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*Extramural English and Informal Language
Learning: A Questionnaire-Based Study on
Audiovisual Content and Online Platforms
as Sources of Language Learning*

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INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely encountered languages in contemporary everyday life. Contact with English does not take place only in school or university, but also through films, TV series, music, social media, online videos, videogames and digital platforms. This kind of exposure is often not planned as formal study is. Nevertheless, it can become part of the way learners experience, understand and develop their knowledge of English.

This dissertation examines Extramural English as part of informal language learning. The term is used to refer to the contact that learners have with English outside formal educational contexts. This contact can take different forms, such as watching audiovisual content, using online platforms, listening to music, or interacting with English-language material in everyday situations. It is especially important today, since English is often present in the digital and media environments that learners use for entertainment, communication and personal interests.

The starting point of this study is the idea that English learning cannot be understood only as a formal process. School and university remain important contexts, especially because they provide structure, guidance and explicit instruction. However, in extramural contexts, English is not approached as a school subject to be studied directly, but it functions as a means through which learners can access content, follow interests, understand media or communicate with others.

The study investigates how respondents perceive this type of informal exposure. In particular, it considers whether they regard Extramural English as useful, which sources expose them most frequently to the language, and which areas of English they connect with informal contact. The dissertation also looks at the relationship between formal education and informal exposure, in order to understand whether these two contexts may support different aspects of English learning.

The empirical section of the dissertation is based on an anonymous online questionnaire. It was created to collect information about respondents' attitudes towards English and their contact with the language outside school or university. The

questionnaire was distributed online and received 160 responses. It included both closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions, to combine quantitative data with more personal comments from the participants. It is important to clarify that the study is based on respondents' perceptions. It does not aim to measure language improvement directly through tests or objective assessment. Instead, it focuses on how learners describe and evaluate their own experience with English in their daily lives, both in formal and informal context.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter One presents the theoretical background of the study. It discusses the distinction between formal and informal language learning, introduces the concept of Extramural English and examines different forms of informal exposure. Attention is given to audiovisual content, subtitles, social media and digital platforms as possible sources of English input.

Chapter Two describes the research design and methodology. It explains the aim of the questionnaire, the structure of the questions, the method of data collection and the general characteristics of the participants. This chapter provides the methodological basis for the analysis of the results.

Chapter Three presents and discusses the data collected through the questionnaire. It analyses respondents' English learning background, their frequency and types of exposure to English outside formal education, their use of films, TV series and online platforms, and their opinions about the relationship between school-based English and extramural contact. The final part of the chapter discusses the main tendencies that emerged from the data and considers the limits of the study.

Overall, this dissertation aims to contribute to the discussion of English learning beyond the classroom. By focusing on learners' perceptions, it explores how English is experienced in everyday life and how informal exposure may interact with formal education. The study suggests that Extramural English is an important dimension to consider, especially in a context where English is increasingly present in media, digital communication and personal activities.

CHAPTER ONE

Extramural English and Informal Language Learning

This chapter provides the theoretical background for the present study. It introduces first the difference between formal and informal language learning, then it explains the concept of Extramural English. A central focus in this chapter is audiovisual content, especially regarding films and TV series, which provide learners with spoken input, visual content, and textual support, such as subtitles or captions, all of which may support language learning (Pattemore & Gesa, 2025; De Riso, 2025). Lastly, the chapter discusses the influence of digital media and online platforms, especially in relation to learners' self-directed access to the language (De Riso, 2025; Banzina, 2025).

1.1 Formal and Informal Language Learning

Formal education has always been the main source for learning a foreign language, in contexts such as schools, universities and language courses. However, during these recent years, there has been a major rise of English encountering outside of the conventional methods, where English is accessed for many personal reasons, such as entertainment, communication, and personal interests (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020; De Riso, 2025).

Formal language learning has defined features and structures, and it takes place in a formal educational institution. It is a one-on-one relationship between a learner and their teacher, which is often recognised and measured through visible outcomes, such as tests and exams. This type of learning is particularly useful because it provides explanation, organisation, and feedback (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). Its structure follows a formal curriculum, which is organised and well-defined by a set of rules and features. Johnson & Majewska (2022: 10) state that: "The written programme can (and often will) include a number of aspects, such as aims, objectives/standards, lesson

plans, equipment to be used, content, order of teaching for specific topics, an evaluation process, teaching strategies, textbooks, and assessments”.

Informal language learning, on the other hand, refers to the everyday learning that takes place outside organised and institutionalised contexts, and which may not always be recognised as learning by the learner (Johnson & Majewska, 2022: 13). Learners may encounter English via many different activities, such as listening to music, playing videogames, watching films or TV series, reading online or simply by interacting with English speaking people. In most of these cases, the main purpose is to simply enjoy content, communication, and information. Nevertheless, this process may still be helpful for language learning, even without making any effort (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020; Reynolds, 2023; De Riso, 2025).

Learners may experience two different things: the so-called “incidental learning”, which means that they are not aware of their learning, or “contextual learning”, which means they are conscious about what they are learning. This could refer to a term in the vocabulary or an unwritten rule while exploring (Johnson & Majewska, 2022; De Wilde, 2025). It is natural for learners to engage in activities that they enjoy and would learn from, which is why, according to Latchem (2014: Abstract), informal learning is accountable for an estimated 70-90% of all learning because it helps learners to improve their social skills and to learn about norms and values. The importance of informal learning is becoming not only more important, but also more recognized amongst the learners. A study conducted by Busby (2024) showed that Norwegian university students agree that informal learning has helped them more than formal education has, regarding their English knowledge. Similarly, Banzina (2025) conducted a study among Northeastern Europe’s generation Z, which has resulted in learners believing that their pronunciation, thanks to informal input, is even greater and more articulated than their teacher’s. However, formal education and informal learning should be complementary, rather than having to decide which one is the most effective. Reynolds (2023: 9) argues that out-of-school learning could be a supplement to formal education and suggests a bridge between out-of-class and classroom-based learning. At the same time, studies such as Busby (2025) show that informal exposure can contribute to learners’ vocabulary expansion, meaning that formal and informal methods can coexist in this dimension of contemporary English learning. This

distinction is fundamental to understand the concept of extramural English. The following section will focus on learning the language outside of the classroom and will cover the main forms of contact.

1.2 Extramural English: Definition and Background

Extramural English refers to the English learners encounter outside formal educational settings. It includes voluntary and self-initiated activities in which learners encounter the language beyond the classroom, both in digital and non-digital contexts (Busby, 2024: 1). Extramural English is connected to self-directed language learning, since the contact with the language is usually initiated by the learner rather than organised by the teacher (De Riso, 2025: 19). This means that Extramural English is different from formal learning not only because it happens outside of school, but also because it is organised in a completely different way. In a classroom, learning usually follows a programme with exercises, explanations, corrections and sometimes tests or exams. In extramural contexts, instead, learners have more freedom: they choose what to watch, read or listen to, how often they do it and why they do it. In some cases, learners may choose to engage with English because they want to improve a specific skill, for example by watching TV series in the original language to practise listening or by using English subtitles to understand the dialogue better, which is a form of intentional learning. However, in many extramural contexts, learning is not the main objective of the activity. Learners may watch a film, listen to music, play a videogame, or use social medias for entertainment or communication purposes, but still acquire new words, expressions, or pronunciation patterns in the process, which could then lead them to search for more intentional explanations. This is the reason learning can happen indirectly, while the learner is focused on the content of the activity rather than on the language itself (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020; De Riso, 2025; Renolds, 2023).

As years go by, research and studies about extramural English have rapidly increased in parallel with the growing relevance of this phenomenon, because learners spend a considerable amount of time engaging with English outside school through media, entertainment, and online communication. The study by Sundqvist & Sylvén

(2016) showed that students who were exposed to both formal instruction and out-of-school English, often perceived extramural engagement as a major source of their English development. This may be partly explained by the fact that extramural activities are frequently linked to personal interest and enjoyment, which can make learners more motivated to engage with the language than in traditional classroom contexts (Busby, 2024).

Having defined Extramural English, it is also important to explain how this contact takes place in everyday life. The exposure is not only limited to one specific activity but can occur through different forms of input and use, depending on the learner's interests and access to media. Some activities involve receptive exposure, while others may require more active participation and interaction (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020: 52; De Riso, 2025: 30). The following section will focus on the main forms of extramural contact with the English language, before moving more specifically to audiovisual content and digital platforms.

1.3 Forms of Extramural Contact with the English Language

Extramural contact with English can be grouped according to the type of input that each activity provides, and to the role of the learner. One useful distinction can be drawn between receptive activities and those that involve more active participation.

Pavesi and Ghia (2020: 82), describe many of the most common sources of informal English contact, such as telecinematic input and YouTube, as mainly receptive and monodirectional. De Riso (2025: 63-72) also confirms this pattern in the Italian context, where learners often engage with English through this form of contact, while activities requiring productive use of the language are less frequent. Receptive contact includes activities such as watching films, TV series, and YouTube videos, listening to music, or reading an online text. These activities are usually connected to entertainment or information, but they still expose learners to the language in everyday contexts. Films, TV programmes, YouTube videos, and songs provide spoken language together with visual and non-verbal information, and can expose learners to repeated words, sounds, and expressions (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020: 78-80). Online reading, such as

reading website pages, blogs, or comments, gives learners contact with written English, usually in a more informal and immediate style (De Riso, 2025). Busby (2024) includes these activities among the extramural experiences that learners remember as the most relevant to their English development. Even when learners are not speaking or writing, these activities should not be considered useless or completely passive, because repeated exposure may still help them notice vocabulary, pronunciation, common expressions, and different English registers (Reynolds, 2023).

Other forms of extramural contact are more interactive. Pavesi and Ghia (2020: 129-131) discuss that social networks and online gaming require learners to use the language more actively and to interact with other users, rather than only receiving input, while blogs and forums are opportunities for written exchanges in online discussions. In these cases, English becomes a practical tool to interact, solve problems or participate in online spaces. This variety of activities are important because they support various aspects of English learning. Audiovisual sources are relevant for practising listening comprehension and spoken English (Pattemore & Gesa, 2025). Online reading gives learners more contact with written English (De Riso, 2025: 133), while gaming and online interactions are helpful with communication and problem-solving (Busby, 2024). Banzina's study (2025) supports that Gen Z learners' pronunciation is also influenced by audiovisual and digital media.

