

Proactive Attitudes towards Integration, Intense Group Identification,
and Perceptions of Levels of Integration of Five Immigrant Groups
among Italian University Students

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of the study was to investigate levels of proactive attitudes towards integration, intense group identification, and perceptions of levels of integration of five groups of immigrants among Italian university students.

Method: A questionnaire was completed by 60 female and 46 male university students in Italy. The mean age of the participants was 23.7 years (*SD* 4.8) for females, and 23.6 years (*SD* 3.8) for males.

Results: There was no sex difference regarding openness to diversity or level of intense group identification, neither on the attitude that cultural efforts, and structural efforts are needed in order to integrate immigrants. Respondents with values above the mean on openness to diversity scored higher than the others on the notion that both cultural and structural efforts are needed in order to integrate immigrants. Intense group identification was overall low in the sample, it correlated negatively with openness to diversity and the need for cultural efforts, but not with the need for structural efforts. The students perceived that the level of integration was lowest for Romanian immigrants and highest for Albanians.

Conclusions: Openness to diversity was positively associated, and intense group identification was negatively associated with the notion that efforts are needed in order to integrate immigrants.

Key Words: Proactive attitudes towards integration, intense group identification, integration of immigrants in Italy, university students.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Aim of the Study	1
1.2 Emigration and Immigration to Italy	1
1.3 Twenty Years of Modern Immigration to Italy: From the Case of the Ship “Vlora” see below in 1991 until 2021	2
1.4 Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants	3
1.5 Social Identity Theory and Social Dominance Orientation	4
1.6 Integrating Minorities and Proactive Attitudes of the Majority	5
1.7 Prejudice, Elite, and Racism	6
1.8 Contact Hypothesis, Majority Influence and Ethnic Hierarchies	8
1.9 The Influence of Educational Background and Gender	9
1.10 National Identity and Integration in Italy	10
1.11 Research Questions	11
2. Method	12
2.1 Sample	12
2.2 Instrument	12
2.3 Procedure	14
2.4 Ethical Considerations	14
3. Results	15
3.1 Correlations between the Scales in the Study	15
3.2 Differences due to Openness to Diversity	15
3.3 Sex Differences	17
3.4 Level of Integration of Five Ethnic Groups	18
4. Discussion	19
4.1 Summary of Findings	19
4.2 Limitations of the Study	20
4.3 Implications of the Study	21
References	22

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate the levels of proactive attitudes towards integration, intense group identification, and perceptions of levels of integration of five groups of immigrants among Italian university students. The study was conducted with an online questionnaire.

1.2 Emigration from and Immigration to Italy

During the last three decades, Italy has become a country characterized by rapid immigration (Busetta, Campolo & Panarello, 2020), while previously, from the 19th century until the 1970s, Italy typically experienced frequent emigration during and after periods of crisis, when millions of Italians left their homeland establishing themselves all over the world, especially on the American continent. Still today, strong evidence of Italian cultural influence can be found, e.g. in the USA, Argentina, Uruguay, and in the southern part of Brazil. In addition, due to differences in the process of industrial development between the South and the North of Italy, and because of the country's later unification in the European state-building process (from 1861 onwards), Italy has also experienced internal immigration of people moving from the southern part of the country to the north.

Beginning in the late 1970's, due to the so-called "Economic Boom", and consequently to the flourishing Italian economy, the first immigration influxes towards Italy consisted of Italians, who after the First World War had emigrated to northern European countries, e.g. Germany, France, Switzerland, and now returned. However, in the last two decades, Italy has experienced a high influx of migrants coming mainly from the Balkans and Eastern European countries. Consequently, and for the first time in its recent history, Italian society and culture had to become accustomed to migrants from other cultures, with traditions sometimes in total contrast with their own. Even if the major migrant groups such as Albanians and Romanians have established themselves in Italy in the last twenty years, they are still facing problems with full integration into Italian society. The last large wave of immigrants, coming mainly from the African continent, has highlighted the problem of integration in the Italian peninsula.

1.3 Twenty Years of Modern Immigration to Italy: From the Case of the Ship “Vlora” see below in 1991 until 2021

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the historical dichotomy between the liberal West and the Communist East started to collapse. In this process, which later brought the Cold War to an end, the whole Communist bloc began to dissolve. Consequently, most of the countries within that formation started to show social and political instability. The beginning of consistent immigration in the Italian peninsula can be placed in 1991, when the Albanian ship Vlora docked in Bari’s harbor, the capital of the Puglia region in the south of Italy, with 30,000 illegal Albanian immigrants on board (Hermanin, 2017). The Albanian immigrants, searching for better life conditions, hijacked the ship in the middle of the Adriatic Sea towards Italy, the closest and safest country from their land. Until this very moment there were noticeable communities of immigrants present in Italy; therefore, the Italian government did not consider immigration as a problem to be placed on their political agendas. However, after this massive immigration episode, year after year, people from Albania started to emigrate regularly and often illegally to Italy. In 1997, a social crisis hit the newborn Albanian state. This event caused a rise in the numbers of immigrants, and in turn, changed the Italian government’s approach towards foreigners. For the first time, Italy abandoned its open-door politics in favor of a closed-door, option, with the implementation of military forces patrolling the Adriatic Sea, hence blocking the unregulated influxes of immigrants (Hermanin, 2017). At the same time, due to climate change and the substantial demographic rise that caused an overpopulation in the African continent from the early years of the 21st century, illegal landings and irregular immigration from Sub-Saharan African countries to the Italian coast began to rise as well. Parallel to the Albanian case, the right-wing Italian government voted in favor of the *Bossi-Fini*, which marked a great closing in Italian immigration policy. Specifically, that law act allowed the Italian authorities to expel illegal immigrants directly without any thorough assessment of their possible status as political asylum seekers or refugees (Geddes, 2008).

