

## **Is there leeway for Italian policy learning from advanced experiences in home language education? A comparative case study of Austria, Sweden and Italy**

### **Policy learning per l'introduzione delle lingue migranti nell'istruzione scolastica: quali premesse? Una comparazione tra Austria, Svezia e Italia**

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#### **Abstract**

Notwithstanding the linguistic hyperdiversity that characterizes most European countries and the evidence that points to the value of migrant languages as resources for host societies, home language (HL) education is taken seriously and developed only in a few countries in Europe. The article aims to identify the policy design and implementation elements that can lead to effective HL teaching as well as the contextual and institutional premises that can facilitate or hamper processes of policy learning flowing from advanced HL education experiences (in this study, Austria and Sweden) to prospective policy learners (i.e., in this article, Italy). It does so in light of the lesson-drawing theorization of policy learning. The research design involves a comparison of three country cases, selected on the basis of their respective approaches to HL teaching. This comparison develops in terms of both contextual features and HL teaching policy characteristics, based on data collected from official reports. The research results are then discussed in light of the literature and indicate several lessons to be learned while at the same time pointing to the existence of many facilitators and a few obstacles to the activation of policy learning dynamics, and puts forwards a few ideas for both education policymakers and policy deliverers.

**Keywords:** public policy, policy learning, education, migration, integration.

#### **Sommario**

Nonostante la iperdiversità linguistica che caratterizza molti contesti nazionali e il valore riconosciuto dalla letteratura scientifica alle lingue dei migranti come risorse per le società ospitanti, l'introduzione di tali lingue nei programmi di istruzione scolastica è una realtà consolidata solo in alcuni paesi europei. L'articolo si propone di identificare gli elementi che riguardano la formulazione degli interventi pubblici che possono condurre a un'efficace didattica delle lingue d'origine dei migranti, nonché le premesse contestuali e istituzionali che possono facilitare o ostacolare l'attivazione di processi di policy learning tra esperienze avanzate di insegnamento delle lingue d'origine (in questo studio, Austria e Svezia) ed esperienze meno avanzate in tal senso (in questo articolo, l'Italia). Il contributo affronta queste tematiche alla luce della teoria del lesson-drawing, comparando i tre sistemi d'istruzione nazionali, selezionati sulla base dei rispettivi approcci e obiettivi rispetto alle lingue dei migranti. La comparazione si sviluppa sia in termini di caratteristiche contestuali che di peculiarità delle specifiche politiche e servizi di didattica delle lingue dei migranti, sulla base di dati raccolti a partire da fonti ufficiali. I risultati della ricerca sono poi discussi alla luce della letteratura rilevante e indicano l'esistenza di molti facilitatori e di alcuni ostacoli all'attivazione di dinamiche di policy learning, proponendo al contempo alcune idee sviluppate a partire dalla comparazione sia per i policymaker che per coloro che sono preposti a erogare i servizi educativi.

**Parole chiave:** politiche pubbliche, MIUR, istruzione, migrazione, integrazione.

#### **Introduction**

The linguistic hyper-diversity (Suárez-Orozco *et al.*, 2011) generated by migrations, which characterizes most European countries (Zolberg, 2001), can represent a valuable resource for both migrants and natives, if we consider languages as assets (Clyne, 2000; Vedovelli, 2014). While the value of foreign language learning is widely acknowledged

in Europe (OECD, 2020), migrants' home languages (HLs) – i.e. the languages mostly spoken by migrant students (SS) at home, which differ from the language of instruction (LI) used at school and are usually also SS' first languages – still struggle to be recognized as assets and therefore to be promoted. However, in a few European countries, such as Austria (A) and Sweden (S), migrants' HLs are «considered as the basis of the whole education process in school» (European Commission, 2019, p. 19).

The insufficiently widespread recognition of migrants' linguistic heritage is a by-product of the monolingual paradigm that prevails in most European publicly-funded schools as a legacy of nation-building processes (Busch, 2011), which implies the prevalence of dominant over minority languages (Blackledge, 2009). This paradigm, however, is subjected to increasing pressure due to the migration flows directed towards Europe and, therefore, needs to be adapted to meet the challenges and opportunities that the renewed sociocultural context entails. This process has not come to an advanced stage yet, especially when considering the promotion of HLs (European Commission, 2019). At the same time, early hints of gradual awareness acquisition can be observed among policy-makers, in line with the scientific literature in support of the benefits of HL preservation for SS' well-being and performance (among others, Benson and Kosonen, 2013; Sevinç and Backus, 2019).

Within this context, the article has two ultimate goals, consisting in the identification of the policy design and implementation elements underpinning HL teaching, and in the recognition of the preconditions for the activation of cross-country policy learning. The research question is twofold: a) how are HL teaching policies designed and implemented in “virtuous” (and less virtuous) education systems, and b) what contextual factors exist that can hinder or facilitate learning by less from more virtuous countries? The study aims to answer these questions by analyzing the main policy features in the three country cases in light of policy learning theory. In this light, it is important to specify that the focus of this article is on macrolevel institutional and policy design features rather than on individual practices of HL teaching, which is mainly the subject of pedagogical, language didactic and sociolinguistic studies. At the same time, it serves as background for such microlevel studies to deal with the actual effects of specific practices in the application context examined each time. In doing so, the article also sets out to contribute to filling a gap determined by the dearth of public policy studies that focus on HL integration into school curricula.

