

AN OUTLINE OF THE STATE OF ITALIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN TAIWAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language education plays a critical role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and communication, and the teaching of foreign languages has become increasingly important in an interconnected world. In Taiwan, Italian language teaching has developed steadily over the last few decades, yet the unique challenges and methodologies involved in teaching Italian within this specific educational context remain underexplored.

This foundational study on Italian language teachers in Taiwan aims to examine their experiences, methodologies, and perspectives, considering the intersection of cultural, historical, and educational influences within their environment. The study begins by providing an overview of the historical and cultural context of the teaching of the Italian language in ROC. Following this, a comprehensive review of the current state of Italian language teaching in Taiwan is offered, highlighting key trends, challenges, and developments in this educational field. To explore these previously uninvestigated aspects, the research questions and methodology are outlined, with a focus on the questionnaire designed to capture the perceptions and perspectives of Italian language teachers in Taiwan. This approach allows for a detailed understanding of the competences and methodologies employed in the classroom, as well as the personal experiences and professional insights of those directly involved in teaching Italian as a foreign language. The data collected through this survey will then be analysed to identify patterns and significant findings.

Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of adopting an intercultural approach to language teaching, particularly in contexts such as Taiwan, where Italian is not a primary language but is nonetheless integral to the broader academic and cultural landscape. The study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on foreign language teaching, offering insights into how teachers navigate the complexities of language instruction in a culturally diverse and historically rich context.

2. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PREMISES

This section will introduce the context of the Italian language teaching in the Republic of China, the official name of the polity based in Taiwan. To understand the present situation

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Section 1 and 4 were closely designed by the authors. Section 2 is attributed to Manuel Delmestro; Section 3 is attributed to Silvia Scolaro.

of Italian (or any language) teaching in Taiwan (or any place) one needs to have a basic knowledge of the modern historical context and the education system in place: what is given prominence and how educational paths veer can provide insights on the position and “handling” of the Italian language in the island.

2.1. *Taiwan and the Republic of China*³

The island of Taiwan, part of the Qing Empire till the end of the XIX century and formerly known in the West as Formosa, was ceded to the Empire of Japan in 1895 under the terms of the unequal Treaty of Shimonoseki, and remained Japanese for 50 years, till the end of the Second World War. In 1945 the island was returned to China, that in 1912 had become the Republic of China (ROC), a country beleaguered since its birth by foreign occupation, warlords, and a civil war between the Kuomintang (KMT) regime and the Communist Party of China (CPC). The latter ended up victorious, which led to the foundation in 1949 of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Since then, the ROC has only maintained control of the main island of Taiwan and a few little archipelagoes nearby, and has transitioned to a democratic political system, despite steadily losing diplomatic recognition. The ROC was forced out of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) in 1971 and, as of November 2024, its government has formal diplomatic relations with just 11 of the 193 UN member states, and with the Holy See.

2.2. *The Educational System in Taiwan*⁴

To be able to focus on the state of Italian language teaching in Taiwan, a schematic digression on the educational system of the island should be provided first.

Taiwan’s education system consists of 6 years of elementary school (小學 *Xiaoxue*, ages 6 to 12), 3 years of junior high school (國中 *Guozhong*, ages 12 to 15), and 3 years of (senior) high school (高中 *Gaozhong*, ages 15 to 18). In addition, there are also middle and high schools that combine the three years of junior high school and the three years of high school, called ‘complete junior high schools’ (完全中學 *Wanquan zhongxue*). High schools were once divided into ordinary high schools and senior vocational schools. However, after the ‘Senior Secondary Education Law’ was promulgated in July 2013, they were unified into ‘senior secondary schools’ (高級中等學校 *Gaoji zhongdeng xuexiao*) and divided into four categories according to school type: (1) General, (2) Technical type, (3) Comprehensive type, (4) Single subject type.

