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The Educational Trajectories of Second-Generation Students Towards Higher Education: Motivations, Family's Role and "Institutional" Bias

*Alessandro Bozzetti**

Abstract: Nowadays Italy is experiencing a structural, stable and multigenerational migratory presence in which new generations have been increasingly gaining access to the highest social and educational levels, including university. The educational choices young people make are influenced by their social, cultural and economic background as well as by their parents or other significant adults' cultural background. This paper aims to examine the challenges and the resources faced by young immigrants when they continue to university. Despite the fact that several researchers explored the presence of second-generation students in primary and secondary schools, the state of research on second-generation students enrolled in Italian Universities is still very poor. After a brief focus on the presence of second-generation students within the Italian university system, the paper will highlight the case of the University of Bologna. Through research that was completed employing a variety of methods, including 537 questionnaires and 30 interviews, the paper aims to explain, through the words of the interviewees, the students' motivations for the choice of long-term educational paths and the role played by family, teachers and educational institutions in inspiring that choice.

Keywords: second-generation students, higher education, motivations, parental and institutional influence, mixed methods

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Introduction

In the analysis of migratory flows and of their impact on the receiving society, the topic of second generations is central. The integration of the so called “children of immigration” represents ‘a testing ground for both their parents’ migration and for the receiving society receptiveness’ (Besozzi, 2009, p.13). The situations and the related expectations, as well as the ideal-typical paths, can differ from first to second generation of migrants. At the same time, the issue of second-generation immigrants as a whole, including not only the children of immigrants who moved to the other country at a later date, but also those born in the foreign country, or “migrants without migration” (Ambrosini, 2004), has a crucial role in discussions of migratory flows since points out a discrepancy between migrants’ socialization and the real opportunities afforded them.

In contemporary societies, in which inheritance continues to play an important role in social reproduction (Ballarino, 2007), the life stories of the children of immigrants show the existence of ambivalences and contradictions that can contribute to the process of the intergenerational transmission of social disadvantages (Santagati, 2009). While several factors, including gender, family background and national origin, help to explain the employment outcomes of individuals (Ballarino, 2007), one key-point emerges from the theoretical and scientific debates in recent years: the significance of education in the life of second-generation young immigrants. School creates a support for their identity and cultural development and is a crucial turning point in their transition to the labor market. For a long time, the literature has highlighted that young people’s social and economic background, as well as their parents or other significant adults’ cultural background (Ravecca, 2009; Spanò, 2011), influence their educational choices. But the empirical research has followed, by now, the “demographic maturation” of the target population: only in recent years has it focused on studying their educational paths within the highest levels of study (Ambrosini, 2004). This topic has therefore informed a large number of studies that mainly focused on primary and secondary schools (Queirolo Palmas, 2006; Besozzi *et al.*, 2009; Ravecca, 2009; Santagati, 2011; Spanò, 2011; Lagomarsino & Ravecca, 2012).

The interactions between the national education system and the peculiar experiences of non-Italian citizens have consequences for their future. The transition between secondary school to higher education, particularly for second-generation students, is far from being linear: this trend is prevalent in most of the western countries, even in those with a long migratory tradition. For example, students with an immigrant background in Italy are mainly enrolled in technical and vocational institutes which formally open up to

a university career, but also often produce a sort of school marginalization that frequently results in social marginalization (Santerini, 2008; Santagati, 2011). However, this point of view is misleading. Focus on second-generation students in the international literature reveal that immigrant background does not unequivocally affect school performance: these results are rather influenced by the differences within different ethnic groups, by their cultural context, the values and prejudices of the receiving society, different historical periods, and mostly to their own distinctive features (Portes, 1998; Crul, 2012).

In this paper, the presence of second-generation immigrant students will be first contextualized from a numerical point of view: a structural and multigenerational presence in which new generations are increasingly gaining access to the highest social and educational levels, including to universities. Starting from a mixed-method research activity carried out at the University of Bologna through via 537 questionnaires and 30 interviews, the paper aims to explain, through the words of the interviewees, the difficulties, strengths, opportunities and dreams of second-generation students enrolled at the university.

Special attention will be paid to the migratory history of students, to the role played by family and teachers where a long-term educational path was chosen, as well as to the existence of experiences of discrimination. All these aspects risk highlighting the growing difficulty in managing cultural diversity both for individuals (teachers or family members) and for (institutional and educational) contexts, which can lead to a social construction of ethnicity in the educational processes. On the one hand the paper has a purely exploratory value, aimed at investigating an aspect so far almost wholly ignored in the research on higher education; on the other hand, we want to study the biographical and educational paths that have led students with migratory backgrounds to access university education. It is quite clear that the university dynamics differ radically from those previously experienced: the decision to continue these studies leads to several questions related to the investment in education that must be addressed. The focus will be mainly on the motivations behind the choice to enroll at the university, and the factors that have influenced it. We will try to understand if and how the role played by the family and by the educational institutions influence the path that second-generation students choose to follow, also in shaping expectations in a direction that cannot disregard the condition of their own life and that of their family.

The identification of the aspects characterized by greater criticality, as well as reflection that can provide, where possible, concrete indications in terms of socialization and active integration paths to support the planning and management of inclusive policies, could lead to new perspectives and

new incentives in research on second generations, thereby preventing the transformation of existing barriers into structural constraints.

Second generations and University: a research field not yet extensively studied

The Italian educational system has recently been characterized by a constant rise in numbers of non-Italian students, which has already stabilized in the last few years. In the 2016/17 school year, 826,091 students came from an immigrant background: this is about 9.5% of the total student population; almost 11.0% in pre-primary and primary schools; 9.7% in lower secondary school/middle schools and 7.1% in upper secondary schools/colleges (MIUR, 2018a). The percentage of non-Italian students who were born in Italy, the narrow definition of second-generation according to Rumbaut (1997), is increasing and represents 60.9% of the total of those students born to immigrant parents.

