



Evolution of Language Policies in Italian Public Schools: A Focus on Multilingual Inclusion

Evoluzione delle politiche linguistiche nelle scuole pubbliche italiane: prospettive sull'inclusione multilingue

Chiara Facciani

Università per Stranieri di Siena

Abstract

In many European countries, educational settings are experiencing increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. Recent data (2024) indicate that students with migratory backgrounds account for 11.2% of Italy's student population. The demographic shift not only alters social dynamics within schools but also necessitates a reevaluation of pedagogical methods to meet the diverse linguistic needs of students. The current article provides a conceptual exploration of top-down Italian public schools policies by employing a data-driven coding process to track the recognition of bilingual learners within national language policies. Through qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000), this article examines evolving language policies in Italian educational settings. From an initial focus on a generic reference to "cultural" diversity and the identification of students' diverse linguistic background, documents gradually refer to the importance of recognizing and supporting linguistic diversity and mention multilingual education in classrooms and students' languages as useful tools for learning. The findings contribute to discussions on integrating multilingualism in education and offer insights into the changing language policies in Italy's educational landscape.

Keywords: Language policies, multilingualism, bilingual education, bilingual students, Italian schools

Riassunto

In molti paesi europei, gli ambienti educativi stanno vivendo una crescente diversità linguistica e culturale. Dati recenti (2024) indicano che in Italia gli studenti con background migratorio costituiscono l'11,2% della popolazione studentesca. Questo cambiamento demografico non solo modifica le dinamiche sociali all'interno delle scuole, ma richiede anche una rivalutazione dei metodi pedagogici per rispondere alle diverse esigenze linguistiche degli studenti. Il presente articolo offre un'analisi concettuale delle politiche scolastiche pubbliche italiane di tipo top-down, utilizzando un processo di codifica dei dati volto a individuare in che modo le politiche linguistiche nazionali riconoscano gli studenti bilingui. Attraverso un'analisi qualitativa del contenuto (Mayring, 2000), questo articolo esamina l'evoluzione delle politiche linguistiche nei contesti educativi italiani. Da un'iniziale attenzione generica alla diversità "culturale" e al riconoscimento dei diversi background linguistici degli studenti, i documenti iniziano gradualmente a fare riferimento all'importanza di riconoscere e supportare la diversità linguistica, menzionando l'educazione plurilingue in aula e le lingue degli studenti come strumenti utili per l'apprendimento. I risultati contribuiscono al dibattito sull'integrazione del multilinguismo in ambito educativo, offrendo spunti sull'evoluzione delle politiche linguistiche nel panorama scolastico italiano.

Parole chiave: Politiche linguistiche, multilinguismo, educazione bilingue, studenti bilingui, scuole italiane

Introduction

In many European countries, educational settings are witnessing an unprecedented growth in linguistic and cultural diversity. The trend reflects broader patterns of migration and globalization, which have brought people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds into closer contact than ever before (Vertovec, 2007). Within the Italian context, recent statistics from the Ministry of Education underscore this phenomenon by highlighting a substantial presence of 914,860 students, which constitute 11.2% of the overall student population, with migratory backgrounds (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2024). Such a significant demographic shift has not only reshaped social dynamics within educational institutions but has also necessitated a comprehensive reevaluation of school language policies to effectively address unique needs and linguistic competencies of this heterogeneous student population.

The influx of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds presents both challenges and opportunities for the Italian education system. One of the primary challenges lies in ensuring that these students receive equitable education opportunities which require adopting inclusive practices that acknowledge and value student linguistic diversity. In the Italian context, the growing presence of bilingual and multilingual students has prompted bottom-up initiatives of linguistic re-planning (Corson, 1999), embracing multilingualism as an asset rather than a barrier (Andorno & Sordella, 2020; Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020; Gruppo di intervento e studio nel campo dell'educazione linguistica [GISCEL], 1975). These grassroots efforts have informed policymakers and, together with European documents on language diversity (Candelier et al., 2012; Council of Europe, 2019, 2020), have gradually led to changes in Italian language policies in schools. Consequently, there is now an increasing focus on developing top-down language policies that support bilingual and multilingual students in public schools.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of language policies in the context of Italian public schools by employing an empirical data-driven approach to explore the gradual incorporation of bilingual and multilingual learners into national guidelines on language policy. The article is structured into two main sections. The first section delves into the transformative landscape of the Italian public school. To do this, I examine the latest data from the Italian Ministry of Education (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2024) through a descriptive analysis that considers shifts both in the number of students with non-Italian nationality and in their countries of origin. The section also provides an overview of how demographic shifts have influenced Italian public-school classrooms in the past. The second section focuses on language policies within the Italian educational framework. Official documents that have shaped language policy in Italian schools—including laws, decrees, ministerial notes, guidelines, and reports—are analyzed. Through a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) of this corpus, this article identifies a notable (yet gradual) shift toward the recognition of multilingualism and linguistic diversity as a characteristic of Italian society and schools. The shift is evident in the gradual emphasis on the recognition of bilingual and multilingual learner presence in educational policy and practice, which reflects a broader commitment to promoting linguistic equity and social integration. Results of this

qualitative analysis allow discussion on the implications of these policy changes for educators, students, and the broader educational community. Results presented in this article identify challenges that have yet to fully realize the goals of inclusive multilingual education, such as addressing the varying levels of support available to schools and the need for ongoing professional development for teachers.

Due to space constraints, the analysis presented here does not account for all of the dynamics related to historical linguistic minorities in Italy (Norme in Materia di Tutela Delle Minoranze Linguistiche Storiche, 1999) but instead focuses exclusively on the language policies of the Italian public school system concerning the recent influx of students from migratory backgrounds. While historical linguistic minorities—such as the German-speaking community in South Tyrol or the Slovenian-speaking community in Friuli Venezia Giulia—have long-standing educational provisions, the recent demographic changes present a distinct set of challenges and opportunities that are the primary focus of this study.

The evolution of language policies in Italian public schools reflects a broader trend toward embracing linguistic diversity and promoting inclusive education. By examining developments of school language policies, especially top-down language policies in the school context (Tollefson, 2006), this article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of ways in which educational systems can adapt to (and benefit from) the rich linguistic and cultural resources that students with migratory backgrounds bring to the classroom. Findings underscore the importance of continued efforts to develop and implement language policies that support all students, fostering an educational environment where linguistic diversity is seen as an asset rather than a challenge to overcome.

Language Policy and Planning Definitions

Amongst researchers there is a lack of consensus regarding the terminology and the definition of the term “language policy and planning” (Ricento, 2006). Grin (2003) defined language policy as all forms of intervention on language, encompassing actions intended to influence the language use of small or large communities. This broad definition includes actions implemented by non-state organizations, by non-governmental associations, by groups, or by individuals. According to Grin’s definition (2003), language policy is a multifaceted term that encompasses a broad array of strategies and interventions aimed at shaping linguistic landscapes within societies. Furthermore, in his work on language policy evaluation, Grin (2003) explains that language policy initiatives are typically carried out by official bodies (or their representatives) and may target specific segments (or the entirety) of the population within their jurisdiction. Similarly, McCarty (2011) defines language policies, including the complex array of practices, ideologies, attitudes, and formal and informal mechanisms that significantly influence language choices in everyday life, as dynamic and process-oriented. In addition, a narrower interpretation of the term comes from Dell’Aquila and Iannàccaro (2004) who view language policy as encompassing political or legislative endeavors aimed at promoting the usage of a particular language. Furthermore, Spolsky (2004) develops a tripartite model of language policy which distinguishes between

language practices (the habitual pattern of language use within a community), language beliefs or ideologies (the values and assumptions about language held by members of the community), and language management (the explicit efforts made to modify or influence language practices). This framework allows for an analysis of how language policy operates on multiple levels and through various agents. For the purpose of this article, Spolsky's (2004) model is adopted, and particular attention is given to language management with specific reference to the inclusion of multilingual students as the aim is to trace the evolution of top-down language policies within the Italian school system. By concentrating on intentional and institutionalised measures that shape language use in educational settings, this perspective enables a deeper understanding of how linguistic diversity is addressed, regulated, and supported in formal schooling contexts.

