# A Study on Linguistic Sustainability in Italian Secondary Education: Language Biographies as a Tool for Understanding Learners' Profiles

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Abstract

The recommendations outlined by the Council of Europe (2022) concerning dropout rates among adolescent immigrant students in secondary education underscore an urgent need for sustainability in teaching Italian as a Second Language (ISL). As part of doctoral research in educational linguistics, this study aims to advance linguistic sustainability by comprehending adolescents' perceptions and attitudes toward ISL within multilingual educational settings (Gardner et al. 1985). To this end, a Language Biography Questionnaire, adapted from the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (Marian et al. 2007), the Language History Questionnaire (Li et al. 2014), and the User's Plurilingual Profile (Council of Europe 2011), was crafted and administered among 126 recently arrived immigrant students (11-20 years old), enrolled in 7 secondary schools of Northeast Italy. The questionnaire is an instrument for assessing learners' linguistic backgrounds and ISL proficiency. The discussion will focus on the development of this tool and its effectiveness in reflecting on teaching and learning ISL.
Results from the survey indicate that Italian is perceived as valuable and attractive; nevertheless, it poses challenges as a second language for study purposes. Bengali, Chinese, Mandinka, and Wolof speakers demonstrate a heightened tendency towards social withdrawal in communication and interpersonal relationships.
Subsequently, the discussion will delve into practical future perspectives and structural measures to promote the sustainability of ISL instruction in secondary schools.

Keywords: Italian as a Second Language (ISL), Multilingualism, Language Biography, Language Proficiency, Language Attitudes, Linguistic Sustainability, Secondary Schools

## 1 Introduction

Italy ensures equal educational opportunities for all minor immigrant nationals – constituting 10.2% (n=423.579) of the student population – by granting them the right to complete compulsory education on par with Italian citizens[1].
Nonetheless, data from the *Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito* and the European Commission (2022) reveal a noteworthy challenge: although the school leaving rate fell from

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[1] Cf. Article 45 of the Decree of the President of the Republic (D.P.R.) of 31 August 1999, No. 394, and Ministerial Note of 8 January 2010, No. 2, Point 3.

34.9% in 2014 to 26.8% in 2023[2], the dropout rates among immigrant students in secondary schools in Italy significantly exceeded those of their non-immigrant counterparts. Moreover, despite school marginalization projects (cf. Article No. 9 2006/2009 outlined in the *Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro* for the school sector) aimed at financing educational projects in high-risk and heavily immigrant areas, most secondary schools where the experimentation occurred have stated that funds allocated to non-Italian students amount to about 7 hours per school unit. Thus, efforts appear insufficient to meet the educational needs of foreign learners. While cultural sustainability is integrated into university *curricula* (Payne, O'Neil 2019), substantial challenges persist in achieving sustainability in second language (L2) learning within secondary schools, particularly for students who have recently arrived in Italy or those born in the country but have been left behind due to cultural, economic, and social reasons.

The situation underscores an increased need for sustainability in teaching Italian as a Second Language (ISL) to mitigate instances of exclusion. Indeed, adolescents require a well-rounded set of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies to achieve positive outcomes in their academic and personal lives, as underlined by Point No. 15 of the Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022[3].

## 2 Linguistic Sustainability in Multilingual Education

The concept of "linguistic sustainability" for foreign students in Italian educational settings is relatively new in its terminology. In Italy, nowadays, there is almost no documentation that explicitly acknowledges the significance of languages' sustainability for young immigrant learners. Instead, terms such as "development", "integration", and "support" are preferred, as can be seen from Article 1, Comme 32 of Law No. 107 of July 13, 2015[4], which provides:

> The activities and projects of scholastic orientation as well as access to work are developed with methods suitable to also *support* any difficulties and problems specific to students of foreign origin. (our italics)

Moreover, the vocabulary of sustainability is mainly associated with environmental, economic, and social contexts (de la Fuente 2021: 2). To promote sustainable practices, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission adopted a recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development where it defines the umbrella term of sustainability education:

> […] education is intrinsically intertwined with sustainability at all levels through competencies embedded across the curriculum. It recognises how sustainability aspects (environmental, social, cultural and economic) are interrelated and how they are interlinked and embedded within disciplines and subjects. Sustainability education is then viewed in the same light as transformative learning as its aim is to change the person and the social institution through a holistic approach. (Bianchi et al. 2022: 13)

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[2]     https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/explore/all/all_themes?lang=en&display=list&sort=category [28/06/2024].

