



Teacher education is a deeply pedagogical process rooted in values, ethics, and the social purpose of schooling. Globally, it sits at the core of educational quality and fairness, as research in comparative and international education demonstrates: the training of teachers directly influences students' learning chances, social inclusion, and the democratic aims of schools. Teachers are not simply transmitters of curricula, but active professionals whose convictions, reflective skills, and ability to manage the complexities of classroom life give shape and substance to the educational experience itself.

The pedagogical dimension of teacher education frames teaching as a relational, context-aware, and ethically grounded profession rather than just a set of procedural skills. From a research perspective, this demands robust research methodologies that can critically examine the complex realities of schools and inform evidence-based policies. Equally important is the connection between theory and practice, which helps to bridge the persistent gap between universities and schools.

The contributions gathered in this volume reflect the richness and diversity of experiences showcased during the ATEE Spring Conference 2024, held at the University of Bergamo from May 29 to June 1, 2024. The volume presents 70 selected papers out of more than 300 presented by researchers representing over 40 countries.

This broad spectrum of studies highlights promising directions that can inspire renewed inquiry and concrete proposals aimed at improving contemporary educational systems.

FRANCESCO MAGNI is an Associate Professor of General and Social Pedagogy (PAED-01/A) at the Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Bergamo, Italy. He is a member of the board and Deputy Director of CQIIA (Center for the Quality of Teaching, Didactic Innovation, and Learning). He is also a member of the ATEE - Association for Teacher Education in Europe.

NICOLE BIANQUIN is an Associate Professor of Didactics and Special Education (PAED-02/A) at the Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of the Aosta Valley, Aosta, Italy. She is a member of the ATEE - Association for Teacher Education in Europe.

ATEE Spring Conference 2024

ATEE Spring Conference 2024

Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives

May 29th – June 1st, 2024
S. Agostino, Bergamo



Edited by Nicole Bianquin and Francesco Magni





UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI BERGAMO | Dipartimento
di Scienze Umane
e Sociali



CQIA

Centro per la Qualità dell'Insegnamento,
dell'Innovazione Didattica e dell'Apprendimento
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI BERGAMO



BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

ATEE Spring Conference 2024

Teacher education research in Europe:
trends, challenges, practices and perspectives

May 29th – June 1st, 2024

S. Agostino, 2 - Bergamo, Italy

Edited by Nicole Bianquin and Francesco Magni



Università degli studi di Bergamo

2025

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS ATEE Spring Conference 2024. Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives / Nicole Bianquin, Francesco Magni (edited by) - Bergamo: Università degli studi di Bergamo, 2025

ISBN: **978-88-97253-27-3**

DOI: [10.62336/unibg.978-88-97253-27-3](https://doi.org/10.62336/unibg.978-88-97253-27-3)

This publication is released under the Creative Commons
[Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives license \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)



© 2025 The Authors

<https://aisberg.unibg.it/handle/10446/309209>

An event organised by:

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, **University of Bergamo** // www.dsus.unibg.it

CQIIA – Centro per la Qualità dell’Insegnamento, dell’Innovazione didattica e dell’Apprendimento, **University of Bergamo** // www.cqia.unibg.it

ATEE – Association for Teacher Education in Europe // www.atee.education

In collaboration with:

Siped
Società Italiana di Pedagogia
fondata nel 1989

SIPED
Società Italiana di
Pedagogia

BAUHAUS4EU
European University Alliance

Bahuhus4EU
European University
Alliance



CIRSE
Centro italiano per la
ricerca storico
educativa

SIRD
Società Italiana di Ricerca Didattica

SIRD
Società Italiana di Ricerca
Didattica

SIPSE
SOCIETÀ ITALIANA
PER LO STUDIO DEL
PATRIMONIO
STORICO-EDUCATIVO

SIPSE
Società Italiana per lo
Studio del Patrimonio
Storico-Educativo

**COMENIUS
ASSOCIATION
COMENIUS**

Comenius Association
European Higher Education
Network of Teacher and
Social Education

sipeges
Associazione italiana di pedagogia generale e sociale

SIPeGeS
Società Italiana di
Pedagogia Generale e
Sociale

EFVET
European Forum
of Technical
and Vocational
Education and Training

EfVET
European forum of
Technical and Vocational
Education and Training

SIPeS
Società Italiana
di Pedagogia
speciale

SIPeS
Società Italiana di
Pedagogia Speciale

ETF
Working Together
Learning for All
European Training Foundation

ETF
European Training
Foundation

C.I.R.PED
Centro
Italiano di
Ricerca
Pedagogica

C.I.R.PED
Centro Italiano di
Ricerca Pedagogica

INVALSI

INVALSI
Istituto nazionale per
la valutazione del
sistema educativo di
istruzione e di
formazione

SIREF
Società Italiana di Ricerca Educativa e Formativa

SIREF
Società Italiana di
Ricerca Educativa e
Formativa

**Ufficio
Scolastico
Territoriale
di Bergamo**

**Ufficio Scolastico
Territoriale di Bergamo**

Conference Chair

Nicole Bianquin, associate professor in Special Education, University of the Aosta Valley, ATEE member;

Francesco Magni, associate professor in Education, University of Bergamo, ATEE member.

Scientific committee

Adolfo Scotto Di Luzio, Vice-Rector for Didactics, Guidance and Placement, University of Bergamo, Italy

Marco Lazzari, Head of the Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Bergamo, Italy (until September 2024).

Anna Maria Falzoni, Director of CQIIA - Centre for Teaching Quality, Teaching Innovation and Learning, University of Bergamo, Italy

Maria Assunção Flores, University of Minho, Portugal

Joanne Banks, Trinity College of Dublin, Ireland

Federica Baroni, University of Bergamo, Italy

Tore Bernt Sorensen, University of Glasgow,

Scotland (UK)

Paolo Bertuletti, University of Bergamo, Italy

Serenella Besio, University of Bergamo, Italy

Antonio Borgogni, University of Bergamo, Italy

T.J. Ó Ceallaigh, University College Cork, Ireland;

ATEE AC member

Monica Crotti, University of Bergamo, Italy

Linda Daniela, University of Latvia, Latvia

Dietmar Frommberger, University of Osnabrück,

Germany

Paola Gandolfi, University of Bergamo, Italy

Mabel Giraldo, University of Bergamo, Italy

Etti Gordon Ginzburg, Oranim College of Education,

Israel

Michiel Heijnen, Marnix Academy, Netherlands; ATEE

AC President

Erika Kopp, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary;

ATEE AC member

Marta Kowalczyk-Walędziak, University of Białystok,

Poland

Anna Lazzarini, University of Bergamo, Italy

Hagen Lehmann, University of Bergamo, Italy

Nicola Lovecchio, University of Bergamo, Italy

Gale MacLeod, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

(UK)

Fernando Marhuenda Fluixá, Universitat de València, Spain

Alessandra Mazzini, University of Bergamo, Italy

Sara Nijs, Leuven University, Belgium,

Katrin Poom-Valickis, University of Tallinn, Estonia

Andrea Potestio, University of Bergamo, Italy

Evelina Scaglia, University of Bergamo, Italy

Johannes Karl Schmees, Norwegian University of

Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway

Leah Shagrir, Levinsky College of Education, Israel;