Language Policy and Planning in the Italian Educational Context

In the Italian context, studies investigating top-down language policies within the context of the Italian school system are relatively limited. Amongst these, in her *La politica linguistica in Italia*, Pizzoli (2018) proposed a comprehensive review of Italian language policies from the country's unification to date, where she also includes a chapter on the role of school and universities to promote language policies. Furthermore, Saccardo (2016) conducted a review of language policy in Italian schools, delving into the legislation with specific reference to the right to education for non-Italian students, the teaching of Italian as a second language (L2), and the instruction of foreign languages. In addition, Oricchio (2023) specifies that language policy and planning within Italian education includes regulations on the teaching of the Italian language, introduction of second and third languages in mandatory education, and the training of teachers. Moreover, research on top-down language policies has primarily centered on historical minority languages within the Italian school system, as recognized under Law 482 (Norme in Materia di Tutela Delle Minoranze Linguistiche Storiche) in 1999 (Dell'Aquila & Iannaccaro, 2004). Conversely, language policies concerning students with migratory backgrounds have predominantly been examined from a bottom-up perspective. The studies mentioned above (Oricchio, 2023; Pizzoli, 2018; Saccardo, 2016) help outline the main features of language policy in the Italian school system.

Overall, patterns can be identified as characterising language policy in Italian public education. First, studies highlighted policies' strong emphasis on Italian as the national and vehicular language which placed it at the center of the curriculum since it was generally assumed to be the first language of all students (Pizzoli, 2018). Second, the promotion of multilingualism in line with European directives has led to the introduction of foreign language learning and to initiatives such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), especially in secondary education (Council of Europe, 2020). Third, policies targeting the linguistic integration of non-Italian-speaking students have developed over the years, particularly through guidelines for the teaching of Italian as a second language; these remain largely recommendatory and lack full curricular integration. Fourth, the languages spoken by multilingual students are rarely recognized or supported within the school context, and there is no systematic policy to

incorporate students' home languages into teaching practices (Bagna & Casini, 2012; Barni, 2012). Finally, protection is granted to historical linguistic minorities through Law 482 (Normé in Materia di Tutela Delle Minoranze Linguistiche Storiche, 1999) which allows for bilingual education in specific regions, though this legislation does not extend to the so-called new minorities resulting from more recent migratory flows (Guarda & Mayr, 2023). While these patterns can be identified across the Italian school system, it is important to note they do not stem from a single, unified language policy document. Instead, language policy in Italy emerges from a collection of ministerial texts, regulatory acts, and guidelines issued at different times, often in response to specific educational or political needs. As a result, these documents may reflect diverging priorities and conceptualizations of language policy, rather than a coherent and consistent vision.

Intercultural and Multilingual Education in Schools

Understanding the evolution of linguistic policies in the context of multilingual education within the Italian school system is crucial for addressing inclusive language policies. To explore this theme effectively, two key theoretical constructs must be clarified, which, although distinct, both contribute to the broader discussion of inclusive language policies. The first concept is *interculture*, which refers to the interaction between individuals or groups from different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, and aims to promote mutual understanding and respect. One of the central mandates of intercultural education is to foster intercultural dialogue which is defined as “open and respectful” (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 10) communication that occurs between individuals or groups with diverse cultural and linguistic heritages, based on shared understanding and respect. In this regard, intercultural learning is concerned with how we come to understand other cultures, as well as our own, through interaction. It emphasizes the importance of learning and communicating in cultural contexts and how we culturally adapt through these experiences. Although intercultural education primarily focuses on cultural aspects, it also involves reflecting on the relationship between language and culture in the classroom (Jin & Cortazzi, 2013).

The second construct is *multilingual education*, within which the role of language in fostering inclusion is a focal point. Key studies in this area include research on pedagogical translanguaging (City University of New York-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals [CUNY NYSIEB], 2020) and identity texts (Cummins & Early, 2011) but also include the pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures developed within the European context that further underscore the centrality of language in fostering inclusive educational environments (Candelier et al., 2012). A multilingual education approach encourages the development of a heightened awareness of linguistic diversity and the interconnectedness of different languages and cultures (García & Flores, 2012). Rather than focusing solely on the mechanics of language acquisition, multilingual education promotes the idea that learning about languages (e.g., exploring their structures, uses, and cultural significance) helps students build a deeper understanding of their own linguistic identities while fostering respect for others' linguistic backgrounds. This pedagogical framework

encourages a shift from a monolingual to a plurilingual perspective, where students engage with the relationships between languages and cultures and become aware of linguistic diversity (Little & Kirwan, 2019). While intercultural education focuses primarily on the dynamics of interaction and mutual understanding between cultures, multilingual education places language at the center as a tool for inclusion and identity construction, thus outlining two complementary yet distinct perspectives in promoting inclusive school policies.

A Change from Below: Bottom-up Actions to Shape School Language Policies

While examining top-down language policies, it is also relevant to consider bottom-up initiatives within the Italian context. These grassroots efforts influence the shaping of the linguistic dynamics in education, particularly in response to the increasing presence of multilingual students (Corson, 1999; Hornberger, 2008). In line with Spolsky's (2004) view, language policy is ultimately shaped through a negotiated process where top-down decisions interact with (and are often reshaped by) bottom-up practices and local responses. In the Italian context, traces of bottom-up language policies can be identified in the pioneering instance of the "Theses GISCEL" (Gruppo di intervento e studio nel campo dell'educazione linguistica [GISCEL], 1975). GISCEL, the Italian acronym for the "Group for Intervention and Study in the Field of Language Education" was founded in 1973 within the framework of the Italian Linguistic Society (SLI) (De Mauro, 2018) and in 1975 published a set of pedagogical guidelines, which laid the foundations for a more inclusive and multilingual approach to language education in Italy. It is important to specify that in the mid-1970s, everyday language use in Italy was characterized by a strong presence of regional dialects while exclusive use of standard Italian was relatively limited. Educational practices at the time largely prioritized formal Italian and emphasized literacy-based learning (De Mauro, 2018). The *Ten Theses for a Democratic Linguistic Education* called for reforms aimed at addressing the linguistic diversity present in Italian society, with an emphasis on respect for all linguistic varieties. The document proposes that educational practices begin by considering the linguistic and cultural background of students, not as a limiting factor but as a starting point to expand their linguistic skills. For instance, Thesis III states:

The stimulation of linguistic abilities should begin with identifying the student's personal, familial, and environmental linguistic-cultural background, not to fixate or confine them to this background, but rather, on the contrary, to enrich the student's linguistic repertoire through additions and expansions. (GISCEL, 1975, Thesis III)

Additionally, Thesis IV asserts, "The school should aim to respect and protect all linguistic varieties (whether different languages or different uses of the same language)" (GISCEL, 1975, Thesis IV).