1.3.1 Audiovisual Content as a Tool for Language Learning

Audiovisual content is one of the most important forms of Extramural English because it brings together several types of input. It does not only mean that learners read words or listen to an audio file, because they hear spoken language, see images, facial expressions, gestures, places, and subtitles or captions. Since learners nowadays have a much easier access to television, streaming platforms, and other video-based material, it has become a serious and important topic in second language acquisition (Pattemore & Gesa, 2025). De Riso (2025: 149) shows that audiovisual input is also one of the main sources of learning among university students. They can use more than one channel to understand meanings and scenarios because videos are a much richer

type of input rather than a written text or an audio recording (Pattermore & Gesa, 2025; De Riso, 2025). Comprehension is easier when sounds and images are combined. When learners watch a video, they can also look at the context, the settings, and the characters' action, rather than only hearing words. This means that it is not necessary to know every single word, because they understand the general meaning. In support of original-version audio, Pattermore and Gesa (2025) point out that on-screen text can support the process, because it helps learners to identify words easier. Learners often choose materials to watch just for entertainment purposes, so the exposure to English is connected to an activity they already find interesting (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020: 40, 45-46).

Another important part of audiovisual input are subtitles and captions. The difference between the two is clarified by Pattermore and Gesa (2025: 2), who explain that subtitles (L1 subtitles) provide written texts in the learner's first language, while captions (L2 captions) are written texts in the target's language. They have two quite different purposes: subtitles can help to follow the general meaning of the video, and captions can help to connect what the learners hears with the correspondent written word, since they appear at the same time. Chen (2024) shows that subtitles can influence how learners understand and remember words. However, the effect of subtitles is not always the same for everyone. Depending on the learner's viewing preference and proficiency, the role of on-screen text is very different in terms of how helpful it is.

Audiovisual content can also support vocabulary learning. Learners can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words in the context shown, making it simpler to understand the meaning and how it is used, which could be because a character repeats it or the image helps clarify the situation. Vocabulary acquisition is a very frequent topic in audiovisual input studies, because learners need to meet words, not only in lists or exercises, but also in their contexts, and it can be easier if learners are mainly focused on the activities they are doing (Pattermore & Gesa, 2025; Reynolds, 2023). Busby (2025) has a different approach and perspective to this topic, because she shows that early extramural exposure is related to later vocabulary size; in fact, learners agree that these activities have been more relevant to fill in their vocabulary, than in a formal context. Vocabulary learning from audiovisual content is mainly incidental. Repeated

exposure can help learners become more familiar with a word or expression that eventually will be incorporated in their vocabulary, even if their starting purpose was to watch a video for the story or simply enjoy the content.

A crucial point is that audiovisual input can lead to incidental vocabulary learning, but watching a video in English does not mean it is enough, so especially for learners with lower proficiency, it is not an automatic process. It depends on their attention, the repetition of the inputted item, and the difficulty of the input. But if the learner comes across a word or a sentence many times, they may gradually recognise it and understand them (Pattemore & Gesa, 2025).

Listening comprehension is another important aspect, because it does not only mean the learners are “hearing” English. In classroom activities the input is often selected or adapted for learners, while audiovisual material may expose them to more natural speech and content. The difficulties can be found in how fast the speech is, in the words being connected to each other and in the various accents (De Riso, 2025: 26). It also depends on the learner’s vocabulary knowledge and the type of subtitles or captions used (Pattemore & Gesa, 2025). On-screen text is helpful because it supports speech segmentation and the identification of word boundaries (Pattemore & Gesa, 2025). Pavesi and Ghia (2020) also discuss the role of same-language captions, and students in their study agree that listening comprehension is one of the skills where audiovisual input has the most impact in. Pattemore & Gesa (2025: 5-6) refer to the idea of “narrow viewing”, where viewers who are exposed to the same content and characters for an extended period of time, for instance in a TV series, can find comprehension easier thanks to reduced vocabulary demands. The reason is that they gradually become more familiar with a certain type of speech with recurring voices and accents. Some aspects of the language are difficult to learn even from textbooks, but audiovisual materials can expose learners to it and help them decode it.

Pronunciation, pragmatics, and formulaic sequences are also in relation to audiovisual input, because the English language is not only about vocabulary and grammar. In a video all these aspects can be easier to recognise and identify because of the voice tones, gestures and the social situations. It is important to understand how people use language in different contexts and how they interact with each other. Most

of these expressions are easier to spot when seen in a context rather than only reading it in an isolated sentence. Audiovisual input can help learners notice how English is used in real life scenarios and interactions (Pattemore & Gesa 2025). At the same time, audiovisual content has its limits. It can be considered a valuable tool for language learning, but it must be frequent, meaningful, and suitable for learners' abilities. Audiovisual input can be useful, but it should not be presented as the perfect solution for language learning and a replacement for formal education, as there are many factors that can influence its effectiveness and it does not count as a substitute for guided practice, feedback, or structured instruction. It is better to see it as an additional source of external input, which can support what learners do in the classroom and extend their contact with English outside of the classroom (Reynolds, 2023; Pattemore & Gesa, 2025; De Riso, 2025).

1.3.2 The Role of Films and TV Series in English Exposure

Films and TV series are among the most visible and used forms of extramural contact with English, especially because they are accessed for entertainment rather than for explicit study. Pavesi and Ghia (2020: 95-99) show that films and TV series are often chosen because learners want to hear the original actors' voices, understand wordplay and because of the authenticity. Bonsignori (2018: 59) explains that films and TV series are multimodal products, because verbal language, images, gestures, facial expressions, gaze, prosody, and spatial organisation are all semiotic resources which give the product a meaning. So instead of only observing words, they understand the connection because of the actions, the emotions, and the social situations. Since communication is rarely based on words alone and the language is not isolated, these forms are extremely helpful for learners.

It is necessary to be extremely cautious with the idea of authenticity. Films and TV series may feel authentic because they are created for this very reason, however it is important to remember that the dialogues are still scripted or constructed. They are written-to-be-spoken content and are made to sound natural and believable (Bonsignori, 2018). Dose (2013) makes an interesting point about this topic, because

even though the script of a movie is in fact a written and prepared dialogue, it does not make it irrelevant for language learning. It is explained that engaging in these activities can be seen as a middle ground between spontaneous conversation, which can be fast and chaotic, and textbook dialogues, which can be stiff and mechanical. Even though they are not real conversations, films and TV series are a valuable accessible model for language learning and for exposure to informal and conversational English, and it has shown that subtitles and captions are a focus point.

Frumuselu et al. (2015) make a distinction between interlingual and intralingual subtitles. In the former, subtitles are in the learner's first language, while in the latter they are in English. They conducted a targeted study to investigate how subtitled TV series can help teaching slangs, phrasal verbs, and colloquial expressions, which are common informal language. Their study was based on watching thirteen episodes of the TV series "Friends" over a period of seven weeks under the two viewing conditions: interlingual and intralingual subtitles. The results indicated that participants showed better performance under the same-language subtitles, in terms of understanding and learning new vocabulary. This study supports the theory that an activity in which the exposure to English is natural and repeated, is represented stronger than in classroom materials (Frumuselu et al., 2015: 115). This does not mean that English captions are always better for every learner. Pujadas and Muñoz (2019: 480, 483) point out that the debate between captions and subtitles is still complex, because it depends on the learners. Some may benefit more from L1 subtitles, especially if their proficiency level is low. The difference between L1 subtitles and L2 captions is that subtitles can help learners to follow the general meaning, while captions can give more direct exposure of English. Pattemore & Gesa (2025) stress that a beginner and an advanced learner may not need the same kind of support, according to their pre-knowledge of the language.

Pujadas and Muñoz (2019) explain that it is common for a TV series to contain frequently appearing patterns and fewer different word families, than unrelated content, where the settings and characters change. This reappearance helps learners to recognise and remember expressions, more than watching unrelated clips.

Repeated exposure is also connected to extensive viewing. Pujadas and Muñoz (2019) conducted a study to know the difference between only watching a TV series and doing it with vocabulary pre-teaching. 106 adolescent learners watched twenty-four episodes of a TV series during a one-year classroom. They used different methods: with subtitles or captions, and with or without pre-teaching of target vocabulary. The results show the group that received pre-teaching performed better overall (Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019). This study makes us understand that informal learning activities have a stronger influence and become more productive with a connection to a formal guidance and instruction.

Films and TV series may also contribute to pronunciation awareness. Scheffler and Baranowska (2023) investigated whether watching a TV series in English can help learners recognise and improve their pronunciation of target words. Their study revolves around Polish intermediate learners of English who watched the material with L1 subtitles, L2 captions and no subtitles. The results show that watching the video significantly helped learners recognise the correct pronunciation of words. However, the results of the production and improvement of their own pronunciation were limited, and L1 subtitles were the least effective. The study clearly indicates that this input helps with the recognition but is not as effective for reproducing the right sound of pronunciation.

Another important aspect is the pragmatic and cultural dimension. Since communication is shown in situated contexts, Bonsignori (2018) argues that audiovisual materials can help learners to notice domain-specific, pragmatic, and cultural features. For instance, learners can observe how speakers apologise, make requests, joke, or react in different social situations. Frumuselu et al. (2015) point out that this type of content can expose learners to colloquial English through various channels: visual, oral, and written. Automatically this exposure can contribute to a broader awareness of how English is used socially and culturally, and it helps them to understand and use the language in the right context.