ATEE AC member

Olena Shyyann, Lviv State University of Physical

Culture, Ukraine; ATEE AC member

Vasileios Symeonidis, Pädagogische Hochschule

Freiburg, Germany

Ronny Smet, Karel de Grote University of Applied

Science and Arts, Belgium; RDCs Coordinator of

ATEE

Agnieszka Szplit, Jan Kochanowski University of

Kielce, Poland; ATEE AC Vice-President

Elena Theodoropoulou, University of the Aegean,

Greece

Philippe Tremblay, Université de Laval, Québec

Vidmantas Tūtlys, Academy of Education, Vytautas

Magnus University, Lithuania

Wieland Wermke, Stockholm University, Sweden

Mara Westling Allodi, Stockholm University, Sweden

Jenny Wilder, Stockholm University, Sweden

Rano Zakirova Engstrand, Stockholm University,

Sweden

Organizing committee

Virginia Capriotti, University of Bergamo

Sara Cecchetti, University of Bergamo

Federico Chiappetta, University of Bergamo

Emilio Conte, University of Bergamo

Ester Guerini, University of Bergamo

Paolo Lazzaroni, University of Bergamo

Alice Locatelli, University of Bergamo

Isabel Maggiarra, University of Bergamo

Fabio Sacchi, University of Bergamo

Arianna Taravella, University of Bergamo

Table of contents

Introduction

Francesco Magni, Nicole Bianquin, *Back to the Core: Rediscovering the Power of Teacher Education Research* 7

Teacher education and pedagogical perspective in uncertain times: history, theory, policies and practices

Brigitta Bekesi, Eva Ulbrich, Tony Houghton, Jana Trgalova & Zsolt Lavicza, *The Reflected Double Tetrahedron Model: Project-based learning in teacher training* 11

Andrea Dessardo, «*The Italian didactic secret*». *Teachers' education according to Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice's thought* 19

Ylenia Falzone & Alessandra La Marca, *Lifelong Learning for Mongolia: Occupational Health & Safety project (3L4MHOS)* 25

Ylenia Falzone, Benedetta Miro & Elif Gülbay, *Teachers and Artificial Intelligence: Developing Digital Citizenship Skills* 31

Eleonora Florio, Tanu Biswas, Ilaria Castelli & Letizia Caso, *Bleak Pedagogy: A new term unveiled from research on Adultcentrism* 38

Deirdre Harvey & Maria Campbell, *Promoting and supporting learner resilience in the hospital school* 44

Aggelos Kavasakalis & Angeliki-Despoina Varouxi, *Reasons and beliefs of (Greek) teachers for participating in an MSc relevant to their profession* 54

Semih Kaygisiz & Hanife Akar, *Challenges Head to Train Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teachers* 62

Sabina Leoncini, *Gender Stereotypes between School and Guidance: A Look at European Regulations and Vocational Education in Italy* 69

Silvia Maggiolini & Elena Zanfroni, *Emergency and people with intellectual disabilities. Teachers' training in the LEBEL proposal* 77

Cristina Miralles-Cardona, María C. Cardona-Moltó & José M. Esteve-Faubel, <i>Gender-responsive teaching: What strategies are teacher educators using for gender mainstreaming implementation?</i>	83
Benedetta Miro & Alessandra La Marca, <i>Service Learning in teacher education for soft skills development</i>	93
Georgia Natsiou & Melpomeni Tsitouridou, <i>Reflecting together online and offline: A systematic review on the types of peer reflection activities in teacher education</i>	102
Laura Parigi & Maria Elisabetta Cicognini, <i>Exploring the Transformative Impact of Teacher Professional Development on Student-Centered Assessment Approaches</i>	109
Francesca Pileggi, <i>Non-cognitive competence and critical-creative skills. A critical review of the current perspectives</i>	116
Francis J. Prescott-Pickup, <i>Finding a successful teacher identity: the role of the mentor-mentee relationship</i>	122
Nathanaili Valbona, <i>Analyzing poor academic performance of Albanian pupils in PISA</i>	129
Elena Zanfroni, <i>Problematic behaviours and classroom management: teachers' representations</i>	137

Teaching and learning challenges and professional development

Monica Banzato, <i>Attitudes of Humanities Students and Aspiring Teachers Toward Quantitative Educational Research: An Introductory Study</i>	146
Ane Bergersen, <i>Global awareness and professional teacher competence through student mobility from Norway to Zambia</i>	152
Barbara Bocchi, Elena Bortolitti & Paola Damiani, <i>Informal Support Teacher Networks: training and self-training between Communities of Practice</i>	160
Barbara Bocchi, Elena Bortolitti, Paola Damiani, Giuseppe Filippo Dettori & Barbara Letteri, <i>The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in inclusive learning: an exploratory investigation</i>	167
Virginia Capriotti, <i>The Impact of Teaching and Learning Centers (TLCs) on Initial Teacher Education Programs in Italy</i>	176
Giorgia Coppola, <i>From Burnout toward Pedagogical Teacher Education. A communities perspective</i>	183
Alexandra Efstathiades, Christiane Gesierich, Christian Rudloff & Anna Kapsalis, <i>FOOTT PRINTTS: Advancing Quality Standards in Teacher Training</i>	189

Elena Gabbi, Ilaria ancillotti & Maria Ranieri, <i>Rethinking digital competences for teaching in the Post-Covid Era: A participatory approach</i>	197
Marco Giganti, <i>Emergency Remote Teaching and Teacher Training: The Role of Implicit Beliefs in Lasting Educational Change</i>	205
Hege Knudsmoen & Mette Birgitte Helleve, <i>Develop teachers' professional identity through global internship</i>	212
Charlotte Kohlloffel, <i>Opening the black box of writing instruction in times of change: insights from Italian secondary school teachers</i>	220
Regine Lehberger, <i>A learning-design to promote reflection and digital media skills for professionalisation of teacher students</i>	229
Marica Liotino, Taiwo Isaac Olatunji, Marianne Grace Araneta, & Monica Fedeli, <i>Reflective Practice in MOOCs: Exploring the Role of Tutors and Fostering Teacher Professional Development</i>	236
Cristina Lisimberti & Katia Montalbetti, <i>Guiding students from lower to upper secondary: a challenging and shared task for families and schools</i>	244
Sabrina Natali, <i>Rethinking teacher training in emotional education through sports</i>	256
Sara Nosari & Emanuela Guarcello, <i>The question of non-cognitive skills and the cheetah's coat perspective</i>	262
Alessandro Oro, Ira Vannini & Elisa Guasconi, <i>A formative assessment framework to develop primary school pre-service and in-service teachers' video analysis programs</i>	271
Federica Pelizzari & Simona Ferrari, <i>Exploring Coding and Educational Robotics in Primary Schools. Results and Perspectives from an Action Research Approach to Teaching Innovation</i>	278
Annfrid Rosey & Tove Leming, <i>Internationalization in Teacher Education: How can student practice in Southern Africa contribute to strengthening the professional work as teachers in Northern Norway?</i>	293
Stefano Spennati, <i>Educating on complexity at the time of transition</i>	300
Chiara Urbani, <i>Collaborative and epistemic advances: a study on teacher agency</i>	305
Gerd Wikan, <i>Global Teachers and Practicum in the Global South. A study of Long-Term Impact of International Practicum in Namibia</i>	312
Franco Zengaro & Sally A. Zengaro, <i>Teachers Reflect on Their Identities as Former Students and Future Teachers</i>	318
Sally A. Zengaro & Franco Zengaro, <i>Supporting Active Learning in Online Learning: Creating a Culture of Care</i>	326

