

Chapter 20

Recognition of International School Qualifications for Higher Education Access: A Case Study of International Schools in Italy and Categorization of Qualifications

Chiara Finocchietti

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6993-5782>

University of Trieste, Italy

ABSTRACT

International schools are growing in number and diversity. While this growth has received attention under several dimensions, from cultural, social, and institutional aspects, one aspect that seems less explored is the one related to the recognition of qualifications. This despite the fact that qualifications awarded by international schools are presented and perceived as a gateway for admission to most prestigious universities on a global scale. This chapter explores what the elements are that make an international final school leaving qualification recognizable in order to access higher education according to the European framework of policies and practices in recognition of international qualifications, presenting the landscape of international schools in Italy as a national case study, and elaborates a categorization of international schools from the point of view of the qualifications giving access to higher education that they offer, starting from the international definitions of transnational and international schools.

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

The number and diversity of international schools is growing fast, with their characteristics evolving from the traditional and “classical” structures to a variety of forms that are more challenging to capture in a unique definition or category. Despite this diversity, one element that seems to be recurrent is the perception and the narrative of the qualifications awarded as a gateway for obtaining access to higher

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education, and more specifically, to the leading global universities. Is this always true for all the international schools? What are the conditions and the dimensions that can ease fast and fair recognition of the qualifications they award? This chapter aims to explore the conditions and elements that can support recognition of international qualifications according to policies and practices developed in the last two decades in the European region. The different typologies of international schools will be clustered according to a recognition perspective viewing the characteristics of the qualifications they award. This clusterisation will be analysed vis-à-vis with the main categorisation of international schools in literature, to verify if it is possible to identify common patterns and if the categorisations are fit-for-purpose, also from a recognition perspective. The chapter provides an overview of the regulatory framework at the international level and the challenges in the recognition arising from the actual context, presenting the Italian case as an example of how a national legislator has regulated the presence of international schools on the domestic soil, in the perspective of the recognition of the qualifications providing access to higher education issued by such institutions.

BACKGROUND

What is an international school? When was the concept of international schools born, and how is it evolving?

Literature offers several reconstructions of the historical evolution of classification and elaboration of international schools (Bunnell, 2014; Hill, 2015; King, 1988).

The present chapter refers to the three types of international schools: Type A Traditional, Type B Ideological, and Type C Non-traditional (Hayden & Thompson, 2013), as further elaborated (Bunnell et al., 2016). According to Bunnell, international schools under Type A have been traditionally established to offer education to the children of globally mobile parents, mainly expatriates. In such schools, English is the primary language of communication, and the funding mechanism is usually privately-based, not on a for-profit basis (Bunnell et al., 2016). Type B Ideological International Schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2013) are based on the principles of international open-mindedness and education for global peace and understanding (Bunnell et al., 2016). The schools falling under this typology, such as the United World Colleges, offer international curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate (Bunnell et al., 2016), which is widely offered in other typologies of schools. These two typologies of schools, made by “Type A Traditional form pragmatically serving the global market and the Type B Ideological form serving global peace and internationalism, are being reconfigured by the rapid growth of a new kind of International School categorised as Type C Non-traditional” (Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden & Thompson, 2013). Type C schools are usually for profit, characterized by different configurations, and they enrol local students coming from middle-class and wealthy backgrounds (Bunnell et al., 2016). The development of different typologies of international schools has diluted the “classical” notion of international school, with the concept of an international school becoming complex and confusing (Hill, 2015). In particular, Type-C non-traditional international schools could encompass a large number of variants, such as state schools with international sections, corporate ownership, or branches of elite Anglo-American schools (Poole, 2020). A more recent definition to describe these institutions is “Globalised English Medium of Instruction Schools,” which encompasses several sub-groups of schools “with a global outlook located mainly outside an English-speaking country, delivering a non-national curriculum at least partly in

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