

Enhancing Reading and Digital Competencies

Leveraging Instagram Literature Reviews to Increase Learners' Reading Motivation

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I

The paradigm shift from a print culture to a network society has led to significant societal changes. Felix Stalder's concept of a digital condition is characterized by referentiality, algorithmicity, and communality (13), and its impact on education is widely acknowledged. As digital media continue to shape and disrupt culture, educators must reflect on and adapt traditional cultural techniques, canons, and curricula to meet the demands of the digital age. Education in the Western world has long aimed to enable learners to become competent and active participants in democratic society; however, the increasing complexity and scope of technological progress places new demands on learners' competencies. As a result, the concept of digital competence has attracted considerable interest and is understood as an additional requirement (OECD 10). Ferrari's definition of 'digital competence' is an example of this adaptation. It illustrates the complex interrelationship between various competencies:

Digital competence is the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes [...] that are required when using ICT and digital media to perform tasks, solve problems, communicate, manage information, collaborate, create and share content, and build knowledge effectively, efficiently, appropriately, critically, creatively, autonomously, flexibly, ethically, reflectively for work, leisure, participation, learning, socialising, consuming and empowerment. (Ferrari 30).

As with many educational conceptions of digital competence (for example Eshet-Alkalai 94; Martin19; Ilomäki et al. 671), Ferrari's definition encompasses a set of other forms of competencies, often referred to as literacy, such as computer literacy, internet literacy, media literacy, and information literacy. Here, literacy is understood to

refer to a set of competencies related to technical skills as well as to deconstructing and constructing of media content, enabling the individual to cope in society.

While digital literacy seems to be limited to digital media, I would like to understand media literacy as a much broader approach that includes both traditional and digital media. I posit that media literacy extends beyond reading literacy, suggesting that general reading literacy serves as a component of media literacy and is, therefore, a necessary prerequisite for it. Media literacy cannot exist without its reading literacy foundation. Texts, in the broadest sense – comprising letters, sounds, videos, and images – are never neutral, as highlighted by Funk et al. (Funk, Kellner, and Share 3). To enable learners to critically engage with, contextualize, decode, and interpret these texts through the lens of critical media literacy, reading literacy is an essential foundation, transcending various codes, formats, and digital contexts. It paves the way for digital literacy. OECD has already been able to demonstrate that global competence – the ability to move smoothly between local and global domains – is strongly correlated with reading performance (OECD 2020 160). I assume that the competencies developed through interactions with literary texts empower children and young people to achieve this level of media literacy mentioned above.

Reading literary texts alters the cognitive processes involved in their interpretation, presenting unique challenges to students that require enhanced literary-aesthetic comprehension. These challenges include encountering a more demanding vocabulary that diverges from their everyday language and complex syntactic structures. Furthermore, students must unlock the meaning of text passages to construct coherent interpretations by contextualizing, comprehending shifts in perspective, and interpreting figurative language. Appreciating the aesthetic functions of ambiguous signs and employing them for interpretation are additional skills literary texts demand from readers. Reading such texts cultivates the ability to tolerate ambiguity, ambivalence, and incompleteness, recognize patterns, and think abstractly. I strongly believe that individuals who can understand, categorize, and interpret literary texts are better equipped to navigate the digital condition, enabling them to critically reflect on and classify diverse texts, and respond appropriately to phenomena like fake news. While not the sole critical competence for participating in a democratic and digitized society in the 21st century, this skillset is essential and contributes to the development of critical information literacy (CIL) and computational thinking (CT) competencies.

Looking at an international comparison of 15 existing frameworks for digital literacy in the 21st century (Bravo et al.), one can notice that the promotion of reading literacy falls short or is implicitly assumed without explaining how it is to be promoted in concrete terms. Therefore, I would like to advocate for literary education in the context of comprehensive media literacy. This paper is not meant to be a preservationist pedagogical proposal that opposes the New Literacy or even denies its importance. Rather, I would like to propose a holistic approach that strengthens

reading literacy as one of multiple important competencies for competent participation in the digitalized world.

II

The *International Computer and Information Literacy Study* (ICILS) uses computer-based tests to measure computer and information literacy (CIL), which is defined as the ability to use digital technologies to search for, create, communicate, and evaluate information (Fraillon et al. 53). Second, computational thinking (CT) skills were also measured. CT is defined as the ability to identify aspects of real-world problems that lend themselves to modeling, evaluate algorithmic solutions, and develop such solutions themselves in order to solve these problems using digital technology. It thus targets analytical skills, pattern recognition skills, abstraction skills, and algorithmic thinking skills (Fraillon et al. 240). Here, 8th grade learners in Luxembourg scored well below the study's international average in both CIL and CT (Fraillon et al. 75, 103). Considering what has already been mentioned above, I assume that there is a correlation between reading competence and performance on CIL, or in other words, that improved reading competence would also lead to improved performance on CIL.

