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# Educational requirements and skills for social inclusion: the CPIA resources for unaccompanied migrant minors

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The work hypothesis of the paper is a correlation between language proficiency and social inclusion. From the alphabetization to the Italian language and prospects of social inclusion, the survey conducted in Sicily in 2017, analyses educational needs by interviewing 503 unaccompanied migrant minors (UAM) attending the CPIA in the whole Sicily. By analysing linguistic skills, family, social conditions of departure and permanence in Italy, the research defines the main socio-linguistic profiles and possible paths for training offer and services addressed to UAMs, as key points to start a process of inclusion that transforms in resource what is instead is seen as a problem.

**Keywords**: unaccompanied minors, skills, social inclusion, education, social work.

## 1. Introduction[1]

Every day we are witness to both a degeneration of the public debate regarding hospitality and an increase in anti-foreigner sentiments, fuelled by the manipulative style and contents of communication and the media. The scenario of receiving migrant adults and minors (both refugees and not), in the face of hostile policies, is changing, placing at risk the experience accumulated thus far and the wealth of knowledge and good practices geared towards the reception system and inclusion politics.

These on-going changes at the political level, as in the whole of Italian society, and the material consequences within the welcoming organization, make it even more urgent to document and describe

[1] The chapter is the result of the joint reflection of the authors; however, in order to attribute authorship to the parts drafted, Section 1 is to be attributed to Gabriella Argento, Sections 2 and 4 to Silvana Leonforte, Section 3 to Gaetano Gucciardo, and Section 5 to Roberta T. Di Rosa.

good practices and interventions of a positive nature, along with the methods of integration and the training courses for the unaccompanied migrant minors (henceforth UAMs).

This paper presents the results of wide-ranging research into the reception systems and the CPIA (Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti 'District Centres for Adult Education') in Sicily, the Region that accommodates the greatest number of unaccompanied migrant minors (Di Rosa, Gucciardo, Argento and Leonforte, 2019). In fact, 38% of the UAMs entering Italy are received here (data on 31/12/2018, in Greco and Tumminelli 2019: 40). Around a third of the UAMs presently in Italy attend courses (Di Rosa et al. 2019: 52) at the CPIAs, with afternoon and evening classes geared towards middle-school and secondary school leaving certificates; as a consequence, these centres today have a particular significance as "local cultural and educational centres" (Floreancig 2018: 15). Our focus, therefore, has fallen on the CPIAs and this specific sector of the school population, whilst remaining aware that the introduction of these youngsters into the CPIAs is not devoid of problems, since a huge effort of understanding and reciprocal adaptation is demanded, both on the part of the new arrivals and the school structure itself (Grigt 2017: 28).

## 2. Research into Sicilian CPIAs

As a part of the project *Italiano lingua seconda in soggetti migranti a bassa alfabetizzazione. Ricerca, formazione, didattica* ('Italian as a second language for migrants of low literacy levels. Research, education, teaching'), financed with FFO 2015 funds and run by Mari D'Agostino, we carried out a survey aimed at pinpointing these people's social characteristics, social-cultural background and migratory routes, within a wider-ranging project regarding educational needs of migrant minors in Italy (Di Rosa et al. 2019). We needed to be aware of the fact that "there was a multitude of interlinked aspects in the biographical and educational histories of the learners: cultural and social aspects, aspects relating to gender and age, without neglecting the particulars of their life experiences, and the diversity of their own social and cultural capital which the various

learners might exploit" (Zoletto 2018: 32). An effort was made to investigate the extent to which schools actually managed to tackle the complexity of these persons and their legal requirements. As regards the methodology adopted, over five hundred minors were interviewed; they had been attending courses at the 11 CPIAs in Sicily and been selected on the basis of the number of foreign subjects in the centre of reference. In selecting, as a guideline, we stuck to their distribution in the CPIAs, whilst leaving the interviewers free to select on the basis of availability.

The definitive sample maintains a proportional division of the minors, in line with their incidence in the various Sicilian CPIAs and their division by gender. The sample of 503 UAMs represents about a quarter of the total number of unaccompanied foreign minors attending Sicilian CPIAs. All the questionnaires were administered via direct interviews, most of which were in Italian (over 70%) and the remaining ones in French, in English or with the help of a linguistic mediator. The profiles of these pupils were examined as regards who they were, where they came from, their expectations of the schools and how these expectations were met, which and how many resources were activated for them. Apart from the interviewees' socio-cultural profile, the questions dealt with reasons for emigration, the times and modes of reception, possible contact with relatives, friends, and acquaintances who had already emigrated. The extent of inclusion was investigated with questions about courses attended, opportunities for learning Italian and how free time was being spent. Lastly, an assessment of skills possessed was carried out, especially with regard to which and how many languages were spoken, competence with technological appliances, above all regarding use of smart-phones.