In addition to four-year comprehensive universities (綜合大學 *Zonghe daxue*), higher education institutions also include ‘four-year technical universities’ (四年制技術大學 *Sinianzhi jishu daxue*), ‘second-level technical schools’ (四技 *Siji*, for graduates of ‘five-year technical colleges’, equivalent to the third to fourth years of ordinary college), and ‘five-year technical

³ For a historical and political introduction about the ROC/Taiwan, see Delmestro (2019).

⁴ As outlined in 日本語教育 国・地域別情報 2023年度(台灣), (Survey by Country/Region on Japanese Language Teaching):

https://www.jpf.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/area/country/2023/index.html#e_asia.

colleges' (高等專科學校 *Gaodeng zhuanku xuexiao*). In addition, there are also 'two-year technical colleges' (二專 *Erzhuhan*, equivalent to a shorter-span college).

Compulsory education in Taiwan originally lasted for nine years in primary school and junior high school. However, since August 2014, the 'Twelve Years of National Basic Education' provisions have been implemented. Compulsory education in primary school and junior high school totals nine years, plus three years of secondary education in the later period, guaranteeing a total of 12 years of primary and secondary education. Enrolment in later secondary education is optional, not compulsory. In accordance with the Higher Secondary Education Law promulgated in July 2013, measures such as the abolition of entrance examinations, tuition exemptions, and the establishment of new school districts are stipulated.

In addition, admission to many high schools mainly relies on the results of the 'Junior High School National Education Examination' (國中教育會考 *Guozhong jiaoyu huikao*), which is held in mid-May every year and is targeted at junior high school students. The examination results and the academic performance of junior high schools are the key factors for entering high schools.

Apart from the formal structure of public and private schools from kindergarten to university, Taiwan hosts a sizeable web of private cram schools/preparatory schools (補習班 *Buxiban*) that teach practically any subject (from languages to law), and are especially popular with high school students, who have to face a heavy load of examinations weekly, but also with people preparing national examinations for civil servants, and with working adults interested in broadening their knowledge.

Admission to universities also relies on the results of a national examination called General Scholastic Ability Test (大學學科能力測驗 *Daxue xueke nengli ceyan*), administered in January every year over two days and in five subjects: Chinese language and literature; English language; Mathematics; Social studies (including History, Geography, and Civics); and Science (including Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Earth Science). In the event of failing the *Xuece*, another round of examinations, the more course-oriented 分科測驗 *Fenke ceyan*, offers a second chance.

What department and what college one ends up in is a mixture of active choice and the results of the aforementioned national examinations. The higher the score attained, the wider (the scope of) the possible choice. Students with lower scores can only choose among low-ranked colleges and low-ranked departments that do not necessarily match their interests or vocations. This gap between personal interests and the major one starts to study can also partially explain some of the issues that will be discussed later in the paper.

2.3. *The state of the art of Italian language teaching in Taiwan*

To the authors' best knowledge, there has been no previously published work on the history of the teaching of the Italian language in the ROC/Taiwan before the nineties.

In limiting the scope of the research to the XX and XXI centuries, no records have been found of Italian teaching during the Japanese colonial period, neither in the form of formal public education at university level, nor in that of missionary activities-related language tutoring. It appears that the Japanese colonial government's main effort in the field of language and culture was to 'nipponize' Taiwan, while simultaneously de-sinicizing it; and,

understandably, not promote the learning of European languages (Klöter, Wasserfall, 2022). As to missionary activities, it seems that, despite the immense contribution missionaries (both Catholic and Protestant) have given in the alphabetisation and romanisation of many Aboriginal languages in Taiwan, not much effort was spared by the missions to teach the inhabitants their European mother tongues (So *et al.*, 2018).

Since the late 1980s, Taiwan has moved away from a Mandarin Chinese-only language policy in favor of greater recognition of local languages as part of a greater localization movement. While continuing to implement language policies aimed at promoting local languages (Minnan/Taiwanese, Hakka, Aboriginal languages), the government of Taiwan has additionally made plans to implement a bilingual language policy to incorporate English, making it a sort of adjunct national tongue. In contrast to this desire of building strong English-speaking capabilities nationwide, the same level of attention seems not to have been given to other foreign languages (Ngangbam, 2022).