The empirical results school of performance measurements on general reading literacy should be recognized as relevant if we are to address literacy in the 21st century and draw the necessary conclusions from them. In the following, I would like to throw a spotlight on the results of empirical reading research in order to present some reflections on an empirical understanding of literary reading in the context of literacy promotion in Luxembourg. In doing so, I will focus on grade 9 and try to offer a small partial solution as to how reading can be promoted.

Every year, the Luxembourg Centre for Educational Testing of the University of Luxembourg conducts a national learning assessment at Luxembourg schools, the so-called 'Épreuves Standardisées' (ÉpStan). The results of the ÉpStan provide a good data base for reading literacy research. In 2019 a sub-sample of 4,574 students was asked how often they read certain types of texts in their free time. The results show that a large proportion of young people in Luxembourg do not like to read. Only a fraction of respondents in Luxembourg (8 %) say they read printed literary texts more than once a week in their free time for pleasure or enjoyment (Reichert; Krämer 105). In contrast, reading digital texts plays a central role in leisure activi-

ties. Social media posts, blog, and forum entries, etc. are the most preferred group of texts, making them a ubiquitous part of media socialization.¹

Apart from evaluating reading frequency, a total of 6,493 ninth-grade students participated in the ÉpStan assessment in 2019, which was conducted using computer-based testing. Their performance in German reading literacy was systematically observed and analyzed. Two sub-skills were measured: »finding and understanding information in a text« and »analyzing and interpreting texts and drawing (knowledge-based) conclusions«. The reading tests included both shorter and longer texts and included both literary and non-literary, continuous, and discontinuous texts – i.e., also graphics, diagrams, and pictures (ÉpStan.lu). Overall, it becomes clear that Luxembourg's learners do not have particularly high levels of reading literacy on average. This is also confirmed by the results of the PISA study. Luxembourg's young people score an average of 470 points in reading literacy, which is below the OECD average of 487 points (OECD 2019b 1).

Based on the ÉpStan data, a regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of reading habits on reading literacy (Reichert; Krämer 106f.). It shows a statistically significant positive correlation for blogs or other digital texts that adolescents read in social media. Students who reported reading German-language texts on social media or blogs more than once a week scored 45 points higher on the ÉpStan test of reading literacy than adolescents who never or almost never did so. It is found that regular reading of printed narrative texts, in particular, is positively related to general reading literacy. Comparing those students who reported reading a novel or narrative in German at least once a week with those who never or almost never read such texts, the first group scored 66 points higher on the ÉpStan reading literacy scale than the second group (Reichert; Krämer 106). This regression analysis thus clearly reveals that what students read in their free time does matter. Reading promotion should therefore not only focus on the quantity of reading but should above all try to get students intrinsically motivated about reading literary texts.

Moreover, research has shown that literacy in Luxembourg is strongly related to socio-economic background. As in other countries with similarly structured educational systems, children of low socio-economic status in Luxembourg are systematically disadvantaged and perform worse on achievement measures than their peers of high socio-economic status. PISA 2018 shows that there is a strong correlation between socio-economic background and student performance in Luxembourg (OECD 2019, 60). Similarly, Boualam et al. (122) have pointed to a statistically significant correlation between socio-economic status and CT/CIL performance in Luxembourg, which became evident in ICILS. This is also confirmed by the ÉpStan: here,

1 According to the JIM study 2022 (MPFS 17), this is also the case in Germany and, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education), in the United States.

too, children in Luxembourg from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds have lower scores (Sonnleitner 109). Parents with university degrees, regular reading routines, a large number of books in the home, role models who read frequently – all of these factors are statistically associated with a child's ability to read. Accordingly, an educational system would be equitable if it could compensate for critical characteristics in such a way that all students have the same opportunities to acquire reading skills and that these opportunities are less dependent on social background. Educational institutions, including the German language classroom, can help compensate for students' unequal starting opportunities by supporting their reading socialization.