[3]     https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2022%3A469%3AFULL [12/08/2024].

[4] For the original Italian version, please refer to https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg [12/08/2024].

While "sustainability" within educational environments continues to serve as a broad, encompassing term for sustainable development[5], its implications become more distinct when examined through specific educational practices and methodologies. Thus, providing shared sustainable guidelines and examples of good practice for what language support may look like is crucial to achieving immigrant learners' well-being. In this regard, Scalabrino (2022: 29) drew attention to a set of sustainability competencies: *i)* system thinking, *ii)* anticipatory, *iii)* normative, *iiii)* critical thinking, *v)* agency, *vi)* self-awareness, and *vii)* collaboration. In this context, the L2 emerges as a critical instrument that is procedural and substantive (Hamid et al. 2024). As a procedural tool, L2 can facilitate communication and learning processes; however, it also possesses substantive power, as it can either exclude or include students.

This dual role of foreign languages holds profound implications, particularly for immigrant adolescents, whose educational experiences and social integration are significantly influenced by their ability to navigate the new linguistic landscape. Thus, understanding and implementing sustainable educational practices that address linguistic inclusion is fundamental for promoting equitable and effective learning environments.

Immigrant students come from diverse linguistic and cultural contexts that profoundly impact their approach to learning a new language (Galante 2018). Table 1 presents the first three countries from which foreign adolescents and adults emigrated to Italy in 2023, at the national and regional level (i.e., Veneto, where the research was conducted), and within the sample participating in the experiment[6].

| Continent of Origin | Ranking Foreign Citizens in Italy | Ranking Foreign Citizens in Veneto | Ranking Research Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Europe** | 1. Romania<br>2. Albania<br>3. Ukraine | 1. Romania<br>2. Albania<br>3. Moldova | 1. Albania<br>2. Ukraine<br>3. Moldova |
| **Asia** | 1. China<br>2. Bangladesh<br>3. India | 1. China<br>2. Bangladesh<br>3. India | 1. China<br>2. Bangladesh<br>3. **Sri Lanka** |
| **Africa** | 1. Morocco<br>2. Egypt<br>3. Nigeria | 1. Morocco<br>2. Nigeria<br>3. Senegal | 1. **Senegal**<br>2. **Gambia**<br>3. Morocco |
| **America** | 1. Peru<br>2. Ecuador<br>3. Brazil | 1. Brazil<br>2. Rep. Dominicana<br>3. Colombia | 1. Peru<br>2. Brazil<br>3. - |

Tab. 1: National, Regional, and Sample Data (ISTAT Statistics)

The ranking of the sample is based on the demographic profiles of the respondents. The table shows how the sample's ranking reflects almost entirely that of the data of Italy and Veneto, with two exceptions: the strong presence in the province of Treviso of the Senegalese community and the province of Padova of Gambian and Sinhalese students (in bold).

With regard to the wide variety of the sample, it is important to note that internal and external factors such as awareness, self-confidence, anxiety, and learning materials, can create significant disparities in attitudes toward a target language (Le, Le 2022). As cited by the Council of Europe (2018: 7), attitudes describe the disposition and mind-sets to act or react to ideas, persons, or situations. For instance, students from linguistically similar backgrounds

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[5] See the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030, Goal No. 4, which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.
[6] https://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2023/ [10/07/2024].

(e.g., European students) may find it easier to adapt, while those from vastly different linguistic backgrounds could struggle more and develop negative attitudes towards ISL.

