Students from migrant backgrounds in Italian schools: the role of socialisation agents on their psychological and academic adaptation

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General introduction

The demographic changes resulting from migratory flows over the past few decades (OECD/European Commission, 2023) have profoundly changed the composition of our societies and, as a result, global educational institutions (Cerna et al., 2021; OECD, 2018a). In Italy, where immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon beginning in the second half of the 1990s, the resident foreign population is now an established reality (ISTAT, 2023). In fact, although to a lesser extent than in many other European nations (OECD, 2022), after the surge documented in the decade 2005-2014 (during which the foreign resident population grew from less than 4 to more than 8%), migratory flows towards Italy have acquired a degree of stability. According to data from the Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Policies (XIII annual report[1]), on January 1, 2023, legally resident foreigners made up 8.6% of the total population (+0.4% compared to 2022) and, in 2021, the number of residence permits issued for family-related reasons increased significantly compared to the previous year (+126.8%).

Due to these demographic shifts, the proportion of immigrant students or students with foreign-born parents has increased over the past decade in most nations, particularly in the United Kingdom, Italy, and the Nordic countries (OECD/European Commission, 2023). According to data from the Italian Ministry of Education about the 2021-2022 school year, students with non-Italian citizenship in Italian school classes represent a structured reality in all scholastic cycles and constitute more than 10% of the student population (Ministry of Education, 2023).

The increasing demographic diversity of Italian classes necessitates schools to respond to rising students' educational and social needs (Benvenuto, 2018; Catarci & Fiorucci, 2018; ISMU, 2019). In fact, in Italian schools, children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds[2] face various critical issues. They have, on average, lower educational achievements, higher school attrition rates, and are more likely to enrol in technical or vocational programs than

[1] https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita-immigrazione/focus/sintesi-xiii-rapporto-mdl-stranieri-2023# (Last accessed date: September 2023)

[2] In the current dissertation, "students from migrant backgrounds" or "immigrant students" refer to children or adolescents born in Italy or abroad from one or both immigrant parents. For additional information, see: Eurydice Report 2019 "Integration of students from migrant backgrounds in European schools. National Policies and Measures", retrieved from: https://eurydice.indire.it/publications/integration-of-students-from-competitions-migrants-on-schools-European-policy-and-national-measures/ (Last accessed date: September 2023); MIUR, "Intercultural Guidelines", 2022, retrieved from https://www.miur.gov.it-documents/20182/0/Orientamenti+Interculturali.pdf/be99b531-74 (Last accessed date: September 2023).

their native peers (Ministry of Education, 2023; OECD, 2018a). In addition to the difficulties associated with the type and quality of their educational paths, research conducted in the European context[3] reveals that children of immigrant families in Italian schools report a lower sense of school belonging, more significant relational difficulties with peers, lower levels of perceived teacher support and educational expectations compared to their native peers (Save the Children, 2023).

The increasing interest in the educational experiences of immigrant students has led to the identification of several risk factors for their academic success. In this respect, socioeconomic resources and language competencies seem crucial in explaining the performance disparity between students from migrant backgrounds and their native peers. In fact, almost everywhere in Europe, immigrants are at a much higher risk for poverty and social exclusion than native-born citizens (OECD/European Commission, 2023). Compared to native families, immigrants in Italy, on average, were born in poorer countries, have a lower social standing, and often live in conditions of absolute poverty (Carlana et al., 2022; ISTAT, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023). Nevertheless, these structural factors only partially explain the achievement gap among students from different ethnic backgrounds. For instance, low aspirations and ambitions can lead students to select less demanding educational paths (Carlana et al., 2022). Furthermore, contextual influences – such as the perception of obstacles or lack of social support – can significantly impede the developmental trajectories of culturally and economically disadvantaged children and adolescents (Lent et al., 2000, 2001; Marini, Livi, Prislei, et al., 2023).

These secondary effects (Boudon, 1974) due to the migrant background (ISMU, 2020) are drawing attention to the need to apply socio-psychological theories and models to explain and, ideally, reduce educational inequalities related to ethnic origins (Carlana et al., 2018; Gabrielli & Impicciatore, 2021; Gabrielli et al., 2013, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2023; Triventi et al., 2021). In this regard, the multi-systemic and integrative conceptual framework proposed by Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) suggests that to understand immigrant students' adjustment is necessary to adopt a multilevel perspective that takes into account the mutual interaction between their intra-individual characteristics and proximal development contexts, i.e., family, teachers, and peers (see Chapter 2 for a detailed description of this conceptual model). According to this overarching conceptual framework, which guided the design of this PhD project, family, and school (i.e., teachers and

[3] IMMERSE project: https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/. (Last accessed date: September 2023)

peers) shape children and adolescents' development; indeed, within these social systems, it is possible to identify promotive and/or protective factors for students' positive adaptation, particularly among immigrant youth.

The research project. Due to the reasons mentioned above, the research project that will be presented in this doctoral dissertation was conceived to shed light on the role of socialisation experiences, particularly those involving family and school, in shaping the adaptation processes of young people, with a particular focus on immigrant students attending Italian schools[4]. Although the literature has provided a great deal of evidence on the role of socialisation agents in young people's development trajectories, the migration's impact on children and adolescent well-being is still the subject of extensive scientific debate (Crocetti & Eckstein, 2021; Eckstein & Crocetti, 2021). According to information gathered so far (ISMU, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2022b, 2023; OECD, 2018a; Save the Children, 2023), in fact, in the education systems of most European nations, children from immigrant families experience various disadvantages. In countries with recent immigration, such as Italy, in addition, predictors of the educational achievement of ethnic minority students remain a relatively new and understudied topic (for some notable exceptions, see: Alivernini et al., 2018; Alivernini, Cavicchiolo, et al., 2019; Alivernini, Manganelli, et al., 2019; Alivernini et al., 2020; Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Lucidi et al., 2021; Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli, et al., 2021; Cavicchiolo et al., 2020, 2022, 2023; Gabrielli & Impicciatore, 2021; Gabrielli et al., 2013, 2021; Manganelli et al., 2021; Mussino & Strozza, 2012). As a result, research like the one described in this dissertation could be valuable in understanding how to appropriately improve educational policies and practices to respond to these students' needs.

To accomplish this objective, three studies were conducted at several Italian upper secondary schools selected based on the number of students with non-Italian citizenship enrolled[5] (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4). The decision to involve secondary school students was necessitated by the fact that, as described in Chapter 1, this school cycle is particularly important for immigrant students in terms of track choices and psychosocial and educational outcomes. After selecting the schools, school leaders were contacted, and a letter introducing the project was sent to them. After obtaining their willingness to receive more information on

[4] The project started in the 2020/2021 school year. In some schools, studies are still ongoing.

[5] In order to identify the schools, the following portal was consulted: https://dati.editore.it/opendata/opendata/catalogo/elements1/leaf/?area=Studenti&datasetId=DS0050ALUITASTRACITSTA. (Last accessed date: January 2022)

the research, the project was illustrated in detail and, on the school's initiative, the Institute Council approved it.

In each participating school, the following phases were taken before the commencement of research activities:

1) *The investigation topic's definitions*. The themes investigated in each school were determined in collaboration with school leaders and/or their collaborators, based on the school's interests and training needs, beginning with the project's overall objectives.
2) *Presentation to families and students of the research project*. During a special meeting, the research team, consisting of professors and doctoral students from the Sapienza University of Rome, presented their expertise to the families and students and provided information about their professional careers. In addition, parents and students were adequately informed about the research's objectives, procedures, methods and tools, timelines, methods for returning results and protecting anonymity, the right to refuse or terminate participation, and data processing. Specifically, the participants were informed that their consent to participate in the research, which was free and voluntary, could be withdrawn at any time. In addition, contact information of the research managers and their collaborators, who could be reached for clarifications and additional information, were provided. This information was then included in the informed consent form for participation in the research, as required by the Code of Ethics for Psychology Research.
3) *Distribution and collection of informed consent for participation in the study.* The families of the minor students were provided with informed consent for participation in the study, which was developed based on the recommendations of the ethical committee of the *Department of Psychology and Socialisation Processes*, Sapienza University of Rome.
4) *Checking for consent to participate and determining the number of participants*. The research team verified parental permissions and tallied the number of participants. This information was shared with the referring teacher(s) who assisted the research team during this complex and fundamental phase.

As will be described in each study presented in this doctoral thesis, the research design of this project was quantitative. In certain schools, a longitudinal approach has been adopted. In other instances, the test was administered only once during the school year. The schools

determined administration periods based on their requirements and available time. The questionnaire was administered online during school hours and lasted 40 minutes. The questionnaire was distributed in Italian. In general, students from migrant backgrounds possessed good linguistic skills in terms of Italian comprehension. In scarce circumstances, it was necessary to read the questionnaire to the students in Italian or provide them with a translation into English. Before compilation, students whose parents had already consented to participate in the research were provided with all the necessary information to consciously and freely decide whether to participate. During the compilation of the questionnaires, doctoral students and undergraduates assisted the participating students by providing them with helpful information for completing the questionnaire (such as how to respond to the Likert scales) and responding to any need for clarification. After the surveys, a meeting with the school leader and teachers was arranged, during which the research's general results were discussed anonymously and in aggregate form.

The present dissertation. This doctoral dissertation was organised as follows.

In **Chapter 1**, the problem, research needs, and theoretical framework that guided this investigation were introduced. Specifically, concentrating on the Italian scenario, the findings of national and international reports on the dimension and composition of the immigrant population in OECD and UE countries and immigrant students' educational trajectories and well-being were presented. Regarding the theoretical framework, the multi-systemic and integrative model proposed by Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues in 2012 and refined by Suárez-Orozco and colleagues in 2018 – also called *the integrative risk and resilience model for understanding the developmental trajectories of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds* (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) – was discussed in depth. This conceptual model was considered particularly suitable for studying the adaptation of young immigrants. In fact, based on its assumptions, the studies conducted during this doctoral project were defined. In particular, the Authors emphasise that students from migrant backgrounds, like all students, are developing organisms and that this development occurs within the social environments with which children and adolescents continually interact. In three quantitative studies involving both Italian and immigrant students, the current research project, therefore, examined the impact of family (Chapter 1), teachers (Chapter 2), and peer group (Chapter 3) on adolescents' psychological and academic adjustment. In some cases, the comparative nature of the studies was motivated by a desire to identify differences in the socialisation experiences of adolescents from different migrant backgrounds (Chapters 3 and 4). In other

cases, however, the focus was limited to the experiences of students with immigrant backgrounds (Chapter 2). Furthermore, the Motti-Stefanidi et al.' multi-systemic and integrative model suggests using theories, tools, and methods from developmental, social, and cultural psychology to highlight the complex experience of immigrant-origin children and adolescents (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021). As a result, additional specific theoretical frameworks were used in each study described in this dissertation, which allowed for exploring mechanisms and processes by which socialisation agents can influence students' educational experiences based on the characteristics of the social context investigated (family and school). Farther, Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012, 2021) emphasise that positive youth adaptation can be assessed in several ways. Specifically, according to a normative principle, the adjustment of children and adolescents is correlated with what is typical for them regarding age-appropriate developmental tasks; for instance, adaptation includes academic achievement, school motivation, and positive peer relationships. In addition, given the numerous risk factors to which children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds are exposed, acculturative tasks and psychological well-being are crucial indicators for assessing their positive adaptation. Because of this, in the present doctoral research project, several school-related outcomes (e.g., academic self-concept) and general psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem) were examined. Finally, and most important, the multi-systemic and integrative model (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) abandons the deficit-oriented perspectives commonly used in the literature to understand and explain the immigrant students' experiences. In contrast, it emphasises those factors that promote and/or protect positive adolescents well-being (Masten, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Motti-Stefanidi, 2023; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). For these reasons, in the present dissertation, following the *strength-based perspective*, parental influences, teacher-student relationships, and peer relationships were discussed as factors that promote the well-being of all students and as factors that protect well-being in the presence of risk situations, such as coming from immigrant families.

Regarding parental influences, the function of parental educational values in students from immigrant backgrounds' adjustment was discussed in **Chapter 2**. After a brief review of the literature on *Parental Involvement* (Boonk et al., 2018; Kim, 2022), especially among immigrant families (Antony-Newman, 2019; Barger et al., 2019; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007; Seginer, 2006; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010; Kim et al., 2020; Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020), two studies involving a large number of upper secondary school students were described in detail. In particular, starting from the Expectancy-Value model (Eccles, 2005; Eccles, 2009;

Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992; Wigfield et al., 2016, 2017), through study 1a a new tool to assess parents and students' educational values was developed and validated, while Study 1b examined the mechanisms through which immigrant parents' educational values influence their children's future educational expectations.

Regarding the socialisation experiences at school, in **Chapter 3**, a longitudinal study outlined the role of the quality of the teacher-student relationship on students' engagement and educational expectations. In this regard, many studies and research have demonstrated that when teachers provide the appropriate support, at-risk students can successfully adapt to their environment (Pitzer & Skinner, 2016; Ricard & Pelletier, 2016; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009).

The peer context's role in young people's adaptation was discussed in detail in **Chapter 4**. Research has demonstrated that the socio-demographic characteristics of students and their families can have a significant impact on peer interactions (Benner & Wang, 2014; Cavicchiolo et al., 2022; Hjalmarsson et al., 2023; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Plenty & Jonsson, 2017). Specifically, immigrant students are often less accepted, receive less social support, and are frequently rejected and discriminated against by their peers (Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli et al., 2021; Cavicchiolo et al., 2022; Dalmasso et al., 2018; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021). However, positive experiences and inclusive and supportive environments can promote well-being and develop or strengthen the resilience of children and adolescents from disadvantaged groups (Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017). In the study presented in this chapter, after examining ostracism's predictors and mechanisms (Gerber & Wheeler, 2009; Gerber et al., 2013; Hartgerink et al., 2015; Williams & Nida, 2017; Williams & Zadro, 2001), it was investigated whether the presence of a positive classroom climate could moderate the effect of social affiliations on peer relationships by acting as a protective factor for the students' positive adaptation (Masten, 2014a, 2014b, 2015).

It is essential to underline that in all the studies conducted during the present doctoral project, students' educational expectations – in terms of perceived difficulties in completing the studies (Chapters 2 and 3) or perceived probabilities of future success (Chapter 4) – were considered as outcomes of the relationship between socialisation experiences (in the family or at school) and the adaptation indicators suggested by the conceptual model of Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012, 2021), i.e., academic self-concept (Chapter 2), school engagement (Chapter 3), and self-esteem (Chapter 4). Assuming a *strength-oriented perspective*, such expectations have been preferred to objective indicators of success, such as performance

(grades), for several reasons. First of all, over the years, many studies have shown that adolescence is a period in which young people begin to think about their future and, therefore, to build expectations (positive or negative) regarding their educational and professional careers, which can be self-fulfilling prophecies (Beal & Crockett, 2010; OECD, 2012a, 2012b, 2017). Investigating students' future expectations, then, can help predict young people's development trajectories and preventively identify those at risk of maladjustment. Furthermore, research has shown that these expectations are primarily influenced by the opportunities that the context can offer to young people, opportunities that include both socioeconomic and material resources, and social resources – such as relationships with peers, teachers, and parents (Bandura, 2001; Lent et al., 2000; OECD, 2017). Then, the study of the role of socialisation agents in students' future expectations is undoubtedly helpful in identifying risk and protective factors for the future success of young people in the social contexts of reference. Finally, in continuity with previous studies (Cecalupo, 2021), this research project's interest in students' future expectations has been fuelled by the fact that the research conducted so far on this topic has attributed excessive emphasis to the role that structural variables, i.e., economic status and ethnic origin, play on students' beliefs and perceptions, neglecting the role of psychological and contextual factors, and their mutual interaction (e.g., Agasisti et al., 2021; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Minello, 2014; Lindstrom-Johnson et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016). However, literature has demonstrated that the social context, in interaction with personal characteristics and resources, can act as a promotive and/or protective factor for students' resilience, mainly when disadvantageous conditions are present (see Chapter 2; e.g., Masten, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Motti-Stefanidi, 2021; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021, 2022).

In the **Conclusions**, the general results of these studies were discussed, as well as the practical implications of this research, and educational research in general, for improving educational institutions and, by extension, societies as a whole.

Chapter 1

Young Immigrants' Adaptation: Research Needs and Theoretical Perspectives

Abstract

This chapter will discuss the findings of national and international reports on immigrant students' educational, psychological, and social adjustment. The analysis of these reports revealed that, compared to their native counterparts, ethnic minority groups have lower academic performance and socioemotional well-being. This is notably true in Italy, where students from migrant backgrounds demonstrate a general disinvestment in education. These disadvantageous conditions are partly attributable to the economic instability that frequently accompanies the experience of migrant families and to the challenges associated with acculturation processes, such as learning the host country's language. Despite this, numerous psychosocial and contextual factors can help explain immigrant students' educational disadvantages. In particular, the multi-systemic and integrative model proposed for the first time by Motti-Stefanidi et al. in 2012, integrating theoretical paradigms relating to developmental, social, and cultural psychology, defines the importance of socialisation agents, in interaction with social factors and intra-individual characteristics, in promoting culturally and economically disadvantaged students' well-being (Motti-Stefanidi, 2023). This model was used to design the investigations described in the following chapters.

"*Education Breeds Confidence.*
Confidence Breeds Hope.
Hope Breeds Peace."
Confucius

Education is the primary tool for integration and social mobility in contemporary societies (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012; Sewell & Hauser, 1972). Consequently, educational inequalities that still exist today – such as differences in academic success and access to education systems among students from different ethnic and social backgrounds – demonstrate how far global social policies are from ensuring equal opportunities and egalitarian principles to which they aspire (Agenda 2030).

Considering ethnic origins, official national and international reports (Cerna et al., 2021; Ministry of Education, 2022b, 2023; OECD, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) describe profound disparities in performance, educational choices, and socio-emotional well-being between immigrant and native students, which can be traced back to various factors related to the migratory experience, such as language difficulties and socioeconomic disadvantages.

In Italy, the situation is not encouraging, especially for immigrant students attending upper secondary school[6], which is crucial to their educational and professional future. Compared to their Italian peers, students from migrant backgrounds, particularly first-generation students, choose less prestigious and challenging educational paths, have poor academic performance and high levels of academic delay, or, in extreme cases, dropout of school (Gabrielli et al., 2021; Ministry of Education, 2022b, 2023). These socio-educational disparities have long-term consequences that hinder the social mobility, the integration, and the general well-being of students and their families (Alba & Foner, 2015; Belfi et al., 2021; Cebolla-Boado & González-Fernández, 2021; Corak, 2013; OECD, 2018c).

In the following paragraphs, after a brief summary of the current migration situation at the national and international level (OECD/European Commission, 2023), the data processed by the Italian Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2022b, 2023) regarding the

[6] Primary (5 years), lower secondary (3 years), and the first two years of upper secondary education (5 years) are mandatory in Italy. High schools (*licei*), technical schools, and professional schools constitute the upper secondary curricula. Students can enrol in higher education (university) after completing secondary school and passing the state exam.

school population of students with non-Italian citizenship during the 2021/22 school year will be presented. In addition, beginning with the most recent OECD reports (2018a; OECD/European Commission 2023; Cerna et al., 2021), the academic performance and social-emotional adjustment of students from migrant backgrounds in Italy and the other OECD-UE nations will be examined.

1.1 Migration's impact on education systems: OECD and national reports

After a decline during the pandemic crisis, international migration rebounded strongly in 2021, fuelled by the reopening of borders and the revival of economic activity (OECD, 2022; OECD/European Commission, 2023). Migration flows increased further in 2022, driven by the crisis in Ukraine and ongoing influxes via the Eastern, Central, and Western routes[7] (ISMU, 2023). Currently, the European Union (EU) and OECD countries regularly host, respectively, 54 and 142 million foreign-born persons (about 12% of the EU population and 10% of the OECD population), with a 20% rise in the last ten years (OECD/European Commission, 2023).

In the EU-OECD nations, then, immigrant populations and their descendants are expanding significantly. Although migration is currently an issue for many countries worldwide, the number and composition of the immigrant population and the level of integration of immigrants and their families in EU-OECD countries vary considerably (OECD/European Commission, 2023). Nonetheless, some nations have comparable migrant population characteristics (e.g., dimensions, motivations for migration, and average age) and demographic histories of immigration (OECD/European Commission, 2023), placing them in a similar position regarding challenges and issues. In particular, Italy, along with Costa Rica, Greece, Korea, Portugal, and Spain, have been identified as countries of recent immigration with a significant proportion of labour migrants (OECD/European Commission, 2023) (see Box 1 for a more in-depth look at the Italian situation). About one-sixth of immigrants in these countries possess a postsecondary degree. In addition, even though immigrant employment rates are, on average, comparable to or higher than those of natives, immigrants with a postsecondary education have more difficulties in finding employment than their

[7] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Migration flows towards the EU: https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/politica_europea/dossier/migrazioni/#:~:text=I%20flussi%20migratori%20verso%20l,essenzialmente%20lungo%20le%20seguenti%20rotte%3A&text=Mediterraneo%20centrale%2C%20con%20arrivi%20via,transitati%20via%20Tunisia%20e%20Libia (Last accessed date: September 2023)

native counterparts. Furthermore, with few exceptions, the immigrant family poverty rate is roughly double that of the native family.

BOX 1.

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE ITALIAN MIGRATION SITUATION

Sources:

ISTAT, 2023 - Demographic history of Italy from Unification to today[8]

Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, 2023 - XIII ANNUAL REPORT. Foreigners in the labour market in Italy

- Italy has 5.050 million immigrants (8.6% of the population).
- Compared to 2022, resident immigrants grew by 20.000 (+0.4%).
- Italy accepted 132.000 immigrants in 2020, 30.6% fewer than in 2019.
- Immigrants mostly come from Romania, Albania, and Morocco.
- The number of residence permits increased from 107.000 to 242.000 in 2021 (+126.8%). 50.9% of these permits were issued for family-related reasons, while 21.1% were for employment-related reasons.
- Half of the Italian immigrants had a low formal education, whereas a third of natives attended only lower secondary school.
- Only 12% of Italian immigrants have degrees, compared to 20% of natives.
- Compared to other countries, highly educated immigrants rose by less than 1%.
- In 2021, 28% of Italian immigrants worked in low-skill employment, compared to 8.5% of natives.
- 13% of foreigners in Italy in 2021 had higher-skilled jobs, compared to 39% of natives.
- Both EU and non-EU immigrants (11.9% and 12.0%, respectively) have higher unemployment rates than Italians (7.6%).
- For EU-citizen women, the unemployment rate is 15.1%, compared to 8.2% for males. Women have a 15.2% unemployment rate among non-EU unemployed, while men have a 10% unemployment rate (in the Italian population, the disparity is 1.8 percentage points: women: 8.6%, men: 6.4%).

Despite the unique characteristics of each nation, the integration of immigrants and their offspring is a political priority for all countries. Notably, the educational success of the children of immigrants is the focus of attention in several nations, as it serves as a valuable indicator of their level of integration in the host societies (OECD, 2012a). Globally, the

[8] https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/280672 (Last accessed date: September 2023)

number of children and adolescents born in a foreign country or with parents born in a foreign country has risen (OECD/European Commission, 2023). In the EU, 25% of children under 15 were born abroad or have parents born abroad. Considering OECD countries, this proportion increases to 28%. As for young individuals aged 15 to 34 in the EU, 23% were born abroad or have parents born abroad (28% in OECD countries), while 10% of the population comprises natives with at least one parent born abroad.

According to data from the *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA)[9], these demographic changes are significantly impacting the ethnic composition of classrooms worldwide (OECD, 2018a). In 2018, 23.8% of OECD 15-year-old students and 22.6% of EU 15-year-old students were foreign-born or had at least one foreign-born parent (+5% between 2009 and 2018 in OECD countries) (Cerna et al., 2021). The largest group consisted of native students with mixed-heritage (9% on average in OECD and EU countries), followed by second-year immigrant students (8% in OECD countries and 7% in EU countries) and first-generation students (5% in both the OECD and EU) (Cerna et al., 2021). Despite variations among countries participating in the PISA survey, the number of native students with foreign-born parents increased the most, followed by mixed-heritage natives (native students with one native parent and one foreign-born parent) and foreign-born students (students born abroad to foreign-born parents) (OECD, 2018a).

In terms of the Italian scenario, according to the most recent Ministry of Education report (2023), students with non-Italian citizenship (NIC)[10] account for 10.3% of the student population (data corresponds to the 2021/2022 school year). Despite this percentage falling for the first time in several years, the number of NIC students has remained unchanged compared to the previous year (Table 1.3), as the total number of Italian students has decreased (-1.2% compared to last year). Specifically, the proportion of NIC students in primary school is the highest (12.4%), whereas the number of NIC students in upper secondary school is decreasing (-725 students compared to the previous year) (Table 1.4).

[9] The PISA 2018 report distinguishes among *first-generation immigrant students* (students born abroad with two foreign-born parents), *second-generation immigrant students* (native students with two foreign-born parents), *students with mixed-heritage* (native-born students with one foreign-born and one native-born parent), and *return foreign-born immigrant students* (foreign-born students with at least one native-born parent).

Instead, in the OECD 2023 report (OECD//European Commission, 2023) which provides some analysis of the PISA 2018 data, when describing the outcomes of immigrant children and comparing them to those of native children, children and adolescents are categorised as follows: 1) native children of native parents, 2) native children of one or both parents born abroad, and 3) foreign-born children of foreign-born parents.

Despite this, as anticipated in the introduction section, in this dissertation, the expressions *immigrant students* and *students from migrant backgrounds/student with a migrant background* will be used in accordance with national reports and indications (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

[10] The Italian Ministry of Education data illustrate students' educational paths by comparing their results according to nationality (Italian or non-Italian).

Concerning generational status, national reports indicate that 67.5% of NIC students are second-generation students (+1% compared to the previous year). Even though NIC students come from nearly 200 countries, Romanian citizenship is the most common. Moreover, 44.06% of NIC pupils are European (Romania or Albania), while 27.6% and 20%, respectively, are of African or Asian (Morocco and China) origin (Table 1.5).

Table 1.3 *Historical series of non-Italian citizenship students* (Data processing by the Ministry of Education, University and Research, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022b, 2023)

School year	Total	% NIC students on the total school population
1983/1984	6.104	0.06%
1993/1994	30.547	0.32%
2003/2004	232.766	2.96%
2004/2005	282.683	3.49%
2014/2015	814.208	9.20%
2015/2016	814.851	9.23%
2016/2017	826.091	9.45%
2017/2018	841.719	9.71%
2018/2019	857.729	10%
2019/2020	876.801	10.33%
2020/2021	865.388	10.30%
2021/2022	872.360	10.60%
Note. 1983/1984 was the first school year in which reliable statistical data were collected		

Table 1.4 *Students with non-Italian citizenship by school order* (school year 2021/22) (source: Ministry of Education, 2023)

School cycle	NIC students	%
Kindergarten	156.701	11.7%
Primary school	312.713	12.4%
Middle school (or lower secondary school)	188.234	11.2%
High school (or upper secondary school)	216.987	8%
Total	872.360	10.6%

Table 1.5 *Students with non-Italian citizenship from the top 15 countries of origin* (school year 2021/22) (source: Ministry of Education, 2023)

Foreign state of citizenship	NIC students	%
Romania	151.735	17.394
Albania	116.931	13.404
Morocco	111.837	12.82
China	49.288	5.65
Egypt	34.176	3.918
India	31.063	3.561
Moldova	25.396	2.911
Bangladesh	24.654	2.826
Philippines	23.893	2.739
Pakistan	22.863	2.621
Tunisia	21.931	2.514
Peru	20.909	2.397
Ukraine	20.319	2.329
Nigeria	20.070	2.301
Senegal	16.780	1.924

The increase in the number of children from immigrant families enrolled in global education systems has sparked significant interest in the impact of ethnicity on students' educational and social well-being. In this regard, the most recent OECD reports (OECD, 2018a, 2021) emphasised the concept of *youth resilience*, which is defined as "*the capacity to overcome adversity and positively adapt to a new life*" (OECD, 2018a, p. 29), investigating the academic, social, emotional, and motivational outcomes of immigrant-origin students, which are crucial for their long-term integration and, thus, for the economic and social stability of the host countries. Specifically, academic competence, the sense of belonging to the school community, life satisfaction, school-related anxiety, and motivation to succeed are considered as factors to promote well-being and adaptive processes. According to this perspective, immigrant students who demonstrate positive emotional and social adjustment and reach a minimum level (i.e., Level 2) in academic performance can be considered *overall resilient* (OECD, 2018a).

The following section will provide an international overview of the educational adaptation of immigrant students based on the most recent data available, along with an in-depth examination of the Italian context. In addition, based on OECD-PISA data and national and international literature, young immigrants' resilience will be discussed in terms of some psychological-social adaptation indicators, such as life satisfaction and school well-being.

1.1.1 How well students from migrant families do in school: international and national data

OECD-PISA 2015 report defines *academic success* as the probability of reaching the basic level of *academic proficiency*, measured by PISA test scores in all subjects assessed (science, reading and mathematics) (OECD, 2018a). Regarding the performance of students from migrant backgrounds, OECD-PISA 2015 results show that, on average, these students are particularly vulnerable concerning this dimension of resilience. In OECD countries, immigrant students' academic performance is typically lower than their native-born peers. This disparity is more significant for foreign-born students; in PISA 2015, more than 50% of these students, compared to 28% of natives, did not acquire essential academic skills in the three PISA subjects (reading, mathematics, and science) (OECD, 2018a). Overall, immigrant students were 68% more likely to fail to attain Level 2 academic proficiency than their native peers (Cerna et al., 2021). In particular, in most nations, socioeconomic disadvantage and language barriers have emerged as obstacles to the academic resilience of students from migrant backgrounds. OECD reports show that socioeconomic factors account for over a fifth of the performance disparity between immigrant and native students (OECD, 2018a). Concerning language barriers, students who do not speak the native language of the destination country at home are less likely to demonstrate academic resilience than native speakers (Cerna et al., 2021; OECD, 2018a).

Data updated from PISA 2018 indicate that, in OECD and EU countries, the performance disparity between native students and students from migrant backgrounds remains constant, despite significant variations between countries (Cerna et al., 2021). In Italy[11], in PISA 2018, there was a 43-point differential in reading performance between Italian students and students from migrant backgrounds, which was reduced to 22 points once the

[11] Reading was the 2018 PISA survey's focus, followed by maths, science, and global literacy. No global competence survey was conducted in Italy

socioeconomic profile of the students and schools was considered[12]. The share of students with migrant a background who scored well in reading (14%) was also lower than the OECD average (17%)[13] (Cerna et al., 2021).

Although over the past decade there has been a decline in the number of native students with foreign-born parents who have dropped out of school (less than 3% in the EU), the socioeconomic and cultural origins remain a predictor of school dropout and the NEET phenomenon, i.e., youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)[14]. On average, students from migrant backgrounds (11%) are still more likely to dropout of school than their native peers with native parents (8%) (OECD/European Commission, 2023). Particularly, the German-speaking countries, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, and Finland, have the most significant variations in school dropout rates between immigrant and native students (+ at least 4%). Data also show that school dropout is more common among immigrant students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are overrepresented in many European countries, and are motivated by a lack of alignment between what the school offers and the needs and interests of the students, a desire to start working, difficulties in studies, and family reasons (OECD/European Commission, 2023).

Concerning Italy's data, the Ministry of Education in 2023 provided significant information on the academic adaptation of NIC students. In particular, consistent with previous school years, during the 2021/2022 school year, 85.2% of these students enrolled in an upper secondary school, while only 8.6% attended a regional vocational training course[15]. In terms of educational path choices, NIC students behave similarly to their Italian peers: technical and professional programmes are preferred when the grade obtained on the final exam of the lower secondary school is low, whereas academically oriented programmes (*licei*) are chosen more frequently when this grade is high (Table 1.6). However, the final grade obtained at the end of the lower secondary school differentiates NIC students from Italian students. In fact, during the 2021/2022 school year, 62% of NIC students received a grade of 6 or 7, compared to 63.7% of Italian students who obtained a grade of 8 or higher.

[12] According to PISA 2018, three out of seven migrant students in Italy were socioeconomically disadvantaged (source: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_ITA_IT.pdf) (Last accessed date: September 2023).

[13] Italian brief report available at the following link: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_ITA_IT.pdf (Last accessed date: September 2023)

[14] Share of the population aged between 15 and 29 who is neither employed nor involved in education or training

[15] Regional vocational training courses are organised at regional level in which hours of theoretical-practical training are provided in different professional sectors. At the end of the course, the participant receives a certificate certifying the skills acquired. These courses do not allow access to tertiary education courses.

Table 1.6 *Students by citizenship, first-cycle final state exam grade (school year 2021/2022) and secondary school course (school year 2022/2023)* (source: Ministry of Education, 2023)

	NIC students		
Grade (exam state - lower secondary school)	High school (Licei)	Technical school	Professional school
6	12.3%	30.9%	51.1%
7	27.6%	39.1%	34.3%
8	28.3%	21.2%	11.7%
9	21.2%	7.1%	2.5%
10	6.1%	1.2%	0.4%
10 cum laude	4.5%	0.6%	0.1%
	Students with Italian citizenship		
Grade (exam state - lower secondary school)	High school (Licei)	Technical school	Professional school
6	4%	16.3%	36.7%
7	15.6%	36%	40.2%
8	27.8%	30.2%	17.3%
9	29.3%	13.4%	4.7%
10	12.4%	2.7%	0.8%
10 cum laude	10.9%	1.3%	0.2%

Another variable implicated in the educational choices of NIC students is their generational status: first-generation students are more inclined toward vocational schools (followed by technical schools), whereas second-generation students prefer technical and academically oriented schools (Table 1.7).