In the last two decades, Berlusconi’s government, due to the relapse of the immigration problem, signed many agreements with Libya’s dictator Gaddafi to contain the rising influxes of immigrants coming from Africa (Di Caro, 2008). However, in 2011 the North African and Middle Eastern regions experienced socio-political dissent movements called the Arab Spring that involved most of the countries in these areas. Thus, Libya as many other states fell into violent civil wars, which brought instability all over the immigrants’ routes that, again, “opened” the doors to illegal sea migration in Italy. In addition, the second Libyan civil war

and the parallel Syrian civil war acted as catalyzers in 2014 for the massive immigration coast landing phenomenon in Italy, which only in that year had 170,100 refugees and immigrants' arrivals on the Italian coasts (Fondazione ISMU, 2014). However, the primary community of immigrants in Italy is the Romanian one, which has doubled in number during the last decade. Notably, this vast influx of Romanian immigrants had a smoother process to enter the country due to Romania's entrance inside the EU in 2007. Consequently, Romanian citizens from 2007 could benefit from the freedom of movement inside any of the EU states due to the Schengen Agreement signed in 1993, which was the cornerstone to gradually eliminate borders between European countries (Marzocchi, 2020). In detail, the Romanian community in Italy doubled in units, starting from 342,200 units in 2006 (ISTAT, 2006) reaching 652,278 units in 2007 (ISTAT, 2007) and rising over the years until 2019 when the community could rely on 1,145,718 million units (ISTAT, 2019), which still today represents the most prominent Romanian community outside Romania.

1.4 Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants

In the last twenty years, the migration phenomenon in Europe and especially in Italy, has become one of the main concerns on the governments' political agendas. Due to many violent events and civil wars, many countries around the Mediterranean basin had become departure points for those escaping tragedies to reach the European coasts to find sanctuary. However, those fleeing or just moving from their countries are often erroneously categorized under the Economic Immigrant class. Consequently, the incorrect categorization does not allow distinguishing between those, who need seeking protection in another country from those who do not. A migrating individual can be classified under three globally recognized categories: refugee, asylum seeker and migrant. In Italy, the jurisdictional regulation for the refugee status is governed by the *Decreto Legislativo* 2007 n.251 (Ita.), an act of law passed in 2008 to integrate the *Direttiva* 2004/83/CE (EU), which establishes the aspects that determine the approval of the refugee status, described as: "foreign national who, due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for their race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion, is outside the borders of the country of their nationality and is unable or, due to such fear, unwilling to take advantage of the protection of that country, or a stateless person who, for the same reasons mentioned above, is outside the region where he previously resided and is unable or, due to such fear, unwilling to return to it" (Gazzetta Ufficiale dell'Unione Europea, 2004, N. Molini, Trans.) Furthermore, this definition of a refugee is based on the Geneva Conference

that was arranged in 1951 and, together with the *articolo* 10 of the Italian Constitution, the 1967 *New York Protocol* and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, they represent the main guidelines followed to assign that specific status (Manocchi, 2012). On the other hand, the asylum seeker status relates to the request for a sanctuary that has not yet been processed (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). Yet, as described by Manocchi (2012), the process to achieve such status in Italy can have four different results and it is regulated by the *Commissione Territoriale* (Local Commission). The first is the positive recognition of the refugee status and the consequential access to the benefits and rights that are protected both at a national and international level. The second relates to the concession from the Italian state of subsidiary protection, or in other words, the right to remain in Italy with a limited grant of civil rights and with the obligation of renewing the permit every three years. The third can result in a negative recognition of the refugee status at an international level but with the release of a resident permit valid for one year to live in the country on a humanitarian basis. The last outcome can result in the total negative recognition of the refugee status with the immediate repatriation of the individual (Manocchi, 2012). To conclude the categorization, the so-called economic migrants, move voluntarily from their country of origin to achieve better living conditions and emigrate legally or illegally to a country. Nevertheless, there is a need to specify how the Italian jurisdictional system evaluates immigrants' status via *Legge Bossi-Fini* and *Legge Martelli*, which are acts of law used as guidelines to grant or not the resident's permit. These bills are based on the Geneva Conference agreement and the EU acts as mentioned above, which invokes providing the resident's permit or refugee status only to individuals, who are personally exposed to the risk of persecutions in their country of origin (*Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, 2002). However, many of the immigrants defined as economic migrants are escaping from humanitarian crises that are not considered situations that put the lives of the individuals in danger (Angelini & Di Bella, 2009). Consequently, that definition of the Italian law system created more confusion, when the Local Commissions had to evaluate the situations to give proper protection to the people in need.

1.5 Social Identity Theory and Social Dominance Orientation

In order to understand why societies, tend to be based on hierarchies of groups, there is a need to specify the psychological processes creating such categories. The groups with which we tend to identify are characterized by factors such as race, religion, tribe or belief systems, and they impact how we translate the world around us without us being conscious of these influences

(Dixon, Hawkins, Hejbroek, Juan-Torres, & Demoures, 2018). Social Identity Theory (SID) and Social Identity Development Theory (SIDT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), try to explain how hierarchies are generated among distinct social groups. Individuals tend to create groups through social categorization, leading to the division between in-groups and out-groups. This logic empowers individuals to evaluate particular actions as good or bad, depending on whether the actions are undertaken inside or outside one's group. As a consequence of the strict hierarchies existing in most societies, the Social Dominance Theory (SDO) attempts to explain how majorities in societies usually promote inequalities to maintain their dominant role. In fact, in multi-ethnic societies, the hierarchies, which are based on the ethnicity of various groups, are implemented to use social distance as a tool to maintain inequalities and avoid general contact (Hagendoorn & Neukee, 1998; Lange, 2000). However, SDO can be considered as a mere attitude related to these groups' contacts, where each group decides if the relationship is equal or hierarchical (Grigaitytė, Österman & Björkqvist, 2019). In circumstances of increased polarization, people are more likely to view issues through the group identity lens and, consequently, from an in-group that is being threatened by hostile out-groups, or in other words, "us" versus "them".