TV series can also be used as material for more focused classroom activities. Dose (2013) introduces the Corpus of American Television Series (CATS), a corpus made of transcribed dialogue from four contemporary American TV series: “Gilmore Girls”,

“Monk”, “Six Feet Under”, and “Veronica Mars”. It is a pedagogically relevant corpus of about 160,000 words for teaching and learning spoken grammar. The visual files can be combined with transcripts: learners can watch an excerpt, fill gaps in a transcript, transcribe short sections themselves, or compare their transcription with the original one. The aim is to incorporate this corpus into a classroom, which can become material for noticing spoken grammar, discourse markings, and differences between spoken and written English (Dose, 2013).

1.3.3 The Influence of Digital Media and Online Platforms

Digital media and online platforms have changed permanently the way learners encounter the English language. Nowadays, we have access to many forms of exposure, through smartphones, social media, streaming platforms, YouTube, podcasts, online communities, and language-learning apps, while in the past, it was more limited to only music, books, and television. De Riso (2025: 63-79) shows that the exposure to these media is vividly connected to contemporary media habits, and it has become part of learners’ ordinary digital routines.

Social media platforms are particularly relevant because through reading posts, watching videos, writing comments, and following content creators, learners are constantly exposed to English. It provides authentic and learner-generated content because it is a space where input and output happen simultaneously (Erarslan, 2019). Alharthi, Bown and Pullen (2020: 325-326) point out that social media platforms offer different contexts for vocabulary use and it is more varied than traditional classroom input. They can improve learners’ engagement, motivation, and vocabulary development, because they are found in posts, captions, comments, videos, and memes, instead of only in isolated exercises.

An important distinction is made based on the content learners focus on, meaning that a learner who reads news posts, may encounter a different form of English from someone who mainly reads comments, captions, or short messages. Muftah (2024) reports that undergraduate students perceive social media as useful regarding lexical variations, reading and communication skills, and writing style. Alharthi et al. (2020)

review research on social media platforms and conclude that they may improve engagement, motivation, and vocabulary development.

Since many platforms are based on short written interactions, digital media can also support the development of written English. However, not every form of online writing is academically correct. There is a distinction to draw between academic writing and social media writing, which may contain informal and abbreviated forms of grammar and vocabulary. Bakeer (2018) studied the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and social media in a university writing course and discovered that the integration of these tools had a positive effect on students' writing skills. Students perceive social media as useful for improving their writing style, quality, and quantity.

Online platforms do not only provide written input, but learners have also access to a wide range of spoken English. Fitria (2021) lists several digital resources that can be used for listening practice: musical platforms such as Spotify and Joox, YouTube channels such as BBC Learning English and Voice of America, podcasts, and websites designed for listening activities. Learners can choose materials according to their proficiency level, interests, and available time. De Riso (2025) shows that YouTube is one of the most important and used platforms in informal English exposure. Online listening can be more appealing to learners than traditional listening exercises because it can be more flexible, meaning that they can pause, replay and slow down the content.

Recent studies have begun to examine short-video platforms, such as TikTok, not only as entertainment tools, but also as possible resources for language learning. Zhai and Razali (2021) describe TikTok as a platform that may support oral communication in English, especially because it offers videos created by teachers and native speakers. Ibrahim, Shafie, and Abdul Rahim (2023) argue that TikTok is a useful tool for authentic language use and opportunities to practice language skills, however they also note that more research is needed and mention potential problems, such as distractions and the quality of content. It remains a valid option for encountering English through short videos when they are not deliberately studying.

Instagram is another example of a social media platform that can be helpful. Erarslan (2019) conducted a study in which Instagram is used as an educational platform for EFL learners and found that, when it was used as a supplement to formal classes, it had a positive impact on achievement scores. We can deduce that social media, when used in the right way, can be an extension of classroom learning. Social media can also be a less stressful space and may let learners feel more comfortable participating and expressing themselves.

Another aspect affected by digital media is learners' autonomy. Nowadays smartphones, tablets, laptops, and mobile apps have made English more flexible and accessible at all times for adult learners, and it is connected to self-direct learning (Yadav, 2021). Zhai and Razali (2021) make a similar point regarding TikTok and describe it as useful for self-regulated learning. However, autonomy is intertwined with responsibility, because the learning potential may be limited if learners choose content that is too easy, too distracting, or not linguistically correct.

To conclude, digital platforms have both advantages and disadvantages. They provide frequent input, different registers, opportunities for interaction and access to English outside of the classroom (Erarslan, 2019; Alharthi et al., 2020; Muftah, 2024). They can also support a variety of specific skills, such as listening, vocabulary, and writing (Fitria, 2021; Bakeer, 2018; Muftah, 2024). On the other hand, the quality and the reliability of online content is not always controlled and some platforms may distract the learner. Critical interpretation is needed when exposed to digital platforms because it can affect its efficiency in complex ways, including informal spelling, abbreviations, and non-standard forms. In the context of the present dissertation, digital platforms are therefore important because they make English accessible and entertaining, while still requiring guidance, awareness, and critical use.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and methodology of the current study. After the theoretical background discussed in Chapter One, this section describes the empirical part of the dissertation, which is based on an anonymous online questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire is to investigate participants' habits, experiences, and perceptions regarding contact with English outside formal education.

The chapter first explains the aim of the study and the reasons behind the choice of a questionnaire-based methodology, then the structure of the questionnaire, and finally, it presents the target participants, the demographic information collected, and the techniques used for data collection.

2.1 Aim and Description of the Study

The present study investigates the role of extramural contact with English in language learning: the ways in which participants encounter English outside formal educational contexts, and how they perceive the influence of this exposure on their language development. The study is connected to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter One, where Extramural English was discussed as contact with English beyond the classroom, especially through informal and self-directed activities.

The main aim of the study is to explore whether learners perceive informal exposure to English as useful for improving their language skills. Attention is given to audiovisual content, such as films, TV series, and online videos, and to digital platforms, including social media, streaming services, music platforms, video games, podcasts, and online communities. People may encounter English in everyday life through these common forms of contact, even when they are not deliberately studying, and that is the reason they were chosen. The study also aims to compare participants' perceptions of formal and informal learning. The questionnaire includes questions on

both school or university English and extramural exposure. This makes it possible to observe whether participants feel that their English has been influenced more by formal instruction, informal contact, or both.

The study does not measure participants' actual linguistic improvement through a language test: it focuses on self-reported habits, experiences, and perceptions. The information collected through the questionnaire is about how often participants encounter English, which activities expose them to the language, which skills they believe are supported by these activities, and how they evaluate the usefulness of informal English exposure. Rather than measuring actual language acquisition, the study examines how participants experience and evaluate extramural English.

2.2 Research Methodology

The research was conducted through an anonymous online questionnaire. Since the aim of the study is to explore habits and perceptions related to English exposure outside formal education, a questionnaire was considered appropriate because it makes it possible to gather information from a relatively varied group of participants in a brief period of time. This group may contain different educational backgrounds, age groups, and experiences.

Most questions are closed-ended and produce numerical and quantitative data that can be analysed through percentages and frequency counts. When participants are asked to evaluate the usefulness of specific forms of exposure, the question uses a 1-5 scale. However, the questionnaire also includes a small qualitative component: the concluding section contains two optional open-ended questions, which invite participants to explain how contact with English in their daily life has influenced their learning and whether there is a particular experience, habit or type of content that they consider especially useful. These answers can provide more personal and detailed comments and thus help explain some of the tendencies that emerge from the quantitative data.

Since the questionnaire was distributed through personal contacts and online sharing, the study relies on a convenience sample. Participants were not selected through a controlled or statistically procedure but took part because they received the questionnaire and chose to complete it. Although this sampling method was appropriate for a small-scale study of this kind, it also represents a limitation: the results cannot be generalised to account for any learner of English. Nevertheless, the data can still provide useful insights into how different participants perceive the role of English exposure outside formal education.

Although the dissertation is written in English, I have decided to present the questionnaire in Italian, to make it accessible to participants at various levels of English proficiency. If the questionnaire had been written in English, participants with lower knowledge of the language might have avoided completing it. Using Italian made it easier for respondents to understand the questions clearly and answer them without feeling limited by their English level.

2.3 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was created and administered using *Google Forms* and administered online. It consists of thirty-three questions divided into five sections. Thirty-one questions are closed-ended and compulsory, while the final two are open-ended and optional. The questionnaire is anonymous and does not collect names, email addresses, or other identifying information.

The first section collects general information about the participants and their relationship with English. It includes questions on age group, highest level of education achieved, current student status, years of English study, self-assessed English level, and perceived usefulness of formal English learning. Participants are also asked to indicate where they believe they learned the most: at school or university, outside formal education, through both contexts equally, or whether they are unsure.

The second section focuses on contact with English outside the formal educational context. Participants are asked how often they encounter the language outside school,

which activities expose them most often to it, why they usually engage with English content, and what the main difficulty is when they get in touch with it. The activities listed include films, TV series, YouTube videos, music, social media, videogames, podcasts, websites, blogs, forums, books, articles, and online conversations.

The third section is dedicated to films, TV series, and audiovisual content. The questions ask participants how often they watch films, TV series, or online videos in English, which viewing mode they usually choose, and why they watch these contents in English. The questionnaire also asks which aspect of English they believe is most supported by films and TV series, such as listening comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation, confidence in speaking or understanding informal expressions. Three scale questions then ask participants to evaluate whether films and TV series have helped them improve vocabulary, understand spoken English better and learn through subtitles.

The fourth section focuses on social media and digital platforms. Participants are asked which platforms they mainly use, which ones and how often do these platforms expose them to English, if they usually understand the content without translating it, and whether they think these platforms are useful for improving their English. The options include YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Netflix or other streaming platforms, Spotify or other music platforms, podcasts, videogames, online forums or communities, news websites, and language-learning apps.

The last section asks participants to reflect more generally on the topic of formal and informal contexts. Participants are asked how much they feel they have improved thanks to informal English, which context they believe has contributed more to their learning, which aspects are taught better in formal education and, eventually, which elements are better supported by contact with English outside classroom environment. The section ends with a question about whether school or university should connect English learning more with contents used in daily life, such as films, TV series, social media, music, and online videos. Finally, two optional open-ended questions allow respondents to add personal reflections on their experience with English in everyday life.