Secondly, many studies (Gardner, Lambert 1972; Gardner 1985; Lu et al. 2023 to mention just a few), has shown that students' attitudes towards the L2 directly affect their engagement, effort, and achievement in language learning. Therefore, as Larasati and Simatupang (2020) stressed, this may lead to the assumption that positive attitudes might influence language proficiency and help determine which methodologies to implement with foreign learners, while negative attitudes may hinder progress.

## 3 Research Objectives

The Language Biography questionnaire seeks to delineate, alongside demographical and social characteristics, the attitude traits of immigrant adolescents. Indeed, its main purpose is to investigate the complexities of the factors influencing ISL and their impact on ISL learning. Therefore, this paper addresses two primary Research Questions (RQs).

RQ1 explores the disparities in immigrant students' sociolinguistic and historical backgrounds that may influence their attitudes toward ISL.

RQ2 investigates whether there is a correlation between adolescents' attitude towards ISL and their proficiency in the target language.

Understanding these questions can guide the development of more targeted and sustainable educational practices, tailored to the linguistic and cultural specificities of the immigrant teenage population.

## 4 Methodological Considerations

The study employed a qualitative methodology. The qualitative component consisted of a semi-structured interview containing 15 items to evaluate foreign students' language profiles and perceptions of their foreign language learning. Simultaneously, this approach allowed for qualitative descriptions of students' performance to determine if it influences their attitudes toward ISL learning (Bachman 1995).

From the literature, questionnaire research generally assumes that the respondents can read and write well (Dörnyei, Dewaele 2022). This assumption implies that if students are not proficient, the questionnaire should be administered in their first language (L1) to ensure comprehension and accurate responses. In this study, participants had not yet undergone formal assessment by teachers. However, classroom observations conducted by schoolteachers indicated that immigrant students exhibited varying proficiency levels, spanning from A1 to A2. Consequently, the questionnaire was administered in Italian, primarily examining students' competence in responding to the items. The error analysis of learners' written productions enabled the detection of common error patterns that could indicate knowledge gaps (Brown 1994). Subsequently, it facilitated the identification of students' linguistic competence levels.

### 4.1 Participants

157 students were selected from 6 lower secondary schools and 1 upper secondary school in Veneto, the region in north-eastern Italy with the highest percentage of foreign students, 10.6%,

in the school year 2023/2024[7]. When the questionnaires were carried out, between December 2023 and January 2024, 126 of the 157 students selected were present.

The sample's age range was 11–22 years (M=14.5; SD=3.02). 10 out of 126 were foreign students in high school and 116 were in middle school. Respondents comprised 73 males (58%) and 53 females (42%). Anonymous IDs ("D1" to "D126") were provided and distributed randomly to ensure the privacy of respondents. Before administering the language biographies, the schoolteachers reported observations about pupils' proficiency levels in ISL. Although there were no formal language tests for attesting proficiency, the level of Italian of the students involved was reported as elementary.