Table 1.7 *Upper Secondary school students by citizenship and educational path (*source: Ministry of Education, 2023)

	Italian students	NIC students		
School Type		**Total**	**Born in Italy**	**Born abroad**
High school (Licei)	53.1%	32.1%	36.4%	28.1%
Technical school	30.9%	38.9%	40.1%	37.7%
Professional school	16%	29.1%	23.5%	34.2%

Concerning school delays related to the 2020/2021 school year, a key indicator of students' academic and social adaptation, the data are positive up to the fifth grade of primary school, in which approximately 84.8% of NIC students have a regular study schedule. Instead, at age 14, only 62.3% attend the first class of lower secondary school regularly. By age 18, 55% are behind in their studies. Despite minor improvements relative to the past, the first two years of upper secondary education are crucial in determining academic delay, which feeds the tendency of students to dropout of school in subsequent years.

In conclusion, this evidence demonstrates that during their school years, children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds encounter systemic educational disadvantages compared to their Italian peers, which can severely compromise their future.

1.1.2 Students from migrant backgrounds' social-emotional well-being

OECD considers social-emotional well-being a valuable indicator for assessing the resilience of immigrant students and for analysing their integration into the social life of host communities. In this regard, OECD data (2018a) revealed that 41% of first-generation immigrant students report a low sense of belonging to the school community[16], compared to 33% of native students; 31% declare being little or not satisfied with their lives[17], compared to 28% of native students; and 67% report high levels of school anxiety[18], compared to 61% of native students. Regarding achievement motivation[19], the data indicated an opposite trend to what was described previously: in the OECD countries, on average, students from first-generation migrant backgrounds report higher levels of achievement motivation than their native counterparts (71% of first-generation immigrant students versus 64% of native students).

The PISA 2018 data updated (Cerna et al., 2021) reveal a similar picture to the 2015 survey: students from migrant backgrounds reported lower levels of well-being than their native counterparts. In particular, foreign-born students declared high levels of school victimisation; in many European nations, including Italy, native students who are the children

[16] The school belonging was measured through the statements "I belong at school" and "I feel like an outsider at school".

[17] Students were asked to evaluate their life on a scale from 0 to 10 to determine their level of life satisfaction.

[18] The school anxiety was measured through the following statements: "I frequently worry that taking a test will be difficult for me" and "Even when I am well-prepared for a test, I feel extremely anxious".

[19] The motivation for success was assessed by asking students to declare their agreement/disagreement with the statement, "I want to be the best, whatever I do".

of immigrants reported being bullied more frequently than their native classmates. Low levels of school affiliation were also prevalent among students with foreign-born parents. Notably, these disparities widen in schools located in economically disadvantaged areas, where immigrant children are disproportionately represented in Europe.

In addition to the dimensions described above, the PISA survey focused on students' educational and professional expectations. Despite not being defined as a resilience dimension in the OECD report (2018a), research indicated that students with positive expectations about their future use their personal and social resources more effectively and, consequently, are more likely to achieve their personal goals (Borgonovi & Pal, 2016; Beal & Crockett, 2010; Khattab, 2018): «*When comparing students with similar levels of ability and attitudes toward school, those who expect to graduate [...] are more likely than those who do not have such expectations to obtain [...] a university degree*» (OECD, 2018a, p. 75). As for immigrant adolescents, OECD data (2018a) indicate that these students have higher educational expectations regarding the completion of tertiary education than native students (with equal socioeconomic status and academic performance), a phenomenon known as the *immigrant optimism paradox* (Feliciano, 2006; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Kao & Tienda 1995, 1998; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). Such positive attitudes toward education, described as a mediator of the effect of social origin on educational outcomes (Goldthorpe, 2014; Li, 2018), indicate that immigrant families, aware of the economic and social benefits of education in social mobility processes, frequently develop optimistic expectations regarding schooling' outcomes, which are intergenerationally transmitted to their children (Barni et al., 2011; Gniewosz & Noack, 2012). For these families, their children's academic success provides an opportunity for social redemption and compensates for migration-related costs (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This phenomenon, however, is not universal and depends heavily on the characteristics of the host country and ethnic groupings (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2008; Motti-Stefanidi & Salmela-Aro, 2018; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). Furthermore, such expectations are frequently unattainable despite being described as a highly adaptive pattern. In this regard, the PISA survey (OECD, 2018a) revealed that, on average, the proportion of students from migrant backgrounds who expect to complete tertiary education and, at the same time, attain basic academic abilities is lower than native students. The phenomenon of *underachievement* despite positive school attitudes (D'Hondt et al., 2016; Mickelson, 1990; Salikutluk, 2016) demonstrates that «*immigrant students with high educational expectations frequently lack the academic skills to meet them. Students who do not reach basic levels of proficiency in PISA's core subjects – science, reading, and*

mathematics – are unlikely to be able to attain ambitious academic objectives and realise their full potential» (OECD, 2018a, p. 248).

Even though these data may be generalised, the vulnerability of immigrant-origin students in the OECD countries varies by country of destination and school characteristics. Despite improvements in recent decades, the Italian educational system has struggled to promote immigrant students' well-being (OECD, 2018a, 2018b). Compared to other European nations, our country has one of the most significant educational disadvantages due to ethnic origins (OECD, 2018a, 2018b). In addition to the significant *performance gap* between students from migrant backgrounds (especially first-generation students) and native students, which is primarily attributable to socioeconomic factors (OECD, 2018a), the former report lower levels of future expectations and aspirations than their European peers (Minello, 2014; OECD, 2018a). This evidence illustrates what literature describes as the direct effect of social origins on students' and their families' attitudes toward education (Boudon, 1974). According to Khattab (2018), this *immigrant pessimism* could be determined by mechanisms of early social selection and pessimistic views of education, most likely due to the negative beliefs of immigrant youth and their families about the benefits of investing in educational pathways. In fact, and as evidenced by OECD reports, despite attaining high levels of education in their home countries, migrant families in Italy are subject to high underemployment rates (OECD, 2018a, 2018b, ISTAT, 2023) and, in general, do not benefit from social policies designed to promote their complete social participation[20]. Despite this, recent studies and research have demonstrated that the current educational disparities in our school system cannot be adequately addressed by considering only socioeconomic factors, which, despite being decisive, only explain a portion of the ethnic achievement gap. In this regard, for instance, Triventi et al. (2021) revealed that, besides families' socioeconomic and cultural resources, students' attitudes toward school play a decisive role in their academic performance and achievements. Particularly, students from migrant backgrounds perceive less control over their lives and are more likely to attribute educational failure to external factors than native students (Triventi et al., 2021). Such negative attitudes pose a threat to the development and maintenance of adaptive motivational patterns, which are associated with effective educational outcomes over the long term (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). In the same vein, Manganelli and colleagues (2021) found that, compared to native students, adolescents from migrant backgrounds report lower levels of intrinsic motivation and higher levels of

[20] MIPEX Index – Migrant Integration Policy Index – https://www.mipex.eu/italy (Last accessed data: January 2020)

controlled motivation and amotivation. In addition, Mantovani and colleagues (2018) discovered that, compared to their native peers, students from migrant backgrounds have lower educational aspirations, a generally negative attitude towards education, and are sensitive to the costs of investment in educational pathways. These findings highlight the role of psychosocial factors in immigrant young people's well-being and positive adaptation (Gabrielli & Impacciatore, 2021). Specifically, theories on school motivation, such as Expectancy-Value models (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), have revealed that positive attitudes toward the educational experience, which are driven mainly by familiar and social influences, are an essential resource for the academic adaptation of all students (Chapter 2). Students with high educational aspirations and expectations are more likely to overcome academic challenges and obstacles. In this regard, as emphasised in the present doctoral dissertation (Chapters 3 and 4), the educational institutions' function is irreplaceable (Agasisti et al., 2021; Argentin & Pavolini, 2020). Numerous studies showed that positive relationships with students and teachers are associated with multiple indicators of academic, psychological, and social adaptation (Zandvliet et al., 2014). In fact, teachers and classmates are an essential source of emotional and instrumental support and, thus, a protective factor in situations that may impede adaptive developmental pathways (Rubin et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2016).

In light of alarming data emerging from official reports and national and international literature, the primary objective of this dissertation was to shed light on the role of family, school, and psychological factors in formal educational pathways and experiences of students from migrant backgrounds. As anticipated in the introduction, the multi-system and integrative conceptual model proposed by Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) was used as a guide for this study. It will be elaborated upon in the following paragraph.

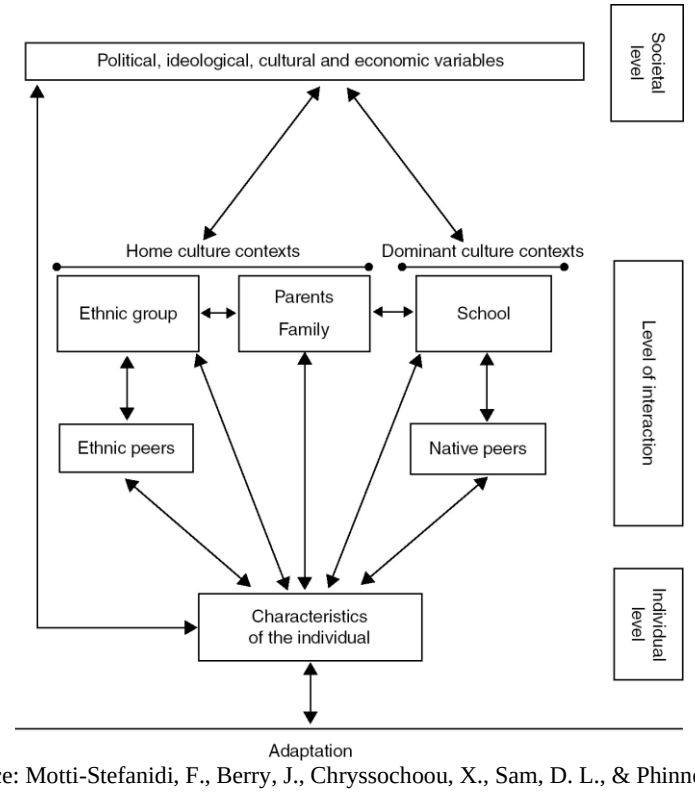
1.2 Positive immigrant youth adaptation: the integrative risk and resilience model for understanding the developmental trajectories of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds

In recent years, developmental trajectories of immigrant children and adolescents have garnered considerable attention in many nations around the world, including Italy (e.g., Alivernini et al., 2018; Alivernini, Cavicchiolo, et al., 2019; Alivernini, Manganelli, et al., 2019; Alivernini et al., 2020; Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Lucidi, et al., 2021; Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli, et al., 2021; Cavicchiolo et al., 2020, 2022, 2023; Gabrielli & Impicciatore, 2021;

Gabrielli et al., 2013, 2021; Inguglia et al., 2017; Inguglia & Musso, 2015; Manganelli et al., 2021; Mussino & Strozza, 2012). To date, however, investigations and research have primarily been conducted from a *deficit-oriented perspective*, resulting in an overemphasis on the detrimental effects of ethnic and cultural affiliations on adaptation in a variety of life domains (Cabrera, 2013; Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017; Cabrera et al., 2012; Masten, 2014a, 2014b, 2015). To overcome these limitations, the most recent theoretical frameworks have adopted a *strengths-based approach* to identify factors that can foster immigrant children and adolescents' psychological and social adaptation (Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017; Damon & Lerner, 2008; Titzmann et al., 2018). Precisely, «*a central question that research on minority youth adaptation and development currently addresses is: "Who among minority youth adapts well or even thrives and why?"*» (Motti-Stefanidi, 2017, p. 1).

In 2012, Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues developed a multi-systemic and integrative theoretical model (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) which, by synthesising the results of research from different theoretical paradigms, is orienting much of the recent research on the positive adaptation of immigrant-origin children and adolescents (Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017) (Figure 1.2).

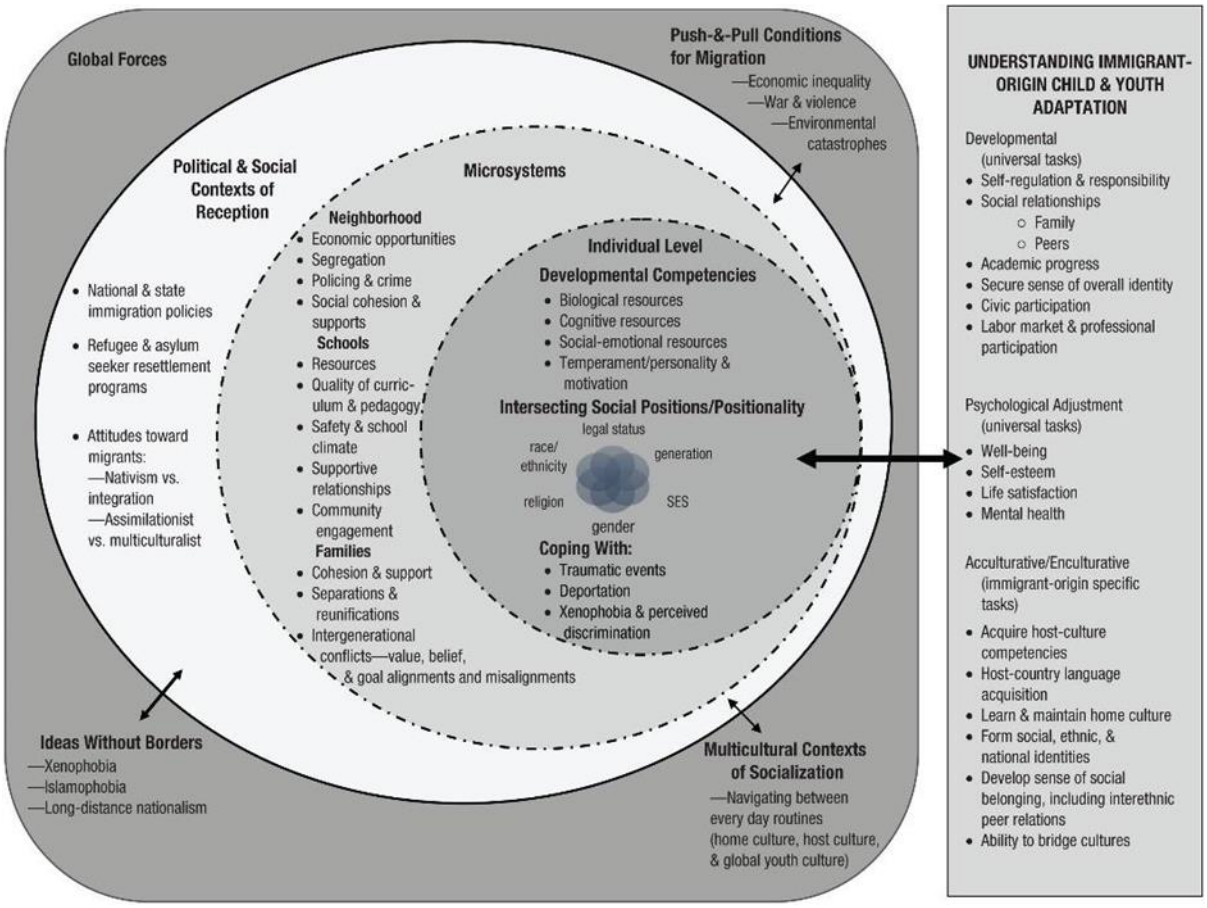
Figure 1.2 *Motti-Stefanidi et al.' multi-systemic and integrative theoretical model (2012)*



Note. Source: Motti-Stefanidi, F., Berry, J., Chryssochoou, X., Sam, D. L., & Phinney, J. (2012). Positive immigrant youth adaptation in context: Developmental, acculturation, and social-psychological perspectives.

In 2018, Suárez-Orozco, Motti-Stefanidi, and colleagues improved the original model and developed the *Integrative Risk and Resilience Model for Understanding Immigrant-Origin Children and Youth Adaptation* (Figure 1.3) based on the results of research conducted in the American (primarily United States and Canada) and European contexts.

Figure 1.3 *Integrative risk and resilience model for the adaptation of immigrant-origin children and youth to the host country* (Source: Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018)



These conceptual paradigms – which will be referred to as a *multi-systemic and integrative theoretical model* in this dissertation – have been influenced by the following main theoretical frameworks in developmental, social, and cultural psychology: Masten's resilience development framework (Masten, 2014a, 2014b); Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998); García Coll et al.'s integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children (García Coll et al., 1996), Berry et al.'s cultural transmission model (Berry et al., 2006); the three-level model of immigrant adaptation proposed by Verkuyten (2018). Particularly, the

Authors' primary goal was to incorporate concepts and assumptions from social and cultural psychology into the resilience development framework (Masten, 2014a, 2014b; Masten et al., 2021) in order to provide a broader perspective for examining the immigrant youths' life experiences and their consequences: «*For immigrant youth, processes of development, acculturation, and cultural adaptation are highly intertwined. Thus, an integrated cultural and developmental science approach is vital to advancing knowledge on immigrant youth adaptation and its applications to support youth resilience*» (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020, p. 11). In fact, even though the resilience framework has provided numerous pieces of evidence regarding the factors involved in the youth's optimal functioning (Masten, 2014a, 2014b; Masten et al., 2021), the role of culture has been largely ignored (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020). However, cultural dynamics – such as the relationships and interactions between the culture of origin and the culture of the host country – play a crucial role in immigrant children and adolescents' psychological and social well-being (Berry et al., 2006). Decades of research on these subjects have demonstrated that contact between diverse cultures can result in more or less adaptive outcomes and influence resilient behaviour (Berry et al., 2021; Sam & Berry, 2010, 2016). In this regard, social psychologists have also highlighted the role of intergroup dynamics in the individual's well-being (Verkuyten, 2018; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). In particular, children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds, as well as adults, are frequently at a high risk of prejudice and discrimination, which can have both short- and long-term negative consequences on their physical and mental health (Crocetti et al., 2021; Schmitt et al., 2014).

For these reasons, the model proposes three indicators to assess the positive adaptation of immigrant children and adolescents:

- *Developmental tasks*, i.e., a functional and adaptive response to the biological, cognitive, and affective changes that occur throughout the various phases of development. Developmental tasks include, among other things, good academic performance, positive relationships with peers, teachers, and families, the development of an integrated and mature identity, participation in social life, planning one's future (e.g., Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021; Masten, 2014a, 2014b; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018);
- *Psychological adjustment* (or perceived well-being), i.e., psychological well-being, such as self-esteem and life satisfaction, and the absence of emotional distress (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012);

- *Acculturative tasks*, i.e., adaptive responses to the cultural and psychological changes that follow contact among members of different cultural groups, and precisely, the ability of youths to manage two or more cultures, the development of cultural competencies (such as communicating in ethnic and national languages, having friends from different ethnic groups) and overcome acculturation-related obstacles (e.g., LaRocque, 2013; Motti-Stefanidi, 2014; 2017, 2023; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013).

The first two indicators – developmental tasks and psychological adjustment (see also Figure 1.3) – can accurately measure the adaptation of all children and adolescents. Instead, acculturative tasks are exclusive to children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds. However, according to Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2021, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), these indicators frequently appear highly interconnected. Doing well in school, for example, or having a favourable self-image can be considered positive results of developmental and acculturative tasks and valid indications of an individual's psychological well-being. In fact, school, while playing an essential role in allowing children and adolescents to learn information and develop knowledge about themselves and the world, is also a valuable social and acculturative context in which young immigrants come into contact with their peers and the culture of the host society (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012). According to some studies based on which this multi-systemic and integrative theoretical model was developed, success in acculturation tasks, like developing a bicultural identity (Berry et al., 2006; Masten, 2014a, 2014b; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013), can be manifested in a variety of ways, from good academic performance to positive friendship bonds with peers (e.g., Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Furthermore, based on developmental and cultural perspectives, psychological well-being – such as high levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem, as well as the presence of positive relationships with peers and family – can be viewed as desirable outcomes of both developmental and acculturation processes, as well as an indicator of resilience (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017; Reitz et al., 2015; Titzmann, 2014).

As illustrated in Figures 1.2 and 1.3, the model describes the adaptation of young immigrants as influenced by various systems that, independently or in interaction with one another, can explain why some individuals are able to face the tasks of development and acculturation successfully and achieve adequate levels of well-being while others succumb to difficulties. According to the Authors, each system has risks and resources for adaptation (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012). Especially, compared to the original model (Motti-Stefanidi et

al., 2012; Figure 1.2), Suárez-Orozco et al. (2018; Figure 1.3) distinguish the *Societal Level* – including ideologies, attitudes, policies, regulations and laws, as well as the immigrants' social position in the societies (i.e., socioeconomic status) and the cultural conformity/divergence between the immigrants' country of origin and the host country (Berry et al., 2021; Inguglia et al., 2017; Inguglia & Musso, 2015) – in:

- *Global Forces*, which encompass the social, economic, and geopolitical forces that encourage migration, such as wars, natural disasters, or economic inequities (see paragraph 1.1); and
- *Political and social contexts of reception*, which include characteristics of host countries (such as migration regulations, refugee and asylum-seeker resettlement programs, and attitudes toward migration) that may impede or promote migrant integration.

In general, these two systems comprise the unique characteristics of the historical period in which migration happens, as well as the receiving countries, which have a more or less direct impact on the adaptation of migrant families and their children.

Instead, the *Interaction Level* (Figure 1.2) encompasses the microsystems (Figure 1.3), i.e., the relationships and interactions between individuals and their proximal developmental contexts, such as family and school (teachers and peers). This level is critical to the well-being of immigrant students; in fact, family, and school, as well as their interactions, have a direct impact on both developmental and acculturation processes (Barrett, 2018; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Jones & Rutland, 2018; Leyendecker et al., 2018; Motti-Stefanidi & Salmera-Alo, 2018).

Finally, the *Individual level* (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3) refers to differences in personality, cognition, and motivation that affect children's and adolescents' psychosocial and academic adaptation. Particularly, examining the characteristics and dynamics of the individual level, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2018) discuss the role of social positions (such as socioeconomic status, gender, religion, legal status, ethnicity, and generational status), and their interactions, in shaping individuals' life experiences and influencing their adaptation. For example, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, first and second-generation students, while sharing some features (such as having immigrant parents), differ in numerous ways. In fact, if it is true that language barriers can be a significant obstacle to the development of academic and/or social skills for first-generation students, it is also true that, in some countries (Dimitrova et al., 2016), these students have a more optimistic vision of their future, which motivates them to participate in the host societies in order to improve their own and

their families' living conditions. Moreover, the *immigrant paradox* (Feliciano, 2006; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Kao & Tienda, 1995, 1998; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009) show that, under certain conditions, children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds may adjust better than their native counterparts. In addition, differences in gender or socioeconomic status may account for some outcomes of immigrant children, adolescents, and adults (see also Box 1) and act as moderators, and thus in interaction with other risk factors, in the relationship between migration experience and adaptation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018).

All of these factors influence immigrant youth's adaptation processes in direct and indirect ways and interact continuously. For example, the characteristics of host societies (societal level/political and social contexts of reception) can have a direct effect on individual well-being (individual level), thereby hindering/favouring the inclusion and integration processes of migrant families and their children in the new social environment (Dimitrova, 2016; Marks et al., 2015, 2018; Phalet et al., 2018). Similarly, the societal level can have an indirect effect on students' adaptation processes by shaping the characteristics of the proximal developmental contexts, such as family and school (level of interaction or microsystems), which in turn can influence students' achievements and performances (individual level) (Evans et al., 2012; Schachner et al., 2018, 2021). It is important to note that although the Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues' model (2021) acknowledges the influence of societies, cultures, and proximal developmental contexts on adaptation, «*Young immigrants are active agents and contribute to the diversity of their adaptation*» (Motti-Stefanidi, 2017b, p. 29). Recognising the individual's agency capacity entails not only attributing an active role to children and adolescents in their development but also considering the possibility that, despite structural risk factors (such as socioeconomic and cultural affiliations), the positive adaptation of these students can be supported through the development or enhancement of their psychosocial resources (Bandura, 2001). Therefore, to understand the experiences of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds, it is necessary to identify the processes involved in their adaptation and development and to shed light on the distinctions between those who successfully adjust and those who are overwhelmed by difficulties. Consequently, this perspective acknowledges that the presence of a migratory background does not necessarily indicate a risk condition and that targeted interventions in the social contexts closest to the person can support young people's development processes and well-being.

Based on what has been described so far, the multi-systemic and integrative theoretical model of Suárez-Orozco, Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021;

Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) suggests that for understanding the complexity of immigrant youth's life experiences is essential taking into account multiple resilient factors that can act on different levels (Motti-Stefanidi, & Salmela-Aro, 2018; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Specifically, according to this perspective, resilient behaviour occurs when individuals can function adequately despite risk situations or adverse events, such as sociodemographic disadvantage (i.e., immigrant and/or low socioeconomic status) (Masten, 2014a, 2014b; Masten et al., 2021). Resilience is, therefore, a dynamic process: although there are individual characteristics that may predispose or hinder resilient behaviour, it is considered the result of the interaction between people and their environment (Masten et al., 2021; Motti-Stefanidi, 2023; Motti -Stefanidi & Salmela-Aro, 2018; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). In this respect, Masten (2014b) has categorised the resilient factors into two macro groups:

1) *promotive factors*, i.e., personal and/or contextual resources that influence adaptive outcomes for all children and adolescents; these resilient factors can foster resilience regardless of the presence of one or more risk factors;

2) *protective factors*, i.e., personal and/or contextual resources playing a crucial role in adaptation under adverse conditions; these resilient factors can mitigate the influence of risk factors on adaptive outcomes.

Despite this distinction, some factors can be both promotive and protective, meaning promoting adaptation in all children and adolescents while playing a more significant role when risk factors are present (Masten, 2014a, 2014b; Masten et al., 2021; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021).

All in all, Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues' (2012) multi-system and integrative theoretical framework describes the role of social and cultural contexts, in interaction with intra-individual characteristics, in shaping immigrant students' life experiences by considering interconnected, complex adaptation indicators. When the migratory experience represents a risk factor for adaptation, such as when it is associated with economic hardships or social vulnerabilities, performing well in school, having close friends, being accepted and not rejected by peers, and developing a positive self-image are success' indicators in acculturation and developmental tasks and psychological well-being. Therefore, the model provides a conceptual framework for designing research on the adjustment of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds that emphasises individual-context interactions and identifies the factors that promote and/or protect their well-being.

Based on this theoretical framework (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012; 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), the current dissertation examined the role of "multiple socialisation experiences" (Eckstein & Crocetti, 2021) in family and school in the psychological, social, and academic adaptation of adolescents from migrant backgrounds in Italy. The studies conducted to accomplish this objective will be described in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2

Parental Involvement and Immigrant Students' Adaptation: The Effect of Intergenerational Educational Value Transmission on Students' Academic Beliefs and Expectations

Abstract

Family plays an indisputable role in young people's development. Concerning educational experiences, psychological research demonstrated that *Parental Involvement* (PI) has a decisive impact on students' attitudes, beliefs, motivations, objectives, expectations, and achievements. However, we still know little about the nature and effects of PI among immigrant students. To fill this gap, the studies presented in this chapter were designed to shed light on a specific aspect of PI, *academic socialisation*, and investigate the relationships between PI, immigrant students' perceptions of academic competence, and their perceived difficulties in completing school. The studies were devised based on the assumptions of Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues' multi-systemic and integrative model (2012, 2021) presented in Chapter 1. In addition, the Expectancy-Value theory was utilised to create a scale of parental educational values and to develop the study's conceptual model. The results demonstrated an indirect relationship between parental educational values and students' educational expectations through students' educational values and their perceptions of academic competence. Notably, these relationships emerged only when the intrinsic dimensions of educational values were considered. The study's implications are discussed in the final section of this dissertation.

2.1. Theories and models of parental involvement

The family plays a crucial role in shaping students' educational paths, especially for students from migrant backgrounds (Antony-Newman, 2019; Cecalupo et al., in press; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). In this regard, research has long demonstrated the importance of *Parental Involvement* (PI) for students' educational success (Epstein, 1987; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007). The involvement of family members in children's educational experiences can promote their academic achievement and social-emotional development (Kim, 2022; Kim et al., 2020). Particularly relevant are family influences on the educational paths of students from migrant backgrounds because, for many of these students and their families, education is a powerful tool to achieve social mobility and improve their life conditions (Cecalupo et al., in press; OECD, 2018c).

Much of the research conducted to date on PI has been heavily influenced by European and American approaches, which, by emphasising the importance of home-school partnerships for students' educational success, have led to the development of policies and practices designed to provide schools with practical guidance on how to collaborate with families (Kim et al., 2020). In this regard, Epstein's *Family, School, and Community Partnerships* (Epstein, 2010; Epstein & Sheldon, 2019a, 2019b) – based on Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological theory – is one of the most influential theoretical perspectives used to describe the significant role of educational institutions in developing effective family-school partnerships to promote student success and reduce dropout rates (Thompson et al., 2018). In recent studies, however, researchers have focused more on the active involvement of parents in their children's educational experiences (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2018). Notably, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) have proposed distinguishing *parental involvement* from *parental engagement* by attributing greater agency to parental figures. In addition, Jeynes (2018) has introduced a further theoretical and conceptual proposal, the *Dual Navigation Approach* (DNA), which, based on several published meta-analyses, has identified a series of PI-related factors on which school leaders and teachers should act to support students' success effectively.

Since the earliest studies, PI has emerged as a complex and multifaceted concept. Over the years, numerous definitions and operationalisations of PI have been formulated, and recent studies on PI consider a wide range of behaviours and practices (Boonk et al., 2018). Despite the importance of PI to the success of children and adolescents, the scientific community has yet to reach a consensus on its definition (Fan & Chen, 2001). In addition, the

relationship between PI and students' academic performance is still ambiguous. According to Boonk et al. (2018), these inconsistencies can be attributed to the limited studies and research that have examined PI from a clear theoretical framework: «*The concept of parental involvement has been operationalised, measured and applied in so many ways that it has become somewhat unclear what exactly is meant by the concep*t» (Boonk et al., 2018, p. 10). Despite these limitations, the systematic investigations begun in the early 1990s identified three primary PI dimensions. In particular, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's research (1997, 2005) have extensively explored *Home-Based* and *School-Based Involvement*. Specifically, home-based involvement encompasses activities such as assisting children with their homework, encouraging them in their studies, and monitoring their academic progress. In contrast, school-based involvement includes activities and behaviours carried out by parents through direct interactions with the school context, such as participation in interviews with teachers or effective presence during school events. *Academic socialisation* is another dimension of PI that concerns the value that parents place on education or, more generally, parents' attitudes towards education (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014). In addition to parents' expectations and aspirations for their children's educational and professional future, academic socialisation encompasses a whole series of practices that parents implement to ensure their children have the best possible future, from parent-child communication to planning strategies toward achieving educational and professional goals (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wilder, 2014).

Numerous single studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses have examined the effects of PI on student outcomes (Wilder, 2014) to elucidate the impact of the various forms of PI on students' educational experiences. However, PI scholars have frequently reached contradictory conclusions. To resolve these inconsistencies, Kim (2022) conducted a valuable second-order meta-analysis using 23 meta-analyses published between 2001 and 2020 (1177 primary studies) to synthesise previous research on the relationship between PI and students' academic achievement. Briefly, this second-order meta-analysis revealed that:

- PI and students' academic achievement were positively associated, both in natural settings (17 meta-analyses reviewed for a total of 908 primary studies) and in interventions designed to increase PI (12 meta-analyses reviewed for a total of 269 primary studies);
- academic socialisation had a strong relationship with students' academic achievement;
- some studies found a negative relationship between home-based involvement and academic performance; however, the results were generally inconsistent;

- high school academic performance was most influenced by PI, followed by middle school and elementary school academic performance;
- insufficient research examined the impact of socioeconomic status, school or class ethnic composition, gender, and particular categories of student outcomes (such us students' academic motivation) on the relationship between PI and academic achievement.

Furthermore, this insightful second-order meta-analysis revealed some gaps in PI research that should be addressed. Firstly, most studies were based on the PI theoretical model proposed by Epstein (2010) and Grolnick and Slowiaczeck (1994), in which parents do not play an active role in school-family interventions designed to improve students' academic performance. This is a significant limitation, particularly when considering the most recent PI conceptualisations in which parental agency – such as parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) – is described as a resource for students' adaptation and achievement (Jeynes, 2018). Secondly, investigations conducted on PI in natural contexts and intervention-focused studies were frequently considered separately; therefore, an integrated perspective should guide research and practice toward a common goal, i.e., students' academic success. Thirdly, and most important for this dissertation's purpose, few studies have examined PI in student populations with different ethnic backgrounds; overcoming this limitation could be especially useful for planning interventions that consider the family's important role in reducing the achievement gap between immigrants and native students (see Chapter 1).

The research project described in this doctoral dissertation used the results of this second-order meta-analysis, particularly the limitations of the literature it has revealed, to design the study presented in paragraph 2.2 (Studies 1a and 1b). Before doing this, a qualitative literature synthesis was conducted to investigate the role of the PI in the educational outcomes of students from migrant backgrounds. In the following paragraph, this work will be described in detail.