## **1. Theoretical and analytical framework: policy learning applied to HL education**

Policy learning has progressively gained currency as an alternative approach and corrective to the conflict resolution approach of many existing models of policymaking (Bennett and Howlett, 1992). As such, it has been the subject of many different theorizations:

- political learning (Heclo, 1974), which is undertaken by policymakers as a partial unconscious reaction to changes in external policy environments;
- government learning (Etheredge, 1981), which postulates that governments increase their intelligence and by doing so they enhance the effectiveness of their actions;

- policy-oriented learning (Sabatier, 1987) as a determinant of policy change involving relatively persistent alterations of thought or behavioral intentions linked to a revision of beliefs;
- lesson-drawing (Rose, 1991), i.e. the process by which programs and policy instruments (but not goals) developed in one country are copied or inspired by others and spread throughout the world;
- social learning (Hall, 1993), through which policymakers try to understand why certain initiatives have succeeded while others have failed, and do so within policy processes.

Among these approaches, lesson-drawing is particularly adequate for framing prospective cross-country learning in the field of HL teaching, for two reasons: first, it is originally conceived to explain learning from one geopolitical context to another; second, it postulates that policy instruments – not goals – can be the subject of learning (Rose, 1991). Indeed, we must acknowledge that language is a political issue with power implications, and as such, the related policy goals are not likely to be imported from other countries but are intrinsic in the general political approach and course of action of a government.

According to the lesson-drawing framework, countries can leverage the national past, speculate about the future, or learn from current experiences from outside, through an evaluation of both external and own programs (Bennett and Howlett, 1992). These processes can then lead to policy change through five main mechanisms: copying other programs (unusual), emulation (of external policy programs and instruments), hybridization (involving elements of two exemplar programs), synthesis (involving elements of more than two exemplar programs), inspiration (which stimulates policy development based on external experiences) (Rose, 1991).

When a learning process has not been activated yet – which is the case with the countries examined *vis-à-vis* HL education – it is important to identify the preconditions for learning to be triggered. As only policy instruments can be learned, the similarity of contexts and policy objectives can be considered as background features that facilitate the learning process (Rose, 1993). Thus, when contextual conditions are similar, one can expect that accurate knowledge of policy instruments can lead to improved policy designs (May, 1992). Once applied to our policy issue of interest, the contextual features that matter as *preconditions for learning* are as follows:

- the educational decision-making level, whose similarity across cases can make learning more likely to occur since, in the face of still-existing cross-country adaptation issues, it at least removes cross-level ones (Gonzales-Iwanciw *et al.*, 2020);
- the funding for and institutional coordination of migrant SS integration in education, whose availability gives policymakers the perception of having the resources and infrastructures to introduce new public services “learned” from abroad (Biegelbauer, 2016);
- the availability of monitoring mechanisms for migrant SS integration at school, which form the basis to provide policy evaluations that in turn serve to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the policies currently in place (Sanderson, 2002);

- the rules concerning the involvement of migrant SS in school system, whose similarity positively influences further convergence on other policy instruments (Sommerer *et al.*, 2008);
- the school systems' focus on language awareness (LA), intercultural education (IE) and diversity, which if common to countries determines a cultural proximity that operates as a facilitator of learning (Sommerer *et al.*, 2008); while LA is a conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life (Ellis, 2012), which facilitates the achievement of a high proficiency level in the languages learned by SS (Svalberg, 2007), IE is understood as the creation of a learning and living space in which SS with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can dialogue, identify similarities beyond differences, develop and show respect for one another, and potentially change the way they see themselves and others (Faas *et al.*, 2014; Lorenzini, 2020);
- the availability of peer professional support infrastructures, which facilitates the embracement of policy changes by policy deliverers such as teachers (Malandrino and Sager, 2021).

Moreover, a study that proposes to identify premises for policy learning in a certain field cannot disregard the actual features of the existing policies. In terms of HL education-specific elements, the examined dimensions include:

- the stated goal of HL teaching, which represents necessary common ground to postulate any cross-national learning (Rose, 1991);
- the mentioning of HLs in official documents and activation of HL courses, which indicate the countries' familiarity with the subject of learning, which is also in turn a facilitator for learning itself (Rough, 2011);
- the definition of specific curricula for HLs as distinguished from foreign languages, which besides being an element to be learned is also, if common to cases, an indicator of cultural proximity that facilitates learning (Sommerer *et al.*, 2008);
- the availability of HL assessment procedures, as a critical curriculum element and therefore an indicator of the importance assigned to HLs in the broader education sector (Sercu, 2004);
- the teachers' (TT) background and education and the availability of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities as a crucial professionalism-related factor for successful change at the policy delivery level (Malandrino and Sager, 2021);
- the availability of mechanisms for monitoring HL education, as key elements for activating further learning from ex-post evaluation (Sanderson, 2002).