Across participants, 27 languages were represented (in alphabetic order): Arabic, Albanian, Bambara, Bengali, Bosnian, Chinese, Dendi, Pidgin English, Farsi, French, Fula, German, Hindi, Jola, Mandinka, Moldovan, Nepali, Pashtu, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Sinhala, Tagalog, Ukrainian, Urdu and Wolof.
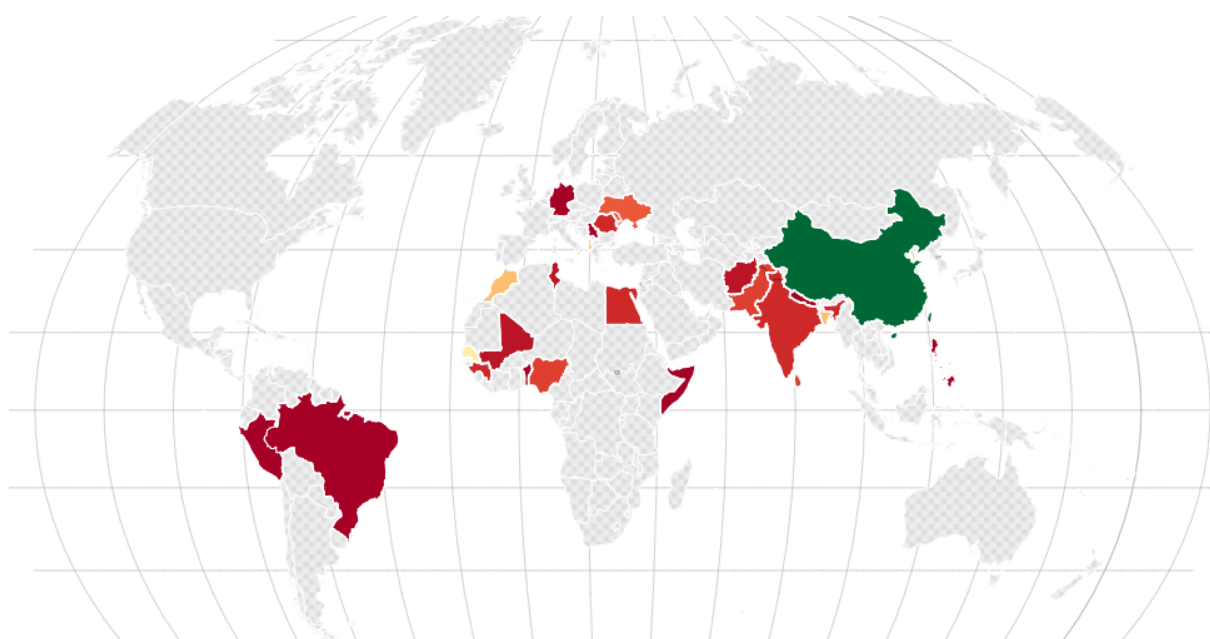


Fig. 1: Distribution of the Sample Participants by their Countries of Origin.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of participants in the experiment. Learners' concentration ranges on a scale from red (minimum) to green (maximum). As illustrated, the highest concentrations of students are particularly found in Asia and Africa.

### 4.2 Specifics of the Questionnaire and Procedure

The Language Biography questionnaire was specifically tailored to fit the characteristics of newly arrived immigrant teenage students studying in lower and upper Italian secondary schools. Four sets of teenagers' characteristics were considered for designing the test. These sets may influence the test performance and align with those identified by Bachman and Palmer (1996): 1) personal characteristics, 2) topical knowledge, 3) affective schemata, and 4) language ability.

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[7] https://www.mim.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Principali+dati+della+scuola+-+Focus+avvio+anno+scolastico+2023-2024.pdf/8ba0c506-a14f-9071-fbb7 e0aede0a5ebb?version=1.0&t=1695388882235 [10/07/2024].

The items were developed based on several established instruments:

A.      Items 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8 were formulated by considering the *User's Plurilingual Profile Presentation of the Learner*, a complimentary resource provided by the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe 2011). Particular attention was paid to the Language Passport for learners aged 10 to 15.

B.      For items 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9[8], the Language History Questionnaire (Li et al. 2014) was considered.

C.      The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire was examined for items 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The LEAP-Q (Marian et al. 2007) is a self-report tool for evaluating the language profiles of multilingual populations ages 14 to 80. Items 12-15, which assess learners' perception toward the target L2, were rewritten while preserving the original structure and purpose of the LEAP-Q.

The semi-structured language biography, presented in a questionnaire format, was answered in classroom settings. The total administration time was approximately 40 minutes. The researcher made sure students understood how the format of the written questionnaire works and gave some specific instructions (e.g., whether students needed to place a cross). This careful preparation aimed to maximize the accuracy and reliability of the responses, contributing to the overall validity of the data collected.