Inclusion in teaching and learning processes and school improvement

Luca Angelone & Federica Festa, <i>Cultivating Inclusive Education: A Collaborative Journey of Secondary School Teachers in Promoting Cognitive and Linguistic Accessibility through Picture Books and AAC</i>	333
Luca Ballestra Caffaratti, Cecilia Marchisio, Alessandro Monchietto, Alessandro Zanzo & Marco Secchia, <i>The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Secondary Schools: Experiences in Initial Teacher Training</i>	340
Daniele Bullegas & Martina Monteverde, <i>Theory into practice: exploring teacher perceptions about Early Intervention in the Italian school system</i>	346
Sara Cecchetti & Nicole Bianquin, <i>The work plan (Plan de Travail) as an educational device that addresses everyone's needs. A survey of teachers' and pupils' perspectives</i>	354
Federica Cilia, Jeanne Kruck, Marie-Hélène Plumet & Mélina Dell'armi, <i>Well-Being and Social Participation of Autism Spectrum Disorder Students at University: the impact of Atypie Friendly Inclusion Program</i>	362
Alice Di Leva & Federica Festa, <i>The Student Voice in teacher training, an investigation into the inclusiveness of European practices</i>	370
Ilaria Folci & Anna Monauni, <i>Differentiation in Preschool. Pedagogical Issues and Best Practices</i>	378
Mabel Giraldo & Fabio Sacchi, <i>Planning the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities: knowledge, perceptions, challenges from STRADE teacher training program</i>	384
Jørgen Klein, Ann Sylvi Larsen & Tove Grete Lie, <i>'People are people' - An investigation of long-term impacts of an international practicum</i>	393
Daniela Maccario & Annamaria Garibaldi, <i>Helping to learn. What are good practices of educational intervention? Structure and preliminary results of a participatory research study</i>	400
Cecilia Marchisio & Alessandro Monchietto, <i>Improving Inclusive Education: The Turin Model of Collaboration between Schools, Universities and Communities</i>	405
Francesca Placanica, Rosa Sgambelluri & Alessandra Priore, <i>Life Designing and inclusive prospects in Italian schools</i>	411
Ilaria Ravasi, <i>Preventing early school leaving. Perspectives of intervention research between school and territory</i>	417

Digital innovation and artificial intelligence (AI): schools, teachers and students between real and virtual world

Valentina Berardinetti, Michele Ciletti, Andreana Lavanga & Giusi Antonia Toto, <i>Digital Innovation and Artificial Intelligence in Museum Education: perspectives, debates and psychological implications</i>	424
Roxana-Madalina Cristea, <i>Investigating the Relationships between In-service Teachers' Technology Pedagogy Content Knowledge and Virtual Learning Environment Success</i>	432
Francesca De Vitis & Marcello Tempesta, <i>Touch in small hands. Responding to the challenges of technology in childhood 0-6</i>	439
Silvia Larghi & Edoardo Datteri, <i>Programming errors and the attribution of intentionality to educational robots</i>	445
Juliana Elisa Raffaghelli, Francesca Crudele, Laura Foschi & Graziano Cecchinato, <i>Let me introduce open education... Facilitating Prospective teachers' understanding of open Education through an ai-based tool</i>	453
Alice Roffi, <i>Digital technologies and collaborative activities for science teaching in the upper secondary school: a qualitative study on teacher's perspective</i>	464
Alice Roffi, Gabriele Biagini, Stefano Cuomo & Maria Ranieri, <i>Development of teachers' competences on Learning Design and on supporting student's Self-Regulated Learning in the lower secondary school</i>	472
Marcello Tempesta, <i>Teacher education and motivation culture</i>	481

School & work and the role of teachers in Vocational Education and Training

Maria Concetta Carruba, Mariateresa Cairo & Magdalena Tsoneva, <i>Comparative Analysis of Inclusive Education Practices in Italy and Bulgaria: Reflections from the Erasmus Plus ASuMIE Project</i>	488
Valerio Ferrero, <i>Teacher Education as a Game Changer: Non-Traditional Factors of Inequality and the Role of Teachers for Equity</i>	494
Anna Granata & Valerio Ferrero, <i>Beyond Patriarchy: Teaching Profession, Gender Issues and Teacher Education in Italy</i>	502
Paola Zini & Dalila Raccagni, <i>Teacher training and well-being best practices: the 3H project</i>	508



POSTER SESSION

Antinea Ambretti, Chiara Gamberini & Arianna Fogliata, *Integration of the Sincrony method in physical education during school age in the digital era* 517

Francesca Finestrone, *Music as an inclusive tool for promoting a sustainable Culture* 523

Francesca Finestrone, Francesco Pio Savino, Leonardo Palmisano & Giusi Antonia Toto, *Nature Connection and Music in Early Education: Insights from the CNS-ch Scale and TEAL Methods* 532

Paula Matijašević, Bruno Matijašević, Ana Žnidarec Čučković & Vesna Babić, *Kinesiologists' and Coaches' Self-Assessment of Their Pedagogical Competences* 538

The contributions published in this book of proceedings have been evaluated through a double-blind peer review process. We would like to thank the members of the Scientific Committee, as well as the many other professors, researchers and experts who agreed to act as reviewers.

Guiding students from lower to upper secondary: a challenging and shared task for families and schools

Cristina Lisimberti, *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*, cristina.lisimberti@unicatt.it
Katia Montalbetti, *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*, katia.montalbetti@unicatt.it

Abstract

Within the Italian educational system, the transition from lower to upper secondary school constitutes a challenging task for many students; in this process teachers and parents play a strategic role. In this paper is presented a survey aimed at highlighting the process of decision-making related to upper secondary education from the perspective of parents. This empirical action is part of a broader project aimed to fight training failure in Varese (Lombardy). A semi-structured online questionnaire was submitted to all parents of students attending lower secondary school in Varese in 2022/23. The results show that the guidance practices carried on by school are generally appreciated by many parents. A closer look to the data shows possible areas of fragility that require schools to take on responsibility.

Keywords: school guidance; research; parents; secondary school.

1. Guidance in the Italian school system

In today's increasingly dynamic society, school guidance is crucial in lifelong learning and in every life context (lifewide learning). It is a complex challenge that requires the person to know how to position and reposition him/herself within fluid and uncertain scenarios, avoiding dispersion and/or fossilization in a static context (Haynes et al., 2014). Undoubtedly, the education system can and must play a fundamental role in creating favourable conditions for the development of these capacities from which the person benefits throughout his/her entire life.

Therefore, guidance is, or should be, cultivated throughout the school life cycle. From childhood, it is up to the school to provide students with the skills and knowledge to face the educational choices to which the same education system subjects them (Marostica, 2019); learning to ponder the different options and self-evaluation are strategic life skills to make conscious decisions both at school and in everyday life (Montalbetti, 2020). The Italian Guidelines for Guidance (C.M. 43/2009) tell us that "guiding an individual means making him/her acquire self-guidance skills, aimed at improving self-perception, making him/her capable of taking decisions and making choices consistent with his/her desires".

In order to fulfil this task, it is necessary to implement targeted guidance practices at certain topical moments, but also to implement guidance didactics in a widespread manner (Guerrini, 2017).

On a more general level, the Italian education system consists of three cycles. Compulsory attendance lasts 10 years (6-16 years) and includes the entire duration of the first cycle and part of the second (the lower secondary school and the first two years of upper school) (L. 296/2006). The first cycle includes primary school, which lasts 5 years (6-11 years) and lower secondary school, which lasts 3 years (11-14 years); the second cycle coincides with upper secondary school (14-19 years), which lasts from 3 to 5 years and is articulated in different ways. The transition from the first to the second cycle marks the beginning of pathway differentiation.

After finishing lower school young people can choose between different types of upper school divided into three main macro-categories: high schools, technical schools, vocational schools and vocational training. All five-year training pathways allow access to university and technical higher education, while the three- and four-year pathways offer a direct outlet into the world of work.

Choosing a path is a complex task that requires a series of evaluations taking into account multiple factors. It is a moment of high emotional intensity and strategic value with regard to the developmental trajectories of young people, and is not infrequently accompanied by uncertainties, doubts and sometimes real difficulties. Although these are not irreversible choices, the decision to attend a high school rather than a technical or even professional pathway bears crucial implications for the future, at least in the short term. Unlike in other contexts (Brunello & Checchi, 2007), in Italy it is required to make this choice in January of the third year of lower secondary school, at an age still considered by many to be precocious, which can amplify difficulties and generate uncertainty.