At the same time, with regard to the reception structures, the managers of the CPIAs and a few teachers were interviewed via (ten) semi-structured interviews and (four) focus groups. The school managers were requested to pinpoint their requirements, problems, the potential of the foreign minors attending, the skills activated and the difficulties encountered by the teaching staff. In the focus groups with teachers the needs of the minors were discussed, as well as the skills required to teach foreign minors and the teaching strategies adopted. An analysis of the experiences of the adults assigned to teaching the

UAMs, as regards the challenge they were facing, did, in fact, seem to be an essential step in thinking out dynamics, strategies and teaching tools that might be appropriate for courses which were also, and above all, a "gateway" to social inclusion.

## 3. Unaccompanied foreign minors in CPIAs: profiles and skills

Ninety-nine per cent of minors interviewed had arrived by sea and the majority were males (95.4%). For both genders, the predominant age-group was 17-year-olds (60.3%), sixteen-year old accounted for little over a fifth of the total; 9.6% of the minors were aged 15 and 6.7% were under the age of fifteen.

From the stories we documented, various types of motivation constituted the reason for migrating; there were those who were fleeing from war-zones, conflict or persecution; others were driven out by a collapse of the family and social unit (orphans or minors whose peer-group had been progressively decimated by emigration) and there were minors in search of new employment prospects (Figure 1).

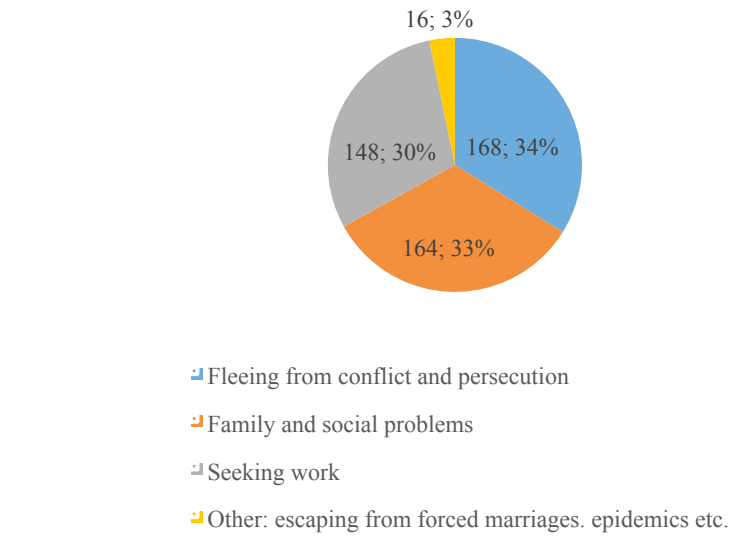


Figure 1. Reasons for migration of the UAMs interviewed in Sicily, 2017 (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

With regard to their country of origin, 92.7% of interviewees came from Africa (north, west and sub-Sahara); 5.8% came from Asia. The first five nationalities (by number) in the sample were: Gambia (133), Senegal (71), Nigeria (54), Mali (52) and Ivory Coast (52).

A total of 72.4% said that they had attended state schools, 14.1% private schools and 7.6% Koranic religious schools. The latter data regarding this type of religious institution is deemed to be rather unreliable, since this information hints at possible links with the world of Islamic fundamentalism.

In the overall cross-section, it is important to stress that only one out of ten had attended school for more than ten years and one out of five had never gone to school (Table 1). Most of the minors in the sample came from west Africa and, on the basis of these numbers, it was, on the whole, those from north Africa who had attended school for the longest.

| | | N°. of years | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Never attended | From 1 to 5 years | From 6 to 8 years | From 9 to 13 years | Over13 years |
| Country of origin | North Africa | 0 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| | | 0.0% | 37.5% | 31.3% | 31.3% | 0.0% |
| | West Africa | 99 | 140 | 125 | 80 | 1 |
| | | 22.2% | 31.5% | 28.1% | 18.0% | 0.2% |
| | East Africa | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | 66.7% | 33.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| | Asia | 2 | 13 | 17 | 1 | 0 |
| | | 6.1% | 39.4% | 51.5% | 3.0% | 0.0% |
| Total | | 103 | 160 | 147 | 86 | 1 |
| | | 20.7% | 32.2% | 29.6% | 17.3% | 0.2% |

Table 1. Country of origin and years of schooling, 2017 (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

Almost half of the total sample declared that they had been working before migrating (48.9%); 30.4% had been studying and 17.6% had

been neither studying nor working. Those that had been working had been mainly employed in the primary or secondary sectors, with the most common occupations being shepherd, agricultural worker, construction worker, carpenter and mechanic. With regard to their family, over a half stated that their fathers had died (53.3%), whereas those still alive were employed as agricultural workers, labourers, craftsmen, small-time businessmen or were unemployed. Deceased mothers accounted for about a third (32%); those still living worked, with half of these working at home. The death of one's mother often led to the son leaving home and often to a break-down in relations with the rest of the family. From the interviews there emerged several cases of minors, whose reason to migrate emerged in the wake of misunderstandings arising with the father's new family, especially regarding relations with the new wife. The effect of losing one's father seemed to have a different effect. The UAMs found themselves with a family mandate that required them to contribute to the family's economic demands.