Table 2 displays the 15 items administered and clarifies item types developed for testing purposes[9].

| Items Administered | Item Type |
|---|---|
| **1.** What is your mother tongue, that you have spoken since birth? | *Short-answer* |
| **2.** Where were you born? (Specify the city and the Country) | *Fill-in-the-blank* |
| **3.** When were you born? | *Fill-in-the-blank* |
| **4.** How long have you been in Italy? | *Short answer with initial input* |
| **5.** Who are you here with? | *Short answer with initial input* |
| **6.** Did you already know the Italian language before coming to Italy? | *Multiple-choice* |
| **7.** What language or languages do you speak with your relatives? | *Fill-in-the-blank* |
| **8.** What language or languages do you speak with your friends? | *Fill-in-the-blank* |
| **9.** Do you prefer to speak or write in Italian? | *Short-answer* |
| **10.** Create two rankings: from the language you like the most to the one you like the least among those you know | *Classification* |
| **11.** From the language you know the most to the one you know the least | *Classification* |
| **12.** Make an 'X' (cross) on the right answer for you: <u>For me</u>, Italian is a language… | *Multiple-choice* |
| **13.** <u>For me,</u> Italian is a language… | *Multiple-choice* |
| **14.** <u>For me,</u> Italian is a language… | *Multiple-choice* |
| **15.** <u>For me,</u> the Italian language is like… | *Multiple-choice* |

Tab. 2: Specifications of the Items

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[8] The last version of the Language History Questionnaire, the LHQ 3.3 (2023), is now compatible with mobile devices. Therefore, participants can access and complete the questionnaire on phones, tablets, and PCs. For more information, see https://lhq-blclab.org [30/06/2024].

[9] The items are presented here in English, although they were administered to learners in Italian. See the Appendix (Fig. 2) for the original questionnaire.

All item types have their advantages and disadvantages. Multiple-choice items limit respondents to a single answer, which could restrict the expression of diverse opinions. On the other hand, short-answer and fill-in-the-blank items allow for more open-ended responses, reflecting the interviewees' knowledge and perspectives more accurately. For these reasons, the different item types were balanced in the questionnaire design.

**5 Findings and Discussion**

The Language Biography questionnaire seeks to delineate the demographic, social, and attitudinal characteristics of adolescent foreign students enrolled in secondary schools toward the L1 and the ISL.

Table 3 summarizes the qualitative analysis conducted to assess respondents' linguistic performance. It consists of four elements: *i)* the specific linguistic objective that each item aims to evaluate, *ii)* an analysis of the responses categorizing the types of errors or correct usages according to predefined criteria, *iii)* transcriptions of typical errors made by pupils, *iiii)* specification of the levels of language proficiency (LP) targeted by the item (cf. Council of Europe 2020; Spinelli, Parizzi 2010 for skills descriptors).

| Linguistic Objective of the Item: To assess… | Analysis of Error Patterns | Examples of Error Transcription | LP |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The use of nationality adjectives and the structure of SVO responses. | **85.7%** failed to use the subject and the verb | **D65:** Albanese | **< A1** |
| | **11.3%** failed to use nationality adjectives | **D12:** Bangladesh <br> **D14:** ROMANIA | |
| 2. The use of simple prepositions of location "a/in" | **94.7%** failed to use the simple preposition | **D53:** Ø BERAT (città) Ø ALBANIA (Stato) | **< A1** |
| | **69.2%** failed to understand the item | **D28:** Ø NIGERIA (città) Ø BINI SITI (Stato) | |
| 3. The use of the definite article "il/l'" | **23.3%** failed to use and select the definite article | **D05:** sono nato l'18/XX/XXXX <br> **D47:** il/l'11/XX/XXXX | **< A1** |
| 4. The use of the simple preposition "da" with temporal function | **26.3%** failed to use the simple preposition "da" with temporal function | **D87:** per 1 anno <br> **D44:** Ø un ano, 9 mesi <br> **D51:** a 11 mese | **< A2** |
| 5. The use of the preposition of company "con" | **18%** failed to use the simple preposition of company | **D20:** Ø papa mama <br> **D23:** Ø mamma sorelle | **< A1** |
| 6. The understanding of "conoscere" and "imparare" verbs in the past perfect tense | **3.7%** failure to understand the item | **D12:** Ø <br> **D54:** L'ho imparata grazie a ciao, come stai, acqua, magia | **< A2** |
| 7–8. The use of nationality adjectives | **5.3%** failed to use nationality adjectives | **D17:** parlo Italia o Hindi <br> **D88:** parlo Pakistan, India | **< A1** |
| 9. The understanding and the use of the irregular verb in -*isc*- (i.e. "preferire", prefer) | **30%** failed to use the subject and "preferire" | **D30:** PARLARE | **< A1** |
| | **9%** failed to understand the item | **D39:** calcio | |
| | **4.5%** failed to conjugate verbs | **D66:** Preferisci di parlare | |
| 10–11. The use of nationality adjectives | **14.3%** failed to use nationality adjectives | **D19:** Bangla English Hindi <br> **D26:** Yoruba Language, Pidgin English, Pidgin | **< A1** |
| 12–14. The use of the descriptive adjectives "facile/difficile, utile/inutile, bella/brutta" | **6.7%** failed to understand the item or the meaning of descriptive adjectives "utile", "inutile" | **D62:** Ø, Ø, Ø <br> **D105:** abbastanza facile, Ø bella | **< A2** |
| 15. The understanding of essential weather vocabulary and simple metaphors | **2.2%** failed to understand metaphors | **D82:** Ø <br> **D152:** Ø | **< A2** |