## 2. Research design

In light of this analytical framework, the study aims to identify premises and contents for policy learning from advanced HL teaching experiences for the benefit of less advanced experiences. It presents a comparative case study involving three countries: A and S as prospective sources of learning, and I as a prospective learner, while keeping in mind

that this pattern (sources of learning – learner) is valid at the policy formulation and implementation macrolevel, as Italy does present some virtuous, isolated cases of HL inclusion in education promoted by single schools; furthermore, the Italian epistemic community is well-aware of the value of language pluralism, as demonstrated by the number of scholars devoting their studies to it (with no pretension of comprehensiveness, see Calvi, 2020; Chiari, 2011; Gianollo and Fiorentini, 2020; Giusti, 2020; Lorenzini, 2020; Vaccarelli, 2001; Vedovelli, 2014). The status of learner is assigned to I, therefore, considering the current streamlining of HLs in education through decisions made at the national macrolevel, which is not a reality at the moment.

Case selection proceeded from an original range of three benchmark cases (A, Finland, and S) and one prospectively learning case (I). The three benchmark cases had been initially selected because of their advanced status in terms of HL teaching, as they are among the systems where top-level education authorities have designed a specific curriculum for HL teaching (European Commission, 2019). I does not have a comparable situation in terms of policy instruments. However, in A, I, and S, the main reported goal of HL teaching is the same, i.e. the preservation of migrant SS' HLs, intercultural competencies and multicultural identity (European Commission, 2019). Finland presents a slightly different story: it draws upon a linguistically diverse school environment to foster plurilingualism for all SS, by valuing all the languages present in the school equally. Since only policy programs and instruments can be learned, while policy goals cannot, if in two or more contexts policy goals are different, it is unlikely that any learning could take place. For this reason, Finland was excluded from the analysis. For the same reason, A, I and S were selected since they share a common goal but pursue it with different tools, thus paving the way for a study of prospective learning dynamics to be activated by a less virtuous country in terms of instruments (I, which does not have a curriculum for HL teaching) with the benchmark of more virtuous countries (A and S, which do have a curriculum for HL teaching). After case selection, the study has focused on a) the contextual features that can make learning likely to occur, and b) the HL education policy-specific elements in the three countries. The data regarding these dimensions have been collected through pertinent policy reports and literature; unless otherwise stated, they derive from the most updated European Commission (2019) report on migrant SS integration. Finally, these data have been compared and framed in terms of both virtuous practices for effective HL teaching and facilitators or obstacles for policy learning activation.

### **3. Comparing contextual preconditions for learning**

#### *Benchmark case no. 1: Austria*

In A, decision-making in the field of education is shared between the central government and provinces, municipalities, and schools (OECD, 2017a). Overall, common provisions exist that led to treat it as a centralized system instead of referring to its single Länder (European Commission, 2019). Migrant integration policies are coordinated by the ministry of the interior, although multiple political actors are de facto involved in migration management (Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger, 2012). Funding for migrant

SS integration is allocated by the federal level, while no specific budget is available at the local level. Language competence is considered a key criterion for the allocation of funding, based on the number of migrant SS needing language support. Finally, monitoring covers both language education provision and access of migrant SS to school, in line with the most commonly monitored policy areas throughout Europe.

Newly arrived migrant young people (MYP), defined as people under 15 years old, have at their disposal guidance tools such as written information about the education system and interpreters. MYP are reported to be enrolled in the school system within three days, and are initially placed in mainstream classes for all or most lessons. In addition, language support classes are provided for SS with inadequate German language competencies, although preliminary testing of German language skills is applied to both native LI SS and foreign-born SS.

Central to the Austrian education system is the acquisition of LA, and IE is promoted as both a theme in the curriculum and a part of school culture, with an emphasis on diversity. Competence frameworks for TT include a range of topics, from dealing with discrimination issues and implicit bias against SS from other linguistic backgrounds to teaching in diverse, multicultural classrooms. These competencies become the subject of optional training activities when we move from initial preparation to CPD.

#### *Benchmark case no. 2: Sweden*

Like A, S is also treated as a centralized education system in the literature, while co-ordination of migrant integration policies is the task of the ministry for employment. Funding management for migrant integration is multilevel: central authorities allocate funds from a dedicated budget and local authorities can use their own revenues and receive applications for resources from schools. Funding allocation criteria are also more multifaceted than in A, as they cover both the number of migrant SS needing language support and the total number of migrant SS. A wide array of issues are subjected to monitoring, including language teaching and strategies for integrating migrant SS.