Contact with the family in one's county of origin is sporadic; in fact, although all of them state that they use a smartphone (96.2%) and, moreover, every day (31.8% from two to four hours, and as many as 39.4% for more than five), calls home is not very frequent. Only three out of ten speak to their family several times a month, whilst a half speak at most once a month and one out of five never. These figures are influenced by the number of cases of orphans or youngsters who have broken off relations with their family, but we might also assume that the relative infrequency of calls to the family is conditioned by the reluctance to inform one's parents that one is not working, not earning and is still in no condition to start repaying the debt incurred by the family to pay for the initial journey.

With what resources do UAMs introduce themselves into this new context of immigration? Above all, languages: we know that "in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa the situation of multilingualism (is) very common" (D'Agostino 2017: 143, 145), and, in fact, we found that over half the youngsters spoke at least three languages, whilst knowledge of at least one *lingua franca* is very common. Practically nine out of ten (86.1%) spoke French or English (47.9% saying that they spoke English and 45.3% French. 2% spoke both English and French). On the other hand, with regard to Italian, a third of the

youngsters understood little or nothing and over 80% spoke a little or so-so. Strangely, however, 87.5% of the sample said they could write in Italian. As we have seen, their level of schooling was low and also of poor quality: in fact, 20.3% of those interviewed, stated that they had never gone to school, 7.6% had gone to Koranic schools and 23.6% had abandoned their studies after 5 or 6 years at most.

Therefore, over a half of the minors interviewed were practically without basic skills. How could these skills be recuperated? 84.7% of the UAMs interviewed were attending or had attended Italian language courses in their reception centres, an experience that had provided them with basic notions, at least at the level of comprehension, which, in some way, may have facilitated their clash with the school system. However, despite the possibility of attending a literacy course in Italy, the absence of schooling in the country of origin affected language comprehension significantly (Table 2).

| | | Did you attend school in your country? | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Yes | No | Total |
| How much Italian do you understand? | None | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| | | 42.9% | 57.1% | 100.0% |
| | Little | 120 | 46 | 166 |
| | | 72.3% | 27.7% | 100.0% |
| | Some | 165 | 36 | 201 |
| | | 82.1% | 17.9% | 100.0% |
| | A lot | 113 | 16 | 129 |
| | | 87.6% | 12.4% | 100.0% |
| Total | | 401 | 102 | 503 |
| | | 79.7% | 20.3% | 100.0% |

Table 2. Comprehension of Italian and school attendance, 2017 (Di Rosa et a. 2019).

In order to examine the skills possessed by the minors (Augelli et al. 2017), a skills index was constructed, thanks to which we can obtain

synthetic information regarding the UAMs' linguistic competences and education.

The index was organized on the basis of a) number of languages spoken by the minor; b) competence, as stated by the interviewee, with regard to comprehension of spoken Italian; c) competence, as stated by the minor, in speaking Italian; d) competence in writing Italian; e) assessment, carried out by the interviewer, of the interviewee's understanding of Italian. The theoretical maximum score is 5; in detail, the average score is 3.1. There is no difference in average scores between males and females. The score increases exponentially in line with age; fourteen-year-olds have an index of 2.3; fifteen-year-olds 3; sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds have a score of 3.1. Those who have attended school have a significantly higher score than those who have not (3.2 versus 2.7) and the greater the number of years of attendance the higher the score for competence.

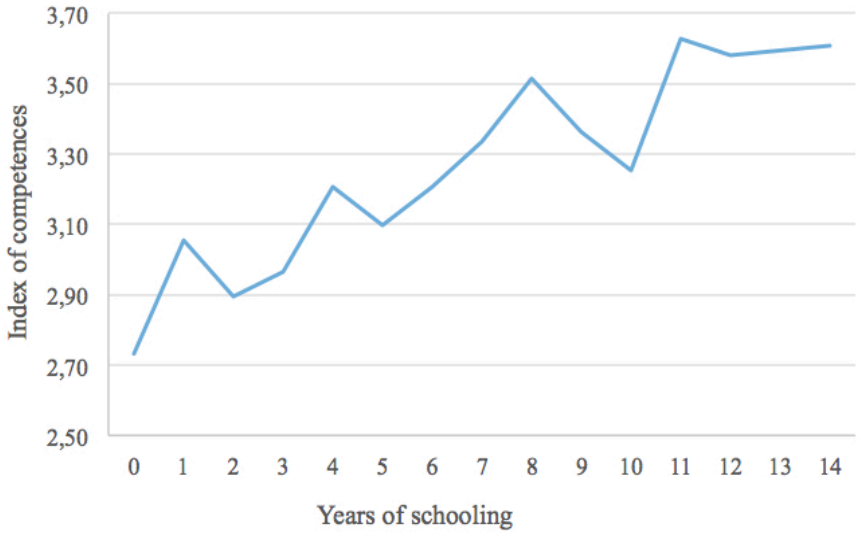


Figure 2. Index of linguistic competence (0-5) per n. of years of schooling, 2017 (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

The index is higher if the youngsters are inserted in higher levels of study (this fact also serves to confirm the validity of the index) and have been in Italy for a longer time (Table 3). There are no differences

in linguistic competence on the basis of the religion of the country of origin.