Tab. 3: Test Objectives, Analysis, and Examples of Outputs

Based on the data, students exhibited proficiency at the A1 level (Breakthrough) in ISL according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Namely, 14.3% of respondents tried to answer fully item 1, and just 9 out of 133 responses were without morphosyntactic errors (e.g., D132: "*Mio madrelingua è cinese", "La mia madrelingua è il cinese", My mother tongue is Chinese). Similarly, items 2, 3, and partially 4 and 5 indicate that learning prepositions and articles is the most significant obstacle for immigrant students in the early stage of L2 acquisition, suggesting a need for more practice in the classroom.

The Bengali, Gambian, Senegalese, and Chinese communities proved to be closer regarding communication and social relationships (items 7 and 8). D81 affirms: "Con gli amici parlo bangalese" (I speak Bengali with friends). D117, D122, D124, D127, D128, D129, D130,

and D131 confirm: "Con i parenti parlo cinese. Con gli amici parlo cinese" (I speak Chinese with relatives. I speak Chinese with friends). Notably, the Italian Statistic Office indicates that during the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school years, students of Senegalese and Chinese citizenship attending Italian schools exhibited the highest overall dropout rates[10].

Furthermore, 76% of learners prefer speaking over writing in Italian L2 (item 9), as D134 states: "*è molto fluense" ("L'italiano è molto gradevole", Italian is very pleasant).

Out of 133 pupils, 112 reported appreciating and having proficiency in at least 2 languages (items 10 and 11). Moreover, only 7.6% of students aged 15-20 reported considering Italian as a language in which they are competent outside of their L1. This figure correlates with their recent arrival in Italy and their low language proficiency in ISL. These results could be aligned with Cummins' (1981) Common Underlying Proficiency Theory, which posits that knowledge and skills acquired in one language can transfer to another, thereby supporting language development and academic achievement across multiple languages.

Items 12–14 indicate that most students (79.3%) acknowledge the utility of Italian ("utile; "abbastanza utile") for academic or professional pursuits. Recognizing the language's pragmatic value suggests a high level of motivation among students to acquire Italian proficiency, notwithstanding potential challenges. However, the finding that 27.7% of students whose L1 is not Romance-based perceived Italian as difficult underscores the linguistic challenges they encounter within the Italian educational milieu. This perceived difficulty may also indicate a broader systemic issue related to limited exposure and insufficient support mechanisms. To address these challenges, it may be necessary to implement reception protocols from the outset of students' enrollment in schools, as mandated by Law No. 189 of July 30, 2002, and further elaborated in the Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students by the *Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca* (2014).