2.3.1 Description of the Participants

The questionnaire was addressed to participants aged 14 and above. This age range was chosen to include adolescents, young adults, and adults, since all these groups may encounter English through informal exposure. Its aim is to observe whether different age groups report different habits and perceptions regarding the language exposure. The questionnaire was not limited to students, and although formal education is one of the crucial points of comparison in the study, the research also aims to include people who are no longer studying but may still encounter English through work, entertainment, social media, digital platforms, or personal interests. Extramural English is not restricted to school learners but can involve several types of users and learning experiences.

The final sample consists of 160 participants. Approximately 57% of respondents are students, ranging from lower secondary school to master's degree level, while about 43% are workers or participants who are not currently studying. This variety allows the study to consider both participants who are still involved in formal education and those who encounter English outside school or university.

2.3.2 Demographic Information

The demographic section of the questionnaire was designed to collect only basic information needed for the analysis. Participants were asked to indicate their age group, highest level of education and whether they were currently studying. Exact ages were not collected; instead, age ranges were used to compare broader groups without asking for unnecessary personal information.

The age groups included in the questionnaire are 14-17, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44 and 45+. The younger age group is relevant because adolescents often encounter English through school, social media, music, videogames and audiovisual content. Adult participants, instead, may have different experiences, especially if they are no longer

exposed to English through formal education but still encounter it through work, travel, entertainment, or digital media.

Participants were also asked to indicate their highest level of education. The options included lower secondary school, upper secondary school, bachelor's degree, master's degree, PhD or other postgraduate qualification, and "Other". Educational background is an important topic to cover in the questionnaire because it may influence both participants' formal exposure to English and their perception of school-based language learning.

Another question asked whether participants were currently studying. This distinction is useful because the study does not only focus on students, but also on people who may have completed their formal education. An aspect brought up by the questionnaire was whether asking both students, who are still involved in formal education, and non-students, who encounter English through work, travel, and social media, could be helpful with seeing differences in the perception of English learning.

The questionnaire also included questions on participants' English learning background. Respondents indicated the number of years they had studied English in a formal context and selected their current self-perceived level of English according to the CEFR levels, from A1 to C2. These self-assessed levels do not provide an objective measurement of competence, but they are useful for understanding how participants perceive their own proficiency and confidence in English.

2.3.3 Data Collection Techniques

The questionnaire was distributed through personal contacts and online sharing, especially through WhatsApp and social media. Participants were also encouraged to share the questionnaire with other people, to reach respondents from different age groups and backgrounds.

The online format made the questionnaire easy to administer and allowed participants to answer from their own devices, such as smartphones, tablets, or

computers. This was particularly useful because the topic of the study itself concerns digital media, online platforms, and everyday contact with English.

The data collected from closed-ended questions will be analysed through percentages and frequency counts. This will make it possible to identify general tendencies in the sample, such as the most common forms of extramural contact with English, the frequency of exposure, the platforms most frequently associated with English input, and the skills that participants believe are most supported by informal exposure. The answers to the open-ended questions will be analysed qualitatively. They will not be used to produce statistical generalisations, but to provide examples of participants' firsthand experiences and perceptions. These comments may help illustrate how individual respondents understand the role of English in their daily lives and how they connect informal exposure with their own learning process.

All responses were analysed in aggregate form. Since the questionnaire was anonymous, the study does not identify individual participants. The data are used only for academic purposes and only in relation to the research aims of the dissertation.

The analysis of the results will be presented in Chapter Three, where the main findings of the questionnaire will be discussed in connection with the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter One.

CHAPTER THREE

Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaire and discusses them in relation to the main topic of the dissertation: the role of Extramural English and informal exposure in English language learning.

The results of the questionnaire are presented through percentages, figures and tables, with particular attention to the areas that are most relevant to the study: participants' English learning background, their contact with English outside formal education, the role of audiovisual content, the influence of social media and digital platforms, and the perceived relationship between formal education and extramural exposure. The final part of the chapter discusses the general meaning of the results and connects the quantitative answers with the open-ended responses.

3.1 Questionnaire Overview

The questionnaire collected answers from 160 respondents. The first questions were used to obtain a general profile of the sample, including age, educational background and current student status. It contributes to a better understanding of who the respondents are and how their answers may reflect different experiences with English.

Figure 1 illustrates the different age groups:

1. Qual è la tua fascia d'età?

160 risposte

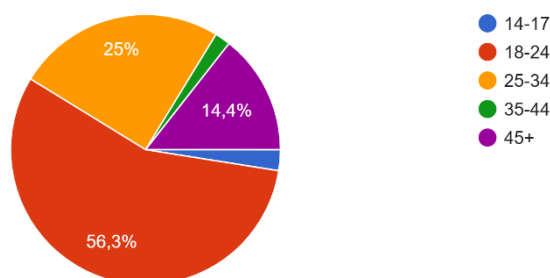


Figure 1- Age groups

The sample was mainly composed of young adults. The largest age group was 18-24, which included 90 respondents, corresponding to 56.3% of the sample. The second largest group was 25-34, with 40 respondents (25%). The questionnaire also included 23 respondents aged 45 or above (14.4%), while the younger group aged 14-17 represented 2.5% of the sample. The smallest group was 35-44, with 1.9%.

Regarding the educational background, as shown in Figure 2 below, the largest group had completed or was attending upper secondary school, which represented 50.6% of the sample. Respondents with a bachelor's degree represented 31.9%, while 11.9% had obtained a master's degree. Smaller groups included respondents with lower secondary education and other qualifications. This confirms that most respondents had already had several years of formal education and, as the following results show, most of them had also studied English for a long period of time.

2. Qual è il tuo livello di istruzione più alto?

160 risposte

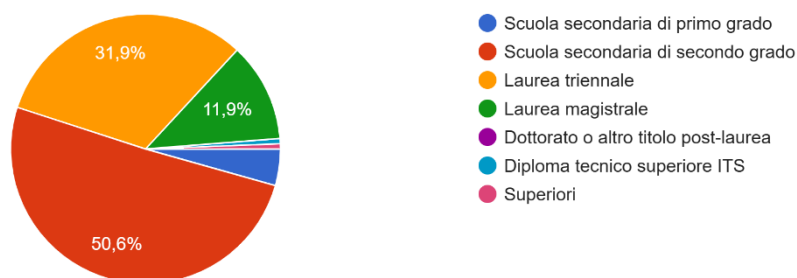


Figure 2- Educational background

The questionnaire did not only reach out to students or people currently involved in formal education, but included a variety of other participants who may experience English through work, entertainment, online platforms or personal interests. In fact, when respondents were asked whether they were currently studying, 91 participants answered yes (56.9%), while 69 participants answered no (43.1%). This variety of ages and educational backgrounds makes it possible to observe how English is perceived not only as a school subject, but also as a language encountered in one's daily life.

3.2 Main Findings and Results of the Study

Figure 3 illustrates the range of participants' learning backgrounds, specifically how many years they had studied:

4. Per quanti anni hai studiato inglese a scuola, all'università o a un corso?
160 risposte

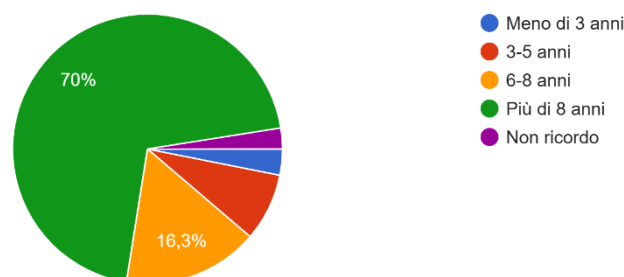


Figure 3- Years of English study

A large majority of respondents had studied English for many years. In particular, 112 respondents (70%) stated that they had studied English for more than eight years, while 26 respondents (16.3%) had studied it for six to eight years. This means that most of the sample had long-term formal exposure to English through school, university or language courses. Most respondents were not generally beginners with little experience of English and had already studied the language for a considerable amount of time.

Figure 4 illustrates their perceived current level of English according to the CEFR scale:

5. Come descriveresti il tuo livello attuale di inglese?

160 risposte

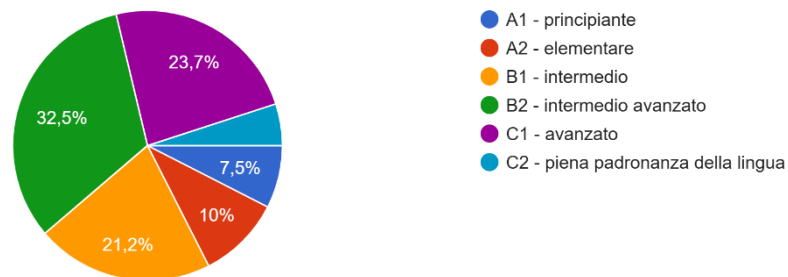


Figure 4- Current level of English

The largest group selected B2 – upper-intermediate, with 52 respondents (32.5%). This was followed by C1 – advanced, selected by 38 respondents (23.7%), and B1 – intermediate, selected by 34 respondents (21.2%). Lower levels were less frequent: A2 was selected by 16 respondents (10%) and A1 by 12 respondents (7.5%). Only 8 respondents (5%) selected C2. Most participants therefore placed themselves between intermediate and advanced levels.

Figure 5 illustrates the context in which respondents believe they mainly learned English:

6. Dove pensi di aver imparato principalmente la lingua?

160 risposte

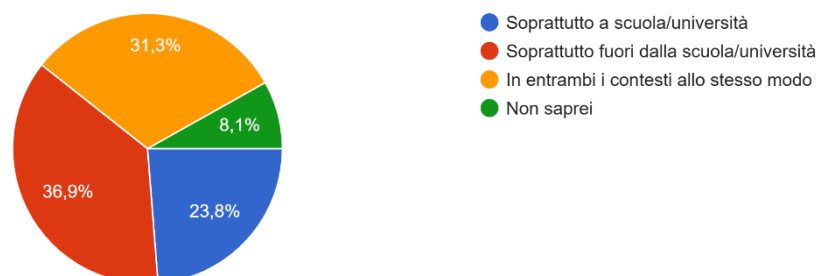


Figure 5- Context in which they learned the most

The most frequent answer was “mostly outside school/university”, selected by 59 respondents (36.9%). Another 50 respondents (31.3%) answered that they had learned English in both contexts equally. By contrast, only 38 respondents (23.8%) stated that they had learned English mainly at school or university, while 13 respondents (8.1%) were unsure. This is one of the first relevant findings of the questionnaire because although most respondents had studied English for more than eight years, many of them did not identify school or university as the main place where they learned the language. If the answers “mostly outside school/university” and “both contexts equally” are considered together, 68.2% of respondents attributed an important role to English exposure outside formal education, as a suggestion that extramural contact is perceived as a major part of their learning experience.