| *Level of course of study in which one is inserted.* | *No.* | *Average* | *Std. deviation.* |
|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 201 | 2.81 | 0.78 |
| A2 | 145 | 3.38 | 0.52 |
| B1 | 21 | 3.41 | 0.48 |
| B2 | 2 | 3.69 | 0.11 |
| Third year secondary | 112 | 3.41 | 0.61 |
| Did not answer | 22 | 2.70 | 0.59 |
| *Total* | *503* | *3.13* | *0.72* |

Table 3. Index of linguistic competence (0-5) per level of insertion in course of study, 2017 (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

| *How many months have you been in Italy?* | *No.* | *Average* | *Std. deviation* |
|---|---|---|---|
| From 1 to 2 months | 10 | 1.96 | 1.02 |
| From 3 to 4 months | 32 | 2.79 | 0.82 |
| From 5 to 6 months | 53 | 2.94 | 0.69 |
| For more than 6 months | 408 | 3.21 | 0.67 |
| *Total* | *503* | *3.13* | *0.72* |

Table 4. Index of linguistic competence (0-5) per duration of stay in Italy, 2017 (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

With regard to nationality, youngsters from Asiatic countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan) had higher scores than those from Africa (among whom, the highest scores emerged from Cameroon, Liberia, Libya, Tunisia).

Among the minors interviewed, the level of schooling was rather low and also rather inadequate; one child out of five had never been to school and was to be considered illiterate (20.3%); this figure could be supplemented by those who had only attended religious schools (7.6%). A further fifth had left school without gaining any qualifications (23.6% had completed 5/6 years of school). It can be

concluded that over half of the minors interviewed were seriously lacking in basic skills.

However, it is useful to point out that they actually possess other skills, primarily linguistic, which, if stimulated, might serve as a resource for learning Italian, as well as actual abilities from which teachers could start to reformulate their teaching approaches, in accordance with the educational and language requirements of the UAMs.

Those learners whose language skills cannot be described using the CEFR (*Common European Framework of Reference for languages*) have no real place in this framework, which, as we know, was designed for those possessing reading-writing skills (Arcuri and Mocciaro 2014, 2016). The term "competence" connotes, in this context, those areas of scholastic education that are concerned with the language field and the use of technology; arrangements for individualising other skills would have demanded the utilization of supplementary instruments that were capable of dealing with them.

With regard to linguistic competence, we encountered significant multilingualism among the UAMs interviewed: "the minors, although they may not be able to read or write, are often competent multi-linguists" (Amoruso, D'Agostino and Jaralla 2015). Here we are offered an important resource for social integration within a European model.

The most relevant factor to emerge from the research, which is of importance in discussing the role of Italian as an instrument of social inclusion, is that, among the UAMs interviewed, there was a noticeable presence of a particular profile of "competent illiterates". In fact, if we consider the pre-migratory educational records of these minors, there emerges a picture characterized by profiles of poorly-educated youngsters.

On the other hand, the data regarding ability in several languages was different: on average, the UAMs interviewed knew three languages. On closer inspection there did emerge linguistic abilities, for 56.6% of those interviewed, that varied from a minimum of three languages to a maximum of seven, with a majority being adolescents (65.6%) stating that they spoke at least two or three languages. On the other hand, UAMs who speak only one language account for 7.8%, whereas there is no shortage of cases of those who speak five or more

languages (8.9%). One out of five speaks at least four languages, over half speak three and 92.2% speak at least two. Furthermore, 40.8% speak English and 38.2% French, whereas 7.1% speak both English and French. Therefore, almost nine youngsters out of ten are able to communicate in French or English and a few also in both languages. Among the other principal languages spoken we find Bambara (18.5%), Wolof (29%) and Mandinka (37%). There also speakers of Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Bangla, Sousou, Pular and others.

Therefore, a striking element is represented by the linguistic skills possessed by a significant number of UAMs; a considerable number of these speak a minimum of two languages and a maximum of four; in addition to the increase in the number of languages spoken there is a concomitant increase in abilities in world languages such as French and English. With regard to the resources possessed by the UAMs these represent important and strategic skills from the social perspective. Effective avenues for social inclusion might well be built on these foundations. Previously acquired linguistic skills represent a strongpoint, something to be enhanced and not a hindrance or impediment to learning the language of the hosting country (Favaro, 2011). In fact, it is widely acknowledged that multilingualism fosters processes of interaction, reciprocity of exchange, the development of intercultural skills. Generally speaking, and not only for the UAMs, multilingualism, regardless of the level of competence, is considered a fundamental benefit, in the same way as a complete mastery of one's mother tongue and the guarantee of being able to conserve it within the frontiers of the hosting country (Council of Europe, 2002).

### 3.1. Italian language skills

With regard to Italian language skills, only 1.4% of the UAMs encountered in the Sicilian CPIAs did not understand the language at all; 33% understood a little, whereas 40% stated that they understood sufficiently well and 25.6% said they understood a lot (see Table 1).

