

Latin teaching in Italy: élite or mass language? Pedagogical-didactic suggestions through a critical analysis of educational reforms

Rita Colace¹ * and Iolanda Zollo¹

¹ University of Salerno, Italy; rcolace@unisa.it; izollo@unisa.it

* Correspondence: rcolace@unisa.it

Abstract: This paper analyzes the evolution of Latin teaching in Italy from the late nineteenth century to the present, exploring the debate over its conception as an élite or mass language. The investigation begins with a historical overview of the value of Latin from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, highlighting how the language, initially a European koiné, became the preserve of a restricted circle. The analysis focuses on the main Italian educational reforms, from the Casati Law to the Gentile Reform and the PNRR, examining the normative transformations and the historical, political, and social context that accompanied them.

The article highlights how, over time, different visions of the role of Latin in education have alternated, oscillating between its valorization as a formative tool and its questioning in favor of more technical and modern education. The objective is to understand how educational reforms have influenced pedagogical reflections and teaching practices.

Keywords: General Didactics; Latin didactics; educational reforms; teacher education; inclusive education.



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1. Introduction

Latin is an Indo-European language that acquired a composite structure through the influence of Greek, Etruscan, and Osco-Umbrian. Initially spoken in a very restricted geographical area, it gradually assumed the role of *koinè* in a large part of Europe during the period of Roman domination. Subsequently, it became an élite language until the end of the 19th century, when a debate emerged concerning whether Latin, and its teaching, should be aimed at the masses or remain an élite pursuit. This discussion recalls the dualism between “apocalyptic” and “integrated” intellectuals, as described by Umberto Eco in 1963 regarding the relationship between intellectuals and mass culture (Eco, 1964).

The teaching of Latin has been a subject of discussion since the late 19th century, when it was considered a legacy of the elitist educational system of previous centuries, although from then on, and especially after Second World War, the debate has oscillated between figures like Gramsci, who argued that Latin should be taught even in

technical institutes, and those like Aldo Moro, who politically succeeded in abolishing the teaching of Latin in middle school, after decades of attempts and those who, like Giulio Preti, favored a more technically oriented and less humanistic school (Preti, 1945).

The intent of scholars and politicians at the time was to provide an adequate education for future citizens, an aim that later shifted toward autonomy and technology, leaving behind contemporary pedagogical-didactic suggestions.

Recently, there seems to be a reversal of this trend. The Minister of Education, Giuseppe Valditara, has stated in an interview his intention to reintroduce as an optional subject starting in the second year of middle school.

He believes that Latin, together with a committee of historians, Latinists, academics, and literary figures, can be a prerequisite for a school capable of building the future. The reasons for this reintroduction of Latin studies, starting in the 2026/2027 school year, lie in the fact that it opens doors to a vast heritage of civilization and traditions, and strengthens awareness of the relationship between the Italian and Latin language, going back to the roots of our language and the meaning of words (Valditara, 2025).

Therefore, how much have the regulations and school reforms that have occurred from the end of the 19th century to the present day influenced pedagogical reflections and teaching practices?

Considering the current decline in enrollments in courses of study that include Latin, particularly in the traditional *Liceo scientifico*¹, one might wonder whether these reforms have shaped the history of Latin teaching in Italy. This paper will provide a brief historical excursus of the value of Latin and its teaching from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, focusing on the main Italian school reforms, from the Casati Law to the PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan), and analyzing the historical, political, and social debates that accompanied them.

2. Latin between the Middle Ages and the 19th century

Classical Latin, the language of Cicero in the 1st century B.C., which is still the reference point for its teaching today, gradually changed due to interference of other languages, and already by the 2nd century A.D. Latin was considered spurious (Preti, 2015).

Such beliefs existed since the Middle Ages and, with the rise of universities, the Latin language further weakened, not considering that it was, and would continue to be for many centuries, the vehicular language of law, philosophy, science, and the European and Catholic Churches of the world.