These theses exemplify bottom-up language policy, as they advocate for reforms rooted in grassroots principles of inclusion and linguistic diversity. Despite their lack of

formal institutional endorsement at the time, the GISCEL theses have played a crucial role in shaping Italian educational practices, particularly in terms of fostering multilingual and intercultural education. Similarly, the Language and New Didactics (Lingua e Nuova Didattica [LEND]) association is another Italian organization whose activities fit into the definition of bottom-up initiatives. Founded in the 1970s with the aim of raising awareness and working toward a democratic school system, the focus of LEND is to conduct research and provide training for teachers in the linguistic field, with the goal of renewing teaching practices in a democratic and civic-oriented manner, while also promoting a multicultural perspective (LEND, 2016).

Further examples of bottom-up policies are the ones emerging from several projects that stand out for their innovative approaches to fostering linguistic inclusivity. For instance, “L’AltRoparlante” is a research-action project in which researchers from the University for Foreigners of Siena and teachers from six Italian multilingual and multicultural schools adopt multilingual pedagogies and integrate students’ diverse linguistic repertoires into class activities (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020), thereby reshaping school language policies. Similarly, “Noi e le nostre lingue” (Andorno & Sordella, 2020) is a project conducted by the University of Turin that aims to raise awareness among students about language diversity by organizing workshops on languages not taught in school but present due to student linguistic repertoires.

Having now established a theoretical framework, with references also to the Italian context, the following section presents data on the presence of students with migrant backgrounds in contemporary Italian schools.

An Overview of Data from the Italian School System

Taking a look at the current numbers in the Italian school system is crucial for understanding its dynamics, particularly when it comes to bilingual students. Since there are no official documents outlining the exact numbers of bilingual students in Italian public schools, partially useful insights could be obtained by looking at the data on students’ citizenships from the statistical office of the Italian Ministry of Education, which annually compiles a report with data regarding students with migratory backgrounds and can provide an overview of statistics concerning the Italian school system. The latest available document at the time of this writing pertains to data from the 2022/2023 academic year (Ministero dell’Istruzione, 2024). The analysis presented in the report is structured by school level, geographical distribution, country of citizenship, academic performance, and other indicators useful for monitoring and evaluating integration and inclusive educational policies. Before moving on to the analysis of the data, it is necessary to provide some clarification regarding how the Italian citizenship system works, as the data presented are based precisely on citizenship.

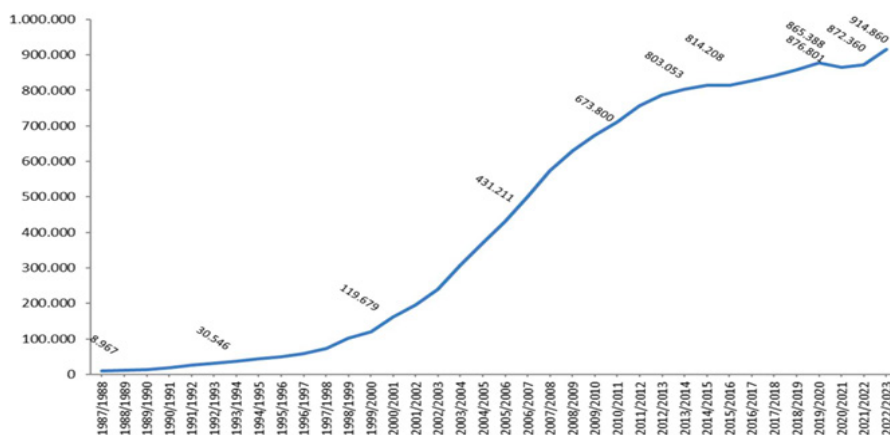
In Italy, citizenship is primarily based on *ius sanguinis* / *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), meaning that children born in Italy to foreign parents do not automatically acquire Italian citizenship. This makes it challenging to distinguish bilingual students solely by citizenship. As a result, citizenship-based data is not entirely reliable for understanding the actual number of bilingual

students. Many students born in Italy to foreign parents, who are fully proficient in Italian and often bilingual, are still officially classified as foreign nationals, since these statistics reflect nationality rather than linguistic competence. Additionally, there are children of mixed couples, where parents come from two different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, as well as students who were brought to their families through international adoption, a process where children are adopted by families from another country. Taking all this into account, results presented in the Italian Ministry of Education's report should be intended as generic and not representative of linguistic specificities of each school context.

Overall, data available at time of this writing (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2024) reports that students of migratory origin amount to 914,860, with a +4.9% increase compared to the previous year. The report also traces changes over time by taking into account the oldest available data (specifically from the 1987/1988 school year) and comparing them with more recent figures in order to provide an overview of the presence of students without Italian citizenship in the Italian school system as illustrated in Graph 1 below.

Graph 1

Students With Non-Italian Citizenship (Absolute Values) - School Years 1987/1988 - 2022/2023
(Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2024)

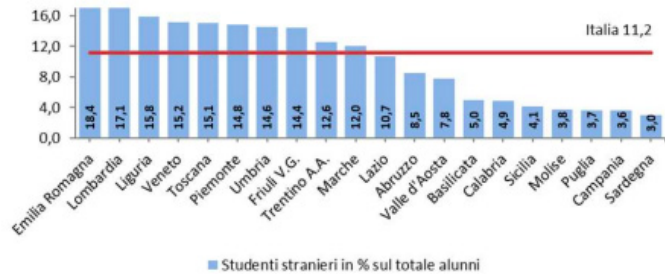


Graph 1 shows that the peak increase was in 2007/2008 with an increment of almost 73 thousand students; thereafter, the growth has been more contained. Furthermore, Graph 1 also illustrates the decline recorded in the 2020/21 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent growth starting from 2021.

A different section within the ministerial data report also illustrates that the territorial distribution of students with non-Italian citizenship is not homogeneous. In fact, there are more students in the northern regions of Italy (e.g., Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia, Liguria, Veneto, etc.) with significantly fewer in the central (e.g., Umbria, Abruzzo, etc.), in the southern regions, and on the islands (e.g., Calabria, Basilicata, Sardegna, etc.) as Graph 2 shows.

Graph 2

Regional Distribution of Students with Non-Italian Citizenship - School Year 2022/2023 (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2024)



Furthermore, the same report provides data on the countries of origin of these students. The students mainly come from other European countries, particularly Romania and Albania. Next, based on the analyzed figures, we find students from Africa, primarily from Morocco and Egypt. Finally, there are students from Asia, with a prevalence of students holding Chinese citizenship.

Following this overview of student data and the current state of demographics within the Italian school system, the following section delves into the study's methodology.

Method: Research Context and Data Collection

The study employs a multi-faceted methodological approach to empirically investigate the evolution of language policies within Italian public schools, particularly concerning bilingual students and the inclusion of languages beyond Italian as the language of schooling. Specifically, the research questions that guided the analysis are the following:

1. Has there been an evolution in the regulations concerning Italian public schools regarding bilingual students and the inclusion of languages other than Italian?
2. If there has been such an evolution, how has it changed in terms of conceptualization?

To inform answers to these research questions, a corpus of official documents published by the Italian Ministry of Education was compiled. All documents included in the corpus were sourced from the official website of the Italian Ministry of Education (<https://miur.gov.it>). The corpus comprises 15 documents, spans a timeframe that ranges from 1989 to 2022, and examines the evolution of language policies within Italian public schools over the past two decades. The selection of this timeframe is deliberate, as it aligns with significant shifts in Italy's demographic landscape due to migratory trends. Before this period, in fact, the sociolinguistic profile of Italy was markedly different: in the mid-1970s, the population was predominantly dialect-speaking, with 51.3% of people primarily using dialects in everyday communication, only 25% using standard Italian exclusively, and 23.7% alternating between Italian and dialect (De Mauro, 2018). From an educational standpoint, the Italian school system at the time tended to focus almost exclusively on standard Italian and on learning through writing (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020). A major shift

began in the 1980s, when the arrival of students from different national backgrounds introduced increasingly heterogeneous linguistic repertoires into the school context. This phenomenon, described by Vedovelli and Casini (2016) as *neoplurilingualism*, marked a turning point in the Italian sociolinguistic landscape and began to challenge traditional monolingual educational models.