1.6 Integrating Minorities and Proactive Attitudes of the Majority

The most certain prediction that can be made about modern societies is that they will become increasingly ethnically diverse because of immigration (Phelps, Eilertsen, Türken, & Ommundsen, 2011). In this process, the majority group plays a core role in how the minority groups are doing in the integration process and what kind of relationship they have with other groups. Focusing merely on reducing negative out-group attitudes to foster tolerance may be too passive and not sufficiently effective to promote ideal integration (Van Quaquebeke, Henrich, & Eckloff, 2007). Integration is a "long-lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migrants in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society" (Heckmann, 2005), and although it is an interactive process, the receiving society has more power and prestige (Fokkema & De Haas, 2011). Contacts between majority and minority groups are influenced mainly by prejudices, stereotypes and an openness to diversity that complicate the relationship at a general level. However, it seems that hosting groups worldwide adopt an assimilation ideology, where immigrants are expected to abandon their traditions to acquire the majority group's customs (Van Oudenhoven, Ward & Masgoret, 2006, p. 649). Consequently, minority groups feeling threatened and attacked prefer to separate themselves rather than

assimilate. For example, as Horenczyk (1996) suggested, immigrant groups such as Israelis or Russians, are more willing to be integrated than assimilated. In the same way, the majority group can feel threatened by the reaction of minorities that tend to close themselves within their community to defend their cultural values. The integration and assimilation processes belong to the acculturation strategies that have been hypothesized in various research. Notably, the “*Contact Hypothesis*” underlines that positive contacts can bring positive outcomes in the whole process. The possibility of a positive contact among different group members can reduce or eliminate prejudices and, consequently, create a mutual trust that generates a positive intergroup relation (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). For instance, the work conducted by Voci and Hewstone (2003) showed how intercultural contact essentially brought positive outcomes towards migrants. In the host society from an individual perspective, a proactive attitude towards integration can be considered a responsibility shared by each individual in the integration process, where the majority recognizes, accepts, and promotes minorities’ cultural values (Grigaitytė et al., 2019).

1.7 Prejudice, Elite, and Racism

Strictly related to the mechanism that regulates the relationships among majority and minority groups, social psychology theories also rely on the in-group mechanisms based on prejudice that catalyze stereotypes toward a general group. For instance, according to DuBois (2015), one of the effects of being an African American in the USA is that every member of that specific minority has a dual personality, or in other words, the individuals identify themselves as American and African American at the same time. This specific context of duality has been studied and identified in other ethnic groups that live in a foreign country such as Latinos and Asians. (Gaines & Reed, 1995). In an individualistic societal logic, these fractures on identification are caused both structurally and by group prejudices. Therefore, Allport (1979) describes how the majority groups’ logic can erroneously generalize such characteristics in these contexts and apply the same stereotypes to an entire group or ethnicity, which, in turn, triggers the categorization mechanism that lies at the very basis of the in-out logic groups mentioned in the previous chapters. However, the main difference with this kind of categorization relates to the presence of a shared hostility among the majority group members that hinders integration and the perception of those individuals as similar or not. (Hagendoorn & Nekuee, 2018). Because of this, the miscategorization can be defined as the consequence of a historical-social structures, which are generated from two processes: the first one was based i

on the majority's increased identification of oppressed groups as "bad", and the second refers to a situation, where those individuals are treated as inhuman justified by the group's beliefs (Patterson, 2018). The whole process results in a type of racism called ethnicism, which is the systematic categorization and exclusion of a group based on differences that could be language, religion etc. (Dijk, 1993). Specifically, the systematic reproduction of those beliefs and behaviors between majority groups is a consequence of the white western nations' logic that today represents the most important network taken as a role model worldwide. As portrayed in the book *Elite Discourse and Racism* by the linguist Dijk (1993), this phenomenon is described using the neologism "Euracism", which represents the white elite dominant ethnic logic. Usually, these dominant groups lean on the social system via media, education, politics etc. to maintain and reproduce the: power logic, the social structures and leadership of the whites. As a whole, the socio-cognitive process from an individual point of view to a social level is the common thread that runs behind the majority's negative categorization of the minority. In other words, the reproduction of these beliefs comes from a social process of learning and sharing inside the group. Therefore, being the elite controlling the overall communications both nationally and internationally, the alimentation of the vicious circle of miscategorization is caused by the elite. (Dijk, 1993). Nevertheless, there is a need to make a distinction between the form of prejudice described above, which is to be addressed as "blatant" and "subtle" (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). The purpose of this type of prejudice is to prevail and conserve the religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds of the majority (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). The main differences between these two forms of racisms are that the blatant one outlined by Allport (1979) that believes in the genetic inferiority of the out-group and it avoids the intimate contact as well, while the subtle one is characterized by the defence of traditional values, the exaggeration of cultural differences and the denial of positive emotional responses when in contact with the out-group (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). In conclusion, Pettigrew & Meerten's study's results, (1995) showed how individuals that scored low in blatant scale but high in the subtle one, adopted an acceptable way to express their refuses against integration of minorities in a country. For instance, even if blatant racism is regulated against by norms in most European countries, this new category of subtle racism/prejudice expresses rejection in non-prejudiced ways, while complying with the standards (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).