Of the UAMs interviewed, 84.7% were attending or had attended Italian language courses in the reception centre that was hosting them at the time of the interview; the minors at the CPIAs had already mostly received the basics of the language in the reception structures,

an experience that provided them with the basics, at least at the level of comprehension, which in some ways alleviated the initial impact of the school system. It should be stressed, however, that these initial experiences of studying Italian are neither homogeneous from one centre to another, nor within the same centre over the course of the years: the provision of Italian lessons is subject to variations linked to budget availability, the quality of welcome of the various centres and also the professional preparation of the actual teachers. The latter are often not professional teachers of Italian, but general teachers or mere volunteers, who help to provide the basic rudiments of the Italian language in the period following arrival, but before the minors are inserted in the school system.

| How much Italian do you understand? | % |
|---|---|
| Little | 33.0 |
| Just enough | 40.0 |
| A lot | 25.6 |
| I don't understand it | 1.4 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Table 5. Self-assessment of level of comprehension of Italian of UAMs interviewed (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

School attendance in the country of origin has a significant effect on language comprehension, as shown in Table 6:

| Did you go to school in your native country? | No | Yes | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| How much Italian do you understand? | | | |
| Nothing | 57.1 | 42.9 | 100.0 |
| Little | 27.7 | 73.3 | 100.0 |
| Just enough | 17.9 | 82.1 | 100.0 |
| A lot | 12.4 | 87.6 | 100.0 |

Table 6. Relationship between self-assessment of Italian language comprehension and school attendance (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

As regards Italian language speaking skills, the most frequent answers were "little" and "so so". Only 18.9% think that they speak very well (see Table 7).

The first decisive element is the length of stay. In fact, the longer one has been in Italy, obviously, the more language one learns and speaks in a variety of situations.

| How well do you speak Italian? | % |
|---|---|
| Not at all | 40.6 |
| So and so | 40.6 |
| Well | 18.9 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Table 7. Self-assessment of Italian speaking skills on the part of the MSAs interviewed (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

The second pivotal factor in the learning curve is the relationship with the context of incorporation. In fact, when juxtaposing one's perceived language competence and the experience of contact with the hosting context, it can be seen that, the better one's Italian language skills, the more opportunities arise for socializing and communicative exchanges outside school, with people of different nationalities and with groups of Italians of the same age (see Table 8).

| In what situations do you use Italian? | How much Italian do you understand? | |
|---|---|---|
| | None or very little | Enough or a lot |
| Only at school | 60.0% | 40.0% |
| With the staff and school | 57.4% | 42.6% |
| With the staff and friends | 17.6% | 82.4% |
| With friends and school | 16.7% | 83.3% |
| Total | 34.5 % | 65.5% |

Table 8. Situations in which Italian is used at the declared level of comprehension (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

Those who have the opportunity to speak Italian with friends demonstrate a better level of Italian than those who have no friendships or, nonetheless, do not speak Italian with their friends. Naturally, there is a reciprocal relationship between the two factors, but, in any case, having friends who provide opportunities for

interaction in Italian represents a pivotal factor for swift and effective learning of the local language. As regards Italian writing skills, 87.5% state that they know how to write, whereas 12% say that they cannot write Italian.

## 3.2. Use of technology

Reference to the use of technology on the part of UAMs may represent an interesting dimension for understanding how this might be linked to the learning of Italian. In fact, 96.2% of the UAMs interviewed use mobile phones or smartphones.

The figures relating to the time spent on the device reflect the extent to which young people rely on their phones. Interview data reveals that 33.1% use them for 2 to 4 hours per day, whereas 40.9% use them for more than 5 hours per day.

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 1 hour | 31 | 6.4 |
| Between 1 and 2 hours | 95 | 19.6 |
| Between 2 and 4 hours | 160 | 33.1 |
| More than 5 hours | 198 | 40.9 |
| Total | 484 | 100.0 |

Table 9. For how many hours per day do you use your mobile phone/ smartphone? (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

Naturally, the smartphone is used for multiple functions: phoning, going on social network sites, listening to music, but also listening to the Koran, watching football matches or films in their native languages, for games, music, reading, translation and study. Only a small number (4.6%) use them only for phoning or only for social networking (9.3%) or do not actually own one. However, at the same time, the specific category of young immigrants who have arrived unaccompanied, often use their mobile phones/smartphones for particular purposes; in fact, applications for translation into Italian and study in general are widespread (33.1%), as are applications to remind one of the moments for prayer and reading of the Koran (14%).

The data gathered from the interviews confirms that, for the UAMs, the mobile phone/smartphone plays a crucial role in both the pre-migratory phase, to organize the journey, and during the actual journey and the reception phase. In fact, for these minors, once they have arrived in the hosting country, it is only through these devices that they can keep in touch with family, maintain a sense of belonging, see photos and hear the voices of their relatives (Save The Children 2017).

The stated uses were examined (Lo Verde 2018) with particular reference to the distinction between the social and relational interlinks initiated by the migrants. Firstly, as instruments of social bonding, which is to say, maintaining links with one's native community, with social bridges, as a means for building and maintaining contact with other communities. Secondly, as social links, this time in the sense of instruments of exchange and linking with local institutions.