The empirical results presented underscore the need to foster students' intrinsic motivation to read more intensively than in the past. Traditional reading socialization research identifies two primary reading crises: the »first reading crisis,« which occurs immediately after the acquisition of written language, as described by Garbe (199); and a »reading crisis at the end of childhood,« typically arising during puberty (Graf 72). In reading biography research, the second crisis in particular is emphasized as a critical time for the development of a stable habitual reading disposition. Graf (115) assumes that a successful »secondary literary initiation« during or at the end of puberty – for example, through the positive influence of teachers in German classes – can be expected to lead to a long-term affinity for literature. Odendahl, however, points to the existence of a third reading crisis that can occur during university studies. He notes a decline in private reading motivation among students of German language and literature. An illustrative example of a student's statement is as follows:

Der Beginn des Lehramtsstudiums [...] vor zwei Jahren hat wiederum einen Umschwung meines Leseverhaltens herbeigeführt. Aktuell lese ich hauptsächlich Fachliteratur, um an den Lehrveranstaltungen und Diskussionen in der Gruppe partizipieren zu können, und wende nur mehr selten Zeit auf, um meinen Lesevorlieben sowie entspannender Lektüre am Abend nachzukommen. Auch mein viel zu hoher Smartphone-Konsum und neue Medienangebote wie Netflix spielen hier eine nicht unbedeutende Rolle. Manchmal fehlt mir die Motivation zum Lesen, manchmal ist es die Zeit. (Odendahl)²

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- 2 »The start of my teacher training [...] two years ago has in turn brought about a change in my reading behavior. Currently, I mainly read technical literature in order to be able to participate in the lectures and discussions in the group, and only rarely spend time to follow my reading preferences and relaxing reading in the evening. My far too high smartphone consumption and new media offerings such as Netflix also play a not insignificant role here. Sometimes I lack the motivation to read, sometimes it's the time.« (Odendahl). Translation of the author.

This observation aligns with our findings among some students in Luxembourg, particularly student teachers. These individuals play a critical role in fostering reading habits, as their intrinsic motivation for literary reading not only influences their personal reading biographies and subject didactic development but also shapes their future students' attitudes towards reading. As teachers, they serve as motivational reading role models for their students, significantly impacting the success of students' literary socialization. Hence, it is essential to nurture personality-related factors of reading during their studies. Notably, an increasing number of children from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds are enrolling in secondary schools, which may contribute to the declining acceptance of literary education from a literary sociological perspective. This trend suggests that, in some cases, the motivational prerequisites for fostering a literary education may be absent.

III

To this end, I would like to suggest what should be considered when selecting readings in German classes in order to promote reading motivation and thus reading competence. I derive criteria for this from traditional and digital formats of literary criticism.

Regardless of the changing forms that the teaching of German in Luxembourg has taken depending on the political constellation and the horizon of national identity construction, it can be said that the curricula of the lower and middle grades do not prescribe a binding canon of texts and do not provide a catalogue of interpretations. It is only for the final grade that there are binding specifications as to which texts are to be read. Since the pedagogical autonomy of teachers has always been respected in Luxembourg, it is up to them to evaluate and select literary works for use in the classroom. There is no collectively maintained traditional canon for children's and young people's literature to which one could refer. According to Ewers (351ff.), it is not part of a special literature in the literary-pedagogical canon (*Bildungskanon*) either. There are the so-called classics for children and young people, but these are primarily compiled by German publishers in series and thus do not constitute a canon. Even if there were such a canon to refer to in Luxembourg, the more recent works would not be listed. In addition to the orientation towards awards and youth literature prizes, however, the orientation towards literary criticism for children's and youth literature is an excellent option.

First of all, it should be noted that in the digital condition, the conditions for the social system of literature and thus also for literary criticism have also changed. This is due, *inter alia*, to the change in communication habits as a result of the change in the leading media from the analog print format to the digital via the Internet. The emergence of specific text types and functions in digital media calls for considera-

tions of a changed approach to literature, focusing on the didactic potential of the virtual public sphere with its own reading and writing conventions. While literary criticism published in traditional formats is usually written by professional reviewers, it is often lay people who write reviews online, situating criticism in a new media space. By »traditional formats«, I do not mean exclusively printed reviews or reviews in the major feuilletons, but also texts published on the Internet that follow the same hierarchical structures. For example, »FAZ.net« or »Sehepunkte« and »IASL-Online«, which have editorial teams that subject all contributions to a multi-stage review process and thus fulfill a kind of gatekeeper function. They select and decide how and what is made available to the public.

When I talk about digital reviews, they are structurally very different from these traditional formats. Here, a distinction has to be made between customer reviews, reader reviews, social networks, and literary forums. What the literary salon was in the 18th century are now reading forums on the Internet, which give rise to corresponding communities (book blogs, lovelybooks.de; etc.). There are no gatekeepers; anyone who creates a user account on these portals can publish unedited. The same goes for reviews on social networks like Instagram. In this context, there is talk of the »democratization« of opinion-forming processes and thus of literary criticism. Reactions to this have ranged from emphatic enthusiasm for the democratization of literary criticism to a farewell to the ideal of enlightened criticism.