1.8 Contact Hypothesis, Majority Influence and Ethnic Hierarchies

In the *Nature of Prejudice* (1954), the social-psychologist Gordon Allport, drew the Contact Hypothesis theory. The main point sustains the possibility of reducing prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination between two or more groups to improve intergroup contacts and relationships. Starting from the Contact Hypothesis theory, psychologists and sociologists began to elaborate a new theoretical framework including factors that, positively or negatively, influenced the outcomes of those processes. Hence, contacts between different groups are affected by intergroup anxiety and the salience of the groups' categorizations that determine the quality of contacts and the intergroup bias present (Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Moreover, these two factors have different effects and roles that have been analyzed in the research works of Voci and Hewstone (2003) studying the Italian population. In that context, the intergroup anxiety worked as a key mediator that had a direct positive effect on the out-group variability but a negative one when addressing the subtle prejudice. In addition, intergroup anxiety mediated the out-group attitude, and as shown in the research work, it can lead to a better comprehension from the majority group. Whereas, the salience of group membership worked as a key moderator that changed immigrants' perception positively and, combined with positive contacts, it reduced the overall anxiety and enhanced the positive attitude of the out-group in general but with limitations on the effects in the long run. (Voci & Hewstone, 2003). However, the majority group itself functions as a factor of influence as well. For instance, it can shape attitudes towards specific minorities and change the intergroup contacts outcomes (Brylka, Jasinskaja-Lahti & Mähönen, 2016). To understand genuinely how the majority group influences such contacts, Brylka et al. (2016) propose the concept of diagonal hostility that merges together two dimensions involved in the out-group perception, which are: cultural similarity (Horizontal Dimension) and status position (Vertical Dimension). For example, in Brylka et al. study carried out in Finland, even if the Russian minority should be treated better than the Estonian one, due to a higher cultural similarity, the status position in Finnish society results in a better treatment of the latter minority mentioned. Therefore, diagonal hostility results from vertical and horizontal closeness to the majority which defines the degree of integration of minorities (Brylka et al., 2016). This consequence of different treatments towards minorities inside the social tissues results from the reproduction of hierarchic ideologies by the majority, that generates inequalities affecting mainly the low-status minority groups (Brylka et al., 2016). Besides, the threat of losing social status through interethnic contacts can catalyze the ethnic categorization process that even if it relates greatly with individuals who scored high

in SDO, it reveals a general trend to create categories independently from the individuals' score on the SDO scale (Snellman & Ekehammar, 2005). An additional theory that is worth mentioning is the Integrational Threat Theory (ITT), conceived by Stephan, Diaz-Loving, & Duran (2000), that has been applied to comprehend how the perceived threats from the majority groups when in contact with the minority, affects the entire intergroup contact process. Particularly, there are four types of threats that tied together compose the ITT index values, which are: realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes (Stephan, Diaz-Loving, & Duran, 2000). Realistic threats and symbolic threats represent the two new factors that characterize the framework, which combined together with the ones mentioned in the Contact Theory, predict how the contacts outcomes will be. The Realistic threats factors refer to the menace of destabilizing or erasing the group. For instance, they can be of economic or political nature, while the symbolic threats are described as differences perceived in values or morals between the groups. Thus, more positive contacts between the groups resulted in a decrease of perceived threats and, as a consequence, a reduction in general prejudice towards the other group favoring positive intergroup relationships (Stephan et al., 2000).

1.9 The Influence of Educational Background and Gender

Attitudes towards openness and acceptance are directly linked with the educational background of individuals (Grigaitytė et al., 2019). In a study carried out by Barkley, Boone & Holloway (2005), findings revealed that students who had a higher desire to continue their academic studies over the undergraduate level, had a higher level of openness and tolerance than students who did not have that wish. In addition, at a general level, the research brought vital evidence to confirm that the university environment facilitates the possibility to have different contacts among different group categories belonging to other social classes and ethnicity. Consequently, students are facilitated to create connections and familiarize with individuals who have a diverse background. Finally, higher education levels develop cognitive skills that make it easier for individuals to understand others' cultural or ethnic backgrounds, ending in a generally more positive opinion about immigration (Hagerdoon & Neukee, 1999). Specifically, right-wing authoritarian traits and ethnocentrism levels tend to be lower among individuals who have achieved higher levels of education. Besides the importance of educational background, it has been shown that proactive attitudes towards immigration vary depending on the gender (European Commission, 2018).

1.10 National Identity and Integration in Italy

The last Italian parliamentary elections in 2018 resulted in a coalition between two populist political parties, Movimento 5 Stelle and Lega Nord. This result reflects how frustrated the Italian population feels about the political system and the political class in general, which is perceived as corrupt and broken in the peninsula (Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Italy, 2018). Moreover, together with economic recession and unemployment, the topic of immigration was one of the strongest concern for the Italian people. In addition, many of the studies conducted about the opinion of Italians on this topic show that there is a misleading public opinion and that, consequently, most of the people feel confused and divided on the matter. The report *Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Italy* (Dixon, Hawkins, Heijbroek, Juan-Torres & Demoures) brings an analysis of the public opinion in Italy and how the citizens feel and perceive the phenomenon of immigration. The report divides the population into three segments which are: “Open”, “in the Middle” or “Close” depending on what they think about immigration, and seven major groups which are: “Italian Cosmopolitans”, “Catholic Humanitarians”, “Disengaged Moderates”, “Left Behind”, “Security Concerned”, “Cultural Defenders” and “Hostile Nationalists”. In particular, the closed group represented the 24% that are against immigration and are defenders of traditional values. In comparison, the middle group represented 48%, in which there are uncertain opinions regarding the immigration phenomenon. In other words, results from this research is that the majority of Italians are in favor of integration. Still, at the same time, they think that the institutions should be more competent in the process to handle it better. When addressing the Italian national identity issue, roughly half of the population feels that Islam’s culture is incompatible with theirs, like in many European countries. Since Italy has a Catholic heritage, most of the population believes that it is important to maintain these catholic values which must be protected from contamination from other faiths or traditions. However, Italians are optimistic about welcoming and hosting immigrants when they feel that their laws and cultural values are respected. Furthermore, the open and middle segments believe in integration and are favorable to it, even though the second category criticizes institutions to be passive and that there is no real work promoting immigration. Moreover, the groups in the closed segment want assimilation of the immigrants into Italian culture, placing the national identity first. In addition, with the continuous exploitation of the topics mentioned above, there is a strong feeling of division felt by the Italian population where polarized segments of society tend to increase the “In-Out” group logic, triggering in turn anxiety about intergroup contact.