For these reasons, guidance activities intensify in the last two years of lower school; in December of the third year the teachers of the class council must express a non-binding suggestion regarding the high school route suitable for the student. This suggestion is called 'guidance advice'; it is an administrative act (Settembrini, 2019) that teachers must obligatorily give in order to guide the choice of one of the paths offered for upper secondary schools. Despite being a nation-wide administrative act, the formulation of the advice is not based on uniform, standardized criteria, but is defined independently by each school (Romito, 2016).

Both the practices activated in each institute and the guidance advice do not have the child as the sole interlocutor but also involve the family in different ways. It is precisely the parents, spurred by different intentions, who assume a strategic role in directing their sons and daughters; it is enough to look at the data to realise that there is a sort of family tradition traceable in the regularity of paths between one generation and the next (Checchi, 2010; Bonizzoni et al., 2014; Argentin et al., 2017). Beyond the reasons that motivate parents, the choice of upper school, for better or worse, takes on the appearance of a family task; this does not mean that families always play an active role but their positions, from disinterest to over-involvement, exert considerable influence.

A good guidance advice should consider aptitudes, skills and aspirations, acting as a protective factor against the risk of school drop-out and abandonment (Dodd et al., 2022; Agostini et al., 2022). High

dropout and school abandonment rate is a structural problem of the Italian school system (European Commission, 2022) and frequently at its origin there are difficulties encountered precisely at career turning points and in the management of choices in these crucial moments (Agostini et al., 2022). In this perspective, guidance in secondary school is configured as an educational resource to prevent situations of failure and as a lever to counter the reproduction of educational inequalities (Psifidou et al., 2021).

2. Device

Within this briefly outlined framework took shape the research "What choice after lower secondary school? The point of view of families". The action is part of the Agreement between the Centre for Studies and Research on Education Policy of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and the Local School Authority in Varese (Italy). Starting from school year 2021/22, various actions have been planned and implemented with the aim of learning about and combating the phenomenon of educational poverty thanks to the synergic action between school and territory.

The evidence gathered in the previous year confirmed on an empirical level the link between the choice made at the end of lower school and the likelihood of showing, especially in the first year of upper school, signs of fragility that quite often lead to dropping out or leaving school due to a poor school performance. As already mentioned, in a choice that calls into question the educational responsibility of multiple subjects, the family plays a fundamental role. Therefore, it was decided to investigate the point of view of the families of children attending the last year of lower school in the aftermath of pre-enrolment in upper school. The academic research interest in deepening the theme converged with the local context.

The aim of the survey is to investigate the issue within a broad perspective, involving as many parents as possible; for this reason, a semi-structured questionnaire, administered online, was prepared and addressed to all parents of children attending the third year of lower secondary school. The questionnaire is divided into 6 sections:

- Profile (respondent and child);
- Choice of school;
- Guidance advice;
- Outgoing guidance (lower school);
- Incoming guidance (upper school);
- Needs and perceptions.

The invitation was sent by the Local School Authority in Varese to all schools, inviting third-year lower secondary class coordinators to put the link on the electronic register in order to encourage parents to complete the questionnaire. A second reminder was sent to raise the rate of respondents.

During the questionnaire period (February–March 2023), 2741 valid questionnaires were received, representing 31% of the students who pre-registered for upper school for the 2023/24 (n=8803). The coverage was consequently very good and the response rate higher than what is generally considered acceptable in surveys conducted via online questionnaires.

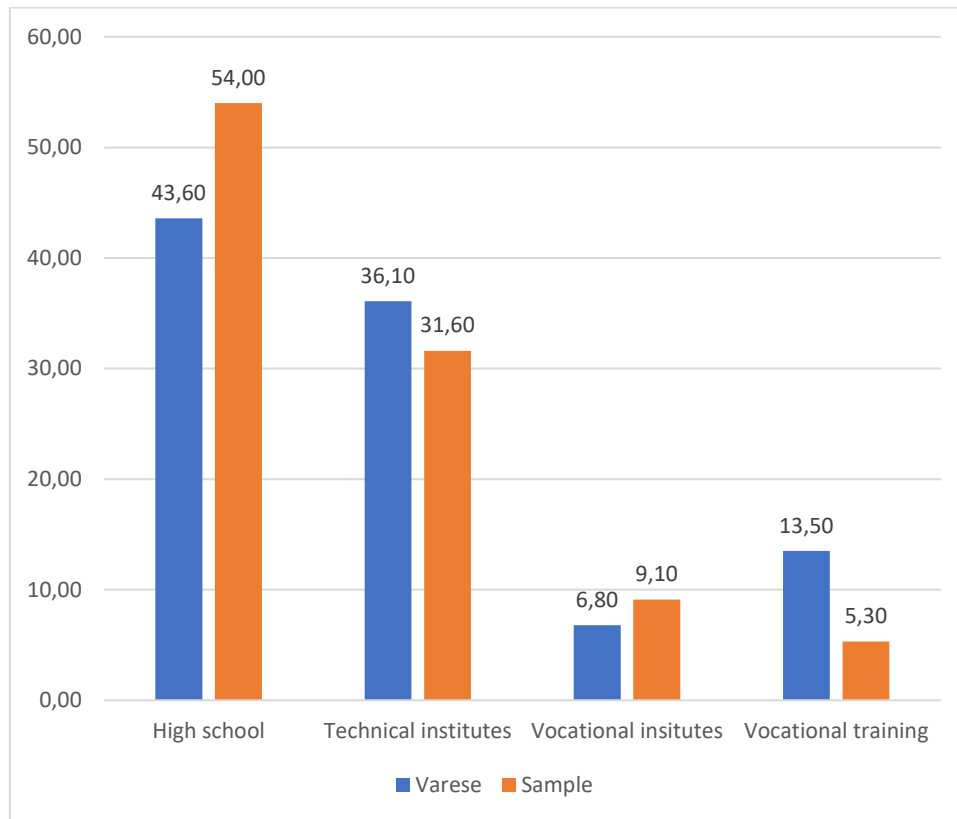
3. Data presentation

Below are the main results of the questionnaire grouped by area.

3.1 Profile of respondents

The questionnaire was generally filled in by the mothers (86.1%) of the students enrolled in the last year of lower school in Varese. The children, mainly of Italian nationality (97.6%), are equally divided between males and females and, in line with the expected age, are 13 or 14 years old (99.4%). A small

group is already 15 or 16 years old; among them may be students who failed in the lower classes (0.6%). The choice of type of school is clearly oriented towards high schools, which gather 54.0% of the respondents' preferences, followed by technical institutes (31.6%), vocational institutes (9.1%) and vocational training (5.3%). Compared to the 2023/24 enrolment data of the province of Varese¹, the sample is sufficiently evenly distributed (Chart 1).



Graphic 1: Upper secondary school type chosen: population comparison (Varese) – sample (%).