The 14th century identified grammar, seen as *ancilla theologiae*, as one of the three foundations of human action, along with logic and metaphysics. Especially since the Humanist period onwards, Latin constituted the pivot of linguistic education (Balboni, 2009), reserved for a restricted circle of society. It began to be considered an international language and the language of culture *par excellence*, freeing itself from excessive grammaticism and focusing on the thought of the ancients, transmitting all the innovations and revolutions of European culture, including the great scientific

¹ Scientific High School or Science Lyceum

transformation that took place between the 16th and 17th centuries (Miraglia, 2009, p.22). Exercises based on vocabulary by semantic fields were also proposed.

Despite the didactic innovations of the Humanists, the arid pedantry that they reproached in the medieval schools continued to present itself in the form of a dusty, bookish erudition (Preti, 2015). Erasmus of Rotterdam, in *The Praise of Folly* (1511), fiercely criticizes grammarians, emphasizing the importance of *Colloquia* (short dialogues, elementary compositions, and readings of authors, aimed at imitation: a living and concrete communication tool, which adapts words to real-life situations, restoring Latin to its richness) as a methodology to be adopted for Latin teaching. From the second half of the 16th century, Latin returned to being a language studied by the élite and by ecclesiastics in Jesuit colleges, alongside Greek and Hebrew.

Comenius, the father of didactics, would later radically change the vision of disciplinary didactics and Latin in his *Novissima linguarum methodus*, in which he identified strategies and methodologies related to *didactica linguarum*, and in *Orbis sensualium pictus*, in which he argues that words should be associated with things and advocates an inductive method (Balbo, 2023, p.7-8).

From the 17th century, a process of bourgeoisification of schools began, culminating towards the end of the 19th century in Italy. Already in the 18th century, the Italian language began to be considered as a language of culture due to both literary production and the action of the Accademia della Crusca², and the international *lingua franca* was increasingly represented by French. Latin, therefore, began to lose its cultural and international role, and the “grammatical madness” (Montaigne, tr. 2012) raged and teaching methods were even judged harmful and “shameful wastes of time” (Alfieri, 1996) by eminent personalities of the time, such as Alfieri and Montaigne.

3. From the Casati Law to the Gentile Reform: The Primacy of Latin

3.1 The Casati Law

The Casati Law (November 13, 1859, law n.3725), in this cultural and didactic context, centered on rigid methods and the pedantic study of Latin grammar, marks an epochal turning point for education in the Kingdom of Italy, introducing compulsory schooling for the first time and a system of secondary education that, developed in Piedmont, was extended to the entire peninsula from 1861, albeit encountering regional resistance and peculiarities. Characterized by a formalistic didactic approach and the meticulous study of Latin grammar, Title III of the law was fully implemented only in some areas of the country until the advent of the Gentile reform (1923). The disciplinary teaching for upper secondary education was thus outlined, divided into five years for the first level and three for the second, with a significant focus on Italian and Latin followed by history, mathematics, and Greek, reserving, over the eight years, a pre-eminent role for the study of Latin and Greek and attributing an overwhelming superiority to the humanities, which occupied 80% of the curriculum, compared to the sciences, confined to the remaining 20% (with a progression from 9% in the *ginnasio*³ to 36% in the *liceo*⁴).

² The Accademia della Crusca was founded in Florence between 1582 and 1583 and is one of the main points of reference for research on the Italian language.

³ Lower secondary school

⁴ Classical High School or Classical lyceum

Even a staunch opponent of Gabrio Casati like Pasquale Villari recognized the irreplaceable formative value of classical languages (Bertoni Jovine, 1976): from ages 11 to 19, character is formed and intellect is developed.

An approach known as *Formale Bildung* was advocated, aiming to form a rational and systematic mentality through intense intellectual exercise, in which the ancient languages served as the primary tool for refining logical and analytical skills, often, however, at the expense of a real understanding of the culture and civilization that had originated them, reducing the ancient world and its language to a mere repository of grammatical rules, thus mortifying its learning.