1.11 Research Questions

It was investigated whether

(a) the belief that cultural and structural efforts are needed in order to enhance the situation of immigrants would correlate positively with openness to diversity and negatively with intense group identification,

(b) respondents with high values on openness to diversity would score higher than others on the need for both cultural and structural efforts,

(c) respondents with high values on intense group identification would score lower than others on the need for both cultural and structural efforts,

(d) a sex difference would exist regarding cultural efforts, structural efforts, openness to diversity, or level of intense group identification,

(e) evaluations made by students on the level of integration of immigrants would differ significantly depending on which ethnic group was evaluated,

(f) the opinions of students concerning whether cultural and structural efforts are needed to enhance the situation of immigrants would correlate with how well integrated they perceived the different groups of immigrants to be,

(g) the level of openness to diversity of the students would correlate with how well integrated they perceived the different groups of immigrants to be

2. Method

2.1 Sample

A questionnaire was completed by 60 female and 46 male university students from the following four Italian universities: Università degli studi di Macerata, Università degli studi di Torino, Università La Sapienza Roma, and Università degli studi di Milano. The mean age of the participants was 23.7 years (SD 4.8) for females, and 23.6 years (SD 3.8) for males. The age difference was not significant. The age range was between 19 and 45 years.

2.2 Instrument

A questionnaire was constructed for the study. It included scales for measuring proactive attitudes towards integration, intense group identification, and perceptions of the level of integration of five ethnic minorities in Italy.

2.2.1 Proactive Attitudes towards Integration

The questionnaire included three scales measuring proactive attitudes towards integration. The scales measured (a) cultural efforts to enhance the situation of immigrants, (b) structural efforts for the same, and (c) openness to diversity (Phelps, Eilertsen, Türken, & Ommundsen, 2011). The response alternatives were on a five-point scale (0 = completely disagree, 4 = completely agree). For Cronbach's alphas of the scales, see Table 1.

2.2.2 Intense Group Identification

The questionnaire also included a scale measuring (d) intense group identification (Grigaitytė, Österman, & Björkqvist, 2019). The response alternatives were on a five-point scale (0 = completely disagree, 4 = completely agree). For Cronbach's alphas of the scales, see Table 2.

2.2.3 Level of Integration of Five Ethnic Immigrant Groups in Italy

The students' perceptions of how well five ethnic groups, Romanians, Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese, and Ukrainians, have been integrated were measured with four questions: "Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements regarding immigrants who have come from different countries to Italy": (a) They have equally good access to work, medical care, and education as Italians, (b) Their customs are accepted by Italians, (c) They have integrated well in the Italian society, and (d) People are treating them with respect. The response

alternatives were on a five-point scale (0 = I completely disagree, 1 = I disagree a little, 2 = neutral, 3 = I agree somewhat, 4 = I completely agree). Cronbach's alphas for the scales were as follows: Integration of Romanians .81, Albanians .80, Moroccans .66, Chinese .72, and Ukrainians .80.

Table 1

Single Items (Adapted from Phelps et al., 2011) and Cronbach's Alphas for Scales Measuring Cultural Efforts, Structural Efforts, and Openness to Diversity (N = 106)

Cultural Efforts (7 items, $\alpha = .63$)

1. If integration is taken seriously, both Italians and immigrants should accept that their cultures change
2. Italians are entitled to demand that their own traditions and practices stay dominant in comparison with immigrant cultures (R)
3. Italians should not let their own culture be influenced by immigrants (R)
4. Italians should accommodate to immigrant traditions
5. Italians should be more open and welcoming toward the customs of ethnic minorities
6. Italians should do more to get to know immigrants
7. Italians should accept that immigrants use their own traditional clothing when they are at work

Structural Efforts (8 items, $\alpha = .74$)

8. Immigrants should receive economic support to establish themselves in society
9. Italian authorities don't do enough to make immigrants feel at home in Italy
10. Immigrants cannot expect that public services are tailored for them (R)
11. Laws and rules should be adjusted so that it is easier for immigrants to feel integrated in society
12. To make integration easier, public services should be customised (health and social services for example) for different immigrant groups
13. In order for ethnic minorities to feel more welcome, the state should economically support construction of place for worship for them.
14. Political parties should have a quota for ethnic minorities on election lists so that they have a better opportunity to be elected
15. The composition of personnel in the public sector should mirror a multicultural Italy

Openness to Diversity (6 items, $\alpha = .81$)

16. It's a positive thing to have a multicultural society where all groups can keep as much of their cultural traditions as possible
 17. Ethnic minorities go too far in showing off their cultural heritage (R)
 18. Italy belongs to immigrants just as much as it belongs to Italians
 19. Italians have much to learn from immigrant cultures
 20. People with other cultural backgrounds enrich the Italian society
 21. It is a positive thing to have ethnic minority cultures in Italy
-

(R) = Reversed scoring

Table 2

Single Items of the Scale Measuring Intense Group Identification (N = 106) ($\alpha = .63$)

-
1. The moral values of my culture are the best for me
 2. A person from another cultural group can never understand me as well as someone from my own group
 3. It is difficult interact with people from another cultural group
 4. People from different cultural groups should not mix too much
 5. One can never trust a person from another cultural group as well as one from one's own group
 6. I would not like my children to marry a person from another culture
-

2.3 Procedure

The data collection was conducted with an online questionnaire. The link was shared by email or through social media with the respondents. The link was active from the January 25th 2021 until the April 12th 2021. Due to the complications of approvals from the Italian's university official networks, the questionnaire was mainly spread among acquaintances in the universities of: Università degli studi di Macerata, Università degli studi di Torino, Università La Sapienza Roma, and Università degli studi di Milano.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The study is consistent with the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), and it also follows the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012).

