

Country Report: Italy

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General information about Italy's educational system

In Italy, 90% of the students attend public schools administered by the Ministry of Education, while the remaining 10% attend private schools (most of them Catholic). Compulsory education begins at the age of 6 and ends at the age of 16, but to enter university three more years are required. The school system is structured in three levels, at the end of each there is an examination: 5 years primary school (age 6-11), 3 years secondary school (age 11-14), 5 years upper secondary school (age 14-19). The Italian education system unfortunately suffers from some structural gaps, regularly pointed out by international surveys: percentage of investments lower than the OECD averages, teachers' salaries lower than OECD countries' average, school dropout rate higher than the 10% target set by the EU (Italy 12,7%). (cf. OECD 2022)

On an administrative level, schools are regionally organised. The official language is Italian, but in some regions, on the borders with France and Austria for example, there are schools in French and German. Italy is a country that has historically experienced important emigrations, but in the last 10-15 years it has been the destination of important migratory flows. The number of foreign students has increased significantly and accounts for approximately 11,3% of all students in the three levels (8,7% in upper secondary).

Current situation of philosophy in schools

There is no teaching of philosophy in primary or secondary schools, but optional activities of philosophy are possible, organised within the framework of school autonomy. The teaching of philosophy is currently present on a compulsory basis in upper secondary schools, only in grammar schools (lyceum), not in technical and vocational ones. Since 51 % of upper secondary students attend one of the eight different lyceum¹, we can say that at least half of the Italian students study philosophy for three years (age 16-19); totaling 1.367.657 in 2022. (cf. Italian Ministry of Education 2023)

In grammar schools with programmes for Art, Language, Music and Dance, Applied Sciences, Law and Economics there are two lessons of philosophy per week for a total of approximately 198 hours; in grammar schools with programmes for Classics, Science, and Human Sciences there are three lessons of philosophy per week (approximately 297 hours in three years). In these schools, philosophy teachers always teach another subject as well, which according to our cultural tradition is mainly History, with the exception of Human Sciences lyceum where the curriculum consists exclusively of human sciences (Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology).

Laws and debates on teaching philosophy

In Italy, the debate on the teaching of philosophy is particularly lively among the scholarly and academic community, and it has a long tradition dating back to the early 20th Century. The

¹ (1) Art; (2) Language; (3) Music and Dance; (4) Applied Sciences; (5) Law and Economics; (6) Classics; (7) Science; (8) Human Sciences.



current teaching of philosophy still follows a well-established tradition, from which, despite various attempts to reformation, it has never really been able to emancipate itself.

Philosophy has been taught in the last two years of grammar school curricula since 1860, when the Italian state was founded. The main issues of logic, metaphysics, and ethics were taught, because this was seen to be part of the education of the country's new political and economic leaders. There was no prescribed syllabus, but teachers were free to choose from some suggested authors and texts.

The most important school reform was made in 1924, during Fascist dictatorship, and was named after the philosopher who, at the time, was Minister of Education: Gentile's Reform. Gentile established that the teaching of philosophy should be spread over three years, that there should be an examination curriculum, and that the teaching should focus on philosophical texts and historical perspective (Cantillo 2019).

Currently, the teaching of philosophy is regulated by *National Guidelines* issued by the government in 2010 (Italian Ministry of Education, 2010), that I will sum up in the next section.

In 2017, the Ministry of Education published the *Guidelines for Learning Philosophy in the Knowledge Society* (Palumbo et al. 2017), a document emphasizing the importance of teaching philosophy by the Italian tradition, in order to promote cognitive and citizenship skills, according to the fundamental goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Cantillo 2019: 46).

General objectives and methods of teaching philosophy

Philosophy is a compulsory and characterizing subject of the eight grammar schools. The *National Guidelines* indicate specific learning objectives, general educational objectives, and skills that students must possess at the end of lyceum in accordance with European Qualification Framework indicators.