3.2 Some Reform Attempts

Casati's successors endeavored to reduce the importance of Latin. Mamiani suggested abolishing it from the lower secondary school, a proposal that was taken up by Coppino in 1867. However, it was only not until 1962, thanks to the intervention of Minister Gui, Latin became an optional subject in the unified lower secondary school, although it provided for the mandatory inclusion of “elements of Latin” in the Italian programs of the second year.

In 1890, Minister Boselli attempted, unsuccessfully due to procedural issues, to exclude it from the second year. Similar attempts were promoted by Martini in 1893 and Gallo in 1901, and Bianchi, in a famous speech in 1905, defined Latin in the early years of secondary school as a psychological and pedagogical error, a legislative fault, aggravated by the irrationality of methods, and his proposal for a *scuola media*⁵ with French instead of Latin was only debated. The programs of the pedagogue Aristide Gabelli, launched in 1888 by Boselli and implemented in 1894 and 1904, instead promoted a more practical and concrete didactic approach (Gabelli Programs: Royal Decree No. 5724 of September 25, 1888), based on direct experience and observation, rather than on the slavish memorization of abstract rules: the teachings of Rousseau and Pestalozzi are put into practice, they become didactic action.

In the period between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the study of Latin remained the prerogative of a literate and urban élite, closely linked to the processes of industrialization and modernization. Illiteracy gradually decreased in the North from 1861 to 1901, but persisted at worrying levels in the South (Balboni, 2009). Prominent intellectuals such as Lombardo Radice, Villari, and Salvemini firmly opposed the abolition of Latin from *scuola media*, fearing a cultural impoverishment of education and the disappearance of a distinctive element between the ruling class and the rest of the population: Latin, therefore, is the dividing line between élite education and mass education, it is a political question and certainly not one of linguistic education. At the same time, there was a growing awareness of the need to emphasize Italian, history, and geography, considered essential disciplines, cornerstones of lower secondary education for the formation of aware and participatory citizens (Bianchi, 1905 in Cova, 1982).

⁵ Middle School

3.3 The Baccelli Programs

The programs of 1920, preceded by the Baccelli circular of 1919, harshly criticized the prevailing formalism in the teaching of classical languages, attributing to the excessive emphasis of the "false prejudice of the uselessness of classical studies" to the excessive weight of philology and grammar (Royal Decree of January 29, 1920, No. 150). A return to a more humanistic approach was hoped for, focused on the interpretation of texts and the rediscovery of the vital link between Latin and the Italian language. The debate on the teaching of Latin continued to animate the Italian cultural scene even if, during the fascist regime, more thought was given to its political value. Suffice it to say that in 1861, only 2.5% of the population spoke Italian fluently, while the illiteracy rate reached peaks of 90% in some regions of the country, and, paradoxically, the school programs for primary schools completely ignored dialects, promoting an aulic and rhetorical Italian, in line with Mussolini's communicative style.

3.4 The Gentile Reform and Fascism

The Gentile Reform of 1923, the result of the collaboration between the idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile and the pedagogue Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, represented a real revolution in the school system (Royal Decree No. 1054 of May 6, 1923), synthesizing idealism and principles of active pedagogy. Lombardo Radice condensed learning as a moral act of Gentile, the speaking well is thinking clearly of idealist and Croce's matrix, and his conception of linguistic education as a school of sincerity, recalling Rousseau and Pestalozzi already present in Gabelli's programs.

The precept is always negative: do not repeat passively (that is, do not stun with the words yourself and others); do not 'embellish' (express what you feel with naked simplicity). (Lombardo Radice, 1913, p. 152). He anticipates: the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky regarding language learning, considering this as the result of imitation and individual creation; Selinker's interlanguage (1972), defined as an innate and time-varying linguistic system, and Pallotti's (1988), a real linguistic system, with its rules and logic; Chomsky's *Language Acquisition Device* and Bruner's *Language Acquisition Support System*, arguing that the school should help the student in the spontaneous formation of linguistic rules (Lombardo Radice, 1913). For these reasons, De Mauro defines him as the true great philosopher of the Italian language of the first quarter of the century (1980, p. 102).