According to OECD data (2017), tertiary educational attainment in Italy is among the lowest across OECD countries, with only 18% of adults having attained tertiary qualifications. According to the MIUR data, in the last ten years the number of people enrolled in the first academic year has dropped from 304,643 in 2007/08 to 290,353 in 2016/17, although more recently the trend seems to have reversed again. In any case, the decision to invest in long-term education is an idea that is often ignored and this trend has repercussions on the labor market (Zurla, 2001): a young and always less qualified workforce, which historically involved young people coming from families with reduced social and economic resources, enters the labor market without a degree.

Different factors hinder access to higher education. Among these, the most predominant has probably an economic cause: the cost of university education. Direct costs include university fees, accommodation, transport, and indirect costs occur through the fact that students do not normally work during their studies and are therefore a burden on household incomes, especially for the most vulnerable families. Apart from these “hard” barriers, academics have also identified several “soft” barriers to education (Finnie *et al*, 2008): among these, the lack of family and friends’ support; a lower level of social capital; a personal but also a social gap between immigrant and Italian students (this gap is not only linked to their parents’ qualifications but also to their symbolic cultural capital); several language related issues and their symbolic implications. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the situation of young immigrants in the university context has not been extensively analyzed yet: starting from the mid-80s, at an international level, surveys were focused on the experience of some specific ethnic groups and then

moved on to the analysis of the economic implications of completing post-school education (Fligstein & Fernandez, 1985; Ganderton & Santos, 1995; Hagy & Farley Ordovensky Staniec, 2002; Crul, 2012). In Italy, the current state of this research is in its early stages, depending only on the research developed by Lagomarsino and Ravecca (2014) at the University of Genoa – the only empirical analysis carried out so far.

Despite the existence of these barriers, the presence of students with foreign citizenship in Italian universities is increasing significantly, from 50,878 in the 2007/08 academic year to 74,016 in the 2015/16 academic year (MIUR, 2018b). Due to the increase of foreign students, the corresponding drop of Italian students enrolled at Italian universities is not immediately evident: in recent years, the total number of students with Italian citizenship enrolled at university has dropped by 100,000 (from 1,712,764 in 2011/12 to 1,586,431 in 2015/16). Looking at the data regarding the 2015/16 academic year, it is interesting to note that out of the 74,016 foreign students enrolled at university (coming from 158 different countries), 34.5% is a citizen of one of the following countries: Albania, Romania and China. However, the mentioned origins are those of the most represented migrant national groups in Italy, being 37.6% of the total number of citizens with foreign citizenship on the national territory. The presence of students with foreign citizenship within the Italian universities varies greatly from a geographical point of view. It can be briefly pointed out that the universities of Southern Italy see a very limited number of students of foreign origin, who have either a diploma acquired abroad or are of second generation. The Universities of Bari, Naples (Federico II) and Catania, respectively in the third, eighth and tenth place of Italian universities by number of students, reveal minimal percentages of students with foreign citizenship (respectively 1.5%; 0.5%; 0.5%), very much lower than those observed at the “Politecnico” di Torino (13.7%) and Milan (11.7%), as is the case at the University of Rome “La Sapienza” (5.4%) and the University of Bologna (6.7%), the two leading universities in Italy by number of students.

That of the “second generation” is a multi-comprehensive conceptual category, which refers to very different situations: from those children born in the receiving society to the young people who move after having completed a large part of their socialization path in the country of origin, up to the children of mixed couples. A plural population that, by calling into question that barrier which separates “us” from “them”, strongly rooted in the collective imagination, would create disorientation in the native population (Ceravolo & Molina, 2013). Strictly speaking, the second generation is composed of the children of immigrants born in the destination country. In the literature, however, we often take for granted the extension of this conceptual category also towards those young people who have carried out at least part of their

schooling cycle in the host country. Rumbaut (1997), trying to broaden the concept, has developed a typology useful to better define and identify different categories of “second generation young people”, identifying a sort of *continuum* between the children born in the receiving country from foreign parents and the one that arrives just before the age of 18.

In particular, this paper focuses on foreign students with an Italian high school diploma who are now enrolled in Italian universities. This choice is linked to the terminological distinction that has been proposed by the OECD about “international students” and “foreign students”, and based on that provided by the Council of Europe in 1984. The first designation refers to those people who move abroad for educational reasons; the second refers to those students who are not citizens of the country in which they study but who live in that country, and in some cases were even born there. Therefore, the “second generation” category refers to those students who completed at least part of their educational paths in the country of immigration. For this reason, the focus of the analysis will be on those foreign students who have obtained a High school diploma in Italy, completing part of their education within the Italian school system, and then deciding to go to university. By taking into account this differentiation, those young people born in Italy to foreign parents or who have been in Italy since they were children and have Italian citizenship, will not be considered in this research: they can only be identified through the use of qualitative research tools because, when enrolling at the university, citizenship and place of birth of parents are not required.

According to MIUR data, we can identify 30,850 foreign students enrolled in Italian universities with an Italian high school diploma in the 2015/16 academic year. In these statistics, the details regarding secondary school diplomas are not always specified for each student: MIUR data classify as “not provided” the diplomas of about 10,000 students each year. Even considering that it is possible to underestimate numbers, this paper takes into account only those students who have certainly graduated from an Italian school; since the aim is to analyze those students who have completed at least a part of their education in Italy, unspecified cases were excluded. From a statistical point of view, the percentage of foreign students enrolled in Italian universities and with an Italian high school diploma proportionally increased to 41.7% of the total number of foreign students at university (from 26.7% ten years ago). Also the analysis of the countries of origin of foreign students enrolled at university with an Italian high school diploma highlights a partially different situation compared to the previous one. Even if Albania and Romania are still the most represented countries, the number of Chinese students who graduated from Italian secondary schools is instead really low (10.5% of

the total number of Chinese students enrolled in Italian universities): a clear majority of them hold a foreign diploma.