Attempts were also made (Kozachenko 2013) to verify whether the function varied in accordance with different moments of the migratory experience: its utilization in the pre-migratory phase, instrumental in acquiring information and contact with persons and essential resources for the success of the journey; its utilization in the phases of arrival and adaptation in order to orient oneself and re-programme the subsequent stages; utilization on completing the undertaking of incorporation, as an expressive moment of the level of inclusion achieved.

In the case of the minors interviewed, all of whom found themselves in the phase of initial adaptation, intensive use of the smartphone was observed, particularly in relation to the maintaining of emotional ties with the family and community, and as an instrument of identity-fixing, and adherence to rules. In other words, the mobile phone enables one to preserve one's cultural roots and personal identity in a new context lacking principal reference points; with a mobile phone one can always entertain oneself, make friends, plan one's subsequent steps on the road to integration, as well as getting to know the customs and rules of the hosting country, even learning Italian better via specific applications or simply by tuning in to social networks or video channels.

A new instrument and, at the same time, a new space emerges for young immigrants on their way to social inclusion: the virtual world,

entered and exploited mainly via the mobile phone/smartphone; this should be borne in mind for its potential strategic role and for the great impact it has on minors (Premazzi 2010).

| Use of mobile phone/smartphone | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Only for calling the family | 23 | 4.6 |
| Only for going on the social network | 47 | 9.3 |
| Only for listening to music | 11 | 2.2 |
| For all the hypotheses mentioned | 215 | 42.7 |
| For telephoning and for the social network | 59 | 11.7 |
| For telephoning and listening to music | 18 | 3.6 |
| For social networking and listening to music | 103 | 20.5 |
| Other | 10 | 2.0 |
| Does not use cell phone/smartphone | 17 | 3.4 |
| Total | 503 | 100.0 |

Table 10. Use of mobile phone / smartphone (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

## 3.3. Work experiences

With regard to skills, it might be pointed out that 48.9% of those interviewed stated that they had worked in their country of origin, whereas only 30.4% stated that they had studied.

| **Activity carried out** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| Worked | 246 | 48.9 |
| Didn't work | 84 | 16.7 |
| Studied | 153 | 30.4 |
| Other | 12 | 2.4 |
| Didn't answer | 5 | 1.0 |
| Not applicable | 3 | 0.6 |
| Total | 503 | 100.0 |

Table 11. Activities carried out in country of origin (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

Starting working at an early age in contexts characterized by very little legal protection for minors (if not exactly exploitation) seems to

be one of the basic elements in the ambivalent relationship of UAMs with the school. On the one hand they perceive the school as an essential resource for entering the world of work; on the other hand, however, they have to go through the existential shift they underwent even before leaving, towards a day-to-day existence that offers no time for study. Their commitment to keep on with their studies and education should be interpreted in its connection to their past experiences. The most widespread UAM profile is that of a male close to adulthood, who comes from a large family, in which the parents are often absent, from a low social background, linked to a rural cultural background. The high school drop-out rate of these minors back in their country of origin should also be considered. Furthermore, those who attended school did so for very few years or had attended a Koranic school; these schools were mainly informal with regard to schooling and literacy. The classic 3 Rs approach (reading, writing, arithmetic) is seen to be fragmented and there is an abundance of total illiteracy (D'Agostino 2017).

## 4. Teaching and organizational solutions to educational needs of UAMs

Because of its constitutive regulations, the CPIA might represent an essential resource for UAMs, since the envisaged teaching activity in the CPIA (geared towards adults, with particular reference to disadvantaged groups), would be supplemented by welcoming activities, orientation and accompaniment; furthermore, this would aim to provide "assistance in creating one's own learning path", to support "recognition of educational credits and certification of learning progress" and to foster "the fruition of orientation services throughout one's life".

However, the UAM, as a new type of student, represents a complex educational challenge for the teaching staff, with regard to both his/her learning profile and because of the migratory memories that carried from their past; these painful experiences make teaching even more difficult, in the shape of background interference accompanying and affecting the minors' relationships with their new experiences. These traumatic experiences leave a profound mark on

the youngsters and affect their behaviour in class, their ability to concentrate their attention during lessons, their degree of participation in class dynamics, both with the teacher and others in the peer-group.

Managers and teachers are investing intense reserves of energy and resources in responding to these "special" needs" (Bartoli, Carsetti and Mammarella 2013), experimenting with new methods such as learning through realistic tasks, the structuring of teaching by modules, planning teaching activity around creative techniques, music and theatre. What makes the CPIA experience "special" today is the positive feeling generated by the combination of the capacity to invest and the experimentation on the part of managers and teachers; there are obvious organizational limitations but there is also an elevated motivation to learn on the part of the minors, who are determined to obtain the maximum from the lessons they attend, regardless of the duration and continuity of their attendance. Teaching in the CPIAs is based on an educational relationship with the minor, through novel techniques which do without books and involve mime and, more generally, through scaffolding with non-verbal communication. This experimentation has brought considerable benefits; in fact, our research showed that the learning of Italian was proceeding quite rapidly even though the minors interviewed had actually had little schooling.