The school of the liberal Gentile and Lombardi Radice was initially viewed with interest by Mussolini, who defined it "the most fascist of reforms" because it was an aristocratic, elitist school aimed at fostering the development of freedom as a category of the spirit but not, as he interpreted it, a classist school for the socio-economic and political-party aristocracy, but freedom of teaching and the school as a place of authentic training and selection of the ruling class were the principles of Gentile's idealist pedagogy.

Regarding classical languages, with the Gentile reform, the *ginnasio* offered 34 hours of Latin per week compared to 37 in 1860. At *Liceo classico*⁶, there was a marked increase in hours of both Latin and Greek, proceeding from 13 hours per week of Latin and Greek to 11 of Latin alone. In *ginnasio* there were 31 hours of Italian against

⁶ Classical High School or Classical Lyceum

33 of Latin, in *Liceo classico* the three languages had equal weight, while in *Liceo scientifico* the weight of Latin was greater than that of Italian, as well as in the lower technical school; finally, Latin was present in the first two years of the agricultural institute and the institute for accountants. Among the various actions there was also the institution of *Liceo scientifico*, anticipated in some way by law 21 July 1911, n. 860, a school that gave more space to scientific culture and modern languages, while still remaining a predominantly humanistic approach.

Gentile emphasized the cultural aspect, also in its anthropological sense, over mere linguistic knowledge, and integrated the classics into a project of citizen formation: the classical world should be studied and known because it represents a model of discipline and serenity. Soon after Gentile's resignation in 1924, following the Matteotti affair, the reform was modified, not in its structure but primarily in its spirit, so much so that the former minister called it a betrayal, and it was Ministers De Vecchi and Bottai who configured the real "fascist school" in the 1930s.

Lombardi Radice and Gentile seem forgotten in Bottai's School Charter of 1939: Latin is linked to the future of the intelligences, it colours them, it is indispensable for education, it is useful for the Italian language and Romanity, it offers logic and philosophy, and is a selective means of moral and mental formation (Bottai, 1939). In this reform, didactics is a competition between the student and the language to be learned, in which he is left to himself, Darwinistically (Balboni, 2009, p.59).

4. The decline of Latin in Post-World War II Italy: Policies and school Reforms

After Bottai, with Latin responding to a political need and popular schools combatting against illiteracy, education was stabilized under Christian Democratic ministers and reforms culminating in that conceived by Aldo Moro. In the post-war period, Carleton Washburne brought Dewey's activism: individualized teaching based on problem-solving, pleasure in learning, playful methodology, and socialization, elements later found in Ministerial Decree 9/2/1979, part IV, art. 5. In 1948, the Constitution was approved, containing three important articles: Article 6 on linguistic minorities, and Articles 33 and 34 on educational organization.

Regarding classical languages, the debate focuses on school policy: Latin became "good/bad," "useful/useless," "democratic/classist," etc. Latin continued to be advocated and supported by the Christian Democrats and by Concetto Marchesi (Italian Communist Party), who wanted it in a single compulsory *scuola media*, free for all, opposing his party and framing the question in cultural terms, arguing that this discipline should not be confined to the narrow halls of the *liceo* and directed at a predestinate élite. At the legislative level, no significant positions were taken. However, these would be years of political warfare over the reform of the Italian school system and the teaching of Latin, focusing attention on its cultural education, not its linguistic aspect (Bruni, 2005).

The bill by Minister Gonella of July 13, 1951, written through a participatory method, for example, was presented to the Chamber of Deputies and never discussed. The text, with the human person at the centre, the principle of equality, freedom of teaching, did not modify the tripartite *scuola media* but reduced its disciplinary program, streamlined and focused on reading the classics, and the educational organization,

especially of the *liceo classico*, reducing Latin in both the *liceo classico* and the *liceo scientifico*.

Subsequent ministers supported Latin, even if its elimination in the liturgy, the 25% decrease in the first classes of the *licei* and *scuole magistrali*⁷ as early as 1952, and some proposals aimed at establishing a single middle school without Latin, had a significant impact. In 1959, Moro, with draft law no. 359, while favouring the teaching of Latin in *scuola media*, tried to abolish the written test from Italian into Latin in the examination for the *licenza media*⁸, and in 1977 it was definitely abolished.