Item 15 resulted in 46.1% of students having a positive perception of ISL, as reported by D121: "La lingua italiana per me è una lezione per imparare a parlare. È una bella giornata di sole" (The Italian language for me is a lesson in learning to speak. It's a beautiful sunny day). Conversely, 38.5% of respondents equated it to a metaphorical cloudy day, suggesting an uncertainty that could increase or decrease their motivation. Additionally, among Sinophone learners, a remarkable 15.4%, expressed a negative attitude towards Italian, deeming it an impractical language for their community.

This analysis indicates that while a substantial portion of adolescents appreciate the Italian language, a part of the sample faces fluctuating motivation. A minority, especially from Sinophone backgrounds, question its practical utility and value. Hence, the responses underscore the need for educational strategies to address the diverse attitudes revealed by this study to enhance the overall effectiveness of L2 learning in secondary schools in Italy. It is evident that only through effective synergy, based on strategies of school integration and inclusion, can the educational sustainability and academic success of non-Italian-speaking students be guaranteed.

## 6 Conclusions

The data analyzed in the previous section led to the following general outcomes, some of which call for further research.

Some of the results were somewhat surprising, as it can be fairly said that students' attitudes towards ISL are associated with and influence their LPs and the learning process.

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[10]          https://www.mim.gov.it/documents/20182/7715421/Focus_Dispersione+scolastica+aa.ss.1920_2021+-+2021_2122.pdf/7574e014-b372-d32c-a62c-ddabbd5d7c7c?version=1.0&t=1703760495410 [10/07/2024].

Despite their low LP, immigrant adolescents recognize the usefulness of ISL in their school life and speak more than one L2. Findings such as this support the claim that cross-linguistic influence allows L2 knowledge to be transferred between languages teenagers know, facilitating L2 use (McManus 2022).

Thus, promoting an action-oriented approach that practically implements the descriptive framework of the CEFR could benefit multilingual classrooms. Moreover, as Meeuwisse et al. (2010) explained, introducing collaborative tasks in L2 classrooms through a hands-on, dialogic teaching method (Council of Europe 2020: 31) could influence learners' sense of belonging by making educational environments feel more socially and academically supportive.

Linguistic sustainability involves proficiently navigating complexity within the plurilingual environments and embracing a plurilingual communication approach to encourage multilingualism within classrooms (Chapman 2022: 90). For these reasons, teachers should acknowledge cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variations among learners when devising pertinent *curricula* for ISL for study purposes. In line with this view, the Council of Europe's perspective on integration (2022), with Principle No. 4(ii), prioritizes respect for and valuing pupils' linguistic and cultural diversity[11].

Cummins (2019) interestingly pointed out that students can be actively engaged by incorporating translanguaging in classrooms. This methodology includes strategies such as using bilingual or multilingual labels, word walls, repetition, and translation across L1 languages (García, Kleifgen 2018), along with inferential questions (e.g., "How do you say this in your language?").

To accomplish these objectives, it would also be essential to guarantee the availability of supplementary materials and technological tools for the ISL (e.g., tablets for instant translation, access to L2 apps, simplified textbooks for Italian for study purposes, etc.) to be distributed to incoming immigrant learners to facilitate their language acquisition and integration.

Besides, a greater dialogue, often limited or even absent, between special project teachers[12] of interculturalism and inclusion present in every school could be encouraged (cf. Art. No. 28 of the *Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro* and Art. No. 37 of the *Contratto Collettivo Nazionale Integrativo*). The goal is to support each other in sustaining foreign students with special needs. This could involve initiatives to improve interaction, share best practices, and develop joint strategies for addressing diversity and inclusion within the organization or institution.

Students can also create and maintain a Language Learning Portfolio documenting their language learning journey, including goals, achievements, reflections, and language learning strategies. The portfolio could be used as a compensatory tool to track students' progress, reflect on their learning experiences, and take ownership of their learning process[13].

Multilingualism and sustainability are realities that the EU values deeply; in this respect, point 3 of Article No. 3 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union (2020) underscores the Union's commitment to "shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced". Based on these values, educational systems should preserve and support linguistic diversity and reframe

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[11] This concept is also linked to the notions of intercultural competences and attitudes. Cf. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States, https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a6170e [15/07/2024].