3. Results

3.1 Correlations between the Scales in the Study

It was found that openness to diversity correlated significantly with both cultural and structural efforts to enhance the situation of immigrants (Table 3). Intense group identification correlated significantly negatively with cultural efforts and openness to diversity, but not with structural efforts. Cultural and structural efforts correlated significantly with each other.

Table 3
Correlations between the Scales in the Study (N = 106)

Scales	1.	2.	3.
1. Cultural Efforts to Enhance the Situation of Immigrants			
2. Structural Efforts to Enhance the Situation of Immigrants	.67 ***		
3. Openness to Diversity	.74 ***	.69 ***	
4. Intense Group Identification	-.29 **	-.13 <i>ns</i>	-.26 *

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p < .005$; * $p < .01$

3.2 Differences due to Openness to Diversity

A new variable was constructed based on z -scores of the scale measuring openness to diversity. Respondents with values below the mean were assigned to the group of low openness, and respondents with values above the mean were assigned to the group of high openness. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with openness to diversity (high/low) as independent variable and scores on cultural efforts, structural efforts, and intense group identification as dependent variables. The multivariate test was significant (Table 4). The univariate analyses showed that respondents belonging to the group with values above the mean on openness to diversity scored significantly higher than the others on both cultural and structural efforts (Table 4 and Figs. 1 and 2). No significant difference between the groups on intense group identification existed (Fig. 3), but the mean values on intense group identification were overall low. Please note that the scale in Fig. 1 ranges from 0 to 4, in Fig. 2 from 0 to 3, and in Fig. 3 from 0 to 1.20. The maximum value is in reality 12 for all three figures, but it is adjusted in the figures for the sake of readability.

Table 4
Results of a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Scores on Openness to Diversity (High/Low) as Independent Variable, and Three Dependent Variables (N = 106)

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> ≤	η_p^2	Group with higher mean
Effect of Group (High/Low)					
Multivariate Analysis	12.62	3, 102	.001	.271	
Univariate Analyses					
Cultural Efforts Needed to Enhance the Situation of Immigrants	35.30	1, 104	.001	.253	High Openness
Structural Efforts Needed to Enhance the Situation of Immigrants	23.67	“	.001	.185	High Openness
Intense Group Identification	1.15	”	<i>ns</i>	.011	-

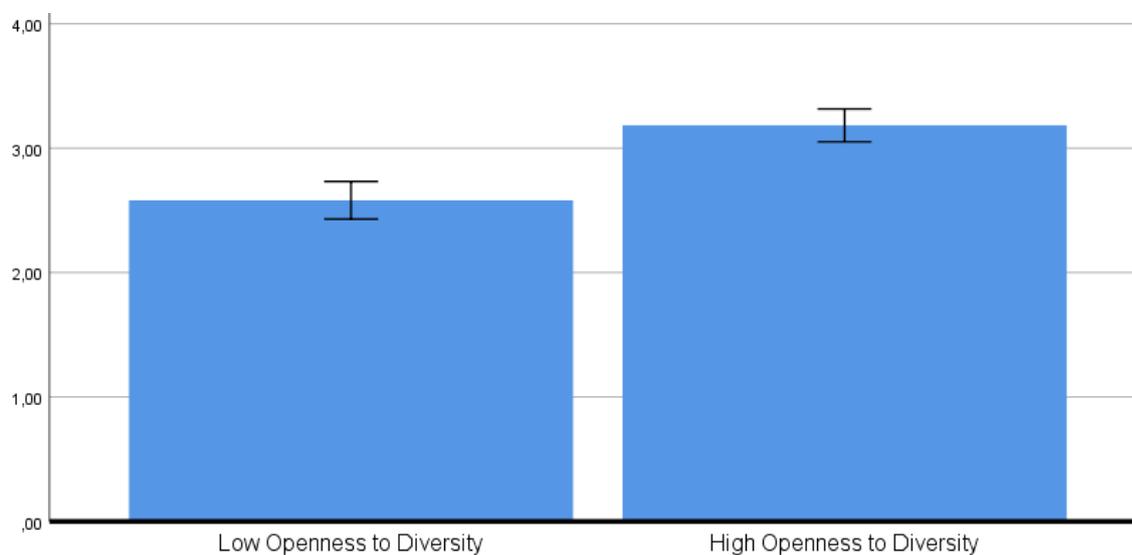


Fig. 1. Mean values on the attitude that *cultural efforts* are needed in order to integrate immigrants of respondents belonging to the groups with high vs. low scores on openness to diversity (N = 106).