4.1 From the unified middle school to the Glottodidactic Revolution: the eclipse of Latin

1962 was the year of the unified *scuola media*, in which students should not have to choose one's fate at eleven years old, and in which Latin disappears as a compulsory subject, but in the second year, the Italian program includes “elements of the Latin language”, compulsory, taught through a comparative approach with the aim of enriching the vocabulary and giving a diachronic dimension to Italian, and in the third year Latin became optional, mandatory for those wishing to enroll in the *liceo classico*. Law No. 1859 of December 31, 1962, implements Article 34 of the Constitution, and the process of mass schooling of Italians begins: without the study of Latin. The *querelle* “Latin yes and Latin no,” “Latin language for the élite or for the masses” would then come to an end in 1977 with law no. 348 of Minister Spadolini, which sanctioned the definitive disappearance of Latin from the then middle school, and with the subsequent elaboration of the programs in 1979. The positions of Gramsci, Marchesi, and Don Milani, who supported the importance of teaching Latin in *scuola media* and for all, were now far. However, these years focused on the cultural education of Latin through a reflection on methods, objectives, and knowledge.

The 1960s and 1970s were those of the glottodidactic revolution, in which classical languages were definitively isolated in favour of modern ones. Sociolinguistics and pragmalinguistics dominated the scenario of those years, marking the teaching of Italian and foreign languages, and it would be seen how even the legislation would follow this direction, promoting the study of foreign languages in Italy.

The focus shifted to Italian and English, on the debate between Pasolini's “future” technological Italian (1964) and Calvino's internationalized Italian (Parlangeli, 1971). In the years of globalization (1980s), Latin was only vaguely mentioned in the reformist projects of the various ministers, in favour of the foreign language, and with the Falcucci reform in 1985, the study of a foreign language was introduced from the third grade of elementary school, giving it a formative value.

5. Latin in the era of globalization and digitalization

The Brocca programs distinguished themselves by their tendency to search for contemporary elements in the ancient world, identifying modern trends in classical references. These programs were formulated by the Commission chaired, since 1986, by the Undersecretary for Public Education Beniamino Brocca and published in 1991

⁷ normal schools or teachers' colleges

⁸ lower secondary school certificate or middle school diploma

and 1992. The text reinforced the invitation to trace in the study of the classics the relevance of the message and provided for the presence of Latin in the four high school curricula—classical, scientific, linguistic, and socio-psycho-pedagogical—each with distinct aims, methodologies, and content (Bruni, 2005).

In the *liceo linguistico*⁹, Latin allowed the analysis of modern languages and fostered awareness of their historicity through analogical and contrastive comparison. In the socio-psychological-pedagogical high school (*liceo socio-psico-pedagogico*), Latin contributed to the analysis of expression and the formation of aesthetic taste, connecting literature with culture and civilization. In the *Liceo scientifico*, Latin provided an essential historical perspective for understanding the traditions of thought and for mastering the intellectual language underlying scientific knowledge. In the *liceo classico*, the study of Latin and Greek enriched the linguistic and literary experience and enabled students to comprehend the origins and developments of European culture in all its manifestations.

The Commission's "*Piani di studio*" were detailed, innovative, and complex, focusing on the linguistic aspect, connections with other disciplines, civilization, the centrality of text analysis, and a sense of historical connection, even though the total hours dedicated to Latin decreased: from 22 to 20 hours in the *liceo classico* and from 20 to 17 in the *liceo scientifico*, and 16 hours in the new *linguistico* and *socio-psico-pedagogico*.