The compiled corpus includes a diverse array of document types, ranging from legislative acts such as laws and decrees regarding students with non-Italian citizenship to administrative communications like ministerial notes, guidelines, and analytical reports, as illustrated in Table 1 below. Among the documents analyzed, two main types stand out: regulations and guidelines. Both are issued at the ministerial level and directed toward schools, yet they serve distinct purposes and differ significantly in their nature, audience, and authority. Regulations (i.e., ministerial circulars and legislative decrees) are legal, top-down directives that establish binding rules and procedures. They are primarily aimed at school administrators and relevant public authorities and carry the force of law and require compliance from educational institutions. In contrast, guidelines are non-legislative documents that offer practical recommendations and strategies for implementing the principles outlined in the regulations. They are primarily targeted at teachers and educational practitioners. Guidelines provide actionable advice without imposing legal obligations and serve to help educators translate regulatory principles into everyday classroom practices. The selection of these specific documents for analysis is driven by their central role in shaping educational policy and practice, particularly in areas such as the inclusion of foreign students where both legal frameworks and practical guidance are crucial for effective implementation.

Table 1
Corpus of Data Collected

| Publication Year | Name of the Document | Translation of the Document Name | Type of Document |
|------------------|--|--|------------------|
| 1989 | Circolare Ministeriale 301 dell'8 settembre 1989, "Inserimento degli stranieri nella scuola dell'obbligo: promozione e coordinamento delle iniziative per l'esercizio del diritto allo studio" | Ministerial Circular 301 of September 8, 1989, "Inclusion of Foreigners in Compulsory Education: Promotion and Coordination of Initiatives for the Exercise of the Right to Education" | Regulation |
| 1990 | Circolare Ministeriale 205 del 26 luglio 1990, "La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri: l'educazione interculturale" | Ministerial Circular 205, July 26, 1990, "Compulsory Education and Foreign Students: intercultural education" | Regulation |
| 1994 | Circolare Ministeriale 73 del 2 marzo 1994, "Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola" | Ministerial Circular 73 of March 2, 1994, "Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence: The School's Project Commitment" | Regulation |

| Publication Year | Name of the Document | Translation of the Document Name | Type of Document |
|------------------|---|---|------------------|
| 1994 | Decreto Legislativo 16 aprile 1994, n. 297, "Norme sull'inclusione degli alunni stranieri nelle scuole italiane" | Legislative Decree No. 297 of April 16, 1994, "Provisions on the Inclusion of Foreign Students in Italian Schools" | Regulation |
| 1998 | Decreto Legislativo del 25 luglio 1998, n. 286, "Testo unico sull'immigrazione" | Legislative Decree of July 25, 1998, No. 286, "Consolidated Act on Immigration" | Regulation |
| 1999 | Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica 394 del 31 agosto 1999, "Inserimento degli studenti neo-arrivati" | Decree of the President of the Republic No. 394 of August 31, 1999, 'Inclusion of Newly Arrived Students' | Regulation |
| 2006 | Febbraio 2014, "Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri" | February 2014, "Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students" | Guidelines |
| 2006 | Decreto Ministeriale, 6 dicembre 2006, "Decreto formazione osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'intercultura" | Ministerial Decree, December 6, 2006, "Decree on the Formation of the National Observatory for the Integration of Foreign Students and for Intercultural Education" | Regulation |
| 2007 | Ottobre 2007, "La Via Italiana per la scuola interculturale e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri" | October 2007, "The Italian Way for Intercultural Schooling and the Integration of Foreign Students" | Regulation |
| 2012 | Settembre 2012, "Linee guida per l'inserimento degli alunni stranieri" | September 2012, "Guidelines for the Inclusion of Foreign Students" | Guidelines |
| 2012 | Settembre, 2012 "Indicazioni Nazionali per il curriculum verticale della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione" | September 2012, "National Guidelines for the Vertical Curriculum of Preschool and the First Cycle of Education" | Guidelines |
| 2014 | Febbraio 2014, "Linee Guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri" | February 2014, "Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students" | Guidelines |
| 2015 | Settembre 2015, "Diversi da chi? Raccomandazioni per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e l'intercultura" | September 2015, "Different from whom? Recommendations for the Integration of Foreign Students and Interculturality" | Guidelines |
| 2018 | Novembre 2018, "Indicazioni Nazionali e nuovi scenari" | November 2018, "National Guidelines and New Scenarios" | Guidelines |
| 2022 | Marzo 2022, "Orientamenti Interculturali" | March 2022, "Intercultural Guidelines" | Guidelines |

The analysis of the collected corpus was conducted through qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000), which allowed for a systematic exploration of recurring themes and categories across the documents. To identify these elements, both inductive and deductive approaches were adopted: on one side, theoretical concepts guided the initial interpretation of the data (i.e., intercultural education and multilingual education); on the other, close engagement with the material enabled the development of new categories grounded in the documents themselves. Furthermore, following the logic of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), the coding process involved multiple rounds of reading and progressive refinement of analytical categories. The analysis was conducted through the support of NVivo 14 software which facilitates the organization and management of the dataset. The software allows uploading the corpus files and treats each document as a separate file for analysis. During the coding process, specific sections of the text are labeled by assigning *codes*, which correspond to the themes or concepts emerging from the data. The themes identified throughout the analysis are then organized into *nodes*, which represent the key ideas and categories and provide a structured way to manage and explore the data in depth. Nodes in NVivo can be non-hierarchical (*free nodes*) or hierarchical (*child nodes* and *grandchild nodes*). Free nodes are independent codes used for themes that do not fit into a specific category, allowing for more flexibility in coding. Hierarchical nodes, on the other hand, consist of parent nodes representing broader themes, with child nodes and grandchild nodes serving as more specific subcategories. The identification of nodes allows us to examine not only recurring themes but also the number of references to a particular theme within a specific document. Furthermore, NVivo's Matrix Query function allows for the selection of identified nodes and the examination of their distribution across separate documents. This feature, combined with a qualitative examination of the dataset, enables an analysis of how policy development has evolved over time. By leveraging the NVivo functionalities described, the study aims to derive insight from the corpus, thereby enriching the understanding of the evolution of language policies within Italian public schools with a specific reference to bilingual and multilingual students. By elucidating how regulatory frameworks have evolved in response to shifting demographic dynamics and educational imperatives, the study's findings have the potential to inform policy discourse and educational practice as well as foster greater inclusivity and responsiveness to the linguistic needs of diverse student populations.

Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the data from the corpus. The qualitative analysis of the corpus allowed us to identify three main categories (or macro-nodes) using NVivo terminology: *linguistic education*, *presence of students with migratory background*, and *strategies for inclusion*.