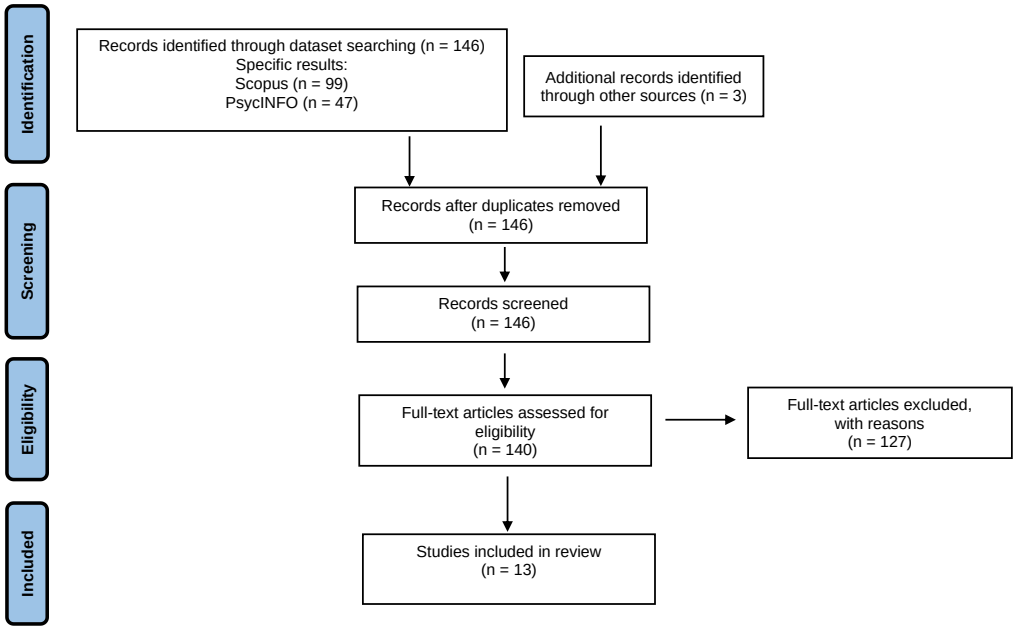
2.1.1 Parental involvement and academic outcomes of students from migrant backgrounds: a qualitative synthesis of literature

Considering the limitations of the studies mentioned above, a concise synthesis of the literature was conducted based on the findings of published meta-analyses concerning the role of PI in the educational experiences of students from migrant backgrounds. Indeed, to date, few studies have focused on predictors and outcomes of PI among minority students; when

present, these studies have primarily focused on home-based involvement – which, typically, has shown a minimal impact on students' academic achievement (Kim, 2022) –, neglecting essential aspects of parents' role in children and adolescents' educational experiences.

This synthesis of the literature was guided by the following overarching research question: *What conclusions can be derived from the quantitative and qualitative research (meta-analyses and systematic reviews) on the role of PI in the educational experiences of students from migrant backgrounds*? Emphasis was placed on a) theoretical models used, b) categories of PI and indicators of students' adaptation considered, and c) findings regarding the relationship between PI and the adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds.

Figure 2.1 *PRISMA diagram*



The following databases were utilised to answer this research question: Scopus and PsycINFO (Crocetti, 2015). Specifically, based on previous research (Boonk et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020), the search was conducted with the following query: ("parent* participation" OR "parent* involvement" OR "parent* engagement" OR "parent* expectation*" OR "famil* expectation*" OR "parent* aspiration*" OR "famil* aspiration*") AND (immigrant* OR migrant* OR minority* OR ethnic* OR racial* OR outgroup* OR foreign*) AND (review OR meta-analysis).

The studies selection was based on the following criteria: 1) studies investigating the role of PI in students from migrant backgrounds; 2) studies exploring the relationships

between parental influences and students' indicators of school-related adaptation; 3) studies written in English; 4) studies involving school-aged children and adolescents; and 5) studies published in peer-reviewed journals. Instead, the following articles were omitted: 1) second-order meta-analyses and second-order syntheses of literature; 2) studies with university students; 3) studies with children and adolescents with disabilities; 4) studies considering forms of PI unrelated to the school context (such as parental styles); and 5) studies involving PI interventions.

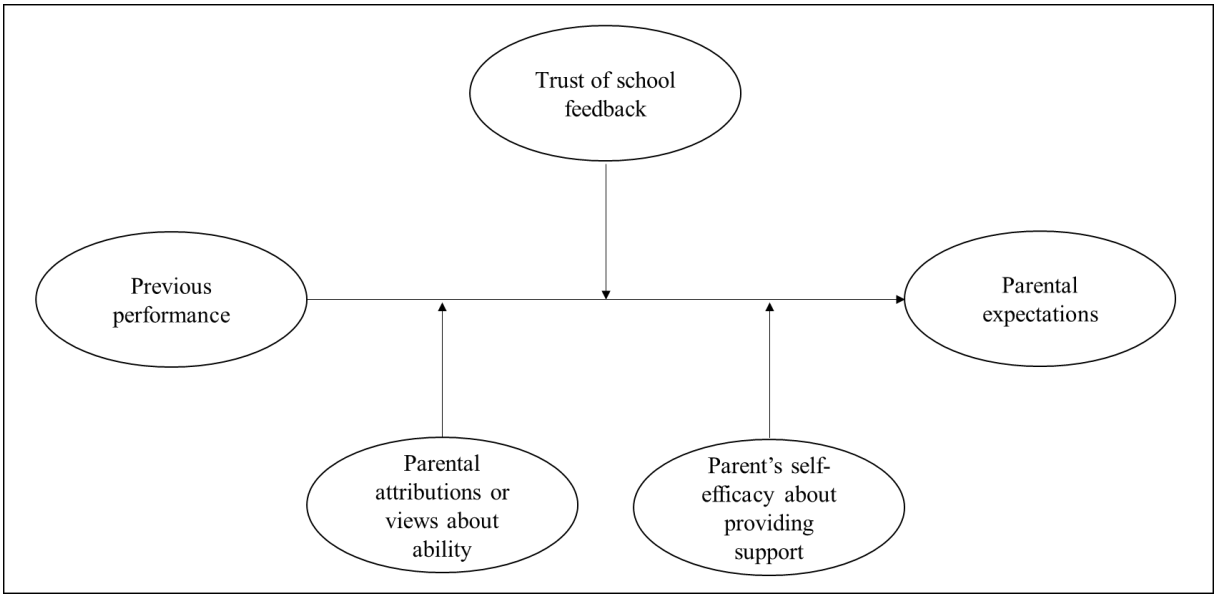
The investigation yielded 146 initial studies. By applying the exclusion and inclusion criteria to screening abstracts, 13 studies were deemed admissible (Figure 2.1). Table 2.1 summarises the selected studies, emphasising their focus, definitions of PI, variables considered in relation to PI, theoretical reference models, and the most significant findings (Wilder, 2014).

This literature synthesis revealed that in 2003 Jeynes published the first meta-analysis on PI among immigrant families. The author's primary objective was to clarify the results that had emerged up to that point in the literature, results that were often inconsistent due to the small samples involved in the studies, the lack of a clear definition of the construct (PI) and the attention paid only the majority ethnic groups. The author specifically aimed to ascertain the overall effect of PI and its specific components on students' academic performance in six distinct minority groups. The overall results confirmed the functions of the PI in all minority groups examined.

Subsequent studies were conducted with a higher level of scientific rigour and with a greater focus on PI's theoretical models and conceptualisations. Following Jeynes' work (2003), Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) investigated, for the first time, the role of *parental expectations* on students' academic achievement within and across various ethnic groups. In those years, many studies highlighted disparities in parental expectations among families with diverse ethnic backgrounds, which stimulated the Authors' interest in the predictors and outcomes of parental expectations. Therefore, Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) employed a *sociocultural perspective* to explain how parental expectations are formed, how they are transmitted to children, and their effects. Through synthesising 33 single studies and 2 meta-analyses, the Authors proposed two explanation models to highlight differences in parental expectations among ethnic groups. The first model describes the moderators of the relationship between PI and students' performances (Figure 2.2). Specifically, the Authors suggest that to understand the mechanisms underlying parental expectations, it is necessary to account for factors at the parental level susceptible to cultural influences. In particular, in light

of the ambiguous results emerging about the relationship between students' previous performances and parental expectations among different ethnic groups, three intervening factors in this relationship are proposed: the parents' point of view regarding the factors that can contribute to enhancing their children's performance, (e.g., the importance attributed to effort rather than ability), the relationship between parents and school (e.g., mistrust in school feedback regarding their children's performance) and low perceived parental self-efficacy in supporting their children in school.

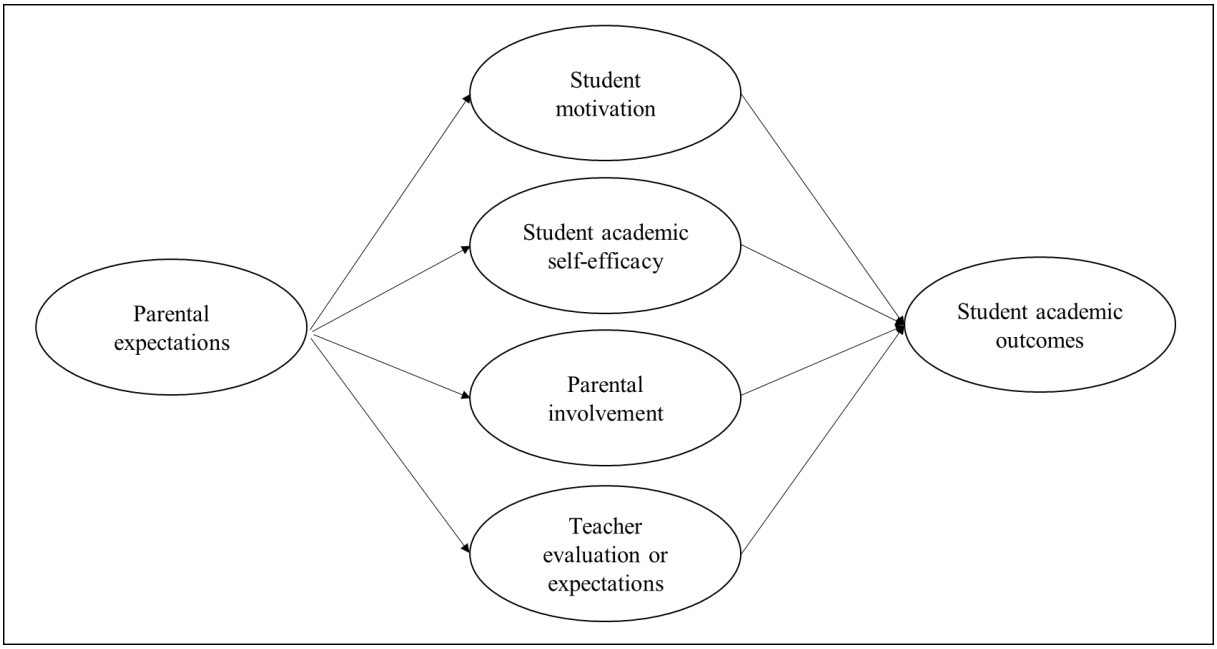
Figure 2.2 *Moderators between students' previous performance and parental expectation according to Yamamoto and Holloway (2010)* (Adapted by Fig. 1 in Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).



The second model was proposed to shed light on the mechanisms that can explain the inconsistencies in the literature regarding the relationship between parental expectations and students' academic outcomes in different ethnic groups (Figure 2.3). In this regard, the Authors suggest that parental expectations affect students' academic motivation and self-efficacy (e.g., parental values and/or beliefs that students internalise), parental involvement (e.g., help with homework, parent-teacher and parent-child communication, parents' expectations and aspirations regarding their children's academic achievement) and teachers' evaluation and expectations (e.g., teachers' reactions to the involvement of parents in school and the effects of teachers' expectations and beliefs on students' actual performance), which, in turn, influence students' academic results. In particular, according to the Authors, the

experiences related to the presence of a migrant background can harm the outcomes associated with parents' educational expectations and hinder their children's success (see mediators presented in Figure 2.3). For instance, the poor academic performance of students from migrant backgrounds may be attributable to parents' inability to communicate their educational expectations to their children (an aspect of parental involvement) due to a lack of knowledge of the host country's educational system and/or language-related obstacles (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Figure 2.3 *Mediators between parental expectations and students' academic outcomes according to Yamamoto and Holloway (2010)* (Adapted by Fig. 2 in Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).



After Yamamoto and Holloway (2010), Isik and colleagues (2018) investigated factors influencing the academic motivation of students from migrant backgrounds. The findings identified academic motivation as a potential mechanism for explaining academic *underperformance* among these children. Specifically, the 45 studies analysed in this review revealed qualitative and quantitative differences in academic motivation between ethnic minority and majority students, which are influenced by facilitators/barriers related to individual characteristics or social contexts, such as family, school, and society. As regards the family factors (family obligations, family support, parental values, family background, socioeconomic status), this systematic review led to the conclusion that «*family is an important factor in the motivation of ethnic minority students*» (Isik et al., 2018, p. 15).

Table 2.1 *Summary of studies selected and analysed in the qualitative synthesis of the literature*

Study	Topic	Theoretical background	Definition of parental involvement	Students' outcomes and sample grade/age	Main results concerning parental involvement and ethnicity
Jeynes, 2003* Meta-analysis	Relationship between PI and minority children's academic achievement.	The Authors used a broad definition of PI without relying on specific theoretical models.	Communications parents-children; parental check on children's homework; parental expectations for their children's academic success; parents' encouragement; parents' school attendance and participation; household rules regarding school; parenting style and warmth; other specific measures of PI.	Grades, standardised tests, and other measures (teacher rating scales and academic attitudes and behaviours). From kindergarten to 12th grade	The impact of PI is significant for all minority groups, and PI affects all academic variables. Some dimensions of PI are especially beneficial for certain minority groups.
Jeynes, 2005 Meta-analysis	Relationship between PI and educational outcomes of urban elementary school children.	Epstein's Family, School, and Community Partnerships.	Parental participation in their children's educational experiences (general and specific PI, parental expectations, attendance, participation, communication, homework, parental style).	Grades, standardised tests, and other measures (teacher rating scales and academic attitudes and behaviours). Elementary school students	PI is associated with the educational outcomes of urban elementary school students regardless of gender and ethnicity.
Seginer, 2006 Literature review	Relationship between PI and children's educational outcomes.	Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework.	Home and school-based PI.	Academic achievement, attainment, motivation, self-perceptions, attitudes, educational expectations. From kindergarten to high school	Family and school-based PI are positively related to children's educational outcomes. Findings on the moderating effect of ethnicity on the PI educational outcome relationship are inconclusive.
Jeynes, 2007 Meta-analysis	Influence of PI on the educational outcomes of urban secondary school children.	Epstein's Family, School, and Community Partnerships	Parental participation in their children's educational processes and experiences (general and specific PI, parental expectations, attendance, participation, communication, homework, parental style).	Grades, standardised tests, and other measures (teacher rating scales and indices of academic attitudes and behaviours). Secondary school students	PI is associated with educational outcomes for all students. Parental expectations exhibited the greatest effect sizes.

Table 2.1 *(continued)*

Study	Topic	Theoretical background	Definition of parental involvement	Students' outcomes and sample grade/age	Main results concerning parental involvement and ethnicity
Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010* Literature review	Relationship between parental expectations and students' achievement within and across diverse ethnic groups.	Sociocultural approach. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework.	Parental expectations about their children's future academic achievement.	Academic achievement. From kindergarten to 12th grade	Parental expectations of Asian-American families are higher than those of other racial/ethnic groups. Parental expectations are significantly related to student performance in European-American families, but less in minority families; differences exist among ethnic groups.
Isik et al., 2018* Systematic review	Factors that influence the motivation of ethnic minority students.	Motivational theories: Self-Determination Theory; Goal Theory, Social Cognitive Theory; Expectancy-Value Theory	Family support; Parental values; Family background; Socioeconomic status	Motivation is a broad concept described through different theories and measures. From elementary school to university	Individual, family-related, school-related, and social factors have either a positive or a negative influence on students' academic motivation.
Antony-Newman, 2019* Meta-synthesis	Effects of immigrant status on PI. Barriers to PI for immigrant families.	Model of parental involvement: Epstein's Family, School, and Community Partnerships; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model.	PI is operationalised and analysed in diverse ways.	None Age group of students: 6-18	Immigrant parents encounter several challenges to their involvement (language barriers and unfamiliarity with the host country's educational system)
Barger et al., 2019 Meta-analysis	Relationship between multiple forms of PI in children's schooling and multiple dimensions of adaptation among children across development.	Model of PI. Students' motivation. Sociological perspective.	PI: parents' commitment (resources) to their children's academic experience Home-based involvement: discussion and encouragement, cognitive-intellectual involvement, involvement in homework. School-based involvement: parents' direct contact with the school.	Academic adaptation: achievement, motivation, engagement. Non-academic adaptation: social and emotional adaptation, delinquency. From preschool to high school	PI is associated with students' positive adaptation, particularly motivation. Due to the limited number of identified studies, the relationship between PI and academic adaptation among students from migrant backgrounds is unclear.

Table 2.1 *(continued)*

Study	Topic	Theoretical background	Definition of parental involvement	Students' outcomes and sample grade/age	Main results concerning parental involvement and ethnicity
Kim et al., 2020* Meta-analysis	Parental influences on immigrant students' achievement-related motivation and achievement. Mediation effect of immigrant students' achievement-related motivation in the relationship between parental influences and immigrant students' achievement.	Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. Motivational Theory. Expectancy-Value model. Sociological perspective. Broad conceptualisations of PI (Boonk et al., 2018; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).	Parental psychological engagement. Parental behavioural involvement. Parental SES/education.	Students' achievement-related motivation and achievement. From primary to high school	Regardless of the parents' SES, parental engagement is associated with achievement-related motivation in immigrant students. Students' motivational variables mediate this relationship.
Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020 Meta-analysis	Relationship between parental educational expectations and child achievement, with attention to factors that mediate these associations.	Expectancy-Value model.	Parental expectations.	Academic achievement. Children mean age < 20 years	Associations between parental expectations and students' academic achievement are strongest in studies with fewer ethnic minority students.
Camarero-Figuerola, et al., 2020 Systematic Review	Relationship between PI and academic variables, with attention to sociodemographic and personal variables.	Epstein's Family, School, and Community Partnerships	School and home-based involvement and school-family relationship.	Academic achievement GPA; grades and attainment Adolescents	PI is a protective factor for academic failure, especially in vulnerable populations and ethnic minorities.
Jeynes, 2022 Meta-analysis	Relationship between parental expectations and students' academic achievement	Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework.	Parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children. Parental expectations: level of education, grades, and employment status that the family expects the child to achieve.	Academic achievement (GPA, standardised test scores, and other measures). Behavioural outcomes (the degree to which students get in fights and obey school rules). From kindergarten-Grade 1 to college students	Parental expectations are associated with positive outcomes for all students, regardless of ethnic background.

Table 2.1 *(continued)*

Study	Topic	Theoretical background	Definition of parental involvement	Students' outcomes and sample grade/age	Main results concerning parental involvement and ethnicity
Tan et al., 2023 Meta-analysis	Relationship among school SES and: student learning outcomes, percentage of ethnic students, students' prior ability, school processes (school climate, teacher capacity, instructional programs, school educational resources, PI).	None.	Private goods: parental networking, parental trust in schools, family, and community. Public goods: parent-teacher relationships and parents' formal school involvement.	Achievement, Attainment, Mixture (achievement and attainment). From primary to upper secondary school	School SES is positively correlated with PI, which directly affects student outcomes. Ethnic minority pupils attend fewer effective schools (evidence of school segregation).

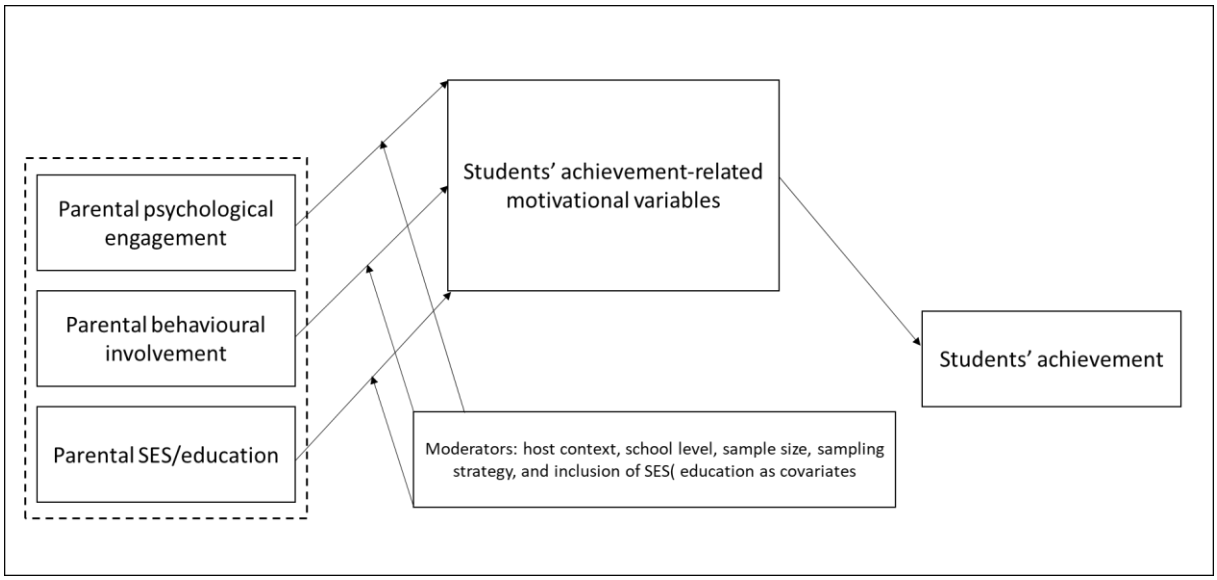
Note. * Indicate studies focus on students and families with migrant origins; PI (Parental Involvement); SES (socioeconomic status)

In 2019, Antony-Newman reviewed 40 qualitative and quantitative studies on PI among immigrant parents. The results confirmed what had already emerged in previous studies regarding the fact that, over the years, PI has been operationalised and analysed in many different ways. Furthermore, this meta-synthesis highlighted that parents' migratory status influences many factors related to their children's educational experience. Family roles, for example, or parental educational practices, strongly influenced by the culture of origin, can have different outcomes on student achievement and performance. Additionally, immigrant parents face unique barriers to involvement due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with the host country's education system.

In 2020, Kim and colleagues addressed the topic of PI utilising the broad theoretical framework proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1994), paying attention to more recent theoretical models (Boonk et al., 2018; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The purpose of the meta-analysis was to examine the relationship between parental influences and several indicators of immigrant students' achievement motivation by focusing not only on the magnitude of the overall effects but also on the mediators and moderators of this relationship (Figure 2.4). The results of the 14 studies analysed have shown that, although the effects that emerged are relatively small, parents' psychological engagement and behavioural involvement affect immigrant students' achievement-related motivation and performance. Among the various dimensions of PI, parental engagement (i.e., parent-child communication about the school, educational values, expectations, aspirations, and emotional support) was highly correlated with students' educational success. Interestingly, this influence was stronger than the role played by structural factors (parental SES and parental education level).

The remaining selected works (Barger et al., 2019; Camarero-Figuerola et al., 2020; Jeynes, 2005, 2007, 2022; Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020; Seginer, 2006; Tan et al., 2023) have included literature reviews or meta-analyses investigating various aspects of PI's role in students' educational outcomes and achievements. In these studies, the migrant background of students and their families was considered a moderator of the relationship between family influences and educational outcomes. Concerning the results, in some studies, the role of the ethnic background was unclear or irrelevant (Jeynes, 2005, 2007, 2022; Seginer, 2006; Barger et al., 2019), whereas, in others, the ethnic background of students and their family affected PI either positively or negatively (Camarero-Figuerola et al., 2020; Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020; Tan et al., 2023).

Figure 2.4 *Model hypothesised by Kim et al. (2020) to explain the relationship between parental influences and student achievement through students' motivation* (Adapted by Fig. 7 in Kim et al., 2020)



Despite these contradictory findings, the reviewed works enabled us to reflect on several issues. Firstly, there is a growing emphasis in the literature on more precise conceptualisations of PI that, recognising a higher level of parental agency and participation in immigrant students' educational trajectories and experiences (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2018), attribute a crucial role to parental beliefs in students' motivation, achievement, and educational choices (Jeynes, 2022; Kim et al., 2020). In particular, parents' expectations have emerged as the most crucial aspect of PI (Jeynes, 2005, 2007). These findings can have significant implications for the professional practice of teachers and school interventions to support the academic success of vulnerable student groups. In fact, contrary to more direct forms of involvement (such as school-based involvement), parental expectations are less visible aspects of PI and, therefore, «*if instructors are unaware of salient features of parental activities, most notably parental expectations, it can lead to negative portrayals and stereotypes of urban parental involvement*» (Jeynes, 2022, p. 3). A second theme from the reviewed literature is the need for a more in-depth understanding of the variables that may mediate the effects of the multiple PI dimensions on immigrant students' educational outcomes. Although this research need was evident in the initial revisions of the PI (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010), the mechanisms of parental influence, particularly when examining the developmental trajectories of students from migrant backgrounds, remain inadequately understood. In this regard, Kim et al. (2020) stated:

«*Immigrant students' low academic performance in comparison to non-immigrant students, together with our finding of a small mediation effect of achievement-related motivation, draw attention to other direct and indirect influences on parenting such as parents' self-efficacy and parental beliefs and the quality of parenting, which also affect immigrant children's achievement. In addition, most of our studies used academic engagement as a mediator, and none explored children's abilities, beliefs, or competencies, which could limit the interpretation of our findings. Therefore, future studies should consider these aspects when investigating immigrant parents' effect on children's motivation and achievement*» (p. 15).

The purpose of the first study of this dissertation, which will be presented below, was to shed light on the role of parents' educational values, an aspect of academic socialisation, in their children's educational experiences by identifying mediators who can facilitate a more accurate understanding of certain aspects of the school experience of students from migrant backgrounds. The Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles, 2005, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 1994, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2016, 2017) will serve as the theoretical model of reference because, over time, it has become ideally suited for a cultural analysis of motivated behaviour (Eccles & Wigfield, 2023).

2.2 The current research

2.2.1 Expectancy-Value Theory: parental influences and students' educational experiences

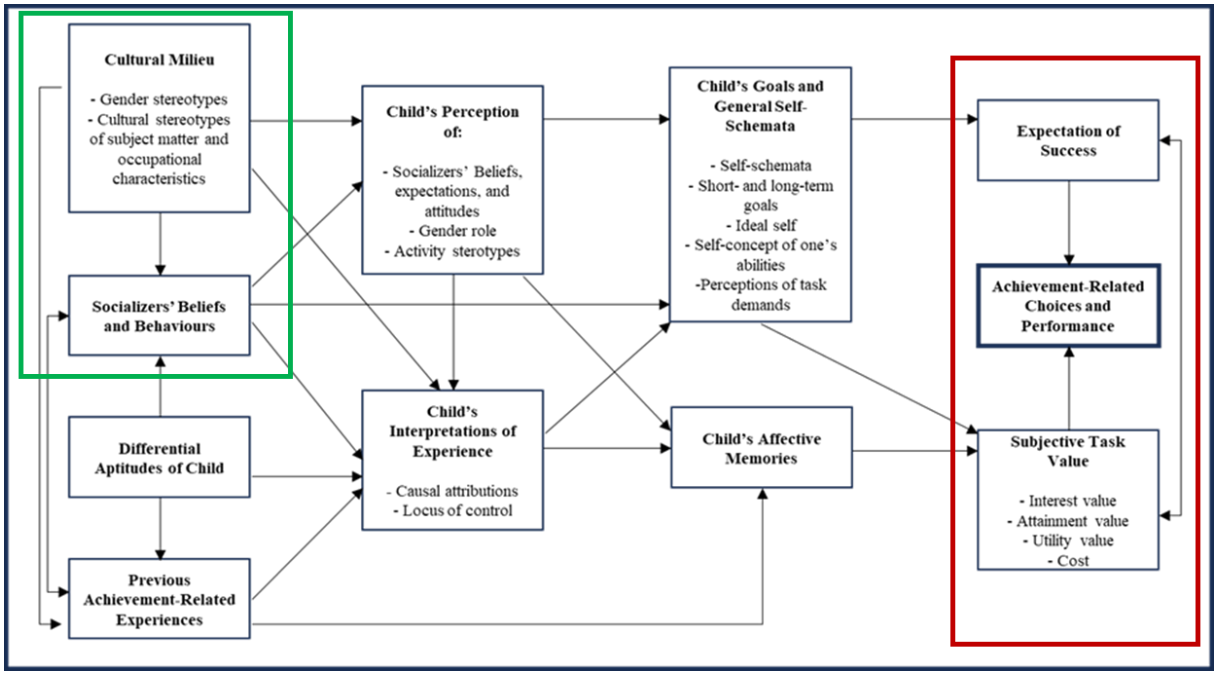
Over the past four decades, the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) has guided a substantial body of psychological and educational research (Eccles, 2005; Eccles, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 1994, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2016, 2017). EVT is based on the pioneering work of Atkinson (1957), who introduced the concepts of *expectation*[21] and *value*[22] to the field of psychological theories of motivated behaviour. In contemporary Expectancy-Value models, such constructs have been taken up and extended (e.g., Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al.,

[21] «*An expectancy is* a *cognitive anticipation, usually aroused by cues in a situation, that the performance of some act will be followed by a particular consequence*» (Atkinson, 1957, p. 360).

[22] «It represents the relative attractiveness of a specific goal that is offered in a situation» (Atkinson, 1957, p. 360).

1983; Pekrun, 2000, 2009; Perez et al., 2014; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2016); furthermore, there has been increasing attention to the psychological, social, and cultural processes involved in their definition (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 *Expectancy-Value Model (EVM) of academic motivation* (Adapted by Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).



Particularly, in EVT, Eccles and colleagues emphasise the effects of individual expectations and values on various personal outcomes (Eccles, 2005; Eccles, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 1994; Wigfield & Gladstone, 2019; Wigfield et al., 2016, 2017). In addition, these effects are described as impacted by sociocultural variables (such as gender stereotypes or socioeconomic status), contextual factors (such as socialisation agents), and individual factors (such as goals, beliefs, or identity) (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield et al., 1998, 2006, 2015; Wigfield & Gladstone, 2019).

The Expectancy-Value model (Figure 2.5) identifies two primary components of motivated behaviour (Achievement-Related Choices and Performance): the *psychological or agentic component* (see the red rectangle in Figure 2.5) and the *social structural/cultural component* (see the green rectangle in Figure 2.5) (Eccles & Wigfield, 2023).

The psychological or agentic component depicts the direct effects of *Expectations of Success* and *Subjective Task Value* on achievement-related choices and performance.

Expectations of Success are the most influential factor in determining motivated behaviour and include the individual's beliefs regarding his/her capacity to perform a specific task or activity. According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), when students have high and positive expectations regarding their ability to complete a task successfully, they are more likely to select the most efficient course of action. Even though, at the conceptual level, expectations and students' broader self-concept are distinct, numerous studies have shown that they are closely related and can be considered synonymous (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Guo et al., 2015; Nagengast et al., 2011; Trautwein et al., 2012). Subjective Task Value qualitatively describes a task and how it influences the desire to engage in specific activities, as well as the meaning individuals attribute to it. In particular, EVT researchers have distinguished among three categories of values (Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992; Wigfield et al., 2006):

- *intrinsic value* or *enjoyment*, i.e., the level of pleasure and effort involved with an activity; it is related to, but different from, the concepts of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2009) and interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006) (for a discussion of the similarities and differences between the concepts, see Eccles, 2005);
- *attainment value* or *personal significance*, i.e. the significance of completing a task and the importance placed on attaining the desired result. According to the model, achievement value is strongly related to identity concerns: a task has high personal significance if it is central to the individual and helpful in defining and expressing significant aspects of one's personal and social identity;
- *utility value* or *usefulness of the task*, i.e., the perception that a particular activity can facilitate the accomplishment of significant short- or long-term goals. Similar to extrinsic motivation, the concept of utility views the task as a means to an end (Ryan & Deci, 2009; Ryan & Moller, 2017).

A further component of the model proposed by Eccles et al. in 1983 is the *cost*, i.e., the expected effort to complete a task (Eccles, 2005). Although initially postulated as the fourth component of value, costs can be defined as critical moderators of the relationship between beliefs and behaviours: the direct effect of expectations and values on motivated behaviour would be contingent on perceived costs (high versus low) (Chiang et al., 2011; Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Watkinson et al., 2005).

In the Expectancy-Value model (Figure 2.5), it is assumed that Expectations of Success and Subjective Task Value are influenced by psychological variables, such as:

- *Goals and general self-schemata*, i.e., self-schemas, identities, goals, self-concept in terms of abilities, task requirements;
- *Child's affective memories* regarding past results;
- *Child's perceptions of attitudes and expectations of significant others* (e.g., family, teachers, peers);
- *Child's interpretation of experience*.

According to EVT, these psychological dimensions interact with one another. Particularly, goals, self-schemas, and affective memories would be impacted by individuals' perceptions of others' attitudes and expectations, as well as interpretations of their past achievements. Furthermore, such perceptions and interpretations would be the result of a wide range of social and cultural factors, including: beliefs and behaviours of socialisation agents (especially parents and teachers), previous experiences, emotions, attitudes, previous results and, finally, the cultural environment in which the person is inserted.