Another question asked respondents how useful they considered the English studied at school or university for their current ability to understand and use the language. Out of a scale from 1 to 5, the most common answer was 3, selected by 65 respondents (40.6%). Many respondents saw formal education as moderately useful, but not as the only or most effective element in their English learning. The answers do not show a complete rejection of school-based English, but rather a mixed evaluation.

A similar pattern appears in the question about confidence in using English in one’s daily life. The answers were distributed across the scale, but 68 respondents selected either 4 or 5, corresponding to 42.5% of the sample. A considerable part of the respondents felt confident using English in everyday situations, although confidence was not equally high for everyone.

The next section of the questionnaire focused directly on the contact with extramural English. Figure 6 illustrates the frequency of Extramural English exposure:

9. Quanto spesso entri in contatto con l'inglese fuori dal contesto scolastico?

160 risposte

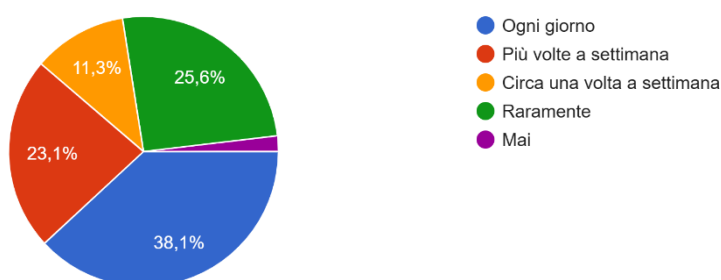


Figure 6- Frequency of Extramural exposure

61 respondents (38.1%) answered every day, while 37 respondents (23.1%) answered several times a week. Taken together, these two groups represent 61.2% of the sample. Only 3 respondents (1.9%) stated that they never encounter English outside school. This result shows that English is a regular presence in the daily life of many respondents. At the same time, 41 respondents (25.6%) answered “rarely”, which means that extramural exposure is not the same for everyone.

Respondents were then asked through which activities they most often come into contact with English outside formal education. Since this was a multiple-choice question, participants could select more than one answer. The most frequent source was music, selected by 124 respondents (77.5%). This was followed by social media, selected by 116 respondents (72.5%), and YouTube videos, selected by 91 respondents (56.9%). Films were selected by 80 respondents (50%), TV series by 77 respondents (48.1%), and websites, blogs or forums by 72 respondents (45%). Other sources included online chats or conversations (27.5%), videogames (23.1%), books or articles (20%) and podcasts (14.4%). These results show that English exposure is strongly connected to media, entertainment and digital platforms. The most frequent sources are not traditional learning materials, but activities that respondents probably use for personal interest or leisure. Contact with English often happens outside intentional study. In many cases, English appears as part of activities that respondents already do for other reasons.

This idea is supported by the following question, as shown in figure 7 below, which asked respondents why they usually come into contact with English content. The most frequent reason was entertainment, selected by 108 respondents (67.5%). The second most frequent answer was personal interest, selected by 89 respondents (55.6%). Study or work reasons were selected by 70 respondents (43.8%), while 46 respondents (28.7%) selected communication with other people. Only 35 respondents (21.9%) selected “to improve my English”. Only 35 respondents (21.9%) selected “to improve my English”.

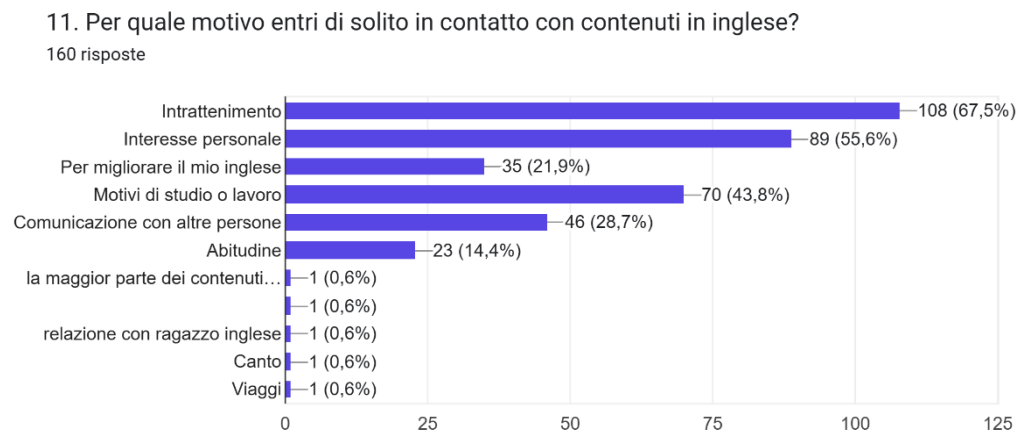


Figure 7- Why do respondents encounter English

This significant result shows that respondents do not usually encounter English only because they want to study it. The learning process may often be incidental. Many of them indeed claim to encounter it because English is present in music, videos, social media, entertainment and online content. A given respondent may be mainly interested in the content, while exposure to English becomes a consequence of that activity. However, contact with English outside school is not always easy.

Figure 8 illustrates the main difficulties they experience when they encounter English content:

12. Qual è la difficoltà principale quando entri in contatto con dei contenuti in inglese?

160 risposte

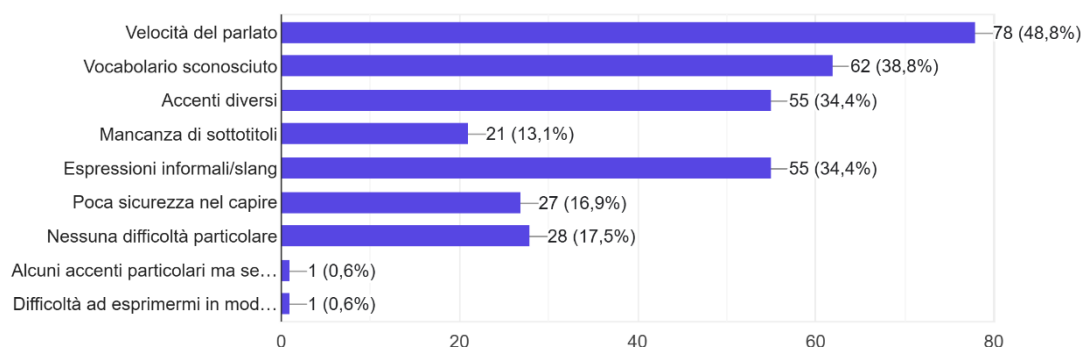


Figure 8- Difficulties in encountering English

The most common difficulty was speed of speech, selected by 78 respondents (48.8%). This was followed by unknown vocabulary, selected by 62 respondents (38.8%). Different accents and informal expressions/slang were each selected by 55 respondents (34.4%). Other difficulties included lack of confidence in understanding (16.9%) and lack of subtitles (13.1%). These answers show that extramural exposure can be useful but also challenging. Authentic or semi-authentic content often includes fast speech, informal expressions, unfamiliar vocabulary and different accents. These difficulties are relevant because they are also aspects of language that respondents later associate with informal exposure. Extramural English may be difficult precisely because it exposes learners to natural language use.

The following section focuses on films, TV series and audiovisual content. Figure 9 illustrates the respondent's frequency of watching content in English:

13. Quanto spesso guardi film, serie TV o video online in inglese?

160 risposte

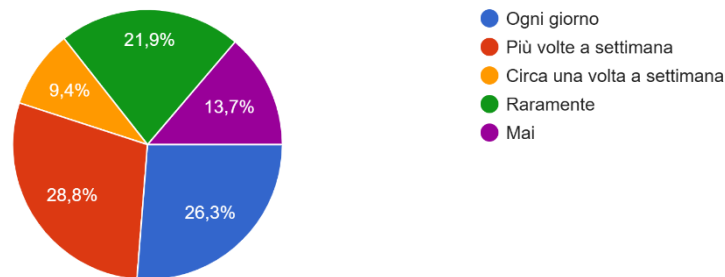


Figure 9- Frequency of encountering audiovisual input

42 respondents (26.3%) answered every day, while 46 respondents (28.8%) answered several times a week. Therefore, about 55% of the sample watches audiovisual content in English frequently. On the other hand, 35 respondents (21.9%) answered “rarely”, and 22 respondents (13.7%) answered “never”. This result confirms that audiovisual content represents an important form of English exposure for many respondents. Films, series and online videos can provide repeated contact with spoken English, pronunciation, intonation, informal expressions and different accents. However, the data also show that not all respondents regularly consume audiovisual content in English.

In figure 10 participants were asked which viewing method they choose most often:

14. Quando guardi film/serie TV, quale modalità scegli più spesso?

160 risposte

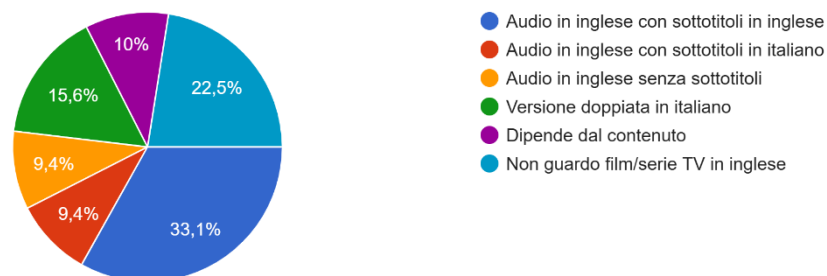


Figure 10- Preferred viewing method

The most frequent answer was English audio with same-language subtitles, selected by 53 respondents (33.1%). 36 respondents (22.5%) stated that they do not watch films or TV series in English. 25 respondents (15.6%) selected the Italian dubbed version. English audio without subtitles and English audio with Italian subtitles were both selected by 15 respondents (9.4%), while 16 respondents (10%) answered that it depends on the content. It is important to highlight the fact that English audio with English subtitles was the most frequent option. This may help them connect the pronunciation of words with their written forms, recognise vocabulary and follow the content more easily. At the same time, the presence of respondents who choose dubbing or do not watch films and series in English shows that this type of exposure is not to be taken for granted.