Given the situation briefly described above, findings on Italian tend to only include the last few decades, and focus primarily – but not solely – on university level teaching.

2.4. *Where is Italian actually taught?*

2.4.1. *Universities*

Italian teaching in Taiwan at university level is centred around FuJen Catholic University (FJU) (located in Xinzhuang District, New Taipei City) and its College of Foreign Languages, where the only Department of Italian Language and Culture was established in 1995⁵. The department enrols around 60 new students annually, and has a faculty of 11: six full-time associate and assistant professors and five part-time teachers (one assistant professor and four lecturers). Faculty are currently from Taiwan, Italy and Ireland⁶. The Department of Italian offers a wide curriculum of courses, spanning from strictly language-related subjects (grammar, phonology, conversation, reading and composition, translation) to culture and literature, to history, and to Business Italian and to Italian Politics and Economics⁷. The Italian Department at FJU is also the only authorised certifying centre in Taiwan for the administration of CILS⁸.

Italian is (or was) also taught as an elective course in various universities and colleges around the island, like in the National Taiwan University (NTU), the Taipei National University of the Arts, the Taiwan National University of the Arts, and Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages. The latter is located in the southern city of Kaohsiung, while the other universities mentioned are either in Taipei City or New Taipei City.

At NTU, Italian is an elective course offered as part of the European Studies Programme of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures (itself part of the College of Liberal Arts), but is accessible to students from all departments of the university⁹.

⁵ http://www.italy.fju.edu.tw/DepIntro.jsp?DL_CODE=1.

⁶ <http://www.italy.fju.edu.tw/teacherEN.jsp?type=a>.

⁷ For an exhaustive outline of the courses in the curriculum, see a detailed description here:

<http://www.italy.fju.edu.tw/article.jsp?articleID=9>.

⁸ <http://www.italy.fju.edu.tw/article.jsp?articleID=2>.

⁹ <https://www.forex.ntu.edu.tw/eul/>.

In Wenzao, a course in Italian Language is offered by the Division of Extensive Education¹⁰.

2.4.2. *High schools*

Italian is not a common subject for 第二外語 *Dier waiyu* second foreign language, but some senior high schools in the past taught it. Currently, it seems that only the New Taipei Municipal *San Min* High School (三民高中) in Luzhou district offers a course in Italian language¹¹.

2.4.3. *Cram schools*

The main place to learn Italian outside universities is *Italia Oggi*, a school that specialises in the language and that has offices both in Taipei City and Taichung, the main city in central Taiwan¹². Other schools that used to offer Italian courses were *CIEL*¹³ and *Eumeia*¹⁴.

2.4.4. *Private tutoring*

Italian teaching can also be found in the form of in person and/or online tutoring¹⁵.

3. THE RESEARCH

3.1. *State of the art: previous studies on the teaching of Italian in the ROC/Taiwan.*

Although there is some existing research on the Italian language instruction in Taiwan, no prior studies have specifically focused on the teachers themselves. This makes the current study particularly innovative in its topic. Previous research on the teaching/learning of the Italian language in Taiwan is scarce and was conducted mainly by professor Nati. Mr. Borotti (2008) also shared with the authors his unpublished Master thesis on the topic. Borotti's thesis describes the state of the art of Italian language teaching but it refers to 16 years ago. He also presents an initiative for the spreading of Italian culture that could also lead to heightening the interest of the Taiwanese for the Italian language. On the other hand, professor Nati's work focuses more on Italian language teaching/learning: i.e., about the use of communicative methodologies with Taiwanese students, the development of intercultural

¹⁰ <https://dee.wzu.edu.tw/Course/1799>.