[12] Special project teachers are project roles that, with the approval of the Teaching Staff, the head teacher assigns to teachers who apply and demonstrate specific skills and expertise in the designated areas of intervention. Cf. Art. No. 3 of National Collective Contract for School Work (CCNL) 2006/2009.

[13] An example of Language Learning Portfolio can be found in https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/the-language-passport [02/07/2024].

linguistic heterogeneity within Italian secondary schools not as a factor of marginalization but as an enriching asset for the Italian school environments.

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**Appendix**

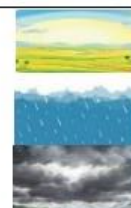| NOME E COGNOME | ............................................................................................................. |
|---|---|
| CLASSE | LA MIA CLASSE: ....................... |
| 1. QUAL È LA TUA MADRELINGUA, CHE PARLI DA QUANDO SEI NATO/NATA? | ............................................................................................................. |
| 2. DOVE SEI NATO/NATA? | SONO NATO/NATA ........................ (CITTÀ) ........................ (STATO) |
| 3. QUANDO SEI NATO/NATA? SOTTOLINEA L'ARTICOLO CORRETTO | SONO NATO/NATA IL / L' _ _ / _ _ / _ _ _ _ |
| 4. DA QUANTO TEMPO SEI QUI IN ITALIA? | SONO QUI IN ITALIA ........................................................... |
| 5. CON CHI SEI QUI IN ITALIA? | SONO QUI IN ITALIA ........................................................... |
| 6. PRIMA DI ARRIVARE IN ITALIA, CONOSCEVI GIÀ LA LINGUA ITALIANA? | ☐ SÌ<br>☐ NO<br>☐ UN PO'. L'HO IMPARATA GRAZIE ........................................... |
| 7. QUALE LINGUA O LINGUE PARLI CON I TUOI PARENTI (NONNO, NONNA, ZIO, ZIA...)? | CON I PARENTI PARLO ........................................................... |
| 8. QUALE LINGUA O LINGUE PARLI CON I TUOI AMICI? | CON GLI AMICI PARLO ........................................................... |
| 9. PREFERISCI PARLARE O SCRIVERE IN ITALIANO? | ........................................................... |
| 10. SCRIVI UNA CLASSIFICA: DALLA LINGUA CHE TI PIACE DI PIÙ A QUELLA CHE TI PIACE DI MENO TRA QUELLE CHE TU SAI PARLARE E/O SCRIVERE | 1. MI PIACE 😊 DI PIÙ...<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5. MI PIACE DI MENO... |
| 11. SCRIVI UNA CLASSIFICA: DALLA LINGUA CHE TU SAI DI PIÙ A QUELLA CHE SAI DI MENO PARLARE E/O SCRIVERE | 1. IO SO DI PIÙ...<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5. DI MENO... |
| 12. FAI UNA "X" SULLA RISPOSTA PIÙ GIUSTA PER TE: PER ME L'ITALIANO È UNA LINGUA... | ☐ FACILE     ☐ ABBASTANZA FACILE     ☐ DIFFICILE |
| 13. PER ME L'ITALIANO È UNA LINGUA... | ☐ UTILE     ☐ ABBASTANZA UTILE     ☐ INUTILE (NON MI SERVE TANTO NELLA VITA) |
| 14. PER ME L'ITALIANO È UNA LINGUA... | ☐ BELLA     ☐ ABBASTANZA BELLA     ☐ BRUTTA |
| 15. PER ME LA LINGUA ITALIANA È COME... | ☐ UNA GIORNATA PIENA DI SOLE E LUCE<br>☐ UNA GIORNATA DI PIOGGIA: DIFFICILE, UN PO' TRISTE<br>☐ UNA GIORNATA NUVOLOSA, INCERTA: A VOLTE PIÙ FACILE, A VOLTE PIÙ DIFFICILE |

Fig. 2: Language Biography Questionnaire