The macro-node *linguistic education* includes normative references regarding the teaching of Italian as a second language (L2), the instruction of curricular languages in the Italian public school system (e.g., English, German, French, and Spanish), language learning in general, and

metalinguistic competence. Additionally, this macro-node contains references to the other languages of the Italian school system, addressing both historical linguistic minorities and immigrant languages (also referred to as *new linguistic minorities*). Table 2 displays the nodes identified within the macro-node *linguistic education*. The type of node is specified as follows: **macro-nodes** are in bold, child nodes are in plain text, and *grandchild nodes* (which contain further sub-nodes) are presented in italics. The table also shows the name assigned to each node during the analysis, the number of files in which the node was coded within the corpus, and the number of references, that is, how many times the node was mentioned within the corpus.

Table 2
Macro-node Linguistic Education

| Node Type | Node | File | Reference |
|------------------------|---|------|-----------|
| Macro-node | Linguistic education | 0 | |
| Child Node | Italian L2 | 11 | 62 |
| Child Node | Foreign curricular languages | 6 | 15 |
| Child Node | Language learning | 2 | 31 |
| Child Node | Metalinguistic awareness | 1 | 3 |
| Child Node | Languages of the Italian school system | | |
| <i>Grandchild Node</i> | <i>Historical minority languages</i> | 3 | 4 |
| <i>Grandchild Node</i> | <i>Migrant languages (new minority languages)</i> | 3 | 3 |

The macro-node *presence of students with migratory background* gathers all references in the regulations that pertain to the presence of foreign minors in the Italian school system, and it examines how the Italian school system manages this presence, including policies, practices, and challenges encountered in the integration process. These references include both citations of Italian immigration laws, particularly the *right to education* approach, and European policies related to these same issues, especially regarding actions that can support integration. Moreover, the macro-node highlights references to specificities within the categories (including newly arrived students, first-generation students, and second-generation students), their distribution in classes, the complexities of assessment, and the dual perspectives of creating differentiated pathways versus emphasizing the importance of classroom integration with Italian peers. Additionally, this macro-node also includes references to the perception of the presence of students with a migratory background as an emergency or problematic issue, references to racism and prejudice and strategies to combat them, the challenges concerning the terminology

used to refer to “new” students, and the establishment of an official ministerial observatory specifically designed to study this phenomenon.

Table 3
Macro-node Presence of Students With Migratory Background

| Node Types | Nodes | File | References |
|-------------------|---|------|------------|
| Macro-node | Presence of students with migratory background | | |
| Child node | Right to education | 8 | 16 |
| Child node | European policies | 6 | 12 |
| Child node | Problem/emergency description | 4 | 5 |
| Child node | First and second-generation students | 3 | 4 |
| Child node | Evaluation | 2 | 4 |
| Child node | Differentiated education path | 2 | 2 |
| Child node | Non-differentiated educational path | 2 | 2 |
| Child node | Prejudices and racism | 1 | 6 |
| Child node | Newly arrived students | 1 | 1 |
| Child node | Students with migratory background classroom distribution | 1 | 1 |
| Child node | Observatory creation | 1 | 1 |
| Child node | Terminology problem | 1 | 1 |

The last macro-node, *strategies for inclusion*, encompasses all references to the various strategies that have been implemented over the years to promote inclusion in the Italian school system. This macro-node includes references to intercultural education, including a child node containing references to how this intercultural perspective might generate stereotypes and generalizations. Additionally, the macro-node includes all references to the recognition of the students’ mother tongues, to the centrality of professional training (both teachers’ training and headmasters’ training), to the valorization of multilingualism, to the involvement of immigrant families, to the valorization and awareness-raising of cultural diversity, to multilingual books and intercultural libraries, to multilingual education and multilingual materials, to cultural and linguistic surveys on students, to mediation and linguistic support, and to cooperative learning. Table 4 displays the child and grandchild nodes.

Table 4

Macro-node Strategies for Inclusion

| Node Type | Nodes | File | References |
|------------------------|--|------|------------|
| Macro-node | Strategies for inclusion | | |
| Child Node | Intercultural education | 8 | 34 |
| <i>Grandchild Node</i> | <i>Stereotyping and generalization risk</i> | 2 | 6 |
| <i>Grandchild Node</i> | <i>Mother tongue recognition</i> | 8 | 26 |
| Child Node | Training | 7 | 34 |
| <i>Grandchild Node</i> | <i>Teachers' training</i> | 7 | 29 |
| <i>Grandchild Node</i> | <i>Headmasters training</i> | 3 | 4 |
| Child Node | Valorization of multilingualism | 7 | 11 |
| Child Node | Involvement of immigrant families | 5 | 21 |
| Child Node | Valorization and awareness-raising of cultural diversity | 5 | 15 |
| Child Node | Multilingual books and intercultural libraries | 5 | 8 |
| Child Node | Multilingual education | 3 | 11 |
| Child Node | Multilingual material | 3 | 8 |
| Child Node | Cultural and linguistic surveys on students | 3 | 4 |
| Child Node | Mediation and linguistic support | 4 | 17 |
| Child Node | Cooperative learning | 2 | 2 |

Furthermore, to better highlight the temporal evolution and support the results presented, it is possible to conduct an additional comparison using NVivo's Matrix Query function. This cross-tabulation tool allows for the selection of identified nodes and the examination of their distribution across separate documents, thus taking into account the temporal development of language policies. Keeping in mind the two theoretical constructs outlined in section "Intercultural and Multilingual Education in Schools," Table 5 compares the distribution of nodes related to intercultural education and plurilingual education across the documents, enabling an analysis of their temporal evolution as well.

Table 5
Intercultural Education and Multilingual Education Nodes Distribution Across the Corpus

| | Intercultural education | Multilingual education |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Ministerial Circular 301 of September 8, 1989, "Inclusion of Foreigners in Compulsory Education: Promotion and Coordination of Initiatives for the Exercise of the Right to Education" | 0 | 0 |
| Ministerial Circular 205, July 26, 1990, "Compulsory Education and Foreign Students: intercultural education" | 5 | 0 |
| Ministerial Circular 73 of March 2, 1994, "Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence: The School's Project Commitment" | 0 | 0 |
| Legislative Decree No. 297 of April 16, 1994, "Provisions on the Inclusion of Foreign Students in Italian Schools" | 3 | 0 |
| Legislative Decree of July 25, 1998, No. 286, "Consolidated Act on Immigration" | 0 | 0 |
| Decree of the President of the Republic No. 394 of August 31, 1999, "Inclusion of Newly Arrived Students" | 1 | 0 |
| Ministerial Decree, December 6, 2006, "Decree on the Formation of the National Observatory for the Integration of Foreign Students and for Intercultural Education" | 0 | 0 |
| February 2014, "Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students" | 3 | 0 |
| October 2007, "The Italian Way for Intercultural Schooling and the Integration of Foreign Students" | 10 | 0 |
| September 2012, "Guidelines for the Inclusion of Foreign Students" | 0 | 0 |
| September 2012, "National Guidelines for the Vertical Curriculum of Preschool and the First Cycle of Education" | 7 | 5 |
| February 2014, "Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students" | 4 | 3 |
| September 2015, "Different from whom? Recommendations for the Integration of Foreign Students and Interculturality" | 0 | 0 |
| November 2018, "National Guidelines and New Scenarios" | 0 | 0 |
| March 2022, "Intercultural Guidelines" | 1 | 3 |

Table 5 highlights the contrast between the presence of references linked to the *intercultural education* and *multilingual education* nodes. Initial documents predominantly feature references related to intercultural education, while those connected to multilingual education only begin to

emerge in later years. This evolution suggests a gradual shift toward a more inclusive approach that, over time, comes to integrate multilingual dimensions alongside intercultural ones.