The second component of the model, the social structural/cultural component, precisely concerns the individual's cultural environment and socialisers' beliefs and behaviours. In essence, it would be the mesosystem described by Bronfenbrenner in his ecological model (1992), which emphasises the role of the broader cultural context and its influence on the proximate contexts (microsystem), such as parents, teachers and peers. Therefore, EVT recognises a crucial role for socialisation agents in motivated behaviour, whose beliefs and behaviours are heavily influenced by the cultural context. In this regard, one of EVT's most frequently discussed subjects is family influences. EVT theorists assert that the expectations and values attributed by families to their children's educational experience influence children and adolescents' beliefs about themselves and, consequently, their likelihood of success (Wigfield et al., 2015). Specifically, parental beliefs, which are related to various characteristics of the family context (such as ethnicity or socioeconomic status), can indirectly influence students' outcomes through parenting practices (Simpkins et al., 2015; Wigfield et al., 2015). For instance, research has shown that, compared to their less privileged peers, children from higher socioeconomic status families perform better academically and have more positive attitudes and values toward school (e.g., Mahoney et al., 2009). This is likely due to the more significant material and cultural resources these families devoted to ensuring their children's success in school and life (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Marks, 2006; Marks et al., 2006; Marks et al., 2018).

Over time, EVT research has demonstrated that individuals' expectations and values, which are powerfully influenced by social and cultural contexts, predict outcomes,

performance, and choices in various contexts. Concerning educational context, students' expectations and values were found to be positively related to various adaptive outcomes: «*when children develop and maintain positive expectancies and values for different school subjects, they are more likely to succeed in them and continue to take classes in these subject areas even as they become more challenging and difficult* […]. *Continuing success in these activities will strengthen children's expectancies for further success, and likely their valuing of them as well, reducing uncertainties children might have about whether they can keep moving forward* […] » (p. 20). The Authors note that this process increases the likelihood that these children pursue educational opportunities and helps them understand that «*education is important and will gain them brighter futures*» (*ibidem*, p. 20). Specifically, expectations have greater predictive power on academic performance (Bong et al., 2012; Durik et al., 2006, 2015; Meece et al., 1990; Musu-Gillette et al., 2015), whereas values show more robust relationships with student's interests and future achievements (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

On the application side, Eccles and colleagues have used the concepts of expectation and value to understand and explain educational inequalities associated with gender differences in educational and professional careers in STEM disciplines (Eccles 1994, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Specifically, the Authors emphasised that the lower propensity of girls to enrol in STEM courses relative to boys is at least partially due to gender socialisation experiences. According to Eccles (1994), the low participation of women in mathematical and scientific careers is not a result of a lack of skills or attitudes but rather a direct consequence of negative beliefs – low expectations of success and low value placed on STEM subjects – that are heavily influenced by the social and cultural environment. According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), «*It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand students' motivation without understanding the contexts they are experiencing*» (p. 128). EVT's emphasis on socio-contextual determinants of motivated behaviour can help elucidate the role of social and structural inequality in individual experiences (Parker et al., 2020). In this regard, motivation theorists are becoming increasingly interested in the applicability of their models to various sociocultural groups in order to investigate differences in motivational orientations, values, and goals that drive human behaviour (Liem & McInerney, 2018). However, while confirming the proposed connections between the various constructs in various countries, most cross-cultural research on the EVT has neglected the study of expectations and values among individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds within the same country (Liem & McInerney, 2018).

Given the educational inequalities that students from ethnic minority groups face in many countries, including Italy, the Expectancy-Value model appears particularly suited to investigating the importance that families and students from migratory contexts place on education and how these perceptions influence students' choices and educational paths. The research outlined below will proceed in this direction.

2.2.2 Research objectives

Drawing from the literature presented in this chapter, the main goal of this study was to investigate the family's influences on the students' psychological and academic adaptation, emphasising the experiences of students from migrant backgrounds. Even though research indicated that, during the transition from childhood to adolescence, the role of the peer group becomes increasingly significant (Ryan, 2000), the socialisation experiences with the parents continue to have a substantial impact on students' educational trajectories in upper secondary school, particularly for immigrant students (Motti-Stefanidi, 2021; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021). In fact, as described in the preceding sections of this chapter, immigrant families place a high value and significance on their children's education because school represents a valuable tool for activating the social lift and improving their living conditions (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010, 2018). Moreover, these beliefs, transmitted to the offspring through various practices, serve as a resource for children's and adolescents' adaptation (Ulferts, 2020). In this regard, the empirical studies conducted on PI, also based on Expectancy-Value models, have demonstrated that the importance attributed by the family to the school and education, as well as parental expectations, have a substantial impact on a wide range of positive outcomes. However, the research reviewed in previous paragraphs (see paragraphs 2.1.1, 2.1.2*)* highlighted that the relationship between PI and families' ethnic backgrounds is still ambiguous, and results are frequently contradictory. These inconsistencies may be partly attributable to the considerable number of studies on PI that have addressed this topic without a clear theoretical framework. In addition, the researchers have focused almost exclusively on a small number of dimensions of PI, such as home-based involvement, which, particularly in high school, appears inadequate to explain the students' academic achievements. In contrast, academic socialisation is still understudied, particularly among students from migrant backgrounds. Considering the research indicating that parental engagement is substantially and positively related to the student's success (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), this represents a limitation that needs to be overcome.

For the reasons described above, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the influence of parents' educational values on the psychological and academic adaptation among students from migrant backgrounds. Specifically, the research was designed with the following objectives in mind:

- **Objective 1:** Creating and validating a valuable tool to evaluate distinct aspects of PI related to academic socialisation.
- **Objective 2***:* Understanding the role of PI (academic socialisation) in the students' psychological and academic adaptation, with particular attention to students from migrant backgrounds attending Italian upper secondary schools.
- **Objective 3:** Investigating the mechanisms through which parental educational values, transmitted intergenerationally to their children, influence the latter's beliefs regarding their abilities and likelihood of success.

Two quantitative cross-sectional studies were conducted to accomplish these aims, which will be described below.

2.3 Studio 1a

This study aimed to develop and validate a measure of parental and student educational values in the Italian context (Objective 1). Drawing from EVT's conceptualisations (Eccles, 2005; Eccles, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 1994; Wigfield et al., 2016, 2017), the items were constructed to detect the parents and students' educational values referring to both intrinsic dimensions – which in the EVT are defined as intrinsic value or importance attributed to various aspects of the educational experience – and extrinsic dimensions – which in the EVT are defined as the perceived utility of the school (Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 1994). Therefore, two distinct but correlated dimensions were hypothesised for parents' and students' educational values.

2.3.1 Methods

2.3.1.1 Participants and procedures

During the school year 2020-2021, 691 high school students participated in the first phase of Study 1a (M_{age} = 15.85; *SD* = 1.37; 58% males; 591 Italian students, 19 first-

generation students, and 81 second-generation students). In the second phase of this investigation, an additional 598 high school students participated; the sample included 329 native students (M_{age} = 16.21, *DS* = 1.5, 57.4% males) and 269 students with at least one parent born abroad (M_{age} = 16.62, *DS* = 1.45, 53.2% males). This latter group of students (students with at least one immigrant parent) also participated in Study 1b (for sample details, see paragraph 2.4.1.1) (see the Introduction for a detailed description of the project's phases and study procedures)[23].

2.3.1.2 Measures

Drawing from EVT scholars' literature (see paragraph 2.2.1), 10 items were developed to assess students' perceptions of their parents' educational values (see the next section for the items' content and meaning). Consequently, and by adapting these early statements, 10 additional items were created to evaluate students' educational values (see the next section for the items' content and meaning). In this case, however, students were asked to indicate the importance they placed on their educational experience. The students responded to each question using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

2.3.2 Data analysis and results

In the initial phase of this study, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were used to evaluate the factor structure of the measures developed specifically for this study. Through SPSS (version 27 – IBM SPSS Statistic, 2020) random split routine, the first sample (691 students) was split into two sub-samples (30% of the sample for EFA and 70% of the sample for CFA). The sample used to conduct the EFA was made up of 200 students (M_{age} = 16.36, *SD* = 1.35, 58% males), whereas the CFA was conducted through a sample of 491 students (M_{age} = 16.58, *SD* = 1.41, 62.3% males). One-way ANOVAs were run to test differences in gender and age among these samples. Results

[23] ***Procedures in summary***. Prior to implementation, the study was presented to the schools. Expressly, detailed information about the study's objectives and methodologies was provided to the school leaders. After the school board approved the study, consent forms were provided to be distributed to the parents. The study's participants were restricted to students whose parents had provided written consent. Students completed the online survey in their respective classrooms. Before compiling it, the researchers provided students with extensive information about the objectives and methods of the research, as well as the fact that their participation was entirely voluntary, anonymous, and revocable at any time. During data collection, research assistants instructed students on how to respond using Likert scales and answered any questions. The Developmental and Socialisation Processes Department of Psychology ethics committee approved the study and its procedures.

showed no significant differences regarding gender ($F(1,689) = 0.952$, $p = 0.33$) and age ($F(1,689) = 3.521$; $p = 0.60$). EFA was performed utilising principal axis factorisation as the extraction method, Parallel Analysis (O'Connor, 2000) to determine the number of factors to be extracted, and Oblimin rotation. Only factor loadings greater than 0.40 were interpreted (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2013). CFA was performed to validate the EFA-emerging factor structure using maximum likelihood estimator. The following indices were used to assess the model fit: incremental or comparative indices (Tucker–Lewis Index or TLI, Comparative Fit Index or CFI), approximation indices (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation or RMSEA), and sample indexes of fit (Standardised Root Mean Residual or SRMR). TLI > 0.90, CFI > 0.95, RMSEA ≤ 0.08 and SRMR ≤ 0.05 were considered indicators of an adequate fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Before performing EFA and CFA, the assumption of variables' distribution normality was examined. The absence of outliers, and skewness and kurtosis indices made it possible to run the analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

In the second phase of this study, a Multiple-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MG-CFA; Chen, 2007, 2008; Hirschfeld & Von Brachel, 2014) was conducted with the primary goal of developing measures of parents' and students' educational values that could be used with groups from diverse ethnic backgrounds. To accomplish this goal, 598 students from diverse upper Italian secondary schools and ethnic backgrounds participated in the study. The total sample consisted of 329 native students (M_{age} = 16.21, SD = 1.5, 57.4% males) and 269 students with at least one parent born abroad (M_{age} = 16.62, SD = 1.45, 53.2% males). The sample of Italian students included students from two upper secondary schools. The sample of students with at least one parent born abroad was drawn from three additional upper secondary schools. All schools were high school or technical school. Using the structural equation modelling approach, both measures' configural, metric, and scalar invariance were evaluated. The Chi-square (Byrne et al., 1989) and CFI difference test (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002) were used to assess the increase/decrease of the fit of more restrictive models compared to less restrictive ones.

Parental Educational Values. Concerning the *Parental Educational Values Scale*, results showed that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.87 and Bartlett's sphericity was significant, χ^2 (55) = 790.955, $p < .001$. This indicated that the sample was appropriate for factor analysis. Parallel Analysis results revealed a two-factor solution. We deleted two items showing high cross-loadings before carrying on with the analyses. Then, EFA was repeated, and the two-factor solution was confirmed (43.16% of explained variance). The first factor

(three items; factor loadings ranged from 0.49 to 0.65; ω = 0.63) was labelled *The importance of schooling for parents (*items example: "My parents place a high value on school", "My parents believe that attending school is essential"). It measured the value parents place on education as a whole. The second factor, labelled *The usefulness of schooling for parents,* consisted of five items (factor loadings ranged from 0.43 to 0.78; ω = 0.81) that measured the extent to which parents viewed school as helpful in enabling their children to achieve future personal goals (items example: "My parents think that doing well in school is important for success", "My parents think that doing well in school is important for being a person of worth", "My parents think that doing well in school is important for finding a job I like"). Factor correlations indicated that the two factors were positively related (r = 0.41, p < 0.001).

Subsequently, CFA was conducted to confirm the factor structure that emerged with EFA. Results confirmed the two-factor solution, showing adequate fit indices (χ^2 (19) = 86.271, p < 0.001; *CFI* = 0.94; *TLI* = 0.92; *RMSEA* = 0.08, 90% *CI* [0.06, 0.10], *SRMR* = 0.04). Subsequently, the two-factor model was compared to the one-factor model. The single latent factor measurement model showed inadequate fit indices (χ^2 (20) = 216.038, p < 0.001; *CFI* = 0.83; *TLI* = 0.77; *RMSEA* = 0.14, 90% *CI* [0.13, 0.16]; *SRMR* = 0.07) and the Chi-square difference test indicated to maintain the two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 33.712, p < .001).

Finally, the MG-CFA results indicated that the measurement model has achieved partial scalar invariance (Table 2.2). Specifically, the intercepts of two items of factor 2 were found to be not fully invariant.

Table 2.2 *Parents Educational Values Scale: MG-CFA results*

Model	χ^2	df χ^2	Δ df χ^2	p (Δ df χ^2)	CFI	Δ CFI
Model 1 (Configural Invariance)	175.92	38		-	0.935	
Model 2 (Metric Invariance)	191.98	46	10.713	0.218	0.933	0.002
Model 3 (Scalar Invariance)	224.64	54	36.871	0.000	0.920	0.013
Model 4 (Partial Scalar Invariance)	197.26	52	5.8594	0.320	0.933	0.000

Students Educational Values. Concerning the *Students Educational Values Scale*, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's sphericity test were used to assess the sample

adequacy. Results showed that KMO was .89 and Bartlett's sphericity test was significant, χ^2 (45) = 1126.091, $p <$ .001, indicating that the sample satisfied the factor analysis requirements. Parallel Analysis results revealed the presence of two factors. Before continuing with the analyses, we deleted two items showing high cross-loadings. Hence, EFA was repeated, and a two-factor solution with an explained variance of 60.96% was confirmed. The first factor, labelled *The importance of schooling for students*, consisted of three items (factor loadings ranged from 0.73 to 0.90; ω = 0.85) that assessed the general value that students placed on school (items example: "I place a high value on school", "I believe that attending school is essential"). The second factor, labelled *The usefulness of schooling for students*, was comprised of five items (factor loadings ranged from 0.58 to 0.88; ω = 0.86) that evaluated the usefulness students attributed to the school in achieving their personal future goals ("I think that doing well in school is important for my success", "I think that doing well in school is important for being a person of worth", "I think that doing well in school is important for finding a job I like"). The factor correlations indicated that the two factors were positively related (r = 0.52, p < 0.001).

Subsequently, CFA was conducted to confirm the factor structure emerging with EFA. Results of CFA confirmed the two-factor solution, showing adequate fit indices (χ^2 (19) = 98.780, $p <$ 0.001; *CFI* = 0.95; *TLI* = 0.93; *RMSEA* = 0.09, 90% *CI* [0.07, 0.11], *SRMR* = 0.04). Then, the two-factor model was compared to the one-factor model. The single latent factor measurement model showed inadequate fit indices (χ^2 (20) = 326.847, p < 0.001; *CFI* = 0.84; *TLI* = 0.77; *RMSEA* = 0.18, 90% *CI* [0.16, 0.19]; *SRMR* = 0.07) and the Chi-square difference test indicated to retain the model with two factors ($\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 228.067, p < .001).

Finally, the MG-CFA results indicated that the measurement model has achieved the scalar invariance (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 *Students Educational Values Scale: MG-CFA results*

Model	χ^2	df χ^2	Δ df χ^2	p (Δ df χ^2)	CFI	Δ CFI
Model 1 (Configural Invariance)	117.16	38		-	0.970	
Model 2 (Metric Invariance)	121.80	46	4.1926	0.834	0.971	0.001
Model 3 (Scalar Invariance)	131.41	54	9.9362	0.296	0.969	-0.002

2.3.3 Discussion

In this study, two instruments were developed to assess parents' and students' educational values. In line with what was assumed, for each scale, both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed the presence of two correlated factors. Specifically, two main dimensions have emerged, reflecting the characteristics of the values described by the EVT (Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). The first dimension, *The importance of schooling* (for parents and students), refers to the school's general significance. The second dimension, *The usefulness of schooling* (for parents and students), refers to the significance of school as a tool for attaining future educational, professional, and personal goals.

According to the study's findings, the definition of school by parents and students might have different meanings depending on whether it is perceived as a valuable educational institution or a tool for achieving significant personal and professional goals and aspirations. Nonetheless, the correlations between intrinsic and extrinsic value dimensions examined in this study indicate that these values are not mutually exclusive and that the importance attributed to the school experience can be of various types.

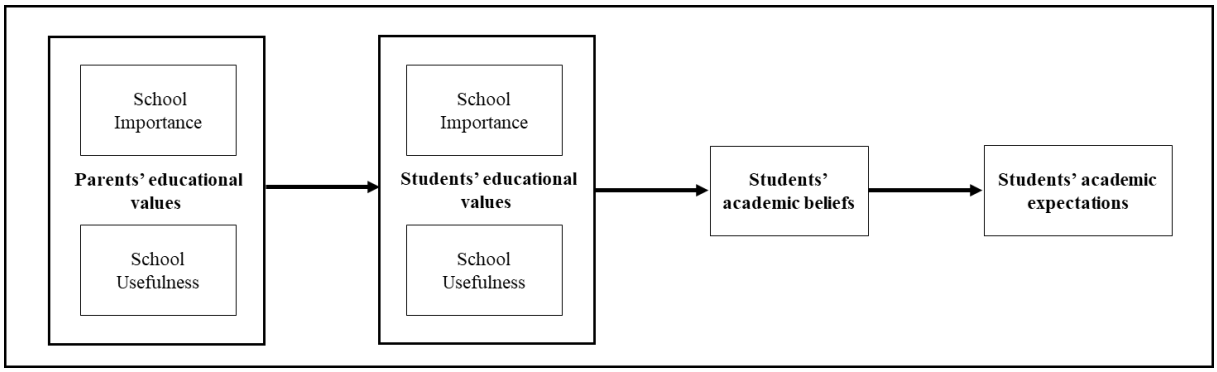
This study has some limitations that must be considered. Firstly, considering national and international reports (see Chapter 1) and the findings of numerous studies and research (see paragraph 2.2.1) emphasising the role of socioeconomic affiliations in parental involvement and the educational trajectories of children and adolescents, a limitation of the study was the lack of information about the students' socioeconomic status. Secondly, due to the small sample size, it was also not possible to investigate the invariance of the measures based on students' migrant background (first- and second-generation). Thirdly, the parents' education values scale did not attain full scalar invariance. Consequently, the content of the items used in the current investigation might be expanded in future studies, particularly regarding values to school usefulness, through in-depth interviews with families and students.

In the study described in the following paragraph (Study 1b), these measures were used to examine the function of parental educational values, an aspect of academic socialisation (see paragraphs 2.1 and 2.1.1), in the psychological and academic adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds.

2.4 Studio 1b

The general purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of family influences on the psychological and academic adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds (Objective 2). Figure 2.6 illustrates the conceptual model that guided this investigation.

Figure 2.6 *Conceptual model*



Considering the findings of Study 1a, the present study focused on the relationships between parents and students' educational values (intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions) and some psychological indicators that, according to EVT (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020, 2023), are significant predictors of the students' positive adaptation: students' beliefs regarding their academic competence and students' academic expectations. This study involved a heterogeneous sample of students from migrant backgrounds, including first-generation students (born abroad from at least one parent born abroad), second-generation students (born in Italy from two parents born abroad), and mixed-heritage native students (born in Italy from a parent born in Italy and a parent born abroad).

Following the EVT, upon which multiple studies have demonstrated a strong relationship among social structures, relational contexts, and student values and expectations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020, 2023; Simpkins et al., 2015), it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1)**: Parents' and students' educational values are related.

Due to the paucity of research on educational values (see paragraphs 2.1 and 2.1.1), the hypotheses regarding the relationships among the specific value dimensions investigated in the present study were exploratory. However, according to EVT (paragraph 2.2.1), it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 1.1 (H1.1)**: The educational values relating to the importance attributed by the family to the school (intrinsic dimension) have stronger relationships with the educational values of the students regarding the same dimension than the educational values relating to the usefulness of the school (extrinsic dimension).

- **Hypothesis 1.2 (H1.2)**: The educational values relating to the usefulness attributed by the family to the school (extrinsic dimension) have stronger relationships with the same dimension of students' educational values than the perceived importance of the school (intrinsic dimension).

Expectancy-Value models' researchers found that the intergenerational transmission of parents' beliefs and expectations, as a result of socialisation processes, plays a significant role in shaping children and adolescents' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding their present capabilities and future prospects (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020, 2023; Simpkins et al., 2015). Based on these findings, the following hypotheses were developed:

- **Hypothesis 2 (H2)**: Parents' educational values are related to students' academic beliefs.

- **Hypothesis 3 (H3)**: Parents' educational values are related to students' academic expectations.

Considering that EVT places a high value on intrinsic values (paragraph 2.2.1), it was also hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 2.1 (H2.1)**: Parents' educational values related to the importance of schooling (intrinsic dimension) have stronger relationships with students' beliefs about their academic abilities than parents' educational values related to the usefulness of schooling (extrinsic dimension).

- **Hypothesis 3.1 (H3.1)**: Parents' educational values related to the importance of schooling (intrinsic dimension) have stronger relationships with students' academic expectations than parents' educational values related to the usefulness of schooling (extrinsic dimension).

Studies conducted based on EVT have also revealed a close relationship between the value students place on school and their academic beliefs and expectations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020, 2023). Consequently, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Students' educational values are related to their academic beliefs.

- **Hypothesis 5 (H5):** Students' educational values are related to their academic expectations.

Even in this case, considering that EVT places a high value on intrinsic values (see paragraph 2.2.1), it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 4.1 (H4.1)**: Students' educational values related to the importance of schooling (intrinsic dimension) have stronger relationships with their beliefs about their academic abilities than the educational values related to the usefulness of schooling (extrinsic dimension).

- **Hypothesis 5.1 (H5.1)**: Students' educational values related to the importance of schooling (intrinsic dimension) have stronger relationships with their academic expectations than the educational values related to the usefulness of schooling (extrinsic dimension).

Finally, it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 6 (H6):** Students' academic beliefs and expectations are related.

Concerning the indirect effects, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **Hypothesis 7 (H7):** Parents' educational values are related to students' academic expectations through students' educational values and academic beliefs.

Particularly, according to EVT's assumptions, it was hypothesised that (see paragraph 2.2.1):

- **Hypothesis 7.1 (H7.1):** The indirect effect of parents' educational values on students' academic expectations through students' educational values and academic beliefs is stronger when intrinsic (the importance of schooling) versus extrinsic (the usefulness of schooling) educational values are considered.

Regarding the ethnic origins of students, and based on national and international literature and reports indicating that migrant families place a high extrinsic value on their children's education as a means of social mobility (Chapter 1), it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 8 (H8):** Students from migrant backgrounds (first- and second-generation immigrant students) report higher levels of extrinsic parental values (the usefulness of schooling) than native students with mixed-heritage.

In addition, considering that EVT places a high value on intrinsic values (see paragraph 2.2.1), it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 9 (H9):** The advantages associated with parents' intrinsic educational values (see H7.1) exist for both students from migrant backgrounds (first- and second-generation immigrant students) and native students with mixed heritage.

Lastly, regarding Objective 3, and based on research indicating that parents, as expectancy socialisers (Frome & Eccles, 1998), transmit their beliefs and worldviews to their children, it was hypothesised:

- **Hypothesis 10 (H10):** The intergenerational transmission of educational values (i.e., the direct relationships between parents' and students' educational values) is essential for explaining the relationships between parents' educational values and their children's academic beliefs and expectations (see Figure 2.6).

2.4.1 Methods

2.4.1.1 Participants and Procedures

The research was conducted in three Italian high schools during the school year 2020-2021 (see the Introduction for a detailed description of the project's phases and study procedures[24]). 269 students participated in the study (M_{age} = 16.62, *SD* = 1.45). Regarding demographic variables, the participants' gender, age, country of birth (Italy or a foreign country), parental educational level, and language spoken at home were collected. 53.2% of students identified as "female" (*N* = 143), while 45.7% identified as "male" *(N* = 123) and 1.1% identified as "non-binary" (*N* = 3). According to the criteria adopted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018a), students born abroad (*N* = 54), and students born in Italy from at least one foreign-born parent (*N* = 70) were classified as *first-generation* and *second-generation* immigrants, respectively. Students born in Italy from one parent born in Italy and one born abroad (*N* = 145) were considered *mixed-heritage native students.* Concerning parental education (1 = elementary school, 2 = middle school, 3 = high school, 4 = university, and 5 = doctorate), 73% of the sample (*N* = 197) reported having at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. The Chi-square difference test for contingency tables revealed statistically significant differences in parents' educational background based on students' migrant backgrounds (χ^2 (2) = 27.195, $p < 0.001$). Particularly, students born in Italy from two foreign-born parents (second-generation immigrants) had parents with no higher education than a high school diploma. Mixed-heritage native students were more likely to have at least one undergraduate parent. No trend could be inferred for students born abroad from at least one foreign-born parent. Concerning the language spoken at home, 33.5% (*N* = 90) of the sample spoke only Italian, 58% (*N* = 156) spoke an additional language besides Italian, and 8.6% (*N* = 23) spoke a language other than Italian. There were statistically significant differences in the home languages spoken by students based on their

[24] ***Procedures in summary***. Prior to implementation, the study was presented to the schools. Expressly, detailed information about the study's objectives and methodologies was provided to the school leaders. After the school board approved the study, consent forms were provided to be distributed to the parents. The study's participants were restricted to students whose parents had provided written consent. Students completed the online survey in their respective classrooms. Before compiling it, the researchers provided students with extensive information about the objectives and methods of the research, as well as the fact that their participation was entirely voluntary, anonymous, and revocable at any time. During data collection, research assistants instructed students on how to respond using Likert scales and answered any questions. The Developmental and Socialisation Processes Department of Psychology ethics committee approved the study and its procedures.

migrant background (χ^2 (4) = 42.633, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, students born in Italy to two immigrant parents (second-generation students) generally spoke an additional language besides Italian at home. In contrast, native students with mixed-heritage typically spoke Italian at home. Students born abroad with at least one immigrant parent (first-generation students) were more likely to speak a language other than Italian at home. According to national documents (Ministry of Education, 2023), most students from migrant backgrounds originated from European countries, namely Romania, Albania, and Morocco. All these findings are consistent with those reported in the international reports (OECD, 2018a) and suggest that the sample adequately represents the population of students from migrant backgrounds living in Italy.

2.4.1.2 Measures

Since the data were self-reported and collected from a single source at a single point in time, the questionnaire construction and administration followed the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2012) for controlling and minimising the common method bias.

Parental and Students Educational Values. Parents' and students' educational values were assessed using the measures described in Study 1a. Six items were used to assess the intrinsic educational values of parents and students (School Importance): three for parents and three for students. Ten additional items assessed the extrinsic educational values of parents (five items) and students (five items) (School Usefulness). In this sample, both parents' and students' educational values dimensions showed adequate reliability (parents' educational values: $\omega_{Importance\ of\ schooling}$ = 0.76, $\omega_{Usefulness\ of\ schooling}$ = 0.85; students' educational values: $\omega_{Importance\ of\ schooling}$ = 0.76, $\omega_{Usefulness\ of\ schooling}$ = 0.88).

Students' academic beliefs. To evaluate students' academic beliefs, Academic Self-Concept (ASC) was measured using a 12-item scale based on the Self-Description Questionnaire II (Marsh et al., 2005; Marsh, 1990). Students responded to each question (items example: "I learn scholastic subjects rapidly", "I do well in school compared to my classmates") using an 8-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 8 = strongly agree (ω = 0.85).

Students' academic expectations. The academic expectations of students were measured with a single item that assessed their perceptions of academic difficulty ("Do you think it will be difficult for you to complete your studies?") to which students responded through a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

2.4.2 Data analysis and results

Before evaluating the model presented in Figure 2.7, preliminary analyses were performed. All variables showed acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), suggesting a normal distribution. Using the open source jamovi statistical platform (version 2.3) (The jamovi project, 2022), descriptive analyses, correlations, and variance analyses (ANOVA) were performed. These analyses allowed us to detect the relationships between the examined variables as well as the differences among groups (mixed-heritage native students, first-generation and second-generation students). R Studio (R Core Team, 2021) was used to conduct a path analysis in which all variables were inserted into the model as observed variables. The models' fit was evaluated using the following fit indices: Chi-Square Test statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kaplan, 2000). TLI > 0.90, CFI > 0.95, RMSEA ≤ 0.08 and SRMR ≤ 0.05 were considered indicators of an adequate fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

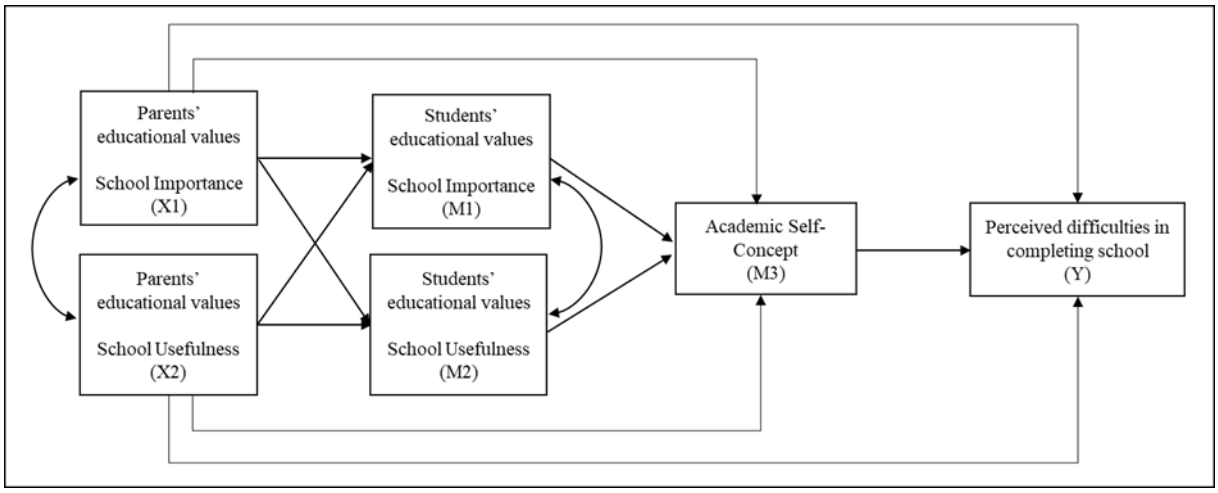
In the path model (Figure 2.7), parents' educational values (X1: Importance of schooling, X2: Usefulness of schooling) were inserted as predictors, students' educational values (M1: Importance of schooling, M2: Usefulness of schooling) and academic self-concept (M3) as sequential mediators, and students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways (Y) as dependent variable. Considering correlations between parents' and students' educational value dimensions (Table 2.4), all possible direct effects between them were considered. In addition, because the two dimensions of educational values (Importance of schooling and Usefulness of schooling) were correlated for both parents and students (see EFA and CFA results in paragraphs 2.3.2), their covariances were also included in the model. Furthermore, all other direct paths among variables presented in Figure 2.7 were considered.

Concerning the indirect effects (IEs), the following relationships were examined:

- Indirect Effect 1 (IE 1): Importance of schooling for parents (X1) → Importance of schooling for students (M1) → Students' academic self-concept (M3) → Students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways (Y).

- Indirect Effect 2 (IE 2): Importance of schooling for parents (X1) → Usefulness of schooling for students (M2) → Students' academic self-concept (M3) → Students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways (Y).
- Indirect Effect 3 (IE 3): Usefulness of schooling for parents (X2) → Usefulness of schooling for students (M2) → Students' academic self-concept (M3) → Students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways (Y).
- Indirect Effect 4 (IE 4): Usefulness of schooling for parents (X2) → Importance of schooling for students (M1) → Students' academic self-concept (M3) → Students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways (Y).

Figure 2.7 *Path diagram*



Subsequently, a Multiple-Group Path Analysis was conducted to compare the model fit between students from migrant backgrounds (first- and second-generation students) and mixed-heritage native students (H9). Firstly, a multigroup model was examined in which all parameters were initially allowed to vary among groups. After doing this, all model parameters were constrained to be equal among groups. Comparing the two models, the Chi-square difference test and ΔCFI were used to determine whether the unconstrained model explained data significantly better than the more conservative model.

Finally, since one of the study's objectives was to assess the role of intergenerational transmission of educational values in the adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds (H10), the contribution of students' educational values in explaining the relationships between parents' educational values and other variables considered (academic self-concept

and students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways) was examined through the comparison of alternative nested models.

Correlation results. The correlation results are shown in Table 2.4. Parents' educational values – Importance and Usefulness – were positively correlated (r = 0.501, p < .001). Similarly, positive relationships (r = 0.547, p < .001) emerged among students' educational values – Importance and Usefulness. The importance of schooling for parents was more strongly correlated with students' educational values regarding the same dimension (r = 0.378, p < .001) than their correlations with students' educational values regarding the usefulness of schooling (r = 0.253, p < .001). Similarly, the usefulness of schooling for parents was strongly positively correlated to students' educational values regarding the same dimension (r = 0.454, p < .001); the correlations between the usefulness of schooling for parents and the importance of schooling for students were positive but not extremely high (r = 0.190, p = 0.002). Academic self-concept was positively correlated with the importance of schooling for students (r = 0.425, p < .001); the correlations between academic self-concept and the usefulness of schooling for students were also positive but lower (r = 0.263, p < .001). Academic self-concept was not correlated with the parents' educational values regarding the usefulness of schooling (r = 0.053, p = 0.390); however, it showed a positive correlation with parents' educational values regarding the importance of schooling (r = 0.177, p = 0.004). Only academic self-concept was negatively correlated with students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathway (r = - 0.414, p < .001).