Regarding newly arrived MYP, S does not report any central-level provisions concerning information and orientation measures. Moreover, compared to A, a wider time limit (28 days) is allowed for enrolling them into school. Then, for all or most lessons some SS are placed in preparatory classes, whose curriculum includes not only the LI as a second language but also other subjects such as maths and arts, as well as IE and HLs. Like in A, LA is framed as a cross-cutting curriculum objective, and IE is considered as a necessary educational approach for a multicultural society and therefore concerns all SS, again with an emphasis of education policies on diversity.

S has adopted integration policies not only for newly arrived SS but also for newly arrived TT, such as the Fast Track program in 2016, organized through a collaborative effort between universities and employment services, and aiming to a quick validation of the possessed (degree-level) teaching qualifications and the inclusion of these TT into the school system through work placements (OECD, 2017c). However, unlike in A, migrant SS integration is not included in competence frameworks for initial teacher education, but CPD optional activities cover the ability to teach in multicultural classrooms.

### *A prospective learner: the case of Italy*

In Italy, education is primarily a responsibility of the central government, which defines general rules and essential levels of performance, while regions have concurrent powers and schools enjoy a certain degree of autonomy. Moreover, migrant integration policy involves the ministries of the interior, of labor and social policies, and of justice, while the ministry of education plays a key role for the integration of migrant SS into the school system, as shown by the efforts made with the adoption of the 2014 Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign SS (MIUR, 2014). Like in S, funding for migrant SS integration (also OECD, 2017b) has a multilevel arrangement: central authorities allocate funds from a dedicated budget and local authorities can use their own revenues. The funding allocation criteria are the same as in S, including the number of migrant SS needing language support and the total number of migrant SS. As in other areas of education (Malandrino, 2021), monitoring is fairly limited on migrant SS issues, as it includes only their access to schools.

On arrival, MYP are provided with written information about the education system. However, unlike in the other two studied cases, no maximum time is established for their enrollment in schools. Like in A, SS are placed essentially in mainstream classes. Official texts exist that deal with the provision of additional LI classes to migrant SS, but unlike in A and S, the development of LA in migrant SS does not appear to be a priority. However, IE is present in Italy both as a curriculum theme and a part of school culture.

Interestingly, teacher networks are reported as the main source of (mutual) support for TT working with migrant SS, thus confirming once again (Malandrino and Sager, 2021) the importance of peer resources in the Italian context. Moreover, just like in A, the competence framework for initial teacher training encompasses a wide range of competencies including teaching in diverse and multicultural classrooms. However, similarly to S, CPD for migrant SS integration lacks strength, and research has shown a general lack of awareness and/or interest on the part of TT regarding intercultural and migrant integration-related training initiatives (Lucenti, 2020).

### *Synopsis of contextual features*

As illustrated in Tab. 1, the comparison of migrant SS integration contextual features in the three countries shows some similarities inherent in the analogous general governance arrangement for integration-through-education policy and the presence of dedicated funding, although organized differently in terms of governance levels (Fig. 1). Moreover, Italy has an asset that does not seem to be predominant in the other two countries: the presence of teachers' networks as peer support mechanisms (Fig. 2). Compared to A and S, however, Italy seems to lack a centralized institutional infrastructure that coordinates integration policies (including education) and, together with A, is weaker than S on the aspect of monitoring (Fig. 3). Moreover, I presents weaknesses on migrant SS enrollment timing regulation, LA focus, and IE appreciation by TT.

	<b>A</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>Level of governance</b>	Central	Central	Central
<b>Funding</b>	Dedicated	Dedicated, multilevel	Dedicated, multilevel
<b>Institutional coordination</b>	Yes	Yes	NA
<b>Monitoring</b>	Yes	Yes	Limited
<b>Rules for prompt enrolment of MYP</b>	Yes	Yes	NA
<b>Focus on LA</b>	Yes	Yes	NA
<b>Focus on IE</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes, but lack of TT' awareness
<b>Focus on diversity</b>	Yes	Yes	NA
<b>Peer professional support</b>	NA	NA	Yes

Tab. 1: Comparison of Austrian, Swedish and Italian institutional and cultural contexts for migrant SS integration (Author's elaboration of European Commission's data).