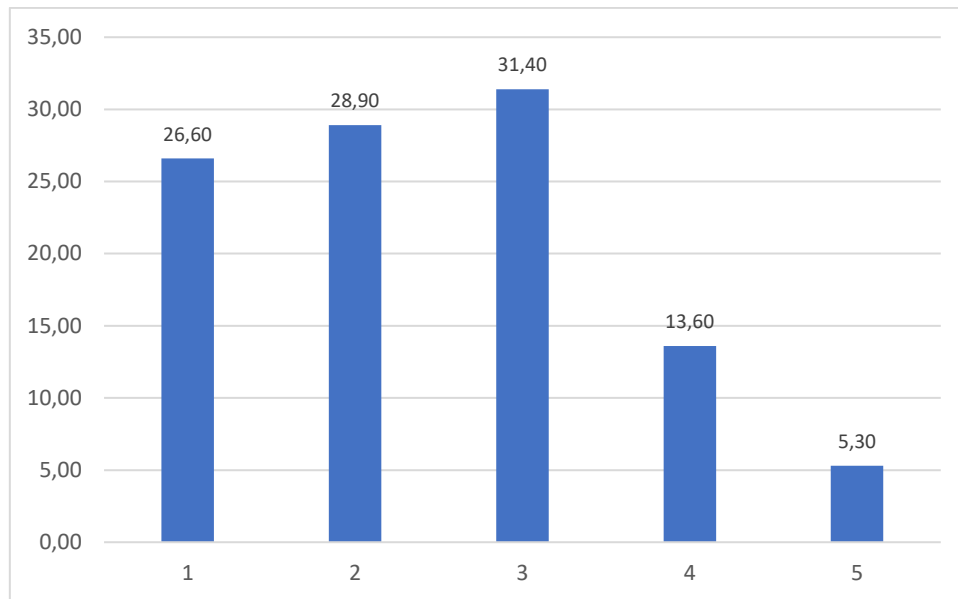
In most cases, students will be able to attend their chosen pathway (88.3%); 11.7% of the sample, however, had to change their initial choice. In particular, a small proportion of students (2.7%) will attend a pathway very different from the one chosen because they did not meet the school's requirements. Among these are also some students who received a different guidance advice from their lower school.

3.2 Choice of school

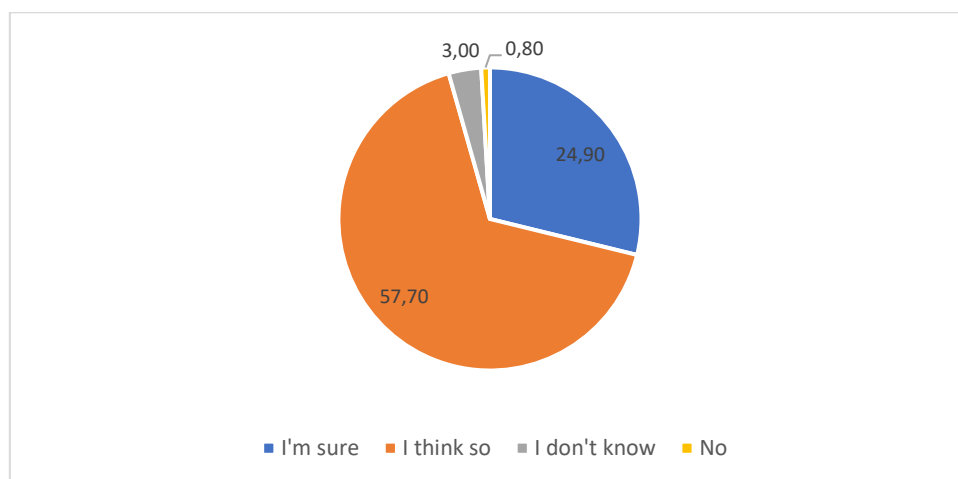
According to parents' perceptions, choosing an upper school was not particularly complex (Chart 2): for 49.5% it was not at all or not very complex (level 1 and 2), for about a third of the respondents it was quite complex (31.4%: level 3), for the remainder the decision was difficult or very difficult (18.9%: level 4 and 5). Given the educational perspective of this survey, it should be borne in mind that for almost one in five families the choice was perceived as rather complex and burdensome.

Consistently, after having made the choice but before the beginning of upper secondary school, most parents believe they made the right choice (86.2%); some, however, were very uncertain (3.0%) and a small number of parents, relevant from an educational perspective, believe a wrong choice was made (0.8%).

¹ Local School Authority in Varese (3.03.2023).



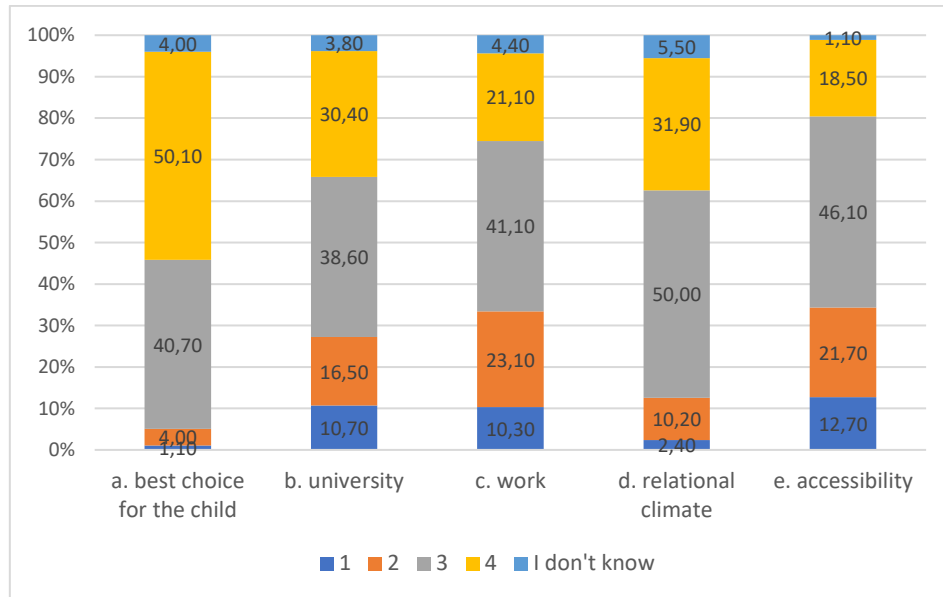
Graphic 2: Complexity of specific route choice (%).



Graphic 3: Perception of correctness of choice.

The factors underlying the choice of upper school were then investigated. The motivations reported are heterogeneous and reflect the complexity of the dimensions involved. What oriented the choice in a decisive way was the will to identify "the best path for one's son/daughter" (a), considered to be very important (level 4: 50.1%) by half of the respondents and overall important (level 3 + 4: 90.8%) by almost all of them. Other motivations refer to the scenarios that will open up after the end of compulsory schooling, such as: the preparation offered for access to university (b: 69%), which is in line with the choice of attending a high school made by more than half of the sample, and the possibility of finding a job soon (c: 62.2%).

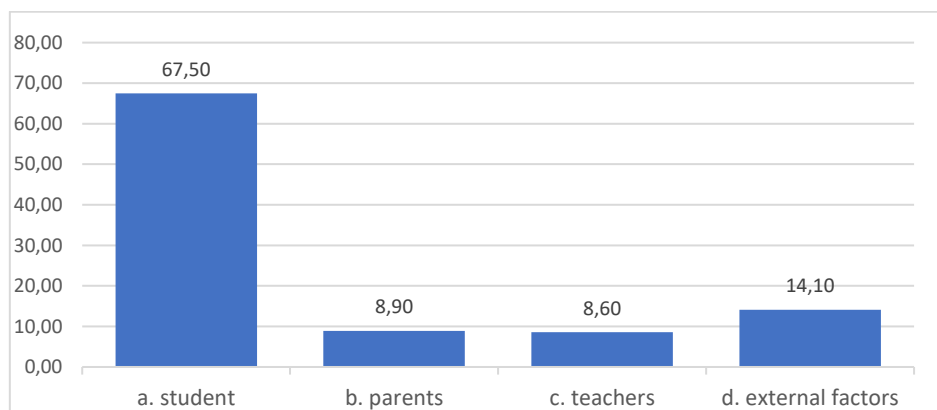
The specific characteristics of the institutions chosen are also relevant. The possibility of finding a serene and welcoming climate in the school is a relevant factor for almost all parents (d: 81.9%), confirming the importance attributed not only to the curricular dimension but also to the relational and educational one. The fact that the school is easily reachable (e: 64.6%), although taken into consideration, does not seem to be one of the main factors guiding the choice, at least for the majority of respondents.