Table 2.4 *Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics*

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. School Importance (Parents)	4.684	0.493	—						
2. School Usefulness (Parents)	3.889	0.884	0.501***	—					
3. School Importance (Students)	3.854	0.821	0.378***	0.190**	—				
4. School Usefulness (Students)	3.186	0.946	0.253***	0.454***	0.547***	—			
5. ASC	5.013	1.122	0.177**	0.053	0.425***	0.263***	—		
6. Perceived Difficulties in completing high school	4.457	2.438	0.020	0.074	-0.100	-0.035	-0.414***	—	
7. Age	16.621	1.458	-0.079	-0.091	-0.126*	-0.159**	-0.068	0.056	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; ASC (academic self-concept)

ANOVAs results. Considering students' migrant backgrounds, the differences in the examined variables were evaluated among mixed-heritage native students, first-generation

students, and second-generation students. Using a dummy variable, mixed-heritage native students were classified as 0 (N = 145) and first-generation and second-generation students as 1 (N = 124). Then, a series of variance analyses (ANOVAs) were conducted, in which the parents' educational level, as well as students' age and gender, were added as covariates.

Concerning parents' educational values, results showed no significant differences in the importance of schooling among groups (F(1, 263) = 1.904, p = 0.17). In contrast, the usefulness of schooling for parents was higher for the first- and second-generation immigrant students (M = 4.11, SD = 0.78, N = 124) than for mixed-heritage native students (M = 3.70, DS = 0.93, N = 145): (F(1, 263) = 12.008, p < .001, η^2p = 0.044). H8 was then confirmed. Concerning students' educational values, results revealed that there were no significant differences among groups (importance of schooling: F(1, 263) = 0.030, p = 0.86; usefulness of schooling: F(1, 263) = 2.646, p = 0.11). Regarding Academic Self-Concept (ASC), results showed statistically significant differences among groups (F(1, 263) = 3.835, p = 0.05, η^2p = 0.014). Specifically, ASC was higher among mixed-heritage native students (M = 5.14, SD = 1.13, N = 145) than students from migrant backgrounds (M = 4.86, SD = 1.09, N = 124). Furthermore, perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways were greater among students from migrant backgrounds (M = 4.96, SD = 2.50, N = 124) than mixed-heritage native students (M = 4.03, DS = 2.31, N = 145): F(1, 263) = 6.503, p = 0.01, η^2p = 0.024. Finally, ANOVA analyses were performed to identify differences in the variables examined between first-generation and second-generation students. Results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences among groups regarding parents' educational values (importance of schooling: F(1,118) = 0.489, p = 0.486; usefulness of schooling: F(1,118) = 0.113, p = 0.737), students' educational values (importance of schooling: F(1,118) = 0.894, p = 0.346; usefulness of schooling: F(1,118) = 1.998, p = 0.160), ASC (F(1,115) = 1.370, p = 0.244), and perceived difficulty in completing education pathways (F(1,118) = 1.378, p = 0.343).

Overall, these results suggest that the presence of a migrant background appears to be a risk factor for students' adaptation: first- and second-generation students, compared to mixed-heritage students, report lower perceived academic skills and more significant difficulties in completing their educational pathways; in addition, they perceive higher levels of parental educational values in terms of perceived usefulness of school. This evidence is consistent with the findings of national and international reports and studies, which reveal, on the one hand, that immigrant students face greater challenges in their school careers and, on

the other hand, that migrant families are frequently motivated by extrinsic factors in their involvement with their children's educational experience (Chapter 1).

Path analysis results. The path analysis's standardised coefficients are shown in Table 2.5. In the first model (Model 1, Table 2.5), all parameters were freely estimated. For this reason, no fit indices were calculated since this model was saturated and showed a perfect fit. Results (Table 2.5) showed that there was a positive relationship between the importance of schooling for parents (X1) and the importance of schooling for students (M1) (*B* = .377; *SE* = .114; *CI* [0.383, 0.824]; $p < .001$). Similarly, the usefulness of schooling for parents (X2) had a positive relationship with the usefulness of schooling for students (M2) (*B* = .437; *SE* = .072; *CI* [0.353, 0.637]; $p < .001$). Contrarily, there were no significant relations between the importance of schooling for parents (X1) and the usefulness of schooling for students (M2) and between the usefulness of schooling for parents (X2) and the importance of schooling for students (M1). Thus, H1 was verified, while H1.1 was only partially confirmed. In fact, it was hypothesised that the relationship between the same dimensions of students' and parents' educational values would be more robust than that among different dimensions. Instead, the relationships between parents' and students' educational values were not statistically significant when considering different dimensions.

Table 2.5 *Path analysis results (Model 1)*

Predictor	Dependent variable	B	SE	P
X1	M1	0.377	0.109	< .001
X2	M1	0.001	0.061	0.993
X2	M2	0.437	0.067	< .001
X1	M2	0.034	0.120	0.586
M1	M3	0.375	0.097	< .001
M2	M3	0.082	0.088	0.267
X1	M3	0.057	0.156	0.407
X2	M3	-0.084	0.090	0.238
M3	Y	-0.453	0.133	< .001
X1	Y	0.047	0.339	0.489
X2	Y	0.056	0.197	0.433
M1	Y	0.055	0.221	0.462
M2	Y	0.016	0.191	0.826
	Indirect Effects			
	X1 →M1→M3→Y	-0.064	0.096	< .001
	X1→M2→M3→Y	-0.000	0.038	0.994
	X2→ M1→M3→Y	-0.013	0.042	0.291
	X2→M2→M3→Y	-0.001	0.013	0.628

Note: X1 (Importance of schooling for parents); X2 (Usefulness of schooling for parents); M1 (Importance of schooling for students). M2 (Usefulness of schooling for students); M3 (academic self-concept); Y (perceived difficulties completing high school).

Additionally, there were no significant relations between the importance of schooling for parents (X1) and students' ASC (M3) and between the importance of schooling for parents (X1) and students' perceived difficulties in completing educational pathways (Y). The usefulness of schooling for parents (X2) had no significant relationship with students' ASC (M3) and students' perceived difficulties in completing educational pathways (Y). H2, H2.1, H3 and H3.1 were not confirmed.

Regarding students' educational values, results showed that the importance of schooling for students (M1) had a positive relationship with students' ASC (M3) (B = 0.375; SE = 0.132; CI [0.328, 0.038]; $p < .001$). Conversely, the importance of schooling for students (M1) was not related to students' perceived difficulties in completing educational pathways (Y). The usefulness of schooling for students (M2) was not associated either with students' ASC (M3) or students' perceived difficulties in completing educational pathways (Y). Therefore, H4 and H4.1 were only partially supported, and H5 and H5.1 were not confirmed. Contrary to expectations, there was no correlation between students' perceived difficulties in completing educational pathways and their educational values. Moreover, only educational values about the importance of school showed significant associations with academic self-concept.

Students' ASC (M3) was negatively related to students' perceived difficulties in completing educational pathways (Y) (B = -0.453; SE = 0.147; CI [-1.319, -0.745]; $p < .001$). H6 was then confirmed.

Concerning the indirect effect, results showed that only the importance of schooling for parents (X1) was negatively associated with students' perceived difficulties in completing the educational pathways (Y) through the importance of schooling for students (M2) and students' ASC (M3) (IE 1: B = -0.064; SE = 0.096; CI 95% [-0.536, -0.154]; $p < 0.00$). Other indirect effects were not statistically significant (Table 2.3). Therefore, H7 and H7.1 were partially supported. Despite showing a positive association with students' educational values, parents' educational values regarding the perceived usefulness of the school had no indirect effect on students' academic expectations.

These preliminary findings suggested that family influences on students' adaptation may be better understood by investigating the educational values held by parents and students, particularly concerning the importance they place on educational experiences. Moreover, these results indicate that educational values may be transmitted from parents to children. In fact, parents and children's educational values positively correlated only when the exact dimensions were considered.

Consequently, an additional model (Model 2, Table 2.6) was examined, wherein the not significant paths among the different dimensions of parents' and students' educational values (see Table 2.5) were constrained to zero.

Results showed that Model 2 has excellent fit indices: χ^2 (2) = 0.324, p = 0.851; *CFI* = 1.000; *TLI* = 1.034; *RMSEA* = 0.000, 90% *CI* [.00, .07]; *p-value RMSEA* = 0.920; *SRMR* = .01. In this model (Table 2.6), the direct and indirect effects found in Model 1 (Table 2.5) were confirmed. In order to preserve the assumptions of the path analysis and make the results easier to interpret, this model, which was more straightforward than the previous one and had fewer parameters to estimate, was used in the following analyses.

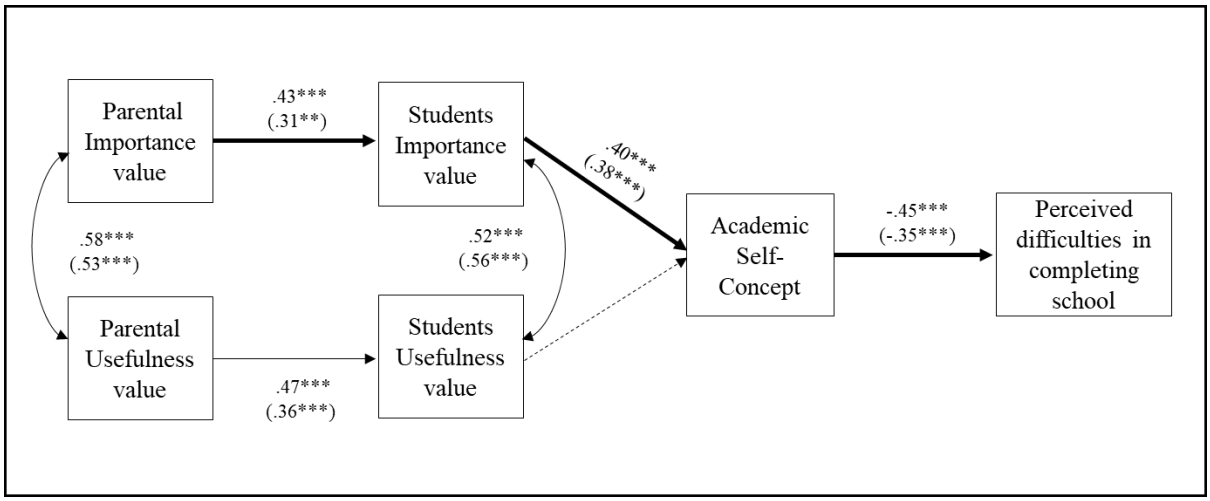
Table 2.6 *Path analysis results (Model 2)*

Predictor	Dependent variable	B	SE	P
X1	M1	0.364	0.085	< .001
X2	M2	0.451	0.056	< .001
M1	M3	0.373	0.108	< .001
M2	M3	0.082	0.090	0.279
X1	M3	0.057	0.150	0.388
X2	M3	-0.084	0.104	0.306
M3	Y	-0.452	0.127	< .001
X1	Y	0.047	0.336	0.486
X2	Y	0.056	0.198	0.436
M1	Y	0.055	0.261	0.532
M2	Y	0.016	0.206	0.839
Indirect Effects				
IE 1: X1→M1→M3→Y		-0.06	0.09	0.001
IE 3: X2→M2→M3→Y		-0.02	0.04	0.287

Note: X1 (Importance of schooling for parents); X2 (Usefulness of schooling for parents); M1 (Importance of schooling for students). M2 (Usefulness of schooling for students); M3 (academic self-concept); Y (perceived difficulties completing high school).

To evaluate the H9, a Multi-Group path analysis was conducted. In particular, it was assessed the Model 2-invariance between mixed-heritage native students and students from migrant backgrounds (first-generation and second-generation students). Results showed that the completely not constrained model had an adequate fit (Unconstrained model in Table 2.7), confirming the configurational invariance. The equality constraints imposed on the model's structural parameters did not significantly worsen the model (Constrained model in Table 2.7): $\Delta\chi^2$ (11) = 11.8, p = 0.379. These results showed no differences in the relationships among the model's variables based on group membership (Figure 2.8). Consequently, H9 was confirmed.

Figure 2.8 *Multi-Group path analysis*



Note. In brackets are the coefficients of first- and second-generation immigrant students

Table 2.7 *Multi-Group path analysis results*

Model	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	CFI	ΔCFI	TLI	RMSEA	P-value RMSEA	SRMR
Model (unconstrained model)	8.602 (4) .	-	0.988	-	0.907	0.09 (CI [0.000, 0.179])	0.166	0.04
Model (constrained model)	20.402 (15) .	11.8 (11)	0.985	0.003	0.971	0.05	0.435	0.08

Note: *** $p < .001$; . not significant

Finally, to evaluate the role of students' educational values in explaining the relationships between parents' educational values and the other variables considered in Model 2 (academic self-concept and students' perceived difficulties in completing the education pathways), Model 2 was compared to a nested model (Model 3) in which all the paths related to the student's educational values were fixed at 0. The Chi-square difference test (Table 2.8) revealed that the imposed constraints substantially worsened the model's fit, suggesting that Model 2 should be retained: $\Delta\chi^2 (7) = 247.09$, $p < .001$.

These findings demonstrated the significance of students' educational values in the relationships between parents' educational values and students' psychological and academic adaptation and the role of intergenerational transmission of educational values in adolescents' development trajectories. H10 was consequently confirmed.

Table 2.8 *Models' comparison*

Model	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	CFI	ΔCFI	TLI	RMSEA	P-value RMSEA	SRMR
Model 2	0.324 (2) .	-	1.000	-	1.034	0.000 (CI [0.000, 0.066])	0.920	0.009
Model 3	247.416 (9)*	247.09 (7)	0.362	0.638	-0.063	0.314*** (CI [0.281, 0.348])		0.219

Note: *** $p < .001$; . not significant

2.4.3 Discussion

The main aim of this study was to investigate parental influences on the psychological and academic adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds. To achieve this goal, a heterogeneous group of students from migrant backgrounds was included in the study: first- and second-generation students and native students with mixed-heritage. This quantitative and cross-sectional study used a self-report questionnaire to assess parents' and students' educational values and students' academic beliefs and expectations.

The preliminary findings revealed that students differed on several variables, such as parents' educational value referring to the school's usefulness, perceptions of academic competence and the perceived difficulties in completing the school. In particular, students from immigrant families (first- and second-generation students) were more likely than native students with mixed-heritage to report that their parents consider the school as essential to achieve personal, educational, and professional success. In addition, first- and second-generation immigrant adolescents assessed their academic abilities as lower than mixed-heritage students and reported more significant difficulties in concluding their educational path. These findings are consistent with the results of other studies, which indicate that members of underrepresented groups are more likely to underestimate their academic potential and dropout of school and that immigrant families place a high value on their children's educational experiences because they view education as a tool to improve their economic standing (Chapter 1). Therefore, it would appear that having a migrant background hinders students' adaptation resources.

In the present investigation, the relationships between parents and students' educational values and students' psychological and academic adaptation (specifically, how confident students are in their academic abilities and how difficult they find completing

school) were also considered. The findings revealed that the importance that parents place on education – an aspect of parental involvement known as academic socialisation (see paragraphs 2.1.1 and 2.1.2) – may be intergenerationally transmitted to their children and, as a result, positively impact the students' psychological and academic adaptation. Notably, only the intrinsic educational values of parents and students had a significant relationship with students' adjustment. In contrast, the perceived usefulness of school did not exhibit significant relationships with the adaptation indicators considered. Regarding the value that immigrant families typically place on school and education as a means of activating social lift, an extrinsic dimension of value, this study suggests that such motivations do not appear to contribute to the development and adaptation of students. In contrast, intrinsic educational values should be strengthened to predict favourable and adaptive psychological outcomes.

Contrary to expectations, this study found no differences between first- and second-generation students and native students with mixed-heritage regarding the relationships between parents and students' educational values and students' academic beliefs and expectations. When parents attribute value and importance to the school as an educational institution, regardless of its utility in achieving future goals, psychological mechanisms that can promote positive adaptation may be activated for all students. According to the theoretical model of Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012, 2021), parents' educational values, in their intrinsic dimension, may be defined as a factor that promotes the resilience of all adolescents from migration backgrounds.

Moreover, these results provide substantial insight into how the parents' educational values may influence the students' adaptation through the intergenerational transmission of parental beliefs. In fact, as proposed by models of parental socialisation (Eccles, 2007), parents may serve as "interpreters of reality" for their children by conveying their perspectives on the world. According to Eccles' model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), these processes substantially impact students' experiences in various life domains (Barni et al., 2011; Gniewosz & Noack, 2012). Following these theoretical assumptions, in the present study, when the students' educational value was not considered, the model's fit substantially worsened, demonstrating the crucial role of intergenerational transmission of educational value in students' adaptation.

The limitations of this investigation must be taken into account. Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of the research design makes it difficult to conclude the causal relationships among the variables (Maxwell et al., 2011; Mitchell & Maxwell, 2013). The direction of these

relationships can only be hypothesised based on the literature reviewed. Regarding parental influence, in fact, the literature has demonstrated that parents' beliefs, values, expectations, motivations, and goals are a fundamental influence on students' beliefs, values, expectations, motivations, and goals and, consequently, successful life experiences (Simpkins et al., 2015). Future studies might overcome these limitations by paying closer attention to the covariates that can substantially alter the investigated models and/or by employing longitudinal studies (Rohrer, 2018). Secondly, variables were only measured from the student's point of view. This represents a significant limitation for studies that, like the present investigation, examine the school climate's influences on students' psychological, social, and behavioural outcomes (Cohen et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016). Future studies might benefit from multi-informant surveys that capture data from multiple sources, such as parents and teachers. Notably, this approach would be essential to investigate in greater depth and with greater accuracy the intergenerational transmission of educational values, which, in this study, were measured only concerning students' perceptions. Thirdly, this study did not consider the parents' and students' behaviours, another variable that could explain the positive outcomes related to educational values (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 2005). Exploring the behavioural correlates of parents' educational values might provide schools and families with suggestions for promoting students' success, mainly when socioeconomic and cultural risk factors are present. Fourthly, only two components of the educational values were assessed. Numerous studies and research based on the EVT demonstrated, instead, that the values are a multidimensional construct (Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Fifthly, the items used to evaluate students' academic expectations were constructed ad hoc for the present study and only assessed students' general perceptions of academic difficulties. For future research, it might be beneficial to use mixed methods approaches (Trinchero & Robasto, 2019) to gain a deeper understanding of these phenomena by giving voice to what students expect from their future and the barriers they perceive to achieving their goals. Sixthly, the present study only included students from immigrant families and did not account for the experiences of native students. Future research might consider comparative research designs to identify any potential differences among groups and shed light on the role of cultural contexts in the adaptation processes of young people. Seventhly, socio-demographic factors other than ethnic origin were not considered in this study. In light of the socioeconomic disadvantage immigrant families face, particularly in Italy (ISTAT, 2022b, 2023; OECD, 2018a, 2023; Tan et al., 2023), future studies should consider this information. Lastly, in terms of sample characteristics, the sample size was modest. Moreover, due to the

nature of the study, it has been impossible to foresee the sample size required to ensure the statistical power of the analyses conducted.

Despite the limitations discussed thus far, the present study's findings provide insights that could contribute to a better comprehension of the role of family influences in the academic adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds. As suggested by the models, theories, and research presented in this chapter, parents' educational values, transmitted intergenerationally to their children, influence students' beliefs about themselves and their future. This study, examining the relationship between parents' and students' beliefs as well as the impact of these on students' motivations and future expectations, has helped to overcome some of the limitations still present in the literature regarding the educational experiences of young immigrant students (Kim et al., 2020). The expectation is that future research will be able to overcome the limitations of this study and continue to focus on the influence of family on the adjustment of students from ethnic minority groups. In the last section of this dissertation, the study's practical implications will be discussed, taking into account the findings of the studies described in the subsequent chapters (Chapters 3 and 4).

Chapter 3

Teacher-Student Relationship as a Factor Promoting Well-Being for All: Effects on Student Engagement and Future Expectations

Abstract

In addition to parental factors, school environments considerably impact young people's psychological, social, and academic adjustment. Specifically, the teacher-student relationship (TSR) is a protective and supportive factor for students' well-being: it is associated with positive academic and social-emotional outcomes for all students – such as interest, engagement, and academic motivation (OECD, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Pianta & Hamre, 2009) – and, at the same time, plays an essential role in the presence of socioeconomic and cultural disadvantages – such as belonging to ethnic minorities or financial hardship. Using a two-wave Cross-Lagged Panel model (CLPM), the present study examined the relationships between TSR, student engagement (SE), and perceived difficulties in completing studies in a sample of upper secondary school students in Italy. Considering the effects of migratory origins and socioeconomic status, the results indicated that TSR has a positive relationship with SE which, in turn, has a negative relationship with students' perceptions of difficulties in completing their studies. Interestingly, there were no significant differences between students from migrant backgrounds and Italian students in the examined model. All in all, this study revealed that TSR is a factor that promotes the well-being of all students. Consequently, in addition to the importance placed on student performance, it is crucial that teachers, in their professional practice, give more consideration to the emotional dimensions of learning processes, which, according to this study, appear helpful in preventing the academic disengagement that frequently accompanies secondary school students' educational experiences. In the concluding section of this dissertation, the study's implications will be discussed, considering also the findings presented in Chapters 2 and 4.

3.1 Theoretical Background

3.1.1 The role of teachers in children and adolescents' school experiences

Educational research has abundantly demonstrated that teaching quality significantly predicts students' academic achievement (Chetty et al., 2014a, 2014b; Jackson, 2018; Kraft, 2019; Pianta, 1999; Torsheim et al., 2000). However, several studies, emphasising the multidimensional nature of the teaching-learning processes (Blazar & Kraft, 2017), have found that the teacher's practices in the classroom have an impact that extends beyond the cognitive outcomes of their students (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; OECD, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Pianta & Hamre, 2009). In this regard, it has been observed that students' experiences with their teachers at school are strongly related to positive socio-emotional outcomes, such as interest in school, academic motivation, and general well-being (OECD, 2020, 2021a, 2021b).

The role of significant others, teachers in particular, in influencing children and adolescents' development has been stressed by many scholars and experts in the educational field (Muijs et al., 2014; OECD, 2021a; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b; Wentzel, 2016). Many influential theories over the years have allowed in-depth knowledge about the characteristics and the functioning of the Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR) (Wentzel, 2016), highlighting that this school climate' dimension (Cohen et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016) represents a critical socio-contextual factor for all children and adolescents successful adaptation in many life domains (OECD, 2021b; Wang et al., 2013; Wentzel, 2009, 2013). In particular, the Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) has significantly contributed to delineating the teachers' role in the children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. According to this theoretical perspective, the dyadic child-teacher relationship can be viewed as a social system within which the children's fundamental psychological needs can be satisfied or, on the contrary, frustrated. Numerous studies and research in this field have demonstrated that a safe relationship with teachers encourages children's curiosity and interest in many school activities (Wentzel, 2016). Based on these insight findings, developmental and social psychologists have strongly fuelled TSR studies by offering different perspectives. According to the Social Support Models (Sarason et al., 1990; Wentzel, 2004), TSR is essential for students' academic persistence and resilience (Wentzel, 2016). Similarly, research based on the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b), which attributes a crucial role to the basic psychological needs (need for competence, need for autonomy, and need for relatedness) in students' well-being, has demonstrated that when teachers are intensely

involved in their students' life, the latter set and attain ambitious academic goals (Wentzel, 2016).

Overall, these theoretical models have enabled a deeper understanding of the role of interpersonal contexts in students' school experiences, demonstrating that the quality of the relationships between teachers and their students is, at all ages, a protective and promotive factor for young people's adaptation processes (Masten, 2015). Considering the numerous risk factors to which adolescents from migrant backgrounds are exposed during their schooling experience, teachers can offer them various educational and social opportunities. In this regard, a large body of research has stressed that at-risk students can persevere in the face of school challenges or difficulties, and successfully adapt to their environment, when teachers provide them with the necessary academic and social support (Pitzer & Skinner, 2016; Ricard & Pelletier, 2016; Roorda et al., 2011, 2017; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009).

3.1.2 Teacher-student relationship and student engagement: theoretical models and literature evidence

Most research on TSR has intensively investigated its role in explaining students' involvement in school life, also known as *Student Engagement* (SE; Quin, 2017). Initially, the scientific interest in this topic was prompted by a large body of research indicating that students, particularly in upper secondary schools, are extremely unmotivated (Wigfield et al., 2015; Muenks et al., 2018). Reflecting on the alarming findings, the scientific community and educational institutions have acknowledged that contemporary school systems frequently fail to meet students' complex psychological and developmental needs, especially during the transition from childhood to adolescence (Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016). Interestingly, some studies have proposed that this evidence might be attributable to the nature and quality of TSR in the upper secondary school, which changes significantly compared to previous school cycles (Hofkens & Pianta, 2022). In fact, unlike in elementary schools, where students spend the entire school day with a single teacher, secondary school students have several teachers throughout a single school day. In addition, secondary school teachers are typically more concerned with their students' academic performance and offer them less emotional support than in elementary schools (Hofkens & Pianta, 2022). According to the most well-known research on motivated behaviour, these contextual changes would frustrate the students' psychological needs, specifically the need for relationships, resulting in low motivation and

engagement (Hofkens & Pianta, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). From this perspective, SE can be conceptualised as a social-relational process (Pianta et al., 2012), mainly determined by the opportunities for engagement offered to students by their teachers during daily interactions.

The first systematic research on SE was published in the 1980s (Mosher & McGowan, 1985). Although early research on SE focused on its "dark side" – which referred to processes of detachment and disinterest during schooling, i.e., *school disengagement*) –, contemporary scholars have described and extensively studied SE as a multidimensional construct (Fredricks, 2014; Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks, Reschly, & Christenson, 2019; Fredricks, Ye, et al., 2019; Reschly & Christenson, 2022). Despite the numerous studies and research conducted on this topic (Reschly & Christenson, 2022), the scientific community has not yet reached a consensus on the SE definition – which is generically described as «*the student's active participation in academic and co-curricular or school-related activities and commitment to educational goals and learning. Engaged students find learning meaningful and are invested in their learning and future*» (Christenson et al., 2012, pp. 816-817) – and its dimensions – which, in most studies, were distinguished in *emotional engagement* (i.e., attitudes and feelings toward school related to the quality of relationships with teachers and classmates), *behavioural engagement* (i.e., compliance with school rules, participation in school activities, and classroom behaviour), and *cognitive engagement* (i.e., metacognitive strategies used for learning) (Fredericks et al., 2004; Reschly & Christenson, 2022).

Nevertheless, regardless of their theoretical models of reference, all SE scholars concur on the profound significance of the relational context for students' short- and long-term development (Eccles & Roeser, 2009; Reschly & Christenson, 2022). In particular, the intriguing meta-analysis on the relationships between TSR, SE, and students' achievement conducted by Roorda and colleagues (2017) – which examined 103 studies from 2009 to 2016 – revealed that in the majority of research conducted in school settings, SE emerged as a mediator of the direct relationship between school environment (i.e., TSR) and students' achievement. Specifically, the longitudinal studies examined in this meta-analysis revealed a stronger association between negative aspects of TSR and SE that, contrary to previous research (Roorda et al., 2011), were present in both elementary and secondary school. Intriguingly, when positive dimensions of TSR were considered, the association TSR-SE was strongest among secondary school students compared to their younger peers. These findings confirmed the significance of positive relationships in secondary school because, according to the Authors, in this school cycle, «*students tend to become naturally less engaged as they*

grow older making the quality of the relationship with teachers crucial for older students at greater academic risk due to their lower engagement» (Roorda et al., 2017, p. 252). The results also demonstrated the mediating role of SE in the relationship between TSR (both positive and negative) and students' achievement across all school cycles, as well as the direct influence of TSR on several academic outcomes.

Regarding the school experiences of students from migrant backgrounds, the focus of this dissertation, recent research based on Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues' multi-systemic and integrative model (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021) has demonstrated that SE is a valuable mechanism for understanding differences in academic achievements among students from different migrant and social backgrounds. In fact, minority adolescents appear to experience a more significant decline in SE during school transitions than their native peers (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2015). In this regard, Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2015), comparing the SE trajectories between immigrant and non-immigrant students, found that the former not only have lower levels of school engagement than their native peers, but this disparity tends to grow over middle school years. According to the Authors, this trend can be explained by the concept of "educational disinvestment", which posits that students from migrant backgrounds may progressively withdraw from school-related activities in order to avoid the emotionally damaging consequences of educational failure (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2015).

In light of this, the quality of immigrant children and adolescents' school experiences (i.e., TSR) may be a viable solution for school disengagement and failure (Fredericks, 2014; Fredericks et al., 2004). As emphasised by Tinto (2022), such evidence makes it necessary to abandon the tendency «*to "blame the victim" for their dropout, namely, that it reflects the attributes of students*» and recognise «*the role the institution plays in constructing environments that have the effect of increasing the likelihood that some of their students, in particular, those from low-income and minority backgrounds, would not persist. To improve student persistence for all students, institutions had to change. This focus on institutional change remains at the centre of much of the current research on student retention*» (p. 370).

Given the importance of school engagement in promoting students' achievement and well-being, comprehending educational institutions' role in this process is essential. As previously noted, research has demonstrated that placement in a safe and supportive school environment may predict high levels of school engagement, particularly for specific at-risk populations such as students from migrant backgrounds. The study presented in the following

paragraph assessed the role of TSR in shaping students' future expectations by examining the SE's mediating function and accounting for the effects of the structural variable, i.e. migrant background and socioeconomic status, in these relationships.

3.2 The current research

3.2.1 Aims and hypotheses

This study's overarching objective was to evaluate the role of teachers in students' psychological and academic adaptation processes. According to Masten (Masten, 2014a, 2014b), in fact, the quality of TSR is essential for enhancing the well-being of all children and adolescents (promotive function) and is also crucial for their resilience in the face of multiple risk factors (protective function).

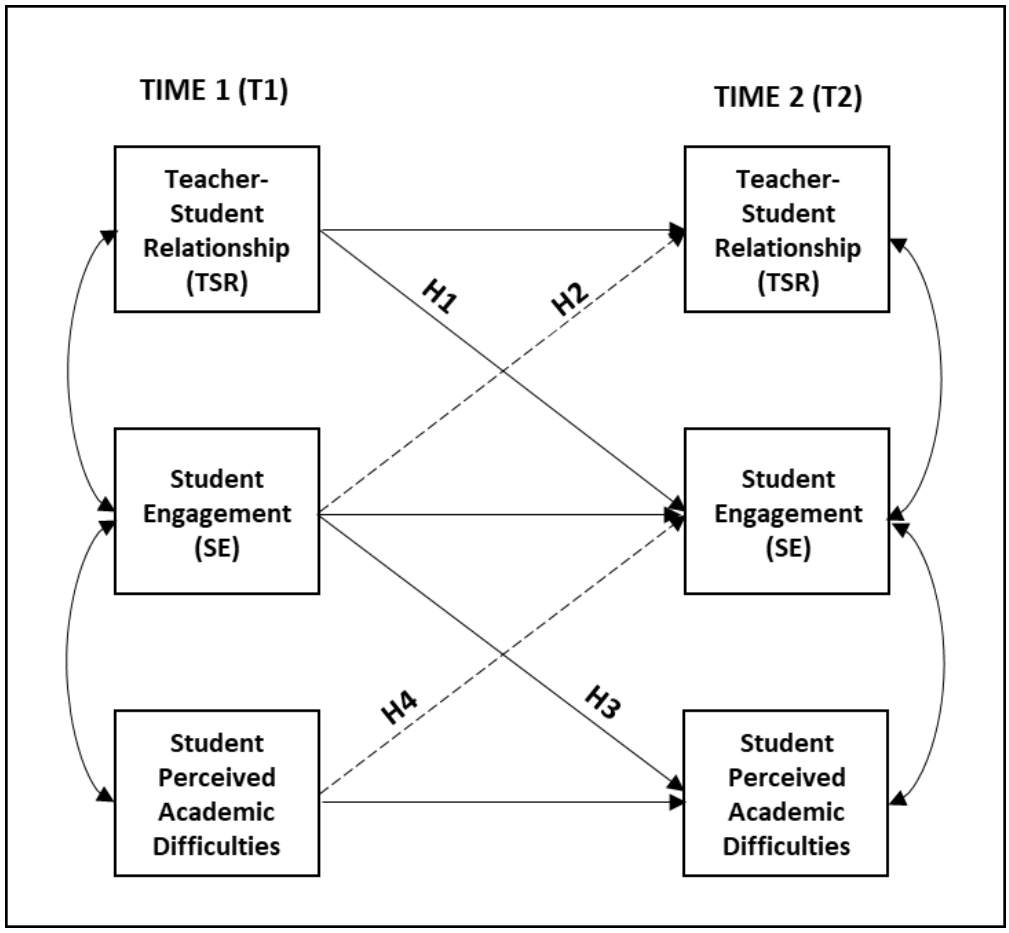
In light of TSR's impact on students' engagement and academic expectations, the study's primary objective was to determine whether TSR could be considered a resilience factor that promotes all students' academic adaptation (promotive function). Specifically, according to the literature described in the previous paragraphs, SE was considered a mediator in the direct relationship between TSR and students' academic expectations (Roorda et al., 2011, 2017).