¹¹ As per the 2024 course list found here:

http://www.smsh.ntpc.edu.tw/news/u_news_v2.asp?id=%7BF17641B3-F387-4D3C-BB24-D454A6E2F4F1%7D&newsid=50368#.

¹² <https://oggi.tw/>.

¹³ <https://www.ciel.com.tw/>.

¹⁴ <https://www.angloinfo.com/taipei/directory/listing/taipei-eumeia-language-center-7211>.

¹⁵ An example can be found here: https://www.instagram.com/italiano_vitamina/profilecard/.

competence (2007; 2008b), evaluation (2012a; 2012b; 2013), the use of different techniques such as subtitling in fostering language learning (2011), and even more grammatical issues such as the acquisition of *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*¹⁶ (2008a). The scholar talks about the difficulty of using a Communicative Methodology in this context due to the following reasons: the lack of knowledge and training on the part of the teachers (even if they were starting to enter into contact with it), the different culture of education in Taiwan and the pressure from students and their parents to obtain quick results. Nati (2006) also mentions the impossibility for Taiwanese students to practise the language in real situations. In his article concerning the sensibilization to interculturality in teaching Italian in Taiwan, Nati attributes the difficulty of achieving it mainly to the different types of cultures as described by Hoefstede (1991 and 2001 in Nati 2007). In terms of teaching materials, beside sharing the process that led to the production of *ad hoc* teaching material for Italian students in Taiwan (2011), another interesting contribution is a study about how the books for Chinese students of Italian make use of contrastive aspects (2021).

Nonetheless, the authors of the present work could not find any study that specifically homed in on the teachers of Italian, the methodologies they used and other such aspects of classroom activities. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill this lack of research on the topic.

3.2. Research questions and methodology

Given the absence of pre-existing research on the teachers of Italian in the ROC, the research questions aimed at investigating both different aspects related to pedagogical practices as well as teachers' beliefs. The first research question aimed at determining the working context. The second sought to understand the teachers' prior language teaching training and the perceived teaching competences. The third research question addressed teaching methodologies, with a focus on specific aspects such as teaching techniques, materials used, and test preparation. Finally, the last part aimed to uncover teachers' beliefs about teaching Italian in the ROC and their perception of Taiwanese learners.

The tool used to gather data on the teachers (of Italian in Taiwan) was an online questionnaire. The researchers chose to administer it in Italian, since it was supposed that both native speakers and non-native speakers teachers of Italian would be proficient enough to reply.

Since the survey aimed at gathering data on the Italian language teaching in Taiwan, in order to choose participants for the survey, a purposive sampling strategy was implemented. Maxwell (1996: 69) defines it a «strategy in which particular settings, persons or events are deliberately selected in order to provide important information that cannot be [obtained] from other choices», but the authors also made use of snowball sampling, also known as chain-referral: asking teachers of Italian to forward it to their colleagues. This type of sampling is used when the population is 'hard to reach' and this was the case in this situation.

At the beginning of the survey participants were informed about the research project and how data would be handled: following the dispositions in the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR¹⁷), data was anonymously collected and its use would be only for research purposes.

¹⁶ The discrimination in the use of these two Italian past tenses is very difficult for foreign students of Italian.

¹⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj>.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts: the first asking for some personal information regarding schooling and teaching experiences, the second about teaching competence and the third on teaching methodology and practices. To develop the questionnaire, items were chosen from different previously validated questionnaires: some items were taken from Tomassetti (2014: 345-357), some from Cinganotto and Turchetta (2020: 20-37), while others were from Canini and Scolaro (2020), Scolaro (2021) and Serragiotto and Scolaro (2023); additional items were newly added for the specific purpose of this research. Moreover, some items were taken as is from the original source, while others were adapted. The following table shows the sources of the items. The asterisk (*) following the number of the item indicates that it has been modified from the original version to better suit the specific situation.