The reasons for watching films or TV series in English were varied. 57 respondents (35.6%) selected “to improve my English”, while 55 respondents (34.4%) selected “to hear the actors’ original voices”. 45 respondents (28.1%) stated that they prefer the original version, and 42 respondents (26.3%) said that they watch in English to better understand jokes, wordplay or expressions. These answers show that audiovisual content is connected both to learning and to enjoyment. Some respondents watch in English with a clear language-learning purpose, while others do so because they prefer the original version or want a more authentic viewing experience.

Figure 11 illustrates which aspect of English is helped the most by films and TV series:

16. Secondo te, quale aspetto dell'inglese viene aiutato maggiormente da film e serie TV?
160 risposte

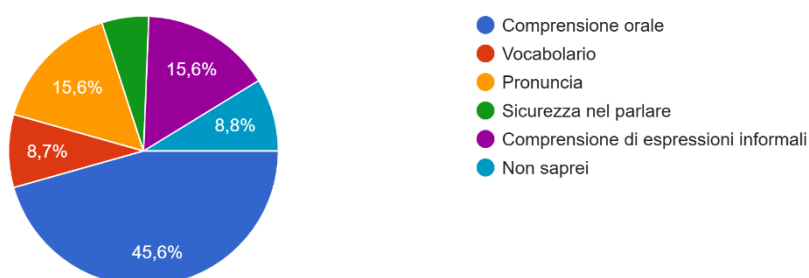


Figure 11- Most affected aspect of English

The most frequent answer was listening comprehension, selected by 73 respondents (45.6%). This was followed by pronunciation and understanding informal expressions, each selected by 25 respondents (15.6%). Vocabulary was selected by 14 respondents (8.7%), while confidence in speaking was selected by 9 respondents (5.6%). This is one of the clearest findings in the audiovisual section. Respondents mainly associate films and TV series with the improvement of listening comprehension. This is expected, since audiovisual content exposes learners to spoken English in context. It also explains why pronunciation, informal expressions and vocabulary appear as secondary but still relevant areas.

The next Likert scale question confirms this positive perception. Table 1 illustrates how audiovisual content is perceived as useful:

Statement	Average score
Films/TV series helped me expand my vocabulary	3.68/5
Films/TV series helped me understand spoken English better	3.80/5
Subtitles help me learn English while watching	3.58/5

Table 1: How audiovisual content is perceived

The statement “Watching films/TV series in English has helped me expand my vocabulary” received an average score of 3.68 out of 5. The statement “Watching films/TV series has helped me understand spoken English better” received the highest average in this group, with 3.80 out of 5. Finally, the statement “Subtitles help me learn English while watching films/TV series” received an average of 3.58 out of 5. These scores show that respondents generally perceive audiovisual content as useful, especially for spoken comprehension. Vocabulary and subtitles are also evaluated positively, but the strongest result concerns the ability to understand spoken English. This confirms the previous answer, where listening comprehension was the most frequently selected skill.

The next part of the questionnaire focuses on social media and digital platforms. Figure 12 illustrates the frequency of English exposure on social media and digital platforms.

22. Quanto spesso incontri contenuti in inglese sui social media/piattaforme digitali?
160 risposte

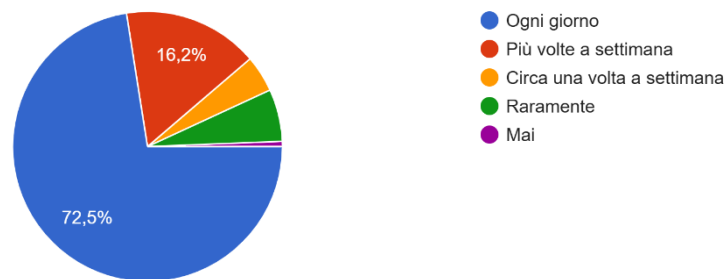


Figure 12- Frequency of English exposure on social media

The frequency of English content on social media and digital platforms is one of the most meaningful results of the questionnaire. 116 respondents (72.5%) stated that they encounter English content on these platforms every day, while 26 respondents (16.2%) answered several times a week. Taken together, these two groups represent 88.7% of the sample. Only one respondent answered that they never encounter English content on social media or digital platforms. This shows that digital platforms provide frequent and repeated exposure to English. Compared to other sources, social media and online platforms appear to be one of the most constant forms of contact with the language. This is especially relevant for the study because it supports the idea that English is increasingly present in everyday online activities.

Table 2 illustrates the results of two questions combined: which platforms they use most often and which one exposes them the most to English.

Platform	Used most often	Exposes respondents to English
Instagram	82.5%	66.3%
YouTube	71.9%	63.7%
TikTok	46.9%	47.5%

Netflix/streaming platforms	61.9%	46.9%
Spotify/music platforms	61.9%	46.9%

Table 2: Most used platforms

In the first question, the most frequently selected platform was Instagram, chosen by 132 respondents (82.5%). This was followed by YouTube, selected by 115 respondents (71.9%). Netflix or other streaming platforms and Spotify or other music platforms were each selected by 99 respondents (61.9%). 75 respondents (46.9%) selected TikTok. In the second question, again, the most frequent answers were Instagram and YouTube. 106 respondents (66.2%) selected Instagram, while 102 respondents (63.7%) selected YouTube. 76 respondents (47.5%) selected TikTok, while Netflix or other streaming platforms and Spotify or other music platforms were each selected by 75 respondents (46.9%). The comparison shows that the platforms respondents use most often are also important sources of English exposure. Instagram and YouTube are particularly relevant, but TikTok, streaming platforms and music platforms also play an important role, meaning that English exposure is connected to ordinary digital habits.

Respondents were also asked whether they usually understand English content on social media or digital platforms without translating it. 104 respondents (65%) answered “yes, almost always”. Another 26 respondents (16.2%) answered that they understand it if the content is simple. 20 respondents (12.5%) stated that they sometimes use a translator. Smaller groups answered that they are not interested in understanding more deeply, that they do not often struggle, or that they do not encounter English content. Digital exposure is not only frequent but also meaningful for many respondents. A large part of the sample feels able to understand English content directly, without constant translation. This does not prove objective language improvement, but it shows that respondents perceive themselves as able to access and understand English-language digital content.

The Likert scale questions also show a generally positive perception. Table 3 illustrates the perceived usefulness of social media and digital platforms:

Statement	Average score
Social media/digital platforms helped me improve my English	3.57/5
Social media/digital platforms make it easier to learn English	3.64/5
I feel more motivated when the content is linked to my interests	4.15/5

Table 3: Usefulness of social media/digital platforms

The statement “Social media/digital platforms have helped me improve my English” received an average score of 3.57 out of 5. The statement “Social media/digital platforms make it easier to learn English outside school/work” received an average of 3.64 out of 5. The highest result was for the statement “I feel more motivated to use English when the content is connected to my personal interests”, which received an average score of 4.15 out of 5. This last statement is particularly significant. 80 respondents (50%) selected the highest score, and 43 respondents (26.9%) selected 4. Therefore, 76.9% of the sample strongly agreed that they feel more motivated when English content is connected to their personal interests.

The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents to reflect more directly on the relationship between formal education and English outside school or university. Respondents were asked how much they feel they have improved in English thanks to contact with the language outside school. The average score was 3.78 out of 5. 56 respondents (35%) selected 4, and 51 respondents (31.9%) selected 5. This means that 66.9% of the sample gave a high score.

The next question asked which context contributed the most to their English learning. The most frequent answer was “contact with English outside school/university”, selected by 76 respondents (47.5%). 41 respondents (25.6%) selected both contexts equally, while only 27 respondents (16.9%) selected school/university. The remaining answers included “I don’t know” and a few individual responses mentioning travel, study interests or experiences abroad. Almost half of the respondents identified English outside school or university as the context that contributed most to their learning. Moreover, more than a quarter of the sample

considered formal and informal contexts equally important. If these two groups are considered together, 73.1% of respondents attributed a significant role to extramural exposure.

The following two questions show more clearly what respondents associate with formal education and what they associate with English outside school. When asked which aspects of English are taught better at school or university, the most frequent answer was grammar, selected by 140 respondents (87.5%). This was much higher than all other options. Other relevant answers were academic English (36.3%), writing (35.6%), vocabulary (28.7%) and correction of mistakes (20.6%). Oral production was selected by only 10.6% of respondents. These answers suggest that respondents associate formal education mainly with explicit, structured and accuracy-based learning. School and university are perceived as useful for grammar, writing, academic English and correction.

The answers change considerably when respondents are asked which aspects are better supported by contact with English outside school or university. The most frequent answer was listening comprehension, selected by 116 respondents (72.5%). This was followed by informal expressions, selected by 113 respondents (70.6%), and pronunciation, selected by 96 respondents (60%). Other frequent answers were confidence in the language (52.5%), vocabulary (45.6%), speaking (43.8%), understanding different accents (43.8%) and cultural knowledge (40.6%). Grammar was selected by only 8 respondents (5%). The contrast between these two questions is very clear. This distinction is central to the interpretation of the results, because it suggests that formal and informal learning are not seen as identical. Instead, they are perceived as supporting different dimensions of English learning.

The final closed-ended question asked whether school or university should connect English learning more with content used in daily life, such as films, TV series, social media and music, as shown in Figure 13:

31. Secondo te, la scuola/università dovrebbe collegare di più l'apprendimento dell'inglese ai contenuti che si usano nella vita quotidiana (film, serie TV, social media, musica..)?

