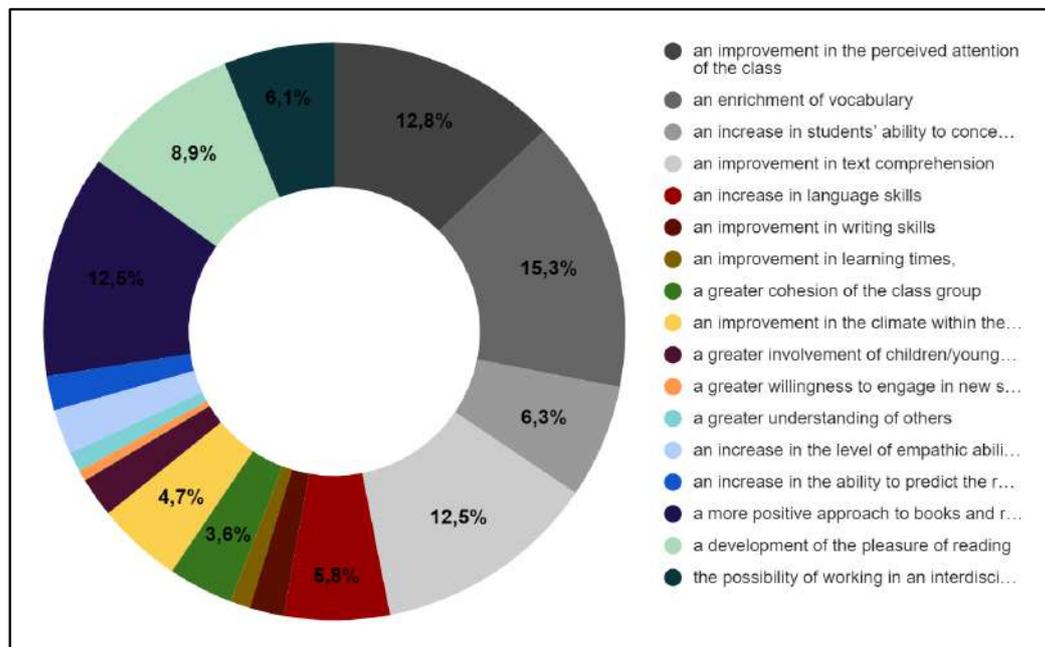


Figure 9. Benefits perceived by Primary School teachers

The ex-post categories identified from the corpus of open-ended responses from the **first cycle secondary school** diaries show the presence of five main thematic nodes: enjoyment of Reading (30; 32%); attention skills (22; 24%); cognitive skills (20; 21%); language skills (16; 17%); affective-relational skills (6; 6%) (Fig. 8).