Although Latin did not have a central role, the Brocca programs clearly articulated the aims of each course of study and of the discipline, arguing that the teaching of Latin strengthened and developed: linguistic competence; awareness of Latin's historical role as the language of European culture; objectification and formalization of linguistic structures; direct access, through texts, to a heritage of civilization and thought; broadening of the historical horizon; critical awareness of the relationship between Italian and Latin; capacity for linguistic-theoretical reflection as a historically concluded language, which allows reflection on consolidated linguistic phenomena, but not exhausted, which refers to the role of the classical language in the semantics and syntax of modern languages. This dual aspect allowed for the establishment of the foundations for a teaching (educational ap, didactics) approach based on Latin and modern languages contrast and on diachronic comparison (Balbo, 2023).

The programs were thus a fusion of knowledge and skills, including translation skills, and Latin, seen as a comprehensive educational discipline, eschewed the grammatical pedantry of previous decades to be a "trait d'union" with European culture and languages.

Following the decrease of hours in courses of study in which there was already Latin and its inclusion in new high school pathways, such as the *linguistico*, Luigi Berlinguer also moved in the same direction with the Essential Basic Contents, developed in 1998 by a commission of experts appointed by him, which proposed, the study of the Latin language only in the classical-humanistic address and the knowledge of classical culture in all courses of the high school curricula, as a fundamental element of Italian and European identity. (Flocchini, 1999) While recognizing Latin's important formative and cultural value, Latin is proposed as an optional subject, in a secondary school that has disciplines such as Italian, foreign languages, mathematics, and history in common.

⁹ Language High School or Linguistic Lyceum

The Moratti reform, Law No. 53 of March 28, 2003, went in the opposite direction, repealing Berlinguer's Law No. 30 of February 10, 2000, which did not mention classical languages and focused on English, and also in Legislative Decree No. 226 of October 17, 2005, with the Specific Learning Objectives, the number of hours of Latin was reduced: 20 hours at the classical high school, 10 at both the scientific and human sciences high schools, 6 hours at the linguistic high school.

In the wake of foreign languages and the downsizing of classical languages, there was the so-called Gelmini reform, Presidential Decree No. 89 of March 15, 2010, which modified the structure of high school education, establishing the *Liceo scientifico* with an Applied Sciences (*scienze applicate*) option that provided for the abolition of the study of Latin.

The new curricula provide for a remodulation of the hours of Latin in the different high schools, with an overall reduction compared to the past: 22 hours *classico*, 4 *linguistico*, 15 *scientifico*, 12 *scienze umane*¹⁰.

One hundred and fifty years after the Casati Law, the Gelmini Law provided for a *Liceo scientifico* course without Latin, the abandonment of Latin in the final three years of the linguistic high school, and a reduction in hours.

The 2015 "Good School" (*Buona Scuola*) reform (Law 107) and the 2021 National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) also went in the direction of digitalization and internationalization, reducing the educational value of Latin. The so-called "Good School" also focused on autonomy, teacher training, and school-work alternation, and the subsequent Legislative Decree April 13, 2017, No. 60 promoted art and humanistic culture, providing for theoretical and practical activities, achievable through curricular paths or extracurricular initiatives, in collaboration with cultural institutions and places. It is clear, therefore, how the focus is not on the pedagogical and didactic aspects but on the organizational ones and those of connection with the territory.

In continuity with Law 107, the Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), approved on July 13, 2021, introduced training courses aimed at enhancing teachers' language skills and improving their teaching methodology skills.

Various reforms are planned, with investments in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), digital, and multilingual competencies, emphasizing modern foreign languages and technology without a theoretical or pedagogical foundation.

The "Futura-the school for the Italy of tomorrow" Program, at the base of mission 4 "Education and research" of the PNRR, aims to create a new educational system that ensure the right to study and digital skills, overcoming any type of inequalities, combating school dropout, educational poverty and territorial gaps, and neglecting the role of Latin in the cultural and intellectual formation of students. Several reforms are planned, and investments will also be made in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), digital and multilingual skills, highlighting the attention to modern foreign languages and technology, without a theoretical and pedagogical substratum.