Table 1. *Source of the items in the questionnaire*

Source	Item
General questions ¹⁸	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 39, 40
Tomassetti (2014)	10, 23*
Cinganotto, Turchetta (2020)	16, 17*, 18*, 19*, 20, 24, 25,
Canini, Scolaro (2020) Scolaro (2021) and Serragiotto, Scolaro (2023) ¹⁹	7, 8, 13*, 14*, 15*, 26*, 27*, 28*, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36
–	21, 22, 37, 38

The first part aimed at gathering information about the teachers' profile and the context where they were actually working. The second section, about teaching competences, asked about the perceived level of competence in teaching, whether they had attended a training course on Italian teaching and the modality (i.e., in person, online, etc.) and if so, when and where. The next question was about which teaching competence the informants believed they needed to improve, followed by the modality they would prefer to do so. One question was about the desire or need for the eventual training to be accredited and, if so, by which type of institution. Ending the second part, the informants were asked to rank in descending order of importance six elements concerning language teaching.

The last part asked which language was mainly used in class²⁰ and an explanation of the reason why it was required. The next was about teaching materials, followed by a question on the methodology used, and the interaction modality used. Then, the topic shifted to evaluation and the preparation for Italian language exams. Subsequently, it was asked whether metacognitive strategies were openly taught in class. This was followed by some opinion questions: enquiring about the perceptions of the most and least adequate teaching techniques for Taiwanese students of Italian, followed by the request for an explanation for the choices made; eliciting strengths and weakness of the learners; what aspects should the teacher of

¹⁸ Items that can be found in most socio-linguistic questionnaires.

¹⁹ Considering that most items could be found in all three of these studies, it was decided to group them together.

²⁰ The choice of structuring the items in such a way was due to feedback received during piloting: it was asked to give the possibility of choosing the class type being in the context where they work sometimes classes are divided among 'subjects'.

Italian in Taiwan take into consideration; and possible advice for a new teacher of Italian in Taiwan. The last question left the opportunity, as in many questionnaires, to add other information and it was an optional open question. In conclusion, participants were asked to leave their contacts, were they available for an interview with the researchers to further discuss these topics. The type of questions included open questions, multiple choice single select and multiple select, grids, and ranking.

The final form of the questionnaire was reached after a piloting session where four people gave their feedback. The main issues regarded the use of the word 'Chinese' to indicate a person from the ROC/Taiwan. The term 'Chinese' could have been used to indicate the language more than the ethnic or general identity, so the researchers decided to change it to 'person from the ROC' or 'Taiwanese' for the reason that these latter two terms could include language and culture as well. In fact, it is very well known that culture is likewise embedded in the school system and therefore students from Taiwan, even if speaking Chinese, might have different cultural values set by their schooling experience. Moreover, for the question concerning the type of school where the teachers work, it was suggested to include kindergarten, primary and secondary school in the item 'other, please specify', given that they are quite improbable in the Taiwanese context. Some questions were better explained to aid informants' understanding: i.e., the levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages* (CEFR), the meaning of some words such as 'interculture' or 'action-research'. The action taken was in most cases to better explain the concept in the questions; while a different path was taken for the word 'action-research', for which it was decided to add the translation in Chinese, given that it is a very specific methodology²¹. The question about the methodology used was integrated with the item 'I don't know' that didn't appear in the first version of the questionnaire. Other changes that were implemented regarded the questions' format: to increase efficiency, some multiple choice and multiple select questions were transformed into grid or matrix questions.

3.3. Data analysis

In this section the data gathered through the questionnaire will be described.