As already discussed in the introductory section of this dissertation, unlike the research conducted so far on these topics – which mainly focused on objective indicators of students' academic success, namely performance (grades) –, the present study focused on students' future academic expectations (i.e., perceived difficulty completing school; Eccles & Wigfield, 2023). Educational and psychological research can benefit substantially from examining contextual and intra-individual factors that impact students' expectations, which are fundamental to their adaptation and success: «*Students' expectations can be self-fulfilling prophecies, as the effort students invest to meet their expectations often pay off. For example, when comparing students of similar socioeconomic backgrounds and academic achievement, students who expect to graduate from university are more likely to complete this degree than their peers who do not have such high expectations. Conversely, students who expect to dropout of school without qualifications are more likely to do so*» (OECD, 2017, p. 104). However, even though the association between different dimensions of school climate (such as TSR) and students' perceptions and beliefs about their future has been established for some time (e.g., Lindstrom-Johnson et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016), most research on this topic has

focused on the role of structural variables (such as socioeconomic status or ethnic background), while ignoring the role of psychological and contextual variables (Agasisti et al., 2021; Boudon, 1974; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Minello, 2014). In order to comprehend how to intervene to improve learning environments so that they can support students' short- and long-term educational goals, it is necessary to close this knowledge gap. Considering this, a further aim of this study was to investigate the role of those closest to students, such as teachers, in shaping their expectations, taking socioeconomic and migrant backgrounds into account.

To achieve these goals, a Cross-Lagged Panel Model (CLPM) with a two-wave design (Cole & Maxwell, 2003) was employed to assess the half-longitudinal mediation of TSR on students' academic expectations through SE (Figure 3.1) (Quin, 2017; Roorda et al., 2011, 2017).

Figure 3.1. *Conceptual model (path analysis)*



Drawing from the literature presented in this chapter, it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1**): TSR at T1 is positively correlated with SE at T2.
- **Hypothesis 2 (H2)**: SE at T1 has no association with TSR at T2.
- **Hypothesis 3 (H3)**: SE at T1 is negatively correlated with students' perceived academic difficulties at T2.
- **Hypothesis 4 (H4)**: No association exists between students' academic perceived difficulties at T1 and SE at T2.
- **Hypothesis 5 (H5)**: SE mediates the relation between TSR at T1 and students' perceived academic difficulties at T2.

A further objective of this study was to investigate the role of TSR in the psychological and academic adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds and to highlight the protective function of TSR for their future expectations.

In order to accomplish this goal, a multigroup analysis was conducted using the model depicted in Figure 3.1 to investigate the presence of distinct patterns in the relationships among the model's variables based on students' migrant backgrounds. Given the literature's findings that minority students have lower levels of school engagement (SE) and more significant academic difficulties than their native peers (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2015; OECD, 2019a, 2019b), it was hypothesised that minority students are more responsive than their native peers to the presence of a positive relationship with their teachers, which would have a positive effect on their levels of school engagement and, consequently, future expectations (**Hypothesis 6 - H6**).

3.2.2 Methods

3.2.2.1 Participants and procedures

The study included 326 students from 14 ninth-grade classes at an upper secondary school in Italy. The questionnaire was administered twice during the 2022/2023 school year: November 2022 (two months after the beginning of upper secondary school: Time 1 - T1) and May 2023 (at the conclusion of the first year of upper secondary school: Time 2 - T2). This time frame was deemed suitable for examining the relationships between the variables examined over time (lag time: 6 months), considering the school's needs and availability to

participate in the study (see the Introduction for a detailed description of the project's phases and study procedures)[25].

At Time 1, 279 students participated in the study (M_{age} = 14.28, *SD* = 0.35, 53.8% girls). Participants from migrant backgrounds were 90 (32.3%), including 26 (9%) first-generation students (born abroad to at least one immigrant parent). Romania, the Philippines, and Egypt were the main countries of origin. Regarding other demographic variables, students' socioeconomic status was measured by asking them to report their parents' educational attainment and their objective economic well-being. Regarding parental education level, 54.9% of the sample had parents with no more than a high school diploma. In contrast, the remaining portion had at least one parent with a postsecondary education qualification. Regarding objective economic well-being, the presence of common goods at home (quiet place to study, single room, desk for homework, PC for studying, internet connection) was assessed using some items from the Family Affluence Scale (Schnohr et al., 2013; Hartley et al., 2016; Torsheim et al., 2016). 47% of the sample reported possessing all the listed economic goods.

At Time 2, 245 students participated in the study (M_{age} = 15.14, *SD* = 0.42, 53.5% girls). Participants from a migrant background were 72 (29.5%), including 20 (8.2%) first-generation students (born abroad from at least one parent born abroad). Since Time 1, no change has occurred in the countries of origin. Regarding the parents' educational level, 56.7% of the sample had both parents with a high school diploma at most; the remainder had at least one parent with a post-secondary education. Regarding objective economic well-being, 48.6% of the sample reported owning all the listed economic goods.

3.2.2.2 Measures

Teacher-Students Relationship. The quality of TSR was measured using 9 items (5-point Likert-type scale) to which students responded by indicating the extent to which they perceived a positive relationship with their teachers in terms not only of emotional security

[25] ***Procedures in summary***. Prior to implementation, the study was presented to the schools. Expressly, detailed information about the study's objectives and methodologies was provided to the school leaders. After the school board approved the study, consent forms were provided to be distributed to the parents. The study's participants were restricted to students whose parents had provided written consent. Students completed the online survey in their respective classrooms. Before compiling it, the researchers provided students with extensive information about the objectives and methods of the research, as well as the fact that their participation was entirely voluntary, anonymous, and revocable at any time. During data collection, research assistants instructed students on how to respond using Likert scales and answered any questions. The Developmental and Socialisation Processes Department of Psychology ethics committee approved the study and its procedures.

and support (item examples: “There is a strong bond between my teachers and me”, “In times of difficulty, I know I can count on my teachers”) but also of facilitation and assistance in achieving educational goals (item examples: “My teachers encourage me in my studies”). The items were created in collaboration with teachers from the schools participating in this research project. Some items were adapted from existing measures (Zullig et al., 2010, 2014, 2015), while others were created from measures used to assess school climate (Carron & Brawley, 2012). Confirmatory analyses conducted in prior investigations confirmed the one-factor factorial solution (Marini, Livi, Cecalupo et al., 2023). The scale’s reliability was acceptable (T1: $\omega = 0.90$, T2: $\omega = 0.91$). The decision to focus on the positive aspects of TSR was influenced by previous studies’ findings that demonstrated that the associations between the positive aspects of TSR and SE were more robust among upper-secondary school students (Roorda et al., 2017).

Student Engagement. For this study, only emotional student engagement was measured using four items (example items: “I like what I am learning in school”, I enjoy learning new things in class”) adapted by Lam et al. (2014). The item’s reliability was adequate (T1: $\omega = 0.85$, T2: $\omega = 0.88$).

Students Perceived Academic Difficulties. Students’ perceived academic difficulties were measured using one single item (“Do you think it will be difficult for you to complete your studies?”), to which students responded through a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted at T1 and T2 for TSR’s and SE’s dimensions to assess common method bias, measurement invariance across students from different migrant backgrounds and longitudinal invariance across time lags. The results showed that the two-correlated factor model had a satisfactory fit both at T1 (χ^2 (76) = 195.356, $p < 0.001$; *CFI* = 0.940; *TLI* = 0.929; *RMSEA* = 0.07 [*CI* (0.06, 0.89); *SRMR* = 0.04) and T2 (χ^2 (76) = 224.480, $p < 0.001$; *CFI* = 0.926; *TLI* = 0.912; *RMSEA* = 0.08 [*CI* (0.07, 0.10); *SRMR* = 0.058). In addition, the fit of the one-factor model was worse at both T1 ($\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 377.811, $p < 0.001$; $\Delta CFI = 0.241$) and T2 ($\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 453.647, $p < 0.001$; $\Delta CFI = 0.225$) compared to the two-factor model. Regarding measurement invariance across students with different migrant backgrounds, the measures achieved strong invariance (TSR: configural invariance compared to weak invariance, $\Delta CFI = 0.004$, and weak invariance compared to

strong invariance, *ΔCFI* = 0.006; SE: configural invariance compared to weak invariance, *ΔCFI* = 0.001, and weak invariance compared to strong invariance, *ΔCFI* = 0.008). Regarding longitudinal invariance, strong invariance was attained for both measures considered simultaneously (configural invariance compared to weak invariance, *ΔCFI* = 0.001, and weak invariance compared to strong invariance, *ΔCFI* = 0.002).

3.2.3 Data analysis and results

Jamovi open-source software version 2.3 (The jamovi project, 2022) was used for descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses. All students participating in at least one administration were included in the analyses (*N* = 326). According to their migrant background, participants were grouped in the following way: 0 = native students (*N* = 219), and 1 = students from migrant backgrounds (*N* = 107). Parental level of education was encoded as follows: 0 = both parents had no more than a high school diploma (*N* = 179); 1 = at least one parent had a postsecondary degree (*N* = 146).

The open-source software R (R Core Team, 2021) with the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) was used to examine the cross-lagged relationships between TSR, SE, and students' perceived academic difficulties (Figure 3.1). In the model, TSR and SE were considered as observed variables. The parameters were estimated using the maximum likelihood estimator (ML). The Monte Carlo simulation approach was used to estimate the partial indirect effects (MacKinnon et al., 2004). Chi-square Test statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were used to evaluate the models' fit (Bentler, 1992; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Kline, 2016). The Chi-square difference test and ΔCFI (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002) were used to compare the models' fit.

Before moving forward with the analyses, the pattern of missing values was evaluated (missing data at T1: TSR = 14.72%, SE = 15.03%, perceived academic difficulty among students = 14.20%; at T2, 25.15% of the sample showed missing data for all variable). Little's Missing Completely At Random (MCAR) test indicated that the pattern of missing values was completely at random ($\chi^2(29) = 30.5$, $p = 0.39$). Thus, missing data patterns were treated with full information maximum likelihood (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2013).

Additionally, given the nature of the data examined, it was determined whether a multilevel design that accounted for the data' nested nature (students nested within classes) was necessary (Kenny et al., 2002). Therefore, each outcome variable's intraclass correlation

coefficient (*ICC*; McNeish & Stapleton, 2016) was calculated. The results showed that *ICC* values were below .10 for all variables. Consequently, the analyses were conducted by treating the data at the individual level as multilevel analysis would provide little benefit (cf. Kenny et al., 2002; Heck et al., 2013).

Table 3.1 displays correlations' results among all variables at each time point. Specifically, TSR at T1 was positively correlated with SE at both T1 and T2. Negative correlations emerged between TSR at T1 and students' perceived academic difficulties only when measured at T2. TSR at T2 was positively correlated with SE at T1 and T2 and negatively correlated with students' perceived academic difficulties at both T1 and T2. SE at T1 and T2 was negatively related to students' perceived academic difficulties only when measured at T2. Concerning the structural variables, positive correlations were found between the students' migrant background (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant backgrounds) and perceived academic difficulties measured at T1. There were negative correlations between objective economic well-being and students' perceived academic difficulties measured at T2. Migrant background (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant background) and objective economic well-being were negatively correlated. No significant correlations existed between the parents' educational level and any of the study's variables.

Figure 3.1 displays the conceptual model. First of all, the following nested models were estimated (Cole & Maxwell, 2003) to determine the direction of the relationships among variables and identify the most suitable model for the present study aims. In the first model, Model 1, cross-sectional correlations and autoregressive paths were estimated. Subsequently, in the second model, Model 2, the following cross-lagged paths have been added to Model 1: from TSR (T1) to SE (T2) and from SE (T1) to the students' perceived academic difficulties (T2). Finally, in an additional model, Model 3, the following cross-lagged paths have been added to Model 1: from SE (T2) to TSR (T1) and from the students' perceived academic difficulties (T1) to SE (T2). It is important to note that the cross-lagged paths predicted by Model 3 were opposite to those predicted by Model 2.

Table 3.2 displays the fit indices for all models and the results of the Chi-square difference test and ΔCFI. Table 3.3, instead, displays the models' results.

Table 3.1 *Descriptive statistics and correlations results*

	M	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.TSR (T1)	3.100	0.809	1	5	--										
2.TSR (T2)	2.991	0.785	1	4.700	.569**	--									
3.SE (T1)	3.448	0.840	1	5	.446**	.257**	--								
4.SE (T2)	3.067	0.884	1	5	.340**	.471**	.506**	--							
5.Students' Perceived Academic Difficulties (T1)	7.789	1.845	1	10	-.099	-.177*	.018	-.090	--						
6.Students' Perceived Academic Difficulties (T2)	7.570	1.992	1	10	-.200**	-.270**	-.145*	-.181**	.402**	--					
7.Migrant status	-	-	-	-	-.006	-.001	-.018	-.074	.171**	.122	--				
8.Parents' Education	-	-	-	-	.039	-.024	.031	.046	-.088	-.099	.031	--			
9. Objective economic well-being	4.262	0.838	1	5	.083	.149*	.101	.085	-.106	-.203**	-.177**	.028	--		
10.Age	14.283	0.352	13.563	16.238	-.045	.009	-.003	-.054	.014	-.087	.143*	.045	-.041	--	
11.Gender					-.128	-.087	.068	.073	.060	.068	.042	-.098	-.096	-.055	--

Note: ** p < 0.01; *** p <0.001

Table 3.2 *Fit Indices of Estimated Cross-Lagged Models*

	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR		$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	ΔCFI
Model 1	16.375 (6)*	0.964	0.910	0.070 (CI: 0.03, 0.12; p = 0.16)	0.070		-	-
Model 2	3.822 (4), p = 0.43	1.000	1.002	0.000 (CI: 0.00, 0.08; p = 0.753)	0.028	M2:M1	12.553 (2)**	0.036
Model 3	13.673 (4)**	0.967	0.875	0.086 (CI: 0.039, 0.138; p = 0.08)	0.059	M3:M1	2.702 (2), p = 0.259	0.003

Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001;

Table 3.3 *CLPMs results*

Predictor	Dependent	Estimate	SE	p-value	ci.lower	ci.upper
Model 1						
Autoregressive paths						
TSR (T1)	TSR (T2)	0.548	0.057	0.000	0.404	0.516
SE (T1)	SE (T2)	0.517	0.062	0.000	0.415	0.538
Students' perceived academic difficulties (T1)	Students' perceived academic difficulties (T2)	0.394	0.066	0.000	0.280	0.410
Model 2						
Autoregressive paths						
TSR (T1)	TSR (T2)	0.599	0.054	0.000	0.472	0.579
SE (T1)	SE (T2)	0.444	0.063	0.000	0.341	0.589
Students' perceived academic difficulties (T1)	Students' perceived academic difficulties (T2)	0.404	0.065	0.000	0.294	0.550
Cross-lagged paths						
TSR (T1)	SE (T2)	0.172	0.072	0.010	0.328	0.186
SE (T1)	Students' perceived academic difficulties (T2)	-0.161	0.191	0.010	-0.120	-0.494
Model 3						
Autoregressive paths						
TSR (T1)	TSR (T2)	0.548	0.057	0.000	0.404	0.516
SE (T1)	SE (T2)	0.517	0.062	0.000	0.415	0.538
Students' perceived academic difficulties (T1)	Students' perceived academic difficulties (T2)	0.394	0.066	0.000	0.280	0.410
Cross-lagged paths						
SE (T2)	TSR (T1)	0.034	0.058	0.591	-0.083	0.145
Students' perceived academic difficulties (T1)	SE (T2)	-0.090	0.021	0.122	-0.072	0.008

In accordance with H1 and H3, the results supported Model 2 ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 12.533$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that, after controlling for autoregressive effects, TSR (T1) influenced SE (T2) and SE (T1) had an effect on students' perceived academic difficulties (T2). As shown in Table 3.3, cross-lagged reverse effects were not statistically significant. H2 and H4 were, therefore, confirmed. In addition, the hypothesis that SE would mediate longitudinally the relationship between TSR quality and student perceptions of academic difficulties (H5) was also confirmed (*B* = -0.092, *CI*: -0.215, -0.009). The model explained 36% of the variance in TSR (T2), 30% of the variance in SE (T2), and 19% of the variance in students' perceptions of academic difficulties (T2). Consequently, Model 2 was used in subsequent analyses.

At this point, multigroup analyses were performed to identify any differences in the model (Model 2) among students from diverse migrant backgrounds. In the first multigroup analyses (unconstrained model), Model 2's autoregressive and cross-lagged paths could vary between groups. On the contrary, in the second multigroup analysis (constrained model), Model 2's paths were constrained to be equal between groups. The models fit' results revealed that both unconstrained ($\chi^2(8) = 10.047$, $p = 0.262$; *CFI* = 0.993; *TLI* = 0.975; *RMSEA* = 0.040 [*CI* (0.000, 0.105), *p-value RMSEA* = 0.531; *SRMR* = 0.046) and constrained model ($\chi^2(13) = 16.942$, $p = 0.202$; *CFI* = 0.987; *TLI* = 0.970; *RMSEA* = 0.043 [*CI* (0.000, 0.094), *p-value RMSEA* = 0.532; *SRMR* = 0.059) had a good fit. Consequently, the Chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2(5) = 6.8946$, $p = 0.2286$) and *ΔCFI* (0.006) revealed non-significant differences among groups based on migrant background. H6 was not confirmed.

Although there were no group differences in the relationships among variables considered in the model, the effects of migrant background on TSR, SE, and perceived academic difficulties at T1 and T2 were assessed separately. In doing this, socioeconomic status effects were also considered. Indeed, economic, social, and cultural contexts are profoundly intertwined (OECD, 2018a; Tan et al., 2023; see also Chapter 1), especially in Italy, where approximately 36% of immigrant families with children live in poverty (ISTAT, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023). However, to maintain the parsimony of the model, the effects of parents' educational level were not considered, as it did not exhibit significant relationships with the variables examined.

The results indicated that socioeconomic status (measured as objective economic well-being, i.e., number of common goods present in the house ranging from 0 to 5) and migrant background (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant backgrounds) were negatively associated (*B* = -0.211, *SE* = 0.022, $p < 0.001$). As for TSR, socioeconomic status was positively associated only with TSR measured at T1 (*B* = 0.150, *SE* = 0.058, $p = 0.011$).

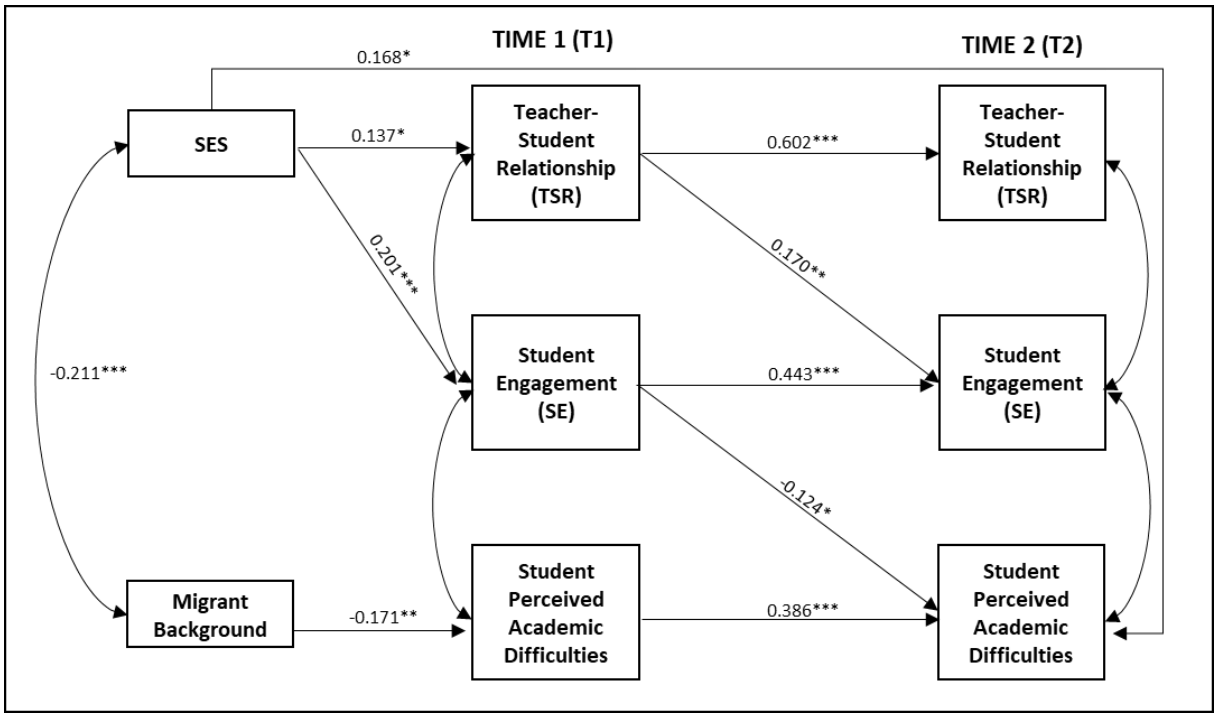
There were no associations between migrant background and TSR. Regarding SE, socioeconomic status was positively associated with SE only at T1 (B = 0.148, SE = 0.055, p < 0.01). There were no associations between migrant background and SE. Finally, migrant background (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant backgrounds) was positively associated with students' perceived academic difficulties only at T1 (B = 0.45, SE = 0.315, p = 0.012). Instead, controlling for associations at T1 (B = -0.088, SE = 0.175, p = 0.136), socioeconomic status was negatively associated with students' perceived academic difficulties at T2 (B = -0.197, SE = 0.183, p < 0.01).

These findings suggest that structural variables (students' migrant backgrounds and socioeconomic status) could be a risk factor for students' adaptation. Students from migrant backgrounds have fewer expectations for their educational future than their native classmates at the start of school. At the same time, students with a lower socioeconomic status perceive a lower quality of relationships with their teachers and experience lower levels of school engagement; furthermore, by the end of the first year, they experience more significant difficulties in completing their studies than their peers with a higher socioeconomic status. Although there were no statistically significant differences among groups in the estimated CLPM, structural variables impact TSR, SE, and students' perceptions of academic difficulty. In addition, negative associations were found between socioeconomic status and migrant background (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant origins). This implies that students from migrant backgrounds in this study's sample reported lower objective economic well-being than their native-born peers.

Based on these findings, CLPM presented in Figure 3.1 was evaluated considering the effects of students' migrant backgrounds and socioeconomic status (Figure 3.2). The model demonstrated an excellent fit: χ^2 (12) = 10.587, p = 0.568, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.010, $RMSEA$ = 0.00 [CI (0.000, 0.051)], p-$value$ $RMSEA$ = 0.945, $SRMR$ = 0.02. Then, it was compared to a nested model in which the effects of migrant background and socioeconomic status were fixed at 0: χ^2 (17) = 55.227, p = 0.000, CFI = 0.884, TLI = 0.808, $RMSEA$ = 0.083 [CI (0.059, 0.108)], p-$value$ $RMSEA$ = 0.013, $SRMR$ = 0.08). The Chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2$ (5) = 44.64, p < 0.01) and ΔCFI (0.116) revealed that the constraints imposed on the model impair the model fit; thus, it was appropriate to maintain the model in which the effects of structural variables were estimated. In addition, the results demonstrated that, after accounting for the effects of structural variables (students' migrant backgrounds and socioeconomic status), the cross-lagged effects of TSR (T1) on SE (T2) (B = 0.170, SE = 0.072, p = 0.01) and SE (T1)

on students' academic perception of difficulties (T2) (B = -0.124, SE = 0.193, p = 0.05) were significant, as well as the indirect effect (B = -0.069, CI: -0.179, -0.001)

Figure 3.2 *CLPM including structural variables*



3.2.4 Discussion

This study's primary objective was to investigate the role of teachers in students' psychological and academic adaptation processes, with a particular focus on the experiences of students from migrant backgrounds. Consistent with the hypotheses, the results showed that TSR influenced students' perceptions of academic difficulties via SE. These results corroborate the conclusions of a recent meta-analysis by Roorda and colleagues (2017) and confirm the importance of positive relationships with teachers for students' school engagement. Furthermore, when the effects of the relationship between TSR and SE on students' academic expectations were examined, the findings revealed that socialisation experiences at school, particularly positive relationships with teachers, significantly impact students' beliefs about their future.

Notably, having a migrant origin and coming from low socioeconomic resource families emerged as risk factors for students' adaptation. Compared to their native-born peers, immigrant students expressed less confidence in completing secondary school. At the same time, students with low socioeconomic status reported less academic engagement and more significant academic difficulties than their classmates with higher social status. However, there were no differences in the relationships between TSR, SE, and perceived academic difficulties among students from various socioeconomic and migrant backgrounds. In fact, when sociodemographic variables were controlled, the effects of TSR on students' educational expectations via SE remained statistically significant.

Overall, these findings indicate that even in upper secondary education, particularly during the first year, supportive relationships with teachers are a resource for students' adjustment. In addition to focusing on their students' performance, according to the research discussed in paragraph 3.1, teachers should also pay attention to the affective dimensions of their profession (e.g., du Mérac et al., 2022). This may allow them to cultivate a positive atmosphere in the classroom, which may have a direct positive effect on short-term academic outcomes, such as student engagement, and future expectations. According to the classification proposed by Masten (2014a, 2014b, 2015), therefore, the quality of TSR has emerged as a factor promoting well-being, as it is associated with positive outcomes for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or migrant backgrounds.

The limitations of this investigation must be considered. Firstly, although a longitudinal research design was used, only a half-longitudinal mediation model could be evaluated. Future studies would benefit from using more complex research designs, thereby enhancing the predictive ability of the examined models. In addition, mixed-method research designs (Trinchero & Robasto, 2019), which combine quantitative data collection with interviews with students, parents, and teachers, could facilitate a deeper understanding of the factors preventing students from completing secondary education. Secondly, the quality of TSR and SE has only been evaluated from the student's perspective. One of the limitations of studies examining the influence of school climate on various psychological, social, and behavioural outcomes is the lack of multi-informant surveys (Cohen et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016). In future research, it would be interesting to consider the perspectives of teachers in order to determine which aspects of their relationships with students are most effective. This could also be an opportunity for teachers to identify the most challenging aspects of their relationships with their students and to develop strategies for overcoming these obstacles. Thirdly, the instruments used to evaluate TSR and SE considered only a

subset of the constructs' dimensions. Future research should focus on the multidimensionality of these phenomena (Wentzel, 2013, 2016; Reschly & Christensen, 2022). Regarding the sample's characteristics, the students were chosen from a single school, so they only represent a small portion of the educational paths available within the Italian education system. It would be helpful for future research to include a variety of academic contexts, including investigating the role of teacher-student relationship quality in middle schools. This could allow for more significant knowledge of the outcomes associated with positive relationships with teachers in a school cycle in which, as discussed in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, affective dimensions play a dominant role in the teaching-learning processes. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons would be desirable to determine whether the associations found in the study also exist in other nations. Moreover, the sample size was small, and the group of immigrant students was substantially smaller than their Italian counterparts. However, in accordance with the provisions of the Italian Ministry of Education, the percentage of immigrant students at the study's participating school fell within the expected 30% threshold[26].

Despite these limitations, the study revealed that relational dimensions of teaching-learning processes are essential for teacher professionalism as well-being promoting factors for all students, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds. In the last section of this dissertation, the study's practical implications will be discussed, taking into consideration the findings of the studies described in Chapters 2 and 4.

[26] Ministry of Education and Merit, C.M. n.2, 8 January 2010, Indications and recommendations for the integration of pupils with non-Italian citizenship.

Chapter 4

Predictors, Mechanisms, and Outcomes of School Ostracism: The Protective Role of School Cohesion for Students from Migrant Backgrounds

Abstract

This chapter will describe a study examining the role of peer relationships and group dynamics in the social-psychological adaptation among a group of secondary school students in Italy. After evaluating whether migrant origin was a risk factor for positive peer relationships, the relationships among ostracism at school, the need for relationships, self-esteem, and future expectations were investigated using a moderated mediation model. The results showed that students from migrant backgrounds, compared to their Italian peers, reported higher ostracism experiences. In turn, these negative experiences impacted students' self-esteem and expectations for the future. Interestingly, perceived social cohesion in the classroom, particularly the dimension of social integration, moderated the association between students' migrant backgrounds and ostracism, which was significant only at low levels of perceived social cohesion. Drawing from the Sociometer Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, 2021), this study demonstrated that immigrant students' ostracism experiences can damage their self-esteem and diminish their success expectations. However, as suggested by the multisystemic and integrated model by Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012, 2021; see Chapter 1), supportive learning environments are a protective factor for well-being in the presence of risk and social disadvantage. In the final section of this dissertation, the study's implications will be discussed, considering the findings described in Chapters 2 and 3.

4.1 Theoretical Background

4.1.1 Peer relationships and adaptation processes: the role of peers in the psychosocial well-being of students from migrant backgrounds

Peer relationships play a crucial role in the positive adaptation of all children and adolescents (Killen et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 2011; Wentzel et al., 2018). Peer interactions and connections are particularly important for immigrant students because, through them, they can learn about the culture of the host country – such as new languages, values, and traditions (Berry et al., 2006) – and receive the necessary support to face the numerous challenges to which they are exposed (Hjern et al., 2013; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Spiel, 2017).

Most research on peer relationships in the classroom has focused on three primary categories of social relationships: friendships, acceptance/rejection, and victimisation (Ladd et al., 2012; Ryan & Ladd, 2012). Studies on the nature and effects of peer friendships have been motivated by researchers' interest in the role of dyadic relationships, especially emotional connections, in the developmental pathways of children and adolescents (Ladd et al., 1997, 2012, 2014; Ryan & Ladd, 2012). Regarding the acceptance/rejection mechanisms, social psychologists have demonstrated that group dynamics, and in particular social status, commonly known as *popularity* (Cillessen et al., 2012), define positions and roles that individuals occupy within their social groups, or relative to external groups, and have a substantial impact on shaping peer relationships (Rutland et al., 2017). Lastly, peer victimisation research has played a significant role in providing the scientific community and institutions with valuable information to prevent violent and aggressive behaviour in the classroom by highlighting the socio-psychological factors that can exacerbate it (Salmivalli et al., 2012). All in all, the findings of these studies indicated that peer relationships influence multiple aspects of students' adjustment, both in terms of academic achievements, such as school engagement and performance (Ryan & Ladd, 2012), and social development, such as prosocial behaviour (e.g., Chávez et al., 2022; Kim, & Cillessen, 2023).

Regarding the role of peer relationships in young immigrant people's adaptation, studies conducted mainly in European countries (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021) have demonstrated that belonging to a minority ethnic group can hinder positive peer relationships, especially in classes with a small proportion of immigrant students (Motti-Stefanidi, 2014; Titzmann, 2014), who, generally, are less accepted by their native peers (Motti-Stefanidi et

al., 2021). In this respect, social psychology research has shown that sociodemographic characteristics of students and their families may have a significant impact on peer interactions in the classroom (e.g., Benner & Wang, 2014; Hjalmarsson et al., 2023; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Plenty & Jonsson, 2017). According to the Social Identity Theory, individuals, in addition to displaying positive attitudes and behaviours toward those who belong to their group and with whom they share central aspects for the definition of the Self, tend to exclude and discriminate against those who are classified as outgroup (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Furthermore, according to the Individual-Group Similarity and Social Misfit Theories (Wright et al., 1986), individuals may be rejected when they differ from others based on multiple characteristics, such as migrant origins. Particularly, school-based research has demonstrated that peer relationships are frequently based on the principle of similarity, according to which friendships are more likely to develop between students who share similar characteristics, including ethnic background (Titzmann, 2017). This phenomenon, called *friendship homophily* (McPherson et al., 2001), explains why immigrant children and adolescents form friendships with peers who share their ethnic background and have considerably fewer friends than native-born students (Titzmann, 2014).

4.1.2 The significance of peer relationships to one's self-image

Beginning with the pioneering work of William James (1890) and George Herbert Mead (1934), psychological disciplines, particularly social psychology, have shed light on the role of social contexts – particularly on interactions and relationships with significant others – in the development of positive self-esteem, a key component for happiness and psychological well-being (Mruk, 2013). The idea that the Self has a social origin and is modified and reconstructed during social interactions (James, 1890; Mead, 1934) has spawned numerous theories and research to delineate causes, outcomes, and functions of self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), highlighting its significance role in various personal and social life outcomes throughout all of human existence (Livi et al., 2018; Orth et al., 2012; Theodorou et al., 2020). High levels of self-esteem are predictors of success in various domains, including school, work, and psychological well-being (Chung et al., 2014; Morin et al., 2013; Orth & Robins, 2014; Orth et al., 2012; Preston & Rew, 2022; Steiger et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2014a; Zeigler-Hill, 2013). At the same time, low levels of self-esteem appear to correlate with a variety of adverse outcomes, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, and low life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 2009; Moksnes & Espnes, 2013; Sowislo & Orth, 2013;

van Tuijl et al., 2014; Zeigler-Hill, 2011). During critical periods of development, such as late childhood and adolescence (Erikson, 1968), self-esteem is crucial for adaptation processes and academic success (Howard et al., 2021; Marsh & O'Mara, 2008; Morin et al., 2013; Trautwein et al., 2006; Virtanen et al., 2016).