In summary, in Italy, over the years, political institutions have significantly modified high school curricula. Just think of the 37 weekly hours of Latin in the five years of *ginnasio* in 1860 with the Casati law, or the 34 hours in 1923 with the Gentile reform, comparing them with the current 22 of the *liceo classico*. The same happened in

¹⁰ Human Sciences High School or Humanities High School

the *liceo scientifico* of 1923, where Latin had the primacy of 15 hours even over Italian and mathematics (14 hours), compared to the current timetable of the traditional *liceo scientifico*, where mathematics is the main subject with 22 hours, followed by Italian with 20 hours, and Latin is assigned 15 hours, more than physics (13) [Table 1].

The weight of Latin from 1952 to 1990 was 15%, from 1990 to a few years ago 11%, while that of scientific subjects at the *liceo scientifico* has seen an increase of 11%. (Rossi, 1997; MPI, 2007).

Table 1. Latin teaching hours according to major reforms from 1860 to the present

	1860 Casati	1920 Gabelli/ Bacelli	1923 Gentile ¹¹	1991-1992 Brocca	2003 Moratti	2010 Gelmini
<i>Ginnasio</i>	37 (8,8,9,6,6)	33 (7,7,7,6,6)	34 (8,7,7,6,6)			
<i>Liceo classico</i>	3,2,2 (7)	12 (5,4,3)	11 (4,4,3)	20 (4,4,4,4,4)	22 (5,5,4,4,4)	22
<i>Liceo scientifico</i>			16 (4,4,4,4)	17 (4,4,3,3,3)	20 (4,5,4,4,3)	15 (3,3,3,3,3,)
<i>Istituto magistrale/Liceo socio-psico-pedagogico (Brocca)/Liceo scienze umane (Moratti)</i>			18 (6,6,6) corso inferiore 13 (5,4,4) corso superiore	16 (4,4,3,3,2)	15 (5,3,4,3)	12 (3,3,2,2,2)
<i>Liceo linguistico</i>				16 (4,4,3,2,3)	6 (3,3)	4 (2,2)

If we look at the *liceo scientifico* applied sciences option, which has been in effect since 2010 with the Gelmini reform, Latin disappears altogether, and this very address

¹¹<https://ia902306.us.archive.org/4/items/ApprovazioneOrariProgrammiRegieScuole1923/OrariProgrammiRegieScuole1923.pdf>

is the one to have an increase in enrollment, in the last ten years (from 2013/2014 to 2025/2026), of 3.50 percent, just as the courses of study that require compulsory Latin are in sharp decline (2,87%), especially the traditional *liceo scientifico*, with the exception of the humanities high school.

6. Conclusions

Latin undoubtedly constitutes an important element of the Italian education system, having been included in secondary school curricula since 1859 and allocated a significant number of teaching hours. Intellectuals have consistently underscored its formative and cultural value, emphasizing the importance of its teaching within a student's educational path.

The political and pedagogical debate accompanying educational reforms from 1859 to the present has been highly dynamic. Initially, Latin was considered as an élite language; later, some intellectuals argued that it should be taught for all. Ultimately, proponents of modern foreign languages, technical-scientific education, and vocational training prevailed, depriving Latin of the pedagogical principles upheld in previous decades.

The Casati Reform emerged in an Italy on the cusp of unification, with an extremely high illiteracy rate and (a population that primarily spoke regional dialects) where dialect was the language spoken by the majority. Politicians and scholars believed that Latin formed character and developed logical skills, aligning with the pedagogical principles of 18th- and 19th-century European, particularly the linguistic pedagogy of Rousseau and Pestalozzi. These ideas were implemented in the curricula developed by the pedagogue Aristide Gabelli in 1888: grammatical acquisition occurred through teacher input; pedagogical grammar was not prescriptive, but rather resulted from guided observation and metacognitive activities based on authentic samples (Balboni, 2009). Minister Guido Baccelli later (1920) introduced the inductive approach to grammar, asserting the necessity of direct contact with the texts of classical authors in order to understand and assimilate their spirit (essence): the formation of the pupil's spirit through the reading skills and interpreting Latin and Greek writers.