3.3.1. First part - personal information

Eleven teachers answered. Two teachers were younger than thirty, four between 31 and 40, four between 41 and 50, with one between 51 and 60. Ten were of Italian nationality and one was Taiwanese, this data also corresponding to their mother tongues. Beside Italian and Chinese (also spoken by the Italian teachers), English was the language that everyone knew. Two teachers also knew German and Japanese, and one knew French, Latin and Spanish. As far as their level of study goes, three teachers held a bachelor's degree (one of which had a 5-year bachelor's degree), three teachers held a master's degree and five of them held a doctorate (PhD). Nine of them did not have a certification to teach Italian to foreigners while two did:

²¹ It was the only word translated.

the first-level DITALS²² and a master's degree in teaching Italian to foreigners. Regarding their experience, two had been teaching for less than a year, one for one to three years, two from four to six years, one from seven to ten years, four from eleven to 20 years and one more than 20 years. Only one had had teachers training experience. Five of them work in a private university, three in a cram school, four as freelancers, one was an employee, and one used to work in a school. To be more detailed one teacher worked in a private university, in a cram school and also as a freelancer, while another in a cram school and as a freelancer. All of them work with university students, eight with adult workers, six with teenagers, four with children up to ten years old, three with youths between 11 and 15 years of age and one with the elderly. As emerges from the answers to the questionnaire, this is due to the contingency of the situation in Taiwan, where the number of Italian expats is low and Taiwanese parents might be scarcely interested in having their children learn Italian²³. Only one of them teaches Italian as a volunteer. In the question about job satisfaction, the weighted average is almost 8/10. When respondents elaborate more about their answers, four out of six mention the fact that university students are not motivated in their Italian studies. It is relayed that the learners' lack interest and attention stemming from that Italian is only chosen because it is easier to enter compared to other academic specialisations. Contrary to this, three mention good relationships with the students and their diligence, attention and curiosity. One also talks about the cooperation between colleagues.

3.3.2. Second part - teaching competences

On the question regarding teaching competences, eight perceive theirs as good, two discrete and one sufficient. Only two of them participated in training courses for teachers: one in Italy and one in Taiwan. When asked about which competences they would like to improve, nine say methodology, six digital skills, four evaluation techniques, three intercultural teaching and three linguistic-communicative skills. Eight of them would prefer the training to be offered in a blended way: online and in person; two in person and one online. Ten would also need the training to be certified and recognised: specifically three from an Italian institution, two from a Taiwanese one: the others do not express their preference as far as country goes, but they highlight the fact that it should be recognised by their working place.

When asked to rank the importance of some aspects in teaching, periodical training was first, followed by reflection and self-evaluation, interculture, cooperation with colleagues, the use of technologies in the classroom and last, research-action.

²² DITALS (Certificazione di Competenza in Didattica dell'Italiano a stranieri) is a certificate of competence in teaching Italian to foreigners developed by University for Foreigners of Siena, Italy ([UNISTRASI - Università per Stranieri di Siena](https://ditals.unistrasli.it/home.asp)).

²³ Data from ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica - National Statistics Institute), report a little over 800 Italian resident in Taiwan: Bilancio demografico della popolazione italiana residente all'estero: <https://demo.istat.it/app/?i=AIR&l=itopolazione italiana all'estero>.

3.3.3. *Third part - teaching methodology*

Teachers generally advocate for a mixed approach using both Italian and Chinese when teaching Italian in the ROC, particularly to A1-A2 level students. The specific language used varies but lesson type and student proficiency. For listening and conversation lessons, Italian is preferred to facilitate practice. For B1 and higher levels, conversation is often exclusively in Italian. For grammar, writing and culture lessons, Chinese is frequently used, especially for lower-level students, to ensure comprehension. However, examples in Italian are consistently provided. Reading comprehension involves activities in Italian, after instructions given in Chinese. Verification and clarification use simple Italian, with Chinese reserved for difficult words or error explanation. From the teachers' responses some specific level consideration emerged: beginner level (A1-A2) students often necessitate Chinese for complex concepts, such as grammar, while higher levels (B1 and above) see increased use of Italian across all lesson types. Also, according to the teachers' words, phonetics at the first university year requires exclusive Chinese explanation. In their opinion, adaptability to students' level is crucial and using Chinese can be more immediate for explaining and translating specific words. The use of the Chinese language also prevents students from discomfort and ensures better understanding for beginners.