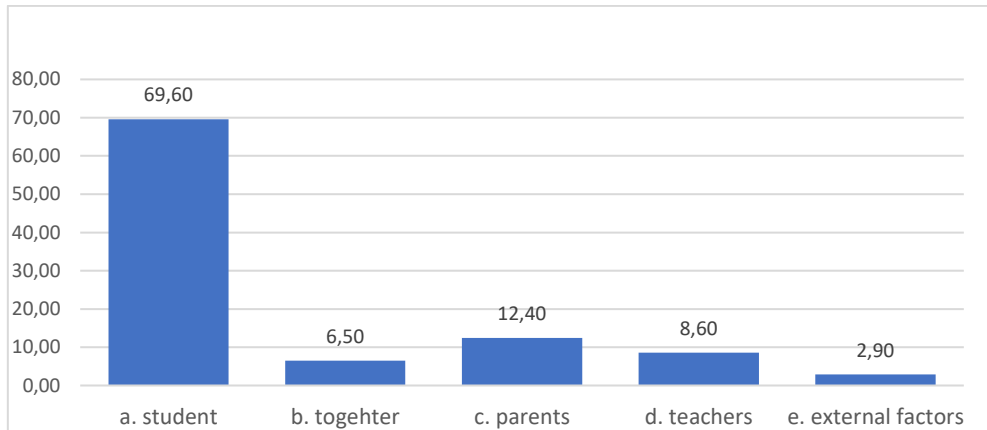
Graphic 4: Motivations that guided the choice (%).

In the parents' opinion (Chart 5), their children had sufficiently clear ideas about the choice of upper school: according to 67.5%, in fact, the children decided autonomously (a); in other cases, they were guided in their choice by their parents (b: 8.9%), teachers or others (c: 8.6%). Other parents, on the other hand, emphasised how the choice was somehow imposed by external factors (d: 14.1%) such as: the non-acceptance of the application, logistical problems or problems related to the school environment perceived as unsuitable.

Parents described their role in their child's choice in a manner consistent with the above (Chart 6): the majority placed their trust in their child, letting him/her decide independently (a: 69.6%) or deciding together (b: 6.5%). A significant proportion of parents, on the other hand, pondered on their own about the best choice, choosing in their child's place (c: 12.4%) or were guided by their middle school teachers or others (d: 8.6%). In some cases, the choice was induced by external motivations (e: 2.9%). These latter cases, although residual, must be taken into careful consideration because, for some, starting upper school could be more complex precisely because the school attended is not the outcome of a choice but of a contingency. Just as much attention should be paid to parents who seem to have decided in their children's stead in order to investigate the underlying reasons. Last but not least, the option chosen by the majority - i.e. allowing the children to be protagonists in the decision process - if, on the one hand, should be considered an indicator of trust, on the other, it could also indicate the difficulty of guiding and accompanying the child by choosing to welcome his/her decision without contradicting him/her, thus delegating parental educational responsibility.



Graphic 5: Child choice mode (%).



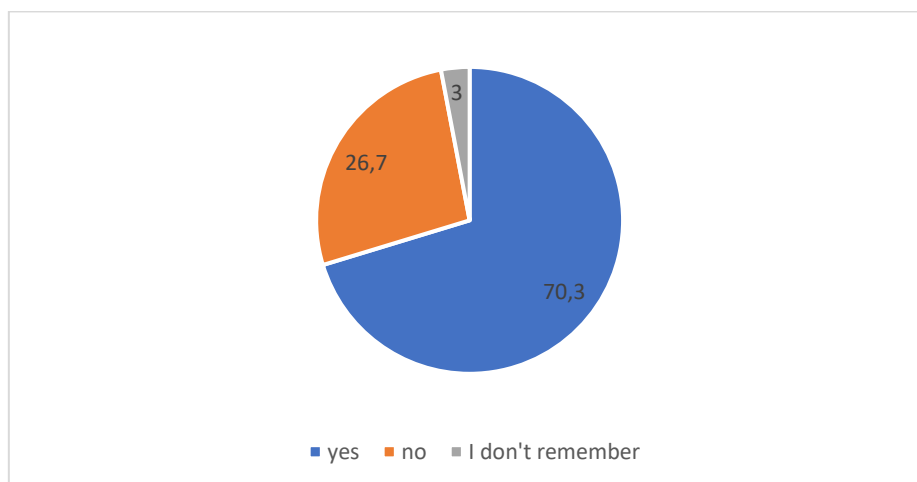
Graphic 6: Parental choice mode (%).

3.3 Guidance advice

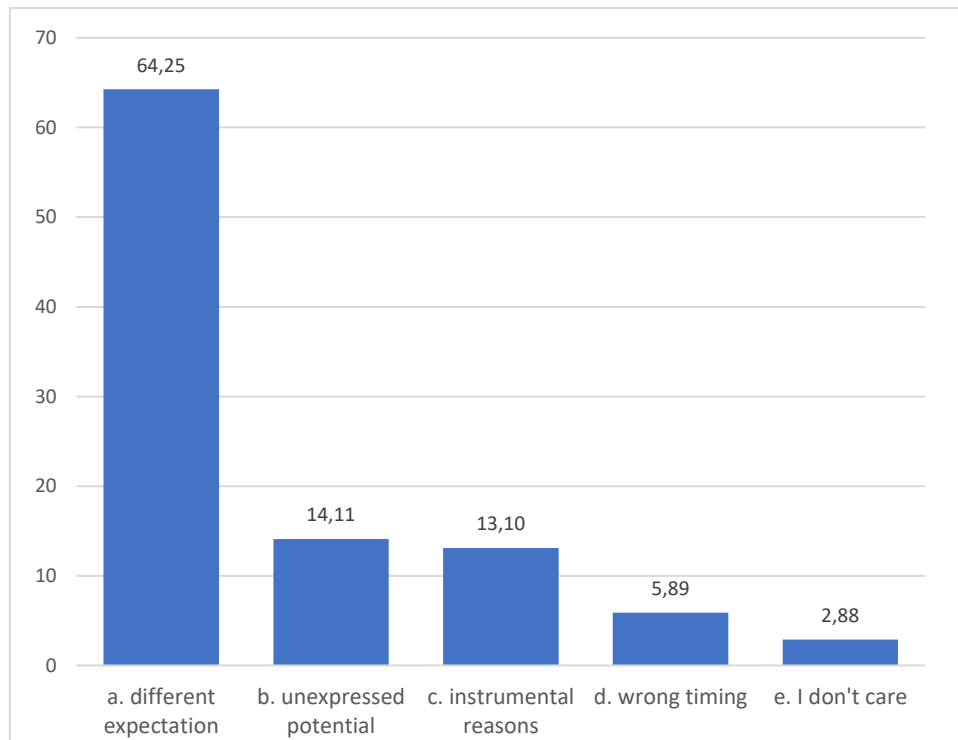
Guidance advice (Chart 7) appears to be a useful tool and generally taken into due consideration by households: the majority of respondents have in fact followed it (70.3%); a non-marginal share of households, however, say they have not (26.7%).

The latter report that they did not follow the guidance advice (Chart 8) mainly because the school recommended did not correspond to what their son/daughter wanted to do (a: 64.0%) or would not have allowed him/her to express his/her potential (b: 14.1%). Others, however, indicated more instrumental reasons (c: 13.1%) such as remoteness, type of environment, need to find a job, etc. On the other hand, 5.9% (d) of the respondents stated that they received their guidance advice too early (before they had seen the different high schools and got to know their characteristics) or too late (when they had already enrolled). A small group, finally, attested its mistrust towards this tool declaring to have intentionally decided not to consider it (e: 2.9%). Although marginal, these two categories deserve to be taken into account in view of possible improvement actions by schools.