However, observation of the present reality shows how, in order to be able to carry out this integration successfully, it will be necessary to invest in the CPIAs in terms of development and consolidation of the courses, in order to overcome the existing difficulties as regards premises and personnel, to update and experiment in teaching, with co-ordination between internal and external activities and between projects and general activities.

From the point of view of proposed contents, there is a widespread feeling of inadequacy among teachers regarding the subjects offered (as dictated by ministerial protocols and mostly linked to "ordinary" courses of literacy), compared to the actual needs of the UAMs, to whom a more flexible curriculum should be offered (IT courses, an increase in the number of L2 Italian courses at various levels; introduction of pre-A1 level courses).

The teachers confirmed that, although these minors struggle to endure long periods of learning with teacher-based lessons, they are

actually capable of activating resources and skills in lessons integrating new educational approaches that are more accessible to individuals with their characteristics (Amoruso et al. 2015; D'Agostino and Sorce 2016). These same teachers have pointed out the fact that the educational needs of the UAMs often simply consist in the need for a more psycho-social type accompaniment and orientation in the acknowledgement of abilities and skills by the hosting society, a requirement to which they are not always able to respond (Di Rosa 2017)

Another relevant theme is the lack of relations and collaboration between teachers and representatives for the minors (tutors or responsible persons from the community). A feeling of isolation in their educational commitment is especially noticeable among the teachers, particularly with regard to an absence of continuity between school activities and time spent outside school, in which there is very little space and time to consolidate the learning initiated during school hours. The interviews with representatives of the community, carried out during our research, show that it is also true that community representatives are subject to a rapid turnover, which makes it difficult to have stable interlocutors; in the communities themselves, generally speaking, few resources are destined for interaction with the local area, or as a back-up to the minors' studies (Di Rosa et al. 2019).

Lastly, various difficulties that emerged from different areas at certain moments of this research, deriving from the organization of CPIAs, should be taken into consideration. In fact, in the face of a considerable investment, the limitations arising from the quality of the workforce and the resources available to the managers were carefully noted. These often proved to be an obstacle, as in the case of accepting new registrations during the year, due to the unpredictability of new arrivals and newly welcomed minors. Then there was the absence of specific teacher-training for teaching foreign pupils, as well as poor incentives for teaching flexibility and the absence of mediators within the workforce.

Teachers do not often receive support from professional figures in the linguistic-cultural field, who might help facilitate the relationship with the students in overcoming the difficulties that arise in class, both in communication between teachers (who usually only speak Italian) and pupils (who often speak other local languages and a

*lingua franca*), and in relational dynamics linked to more specifically cultural aspects.

The CPIAs do boast significant strongpoints: above all, being a state school should be a guarantee of seriousness and homogeneity throughout the country; this constitutes an essential resource in moving from the initial emergency, i.e., the merely material act of welcoming, to ways of integration and safeguard of minors' rights, also as regards preventing social unrest and deviant behaviour. However, in order for this role to be fully enacted there is a need for a dual investment: in teacher-training with regard to specific teaching methodology and the supplementing of educational activities with psycho-social and transcultural intervention, capable of making the most of the minors' skills and, in this way, betting on the added value that positive integration of these minors might bring to our society.

## 5. The Italian language: the road towards social inclusion

The data gathered regarding the UAMs' experience regarding the opportunities offered by the CPIAs and the experiences of the teachers and managers involved in the training, permits us to reaffirm with even greater emphasis the central importance of the combination of Italian language skills with prospects for social inclusion, especially now that the latest regulatory provisions envisage cuts in reception organizations, with an actual repudiation in the providing of migrants with literacy-skills.

For UAMs, and for immigrants in general, the Italian language is, above all, the language of "survival" (D'Agostino 2017b: 142), but during one's stay it also becomes a badge of belonging (Vedovelli 2010).

In fact, learning Italian is not only instrumental to a successful migratory project, but it also contributes to the process of defining one's identity in the context of reception, whilst, at the same time, contributing to strengthening what is defined as the "cultural tearing" of these young people (Bichi 2008), overcoming the state of "temporariness" (Sayad 2002) not only in spatial terms, but on the relational, emotional and cultural levels.

Lack of language is one of the principal indicators of poverty, which manifests itself in a context of marginalization and represents an obstacle to the process of being welcomed. Schooling is a fundamental element in supporting minors in the necessary redefinition of their terms of self-representation and self-identification (Biagioli 2015), in the transition from a condition of sharing symbolic cultural codes, in facing the new and unknown reality of the hosting society, a context full of identity fractures, frustration and lack of representation for newcomers (Moro 2006).

Among the numerous stages faced by UAMs for incorporation into the context of reception (sanitary checks, identification through photos and fingerprints, accommodation in reception centres. etc.), participation in Italian language courses takes on three important aspects: legality, since knowledge of the language is a prerequisite for the renewal of residence permits; functionality, in that it enables one to participate actively and autonomously in the daily life of the hosting society; and finally, relationality, leading to belonging (becoming a citizen), access (being able to participate and survive in Italian society) and, maybe, equity (being able to participate on a level equal to Italians), guaranteeing the conditions for obtaining a new citizenship (Bianchi, 2016).