MIUR data (related to 2015/16 academic year, the year in which the empirical research presented in the following paragraph was carried out) reveal some features of the target student population compared to the whole student population. Interesting trends come to light by focusing on the type of high school diploma earned by students enrolled at the university. The differences among students with Italian citizenship and second-generation students appear very evident. Among the first, the percentage of students with a Lyceum diploma is 71.2%, while among second-generation students (students with foreign citizenship and with an Italian diploma) is to 43.9%, highlighting a difference that amounts of above 27 percentage points. Among second-generation students, technical (38.8%) and vocational degrees (14.3%), usually not associated with the willingness to invest in a long-term education path, at least for Italian students, are more numerous than among their Italian peers (21.2% and 4.1% respectively). Therefore, it seems that the possibility of continuing in studies offered by technical and vocational studies, while remaining residual (or just formal) for Italians students, is much more common among second-generation students, thus not necessarily becoming a precursor of school marginalization.

Focusing on the gender variable, among the Italian students there is a majority of female students (55.7%), almost 12 percentage points more than male students (44.3%), a constant gap during the last decade. Among foreign students with Italian high school diploma, 64.2% are women and only 35.8% are men (a 28.4 percentage point of difference, increasing over the years): this phenomenon is therefore more than doubled among second-generation students. While females lead in the educational setting by at least two decades (Besozzi, 1997), it is interesting to understand how gender issues intersect with migration experience. Several research activities carried out in countries with a longer multicultural tradition show that the reasons for this more considerable gender gap could be linked to the different socialization processes that affect both genders (Portes & Rumbaut 2005; Ravecca 2010). It seems that women in immigrant families have more family support; furthermore, there is a belief in the idea that for many women of immigrant origin, education represents an opportunity for social redemption and a possibility of self-realization (Lagomarsino & Ravecca, 2014). The research activities carried out in Britain and France and focused on Muslim girls (Hassini, 1997; Haw, 1998) seem to confirm that educational success is seen as an opportunity for women to distance themselves from family restrictions through a claim of greater personal freedom from parental figures (especially towards the father figure). This occurs without questioning gender roles within the household, or the values of patriarchal culture, but rather aiming to create a

flexible identity that seeks to reconcile the prescribed identity, bearer of family meanings, and the desired identity, bearer of a change (Aggoun, 2001). As emphasized by Colombo (2009), however, it is fundamental to analyze more deeply the causes and consequences of this gendered connotation of school choices.

At a more general level, females could then count on greater capital resources both within the family, in the form of parental monitoring and expectations, and from outside the family, in the form of an academic-oriented network to and of a more pronounced support of teachers, with whom they generally have more positive relationships than their male peers. For male students, on the other hand, the presence of less strong protective and support networks, the possibility of negotiating more spaces of freedom with parents and the rather widespread need to emphasize their own masculinity to form a well determined (ethnically) identity, seem to lead to less successful pursuit of educational opportunities (Qin-Hilliard, 2003). Clearly, variables such as the geographical area of origin and the gender patterns of their own tradition play a key role in determining ‘the range of possible choices, results, aspirations, ways of use of the educational resource by immigrants’ (Colombo, 2003, p. 91). The proximity or the adhesion to patriarchal ideologies are widespread in certain countries, which tends to reproduce the values related to female subordination, and for example, is closely linked to a low level of education, if not to an actual exclusion of women from education (Hodges Persell *et al*, 1999). In any case, if it is true that countries with a stronger gender gap seem to be associated by an adhesion to Muslim religion, it would be reductive to consider religious faith as the main cause of exclusion. We must therefore avoid the temptation to use a structural factor (such as religion), to explain the variability of another structural factor (such as sex) in access to education, but rather try to focus attention on the subjective interpretations of individual phenomena (Colombo, 2009).

However, almost all the considered countries show a clear prevalence of women among students enrolled in an Italian university, and only in three national groups are there more boys than girls enrolled in Italian universities: students from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt (66.7%). These countries, however, have a small number of second-generation students. There seems to be a “two-way relationship” between gender and citizenship: on the one hand, the low investment in education found in some national groups has a greater influence on the life chances of girls than on boys; on the other hand, the exclusion (or limited participation) of girls in educational paths generates – directly and indirectly – effects of marginalization for the entire national group (Colombo, 2009, p.101).

Finally, focusing on the age of enrolment of the students, it will be noticed that about 80% of students with Italian citizenship are enrolled before the age of 20, a sign of a previous course of study generally linear, free from delays and interruptions. The percentages of second-generation students are instead very different: only 40% of students are enrolled before the age of 20. These data confirm that students with migration backgrounds enter the university education system later than their Italian peers. They tend to be older than their peers in the lower classes, due to an institutionalized production of school delay (Perrone, 2012) and associated with a greater probability of failure in the lower study cycles, beyond the risk of a symbolic downgrade of the students (Queirolo Palmas & Torre, 2005), inevitably has repercussions on the educational and work experience of these students.

The case study of the University of Bologna: the need for a new methodological approach

Some aspects just mentioned are confirmed by the results obtained from an empirical research carried out at the University of Bologna, aimed at investigating the biographical and educational paths that have led students with migrant background to access university studies. The University of Bologna is one of the main Italian universities according to the number of students and the presence of students with migration backgrounds. In more detail, according to MIUR-ANS data (2018b), in the 2015/16 academic year there were 73,469 students with Italian citizenship, 3,237 students with foreign citizenship and foreign diploma, 1,631 students with foreign citizenship and an Italian high school diploma.

The final aim of the research activity was to describe the biographical paths that have led students with migrant background to access university studies, and to understand whether the “classical” variables associated with successful educational trajectories have relevance, also focusing on Italian higher education system. To achieve this goal, the research path has been divided into two different levels, a quantitative and a qualitative one, according to the mixed-methods approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The use of only one method would have been insufficient to reach the research goals: a purely quantitative approach would not have allowed an in-depth investigation into the individual biographies and the relevant attributions of meaning; an entirely qualitative approach would not have allowed the checking of the influence of the variables assumed as relevant by the literature on a broad scale. It was therefore decided not to assign a predominant role to one of the two paradigms, according to a convergent parallel research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), which allowed a reach into the integration of the results at the end of the study. For this rea-

son, on the one hand, a web survey was done in order to obtain generalizable results; on the other hand, semi-structured interviews with 30 students enrolled at the University of Bologna, has deepened their biographical and educational paths.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the results, we will briefly focus on the methods of administering the survey: in addition to sending an e-mail to the students with foreign citizenship enrolled at the University of Bologna, an online sampling activity was carried out. One of the main problems in the identification of the target population has already been highlighted: the impossibility of systematically reaching those students who, despite their migrant background, already have Italian citizenship. For this reason (trying to reach this group of students), a snowball sampling was carried out through Facebook. More in detail, the administrators of some significant Facebook pages (referring to student associations, to informal groups related to the University of Bologna or to specific study courses, to groups of foreign students or belonging to specific religious faiths, to associations particularly sensitive to migratory themes) were contacted, in order to bring attention to the research project.