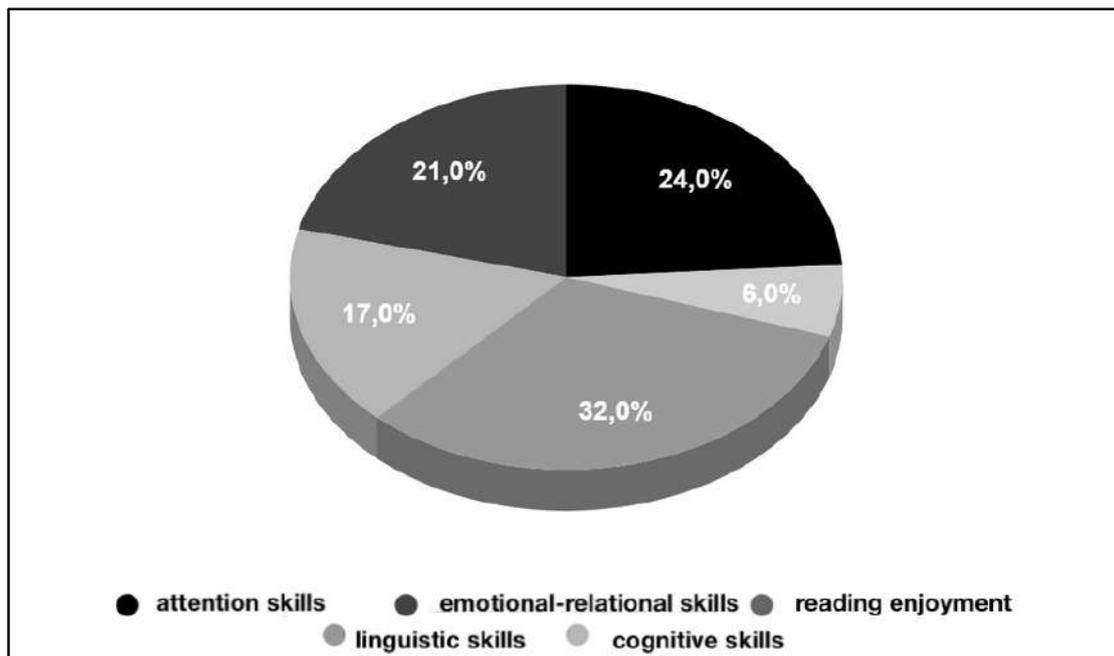


Figure 8. Categories that emerged from the analysis of the logbooks for First Cycle Secondary School

For the language skills category, the following sub-categories were identified: reading and verbal comprehension skills (7%), vocabulary development and communication skills (9%) and written production and textual skills (1%).

For the category affective-relational competence the following domains were identified: empathy, emotion and involvement (4%) and the topic of affective climate and well-being at school (2%).

For the category reading pleasure the following subcategories were identified: interest in and appreciation of reading aloud (23%) and interest in continuing with autonomous reading (7%).

For the category attention skills the following sub-categories emerge: attention (10%), and interest and motivation (10%) and memory skills (4%).

For the cognitive skills category, the following sub-categories were identified: curiosity and foresight (18%), creativity, imagination and problem solving (3%). Table 4 provides noteworthy excerpts from the logbooks in relation to the five most relevant thematic nodes.

Table 4. First Cycle Secondary School Themes and Quotes

CATEGORIES	Sub-categories/Thematic nodes	% Cases	Logbook excerpts
LANGUAGE SKILLS (17%)	Reading skills and verbal comprehension	7%	"The pupils showed a greater understanding of the text than I expected. Even the non-Italian speaking pupils understand the plot and remember the characters"
	Development of vocabulary and communication skills	9%	"There is an improvement in their verbal communication and in their narrative skills"
	Writing skills	1%	"[this project]... got us closer to a variety of narrative genres"

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AFFECTIVE AND RELATIONAL SKILLS (6%)	<i>Empathy, emotions and involvement</i>	4%	<i>"I see enthusiasm, interest, and empathy for the story characters"</i>
	<i>Affective climate and wellbeing</i>	2%	<i>"There is an increase in the curiosity and involvement of the pupils"</i>
READING ENJOYMENT (32%)	<i>Interest in and appreciation for reading aloud</i>	23%	<i>"The class shows curiosity and enthusiasm both towards the text that is being read and the reading activity itself. The children spontaneously ask to read"</i>
	<i>Motivation to pursue autonomous reading</i>	7%	<i>"Some of them read a book during the holidays. They spontaneously started reading books that we have in the class library during breaks or class with a substitute teacher"</i>
ATTENTION AND FOCUS SKILLS (24%)	<i>Attention</i>	10%	<i>"Pupils continue to demonstrate motivation and interest, consistently with their appreciation of the listening experience"</i>
	<i>Interest and motivation</i>	10%	<i>"Reading aloud stimulated curiosity about a story outlined in writing and encouraged the pupils to concentrate themselves"</i>
	<i>Memory skills</i>	4%	<i>"Some children recall the events they read about the previous day, repeating the words of the text almost verbatim"</i>
COGNITIVE COMPETENCES (21%)	<i>Curiosity and foresight</i>	18%	<i>"They make comments about the main character in the new book and spontaneously make predictions about the final part of the story"</i>
	<i>Creativity, Imagination and Problem Solving</i>	3%	<i>"[the project]... helps us to imagine the plot-scenes. What is being read elicits great interest and enthusiasm and there are frequent comments on 'what I would do if I were the main character'"</i>

In the logbooks the teachers reported each week the observed and perceived benefits on different domains they could select.