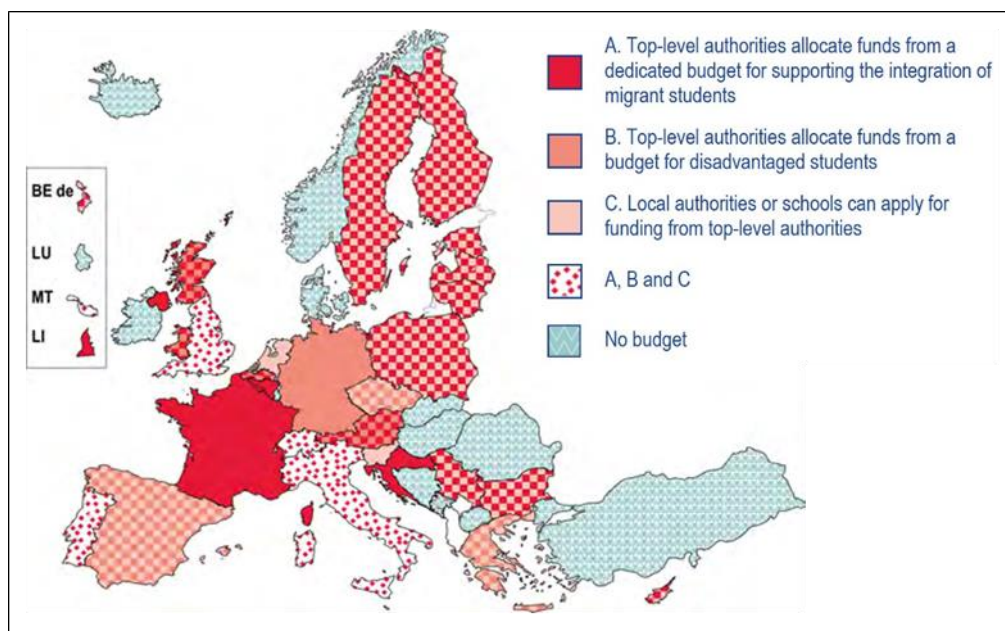


Fig. 1: Funding for migrant SS integration in education (European Commission, 2019).



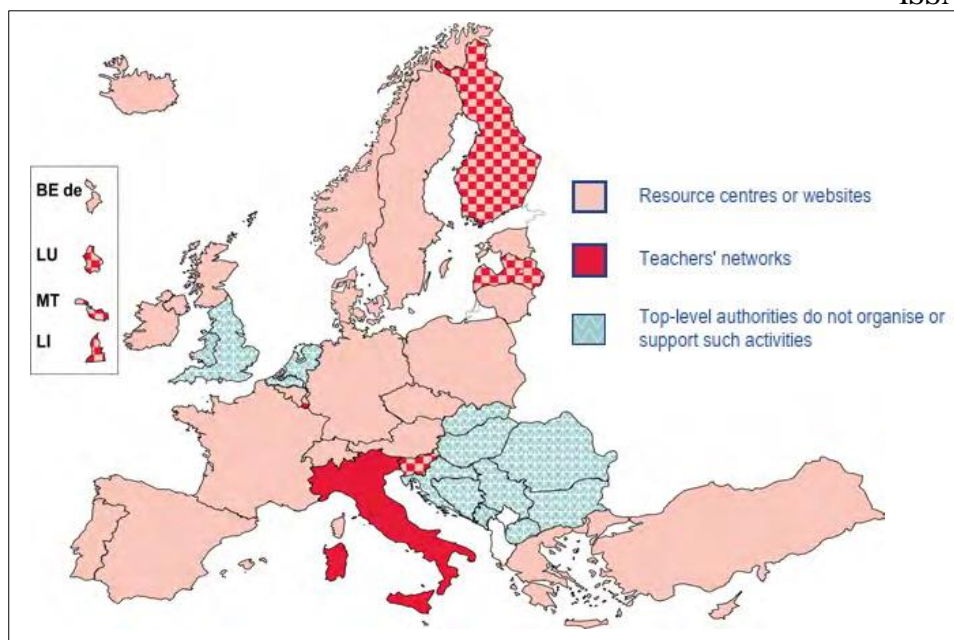


Fig. 2: Support for teachers working with migrant SS (European Commission, 2019).

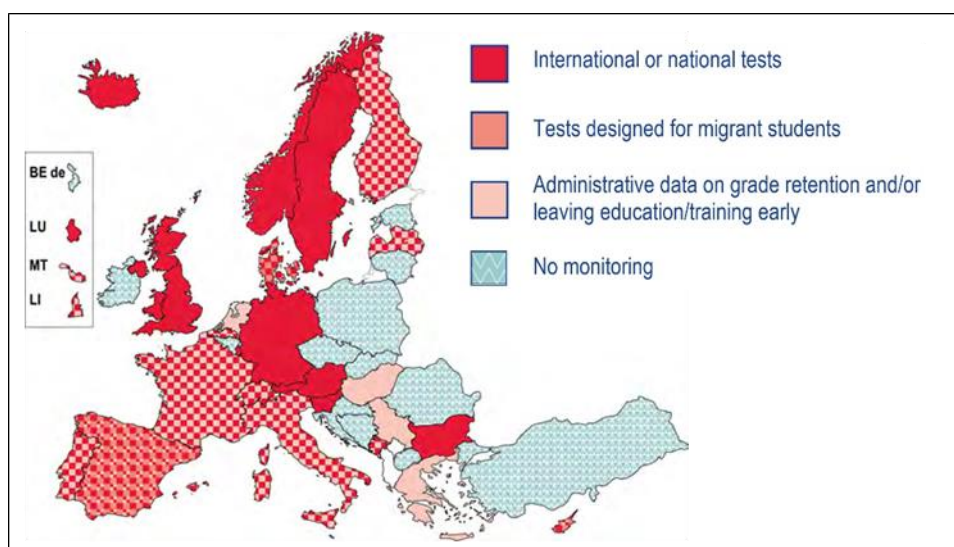


Fig. 3: Monitoring of migrant SS performance in Europe (European Commission, 2019).