In addition, 1,520 private messages were sent to Facebook users, presumably with foreign backgrounds and enrolled at the University of Bologna. We tried to track down the profiles of second-generation students starting from the public information made available by the users themselves in their Facebook pages, with particular attention to information related to the name, place of birth, school attended and place of residence. Aspects such as the registration with specific groups or associations, the circle of friends, the language in which comments are posted, if freely available, have been used to try to contact only users included in the target population. Moreover, the way in which a social network such as Facebook is structured, makes it particularly suitable for carrying out a snowball sampling: beyond any privacy settings, it is possible to view the entire friendship network – registered in the social network – of the subject contacted, so as to try to identify other ‘statistical units’.

Out of 1,520 users contacted, 48.2% provided some kind of feedback. In 430 cases (28.3% of total contacts) this feedback was positive and was followed by the sending of the mail containing the link to the questionnaire or by the awareness of the fact that the survey had already been received and completed. In 12.1% of the cases the students read the message and have therefore been made aware of the research. In 7.8% of cases however, despite the precautions put in place, the user contacted was not a second-generation student enrolled at the University of Bologna: they were mainly already graduated students or users not yet enrolled at the University, but in search of information with a view to a possible, future enrollment.

In carrying out this type of sampling, there may be bias that could cause a distortion of the sample: the population using the internet, and even more so, the social networks, would already be in itself a preselected sample (Suarez-Balcazar *et al.*, 2009). However, the relevance of this aspect is weakened in this case: since the target population is composed of university students, we can safely assume that they have easy access to the network and, at the same time, a high level of digital literacy. This does not mean that the ease of access to the internet automatically results in having a Facebook account: however, from data on the level of diffusion of the social network (Kemp, 2016), we can assume with a certain degree of certainty that the majority of population involved in the research project is registered in the social network. In any case, it is important to highlight that, proceeding in this way, 537 valid questionnaires were collected: among these, 25.7% of the respondents were Italian citizens, and then participated in the research project after being contacted via Facebook.

Results

We will now focus on some of the main results of the research, with particular attention to obstacles and facilities, originating from both the family and the school environment, which played a role in the choice to enroll in university made by second-generation students¹.

The first aspect investigated is the degree of influence of different motivations: we tried specifically to understand if the decision to undertake long-term educational paths was mainly for pragmatic reasons, linked to the working future imagined by the students, or to personal aptitudes related to their specific interests. As shown in Table 1 below, these latter reasons seem to have influenced the choice of respondents to a greater extent: the reasons considered most relevant by the students are the aim of securing a job that accommodates personal interests and the desire to contribute to their own culture. On the other hand, an enrollment linked to the lack of valid alternatives or to the desire to maintain the one's own relational network is one of the factors that have exerted less influence on the choices of respondents.

¹ The research also examined the results obtained by the students during their university career and the projects related to short and long term future through the use of some multivariate analysis techniques (linear regression and principal component analysis), only briefly mentioned in this paper. A typology was also proposed which, although based on some results of the web survey, is essentially based on what emerged from the qualitative part. This section presents some excerpts from the interviews made to the students, in order to clarify and problematize the aspects that emerged.

Table 1. Influence of the following motivations (on a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 is equivalent to “not at all” and 5 is equivalent to “fundamental”) on the decision to enroll at the University (average values, standard deviations and sample size).

	Average value	Standard deviation	N
To find a job coherent with personal interests	4,5	0,040	453
Increase of personal culture	4,4	0,041	453
To achieve professional skills	4,3	0,043	453
Interest in the subjects studied	4,3	0,043	453
To find profitable job	3,8	0,056	453
Difficulty in finding a job without a degree	3,5	0,059	453
High esteem of the university degree	3,3	0,061	453
Because of the family	2,3	0,063	453
Inability to find a job	1,9	0,057	453
The desire to continue to spend time with friends	1,3	0,034	453

The reasons behind the decision to undertake long-term educational paths could therefore not be linked to purely economic reasons (Franchi, 2005, AlmaLaurea, 2016). Certainly, the possibility to achieving a good economic situation can positively affect choices by aptitude.

I was not born in a family with silver spoons... Anyway I did not need to work. (M, 26, G1, Togo, Bachelor of Social Sciences)

The continuation of studies is almost taken for granted not so much to satisfy the wishes of their family, but for the deep-seated desire to succeed in those areas considered fundamental by the interviewees themselves. These motivations lead these students to approach the path they have undertaken in a very passionate way, defending it against any criticism and doubts raised from the outside.

I like to help people in difficulty: in the end, what I do it will not be a job, but it will be what I really want to do. (F, 20, G1.5, Romania, Bachelor of Expert in Social and Cultural Education)

I wanted to be a researcher in Pharmacy since I was 17 because my 6-year-old cousin died of a brain tumor. Bangladesh is a Third-World country, and did not have adequate care for this baby... He was a child with which I had spent a lot of time. (F, 22, G1.5, Bangladesh, Degree in Chemistry and Pharmaceutical Technologies)

The prevalence of choices according to aptitude does not mean that market aspects are not taken into consideration. In today's society, the degree certificate is often considered necessary because of greater competitiveness

within the labor market (Lehmann, 2009). The choice of the University therefore usually takes place only after the collection of detailed information on the institution and after a careful analysis of the possibilities and employment opportunities offered by the specific degree course.