In 1990, drawing on the works of James (1890) and Mead (1934), Leary developed the idea that self-esteem stems from the need to be accepted by others and to feel like a member of a social group. As the Author stated, self-esteem «*may be a reflection of the individual's assessment of the implications of his or her behaviour for social inclusion and exclusion*» (Leary, 1990, p. 227). In 1995, Baumeister and Leary presented the *Sociometer Theory*, according to which self-esteem is an indicator of one's relational value – the extent to which a person considers their relationship with other people valuable and essential (Leary, 2001). Unlike traditional approaches (e.g., Rosenberg, 1979), this theoretical model contends that social relationships are crucial in determining an individual's self-esteem (e.g., Urzua et al., 2018), particularly during childhood and adolescence (Leary, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2012; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Indeed, at school age, pupils spend a significant amount of time within a variety of relationships – i.e., peer relationships, student-teacher relationships, and teacher and parent relationships – (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Livi & Cecalupo, 2020; Zandvliet et al., 2014) that are essential for them to acquire information about themselves (Baumeister, 2019; Cecalupo et al., 2022; Eccles, 1999; Elliot et al., 2017; Marsh, 2007; Marsh & Seaton, 2013; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994) and to successfully adapt in school and non-school contexts (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Marini et al., 2019; Marini, Livi, Cecalupo et al., 2023; van Geel et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2014b; Wentzel, 1999, 2009). The quality of these early social relationships significantly predicts self-esteem throughout their lifespan (Harris et al., 2017; Orth, 2018; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001, 2006).

Regarding the role of peer relationships in the self-image of students from migrant backgrounds, one of the few studies using the Sociometer Theory to understand the factors involved in their positive adaptation revealed that when adolescents are liked by their peers, their perception of popularity increases, which has a positive effect on their self-esteem (Reitz et al., 2016). Positive peer interactions seem to be a risk/protective factor for the well-being and adaptation of minority and/or disadvantaged group members (e.g., Spiel, 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001, 2006). However, additional research is necessary to investigate the nature, characteristics, and dynamics of social relationships among students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in school and better comprehend how to enhance learning environments to support their development.

4.1.3 Negative interpersonal experiences: ostracism as a specific type of social exclusion

Although research has demonstrated that negative social experiences at school are detrimental to all students' psychological, academic, and social development, little is known about *ostracism*, a psychosocial and relational phenomenon that modern social psychology defines as the experience of being ignored or excluded by significant others (Williams, 2009; Williams & Nida, 2017; Williams & Zadro, 2001). In fact, despite the growing interest in this topic (Gerber & Wheeler, 2009; Hartgerink et al., 2015; Riva & Eck, 2016; Williams & Nida, 2017; Williams & Zadro, 2001), studies on ostracism among children and adolescents, especially in natural contexts, are still rare (Gilman et al., 2013; Elenbaas & Killen, 2016) given that experimental research paradigms involving adults or young adults have mainly been used to examine the consequences of social exclusion (Hartgerink et al., 2015).

In the school contexts, research conducted to date through a variety of theoretical paradigms and investigative methods has demonstrated that particular students characteristics, i.e., social affiliations, and contextual factors, i.e., ethnic composition of school classes, can influence exclusion experiences at school (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2016). However, studies on students' experiences of social exclusion have generally referred to ostracism as an indirect form of bullying (Menesini et al., 2017), ignoring its distinctive characteristics (Nida & Saylor, 2017). In contrast, the literature has distinguished ostracism from other forms of social exclusion, such as social rejection (Riva & Eck, 2016; Wesselmann & Williams, 2017), which refers to the presence of negative interactions with others in which individuals are actively excluded (Wesselmann & Williams, 2017). Ostracism, on the other hand, consists of being completely ignored by others. In this case, no active exclusionary behaviours are implemented, but individuals are explicitly ignored in the presence of others (Wesselmann & Williams, 2017).

To understand and explain the consequences of social exclusion, Williams's need–threats model (Nezlek et al., 2015; Williams, 2009) proposes that social exclusion experiences harm fundamental psychological needs (belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence) by hindering individuals' adaptation in various spheres of life (Williams & Nida, 2017). Richman and Leary (2009) argue that ostracism predominantly threatens and harms the need to belong and, consequently, one's relational worth, i.e., self-esteem. This is also consistent with the assumptions of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017), one of the most well-known and extensively applied psychological theories for explaining personality, well-being, and motivation across numerous life domains (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

According to the Basic Psychological Need Theory (BPNT), a sub-theory of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017), the satisfaction of psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan, 1995) plays a crucial role in individual development, adaptation, and health. Mainly, the need for relationships refers to the sense of belonging and connection with one's social environment, which can be severely harmed by loneliness and social exclusion experiences (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). From this perspective, SDT defines *self-esteem* as the genuine satisfaction of the need for relatedness in conjunction with other psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Overall, numerous studies examine ostracism's origins, manifestations, and effects (Riva & Eck, 2016). However, despite growing interest in the ostracism experiences among students with special educational needs (Nida & Saylor, 2017), little is known about the phenomenon among children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds (Janke et al., 2023), even though they are at a high risk of social exclusion (Marinucci & Riva, 2021; Riva & Eck, 2016). This research aimed at overcoming this limitation.

4.1.4 The school climate as a protective and promotive factor for students' well-being

Despite negative life experiences such as discrimination or belonging to low socioeconomic status, minority group membership was not systematically associated with lower self-esteem or maladaptive outcomes (Mruk, 2013; Schmitt et al., 2014; Verkuyten, 2005). In fact, certain contexts and experiences can foster a positive self-image and peer relationships, developing or improving the resilience behaviour of economically and/or culturally disadvantaged children and adolescents. In this regard, educational context is critical (Borraccino et al., 2020). In fact, school is a place where children and adolescents learn a lot about themselves and build psychological resources to overcome developmental challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Educational settings that promote the inclusion of ethnic minority groups can positively affect the well-being of all students (Schachner et al., 2018, 2019).

In recent years, psychological-social research has paid increasing attention to school cohesion as a factor promoting students' adaptation and well-being (Bosselut et al., 2018; Leo, Fernández-Río et al., 2023; Leo, López-Gajardo, et al., 2023; Livi et al., 2019, 2023; Marini, Di Filippo et al., 2023). The initial investigations on group cohesion were conducted in the first half of the 20th century by prominent social psychologists such as Kurt Lewin, Leon Festinger and Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif (Forsyth, 2018), aiming to understand the

groups' functioning, particularly the small social ones (Speltini & Palmonari, 1999; Carron & Brawley, 2012). Defined initially exclusively in terms of interpersonal attraction among group members (Festinger et al., 1950), a substantial body of research has shown that group cohesiveness is a complex and multifaceted concept (Carron & Brawley, 2012; Forsyth, 2018; Speltini & Palmonari, 1999). Even today, researchers have no agreement on its definition and conceptualisation.

Cohesion has been studied in various contexts (Greer, 2012) and defined in numerous ways (Dion, 2000). Carron and colleagues (Carron et al., 1998, 2002) proposed one of the most comprehensive conceptualisations of cohesion, proving its applicability to several social groups. According to the Authors, cohesion can be distinguished in individual and group dimensions, which, in turn, include task and social aspects (Carron et al., 1998, 2002; Carron & Brawley, 2012). The individual dimension «*reflects the individual's personal motivations to remain in the group, as well as his or her personal feelings about the group*» (Carron & Brawley, 2012, p. 727). Instead, group dimensions refer to the individual's perceptions «*about what the group believes about its closeness, similarity, and bonding as a whole and the degree of unification of the group field*» (Carron & Brawley, 2012, p. 727). The distinction between task and social cohesion characteristics was developed during the early phases of cohesion research in social psychology (Hogg, 1992). Specifically, Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) described interpersonal attraction among group members as defined by the group's ability to satisfy socio-emotional-relational goals – referring to the need for interactions and relationships (such as friendships) within the group – and instrumental goals – referring to the need to use the group to attain shared personal goals. Based on the combination of these dimensions, four distinct aspects of cohesion were proposed:

1) *Individual attraction to the group-task*, i.e., individuals' involvement in the group in terms of the task;

2) *Individual attraction to the group-social*, i.e., individuals' involvement in the group in terms of social aspects;

3) *Group integration-task*, i.e., the perceived unity in the group about the task-related aspects;

4) *Group integration-social*, i.e., the group's perception as a social unit (Carron & Brawley, 2012).

This conceptual paradigm was used to create the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ, Brawley et al., 1987), one of the most well-known questionnaires to assess group

cohesion in sports. The adaptation of the Carron et al.' model (Carron et al., 1998, 2002; Carron & Brawley, 2012) and related measurements to the classroom context, both in secondary school and university, is recent (Bosselut et al., 2018; Leo et al., 2023; Livi et al., 2023). However, the four dimensions predicted by the original model were not found in all versions (Leo et al., 2023; Livi et al., 2023). In the Italian adaptation, Livi and colleagues (2023) established a three-factor model. Particularly, the distinction between task and social dimensions emerged from the group viewpoint but not the individual perspective (Livi et al., 2023). However, these findings are consistent with Carron and Brawley's (2012) assertion that the nature and extent of cohesions may vary according to group characteristics and life stage.

Although a consensus definition of cohesion is still lacking, its positive effects have been demonstrated in numerous contexts (Grossman et al., 2022; Maman et al., 2021; Riasudeen et al., 2019). In the education field, building a cohesive classroom environment appears crucial not only for school performance but also for the overall students' positive development (Bosselut et al., 2018; Livi et al., 2019, 2023; Wachs et al., 2018). In this regard, numerous studies and research have demonstrated the importance of supportive and inclusive learning environments for the overall well-being of all students (Borraccino et al., 2020; Slaten et al., 2016). During adolescence, affiliation and belonging to peer groups become especially powerful and significant (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Such environments are even more crucial when considering the experiences of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds, who frequently encounter peer victimisation, rejection, and exclusion at school (Plenty & Jonsson, 2017). To enhance and promote social inclusion and ensure equal opportunity for all, educational institutions need to understand how to improve peer relationships by modifying learning environments (Agenda 2030). Despite these findings, the role of peers in the positive development of immigrant children and adolescents has been neglected by researchers (Spiel, 2017). A further purpose of this investigation was to address this limitation.

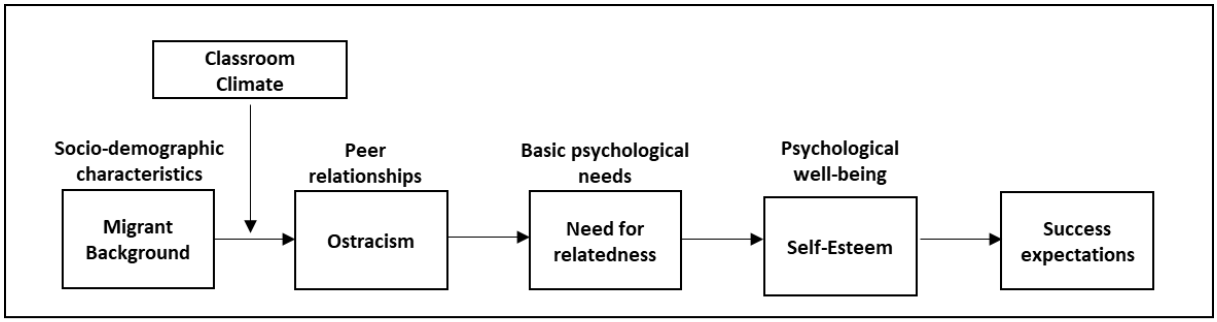
4.2 The current research

4.2.1 Aims and hypotheses

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the role of peer relationships in students' psychological adjustment, focusing on the experiences of students from migrant

backgrounds. In fact, according to the research, models, and theories presented in the previous paragraphs, migratory origins are risk factors for positive peer relationships in the classroom (Motti-Stefanidi, 2014; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Titzmann, 2014). For this purpose, a quantitative and cross-sectional investigation was conducted in an Italian upper secondary school. Figure 4.1 illustrates the conceptual model that guided the current study.

Figure 4.1 *Conceptual Model*



This study was designed to advance knowledge regarding the role of peer relationships in the students' positive adjustment in several ways.

Firstly, the current study's focus was on a form of social exclusion among classmates that has garnered considerable scientific interest: ostracism in the school setting (Riva & Eck, 2016). Previous research on this subject has primarily focused on adult immigrant populations, ignoring the mechanisms and consequences of ostracism among adolescents from migrant backgrounds. Moreover, ostracism has been studied primarily through experimental paradigms; studies of ostracism in natural contexts have been largely neglected (Nezlek et al., 2012). Furthermore, school research has concentrated on bullying, which, despite being a form of social exclusion, appears to have distinct characteristics and outcomes compared to ostracism (Marini et al., 2019; Nida & Saylor, 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001, 2006; Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2018).

In light of the limited prior knowledge on the topic, a further objective of this study was to identify the mechanisms underlying the phenomenon of school ostracism. The relationships among ostracism, the need for relatedness, and self-esteem were specifically investigated. In fact, few studies have been conducted to explain *how* ostracism can prevent young people from acquiring social skills and a positive self-image, particularly among immigrant students. In this regard, Williams' need-threat paradigm (Williams, 2009) suggests

that ostracism compromises individuals' fundamental psychological needs. Nevertheless, studies based on this model have evaluated the psychological needs damaged by social ostracism experiences using measures designed to investigate the short-term effects of ostracism experienced while playing Cyberball, and «*The needs-threat scale is a measure of needs, but we are not certain how many needs it measures*» (Gerber et al., 2017, p. 53). To overcome this limitation, the present study sought to shed light on the actioning mechanisms of ostracism by employing widely validated constructs (the need for relatedness) and models (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

Therefore, based on the literature presented to date (paragraphs 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.13), it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1)**. Students from migrant backgrounds report more ostracism experiences than their Italian peers.
- **Hypothesis 2 (H2)**. Ostracism has a negative correlation with the need for relatedness.
- **Hypothesis 3 (H3)**. The need for relatedness has a positive correlation with self-esteem.
- **Hypothesis 4 (H4)**. Ostracism has an indirect effect on self-esteem via the need for relatedness

Furthermore, the present study aimed to clarify the role of school climate as a crucial microsystem not only for the social and academic development of young people (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) but also for their future educational expectations (Argentin & Pavolini, 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2016; OECD, 2018a). As discussed in the introductory section of this dissertation, future expectations are crucial for students' adaptation, as they influence present and future perceptions, behaviours, and outcomes. Despite being influenced by numerous interrelated personal, interpersonal, and structural factors, research has neglected the role of psychological and contextual variables in shaping students' expectations, concentrating instead on structural variables such as socioeconomic status or ethnic origins (Agasisti et al., 2021; Boudon, 1974; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Minello, 2014; Lindstrom-Johnson et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Literature has demonstrated, however, that the social context, in interaction with intra-individual characteristics, can act as a promotive and/or protective factor for students' resilience, particularly when disadvantageous conditions are present (see Chapter 2; e.g., Masten, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Motti-Stefanidi, 2023; Motti-

Stefanidi & Masten, 2020; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021). Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **Hypothesis 5 (H5)**. Students' migrant background has an indirect negative relationship with their expectations of future success through ostracism, the need for relatedness, and self-esteem.
- **Hypothesis 6 (H6)**. The school climate (classroom cohesion) moderates the direct association between students' migrant background and ostracism experiences. Specifically: In the presence of a positive school climate, the negative relationship between students' migrant background and ostracism is not significant (**Hypothesis 6.1 (H6.1)**.

4.2.2 Methods

4.2.2.1 Participants and procedures

During the 2021/2022 school year, 273 students (M_{age} = 14.59; *SD* =.36; 54.2% girls) attending the first year of upper-secondary education participated in the study (see the Introduction for a detailed description of the project's phases and study procedures)[27].

67.4% of students were born in Italy; 28 (10.30%) were first-generation students (i.e., students born in a foreign country); and 61 (22.30%) were second-generation students (i.e., students with at least one foreign parent). To conduct the analyses, participants were grouped according to their migrant background: 0 = Italian students (*N* = 184), 1 = first- and second-generation students (*N* = 89). The main countries of origin were Romania, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Peru. In addition, all participants provided information about the educational level of both their parents. The information was aggregated into one dummy variable: students whose parents had no academic degree were classified as 0 = first-

[27] ***Procedures in summary***. Prior to implementation, the study was presented to the schools. Expressly, detailed information about the study's objectives and methodologies was provided to the school leaders. After the school board approved the study, consent forms were provided to be distributed to the parents. The study's participants were restricted to students whose parents had provided written consent. Students completed the online survey in their respective classrooms. Before compiling it, the researchers provided students with extensive information about the objectives and methods of the research, as well as the fact that their participation was entirely voluntary, anonymous, and revocable at any time. During data collection, research assistants instructed students on how to respond using Likert scales and answered any questions. The Developmental and Socialisation Processes Department of Psychology ethics committee approved the study and its procedures.

generation students (N = 151), whereas students with at least one parent with an academic degree were coded as 1 = continuing-generation students (N = 121).

4.2.2.2 Measures

Since the data were self-reported and collected from a single source at a single point in time, the questionnaire construction and administration followed the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2012) for controlling and minimising the common method bias.

Ostracism. Students' ostracism experiences were measured by adapting the Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents by Gilman et al. (2013). Participants were asked to respond by thinking about ostracism experiences in their class. Only perceptions of being ignored were evaluated through 6 items (example of item: "My classmates treat me like I am invisible"). The response scale was a 5-point Likert scale by which students indicated the frequency of school ostracism experiences (from 1 = Never to 5 = Always). Reliability was excellent (ω = .93).

Need for relatedness. The need for relatedness was measured using 4 items adapted from Girelli et al.'s (2019) scale. Unlike the original measure, students were asked to rate their need for relatedness satisfaction considering their classroom experiences (item example: "I regard classmates I frequently hang out with to be my friends"). The response scale was a 5-point Likert-type (1 = not true at all, 5 = very true). The scale showed an adequate reliability (ω = .89).

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem was measured through the Italian version (Prezza et al., 1997) of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979). The scale was composed of 10 items that measure the person's degree of general self-esteem (item examples: "Sometimes I feel useless," "I have a positive attitude towards myself"). The scale showed adequate levels of reliability (ω = .85).

Expectations of future success. Students' perceptions about the probability of their future success were assessed through one item ("Do you think you will succeed in what you do in the future?") to which they responded using a 10-point Likert scale.

Classroom Cohesion. Classroom cohesion was evaluated using an Italian adaptation (Livi et al., 2023) of the Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron et al., 2002) in which *Individual Integration* (6 items), *Group Cohesion-task* (3 items), and *Group Cohesion-social* (3 items) were identified as three distinct factors, as opposed to the four factors predicted by Carron's model (2002). Individual Integration refers to the degree to which students are involved in their class group, both in terms of the tasks to be performed by the group and the social aspects (example of item: "In case of difficulties or doubts about what the teachers explain during the lessons, I like to compare myself with my classmates for information or clarifications"). The group dimensions instead refer to the students' perceptions of the degree of unity of the group regarding task-related aspects (Group Cohesion-task, example item: "This class collaborates to face the school program better so that no one is left behind") or social aspects (Group Cohesion-social, example item: "The bonds of friendship within this class are a valuable aspect of this class"). Students rated their responses on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). The scales showed adequate levels of reliability (Individual Integration: $\omega = 0.90$; Group Cohesion-task: $\omega = 0.84$; Group Cohesion-social: $\omega = 0.88$).

4.2.3 Data analysis and results

Jamovi (version 2.3) (The jamovi project, 2022) was used to compute descriptive analyses and correlations. R Studio (R Core Team, 2021) was used to estimate a structural equation model (SEM). SPSS Statistics – 27 (IBM SPSS, 2020) for Windows and Hayes' (2017) PROCESS macro (version 3.5.3) was used to evaluate a moderated mediation model (Model 83 in Hayes, 2018). All variables showed acceptable skewness and kurtosis levels, indicating a normal distribution (Kline, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Ostracism showed high but lower than 6 kurtosis values (Kline, 2016).

Given the nature of the data examined, before proceeding with the analyses, it was assessed whether it was necessary to conduct the analyses through a multilevel design that considered the nested nature of the data (students nested into classes) (Kenny et al., 2002). Therefore, the intraclass correlation coefficient (*ICC*; e.g., McNeish & Stapleton, 2016) was calculated for each outcome variable. The *ICC* values for all variables examined were below 10. Therefore, analyses were conducted by treating the data at the individual level; the *ICC* values indicated that a multilevel analysis would benefit little (cf. Kenny et al., 2002; Heck et al., 2013).

Initially, the differences among groups (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant backgrounds) in the variables examined were evaluated. In the analyses, age, gender, and parents' educational level were considered as covariates. Covariance analyses (ANCOVAs) revealed that only ostracism ($F(1, 267) = 4{,}940$, $p = 0.027$, $n^2p = 0.018$) showed differences among groups: students from migrant backgrounds had higher ostracism average scores ($M = 1.58$, $SD = 0.89$, $N = 89$) compared to Italian students ($M = 1.36$, $DS = 0.63$, $N = 184$). H1 was then confirmed. These results indicate that a migrant background represents a risk factor for students' social adaptation.

Correlations results **(**Table 4.1) revealed that students' migrant background was positively associated only with ostracism ($r = 0.143$, $p = 0.018$), group cohesion-task ($r = 0.143$, $p = 0.018$), and age ($r = 0.136$, $p = 0.024$). In particular, students from migrant backgrounds had a higher average age ($M = 14.36$, $SD = 0.46$) than their Italian peers ($M = 14.25$, $SD = 0.28$): $F(2, 271) = 5.121$, $p = 0.024$). Probably, as students in their first year of secondary school, students from migrant backgrounds had accumulated academic delays during previous school cycles (Ministry of Education, 2023). Ostracism was negatively associated with the need for relatedness ($r = -0.547$, $p < 0.001$), self-esteem ($r = -0.366$, $p < 0.001$), perceived future success ($r = -0.155$, $p = 0.010$), and class cohesion (Integration: $r = -0.479$, $p < 0.001$; Group cohesion-task: $r = -0.319$, $p < 0.001$; Group cohesion-social: $r = -0.356$, $p < 0.001$). The need for relatedness was positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = 0.339$, $p < 0.001$), perceived future success ($r = 0.125$, $p = 0.039$), and class cohesion (Integration: $r = 0.503$, $p < 0.001$; Group cohesion-task: $r = 0.576$, $p < 0.001$; Group cohesion-social: $r = 0.310$, $p < 0.001$), while it was negatively correlated with gender ($r = -0.176$, $p = 0.004$). In particular, females reported a lower level of satisfaction with the need for relatedness ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.94$) than males ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.72$): $F(1, 271) = 8.662$, $p = 0.004$. Self-esteem was positively correlated with perceived future success ($r = 0.461$, $p < 0.001$) and class cohesion (Integration: $r = 0.350$, $p < 0.001$; Group cohesion-task: $r = 0.266$, $p < 0.001$; Group cohesion-social: $r = 0.236$, $p < 0.001$) and negatively related to gender ($r = -0.383$, $p < 0.001$). In particular, females reported lower levels of self-esteem ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.72$) than males ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.73$): $F(1, 271) = 46.452$, $p < 0.001$. The gender differences in this study align with what is reported in the literature (Mruk, 2013). The perceived future success was positively correlated with Integration ($r = 0.135$, $p = 0.026$) and Group-cohesion-social ($r = 0.203$, $p < 0.001$). The class cohesion' dimensions were positively correlated. There were no relationships between the parent's educational level and the

variables considered in the study. This variable was, therefore, not included in subsequent analyses.

Table 4.1 *Descriptive statistics and correlations results*

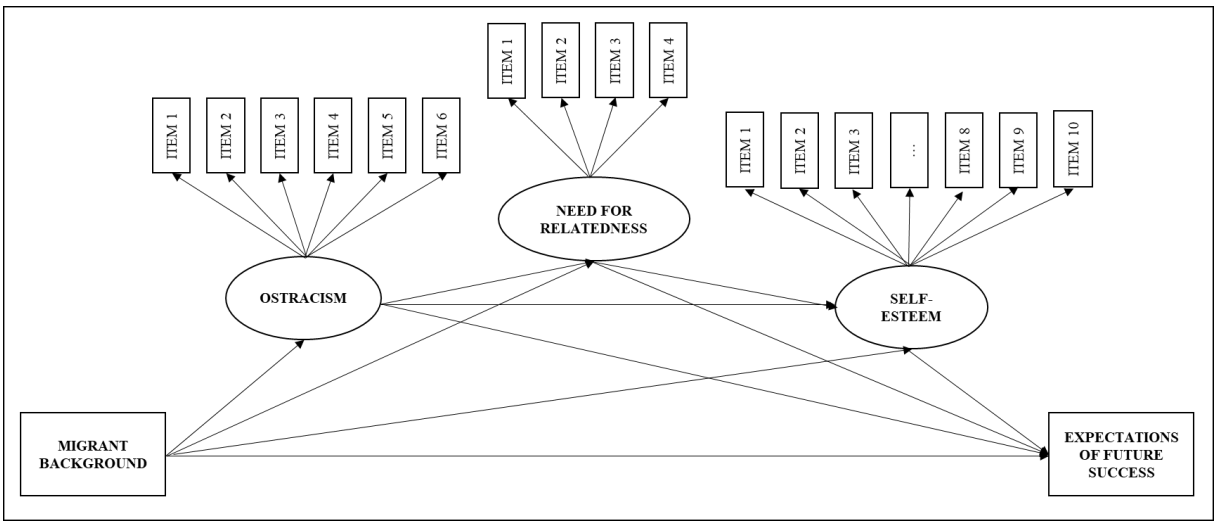
	M	DS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Migrant status	-	-											
2. Ostracism	1.434	0.730	0.143*	-									
3. Relatedness need	3.617	0.862	-0.080	-0.547**	-								
4. Self-esteem	3.540	0.689	-0.095	-0.366**	0.339**	-							
5. Future success	7.789	1.845	-0.020	-0.155*	0.125*	0.461**	-						
6. Integration	5.755	1.945	-0.089	-0.479**	0.672**	0.350**	0.135*	-					
7. Group Cohesion (Task)	5.592	1.975	-0.143*	-0.319**	0.576**	0.266**	0.122	0.745**	-				
8. Group Cohesion (Social)	5.778	1.956	0.030	-0.356**	0.503**	0.236**	0.203**	0.609**	0.570**	-			
9. Age	14.29	0.360	0.136*	-0.034	0.018	0.071	0.042	-0.189**	-0.222**	-0.175**	-		
10. Gender	-	-	-	0.048	-0.176**	-0.383**	0.053	-0.035	-0.043	-0.064	-0.053	-	
11. Parental educational background	-	-	-	0.034	0.065	0.006	0.040	0.051	0.079	0.045	-0.095	0.053	-

Note. *$p \leq 0.01$ ** $p \leq 0.001$

After conducting the preliminary analysis, structural equation models (SEM) with robust maximum likelihood estimation were used to evaluate the hypotheses. In SEM, both the measurement model and the structural model were considered. To assess the degree of fit between the hypothesised model and the empirical data, the following indices were employed: incremental or comparative indices (Tucker–Lewis Index or TLI, Comparative Fit Index or CFI), approximation indices (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation or RMSEA), and sample indices of fit (Standardised Root Mean Residual or SRMR). TLI > 0.90, CFI > 0.95, RMSEA ≤ 0.08, and SRMR ≤ 0.05 were considered indicators of model adequacy (Hu & Bentler, 1999). To assess the statistical significance of the indirect effects, the Monte Carlo test was used (MacKinnon et al., 2004).

In SEM (Figure 4.2), the migrant background was considered the independent variable; ostracism, need for relatedness, and self-esteem were mediators; and the perceived probabilities of future success were the dependent variable.

Figure 4.2. *Structural equation model*



The measurement model's fit was assessed before evaluating the structural model. All factor loadings were significant, with values greater than 0.40 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) and between 0.43 and 0.89.

Since the independent and dependent variables were collected from the same source at the same time, the common method bias was considered. A preliminary measurement model analysis was conducted to evaluate the psychometric properties of the latent variables and the observed indicators. The results revealed adequate factor correlations, no greater than 0.80

(Brown, 2006). The reliability indices of each indicator, the composite reliability indices, and the Average Extracted Variance were also adequate and, respectively, greater than or equal to 0.30, 0.60, and 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Then, the three-factor measurement model was compared to a one-factor measurement model. The one-factor measurement model showed inadequate fit indices: χ^2 (152) = 1071.881, p = 0.000, *CFI* = 0.552, *TLI* = 0.496, *RMSEA* = 0.168 [*CI* (0.159, 0.178)], *SRMR* = 0.153).

The model's fit (Figure 4.2) was assessed considering all direct and indirect paths (Model 1). Results **(**Table 4.2) revealed adequate fit indices: χ^2 (181) = 360.214, p = 0.000, *CFI* = 0.927, *TLI* = 0.915, *RMSEA* = 0.065 [*CI* (0.055, 0.075)], *SRMR* = 0.05).

Table 4.2 *Structural equation model results (Model 1)*

Predictor	Dependent	B	SE	p-value	ci.lower	ci.upper
Migrant background (X)	Ostracism (M1)	0.166	0.120	0.024	0.037	0.508
Migrant background (X)	Need for relatedness (M2)	0.007	0.091	0.900	-0.167	0.190
Migrant background (X)	Self-Esteem (M3)	-0.054	0.121	0.375	-0.345	0.130
Migrant background (X)	Expectations of future success (Y)	0.050	0.234	0.391	-0.258	0.660
Ostracism (M1)	Need for relatedness (M2)	-0.599	0.061	0.000	-0.718	-0.479
Ostracism (M1)	Self-Esteem (M3)	-0.258	0.110	0.004	-0.530	-0.098
Ostracism (M1)	Expectations of future success (Y)	0.008	0.200	0.918	-0.412	0.371
Need for relatedness (M2)	Self-Esteem (M3)	0.249	0.115	0.008	0.079	0.528
Need for relatedness (M2)	Expectations of future success (Y)	-0.070	0.190	0.368	-0.545	0.202
Self-Esteem (M3)	Expectations of future success (Y)	0.529	0.176	0.000	0.713	1.401
Indirect Effect: X→ M1→ M2→M3→Y		-0.052			-0.128	-0.003

Specifically: students' migrant background (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant backgrounds) had a positive relationship only with ostracism (B = 0.166, SE = 0.120, p = 0.024); there was, therefore, no direct relationship between students' migrant background and their future expectations; ostracism had a negative relationship with the need for relatedness (B = -0.599, SE = 0.061, $p < 0.001$) and self-esteem (B = -0.258, SE = 0.110, p = 0.004); ostracism and students' future expectations were not related; the need for relatedness showed a positive relationship with self-esteem (B = 0.249, SE = 0.115, p = 0.008); the need for relatedness and students' future expectations were not related; self-esteem was positively

associated with students' perceived future success (B = 0.529, SE = 0.176, p < 0.001). Regarding the indirect effects, it was found that students' migrant background was associated with their future expectations through ostracism, the need for relatedness, and self-esteem (B = -0.052, CI: -0.128, -0.003). H5 was then confirmed. The model explained 2.7% of the ostracism variance, 35.8% of the need for relatedness variance, 21.5% of the self-esteem variance, and 25.4% of the students' future expectations variance.

These findings are consistent with the Sociometer Theory, according to which social exclusion and rejection experiences, by harming the need to belong, can negatively impact the value individuals ascribe to themselves and, consequently, their self-image. Given that this is the first study that has investigated the mechanisms of ostracism and, in particular, its effects on self-esteem through the need for relatedness, before continuing with the analyses, Model 1 was compared with a nested model, in which all the paths associated with the need for relatedness were set to 0. The results of the Chi-square difference test indicated that the unconstrained model should be retained, as the model's fit was adversely affected by the constraints: $\Delta\chi^2$ (4) = 115.66, p < 0.001. This confirmed the role of the need for relatedness in the direct connection between social exclusion and self-esteem. Then, H2, H3, and H4 were confirmed.

In consideration of these findings and the relationships that emerged between gender and the need for relationships and self-esteem, Model 1 (Figure 4.2) was evaluated by adding gender (0 = male, 1 = female) as covariates (Table 4.3). It was then compared to a nested model in which all covariate effects were fixed at 0. The chi-square difference test suggested maintaining covariates in the model to improve its fit: $\Delta\chi^2$ (4) = 50.097, p < 0.001. Notably, when gender effects were taken into account, the model's predictive power was reduced: in fact, the relationship between the need for relatedness and self-esteem was lower, and the indirect effect between students' migrant background and their future expectations via ostracism, the need for relatedness, and self-esteem was no longer significant (Table 4.3). Nevertheless, the indirect effect of students' migrant background on their future expectations through ostracism and self-esteem was confirmed (B = -0.118, CI: -0.260, -0.013). Then, considering gender differences in students' need for relatedness, self-esteem, and future expectations, H5 was only partially confirmed. These findings suggest that gender differences significantly affect peer relationships and self-image. Consequently, students' developmental trajectories and adaptation should be investigated from an intersectional perspective (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018).