#### 4. Comparing migrant HL teaching policies

##### *Austrian case*

A belongs to a minority of European countries whose official documents advocate HL teaching, in addition to LI acquisition. During the course of time, however, there have been conflicting political views on promoting HLs versus the LI, such as those of extreme right-wing party leader Jörg Haider, who advocated in favor of monolingualism and promoted an anti-immigration rhetoric (Weichselbraun, 2014). More recently, the former Austrian chancellor and (before) minister of foreign affairs tried to promote an assimilationist monolingualism turn, which was however contrasted by educators and teachers at

the implementation level (Flubacher, 2021), although part of the teaching staff still seems to be not fully aware of the value of multilingualism (Nusche *et al.*, 2010).

In A, the stated purpose of HL teaching is the preservation and promotion of migrant SS' HLs, within a context in which HL teaching plays a key role in developing intercultural competencies and a multicultural identity, which in turn facilitate integration and, according to the linguistic interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1979), the acquisition of a second language. The learning of HLs is deemed to be a foundation of the whole education process and a contribution to SS' achievements and well-being.

On a policy design and implementation level, official documents contain provisions on the qualifications to be possessed to teach HLs. HL TT profiles are varied in terms of qualifications and origins: they might come from abroad or be first- or second-generation migrants who were trained in Europe. Moreover, to enhance their preparation, they are supplied with CPD opportunities, such as the nationwide *Home-language Teaching* course, provided by higher education institutions, lasting four semesters and worth 30 ECTS. Monitoring is ensured by the federal ministry of education; however, the organization of teaching and supply of TT are coordinated at the subnational (Land) level. HL teaching can be arranged within the school if the number of SS for a specific language is high in that school, or SS from different schools can be grouped and taught together if numbers are not sufficiently high. The monitoring of HL teaching is carried out annually by the ministry of education and concerns the numbers of SS, TT, federal states involved and courses provided.

What is interesting in the Austrian case is the design of specific curricula for HLs, which are not simply regarded as foreign languages since they target SS with pre-existing knowledge of the HL concerned. There is no restriction as to the languages that can be taught: for instance, 26 HLs were taught in Austrian schools in the 2015/16 school year. Overall, the Austrian case has been classified as “progressive” in that legal provisions and facilities are available for the involvement of HLs in education (Sierens and Van Avermaet, 2017), although issues have been identified at the implementation level, e.g. regarding the mismatch between the expected level of linguistic competence of migrant SS in their HLs and their actual competence (Jessner, 2017).

### *Swedish case*

HL teaching in S has been firmly established since the mid-1970s, when the Swedish Riksdag (parliament) rejected assimilationist integration and adopted (in 1977) the “HL reform”, which entitled MYP to HL instruction and whose importance enjoyed the support of all major political parties (Axelsson, 2005). The Swedish case is therefore similar to the Austrian one, in that HL teaching regulations and recommendations are in place. Entitlement to HL learning is subject to certain conditions: local authorities must provide them in secondary schools if a particular language is requested by at least five SS. This obligation is also combined with the possibility to coordinate their courses to create learner groups of the required size. These provisions derive from the fact that HLs are considered pivotal in the education process for the benefit of SS' accomplishments and overall well-being.

Just like in A, HL TT might have received their training in S or from abroad, and regularly have CPD opportunities at their disposal, which with particular regard to the improvement of HL importance perception have been received very well by both TT and school heads. However, over the past decades, due to budget cuts that obliged schools to choose between regular Swedish teachers and bilingual ones, there has been a decrease in the number of bilingual teachers hired (Axelsson, 2005).

Institutional monitoring generally covers language education provision to migrant SS. Moreover, SS' HL competencies are assessed through an evaluation procedure that is considered one of the most comprehensive in Europe. In this context, HL curricula do not treat HLs as foreign languages but specifically build upon SS' prior knowledge, and there are no particular restrictions concerning the choice of languages to be taught, provided that there is sufficient demand.

The existence of bilingual programs for migrant SS in S has generally entailed positive results in terms of SS' achievements, as shown e.g. by the experimental Lund Composite Bilingual Program for Finnish-speaking SS activated in Malmö and evaluated between 1972 and 1980. Overall, the Swedish approach to multilingualism has been classified as "progressive" in that it provides expressed legal references and facilities to streamline HLs in education (Sierens and Van Avermaet, 2017). However, over time, public authorities have drastically reduced earmarked funding for HL education, which therefore has to rely on other funding sources. This can be seen in the percentage of non-native SS who benefited from HL support, which decreased from 64% in 1980 to 13% in 2000 (Axelsson, 2005).