Knowledge of the Italian language becomes a tool with which to decipher the surrounding reality, shifting grammar from the field of notions to that of democratic opportunity. For this reason, Italian language literacy provides an opening towards social inclusion, not only because it provides access to education and work, but, above all, because it secures the possibility of fully exercising one's civil, political and social rights; this then means being fully incorporated into a society (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2016).

Access to schooling can therefore be considered the pivotal point where minors have the possibility of acquiring the right to participate in public life as new citizens of a country that is to accommodate them (Augelli et al. 2018).

In order for this to be transformed into actual opportunities for integration, it is necessary to guarantee them a learning experience in an educational context that is ready to tackle the challenges offered by their presence and provide appropriate courses for their socio-linguistic profiles.

The aim of inclusion of UAMs through literacy today no longer seems to be on the national agenda, in contrast to that which was implemented in 2017: Law no. 47/2017 "Regulations regarding protection measures for unaccompanied foreign minors: guidelines for the right to study of pupils removed from their family of origin", adopted by the *Ministero per l'Istruzione, l'Università e la Ricerca* and the *Autorità garante per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza*, December 11th, 2017. The changes applied following the Decree-law, Oct.4, 2018, no.113, "Urgent regulations regarding international protection and immigration, public security […] witnessed the first cuts in the reception system, in the shape of access on the part of new arrivals to Italian courses and education in general, with serious repercussions on the quality of the reception system and safeguard of the UAMs' right to study.

This does not mean that guaranteeing migrant minors access to education is any less urgent and necessary and from observation of the CPIAs, in fact, one might conclude and emphasize that the primary importance of access to schooling and education for the UAMs is in providing access to legal protection, rights and participation.

The data obtained from research provides us with a picture in which one can see how, for the UAMs, the learning of Italian has been advancing quite rapidly, even though the adolescents interviewed have a low level of schooling. Bearing in mind this background of poor or insufficient schooling it is important to recognize the widespread multi-lingual ability and competence in world languages.

The relatively young age, allied to the multilingualism typical of life in many parts of Africa (given the mixing of tribes and colonialism, which imported additional languages) where these adolescents were brought up, has made them particularly receptive with regard to language-learning.

For these young people, the opportunity to have access to school in Italy represents the main gateway to sharing a way of life that will be an improvement on the one they are leaving and which, in any case, offers them the hope of having better future prospects and more success than in the countries they are leaving behind.

Schooling for the UAMs can serve as a psycho-social, as well as educational intervention, in such a way as to mitigate not only the difficulties of learning the host country's language, but also

overcoming the shortcomings from insufficient previous education experiences and possible cultural deprivation they suffered in the country of origin, often linked to economic difficulties.

These considerations lead one to stress the importance of providing minors with study courses linked to their need for language; if not taken into consideration at the time of working out the study-plan, these might well compromise the minor's relationship with learning opportunities (Emerson 2009), rendering possible access to education fruitless; consequently the minor may miss out on an opportunity to build upon his/her life experiences, exploiting specific cultural assets, as well as affecting his/her future migratory plans.

Naturally, the minors' immediate educational needs are to learn Italian, but the testimonies of managers and teachers describe how complicated teaching in class can be, with students of varying age, language and preparation; however, *riottosità all'apprendimento* ('opposition to learning') does not actually emerge (D'Agostino 2017). Problems arise because of irregular attendance, there being limited and unequal access; on the one hand, the CPIAs are not in a position to accommodate all the UAMs and, on the other, not all foreign minors are given the opportunity to attend. In line with other research (Grigt 2017: 35), analysis of the data collected from this field research highlights the challenges that the Italian school system will have to face in order to guarantee refugee youngsters and UAMs their right to study and to quality education. In fact, a comparison of the most recent studies regarding this issue (Santagati and Colussi 2019; Traverso 2018) demonstrates that its greater investment in training teachers is indispensable.

Above and beyond the limitations that we might highlight and imagine with regard to this local experience, it clearly emerges that inclusion of UAMs in CPIAs is crucial to any strategies on the road to integration; all this might have led us to hope for specific and increased attention, both at the scientific and political levels, in the wake of the Guidelines published in 2017 (Autorità Garante Infanzia 2017), were it not for the emergence of a political alignment moving in the opposite direction.

Together with managers, teachers and the actual students, we remain of the firm opinion, and foster the resolute conviction, that schooling should be provided for migrants arriving in Italy, since this

establishes the basic condition for future social inclusion; therefore, apart from these unsettling glimpses of fresh scenarios, research into the Sicilian situation reveals how the CPIAs have proved to be educational contexts capable of being all-inclusive, in spite of structural and cultural limitations; in fact, they have managed to "enhance the Freirean link between language and processes of emancipation" (Zoletto 2018: 36) having, thus, endeavoured to foster effective ways towards acquiring citizenship for the UAMs.

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