

The Italian Citizenship Achievement: A Methodological Issue with Practical Implications for the Integration of Students with Foreign and/or Immigrant Background

Debora Mantovani (Università di Bologna)

Up until now, in Italy, the potential underestimation (due to naturalization) of students with a migratory and/or a foreign background has not been a cause for concern due to the Italian nationality law's feature based on the *ius sanguinis* principle (right of blood): citizenship of children is the same as that of their parents, irrespective of their place of birth. Nonetheless, there are good reasons for supposing that the Italian nationality law's constraints are no longer able to limit the mismatch between non-Italian students and Italian students with an immigrant and/or foreign origin. According to the Eurostat statistics, over the last few years, among the EU countries, Italy has granted most of the new citizenships (131,803 in 2020 - 18% of the UE total) and most of them have been granted to minors, who automatically became Italian citizens if co-residents with (at least) one naturalized parent (*iuris communicatio*). Therefore, official school statistics – which apply the unique criterion of citizenship to distinguish student body population – may erroneously exclude from the “foreign” category those pupils who are Italians according to the civil registry but belong to a family with a migratory and/or foreign background.

At the same time, one should also bear in mind that Italy had been a country of emigration for a long time. From the late 19th century to the 1970s, more than 27 million people left Italy in search of better living conditions in other European (France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland) and extra-European countries too (USA, Canada, Latin America, Australia).

In light of these considerations, this article aims to explore if, and to what extent, the student population with a migratory and/or foreign background residing in Italy is underestimated due to the naturalization process. To this purpose, according to previous empirical research findings, a multidimensional analysis of students' legal (citizenship) and personal features (country of birth), as well as their parents' (citizenship and country of birth), is necessary. Indeed, the simultaneous examination of these intertwined factors has the advantage of understanding to what degree the only dimension of citizenship actually turns students with an immigrant and/or foreign origin background – who may suffer from the same school difficulties and problems of integration as their non-Italian peers – into Italian citizens.

The goal of this article does not limit to quantifying the phenomenon of naturalized Italian students – as empirical research has done so far – but also aims to investigate the composition of this population. It is well-known that the origin country may be

differently related to educational and social integration into host societies. Indeed, social values and norms – which are embedded in the culture of a country – set priorities in society. For example, the parenting style of Asian-American students' parents is often inspired by values and norms embedded in the Confucian culture, which encourages hard work, deference, perseverance and diligence, thus explaining why Chinese- and South Korean-origin students are more likely to outperform other minority groups and natives at school.

To fulfil these aims, the analyses will be based on the 2011 Italian Population and Housing Census conducted by the Italian National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT), which is also the last official general census involving all people residing in Italy.