The year 1923 marked a further turning point with the reform led by idealist Giovanni Gentile and pedagogists Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, which combined liberal ideals, socialism, and idealism, prefiguring the theories of pedagogists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Chomsky, and Bruner. This reform was predicated on the notion that both teacher and student are unique individuals, even while remaining themselves, and that educators should tailor their lessons to the student's existing knowledge and capabilities. This reform also reinforced the importance of reading classical texts and the role of Latin was essential in shaping the human spirit: schools were to be sacred workshops of the spirit, and reading—even of classical texts—was considered crucial because it allowed young minds to recognize a single master in the voices of many.

Furthermore, this reform introduced the idea that Latin provides elements to the formation of historical consciousness, which is, in turn, human consciousness.

During the Fascist regime, Latin was seen only as useful for understanding the Italian language and Romanity, as well as being important for moral and intellectual development (Bottai, 1939). At the end of the Second World War, a fervent political debate began, lasting until the early 1960s, when the unified middle school was es-

tablished, and Latin was almost entirely abolished. This was a predominantly political and cultural debate that did not produce significant reforms, but it was animated by scholars, philosophers, and politicians who debated whether or not Latin should be included in the education of the future citizen and on its formative value.

Some supported the study of Latin, such as Antonio Gramsci, Concetto Marchesi, and Don Lorenzo Milani, while others favored scientific and technical education, such as Lucio Lombardo Radice, Alessandro Natta, and Giulio Preti, although with different reasons. Gramsci offered an interesting openness to educational disciplines beyond Latin and Greek, with a view to general education: Latin and Greek can be replaced, but a new subject or series of subjects must be didactically structured to achieve equivalent results in general education. (Gramsci, 2014); Marchesi argued the usefulness of Latin in the education of each individual, stating that it is useful for many things, even if not directly for anything of marked practical utility. (Marchesi, 1956); Don Milani reiterated the importance of the centrality of the word: Mastery of the means of expression is not separated from knowledge of the origins of the language (Don Milani in Piva, 2002).

Conversely, those who advocated scientific education: Giuseppe Lombardi Radice considered science as *historia vitae* (Lombardo Radice, 1913); Alessandro Natta highlighted an idea of education based on “scientific awareness” without considering Latin as essential (Natta, 1960); Giulio Preti then went so far as to lash out against the teaching of Latin, listing it among the useless subjects (Preti, 1945).

The Brocca Programmes (1991-1992) placed the student at the center of the Latin language teaching-learning activity, also through interdisciplinarity for more effective learning, ensuring that the student assumes the role of subject and is involved in order to maintain interest and strengthen motivation to learning. Furthermore, considering Latin a historically concluded and not exhausted language, these programs support the development of students' linguistic-theoretical reflection skills.

With Berlinguer and De Mauro classical languages play a cultural, social and technical formative function (Berlinguer, 2008); whoever, ignoring Latin and promoting its ignorance, thinks he is only kicking a tedious past, is kicking the present and also the future of our full capacity to communicate, understand each other (De Mauro, 2008).

The National Guidelines of 2003 saw the decline of previous pedagogical principles in favor of civil coexistence, autonomy, knowledge, and skills, and, with regard to Latin, the achievement of same objectives in different courses of study and with a different number of hours.

The paradigm shift in secondary education occurred with the Gelmini reform, which, with its National Guidelines, drew up a list of skills and specific objectives to be achieved through Latin language and culture. Since 2010, Latin has been consistently ignored, not included in the new curricular planning, and no longer contemplated in political debates.

Ultimately, everything could be condensed by quoting those who began to question the role of Latin in Italian schools and culture and those who currently do so: Latin is studied to accustom children to studying, to analyzing a historical body that can be treated as a corpse but which is continually recomposed in life. Latin and Greek can be replaced, but it will be necessary to know how to arrange the new subject didactically. In this period, learning must be disinterested, that is, not have

immediate practical goals: it must be formative, even if instructive, that is, rich in concrete knowledge (Gramsci, 2014); classical culture must truly be for everyone and of everyone. For this reason, it would be interesting if some conceptual cores were introduced starting from primary education and the placement of Latin elements in middle school should be re-considered in order to strengthen the students' linguistic education of students (Balbo, 2023).

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