Materials used are mainly books published in Italy. They report their lessons to be communicative, where teachers and students interact. Nonetheless, in the subsequent question asking them the method used, they chose mainly the plenary lesson, but for the conversation class where learners are asked to interact individually.

As far as evaluation goes, there are both formative and final examinations and tests are both written and spoken. In four cases, behaviour too is part of the evaluation, while four do not put forward any type of testing. Only one of these answers was given by a teacher also working as a freelancer, so that could be the case where evaluation is not part of the course. Seven instructors also specifically prepare their students for the exam for the certification in the Italian language, two for the university exams. Two teachers also teach metacognitive strategies in their classes.

When teaching techniques were investigated, in terms of efficiency for the context where these teachers worked, they were ranked as follows: cloze (9), role-play (8), games (7), ordering sequences (5), exercises for fixation (4) and translation (4). One adds the use of softwares for language learning. From these answers it can be gathered that communicative methods coexist with more traditional ones. It also reflects the perception that instructors brought up earlier in the survey, where some of them see the Taiwanese students as proactive in their language learning, while others think they are not so motivated. Moreover, the ordering sequence is an exercise that is often used in the Italian certification exams, so the fact that almost half of the teachers chose it, could show the importance given to preparing the students for the exams, considering how important they are in their educational system (§ 2.2). Conversely, the teaching techniques perceived as least efficient rank as follows: dictation (9), ordering sequences (3), exercises for fixation (2), games (1), role-play (1), cloze (1), translation (1); with one including techniques which involve logical thinking and high abstraction. This perception by teachers regarding the difficulty in abstract reasoning among students from Confucian heritage educational systems could have a dual explanation. On the one hand, the Confucian worldview, in which the teacher is seen as the holder of knowledge to be transmitted to students, may foster a sense of reverence and respect that could inhibit students from expressing what is truly on their minds. On the other hand, there may be a

discrepancy between the students' cognitive level – most of the learners mentioned in this study are university students or adult professionals – and their proficiency in Italian. This incongruity could prevent them from fully participating in interactions that reflect their actual abilities.

In line with the above, teachers who perceive Taiwanese students as passive tend to favour more traditional teaching methods, believing that students need to be guided step by step through the Italian language. In contrast, other teachers emphasise the importance of adapting their teaching techniques based on the students' level of proficiency in Italian and the type of class (i.e., grammar vs. conversation). They stress the need to understand the specific class and students they are working with. One teacher notes that Taiwanese students often prefer easier, less time-consuming activities. This may reflect broader trends related to their age and the fast-paced nature of the modern world, where even news is delivered quickly and concisely. Another teacher acknowledges the tendency to favour teaching techniques they personally prefer.

When discussing the strengths of Taiwanese students, teachers highlight good memory (3), discipline (2), willingness to learn (2), and diligence and hard work (2). A few teachers also recognise the positive influence of English in learning Italian. Two teachers did not express their opinion. Regarding weaknesses, common issues include a lack of communicativeness due to shyness (3), fear of making mistakes, especially in front of others (2), and the habit stemming from the educational system where the instructor speaks and students primarily listen (3). Other weaknesses mentioned include the typological distance between the two languages (2), the difficulty of Italian grammar (2), lack of motivation and interest (2), limited common knowledge or cultural understanding (1), and difficulty in making logical connections (1).

Some aspects that teachers should consider when teaching Taiwanese students are listed as follows by the respondents:

- Acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of the students (3).
- Recognise the shyness of Taiwanese students (3).
- Be patient, ask students if they have questions to show that you are available for further explanations, and try to make them feel at ease (3).
- Avoid being too extroverted (no physical contact or jokes) (2).
- Encourage students and help them understand that, despite the differences between the two languages, they can learn Italian.
- Teach the Italian language alongside its culture.
- Recognise that critical judgement is not always seen as a means of improvement.
- Know the Chinese language.
- Respect cultural differences while also ensuring that students respect the role of the teacher.