In the subsequent section, illustrating the results of the analysis, the focus will shift toward the linguistic perspective emerging within the regulations, particularly concerning bilingual and multilingual students and the integration of their languages in the school system. This section will delve into the specific provisions and measures outlined in the normative framework aimed at addressing the linguistic needs and rights of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It will explore how these regulations gradually started acknowledging and supporting linguistic diversity within educational settings, including strategies for promoting bilingualism, multilingualism, and the equitable integration of students' languages into the educational process.

Results

The corpus of documents examined provides an overview of the languages present in the Italian school system, highlighting several key categories. First, there is the Italian language, which serves as the primary medium of instruction. Second, the documents recognize historical linguistic minorities, acknowledging the importance of preserving and promoting these languages within the educational context. Additionally, documents refer to disciplinary languages, which include other European languages such as English, German, French and Spanish. Lastly, documents discuss the languages of immigrant communities, also referred to as “new linguistic minorities” (Chini, 2009) emphasizing the need to integrate and value these languages in the school environment. This comprehensive overview underscores the multifaceted linguistic landscape within Italian schools and the need for inclusive language policies that reflect this diversity.

The Recognition of Students' Linguistic Repertoires

Initially, documents encompass a focus on the recognition of bilingual students' different language skills. For instance, this is evident from the node *mother tongue recognition*. In earlier corpus documents, attention toward bilingualism is highlighted through various modalities. For example, in the *Ministerial Circular 301 of September 8, 1989, Inclusion of Foreigners in Compulsory Education: Promotion and Coordination of Initiatives for the Exercise of the Right to Education*, there is “the absence of teaching staff able to communicate in the immigrants' mother tongue,” thus indicating the need for greater linguistic support within schools to meet the needs of newly arrived students. At the same time, it is stated in the same document that students belonging to other ethnic groups (especially recent immigrants) must find communicative stimuli from the intervention of immigrant peers who already have some familiarity with the Italian language as well as from the participation of adults who are able to communicate in both Italian and the other language (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 1989).

In this case, reference is made to how bilingual students can be stimulated through communication with other immigrant students who know Italian or adults who know both

languages, thus referring to the figure of the mediator or linguistic facilitator. These references clearly indicate that schools were still unprepared to accommodate student languages. However, they also highlight an emerging awareness of the need for trained professionals to support classroom communication and recognize the potential of peer communication as a valuable tool for inclusion. Furthermore, in the *Ministerial Circular 73 of March 2, 1994, Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence: The School's Project Commitment*, it is specified that the school should offer specific integrative teaching in the language and culture of origin for non-EU students, similarly to what is provided for the children of EU workers and for the children of Italian emigrants returning to Italy, thereby stressing the importance of students' mother tongue and its maintenance with the support of specific teaching programs (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 1994). Additionally, in both the *National Guidelines for the Vertical Curriculum of Preschool and the First Cycle of Education* (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2012b) and the *National Guidelines and New Scenarios* (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2018), more pronounced references begin to emerge not only recognizing the linguistic needs of students but also the idea that language has a strong identity component. For example, the 2012 guidelines state the following:

The mother tongue is part of the identity of every child, but knowledge of other languages opens up encounters with new worlds and cultures. Early childhood education has the responsibility to promote mastery of the Italian language in all children, respecting the use of the native language. (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2012b, p. 21)

The Ministry of Education's 2018 *National Guidelines and New Scenarios* specifies "it is the responsibility of all teachers to ensure mastery of the Italian language, while at the same time valuing native languages and community languages. Thus understood, school becomes a privileged place for learning and free and pluralistic exchange" (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2018, p. 6).

Alongside mentions regarding the recognition of students' diverse languages, albeit limited in the older documents, there are also mentions of the importance of valorizing multilingualism. For example, in the *Ministerial Circular 301 of September 8, 1989, Inclusion of Foreigners in Compulsory Education: Promotion and Coordination of Initiatives for the Exercise of the Right to Education*, it is stated, "The presence of foreign students brings to the attention of the school the additional theme of 'enhancing the language and culture of origin'" (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 1989). Ten years later, the Decree of the President of the Republic No. 394 of August 31, 1999, *Inclusion of Newly Arrived Students*, emphasizes a focus on intercultural education:

The school community welcomes linguistic and cultural differences as a value underlying mutual respect, exchange between cultures, and tolerance; to this end, it promotes and encourages initiatives aimed at welcoming, protecting the culture and language of origin, and implementing common intercultural activities. (Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 1999)

More recently, there has been a growing emphasis on multilingualism. For example, the *National Guidelines for the Vertical Curriculum of Preschool and the First Cycle of Education* (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2012) highlight a stronger focus on multilingual education.

Multilingual and intercultural education primarily contributes to the development of cultural and social literacy. As languages of education, the mother tongue, the language of schooling, and European languages contribute to promoting the subject's rights to the full development of their identity in contact with linguistic and cultural otherness (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2012). Such an approach to education also represents a functional resource for enhancing diversity and the academic success of all, and it is a prerequisite for social inclusion and democratic participation understood as a practice in classrooms aimed at valuing diversity, recognizing others, and moving away from Eurocentrism, particularly evident in the guidelines for teachers. As the excerpts illustrate, regulations have gradually begun to acknowledge students' diverse linguistic repertoires. Initially, the focus was on the challenges of having adequately trained teachers. Over time, the emphasis shifted toward valuing multilingualism. However, the guidelines consistently fell short of specifying how teachers should implement these recommendations in practice.

From Intercultural Education to Multilingual Education

Regarding the strategies that can be adopted to support students' inclusion and integration, the analyzed regulations include an emphasis on intercultural education, which is understood as fostering "dialogue and constructive coexistence among subjects belonging to diverse cultures" (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 1989). Within the corpus, intercultural education is delineated as not merely a pedagogical approach but as a foundational element that enriches the essence of democracy. It perceives "cultural diversity" not as a challenge but as an asset conducive to societal and individual development. At its core, intercultural education aims to cultivate the capacity for constructive coexistence of different cultures (Jin & Cortazzi, 2013). This entails fostering attitudes of acceptance, respect, and appreciation for the cultural identities of others and requires active engagement in the daily pursuit of dialogue, understanding, and collaboration.

The prominence of this intercultural perspective is identifiable across the corpus, albeit more prevalent in older documents, as Table 5 illustrated. For instance, in the *National Guidelines for the Vertical Curriculum of Preschool and the First Cycle of Education*, it is said that "a multiplicity of cultures and languages have permeated the school environment" (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2012b, p. 4), highlighting the transformative nature of interculturality and clarifying that intercultural education embodies a paradigm for the entire educational system. It emphasizes that supporting measures for achieving stable integration and implementing targeted interventions from a didactic standpoint should not be perceived as addressing immigrants solely as "problematic students," instead, such efforts should be integrated into a comprehensive framework of intercultural education that involves the entire student body.

Nevertheless, the intercultural perspective identified in the corpus transcends a narrow focus on linguistic considerations, subsuming them into a broader conception of culture. A

broader focus on generic cultural differences risks overlooking the specific linguistic needs of students (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020). Such an approach can be problematic, as it does not consider that many students are born and raised in Italy, are immersed in Italian culture, but still speak their parents' mother tongue. Consequently, policies may fail to address unique challenges and opportunities presented by this highly situated bilingual or multilingual context.