I chose this course because it can be very useful for me. I took the information on a website where you can see the employment data in the first year after graduation, the expected income, and the career opportunities. (M, 24, G1, China, Master of Quantitative Finance)

At the same time, even cultural reasons, strictly connected to the area of origin, also contribute to this choice: University studies can be considered as a necessary step in view of future employment. This aspect, however, seems to refer to the role played by the ethnic cultural *ethos* that led the American literature to identify the second generation of Asian origin as a *model minority*, mainly in relation to the strong family control exercised on children's educational paths (Portes & Zhou, 1993, Lagomarsino & Ravecca, 2014).

Have you seen that the majority of Chinese attend School of Economics? In China all good students attend Economics and Finance. And this phenomenon derives from the society: it is a different way of thinking, of how society evaluates you. Here in Italy the choice of the University is much freer. (M, 24, G1, China, Master of Quantitative Finance)

I did not have a clear idea of what I would have done at the University, but I knew that I would enroll at the University: that was a certainty. And it will be the same also for my sister. It's a cultural thing because without a University degree nobody pays attention to you in Chile and you're worthless. (M, 20, G1.75, Chile, Bachelor of Business and Economics)

In Argentina the attitude is completely different from here: if you want to be someone you have to enroll at university. Otherwise you can't work anywhere. And so it was, how to say, the path to follow ... (F, 28, G1.25, Argentina, Bachelor of Motor Sciences)

In order to summarize the 10 items and to obtain a reduction in the number of variables through their best linear combinations (Kim & Mueller 1978), a principal components analysis was carried out. In this way, three different components have been identified: the first component includes the reason mostly related to market oriented choices; the second one includes the reasons mainly related to choices by aptitude; the third component, finally, consists of the remaining reasons. Both for the minor semantic affinity between the indicators and the reference component, as well as for the averages of the different items, already illustrated, the analysis focused mainly on the

first and second components. Through a linear regression, a model was developed in relation to the prevalence of the market oriented choices or choices made by aptitude, underlying the decision to continue the studies².

From the analysis carried out, it emerges that an enrollment due to purely market-oriented choices is mainly linked to having received significant parent support when students chose to continue their educational path: in other words, a greater (economic or moral) support received from the parents would promote an enrollment in a university course on the basis of market-oriented choices. This aspect is very significant, especially when compared to the model that focuses on the prevalence of choices according to aptitude: for the latter, in fact, parental support is not relevant, while a significant positive correlation emerges with the support received from teachers.

Parents and teachers seem to be the key figures in determining the educational paths of young immigrant students of our sample. Deeply investigating the role played by some figures supposed to be relevant for the student when choosing to enroll in a university course, the parental ones are considered by the respondents the most relevant: their help is clearly superior, even if compared to the one received by the teachers, whose role, as we will see shortly, cannot in any way be underestimated.

Table 2. Help received (on a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 is equivalent to “not at all” and 5 is equivalent to “fundamental”) in the decision to enroll at the University (average values, standard deviations and sample size).

	Average value	Standard deviation	N
Parents	3,4	0,073	453
Teachers	2,5	0,068	453
Friends	2,4	0,064	453
Other family members	2,4	0,072	453

The role of the family

The family, medium between the generations and, at the same time, between the adult world of the labor market and the educational paths of the children, is characterized by a design dimension strongly influenced by its own history and its own migratory experience, poised between past and future (Santagati, 2009).

² The full results of principal components analysis and linear regression are available upon request to the author.

It is well known that parental support plays a key role in the educational trajectories of young students (Gambetta, 1987; Brunello & Checchi 2007; Leonardi, 2007): the existence of non-conflicting relationships, the implicit or explicit sharing of medium-long term objectives, the possibility of relying on a relative, both from an economic-material (83.5% of the interviewees confirm that they finance their studies, among other things, also thanks to family support) as well as a psychological-motivational point of view in terms of emotional closeness, seems to have a significant impact on the educational career of the interviewees. We have to emphasize that just over half of the interviewees (53.4%) say they have difficulty communicating with their parents, due to different ways of thinking. Difficulties that evidently are not only related to the different processes of socialization among first and second generations of migrants, but also to the widespread conflicts that characterize the post-adolescent age.

As already extensively documented in literature (Portes and Rumbaut, 2005; Ravecca, 2010), parents' help would be more relevant for female students than male classmates, as well as for those who have at least one parent who has had access to university education, confirming the assumption that the level of parental education would be an important factor in the transfer of cultural capital to children (Coleman, 1988). Among the interviewees, just over a third (34.2%) underlined the access to university education of at least one of the parents. Therefore, as shown by other research work carried out in Italy (Bosisio *et al.*, 2005; Queirolo Palmas, 2006; Santagati, 2009), children's educational path would be in close relationship with the family cultural capital. Those who arrive in Italy with high qualifications, regardless of their backgrounds, imagine with greater conviction a continuation of studies up to university for their children, not only to create better opportunities for work placement, but also to preserve their prestige towards their kin who remained in the country of origin (Bertozzi, 2004).

I could never say to my mother: "I do not graduate." I could not do it for the needs within my family environment: it was an unwritten rule. (F, 20 G1, Greece, Bachelor of Philosophy)

My parents above all helped me to choose. In short, they guided me because I wanted to do a very international course of study. (M, 20, G1.75, Chile, Bachelor of Business and Economics)

This more or less explicit support played a key role in the life choices of the respondents. Among the first generation of migrants, parental encouragement emerges in undertaking educational paths abroad: a need to gain experience elsewhere to enhance one's own curriculum, to build one's own competence, to "learn about things". And beyond a motivational support, also an economic support is often present.