For the secondary school, 17.6% of the total number of diaries (76) showed an improvement in attention, 8.5% an enrichment of vocabulary, 13.6% an increase in the ability to concentrate, 17.3% an improvement in text comprehension, 1.5% an increase in language skills, 0.4% an improvement in writing skills, 5.1% a greater cohesion of the class group, 7% an improvement in the climate within the class, 2.9% greater involvement of children/young people who generally remain more isolated, 1.1% an increase in the level of empathic skills, 0.7% an increase in the ability to predict the reactions and behaviour of others, 4.8% an improvement in the relationship between teachers and pupils, 8.5% a more positive approach to books and reading in general, 7% the development of pleasure, 4% the possibility of working in an interdisciplinary manner (Fig. 9).

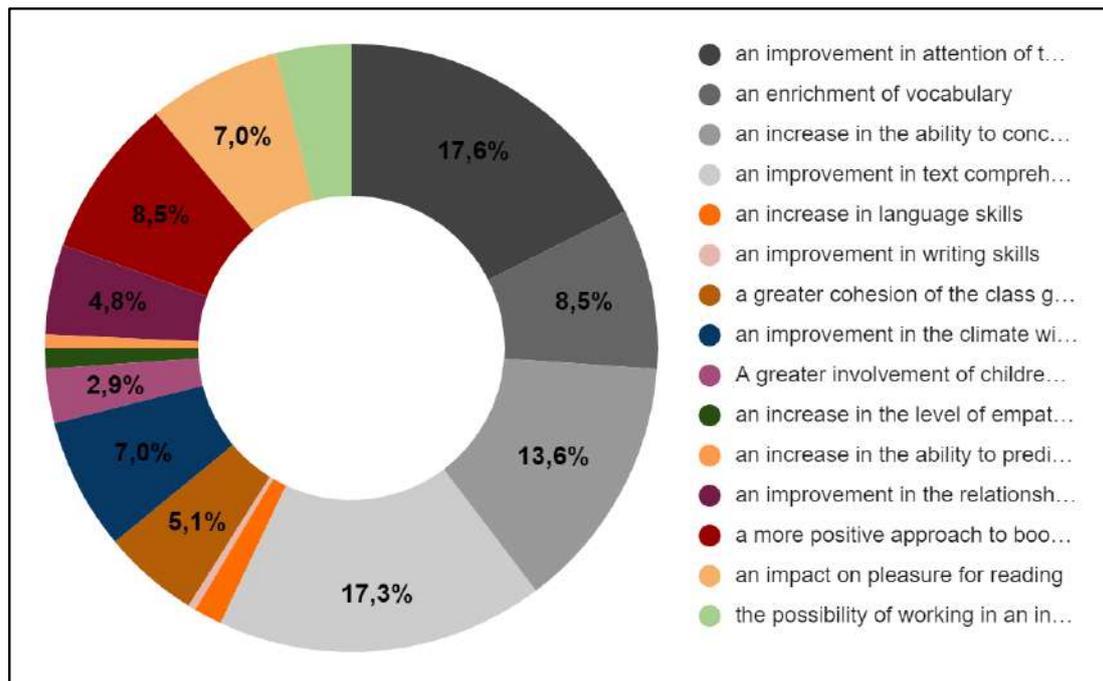


Figure 9. Benefits perceived by First Cycle Secondary school teachers

## 6. The analysis of the qualitative data from the logbooks

As described in the previous paragraphs, the qualitative analysis of the project data was based on the observations and answers provided by the teachers through the logbooks.

Their answers were analysed on a numerical scale, in order to assess (a) the trend over time of certain variables (e.g., reading time, attention spans, etc.) and (b) the frequency of specific content of the answers to the open questions, identifying categories on the basis of their frequency within the reports.

Concerning the logbook analysis process, the observations shared by the teachers with the researchers through the weekly compilation of logbooks were grouped by school grade, and key contents were identified.

A database was created in order to organise the teachers' observations and answers on the basis of the order of arrival of the logbooks for each school site participating in the project. In turn, the observations and answers were grouped by subject areas.