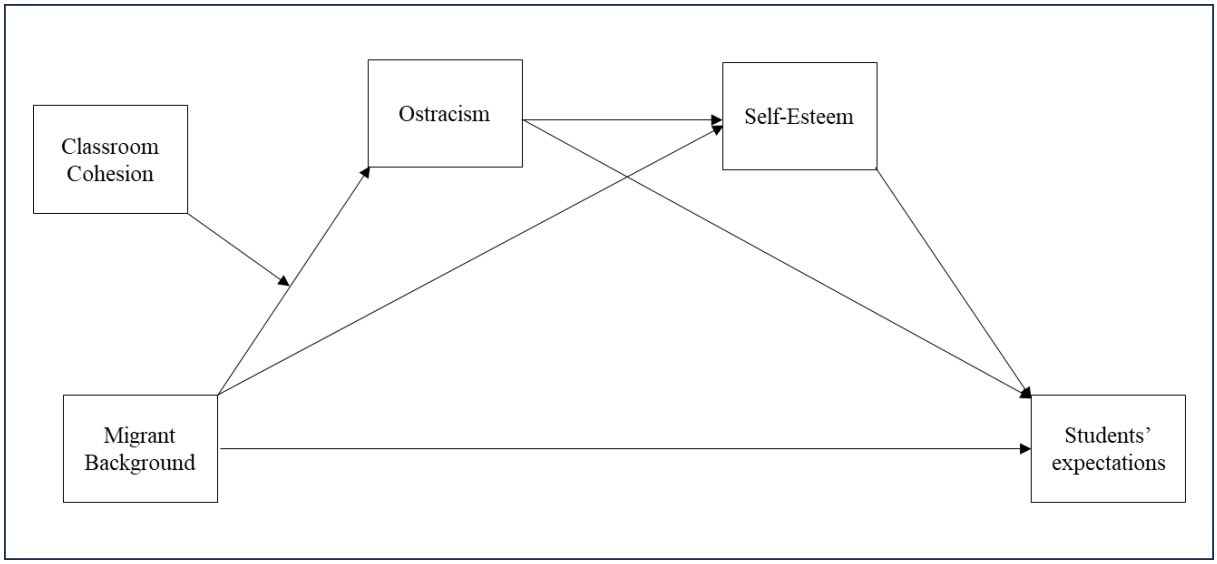
Table 4.3 *Structural equation model results: Model 1 with gender as covariate*

Predictor	Dependent	Estimate	SE	p-value	ci.lower	ci.upper
Migrant background (X)	Ostracism (M1)	0.162	0.121	0.026	0.025	0.500
Migrant background (X)	Need for relatedness (M2)	0.017	0.093	0.762	-0.168	0.197
Migrant background (X)	Self-Esteem (M3)	-0.028	0.113	0.616	-0.297	0.147
Migrant background (X)	Expectations of future success (Y)	0.040	0.226	0.480	-0.285	0.600
Ostracism (M1)	Need for relatedness (M2)	-0.593	0.059	0.000	-0.710	-0.478
Ostracism (M1)	Self-Esteem (M3)	-0.290	0.103	0.001	-0.564	-0.159
Ostracism (M1)	Expectations of future success (Y)	0.031	0.201	0.711	-0.320	0.469
Need for relatedness (M2)	Self-Esteem (M3)	0.168	0.104	0.045	-0.004	0.403
Need for relatedness (M2)	Expectations of future success (Y)	-0.047	0.190	0.544	-0.489	0.256
Self-Esteem (M3)	Expectations of future success (Y)	0.613	0.186	0.000	0.853	1.583
Gender	Ostracism (M1)	0.046	0.098	0.466	-0.121	0.265
Gender	Need for relatedness (M2)	-0.142	0.084	0.009	-0.376	-0.046
Gender	Self-Esteem (M3)	-0.362	0.130	0.000	-0.927	-0.417
Gender	Expectations of future success (Y)	0.197	0.225	0.001	0.299	1.181
Indirect Effects						
X→ M1→ M2→M3→Y		-0.041			-0.113	0.002
X→ M1→M3→Y		-0.118			-0.260	-0.013
X→ M1→Y		0.021			-0.074	0.181

In subsequent analyses, gender effects were added to the model. Moreover, to preserve the model's simplicity and in light of previous findings, the indirect relationship between the students' migrant background and their future expectations was evaluated without considering the need for relatedness (Figure 4.3).

Using SPSS Statistics – 27 (IBM SPSS, 2020) for Windows and Hayes' (2017) PROCESS macro (version 3.5.3) (model 83), the role of the school climate as a protective factor for immigrant students' positive adaptation was evaluated (Figure 4.3). In this moderated mediation model, the migrant background was entered as a predictor, ostracism and self-esteem as sequential mediators, and students' future expectations as the dependent variable. Classroom cohesion was introduced as moderator of the direct path between students' migrant background and ostracism experiences. Three different models were used to examine the three dimensions of classroom cohesion (Integration, Group Cohesion-Task, and Group Cohesion-Social). In each model, age and gender were included as covariates.

Figure 4.3 *Conceptual model: moderated mediation*



Considering perceived classroom integration as moderator, the results indicated that students' migrant background (0 = Italian students, 1 = students from migrant backgrounds) was positively associated with ostracism when moderator levels were low (*B* = 0.512, *SE* = 0.155, *p* = 0.001) (Table 4.4, Figure 4.4). In contrast, there was no relation between students' migrant background and ostracism when individual integration was high (*B* = -0.119, *SE* = 0.165, *p* = 0.473). These findings suggest that school climate is a protective factor for negative peer relationships when risk factors, such as minority group membership, are present. Also, ostracism was negatively related to self-esteem, which, in turn, was positively associated with students' future expectations (Table 4.4). The results showed an indirect effect of students' migrant background on their future expectations via ostracism and self-esteem only when classroom integration was low (Index of moderated mediation = 0.058, Bootstrap SE = 0.030, Bootstrap CI: 0.002, 0.120). The model (Figure 4.5) explained 26.3% of the ostracism variance, 27.3% of the self-esteem variance, and 23.2% of the students' perceived future success variance.

When cohesion' dimensions Group-Task and Group-Social were considered as moderators of the direct relationship between migrant background and ostracism, the interaction effect was not statistically significant (Group-Task: B = -0.185, SE = 0.125, p = 0.139; Group-Social: B = -0.108, SE = 0.070, p = 0.363). Therefore, H6 and H6.1 were partially confirmed.

Table 4.4 *Moderated mediation model results*

Moderated mediation model (Moderator: Classroom Integration)

Predictor	Dependent:	B	SE	P	ci.lower	ci.upper
Migrant background	Ostracism	0.197	0.114	0.085	-0.027	0.420
Integration	Ostracism	-0.378	0.065	0.000	-0.506	-0.251
Migrant background * Integration	Ostracism	-0.316	0.113	0.006	-0.539	-0.092
Age	Ostracism	-0.011	0.150	0.944	-0.306	0.285
Gender	Ostracism	-0.090	0.107	0.402	-0.301	0.121
Migrant background	Self-Esteem	-0.084	0.113	0.457	-0.307	0.138
Ostracism	Self-Esteem	-0.346	0.052	0.000	-0.449	-0.242
Age	Self-Esteem	0.019	0.149	0.192	-0.035	0.172
Gender	Self-Esteem	-0.722	0.105	0.000	-0.929	-0.516
Migrant background	Expectations of future success	0.039	0.116	0.737	-0.190	0.269
Ostracism	Expectations of future success	0.029	0.058	0.616	-0.086	0.144
Self-Esteem	Expectations of future success	0.529	0.063	0.000	0.406	0.654
Age	Expectations of future success	0.026	0.153	0.865	-0.098	0.116
Gender	Expectations of future success	0.296	0.117	0.012	0.066	0,527
Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator:						
-1 DS		0.512	0.155	0.001	0.206	0.818
+1 DS		-0.119	0.165	0.473	-0.445	0.207

Indirect Effect:	B	SE	CI.lower	CI.upper
			Bootstrap 5000	(CI 95%)
Low Integration Migrant background → Ostracism → Self-Esteem → Expectations of future	-0.094	0.047	-0.190	-0.005
High Integration Migrant background → Ostracism → Self-Esteem → Expectations of future success	0.022	0.026	-0.030	0.076

Figure 4.4 *Simple slope analysis*

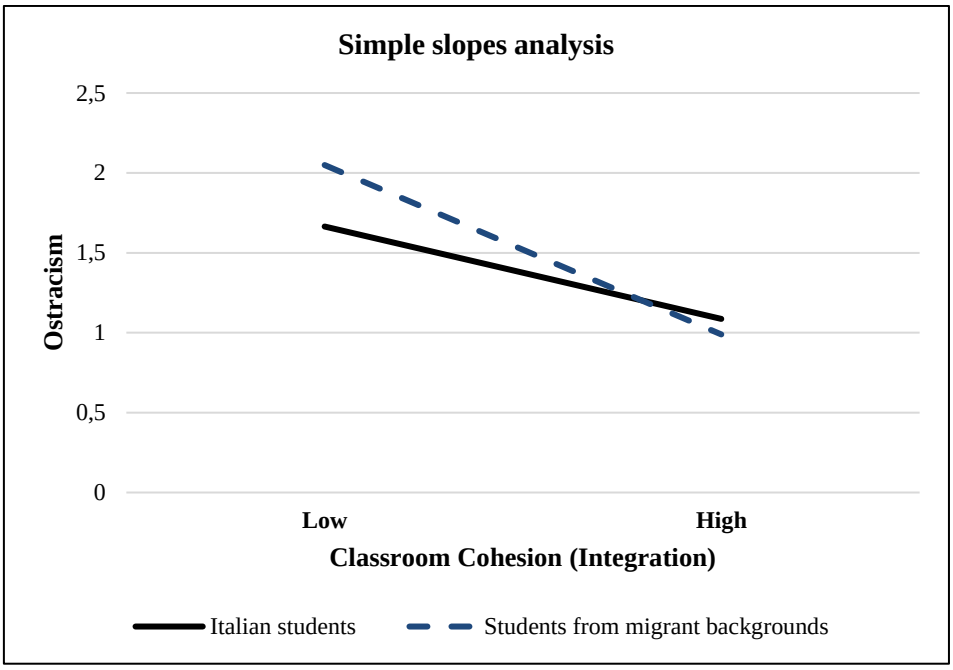
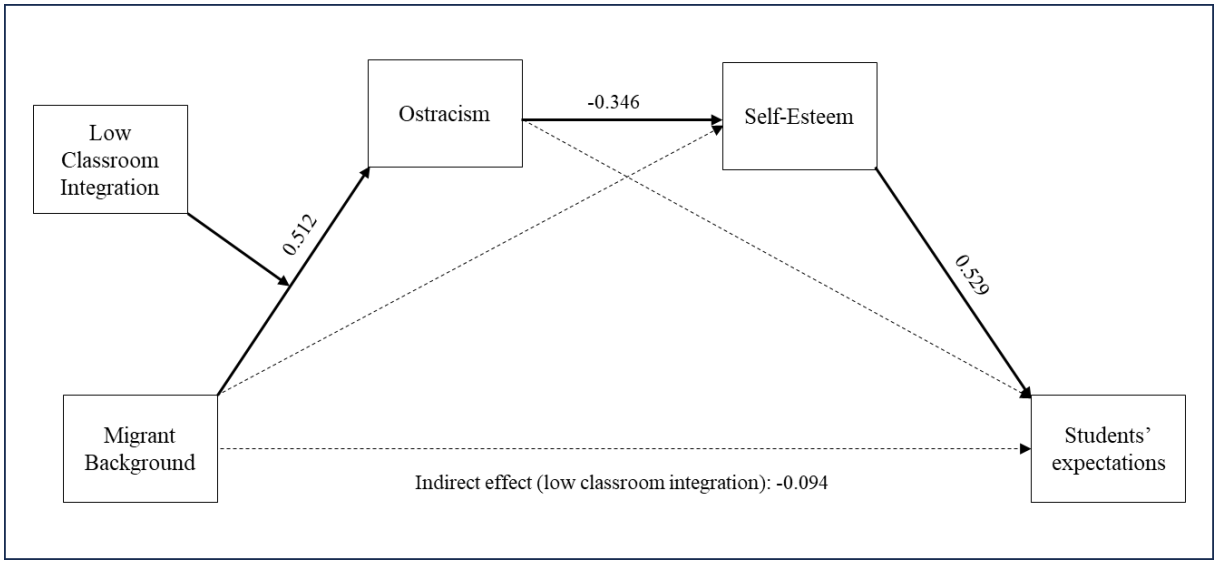


Figure 4.5 M*oderated mediation model results*



4.2.4 Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to evaluate the role of peer interactions in students' psychological adaptation, focusing on the experiences of students from migrant backgrounds. Numerous studies and research have been conducted to identify risk and resilient factors for immigrant young people's positive adjustment (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021). Results have shown that students and their families' socio-demographic characteristics have a considerable influence on peer interactions (e.g., Benner & Wang, 2014; Cavicchiolo et al., 2022; Hjalmarsson et al., 2023; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Plenty & Jonsson, 2017). Generally, students from migrant backgrounds are less accepted, receive less social support, and are frequently rejected and discriminated against by their peers (Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli et al., 2021; Cavicchiolo et al., 2022; Dalmasso et al., 2018; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021). On the other hand, positive experiences and supportive and inclusive environments may foster well-being and develop or strengthen the resilient characteristics of children and adolescents from disadvantaged groups (Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017).

Another study goal was to offer insight into the predictors, outcomes, and mechanisms of ostracism, a specific type of social exclusion (Williams & Nida, 2017). Although research on this topic is increasing, ostracism experiences have been studied mainly in laboratory settings, using experimental paradigms, with little attention paid to the phenomena in natural settings, particularly during essential stages of development (Nezlek et al., 2012). Furthermore, research on ostracism has primarily focused on adult populations belonging to ethnic majority groups, ignoring ostracism processes and consequences among adolescents from migrant backgrounds (Gilman et al., 2013; Janke et al., 2023; Riva & Eck, 2016). As a result, there is a need to deepen our understanding of ostracism and investigate the distinctive characteristics and mechanisms that distinguish it from other forms of social exclusion and rejection, such as bullying (Nida & Saylor, 2017).

This study illustrated some mechanisms involved in school ostracism. According to Hypothesis 1, adolescents from migrant backgrounds have reported more ostracism experiences than their Italian classmates. In addition, as predicted (Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4), ostracism was indirectly connected with self-esteem via the need for relatedness. These findings support the assumptions of Sociometer Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which hold that individuals are motivated to develop and maintain positive relationships within their social contexts, which can predict well-being by increasing the person's relational value. Thus, the current study's findings

corroborate the idea that self-esteem is a manifestation of satisfying the need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Furthermore, in this study, these mechanisms were evaluated concerning the probability of future success perceived by students, which the literature has defined as predictors of actual achievement in many domains (OECD, 2017, 2018a). Confirming Hypothesis 5, the study then demonstrated that students' migrant background influences ostracism experiences, which, in turn, influence the need for relatedness and self-esteem and hinder students' expectations of future success.

Additionally, this study revealed that, besides their migrant background, students' gender can hinder positive adaptation processes. When gender was introduced as a covariate in the model, being female negatively affected students' need for relatedness, self-esteem, and future expectations, lowering the model's predictive power. However, the indirect effect of migrant background on students' future expectations through ostracism and self-esteem was confirmed. These results support a large body of research that has demonstrated that demographic characteristics are risk factors for young people's adaptation and well-being (e.g., Benner & Wang, 2014; Hjalmarsson et al., 2023; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021; Plenty & Jonsson, 2017) and suggest investigating the developmental trajectories and adaptation of minority groups from an intersectional perspective.

Regarding the role of the school context, this study investigated school cohesion as a protective factor in the presence of risk factors such as coming from immigrant families. As predicted by Hypothesis 6, school cohesion moderated the effect of migrant background on ostracism. Specifically, the adverse effect of migrant origin on students' perceptions of their future success through ostracism experiences and self-esteem was evident when classroom cohesion was low. In this study, however, only classroom cohesion associated with individual integration exhibited the hypothesised moderating effect. The other two cohesion dimensions proposed by Carron and colleagues (Carron et al., 1998; Carron et al., 2002; Carron & Brawley, 2012) – Group Cohesion-Task and Group Cohesion-Social – did not moderate the effect of migrant background on ostracism. There may be various explanations for this result. First of all, as described in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, the group dimension of cohesion evaluates students' perception of belonging to a united group in terms of learning or social aspects without considering the position of individuals within the group, which is instead captured by dimensions of individual social integration. It is thus conceivable to hypothesise that the individual integration dimension, by assessing students' perceptions of feeling integrated into their class group, has captured students' involvement with their classmates more clearly than the group cohesion dimensions. Furthermore, based on

Tuckman's model of group development (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), it may be assumed that students involved in this study, as students in the first year of upper secondary school, were still engaged in the first phase of the development of the class group (*forming phase*), in which the processes of social and instrumental interdependence, preparatory for the development of cohesion, were not yet functioning. As a result, group cohesion (task and social) may not have played a moderating function in the hypothesised model because it was not yet fully developed. Still considering Tuckman's model (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), it may also be possible to hypothesise that the interactions that occur after the initial orientation phase, during which group members collect and exchange private and personal information (Forsyth, 2018), may have allowed students to develop a first sense of social integration, which, in the study presented, served as a protective factor for the most vulnerable students against social exclusion processes. However, these assumptions must be confirmed. Carron's cohesion model has been disregarded in the educational environment and has only lately been employed to explain the role of group dynamics in learning processes (Leo, Fernández-Ro et al., 2023; Leo, López-Gajardo et al., 2023). However, this conceptual model and the various dimensions of classroom cohesion seem particularly useful for understanding the role of the school climate as a factor of resilience in situations of risk or vulnerability.

This study has significant limitations. Firstly, the data were collected at a single point in time. Cross-sectional studies do not allow assumptions about the causal nature of the relationships among the variables considered (Maxwell et al., 2011; Mitchell & Maxwell, 2013); at best, they can help describe covariations between variables within causal relationships defined only at a theoretical level (Hayes, 2017). As a result, it would be appropriate for future studies to overcome these limitations by paying more attention to the factors that can cause significant changes in the analysed models (Rohrer, 2018) and/or adopting longitudinal study designs. In particular, a recent meta-analysis found that social relationships' nature and quality and self-esteem development and maintenance have reciprocal effects under certain conditions (Harris & Orth, 2020). In future studies, considering these effects, for example, through cross-lagged panel models, could lead to a better understanding of classroom social phenomena. Secondly, the variables have only been measured from the student's point of view. This is a severe limitation for research looking into the impact of school climate on various psychological, social, and behavioural outcomes (Cohen et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016). Multi-informant surveys or hetero-evaluation measures among students should be considered for future studies. Thirdly, the items used to

assess students' future expectations were created ad hoc for this study and only assessed aspects of students' expectations about their general future life. Using validated scales in the study's target group would be desirable in future investigations. Lastly, regarding sample characteristics, the students were selected from a single school, representing only a small fraction of the Italian education system's educational offerings. Moreover, the sample size was small, and the group of immigrant students was much smaller than their Italian counterparts. However, in accordance with the provisions of the Italian Ministry of Education, the percentage of immigrant students at the study's participating school fell within the expected 30% threshold[28]. In addition to preventing the evaluation of differences in the model examined between first- and second-generation immigrant students, these limitations threaten the statistical power of the results even though, due to the nature of the investigation, it was not possible to define a priori the sample size required to ensure statistical power of the analyses.

Despite these limitations, which limit the generalizability of the obtained results and necessitate further research on the topics addressed, the present study has demonstrated that social belongings can represent a risk factor for students' adaptation, thereby hindering relational processes. Being ignored by peers at school, in fact, is detrimental to a person's self-image, which impedes the formation of optimistic future expectations. However, school environments that are welcoming, supportive, and cohesive can counteract these harmful occurrences.

In conclusion, the findings of this study allow us to consider the role of school in a variety of socio-emotional outcomes among adolescents, as well as the significance of peer interactions during a crucial developmental period such as adolescence. In the following section, the study's practical implications will be discussed, taking into account the results of preceding studies (Chapters 2 and 3).

[28] Ministry of Education and Merit, C.M. n.2, 8 January 2010, Indications and recommendations for the integration of pupils with non-Italian citizenship.

Conclusions

This doctoral dissertation aimed to expand current knowledge regarding students' well-being and psychological-social adaptation, focusing on students from migrant backgrounds in the Italian school system. As described in Chapter 1, the migratory flows that have impacted European nations over the past several decades have profoundly changed the composition of our societies. As a result, national education systems face numerous educational and social challenges, exacerbated by the increasing cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the school population (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In Italy, students with non-Italian citizenship, who represented less than 1% of the school population in the various school levels only twenty years ago (6.104 presences), now account for 872.360 units, with a slight increase from the previous year mainly due to a general decline in the number of Italian students (Ministry of Education, 2023).

This dissertation's interest in the topic of the experiences of students from migrant backgrounds was fuelled by the fact that in most European education systems, taking into account differences between and within countries (OECD/European Commission, 2023), such students – along with other under-represented social categories, such as, for example, students from socio-economically deprived contexts – lag behind their majority-group peers in a variety of ways, ranging from academic achievement to social and emotional well-being (see Chapter 1). In fact, students from migrant backgrounds in EU and OECD countries have, on average, poorer academic outcomes than their more privileged peers, report being victims of bullying and cyberbullying more frequently, declare a lack of school engagement, and achieve lower levels of well-being in school and personal life overall (OECD, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, OECD/European Commission, 2023; Save the Children, 2023). According to Italian data, our educational system also has significant difficulties supporting immigrant students' academic paths and needs. In Italy, the migrant background has adverse effects on learning (INVALSI, 2023), educational-professional choices and careers (Ministry of Education, 2023; see also ISTAT, 2023, data on NEETs – young people "*Not in Education, Employment or Training*"), and the psychological and social well-being of children and adolescents (OECD, 2018a, Save the Children, 2023). In addition, as in most European countries, migrant families in Italy, on average, face a greater risk of poverty and social exclusion than native-born citizens (Carlana et al., 2022; ISTAT, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023; OECD/European Commission, 2023).

Therefore, the socioeconomic and cultural context of origin, as well as the schools' socioeconomic profile, are predictors of students' academic adaptation (OECD, 2023; Ministry of Education, 2023; Save the Children, 2023).

Despite the improvements recorded over the past decade and the efforts made thus far, educational inequalities persist in many countries around the world (OECD/European Commission, 2023), compromising the growth paths of immigrant students and, consequently, their opportunities to realise themselves as individuals (Council of the European Union, 2022). Often, children born and raised in culturally and economically deprived environments are suffocated not only by their primary and physiological needs but also by the more complex and sophisticated needs through which they can realise their full potential and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970). For these reasons, and in order to support the educational and life paths of all students, particularly immigrant students, the purpose of the studies described in this dissertation was to identify context and individual factors that promote and/or protect their well-being and resilience. This is particularly important in Italy because, as nations with recent immigration, predictors of the educational achievement of ethnic minority students are a relatively new and understudied topic (for some notable exceptions, see Alivernini et al., 2018, 2019; Alivernini, Cavicchiolo et al., 2020; Alivernini, Manganelli et al., 2020; Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Lucidi et al., 2021; Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli et al., 2021; Cavicchiolo et al., 2020, 2022, 2023; Dalmasso et al., 2018; Gabrielli & Impicciatore, 2021; Gabrielli et al., 2013, 2021; Manganelli et al., 2021; Mussino & Strozza, 2012).

Nowadays, the well-being and resilience of immigrant students are highly relevant issues in political and public discourse. In particular, the European Commission, in response to the demographic, cultural, and social changes in our societies and the needs of students from migratory backgrounds, as well as students experiencing disadvantaged situations, is working on the creation of a *European Education Area*, a collaboration among European Union countries aiming to ensure the construction of resilient and inclusive educational systems. Among the actions promoted to achieve this goal, the "*Pathways to School Success*" initiative (Council of the European Union, 2022; European Commission, 2022) recognises schools as *integration hubs* that play a critical role in improving performance and reducing school dropout rates among young people from migrant backgrounds (Council of the European Union, 2022; European Commission, 2022). Notably, the Council's Recommendations adopt a holistic, inclusive and systemic approach to educational success (Council of the European Union, 2022; European Commission, 2022) in which, in addition to

the importance of the acquisition and development of basic knowledges for all learners, ample space is reserved for students' well-being as a crucial component of academic success. From this perspective, the multi-systemic and integrative model of Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), based on which the studies of this dissertation were designed, was considered particularly suitable for addressing the topic of students' resilience defined as a «*process of adaptation and growth (academic, vocational, socioemotional) despite adversity*» which is «*the result of the interaction between the individual and the environment, such as the family, the community, the school and broader socio-cultural system*» (European Commission, 2023). In fact, numerous studies and research in this field have shown that family influences and school contexts – i.e., the quality of students' relationships with their teachers and peers – play a crucial role in fostering the motivation and engagement of children and adolescents (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4). Relationships within socialisation contexts are particularly effective for students who, for several reasons, are considered to be at risk of failing school. Notably, schools, families, and peer groups that provide supportive school experiences can promote the development of positive personal resources and increase the likelihood of success for immigrant students (Tinto, 2022).

In each of the studies presented in this dissertation, the interaction between social contexts and individual characteristics, and its influence on students' future expectations, a core aspect of students' adaptation (OECD, 2017), were examined. The first study (Chapter 2) focused on the family's role in the academic and psychological adaptation of students from immigrant backgrounds. The relationship between parents' educational values (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic value attributes to school) and students' future expectations (i.e., perceived difficulties in completing their studies) was investigated, considering the mediating role of students' educational values and their perceptions of academic competence. In the second study (Chapter 3), the importance of positive social relationships between teachers and students for students' well-being was examined in terms of its effect on students' school engagement (i.e., emotional engagement) and future expectations (i.e., perceived difficulties in completing studies). Finally, Chapter 4 explored the role of peer relationships (i.e., ostracism) as a risk factor for the psychological well-being (i.e., self-esteem) of students from migrant backgrounds by examining the effects of supportive school environments (i.e., school cohesion) on students' perceptions about their future success (i.e., perceptions of life success in general).

The findings of these studies have provided some insights into the characteristics of socialisation contexts that can function as factors promoting and/or protecting well-being (see Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2).

The first study's findings (Study 1b, paragraph 2.4) highlighted the importance of the intergenerational transmission of educational values among immigrant students and their families. Specifically, the results demonstrated that parents transmit to their offspring the specific content of these values. When parents give school intrinsic value, their children will do the same. When parents view school as a means for their children to attain personal and professional objectives, and therefore, as having an extrinsic value, the children will hold similar beliefs. Furthermore, this study revealed the role of family influences in the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations of students from migrant backgrounds, which appear to be bolstered in particular by intrinsic parental values that, when transmitted to their children, enable them to develop positive beliefs regarding their academic competence and reduce the perception of obstacles in completing their studies. The second study's results suggested that positive relationships between teachers and students can promote all students' well-being, regardless of socioeconomic status or migratory origins. Feeling supported and having trust in one's teachers appears to support the emotional involvement of all students in the school experience and the development of optimistic future expectations. Regarding the final study, the findings revealed that students' migrant origins may hinder their social adaptation. Specifically, students from migrant backgrounds are more frequently socially excluded by their peers than Italian students and such negative experiences can harm their self-esteem and perceptions of future success. Intriguingly, the relationships between the variables examined in the study were also affected by students' gender; specifically, girls were at a greater risk of maladjustment than boys. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating an intersectional lens into studies of the well-being of adolescents. In addition, the results revealed the significance of classroom climate in the positive adaptation of students from migrant backgrounds, who, when placed in cohesive classes, can develop positive peer relationships and receive personal benefits from these.

Despite the need for additional research, these results provide crucial information on how to act in proximal development contexts to support all students' well-being. There are consequently numerous implications for institutions and society as a whole.

Principally, it is essential for schools to acknowledge the role of parents in the educational experiences of their students and to collaborate with immigrant families to promote students' success (Cicciarelli, 2019). In fact, as described in Chapter 2, although

research indicates that the peer group becomes a frame of reference for individual growth and development during adolescence, the family continues to exert a significant influence on the educational paths of all students, even in secondary school (Cecalupo, 2021). Consequently, parental involvement is a factor to consider in school-family collaboration, particularly its frequently underappreciated and less visible characteristics, such as educational values. Therefore, the first step in promoting the academic success of immigrant students should include training teachers and raising awareness among families. The goal is to make the educational community aware of the relationships between parents' educational values and the motivational variables now recognised by the scientific community as predictors of a students' educational success, such as perceptions of academic competence and educational expectations. Regarding teachers, it would be necessary to provide training modules that illustrate recent psychological theories and models on parental involvement, particularly in schools where the proportion of students from migrant backgrounds is high. Raising awareness about parental involvement could benefit parents and families, allowing them to understand better how their beliefs, attitudes, and practices influence their children's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. In this regard, special consideration should be given to the intrinsic dimensions of values, which, based on the findings of this dissertation, appear significantly associated with positive educational and psychological outcomes for all students. This is particularly crucial for immigrant families. In fact, social-psychological research demonstrated that these families attribute an extrinsic value to the school in terms of its perceived utility in achieving personal and professional objectives. Even though education is a tool for enhancing one's living conditions and attaining success, it is essential that these families recognise the intrinsic value of education. This could enable them to implement effective practices to support their children's educational pathways. To achieve this goal, at the community level, the fight against primary barriers (such as socioeconomic and/or linguistic barriers) that prevent immigrant families from understanding the intrinsic educational value of school should, therefore, remain a priority in the educational policies.

In addition, the teacher-student relationships can be viewed as an antidote to the disengagement that characterises the secondary education experience for many students. Emotional-relational dimensions of the teacher-student relationship play a crucial role in bolstering students' motivation and future expectations. This should be a training topic for teachers, particularly in secondary schools, where they generally place a higher value on the performance and achievements of their students than the socio-emotional dimensions (see Chapter 3). In particular, it is crucial for teachers to acquire awareness about the importance

of the affective dimensions in teaching-learning processes and their role in preventing students' school dropout (for some projects in secondary schools that are moving in this perspective, see Marini, Montebello et al., 2023).

Regarding peer relationships, it is appropriate to educate children on the effects of positive relationships in the classroom on individual well-being and to train them to be active and responsible citizens. In fact, shedding light on the role of social belonging and the resulting socio-psychological mechanisms could contribute to creating secure and supportive school environments, as well as more cohesive and inclusive societies devoid of stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. In this respect, it would be advantageous to conceive of research-intervention and research-training initiatives in schools, in which schools and universities (and/or other research institutes) can actively collaborate to ensure the well-being of all students. This would be especially beneficial in Italy, a country where multicultural schooling is a relatively new phenomenon, and as a result, teachers should have access to tools that will assist them in meeting the needs of an increasingly complex and heterogeneous school reality.

Although significant limitations of the studies have been discussed in each chapter of this dissertation, this project's general limitations should be addressed to design future studies.

Considering theoretical limitations, academic socialisation could be approached more comprehensively, particularly regarding the study of familial influences on the adaptation of immigrant students. In fact, the measure created to evaluate this aspect of parental involvement (Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.1 and 2.1.1) captures only some aspects of the broader meaning that expectation-value models attribute to the value dimension (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.2.1). Therefore, the construct may be more complex; there may be more specific dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic values, also influenced by the context of the origin of immigrant families and the cultural values of their home country. Moreover, numerous additional family dimensions could be investigated through the application of the *Expanded Parent Socialization Model* (Eccles & Wigfield, 2023) that expectancy-value model researchers have recently proposed. Furthermore, in this project, essential research topics on the role of school in the adaptation of students from a migrant background were overlooked. As also indicated by the multisystemic and integrated model of Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), it would have been interesting to investigate teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards cultural diversity in the classroom, as well as the practices adopted to address these issues (e.g., Fallon et al., 2023; Gay, 2015; Geerlings et al., 2018; Hachfeld et

al., 2015; Suárez-Orozco, 2017). This would have made it possible to enrich the concept of teachers' intercultural competencies, which is gaining increasing interest, particularly in Italy (Colussi, 2021). Regarding group dynamics, based on the vast literature on acculturation processes, and therefore considering the positive outcome of these processes for the well-being and adaptation of young immigrants (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), it would have been helpful to investigate students' attitudes and beliefs regarding the cultural plurality of school classes and, in general, societies. The topic is, in fact, of great interest in several countries around the world (see, for example, MIRIPS Project – *Mutual Intercultural Relations In Plural Societies*[29]) and, if addressed in school, would have provided valuable information on the mechanisms that regulate interactions between people of different cultures during a period of development, such as adolescence, in which peer relationships play a crucial role in the formation of the individual. In addition, the effects of relationships with teachers and students may be considered simultaneously and/or interactively (Gasser et al., 2022). The function of teachers as the *invisible hand* (Farmer et al., 2011) is especially relevant for increasing teachers' awareness of their role not only in students' learning but also in the development of their social abilities. Lastly, an investigation into the dynamics that result from the interaction among these three socialisation contexts – family, teachers, and peer group – would have enriched our understanding of the lives of all students enrolled in multicultural Italian classes.

On a methodological level, all of the studies conducted and described in this dissertation have several limitations that future research must surmount. Specifically, two out of three investigations collected cross-sectional data. Thus, no inferences can be made regarding the causal relationships among considered variables. In addition, schools included in the studies did not represent the entire educational offering of the Italian educational system, and due to the small sample size, it was not possible to conduct comparative studies that took into consideration the type of educational program that schools offered. However, the more significant limits were related to the sample's characteristics. In fact, not all studies have collected data on students' socioeconomic status. When they did it, the data collected lacked information regarding the multifaceted character of the broader concept of social class in both objective and subjective dimensions (Diemer et al., 2013). In addition, due to the limited sample size, it was impossible to compare the students' results based on their ethnicity or the characteristics of their migratory background (e.g., first- and second-generation status).

[29] https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/cacr/research/mirips (Last accessed date: September 2023)

This precluded from thoroughly investigating the role of cultural influences and migratory experience in students' and families' adaptation processes.

All in all, consistent with the theoretical developments discussed in the previous chapters, this dissertation emphasised the importance of school as an essential social context for understanding immigrant adolescents' developmental paths. In fact, the educational success of this student population is a precious indicator of the individual's psychological adaptation and the general well-being of society (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2021).

In conclusion, psychological-social studies and research are valuable for identifying the individual and environmental risk factors and resources that can be reduced or enhanced, respectively, through targeted interventions to improve the life experiences of all children and adolescents. Specifically, the results of the studies presented in this dissertation can assist the school community in reflecting on the role of social contexts – family, school, and peer group – in the adaptation of their students, as well as creating effective practices to support their success.

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