My father always told me “I started from nothing, I had no one to support me, and I bootstrapped myself, and I would like you to do the same” (...) But in the end he supported me with all the expenses: he did everything... (M, 26, G1, Togo, Bachelor of Social Sciences)

Studying is one of the most beautiful things. But even parents have played a role because they say “Golly, we work hard. Having the daughter enrolled at the University is a prestige” (...) In the end, even my parents wanted it. Now they tell me that the important thing is that I like it and that I study willingly, and that’s really what happens, so... (F, 20, G1.5, Romania, Bachelor of Expert in Social and Cultural Education)

Focusing on students who have moved to Italy with their family, parents’ desire to have children with high educational qualifications is often considered one of the key elements when the decision to embark on a migration paths was made. The migration is therefore interpreted from the perspective of an investment by parents in their children, within a project of improvement living conditions, of realization, and of social mobility for the whole family. The aspirations are a key element for explaining the path of immigrant families and their children: they are produced within the family, in which the educational process takes place starting from a balance of past and present, individual and collective experiences of its members (Djoud-er, 2007). Several researches show that foreign parents, rather than Italian ones, repeat with greater insistence to their children that the possibility of having an education is a fortune and, above all, that studying is essential to find a good job (Colombo & Santagati, 2014). This aspect is implicitly read by young students in terms of a request for responsibility, as recipients of a series of educational (and work) expectations.

Let’s say that my parents decided to emigrate to another country mainly for me and my sister. And studying, making their children study in good universities, then giving them the chance of a better life, is certainly one of the reasons why one takes a rubber boat, risking his life. And so the least I owe to them is to continue studying, giving some satisfaction. I’ve always had a sort of pressure for that, but it was never a duress. Even if my parents have not yet understood what I’m studying, they support me. (F, 25, G1.75, Albania, Master of International Relations and Diplomatic Affairs)

My father, however, was an engineer and here he is a metalworker at the end; my mother was employed and now she is unemployed. So they are not completely enthusiastic. But they gave more chances to me and my brothers than we could have in Albania. (M, 21, G1.75, Albania, Bachelor in Biotechnology)

These expectations sometimes result in a support that can be found not only when choosing to enroll in a university course, but which also manifests itself during the academic path through “diffuse incitements” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979), constituting essential support for the overall outcome. According to Coleman (2005), the family provides young people with an important form of social capital, defined as “prolonged attention”, which is seen as a continuity of care given by parents to their children. The existence of support from highly functional families is therefore considered as one of the key elements in ensuring that young students are led along positive growth paths (Coleman, 1988).

My family is happier than me, because studying has always been important in my family (...) Last year I had not passed any exams, and I told myself or that I was idiot or that it was too difficult for me. Instead my mother has always been there: “No, you must go on”. (F, 21, G2, Morocco, Bachelor of International Relations and Diplomatic Affairs)

My family is very happy. Indeed, my father maybe even more: he has been outside prescribed time for almost 20 years, so ... He always tells me: “Even if you take 10 years to graduate who cares: at the end you will become a doctor” Okay, calmly ... Also because if I have to study 10 years, having to pay 2000 euros of taxes a year (...) They are very satisfied with me, in such a way that I feel sometimes even a little embarrassed, because I do not think I deserve this. But they are really very proud of me, sincerely. In the end it seems to me to do my duty only, so I cannot see anything special in what I do. (F, 27, G2, Nigeria, Degree in Medicine and Surgery)

Parents’ hopes and expectations sometimes go beyond their children’s desires, turning out to be an imposition of unshared and openly opposed formative choices. Immigrant parents generally have high aspirations and their ambitions are translated into supporting children and requiring their commitment and perseverance in the educational process: the not always total coincidence between parents’ expectations, actual paths and aspirations of their children, however, proves that transmission does not happen in a linear and smooth way (Brinbaum, 2005).

As in this specific case, in which the high parental expectations clash with the desire for short-term educational paths manifested by the student on several occasions, the coercive motivation, being a negative predictor of scholastic success (Colombo, 2014), results in a lack of stimulus and a rather low average rating.

The Accountancy Qualification was a choice of my parents, not mine, as well as the University: I was not at all convinced (...) But now I have my Accountancy Qualification: at least I finished it. Instead the Uni-

versity... Surely I would have preferred not to continue. (F, 19, G1.75, Albania, Bachelor of Social Sciences)

While the chance to have strong parental support is evidently influenced by the economic resources available to the family of origin (and among the respondents, 68.9% say they have several economic problems at home), also the cultural background of the parents, as already revealed, plays a key role. Several studies show that for second-generation students the socio-economic status of parents does not have a direct impact on their children's academic performance, but that it is rather their cultural capital and the attention given to their children's educational problems that make the difference (McLanahan, 1985; Spanò, 2011; Colombo & Santagati, 2014). This happens even though many parents have obtained their own degrees in their country of origin, for which reason their qualifications are not valid in Italy. This condition is common to many migrant families, often characterized by overeducated members, willing to accept a downgrading of their conditions provided that a valid chance of educational and professional success is given to their children.

In Albania my mother graduated in what would be Pedagogy here in Italy. My father in Engineering. Obviously neither of their qualifications were recognized: my father started as a worker. My mother, on the other hand, would have to re-do half of her degree, so she stayed at home. (M, 21, G1.75, Albania, Bachelor of Biotechnology)

And when the help does not come from their parents, an important role is played by other significant adults.

My ex-girlfriend's parents supported me a lot. My parents asked me why I wanted to enroll at university, since I already had a well-paid job. I was earning 1,200 euros, already as a beginner: my salary could only improve. So this other family has supported me in a particular way, and in fact I will always thank her. (M, 23, G1.75, Tunisia, Bachelor of Biomedical Engineering)

Obviously, the socio-economic status of the family can influence the choice of school and training: the adolescent is often called to contribute to the sustenance of the family, through an early entry in the labor market, which is realized with the interruption of the course of study or with the participation to work activities simultaneous to school attendance (Traversi & Ognisanti, 2007). In other cases there is an evident opposition to the chosen educational pathways: sometimes the dissent concerns the choice to leave a high-paying job, sometimes an explicit disagreement with the decision to move away, sometimes for reasons of cultural incompatibility.