160 risposte

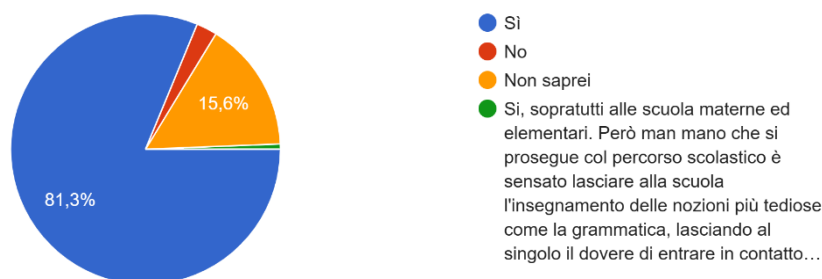


Figure 13- Connecting more formal education with everyday content

The results were very clear: 130 respondents (81.3%) answered yes. 25 respondents (15.6%) answered I don't know, while only 4 respondents (2.5%) answered no. One respondent gave a longer answer, suggesting that everyday content could be especially useful in earlier stages of education, while grammar could remain part of formal instruction. Most of the respondents seem to support a closer connection between classroom English and the English they encounter outside the classroom.

The two open-ended questions provide further support for the quantitative results. The first open-ended question asked how contact with English in daily life had influenced respondents' language learning. 90 respondents answered this question. Many answers mentioned improvement in listening comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation, informal expressions and confidence. Several respondents also referred to films, series, social media, music and conversations with foreign people as important sources of learning. Some answers clearly distinguished between school-based English and everyday English, reflecting the same contrast found in the closed-ended questions: formal education is associated with foundations and structure, while extramural exposure is associated with practical use and comprehension.

The second open-ended question asked whether there is an experience, habit or type of English content that respondents found particularly helpful and would recommend. 95 respondents answered this question. The most frequent examples were watching films and TV series in English, listening to music, watching YouTube videos, using social media, reading books in English, travelling abroad and speaking with foreign

people. Some respondents also mentioned videogames, online content and translating unknown words while watching or listening to English content.

These open answers show that respondents experience English outside school in different ways. For some, the most useful activity is watching films or series with subtitles. For others, it is travelling, speaking with people, listening to music or using online platforms. Despite this variety, the answers point in the same general direction: English in daily life is perceived as useful because it exposes learners to language in context, often in a more spontaneous and personal way than formal instruction.

3.3 Discussion of the Results

The results of the questionnaire suggest that extramural English has an important role in the respondents' learning experience. The first point that emerges clearly is the frequency of exposure, since many respondents encounter English outside school every day or several times a week. The data on social media and digital platforms show that respondents feel more motivated when English content is linked to something they are interested in. Motivation is strongly connected to personal interest, which is a key factor in extramural English exposure. Learners may engage with English more willingly when the language gives them access to something they already care about. Extramural English can be motivating because it is connected to voluntary and meaningful activities. The language is not always the main object of attention, sometimes it becomes part of the activity itself. This does not mean that learning is absent but rather suggests that exposure often happens incidentally. Respondents may listen to music, watch videos or use social media because they are interested in the content, but at the same time they are repeatedly exposed to English. For many respondents, English appears as part of their ordinary life in digital environment.

The questionnaire also shows that extramural exposure can be challenging. Respondents identified speed of speech, unknown vocabulary, different accents and slang as common difficulties. These are typical features of authentic or semi-authentic English input. Therefore, informal exposure is not always simple or immediately accessible. However, these difficulties may also explain why respondents consider

extramural English useful: it exposes them to aspects of the language that are often less controlled and more varied than classroom materials.

The comparison between formal education and extramural exposure is one of the strongest parts of the study. Respondents do not seem to reject school or university completely; in fact, the results do not support a simple opposition between school learning and informal learning. It would be too reductive to say that one is better than the other. A more realistic interpretation is that the two contexts have different functions: formal education gives learners foundations, rules and guidance, and are associated with specific strengths, such as grammar and writing, while Extramural exposure gives them repeated contact with English in terms of listening, pronunciation and speaking. The first context tends to be more controlled and explicit, while the second is more spontaneous, varied and connected to real-life content. The answers show a more balanced situation, meaning that they can complete each other. The open-ended answers confirm this interpretation.

Several respondents explained that school gave them the basics, while contact with English in daily life helped them understand spoken language. This kind of answer is important because it shows that learners themselves often make a distinction between knowing English as a school subject and using English as a practical language. 81.3% of the participants suggests that learners would like formal education to be more connected to the English they encounter outside the classroom. This does not necessarily mean using only films, social media or music in class. Rather, it suggests that formal education could benefit from including more authentic or familiar materials, so that learners can see a clearer connection between classroom learning and real-life English use. Eventually, a more effective approach to English learning may be one that recognises the value of both: the structure of formal instruction and the frequent, meaningful exposure provided by everyday English contact.

At the same time, it is important not to overstate the results. The questionnaire is based on self-reported answers, so it measures participant perceptions rather than their actual linguistic improvement. Respondents may feel that films, social media or music have helped them, but the study does not test their vocabulary, pronunciation or listening comprehension directly. Therefore, the data cannot prove that extramural

exposure automatically leads to language acquisition, and it should be read as exploratory. What it shows is how respondents perceive the role of this exposure in their own learning experience.

A further point that can be observed concerns age. The sample is not evenly distributed across all ages, since the 18-24 group is much larger than the others, while the 14-17 and 35-44 groups are very small. Although the study does not aim to provide a detailed comparison between age groups, some tendencies emerge from the data. Younger respondents, seem more likely to attribute an important role to English outside school or university. Older respondents, especially those aged 45 and above, appear to rely more on formal education or to report less frequent extramural exposure. This may be connected to different media habits and to the stronger presence of digital platforms in the everyday lives of younger participants. However, this point should be treated as a possible tendency rather than as a firm conclusion.

Overall, the questionnaire supports the idea that English learning today is not limited to school or university. For many respondents, English is also encountered through these informal activities. These forms of contact are not always planned as language learning, but they are perceived as meaningful and useful. The results therefore suggest that extramural English can play an important role in supporting language development.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has investigated the role of Extramural English in informal language learning. The main purpose of this study was to understand how learners perceive the English they encounter outside of school or university, and how this exposure becomes part of their personal learning experience. It was not based on language tests or direct measurement of proficiency: it focused on learners' perceptions, habits and opinions.

This area of study is relevant because English is no longer encountered only in classrooms, textbooks or traditional learning materials. Many learners meet the language in ordinary moments of their daily lives, often without perceiving those moments as real study. Therefore, the boundary between learning and simple exposure can become less clear. A person may be watching a video, listening to music, using an online platform or following content for personal interest, but at the same time they may be exposed to vocabulary, pronunciation, expressions and patterns of language use. This is one of the reasons why Extramural English represents a significant area of investigation within language learning studies.

The theoretical part of the dissertation helped framing this idea by distinguishing between formal learning and informal exposure. Formal education is generally organised, guided and connected to clear objectives. Informal exposure, by contrast, is less structured and often depends on the learner's interests, habits and environment. Although these two dimensions are different, the study has shown that they should not be treated as separate. In many learners' experience, they coexist and influence each other.

The questionnaire offered a practical way to observe this relationship. The answers showed that many respondents did not perceive English only as a school subject. They also associated it with activities, content and situations that belong to everyday life. It indicates that English learning may continue outside the classroom in ways that are less visible but still meaningful. Even when learners are not intentionally studying, repeated contact with the language may shape their familiarity with it.

One central point that emerges from the study is that informal exposure can make language users perceive English as more concrete. In formal education, the language is often divided into rules, exercises and specific skills. This is useful and necessary, especially for developing grammar awareness and accuracy, but it can sometimes make people English feel as distant from real communication. Extramural English, instead, places the language in contexts where it has a practical function: understanding content, following interests, communicating, or participating in a wider cultural and digital environment. This kind of contact may help learners view English as a living language rather than only as an academic subject.

At the same time, the dissertation does not suggest that informal exposure is enough by itself. Extramural English can be useful, but it can also be incomplete, irregular and difficult to understand. Learners may be exposed to language that is fast, informal or unfamiliar, and they may not always have the tools to interpret it correctly. Formal education remains important because it can provide explanations, structure and correction, helping learners make sense of what they encounter outside the classroom.

The most balanced interpretation, therefore, is that formal education and Extramural English can complement each other. Formal learning can give learners a foundation, while informal exposure can give them opportunities to recognise and experience the language in less controlled contexts. One dimension should not be considered better than the other. They respond to different needs and can support different parts of the learning process. This complementarity is one of the most central ideas developed in the dissertation.

Motivation concerns another relevant point. Informal contact with English is often linked to content that learners choose freely. This can make the experience more personal and less connected to obligation, and learners may be more willing to spend time with the language. This does not automatically mean that learning takes place in every situation, but it shows that motivation and personal relevance can make exposure more frequent and more meaningful.

The study also suggests that formal education could take greater account of the English that learners already encounter outside of school. This does not mean that lessons should simply reproduce entertainment content or abandon traditional

teaching, but it rather means that classroom learning could benefit from a stronger connection with real-life language exposure. If students can relate what they study to the English they meet in their daily lives, the language may become more relevant and easier to contextualise.

As with any small-scale questionnaire study, the findings of this dissertation must be interpreted with caution. The aim was not to produce general conclusions about all learners of English, but to observe the perceptions of a specific group of respondents. The data are based on personal opinions and experiences, and therefore they show how participants understand their own contact with English rather than measuring language development directly. Since the questionnaire was distributed through online sharing and personal contacts, the sample presents some limitations. It is not balanced across all age groups, and this affects the extent to which the results can be generalised. However, this does not reduce the value of the study, rather, it clarifies its purpose: the data should be understood as an exploratory insight into learners' perceptions of Extramural English, not as conclusive evidence.