If, on the one hand, not following advice to respect one's own child's wishes could be considered virtuous behaviour, on the other hand, one cannot overlook the risk that behind such conduct lies the difficulty of contradicting the child or distancing from the image of an ideal child or school. In the background there is also the issue of the relationship between school and family: only if this relationship is based on trust and educational co-responsibility is it possible to 'team up' and accompany the children in their growth in the best way possible.



Graphic 7: Guidance advice (%).



Graphic 8: - Reasons for not following guidance advice (filtered) (%).

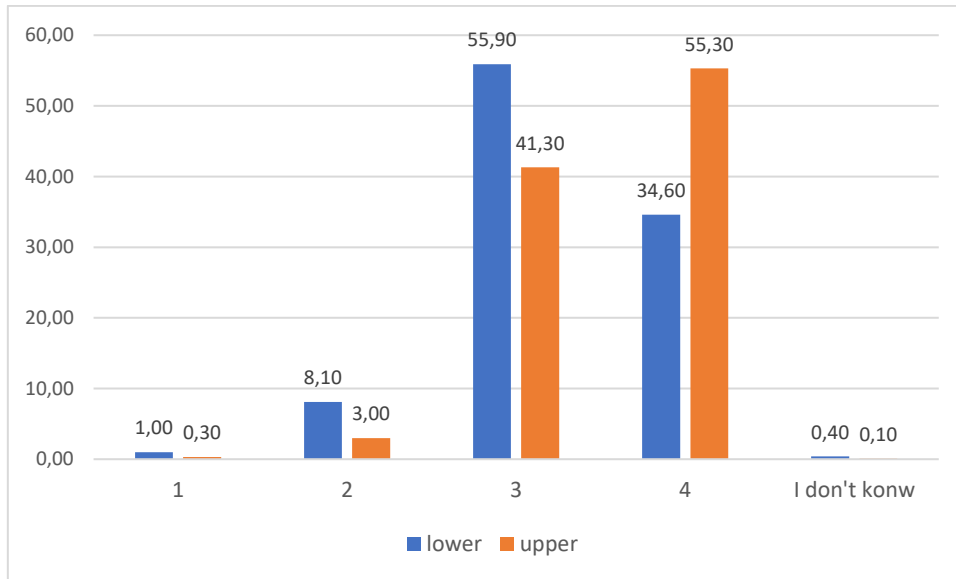
3.4 Outgoing and incoming guidance

The majority of lower schools organised outgoing guidance activities (78.9%). Although this figure is reported by parents, who may not have a clear picture of the activity pathway carried out at school, it is surprising that in 21.1% of cases it seems that no guidance activities were carried out at all. Clearly, this information must be cautiously considered but could also indicate that, in a number of cases, outgoing guidance activities were not particularly evident or incisive, or were not communicated to parents. It cannot be excluded that some schools did not actually carry them out, leaving pupils and families alone in their choice.

Almost all upper schools, on the other hand, organised incoming guidance activities (93.8%), which are confirmed to be strategic for making their educational offer known.

Parents who participated in outgoing (76.1%) and incoming (83.0%) guidance activities generally find them useful. The judgement (Chart 9) is however much more positive for upper schools (level 4: 55.3%) than for lower schools (level 4: 34.6%).

Although the positive effect induced by the first impact with the new upper schools and the different role assumed by the two schools should not be underestimated, from an improvement perspective it could be particularly useful for first-cycle schools to reflect on the way guidance activities are organised and presented.

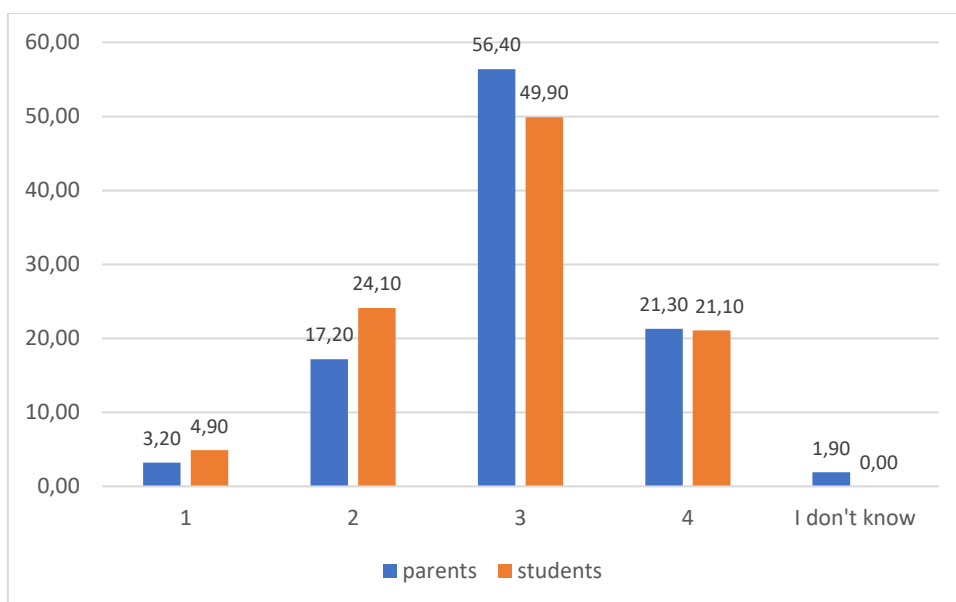


Graphic 9: Usefulness of guidance activities in secondary schools (%).

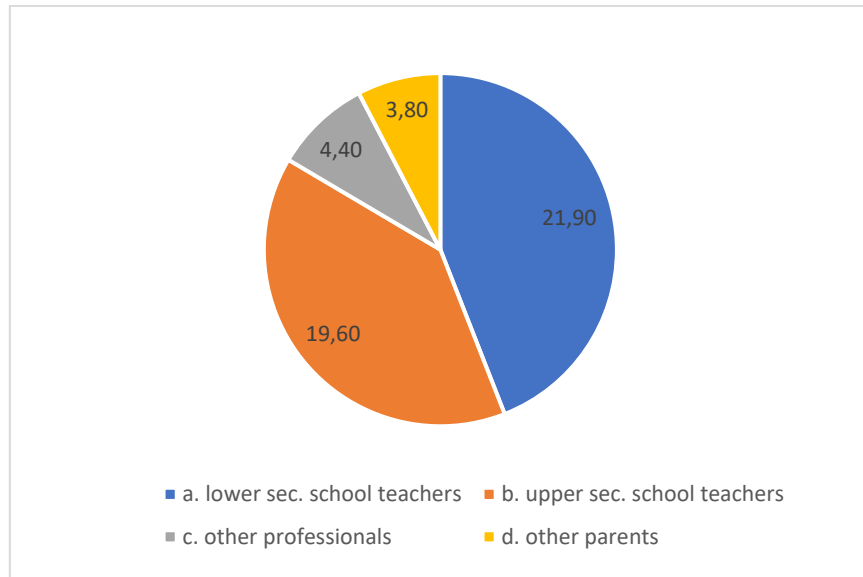
3.5 Needs and perceptions

Most parents felt fairly supported in their choice (levels 3 and 4: 77.7%) although 20.4% did not perceive the necessary support (Chart 10). The perception of support offered by the school to their children is only slightly lower (levels 3 and 4: 71.0%). These data are in line with the percentage of those who stated that the lower school did not organise guidance activities.

Consistent with the overall appreciation of the activities carried out, about half of the respondents (49.0%) did not feel the need for further information or accompanying actions. The remaining part (Chart 11), on the other hand, indicates that they would have liked more direct and individualised moments of discussion with lower school teachers (a: 21.8%) or in-depth discussion with upper school teachers (b: 19.6%). On the other hand, a small part of the respondents would like to see greater involvement of psychologists or other experts (c: 4.4%) or the possibility to have exchange opportunities with other parents (d: 3.8%).