From these responses, it is clear that most of the aspects mentioned above are more closely related to interculturality than to language teaching alone. The contact between two different cultures – the Italian culture of the teacher and the Taiwanese culture of the students – takes place and interacts within the language classroom. In the final question of the survey, teachers were asked to offer advice to a colleague who had no prior experience teaching Taiwanese students and was about to start teaching Italian to them. The suggestions provided are as follows:

- Make lessons more interesting by addressing topics such as art, music, food, etc. (2).
- Knowing the students' language can be helpful at the beginning (2).
- Understanding the students' culture is important (2).
- Build a relationship of trust with students to help them feel more comfortable in the classroom, reduce shyness, and encourage them to speak (2).
- Give students plenty of opportunities to speak.
- Have a solid background in teacher training and be open to continuous learning.
- Go slowly, repeat, and review frequently.
- Ensure that students learn the Italian morphosyntactic features thoroughly from the beginning.
- Avoid teaching in Taiwan (ROC).

From these responses too, the strong connection between language and culture becomes evident. Knowing the students' language and culture can serve as a bridge for dialogue and understanding, which in turn fosters language learning. There is also an emphasis on building positive relationships in the classroom to create a comfortable environment for language teaching and learning. However, three key aspects of language teaching are highlighted: both the morphosyntactic features of Italian and the teaching methodology. Additionally, one respondent underscores the importance of teacher training, recognising that it is a lifelong and expansive process. In the very last question, one teacher emphasised the importance of pragmatism in teaching in this context, as opposed to teaching a language for its own sake. This idea is also reflected in the literature (Watkins, Biggs, 1996: 273; Nati, 2006: 9).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research is the first to explore the perspectives of Italian language teachers in Taiwan. The results show that the majority of teachers have substantial teaching experience and advanced degrees. However, their comments show a strong willingness to learn more about effective language teaching approaches, despite their relatively minimal expertise in foreign language education. In fact, periodical training was ranked as the most important aspect of teaching.

Students are portrayed in diverse ways. They are perceived as less motivated and frequently rely on memorisation rather than critical thinking, but they are also seen as hard-working, disciplined students who have a strong drive to succeed and a good memory. The type of students involved may have an impact on this dichotomy: many Taiwanese university students learning Italian may have done so because of the requirements of the educational system and admission tests rather than because they are interested in the language (§ 2.2). On the other hand, because they are spending their own money to learn the language, students at cram schools are typically older and more motivated. Therefore, instructors in different educational environments would have different perceptions about learners.

An essential aspect that emerged is the significance of understanding not only the language of the learners but also their cultural backgrounds. This understanding helps to establish a solid foundation for effective communication between instructors and students. Promoting intercultural practices is vital for language acquisition, especially within a humanistic framework that places the learner at the centre of the educational experience (Caon *et al.*, 2020).

While communicative approaches are often regarded as more effective for language learning, it is important to consider the educational environment in which learners develop and the concept of learning they hold, these are often referred to as 'learning cultures' (Jin, Cortazzi, 2006; Rao, 2006; Rao, 2017). Thus, in a mixed culture classroom (Zhao, 2016), a blended approach that incorporates both traditional language teaching techniques and communicative methods could be particularly beneficial for students in this context.

The role of teachers in this scenario is critical; they have the potential to significantly enhance language learning. A teacher who is proficient in the language, familiar with the local culture, and aware of the unique needs of their students can effectively select appropriate methodologies, strategies, and techniques at the right moment in the learning process. Consequently, the training of language educators becomes vital (Serragiotto, 2009; 2017 and 2022).

The minimal number of participants in this study is a significant restriction. However, as all participants are native speakers and only a small percentage are Taiwanese, the sample can be considered representative of the community of Italian teachers in Taiwan (Nati, 2006: 9). Addressing the vacuum in the literature about the opinions of Italian language instructors in Taiwan was the main goal of this study. Although the study provides a basic understanding of the topic, further thorough research is required to examine a number of issues in greater detail.

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