### *Italian case*

Compared to the two benchmark cases, I is characterized by similar premises and (stated) goals but different policy design and implementation features. Although there are guidelines defined at the central government level for migrant SS integration (MIUR, 2014) and the reported goal of HL teaching is the preservation and promotion of migrant languages as tools for the development of intercultural competencies and multicultural identities, the policy instruments vary compared to A and S. Indeed, while the official documentation deals with the importance of HLs, the provision of HL classes depends on the stipulation of agreements with migrant communities or countries of origin's authorities, which are quite rare in practice, as well as on schools' autonomous decisions. In fact, even on this latter level, only few educational institutes decide to activate HL courses or initiatives promoting HL knowledge (Calvi, 2020).

As a consequence, the bottom-up demand of HL courses by SS (and their families) is penalized. In turn, this is also due to the low prestige enjoyed by most migrant languages, which hinders their diffusion and favors their perception as obstacles for learning Italian (cfr. Vaccarelli, 2001). As a result, the usage of HLs by migrant SS is prevalently relegated to their family contexts (Gianollo and Fiorentini, 2020), which in turn deprives TT and SS of the cultural heritage of migrants as an asset for developing intercultural thinking in the classroom (Giusti, 2020) that could be leveraged, not least, within cooperative learning arrangements (Chiari, 2011) between migrant and native SS.

In addition, the background of TT qualified to teach HLs is less varied than in A and S: these TT come primarily from the countries where the relevant languages are spoken, and their education is accomplished mostly in those countries. Moreover, responsibility for the organization and funding of HL courses usually lies with institutions in those countries, rather than with Italian ones. Consequently, the supply of HL TT is arranged with the countries that send them.

### *HL teaching strengths and weaknesses comparatively*

The HL education policy features in A and S present several strengths that indicate the embeddedness of HL teaching. Among them, the definition of specific curricula and assessment procedures for HLs as distinguished from foreign languages, the variety of HL TT' backgrounds, the institutionalized supply of CPD opportunities, the arrangement of monitoring procedures, and the bottom-up nature of course activation that implies the virtual unlimitedness of HLs taught indicate that the reported interculturalism goals are taken seriously and overall point to the usage of consistent policy instruments.

Conversely, the Italian system presents several weaknesses that disclose the non-institutionalized nature and lack of sensibility towards the importance of HL teaching. These features range from the lack of definition of specific curricula and assessment procedures for HLs to the sole provision of TT by the countries where those languages are spoken, which does not help to solve the general lack of qualified TT, both in general (Magni, 2020) and with specific regard to HLs (OECD, 2015). Problematic aspects also include – perhaps most importantly – the fact that the provision of HL courses is highly dependent on whether agreements are signed with migrant-sending countries, which penalizes SS coming from countries with which no agreements have been stipulated, thus de facto laying the premises for a discriminatory language education policy. As in other areas of the Italian education system, such as the implementation of teacher training (Malandrino, 2021), the absence of specific monitoring represents another critical issue. In Tab. 2, the HL education policy features of I are contrasted with those of A and S.

	<b>Austria</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Italy</b>
<b>Stated goal</b>	HL preservation and promotion, intercultural competencies, multicultural identity	HL preservation and promotion, intercultural competencies, multicultural identity	HL preservation and promotion, intercultural competencies, multicultural identity
<b>HLs in official documents</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Activation of courses</b>	Bottom-up demand	Bottom-up demand	Negotiated
<b>Covered languages</b>	All (in principle)	All (in principle)	All (in principle), provided that agreement is stipulated
<b>HLs as distinguished from foreign languages in curriculum</b>	Yes	Yes	NA
<b>HL assessment procedure</b>	NA	Yes	NA

<b>TT' background and education</b>	Varied (host and foreign countries)	Varied (host and foreign countries)	Only foreign countries
<b>CPD opportunities</b>	Yes	Yes	NA
<b>HL education monitoring</b>	Yes (specific for HLs)	Yes	NA

Tab. 2: Key features of HL education policy in Austria, Sweden, and Italy (Author's elaboration of European Commission's data).

## 5. HL education policy learning: whether it is possible, what can be learned

Sections 3 and 4 have respectively shown the contextual premises for policy learning and HL education policy contents in A, S and I. In this section, the two questions presented at the beginning of the article will be discussed, as to *whether* policy learning can be activated in I from A and S, and *what* can be learned from these experiences, while the conclusions will linger on some suggestions on how to activate learning.

*Whether policy learning can be activated:* the contextual features of the examined cases (Tab. 1) play a key role for the identification of learning premises. More specifically, in light of what was illustrated in Section 1, the similarities existing between the analyzed contexts act as facilitators of learning because they indicate common ground to build on, in terms of policy governance level, migrant integration funding and the value attributed by official policy to IE (albeit still improvable in I). On a positive note, once an adequate regulatory and institutional framework for HL teaching has been provided – which would imply the activation of learning at the policy design level – the main strengths of the Italian case consist in the existence of teacher networks and guidance on arrival for MYP, which can act as learning facilitators at the implementation level, for TT as policy deliverers to learn together how to embed HLs in education and for migrant SS (and their families) as policy targets to get informed about HL education opportunities. At the same time, contextual differences in terms of the institutional coordination and monitoring of integration policies and MYP enrolment on arrival, as well as cultural dissimilarities in terms of LA and diversity promotion can act as obstacles and should be overcome for learning to concretize between more structurally and culturally similar contexts.