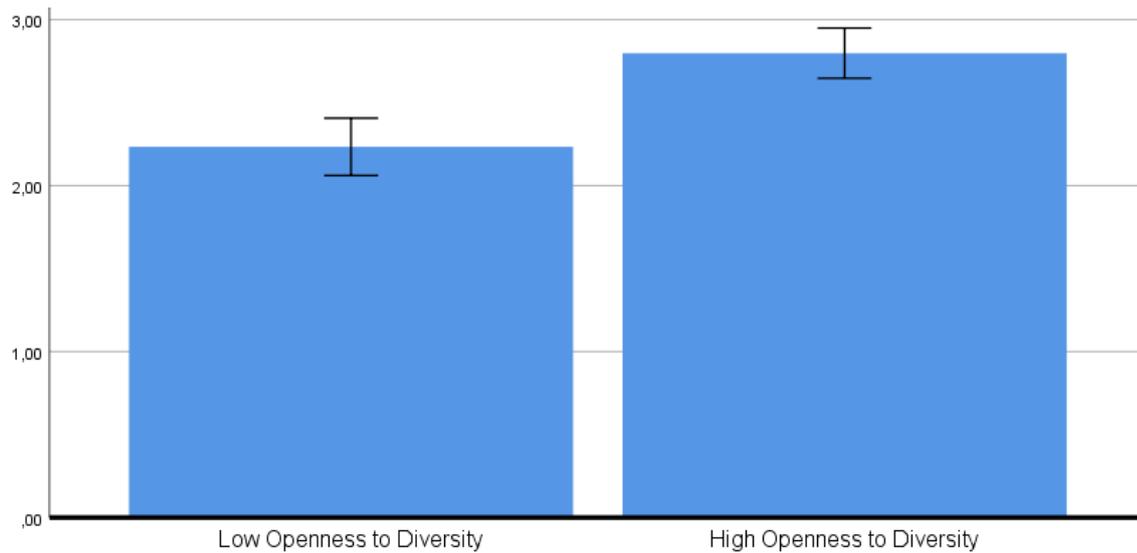


Fig. 2. Mean values on the attitude that *structural efforts* are needed in order to integrate immigrants of respondents belonging to the groups with high vs. low scores on openness to diversity ($N = 106$).

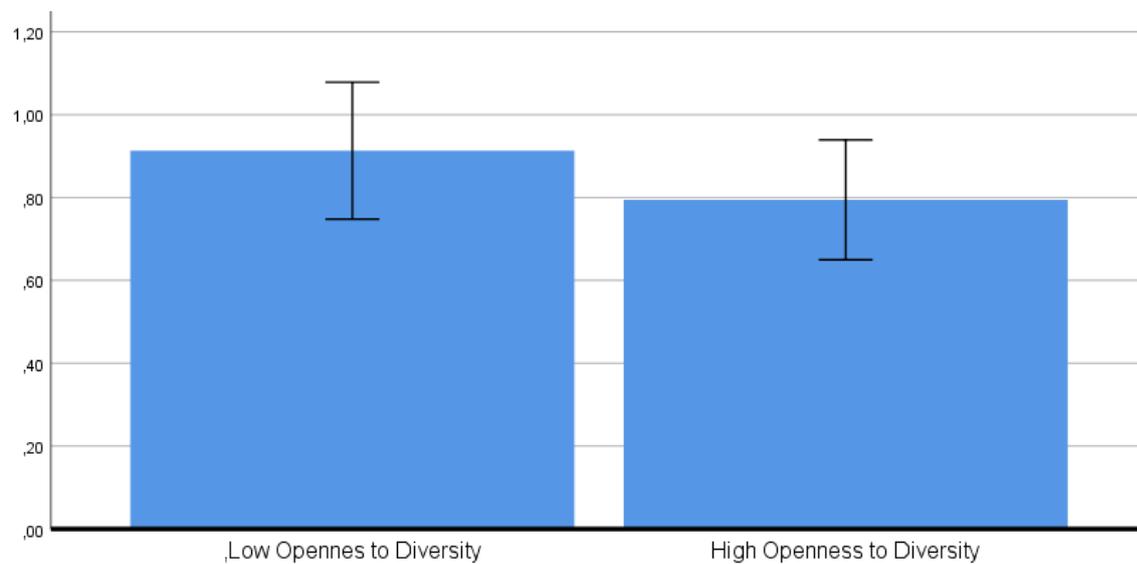


Fig. 3. Mean values on *intense group identification* of respondents belonging to the groups with high vs. low scores on openness to diversity ($N = 106$).

3.3 Sex Differences

No sex difference regarding cultural efforts, structural efforts, openness to diversity, or level of intense group identification was visible [$F(4, 101) = 0.091$, *n.s.*, $\eta_p^2 = .004$].

3.4 Level of Integration of Five Ethnic Groups

Students' evaluations of the integration level of immigrants differed significantly depending on which ethnic group was evaluated [$F_{(4, 102)} = 187.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .880$]. (Fig. 4). The level of integration was perceived to be the lowest for Romanian immigrants and highest for Albanians.

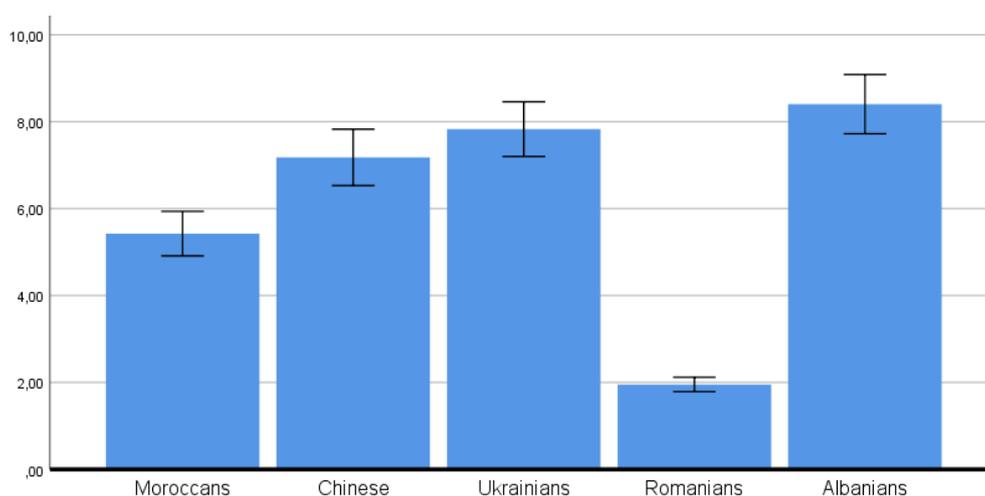


Fig. 4. Mean values of evaluations made by students of the *level of integration* of immigrants belonging to five ethnic groups in Italy ($N = 106$).