I've always done everything myself. My goal has always been to make them proud anyway, even if they did not share my choices, because

maybe at first they did not understand them. They asked me why, since I already had a well-paid job. (M, 23, G1.75, Tunisia, Bachelor of Biomedical Engineering)

My father was against my choice to come here to Bologna: he never supported my decision to leave home. This is why I also had some problems, because I had to make my own living, to find a job (...) I understand my father's resentment and anger in letting a son go away, but I hope he understands that for me to go away was a useful thing, a necessary thing.. (M, 22, G1.5, Pakistan, Degree in Law)

My father was against my choice for a cultural reason, because a woman can't spend the nights away from home, et cetera. I do not care(...) I wanted to be a nurse, I did not care. I followed his choices up to the high schools: he enrolled me in a high school that I did not even know (...) I am about to graduate, and I will invite my father to my graduation ceremony: it will be my revenge. (F, 21, G2, Morocco, Bachelor of Nursing)

The role of educational institutions

Teachers and, more generally, the educational institution as a whole, play a fundamental role in the educational process of the pupils. The possible, even if unintentional, discriminations that can be put in place (more modest expectations than Italian students, the underestimation of their performance) risk jeopardizing the success of students of foreign origin. This is especially true if we consider the final phase of a specific cycle of studies and the related scholastic orientation that follows. If teachers seem to feel a certain "benevolence" for the immigrant students upon arrival, paying particular attention to the phase of the first reception, their sensitivity is greatly reduced in the teaching-learning phase (Colombo, 2014).

However, the pre-university educational path is a factor that must be considered in the analysis of the educational trajectories of second-generation youths. The concentration of foreign students in certain educational paths may be a link to choices that meet the needs of immigrant families in a realistic way, but might also lead to wrong orientation at the end of lower secondary school and to forms of "disincentivation" (Giovannini, 2008). However, the percentages that emerged among the students interviewed are slightly different: among those in possession of an Italian diploma, the majority (53.3%) has a diploma acquired in a "Lyceum". It is well known that attending a Lyceum results more commonly in long-term educational paths. On the other hand, we have to highlight the difficulties encountered in choosing secondary school by those families who are not adequately supported through specific guidance activities: these activities would allow them to understand the different degrees of preparation and the different future perspectives of-

ferred by the various schools (Spanò, 2010; Ricucci, 2012; Romito, 2016). These guidance services would be necessary to consider all the different aspects that characterize the scholastic-educational choice, from those related to the attitudes and inclinations of the students, to those more inherent to employment opportunities, so as to avoid risks of drop-out (Santagati, 2011).

I'm happy to have attended the vocational school, because it was a good path. But if I went back, I'd attend another school: I'd go to Lyceum, because the beginning of the University has been difficult, really hard, because I did not have the basics. Compared to the majority of my fellows, I think I started from a very different level. (F, 19, G1.75, Morocco, Bachelor of Nursing)

The support shown by the teachers encountered during the pre-university path can be fundamental in encouraging certain choices. If the interviewees confirm the results of different researches carried out on Italian territory (Lagomarsino & Ravecca, 2011; Colombo, 2012), namely the presence of a usually positive relationship with teachers, and their efforts to favor a process of inclusion of second-generation students within the class, it is equally true that the story of A., a Moroccan student enrolled in the third and final year of the course of Law, is so particular that it cannot allow any generalization. After starting primary education in Morocco, he arrived in Italy at the age of 10, without his parents. After several problems (including a few months' hospitalization, custody in a center, a quarrel with a relative who would bring him, at the age of 13, to terminate any contact with parents and family) he moved to live with friends in northern Italy and then in Germany, taking part in some illegal activities that would lead him to be imprisoned in Italy. During his detention, A. achieved the diploma and met the main reference person in his life.

And then I met a professor. He taught in prison as a volunteer, because he spoke Arabic, and lectured Arab prisoners. At a certain point we became like friends, and he said to me, "Promise me that when you will be released from prison you will enroll at the University: just take an exam, then do what you want." And so I am enrolled in university and I am still continuing to study. (M, 27, G1.5, Morocco, Degree in Law)

The history of A. is so peculiar that it deserves a separate discussion: given the extremely special case, we cannot proceed with generalizations in relation to the role played by teachers when deciding on the continuation of the educational career of students. In any case, as other studies have already highlighted, it seems certain that the attitude of the teachers and the degree of trust given by the students to the professors (factors that, among others, contribute to define the so-called "class effect"), are aspects that have a crucial influence on the full integration of pupils within the class group (Co-

lombo & Santagati, 2014) and, consequently, contribute to reduce following pre-established paths based on the origin of the students.

And indeed it can be stressed that, when this support did not exist or was aimed at other educational paths than those desired by the interviewees, it has later been criticized, following what has been learned in relation to the logic of educational segregation, which often affect young people with migration backgrounds. This happens when teachers' expectations and advice, implementing the mechanisms of subordinate integration (Ambrosini, 2011), direct young people to more poorly qualifying educational paths.

My Professor of Mathematics had suggested a vocational school. And since I did an Anthropology exam, I read that the second generations are usually pointed to those paths by the teachers or by educational institutions themselves. There would be this prejudice, even involuntary. Also in the case of my math teacher. She told me: "I would see you well for this thing. Not because... But, you know..." But in the end I chose a Lyceum. (F, 20, G1.5, Romania, Bachelor of Expert in Social and Cultural Education)

It should also be emphasized that, from the quantitative analyzes carried out, the support received from teachers would seem to influence the parents' willingness to invest in their children's educational path: these commonly-held intentions would therefore positively influence the educational trajectories of the students.

In the end, a final consideration is required. 60.7% of the sample suffered episodes of discrimination in Italy because of their origins: This is a very high percentage, considering that it refers to a target that has in any case successfully completed their educational paths. While 43.5% of students report having suffered these episodes in different areas of daily life, 32.7% have suffered them within their pre-university educational experience, while 11.0% have suffered them at the University. The experience of episodes of discrimination is an aspect that is very important in determining the educational trajectories and expectations of the interviewees. Having experienced the prejudices of the receiving society, or having faced real episodes of discrimination, could be a very important risk factor in the possibility of undertaking a successful training path (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

The existence of forms of discrimination in daily practice are seen in the perception of the children of immigrants as the denial of equal opportunities and of rights of substantial equality with respect to their peers (Colombo, 2009; Caneva, 2011; Eve & Perino, 2011). Hence the need arises to create synergies between educational and immigration policies in a broad sense, such as to successfully support the educational careers of young people of immigrant origin (Besozzi *et al.*, 2009; Ravecca, 2009). If on the one hand we can speak, at the macro level, of an "institutional" discrimination concerning

the uncertainties, the delays and the bureaucratic difficulties that characterize the mechanisms of acquisition of Italian citizenship, as well as those mechanisms of educational segregation described above, on the other hand the interviewees also highlighted individual episodes of discrimination due to teachers' biases or strong prejudices.