Only in more recent regulations have the strategies proposed started including a shifted focus to linguistic diversity present in Italian classrooms. The latter focus is more recent (visible only in documents from 2012, 2014, and 2022) and is centered around the idea that all students' languages can be important tools for learning. For example, within the February 2014, *Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students*, it is explained how "one way to facilitate the understanding of a study content may be, in the initial phase, to propose a brief list of key terms or a small bilingual glossary related to the topic" (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2014, p. 20). In addition, in the same document:

Within themes in the common curriculum, one can find ways throughout the year to present the richness and variety of languages in different ways: by mentioning the linguistic loans that have always existed between one language and another (there are many loans, for example, from Arabic to Italian). (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2014, pg. 20)

Similarly, the more recent *Intercultural Guidelines* of 2022 states:

An education in multilingualism, as advocated by European and Council of Europe documents, must set objectives: (1) the recognition of the languages spoken by children in extra-curricular contexts and the collection of their linguistic biographies; (2) the valorization of each language and linguistic diversity present in communities; (3) the activation of metalinguistic processes of comparison and exchange between languages. (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2022)

In this case, the document has a clear focus on the linguistic issues involved when bilingual and multilingual students are present in the classroom. Unlike previous documents, this one proposes clear objectives for teachers to achieve to adopt "an education in multilingualism" in the classroom. On a similar note, in more recent documents from 2014, 2015, and 2022, attention has been given to the creation and provision of multilingual material for bilingual students and their families. For instance, in 2015, it emphasized the importance of "accurately informing (including with multilingual brochures) families and students with migratory backgrounds about the Italian school system and opportunities for further education" (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2015). The same document also highlighted, "Constant attention should be given to daily and routine interactions, which must be as inclusive and facilitated as possible: through multilingual messages, through formal or informal tools of linguistic-cultural mediation, and above all through attitudes of closeness" (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2015).

Finally, in 2022, the importance of making information accessible to all through translation into class languages was emphasized. Notices were translated into multiple languages, multilingual informative brochures on the school and the Italian education system were drafted and materials and messages were uploaded onto a section dedicated to multilingual communication on the school's website and/or in the school's library. References to both nodes—*multilingual education* and *multilingual material*—only appear in more recent documents, underscoring a shift in the strategies suggested in the regulations. From a focus on generic references to intercultural education and cultural diversity, the discourse shifts to a focus on linguistic diversity and the need to understand and valorize student linguistic backgrounds.

Implementing Bilingual and Multilingual Education: Teachers Training and Mediator Roles

Another pattern that emerged in the corpus was a focus on professional roles crucial for supporting bilingual and multilingual education, particularly teachers and mediators. Regarding teachers, the *training* node underscores the indispensable nature of their preparation concerning cultural and linguistic diversity. The corpus highlights both the challenges, as indicated by references such as “the absence of teaching staff capable of communicating in the immigrants’ mother tongue and facilitating their acquisition of the Italian language” (Ministero dell’Istruzione, 1994) and the imperative need for attention, expressed through statements like “the problem of the availability of qualified teachers remains open, that is, possessing suitable requirements to address educational issues with students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds” (Ministero dell’Istruzione, 1994). Furthermore, there is an emphasis on fostering a renewed perspective on teacher training as “culturally sensitive” that aims at a reflective construction of teachers’ personalities to enable them to embrace diversity and interpret students’ cultural backgrounds in their unique and subjective aspects (Ministero dell’Istruzione, 2012a). These developments in teacher competencies signify a trend toward transcending predominantly informational-cultural or aesthetic forms of training in favor of fostering critical formation capable of stimulating rethinking of the teaching role itself. Similar considerations are extended to school leaders when it is deemed crucial to provide intercultural training for all school administrators, with particular attention to schools with a higher presence of students from migratory contexts and greater social complexity, such as large urban peripheries. The role of school leaders is pivotal in fostering an atmosphere and a style of openness among all school components concerning themes of integration and multiculturalism as well as facilitating improved utilization of resources and services (Ministero dell’Istruzione, 2012a).

Another actor that emerges from the analyzed corpus is that of mediators or linguistic facilitators. These professionals play a vital role in bridging communication gaps and facilitating understanding between individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Within the corpus, the node *mediation* highlights the importance of these roles in facilitating communication and integration processes within educational settings. Mediators (or linguistic facilitators) offer linguistic and cultural support to ensure effective communication and smooth

integration and are often positioned as essential intermediaries between students, teachers, school administrators, and families. The first reference to mediation in the corpus is found in the *Legislative Decree of July 25, 1998, No. 286, Consolidated Act on Immigration* (Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 1998), which states that regulations are adopted to provide specific guidelines for the enrollment and placement of foreign students coming from abroad, the distribution of foreign students in classes, and the activation of specific linguistic support activities. Later, in October 2007, *The Italian Way for Intercultural Schooling and the Integration of Foreign Students* (Ministero dell'Istruzione 2007), the importance of mediation during the welcome phase of newly arrived students from different countries is emphasized, particularly concerning the “knowledge” factor. The document specifies that the personal, educational, and linguistic history of the foreign minor must be reconstructed through documents presented, the interview with parents, and the collaboration of linguistic-cultural mediators. Similarly, in *Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Students*, mediation is mentioned in relation to family-school relations:

The ability of the school to facilitate communication with the student’s family is of particular importance, paying attention also to non-verbal aspects, using, where possible, cultural mediators or interpreters, to overcome linguistic difficulties and also to facilitate the understanding of the school’s educational choices. (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2014)

In addition, “The presence of the cultural mediator, where necessary, can help create a serene climate of real communication. It will be important to maintain an attitude of extreme respect to avoid an approach that could be misunderstood as invasive” (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2014).

Conclusion

This article aimed to analyze national guidelines and the development of top-down language policies within Italian educational contexts, with particular attention to bilingual and multilingual students (Spolsky, 2004). This focus emerged given the steady increase in the number of immigrant students entering the Italian public school system, resulting in a significant demographic transformation in the nation. As a consequence, Italian schools have become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, prompting the need for a critical reassessment of existing language policies to better address and support this diversity.

The article offered an overview of the influx of newly arrived migrant students and their countries of origin over the past few decades to illustrate the evolving demographic landscape of Italian classrooms. In addition, a corpus of official documents issued by Italian ministries—comprising regulations, ministerial decrees, and policy guidelines—was compiled and analyzed, covering the period from 1989 to 2022. The time frame was chosen deliberately to coincide with the rise in the number of students with migrant backgrounds and to allow for a comprehensive analysis of language policies over this period. Utilizing a qualitative content

analysis approach (Mayring, 2000), the corpus was analyzed using NVivo 14 software to identify recurring patterns and the evolution of language policies. The analysis revealed a discernible shift in the corpus's focus over time. Initially, the documents emphasized intercultural education (Jin & Cortazzi, 2013), advocating for the celebration of cultural diversity (and its integration into the classroom environment), highlighting the need to acknowledge that new students bring different languages with them, and exposing a gap in teacher training and preparation to address linguistic diversity effectively. Regulations have more recently started including an emphasis on bilingualism and multilingualism and the need to incorporate students' diverse repertoires in classroom activities (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020; CUNY-NYSIEB, 2020; Little & Kirwan, 2019; Shohamy, 2006). More specifically, this latter direction places greater importance on linguistic aspects as key components of inclusion and advocates for the creation of welcoming materials in multiple languages to facilitate integration. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the role teachers can play in embracing linguistic diversity by incorporating references to languages spoken in the classroom into their lessons.

The evolving language policies depicted in the corpus reflect a gradual shift toward recognizing and valuing linguistic diversity within Italian educational settings. The shift is indicative of a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the importance of language in shaping student identities and learning experiences. Moreover, it underscores the critical role of education in fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Moving forward, it is necessary to continue monitoring and evaluating language policies to ensure they effectively address the needs of bilingual and multilingual students. Doing so requires ongoing collaboration between policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders to develop inclusive and culturally responsive practices that promote linguistic diversity and support the academic success of all students.