Students' opinions on whether cultural and structural efforts are needed to enhance the situation of immigrants did not correlate with how well integrated they perceived the different groups of immigrants to be. The students' level of openness to diversity did also not correlate with how well integrated they perceived the different groups of immigrants to be. The level of intense group identification of the students, on the other hand, did correlate with how well integrated they perceived the immigrants to be. Students with a high level of group identification with their own group perceived immigrants from four countries to be significantly more integrated in the Italian society compared to students with a low level of identification with their own group. The correlations were as follows: Chinese ($r = .36, p < .001$), Romanians ($r = .34, p < .001$), Ukrainians ($r = .28, p = .004$), and Albanians ($r = .22, p = .021$). A similar tendency was also found for Moroccan immigrants ($r = .18, p = .070$).

4. Discussion

4.1 Summary Findings

This study research was implemented to better view the Italian social situation in the European immigration crisis context, extending the body of research on the topic. Moreover, the purpose was to target what the Italians think about the majority efforts concerning the integration process and to which degree every minority group present in Italy is integrated. The research provided quantitative data on proactive attitudes towards integration, the intense group identification levels and the level of integration of the five minorities groups present in Italy. This study simulates in part Phelp's et al. (2011) study, applying an adapted Major Integration Efforts Scale and the Intense Group Identification scale created by Grigaityte et al. (2019) in another study. The data showed that Italian students generally have a positive attitude towards accepting changes brought by immigrants. Specifically, the openness to diversity correlated positively with the cultural and structural efforts to enhance the immigrants' situation. As discussed earlier, both traditional hosting culture and an environment composed of different ethnicities could have sensitized the young generation towards a more inclusive approach when in contact with individuals from a minority group. Furthermore, the second or third immigrant generation could have had a key role in mediating intergroup anxiety. Assumedly, interactions were facilitated by the academic environment that raises the chances of making connections with individuals who have a different background. (Barkaly et al., 2005; Grigaitytė et al., 2019. Additionally, EU exchange programs and the entire content of integration enhanced by these institutions could have favored an overall decline in national identification, promoting a European concept of citizenship expanding the effect on the openness to diversity of the individuals. Students with high openness to diversity marked significantly higher on the need for both structural and cultural efforts. However, Intense Group Identification and Openness to Diversity related negative with structural efforts. Hence, it revealed that the government does not implement effective policies to endorse positive attitudes of the majority to improve relationships and consequently integration of minorities (Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Italy, 2018). Also, compared to Grigaitytė's et al. (2019) study, no significant differences between sex or age have been encountered. Instead, the majority perceived immigrants' values and culture as equally essential as their own. Besides, students who scored high on intense group identification perceived the four immigrants' groups to be more integrated, whereas the opposite happened to students with low scores in intense group identification. This effect could indicate that students who strongly identify themselves with

the values of the majority group have fewer contacts with members of the minority groups. Results from the perceived integration of the five minorities present in Italy resulted in substantially different levels when addressing each community. The structural and cultural efforts together with openness to diversity did not correlate with how well the minorities were integrated, instead, Intense Group Identification did. Specifically, students who scored high in IGI perceived the minorities as more integrated, suggesting that these individuals may experience less frequent contact with outer groups. On the other hand, students scoring low in IGI may have more connections with external groups, suggesting broader knowledge about immigrants' life conditions. Moreover, Italian students feel that the Romanian minority is the less integrated group in the Italian society. Romania, as mentioned before, is a member state of the EU and its culture and language are similar to the Italian culture. Nonetheless, many possible explanations for this result exist. The first reason can be the relation between Romani people and Romanian communities in Italy. For instance, Romania hosts the largest number of Romani people communities in Europe, therefore, Italians may have erroneously associated the two communities, and since Romani people are viewed negatively and often discriminated against for their nomad lifestyle, consequently Romanians are also discriminated against. The second reason could be related to the schools' curriculums which, due to the strong attachment to the catholic traditions, always prioritized sensitizing children towards Muslims culture, to avoid cultural-religious clashes. Consequently, the schools' curriculums neglected to treat issues with others minorities not perceived as distant as the Muslim culture world. The last aspect to consider concerns the dimension of the Romanian community, or in other words, the perceived threats from the majority. Conceivably, applying the Integrational Threats Theory (Stephan et al., 2000), one of the significant concerns of the majority would be that Romanian population's influence, due to its large dimension in Italy, represents a real threat that could destabilize, undermine and change significantly the group's culture.

4.2 Limitations of the Study

The study presented results related to the integration literature in Italy. However, the findings have limitations that have to be addressed critically. Firstly, the data have been collected via an online questionnaire sent to five different universities located between the central and the northern parts of the country. Therefore, the results do not reflect the perspective of the southern part, where immigration is particularly felt due to the substantial coast immigration influxes in the last years. Secondly, the sample size did not represent the ideal model to draw significant

conclusions. The pandemic situation, characterized by lockdowns and impossibility to move, made collecting data difficult and the study therefore mainly relies on informal distribution methods such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups.

4.3 Implications of the Study

The study revealed that Italian students have a positive, proactive attitude towards the integration of immigrants. The negative correlation between Intense Group Identification and structural efforts, on the other hand, suggests that the Italian government does not do enough to facilitate integration. Further research on the Italian government agendas on integration could reveal if this positive acceptance trend of immigrants derives from external European policies or specific policies to sensitize students on the topic. Findings on the integration levels of the five main minorities in Italy demonstrate that Romanians are perceived as the less integrated. Thus, schools' curriculum programs, that sensitize more the five most significant minorities' cultures present in Italy, might be implemented to reach the integration gap discussed in the study. In addition, future research focusing on the Romanian minority's perception of the majority may help clarify the relationship with the Italian majority.

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