According to Porombka, it would not be appropriate to discuss which – traditional or digital – literary criticism should be considered the »true or correct« one. Porombka rightly emphasizes that it would be wrong to measure new formats against traditional ones – that is, simply to critically compare new digital formats with their own regularities to formats in the feuilleton. Rather, it would be necessary to understand them as a specific form and not to try to grasp them with a traditional concept of literary criticism (Porombka 301). Digital literary criticism is more than a duplicate of traditional formats available in analog form. Their specific quality of social media culture is per se oriented towards connective communication. While critiques in traditional formats are usually more or less independent texts that generate a rather one-way communication, digital critiques published in social media like Instagram offer new, truly digital phenomena of participatory culture. According to Felix Stalder, who – as mentioned at the beginning – identifies algorithmicity, referentiality, and communality as the central characteristics of the digital condition, critiques posted by young people on Instagram demonstrate these characteristics par excellence through their procedures: through comment functions or links, they enable an immediate mutual reference and thus a networked dialogicity about as well as on the basis of literature, which can be expanded and continued at will. In addition, digital critiques open up greater opportunities for literary recipients to participate in the literary system.

In particular, traditional criticism of children's and young adult literature is usually written by adults. In terms of literary evaluations, therefore, the first question that arises is that of criteria and standards for judging texts. In general, traditional literary criticism asks about the status of a work within the literary system, examines traditions, aesthetics, language and style, and originality. In this context, self-reference, polyvalence, openness, complexity, and coherence are considered characteristics of »good or beautiful« literature, as von Heydebrand and Winko, among others, point out (Heydebrand, Winko 113ff.). In the context of its function as mediating literature, however, children's and young people's literature criticism should take other criteria into account: According to Hurrelmann, good children's and young people's literature must have the ability to form literary reception skills and, at the same time, literary enjoyment skills, as well as to promote linguistic production skills in children and young people (Hurrelmann 45–60). Ewers further states:

Die KJL-Kritik sollte den kinderliterarischen Kommunikationsprozess in all seinen Aspekten im Auge haben, aus allen Warten heraus urteilen können, nicht zuletzt auch aus der des heimlichen kindlichen oder jugendlichen Lesers (Ewers 82)³

Traditional literary criticism of children's and young adult literature often relies on adult perspectives and mediators, such as parents or teachers, to determine the pedagogical and aesthetic value of literary works. This approach may not accurately represent the interests and preferences of young readers and can limit the impact of literature on promoting reading motivation in students. Against this background, this paper aims to demonstrate the value of incorporating digital literary reviews published by young people on Instagram as a complementary source of information for reading selection in order to foster students' reading motivation.

I conducted a qualitative analysis of digital literary reviews posted by young people on Instagram, specifically focusing on the *young_bookstagram* community and the hashtag #*Youngbookstagram*. The analysis included a review of 550 posts published between the end of 2019 and May 31st, and an examination of the profiles of individual users who contributed to the community. The evaluation criteria included: target audience; focus of the review; gender representation; evaluation criteria and judgments of taste; aspects of content, form, language, and style.

The analysis revealed several key differences between young people's digital literary reviews on Instagram and traditional literary criticism, including:

3 »Children's and youth literature criticism should have the children's literary communication process in all its aspects in mind, be able to judge from all waits, not least from that of the secret child or adolescent reader.« (Ewers 82). Translation of the author.

- Digital criticism by young people is directed at other young readers, not at adult mediators.
- Young reviewers are not interested in an enlightened formation of taste or a congenial understanding of the author, but rather in an exchange about what is read as a community, in reading as a cultural technique, with a focus of social reading as a cultural practice.
- Boys are also engaged in writing and commenting on reviews, which is significant given their underperformance in reading literacy assessments.
- Young readers' judging criteria are based on subjective reading experiences, with content enjoyment carrying more weight than judging about the quality of narrative or linguistic design.
- Aspects of evaluation such as form, language and style, originality, or comparison with other authors and works rarely appear in young people's digital literary reviews.
- Young readers prefer readings that present them with exciting, realistic stories that are easy to read and provide an opportunity to discuss social or moral issues.

IV

This shows that the research literature on literature valuation applies criteria and standards to youth literature that are obviously not appreciated by young readers. The findings suggest that incorporating digital literary reviews written by young people can provide valuable insights for reading selection and pedagogical approaches in the classroom to enhance reading and digital competencies. I propose the following recommendations for educators and researchers:

- Utilize digital literary reviews as a complementary source of information for selecting reading material that promotes students' reading motivation.
- Foster a classroom environment that encourages engagement with literature that appeals to young people without creating a dichotomy between »lowbrow« and »highbrow« reading.
- Develop didactic concepts that emphasize linguistic and formal analysis in teacher training, to promote students' ability to critically engage with diverse texts.

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates the potential of digital literary reviews published by young people on Instagram to enrich traditional literary criticism and promote students' reading motivation. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of incorporating these reviews into classroom practice and to develop

more comprehensive strategies for promoting students' engagement with literature in a digital age.

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