The analysis presented in this article provides valuable insight into the evolution of language policies within Italian educational settings and highlights the importance of embracing linguistic diversity as an asset rather than as a barrier. By fostering a more inclusive learning environment that celebrates student linguistic and cultural backgrounds, schools can better prepare students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and multilingual world.

References

- Andorno, C., & Sordella, S. (2020). Noi e le nostre lingue. Potenziare attitudini metalinguistiche in laboratori di éveil aux langues. *Italiano Lingua Due*, 12(1), 330–352. <https://doi.org/10.13130/2037-3597/13765>
- Bagna, C., & Casini, S. (2012). Linguistica educativa e neoplurilinguismo nelle scuole italiane: La mappatura della diversità linguistica e la gestione delle immagini del contatto. In *Linguistica educativa: Atti del XLIV Congresso internazionale di studi della Società di linguistica italiana (SLI), Viterbo, 27-29 settembre 2010* (pp. 225–236). Bulzoni. (Pubblicazioni della Società linguistica italiana; 55).

- Barni, M. (2012). Diritti linguistici, diritti di cittadinanza: L'educazione linguistica come strumento contro le barriere linguistiche. In *Linguistica educativa: Atti del XLIV Congresso internazionale di studi della Società di linguistica italiana (SLI)*, Viterbo, 27-29 settembre 2010 (pp. 213–223). Bulzoni. (Pubblicazioni della Società linguistica italiana; 55).
- Candelier, M., Daryai-Hansen, P., & Schröder-Sura, A. (2012). The framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures – A complement to the CEFR to develop plurilingual and intercultural competences. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 6(3), 243–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2012.725252>
- Carbonara, V., & Scibetta, A. (2020). *Imparare attraverso le lingue*. Carocci.
- Chini, M. (2009). L'italiano L2 nel repertorio delle nuove comunità alloglotte: Riflessioni su alcune dinamiche in atto. In C. Consani, P. Desideri, F. Guazzelli, & C. Perta (Eds.), *Alloglossie e comunità alloglotte nell'Italia contemporanea. Teorie, applicazioni e descrizioni, prospettive* (pp. 279–316). Bulzoni.
- Corson, D. (1999). *Language policy in schools: A resource for teachers and administrators*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Council of Europe. (2008) *White paper on intercultural dialogue*, “Living together as equals in dignity.” The Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf
- Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Council of European Union. (2019). *Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages*. Official Journal of the European Union. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(02))
- Cummins, J., & Early, M. (2011). *Identity texts: The collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools*. Trentham Books.
- City University of New York-New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (Eds.). (2020). *Translanguaging and transformative teaching for emergent bilingual students: Lessons from the CUNY-NYSIEB project*. Routledge.
- De Mauro, T. (2018). *Educazione linguistica democratica*. Laterza.
- Dell'Aquila, V., & Iannàccaro, G. (2004). *La pianificazione linguistica*. Carocci.
- García, O., & Flores, N. (2012). Multilingual pedagogies. In M. Martin-Jones, A. Blackledge, & A. Creese (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of multilingualism* (pp. 232–246). Routledge.
- Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana. (1994). *Decreto legislativo n. 297 del 16 aprile 1994: Norme sull'integrazione degli studenti stranieri nelle scuole italiane*. The Italian Ministry of Justice.
- Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana. (1998). *Decreto legislativo n. 286 del 25 luglio 1998: Testo unico sull'immigrazione*. The Italian Ministry of Justice.
- Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana. (1999). *Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica n. 394 del 31 agosto 1999: Integrazione degli studenti appena arrivati*. The Italian Ministry of Justice.
- Grin, F. (2003). *Language policy evaluation and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Gruppo di intervento e studio nel campo dell'educazione linguistica (GISCEL). (1975). *Dieci tesi per un'educazione linguistica democratica*. <https://giscel.it/dieci-tesi-per-leducazione-linguistica-democratica/>
- Guarda, M., & Mayr, G. (2023). Responding inclusively to linguistic diversity in the classroom: Preliminary findings from the COMPASS initiative with primary school teachers in South Tyrol (Italy). In P. Hohaus & J.-F. Heeren (Eds.), *The future of teacher education* (pp. 255–285). Brill.
- Hornberger, N. H. (Ed.). (2008). *Can schools save indigenous languages? Policy and practice on four continents*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jin, L., & Cortazzi, M. (2013). *Researching intercultural learning: Investigations in language and education*. Springer.
- Lingua e Nuova Didattica. (2016). *Statuto*. Retrieved May 22, 2025, from <https://italia.lend.it/index.php/associazione/statuto.html>
- Little, D., & Kirwan, D. (2019). *Engaging with linguistic diversity: A study of educational inclusion in a primary school*. Bloomsbury Academic Publishing.
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.2.1089>
- McCarthy, T. L. (Ed.). (2011). *Ethnography and language policy*. Routledge.
- Menken, K., & García, O. (Eds.). (2010). *Negotiating language policies in schools: Educators as policymakers*. Routledge.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (1989). *Circolare Ministeriale n. 301 dell'8 settembre 1989: Integrazione degli stranieri nell'istruzione obbligatoria: Promozione e coordinamento delle iniziative per l'esercizio del diritto allo studio*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (1990). *Circolare Ministeriale n. 205 del 26 luglio 1990: Istruzione obbligatoria e alunni stranieri: Educazione interculturale*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (1994). *Circolare Ministeriale n. 73 del 2 marzo 1994: Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: L'impegno progettuale delle scuole*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2006). *Decreto Ministeriale del 6 dicembre 2006: Decreto di istituzione dell'Osservatorio Nazionale per l'integrazione degli studenti stranieri e l'interculturalità*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2007). *La via italiana per la scuola interculturale e l'integrazione degli studenti stranieri*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2012a). *Linee guida per l'integrazione degli studenti stranieri*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2012b). *Linee guida nazionali per il curriculum verticale della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2014). *Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli studenti stranieri*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2015). *Different from whom? Raccomandazioni per l'integrazione degli studenti stranieri e l'interculturalità*.

- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2018). *Linee guida nazionali e nuovi scenari*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca. (2022). *Linee guida interculturali*.
- Ministero dell'Istruzione. (2024). *Gli alunni con cittadinanza non italiana*. Retrieved May 22, 2025 from https://www.mim.gov.it/pubblicazioni/-/asset_publisher/6Ya1FS4E4QJw/content/gli-alunni-con-cittadinanza-non-italiana-anno-scolastico-2022-2023
- Oricchio, A. (2023). Politiche linguistiche sovranazionali, nazionali e locali. La regolamentazione della comunicazione nello spazio pubblico in Europa, in Italia, nel Lazio e a Roma Capitale. *Studi Politici*, 3(2), 97–116.
- Normé in Materia di Tutela Delle Minoranze Linguistiche Storiche. (1999). *Legge no. 482*. Parlamento Italiano.
- Pizzoli, L. (2018). *La politica linguistica in Italia. Dall'unificazione nazionale al dibattito sull'internazionalizzazione*. ARO.
- Ricento, T. (Ed.). (2006). *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Saccardo, I. (2016). *Language policy and identity in a European context*. Peter Lang.
- Shohamy, E. (2006). *Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches*. Routledge.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tollefson, J. W. (2006). *Policy and ideology in education: The selected works of Joseph W. Tollefson*. Routledge.
- Vedovelli, M., & Casini, S. (2016). *Che cos'è la linguistica educativa?* Carocci.
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599465>