*What can be learned:* As a general rule, HL education should be designed as an inclusive process since educational segregation can be detrimental to both migrants and natives' educational results (Nusche, 2009). Under this perspective, HL education should be aimed, in principle, at both SS with and without a migrant background and leave SS (and their families) free to choose which language to learn. Thus, making HL education provision depend on bottom-up manifestations of interest would entitle both migrant and native SS to a further educational opportunity, while promoting adequate representation not only of “prestigious” languages (such as English) but of all languages, as seen in the Austrian experience.

As for HL education contents, the fact that only a few countries in Europe – including A and S – have designed specific curricula for HLs as separate from foreign languages is part of the more general difficulty in producing high-quality guidelines and materials

connecting mother tongue education to the mainstream curriculum (Nusche, 2009). Experiences such as those of A and S, which have managed to do so, should therefore be observed by learning countries such as I as successful practices.

Moreover, just like any other public service, HL education is contingent upon financial and human capital (Melton, 2017). Therefore, funding should be earmarked for HL education, as the Swedish experience shows how important this is for widespread HL education provision. On the other hand, it is important that TT have the necessary skills to deliver HL education, since for sound policy implementation, human resources must be adequate in terms of their preparedness (Gleeson *et al.*, 2011). To this aim, HL TT should be offered CPD opportunities and incentivized to leverage them as essential capacity-building tools (Mooney Simmie, 2007). Moreover, human resources must be available in sufficient number. The article shows that the supply of HL TT can be arranged in different ways and, more specifically, can represent a responsibility of the host country or the country/ies where the HLs are spoken. In this regard, making this supply depend on international agreements can reduce human resource availability, while providing a consistent framework that allows a variety of recruitment paths can enrich that supply. This is particularly important if we consider that the provision of an adequate number of TT has proven to have positive effects on educational outcomes, which are modest in general (Nusche, 2009) but are amplified on disadvantaged categories such as migrants (Björklund *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, and from a different perspective, an increase in TT diversity, combined with a more systemic approach to HL teaching than the agreement-based one adopted in I, can become a source of job opportunities for both natives and linguistic minorities of either recent or older migration (Carrington and Skelton, 2003). This is a special challenge for I, given the shortage of TT in its educational system and the continuous, incremental changes in its initial teacher training and recruitment policies over the last years (Malandrino, 2021). For I, such challenge would possibly entail the creation of new subject-matter areas (*classi di concorso*) with access subjected to specific requirements related to HL teacher training. At the same time, such an increase of TT with specialized, varied and inclusive training paths would leave room for the role of same-background educators to improve migrant SS' self-confidence and motivation and ultimately lead to enhanced education outcomes (Villegas and Clewell, 1998).

Finally, on the level of SS assessment, the importance of language evaluation systems or procedures *inter alia* derives from the need to distinguish between language barriers and other needs that learners might present (OECD, 2019). While this generally applies to the evaluation of SS performance in the LI, the application of an assessment framework to HLs and the attribution of a higher value to migrants' HL competencies could help to achieve a more comprehensive picture of SS' skills and to avoid the deficit-oriented approach that characterizes, for instance, even the comparatively advanced Austrian experience (Nusche *et al.*, 2010).

## Conclusions

The article sets out to employ a public policy lens to examine a subject matter that is usually dealt with from sociolinguistic, pedagogical and didactical perspectives. More

specifically, it employs policy learning theory to assess the extent to which I might learn from A and S in terms of HL education policy, while at the same time employing lesson-drawing as a specific learning framework in an empirical context in the face of its underapplication so far (Bennett and Howlett, 1992). From an operational point of view, the article suggests that Italian policymakers have much to learn in terms of HL education policy, in order to make the related educational services more widely and uniformly available. In fact, the importance of HLs is too high to be left to the initiative of single schools or teachers. But the article also shows that I already presents some institutional and contextual features (e.g. funding, a mature epistemic community, a ministerial bureaucracy aware of the value of migrant HLs and IE) which constitute fertile breeding ground for successful learning to occur. As suggested by May (1992), successful policy learning may be facilitated through the introduction of specific instruments supporting policy design, such as planned experimentations, evaluation, hearings, assessments and organizational designs, which might for instance involve the institutionalized provision of civil servant secondment into systems characterized by “virtuous” policy practices. Moreover, education professionals – i.e. TT and school heads – could leverage the results of the application of those instruments and the existing strengths of the Italian system (such as the existence of teacher networks and the availability of HL-related literature) to support their own work and thus act as operators of integration-through-education, for instance by setting up or consolidating cross-subject-matter peer networking activities and projects, or by using textbooks in an interlinguistic manner as suggested by Benavente (in this issue).

### **Glossary**

A = Austria

I = Italy

S = Sweden

CPD = continuing professional development

HL = home language

IE = intercultural education

LA = language awareness

LI = language of instruction

MYP = migrant young people

SS = students

TT = teachers

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