I will never forget a teacher who has never called me by name but called me "Albanian": never by name. (F, 25, G1.75, Albania, Master of International Relations and Diplomatic Affairs)

Sometimes they look at me and they say to me: "You are not Tunisian, you are Italian, you are not like those others". It was terrible because those others ... I belong to those others. (F, 23, G2, Tunisia, Bachelor of International Relations and Diplomatic Affairs)

In 2013, when I arrived in Italy, I attended an Italian course. I said I was from Mali and the teacher asked me to talk a bit about my experience. And I started talking about the schools I attended. He stopped me and said, "Can you talk about your hunting experiences?" Because in his opinion you have to hunt to survive in Mali. He asked me how many times I had seen a lion.. But I have never seen a lion! In short, there are a few prejudices... (M, 27, G1, Mali, Master of International Cooperation)

Nobody considers you if you are a foreigner. If you are white and foreign, it is a little easier: that is, you have a very easy life until you don't say what nationality you are. While if you are black it is not important if you were born in Italy, if you have citizenship, or if you have just arrived: you are discriminated against anyway. It is not important if your family has annoyed you to be good and careful, because you will always be the one that is never good. That is, nobody assumes that you can do something good (...) I feel like an Italian citizen because I grew up here. The only problem is that I never get to say it out loud in front of others because no one recognizes me as an Italian citizen: even if I had citizenship I would not really be considered that way, either at school, at work, or anywhere. (F, 22, G1.5, Ivory Coast, Bachelor of Foreign Languages and Literature)

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to focus on a population of students often ignored by analyses related to the educational processes, although it constitutes a well-established and constantly expanding reality, namely those students with migratory background who have had access to university education. The analyses carried out on the entire student population starting from the MIUR

data have highlighted some interesting trends, mainly related to the students' pre-university educational pathways and to the way in which gender issues intersect the migratory experience.

This empirical research, focused on the case of the University of Bologna, tried to highlight to what extent the motivations, the role played by parents and by educational institutions and the presence of situations of social discrimination influence the trajectories, the opportunities and the choices of young people with migratory backgrounds. We started with an analysis of the motivations behind the choice to continue their studies, so as to investigate a possible prevalence of market-oriented choices or, in other cases, of choices made according to aptitude. Having emphasized the prevalence of the latter, we then tried to investigate which aspects, more than others, can lead to reasons of a financial nature or personal inclination. One of the most relevant examples of empirical evidence is given by the type of support received: market-oriented choices are mostly linked to parental support; the support received from teachers, on the contrary, is mostly linked to an enrollment based on choices influenced by aptitude.

From the words of the interviewees it is clear that they can take advantage of parental support, both from an economic and, above all, from a moral point of view. The educational path is obviously linked to the socio-economic resources of the families and many researchers show that the mistrust towards the Italian school is not the main reasons that young people abandon their studies, but that this decision is more frequently due to the need to contribute to the family life (Bertozzi, 2004). At the same time, this lack of help is not automatically reflected in less successful educational pathways, but further efforts by the students are requested in this case, in order for them to overcome different obstacles – obstacles that sometimes derive from the scholastic institution itself, and which risk translating into pre-determined and discriminating paths (without forgetting that the student's agency must always be taken into consideration).

Therefore, a final mention must be made about those educational policies that can be concretely implemented to encourage the full integration into higher education of students from a migratory background. By focusing on the pre-university educational experience of the interviewees, the importance of the inclusion pathways is evident: it is necessary to avoid a delayed entry into high school education by young people of foreign origin. At the same time, relegation to lower classes compared to peers of corresponding age is not a successful solution. The possibility of counting on experiences put in place in countries where the migratory presence is well-established can be of great help (Molina, 2014): constant attention must be paid by the educational institution to the specific needs of young people of foreign origin, taking every

precaution to limit the dangers that may derive from stigmatization, so as to reach policies and proposals that are sensitive to students' full integration.

Another aspect to underline is the importance of all the guidance that needs to take place in order to avoid the information gap that often characterizes immigrant families. Guidance is essential for students to be able to choose, in a conscious and informed way, what they consider to be the best training path, based on their interests and their passions: in this way we could also try to remedy the high dropout rates of students of foreign origin, among the highest in Europe (INDIRE, 2014). Structural factors (such as the socio-economic condition of the family) will always play a role in this choice, as happens among native Italians: it is however important that the choice adopted is characterized by a full awareness on the part of the young and of his family. To make this happen, the role of teachers, starting from lower secondary schools, is central. In particular, as also emerged from several interviews, students of foreign origin should not be directed a priori towards technical and vocational education, often producing short-term educational paths. The interviewees, despite having completed successful educational paths, resulting in enrolment in a university course, have sometimes found this tendency during their school experience. Moreover, an educational path developed in a certain set context, risks inadequate preparation of the students in view of the continuation of their studies, creating a certain disorientation in them, with the consequence that they obtain lower results than expected.

Definitely, the study of the different and complicated identities of young second-generation students in the Italian university system is by now essential. This phenomenon is increasingly consolidated but, as it often occurs, research starts when the issue is already rooted, without any anticipatory analysis (Lagomarsino & Ravecca, 2014). The presence of foreign students in Italian secondary schools has been extensively covered by research (especially regarding their presence in technical and professional institutes), but little is known about their presence at the university level. It would be simplistic to assume that those students who enrolled at university had never experienced any trouble in their pre-university or university career. A deepening of their educational paths, especially at university, is crucial: the opportunity to count on a theoretical corpus and on several experiences implemented in other countries that have already went through these dynamics, allow Italy to benefit from this international experience. Italy should then be able to gain from this advantage in order to grow its human, cultural and economic capital.

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