Future research could develop this topic in different directions. It could focus on a single form of informal exposure, or compare learners with different ages, educational backgrounds and media habits. It could also combine questionnaires with interviews, language tests or learning diaries, in order to compare learners' perceptions with more direct evidence of language development. Learners may perceive Extramural English as helpful, but this perception does not necessarily show how their vocabulary, listening comprehension, pronunciation or speaking skills actually develop. Future studies could therefore investigate not only how learners describe their contact with English, but also how this contact is reflected in their actual language use over time.

To conclude, this dissertation has shown that English learning should be viewed as a process that may extend beyond the limits of formal instruction. School and university remain important, but they are not the only contexts in which learners meet and develop English. Extramural English shows that language learning can also be connected to everyday practices, personal interests and repeated exposure. Recognising this wider dimension allows for a more realistic understanding of English learning, as a process that happens both inside and outside the classroom.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

I acknowledge use of the following:

Tool 1 – ChatGPT: used as a support tool for brainstorming, organising ideas, clarifying concepts, supporting my understanding of academic books and articles, and checking grammar, spelling and clarity of text written by me.

All sources, summaries, references and data were checked against the original materials. The questionnaire, data collection, analysis and final content were developed, revised and finalised by me.

SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

La presente tesi analizza il ruolo dell'inglese extramurale nell'apprendimento informale della lingua inglese, con attenzione ai contenuti audiovisivi e alle piattaforme online come fonti di esposizione linguistica. Questa tesi vuole capire come gli studenti vivono il contatto con l'inglese fuori dalla scuola o dall'università, e se lo considerano effettivamente utile per migliorare le proprie competenze linguistiche. Non si cerca quindi di misurare il progresso linguistico con test o prove oggettive, bensì a ciò che i partecipanti pensano, alle loro abitudini e al modo in cui percepiscono l'esposizione all'inglese nella loro vita quotidiana.

Il punto di partenza del lavoro è l'idea che l'apprendimento dell'inglese non avvenga soltanto attraverso l'istruzione formale. La scuola e l'università continuano ad avere un ruolo importante, tuttavia, oggi molti apprendenti entrano in contatto con l'inglese anche attraverso attività quotidiane come film, serie TV, musica, video online, social media, videogiochi e piattaforme digitali. In questi casi, l'esposizione alla lingua può avvenire anche senza un'intenzione esplicita di studio. Si tratta di un tipo di esposizione proveniente da un'attività volontaria e auto-iniziata, in cui l'inglese viene incontrato fuori da un contesto educativo istituzionale. L'inglese, quindi, non è sempre l'oggetto principale dell'attività, ma può diventare parte dell'esperienza stessa.

Il primo capitolo della tesi presenta il quadro teorico dello studio. Inizialmente viene discussa la distinzione tra apprendimento formale e informale. Questa distinzione è importante perché permette di osservare l'apprendimento linguistico come un processo che può svilupparsi tra forme di apprendimento organizzate all'interno di istituzioni educative e forme di apprendimento che avvengono in contesti meno strutturati. Il capitolo introduce poi il concetto di inglese extramurale e ne evidenzia l'importanza nell'esperienza contemporanea degli apprendenti. L'inglese, infatti, non si incontra più soltanto attraverso libri di testo o materiali didattici, ma anche attraverso contenuti autentici o semi-autentici disponibili nella vita quotidiana. Particolare attenzione viene dedicata ai contenuti audiovisivi, come film, serie TV e video online; infatti, viene analizzato il contributo dei film, delle serie televisive e dei sottotitoli nell'apprendimento dell'inglese, soprattutto per quanto riguarda il contatto

con forme di lingua più informali. Il primo capitolo prende in esame anche i social media e le piattaforme digitali, che rappresentano oggi una fonte frequente di contatto con l'inglese, evidenziando i possibili ruoli di queste piattaforme anche in prospettiva educativa. Questi ambienti digitali possono quindi esporre gli utenti all'inglese in modo rapido, ripetuto e spesso collegato ai loro interessi personali.

Il secondo capitolo descrive il disegno della ricerca e la metodologia utilizzata. Lo studio empirico è stato svolto tramite un questionario anonimo online, creato con Google Forms e diffuso soprattutto attraverso contatti personali e condivisioni in rete. Il questionario è stato scritto in italiano, così da essere comprensibile anche per chi aveva una conoscenza limitata dell'inglese. Le domande erano divise in varie sezioni. Prima venivano raccolte alcune informazioni sul profilo dei partecipanti e sul loro percorso linguistico. Poi il questionario passava al contatto con l'inglese fuori dalla scuola, all'uso di contenuti audiovisivi, e dei social media e delle piattaforme digitali. L'ultima parte riguardava invece le opinioni personali sull'apprendimento formale e informale. In totale sono state raccolte 160 risposte. Il campione era formato soprattutto da giovani adulti, in particolare persone tra i 18 e i 24 anni, ma erano presenti anche partecipanti di altre fasce d'età. Alcuni rispondenti stavano ancora studiando, mentre altri avevano già concluso il loro percorso di studi. Questo ha permesso di considerare esperienze diverse di contatto con l'inglese, non legate solo alla scuola o all'università. È importante sottolineare che il campione non è statisticamente rappresentativo di tutti gli apprendenti di inglese, ma offre comunque dati utili per comprendere le percezioni di un gruppo specifico di partecipanti.

Il terzo capitolo presenta e discute i risultati del questionario. Un primo dato significativo riguarda la lunga esposizione formale all'inglese: la maggior parte dei partecipanti ha dichiarato di aver studiato la lingua per più di otto anni. Nonostante ciò, quando è stato chiesto dove pensassero di aver imparato principalmente l'inglese, molti rispondenti hanno attribuito un ruolo importante anche al contatto con la lingua fuori dalla scuola o dall'università. Nella percezione dei partecipanti, questo risultato, suggerisce che l'apprendimento dell'inglese dipende anche dall'esposizione informale, e non soltanto dall'istruzione formale.

Un aspetto particolarmente interessante riguarda le motivazioni del contatto con l'inglese. Molti partecipanti hanno detto di entrare in contatto con contenuti in inglese soprattutto per svago o per interesse personale. Solo una parte più piccola lo fa principalmente con l'obiettivo di migliorare la lingua. Questo fa pensare che l'esposizione all'inglese avvenga spesso quasi "di passaggio": si guarda una serie, si ascolta una canzone, si segue un contenuto online perché piace e interessa, non per forza perché si vuole studiare. Però, anche senza cercarlo in modo esplicito, l'apprendente finisce comunque per essere esposto alla lingua. Inoltre, i partecipanti sembrano sentirsi più motivati a usare o comprendere l'inglese quando il contenuto è collegato ai loro interessi personali. In questo modo la lingua può apparire più utile, concreta e meno legata all'obbligo scolastico.

I contenuti audiovisivi e le piattaforme digitali rappresentano le aree più rilevanti dello studio e fonti centrali di esposizione. Molti rispondenti guardano film, serie TV o video online in inglese con una certa frequenza; mentre Instagram, YouTube, TikTok e le piattaforme di streaming sono tra le fonti più usate e più frequentemente associate all'inglese. Per molti si tratta di un'esperienza quotidiana. Infatti questi contenuti sono una parte significativa dell'esperienza linguistica dell'apprendente, e vengono percepiti come particolarmente utili per entrare in contatto con l'inglese parlato e con forme linguistiche meno scolastiche.

Il confronto tra istruzione formale ed esposizione extramurale è uno dei punti centrali della tesi. I risultati indicano che i partecipanti non considerano la scuola o l'università inutili. Al contrario, l'istruzione formale viene associata soprattutto ad aspetti che richiedono spesso una guida esplicita e una struttura didattica, come la grammatica e la scrittura. Tuttavia, l'inglese incontrato fuori dalla scuola viene associato maggiormente alla comprensione orale, alla pronuncia, alle espressioni informali, alla sicurezza nell'uso della lingua, al vocabolario, alla produzione orale e alla familiarità con accenti diversi. Ciò suggerisce che apprendimento formale ed esposizione informale non debbano essere considerati come due dimensioni opposte. La scuola e l'università forniscono basi e regole, mentre l'inglese extramurale permette agli apprendenti di incontrare la lingua in contesti meno controllati e più vicini all'uso reale. L'una dimensione non sostituisce necessariamente l'altra, ma entrambe possono contribuire in modi diversi allo stesso percorso di apprendimento. Le risposte aperte

del questionario confermano questa interpretazione. Diversi partecipanti hanno spiegato che la scuola ha dato loro le basi grammaticali, mentre il contatto quotidiano con l'inglese li ha aiutati a comprendere meglio il parlato. Per molti apprendenti, l'inglese non è percepito soltanto come una materia scolastica, ma anche come una lingua collegata a contenuti, persone e situazioni reali.

Lo studio presenta naturalmente alcuni limiti. I dati raccolti si basano su risposte autoriferite, quindi riflettono le percezioni dei partecipanti e non una misurazione oggettiva del loro livello linguistico. Inoltre, il campione è limitato e non rappresentativo, poiché il questionario è stato distribuito online e attraverso contatti personali. Per questo motivo, i risultati devono essere interpretati con cautela e non possono essere generalizzati a tutti gli apprendenti di inglese. Tuttavia, essi offrono un contributo esplorativo utile per comprendere come un gruppo di partecipanti percepisca il ruolo dell'inglese fuori dal contesto formale.

In conclusione, la tesi mostra che l'inglese extramurale rappresenta una dimensione importante dell'apprendimento dell'inglese oggi. Il contatto con la lingua non avviene soltanto attraverso lezioni, manuali ed esercizi, ma anche attraverso attività quotidiane, contenuti digitali e interessi personali. L'istruzione formale rimane fondamentale, soprattutto per fornire struttura, accuratezza e conoscenze esplicite. Tuttavia, l'esposizione informale può offrire un contatto frequente, vario e motivante con l'inglese. Considerare insieme queste due dimensioni permette di comprendere l'apprendimento della lingua in modo più realistico, come un processo che si sviluppa sia dentro sia fuori dalla classe.