Graphic 10: Perception of support from lower secondary school: students and parents (%).



Graphic 11: Perceived needs as parents (multiple answer) (%).

4. Limits

The survey carried out takes into consideration only the point of view of parents; a structured questionnaire does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the various aspects but offers an overall representation. It might be useful to investigate the point of view of teachers and pupils and to analyse the guidance activities proposed by lower and upper schools; tools that allow a qualitative in-depth study could also be useful.

The sample considered refers to a limited territorial context: the data collected can be useful at local level to accompany the continuous improvement work of schools. Although it is not possible to generalise them, they can also offer useful indications for the Italian context.

5. Discussion and further analyses

The data collected show an overall positive scenario: most of the children chose upper secondary school independently and will have the opportunity to attend it. According to parents' reports, despite the choice was taken rather early (Brunello & Checchi, 2007), it was not particularly complex, was accompanied by the outgoing and incoming guidance activities organised by the schools and was consistent with the guidance advice given by teachers.

From an analytical reading of the data, however, some points worthy of attention emerge that seem to fall in line with the reference literature. These can be grouped around topics that, at the same time, open up to further research and improvements in the schools and in the area of reference.

- A satisfying choice: for many but not for all? The choice made convinces most of the children; some, however, will have to attend a school very different from the one they chose and are not satisfied with the change. Although these are only a few cases, from an educational perspective they are worthy of the utmost attention by the schools that will receive them; indeed, it cannot be ruled out that these initial difficulties may constitute a significant obstacle for the continuation of the school career. In general terms, such situations could conceal both ineffective guidance paths and structural problems linked to the number of places available in the schools in the area. In any case, accompanying the entire selection process, including any early reorientation, constitutes the first fundamental strategy to promote success at school

(Byrne et al. 2010; Psifidou et al. 2021; Agostini et al., 2022; Dodd et al. 2022). On a more practical level, a suggestion could be to investigate potentially problematic situations thoroughly and take charge of them early on in the process.

- Autonomous choice: myth or reality? The majority of parents preferred their son/daughter to choose the route independently. While on the one hand such behaviour demonstrates their trust in their children and their empowerment, on the other hand it could also indicate an educational difficulty for parents in presenting themselves as meaningful and authoritative interlocutors. Behind an excessively compliant accompaniment could be concealed a fear of contradicting one's own son/daughter: going along with the choice could therefore be an act of renunciation of one's own role. Similarly, choosing in place of children could be a behaviour dictated by the conviction of having to support them in the face of certain objective frailties (for example, in the case of students with disabilities) or, on the contrary, by the desire to carry on with the project conceived by the parent for him/her own child regardless of the latter's desires and inclinations, often re-proposing family traditions as documented in literature (Raque-Bogdan et al, 2013; Checchi, 2010; Argentin et al., 2017). A suggestion to address this issue could be to find a balanced position respecting the children's autonomy without giving up the educational task of guiding them to make important choices.
- The guidance advice: process vs. outcome? The majority of parents put their trust in the guidance advice while a portion did not. The latter could include cases in which the advice is interpreted by teachers as a mere bureaucratic fulfilment (Romito, 2016) and is not configured as the outcome of a process involving students, teacher, family. The guidance advice therefore calls into question, first and foremost, the relationship between school and family: only if this relationship is based on trust and educational co-responsibility is it possible to "team up", accompanying the children in the best way possible on their growth path. On the other hand, distancing from bureaucracy means considering things from a broader perspective and developing devices that follow the child and his/her family along a coherent pathway where each school segment plays its part within a horizon of communality. In this regard, it is fundamental to reinforce the specific skills of teachers and promote the use of guidance didactics (Haynes et al, 2012; Guerrini, 2017). More practically, a suggestion could be to find a space for authentic discussion to prioritise the interest of the student/child.
- Guidance: present vs absent? Despite the overall appreciation shown for the guidance activities organized by lower and, above all, upper schools, part of the families did not perceive them as useful even for their own children. It may prove fruitful to deepen through more targeted surveys the guidance activities actually organised by the schools also in order to accompany them to a possible redefinition. Dissatisfaction might concern merely informative rather than educational activities. As clarified at the outset, however, in the guidance process it is fundamental to teach how to choose (Marostica, 2019; Montalbetti, 2020): teachers' and families' efforts should be directed in this direction (Raque-Bogdan, 2013). Therefore, a suggestion could be to invest more resources to understand the real needs and consequently be able to respond to them effectively.

Accompanying each student to make informed and autonomous choices is a fundamental goal: the school and the family have the crucial task of promoting these skills and supporting the process.

Bibliography

- Agostini, C., Bonomi, E., & Nocentini, M. G. (2022). *Contrastare le disuguaglianze educative: Partecipazione studentesca e orientamento scolastico*. <https://www.secondowelfare.it/studio/contrastare-le-disuguaglianze-educative-partecipazione-studentesca-e-orientamento-scolastico/>
- Argentin, G., Barbieri, G., & Barone, C. (2017). Origini sociali, consiglio orientativo e iscrizione al liceo: Un'analisi basata sui dati dell'Anagrafe Studenti. *Politiche Sociali*, 1, 53-73.
- Bonizzoni, P., Romito, M., & Cavallo, C. (2014). Teachers' guidance, family participation and track choice: The educational disadvantage of immigrant students in Italy. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(5), 702-720.
- Brunello, G., & Checchi, D. (2007). Does School Tracking Affect Equality of Opportunity? *New International Evidence. Economic Policy*, 52, 781-861.

- Byrne, D., & Smyth, E. (2010). *No Way Back? The Dynamics of Early School Leaving*. Technical Report. Liffey Press, Dublin, Ireland.
- Checchi, D. (2010). Orientamento verso la scuola superiore: Cosa conta davvero. *RicercaAzione*, 2(2), 215-236.
- Dodd, V., Hanson, J., & Hooley, T. (2022). Increasing students' career readiness through career guidance. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 50(2), 260-272, DOI:10.1080/03069885.2021.1937515
- European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022). *Education and training monitor 2022 - Comparative report*. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/117416>
- Guerrini, V. (2017). La dimensione orientante nell'insegnamento. Una competenza chiave per la scuola del XXI secolo. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, XV(2), 165-174.
- Haynes, G., McCrone, T., & Wade, P. (2012). Young people's decision-making: the importance of high quality school-based careers education, information, advice and guidance. *Research Papers in Education*, 28(4), 459-482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2012.727099>
- Marostica, F. (2019). Le competenze orientative. *Scuola7*, 154-157. <https://www.scuola7.it/2019/154/le-competenze-orientative-1/>
- Montalbetti, K. (2020). Apprendere la competenza valutativa a scuola: un asset strategico per la vita. *Giornale Italiano della Ricerca Educativa*, 24, 54 - 66.
- Psifidou, I., Mouratoglou, N., & Farazouli, A. (2021). The role of guidance and counselling in minimising risk factors to early leaving from education and training in Europe. *Journal of Education and Work*, 34(7-8), 810-825, DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2021.1996545
- Raque-Bogdan, T. L., Klingaman, E. A., Martin, H. M., & Lucas, M. S., (2013). Career-related parent support and career barriers. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 61(4), 339-353.
- Romito, M. (2016). *Una scuola di classe. Orientamento e disuguaglianza nelle transizioni scolastiche*. Milano: Guerini Scientifica.
- Settembrini, F. (2019). Teoria e pratica dell'orientamento nella scuola italiana contemporanea: Competenze orientative e disuguaglianze nella società della conoscenza. *Rivista trimestrale di Scienza dell'amministrazione*, 1, 1-19.