Quantitative and qualitative data were then worked on in parallel, thus working on the one hand on the numerical data – Likert scales –, and on the other hand on the categorisation and analysis of the open-ended answers and on the calculation of the percentages relating to the answers of the logbook questions.

## 7. Analysis and discussion of teachers' observations

The aim of the weekly logbook activities was to document the project outcomes and to scaffold a reflective activity by the teachers in order to raise awareness concerning this specific reading aloud process. In turn, these narrative data enabled the researchers to gather both qualitative and quantitative information leading to a better understanding the evidence that emerged from the testing score concerning the reading aloud effects.

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The design framework and the tools used in the implementation phases of the project enabled the research team to collect and analyse two different types of data: qualitative data, resulting from the collection and analysis of the logbooks filled in weekly by the educators/teachers adhering to the project and belonging to the (reading aloud) experimental group, and quantitative data, emerging from the statistical analysis of the standardised instruments administered by the experimenters to the children and young people in the experimental and control groups.

Quantitative data show significant improvement of several skills in the experimental groups between the first and second tests administration, showing positive effects of the narrative training.

The qualitative data gathered from the logbooks represent a rich source of information regarding the daily progress of the project, allowing one to trace and valorise more complex and profound aspects of the project, which cannot be detected by the quantitative data.

The choice of preparing a qualitative-quantitative data collection allowed to grasp a more complex, exhaustive and representative scenario of the project itself, in which the strength of the quantitative results supported by the statistical analysis is accompanied by the richness of the evidence produced day by day by the teachers.

Both quantitative and qualitative data reflect the initial concern by teachers in relation to the poor initial performance in comprehension and communication by children with a migrant background. After 14 weeks of reading aloud training the data provide a different picture: both the comprehension and communication skills of children with a migrant background have remarkably improved, and this goes hand in hand with their motivation to read and to reflect and engage with the narratives that reading activities have made accessible to them.

This is evident across the three age groups, and it is sampled by the three tables including key themes and codes from the teachers' logbooks. Among the most frequent annotations by teachers, there are recurrent evidence that children developed curiosity and enthusiasm towards the written text as well towards the reading activity itself. They observe that the training supports children' spontaneous desire for the reading activity.

It seems important to relate these results with Bilgili, Volante, and Klinger (2018, p. 11) statement that

Immigrant students often face double disadvantage and have to overcome both social and cultural barriers. Their parents often possess fewer social and economic resources and weaker proficiency in the language of instruction. Because of these reasons, their educational achievement is especially dependent on the quality of teaching. A shortage of qualified teachers and staff significantly diminishes immigrant students' opportunities to use the education system as a means of social mobility.

The 2022 Porta Palazzo results show that qualified teachers make a difference in relation to children learning as reading aloud at school has a positive impact upon those children who are coming from families that are not used to read aloud to their children, an activity that proves to be

invaluable for the opportunity it provides children who are not read to within the home. While these children may encounter other types of beneficial and rich oral literacy experiences, it is nonetheless concerning that over a quarter of primary school-aged children report that they are not being read to at home (Ledger & Merga, 2018).

Of crucial importance here is the ability to scaffold a dialogue among teachers as well as among teachers and parents that can facilitate better understanding of children's motivation to read, and to practice reading in autonomous ways, i.e. to use Wigfield and Eccles (2000, p. 68) words

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for recreation, as “individuals’ choice, persistence, and performance” to perform an activity can in part be explained by “the extent to which they value the activity.

The double inequality (Wang, 2021) experienced by migrant students also depends on the school context. The project ‘Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo’ aims to act precisely on the conditions of learning equity and cognitive democracy. It is essential to think about a change on a political, critical and transformative level (Catarci, 2018). Intercultural training and education cannot be neutral practices but requires precise field choices.

The approach must be political and critical in order to be transformative, as Freire (1968) writes:

“No one educates anyone, no one educates himself, men educate themselves together with the mediation of the world”.

According to Paulo Freire, education is an act of love. Reading aloud as a generative and relational practice seems to us part of this great act of love that is education.

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