The teaching of philosophy is considered as being particularly well suited to enhance students' personal reflection, critical thinking, the aptitude for in-depth study, rational debate, argumentation, citizenship skills. (cf. Italian Ministry of Education 2010: 20-22)

At the end of Lyceum students are expected to:

- understand the universalistic scope of philosophical reflection, which, as a specific and fundamental mode of human reasoning in different epochs and different cultural traditions, constantly re-proposes the question of knowledge, human existence and the meaning of being;
- understand the conceptual and philosophical roots of the main currents and problems of contemporary culture;
- know the nodal points of the historical development of Western thought;
- contextualize each author or issue treated within the cultural-historical context;
- identify the connections between philosophy and other disciplines;
- be able to orient themselves on fundamental problems: ontology, ethics, and the question of happiness, the relationship of philosophy to religious traditions, the problem of knowledge, logical problems, the relationship between philosophy and other forms of knowledge, especially science, the meaning of beauty, freedom and power in political thought (citizenship skills);
- be able to use the vocabulary and categories specific to the discipline.

The most common method is historical-critical, i.e., the teaching of philosophical issues, topics, and philosophers follows the chronological order and provides the historical context. Even though philosophy is an oral subject (no mandatory written exercises or tests), much emphasis is placed on the direct reading of texts. Philosophy is normally taught in Italian but is among the subjects that may also be taught in a second language according to the CLIL methodology.

The Ministry of Education has, since several years, included the International Philosophy Olympiad (IPO) among the projects for the enhancement of excellence and organizes, together with the Italian Philosophical Society, the selections at regional and national level.² It considers the IPO an opportunity for didactic innovation, in particular for the promotion of argumentative writing skills.

National curriculum for grammar schools (lyceum)

In the first two years, the most significant milestones of philosophical research from its origins to Hegel are studied. The study of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle is mandatory, to enhance their understanding, the teaching of pre-Socratics and Sophists is also recommended. Also recommended is the teaching of the philosophies of the Hellenistic-Roman period and the theme of the intersection of Greek philosophy and biblical religions. It is mandatory also to study Augustine of Hippo, in the context of Patristics, and Thomas Aquinas, in the context of Scholastic Philosophy, from its beginnings to the ‘rediscovery’ of Aristotle.

The study of the following topics in modern philosophy is obligatory: the Scientific Revolution and Galilei; the problem of method and knowledge, with reference to Descartes, Hume’s Empiricism and Kant; modern political thought, with reference to at least one author among Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; and German idealism with special reference to Hegel.

To better contextualize these topics, the teaching of cultural movements such as Humanism-Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romanticism is recommended, as well as the study of authors such as Bacon, Pascal, Vico, Diderot, Spinoza, and Leibniz.

The final year is devoted to the study of post-Hegelian philosophies to the present day. Within 19th century, the study of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Positivism, and the most significant developments in sciences and theories of knowledge, is mandatory. Teachers have to treat at least four authors or problems of 20th century philosophy, chosen from the following: (a) Husserl and Phenomenology; (b) Freud and Psychoanalysis; (c) Heidegger and Existentialism; (d) Italian Neo-Idealism (e) Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy; (f) Vitalism and Pragmatism; (g) Christian Philosophy and the New Theology; (h) interpretations and developments in Marxism, particularly Italian Marxism; (i) themes and problems of Political Philosophy; (l) developments in epistemological reflection; (i) Philosophy of Language; (l) Philosophical Hermeneutics.

Current situation of teacher training in philosophy

Until the end of the 1990s, access to teaching philosophy required a master’s degree in Philosophy, or a master’s degree in Humanities (having passed a certain number of courses in philosophy), and the passing of an official national exam. Didactic training was not provided.

Since 1999 to 2009, two-year postgraduate schools with teaching courses were established

² See <https://www.sfi.it/248/olimpiadi.html>; <https://www.philolympia.org>. About the International Philosophy Olympiads see also the special issue Vol. 4 No. 3 (2020) of the *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy*.

to access teaching in secondary and upper secondary schools. After ten years, these schools were abandoned and one-year specialization courses on didactics were set up. Currently these courses have also been abandoned, and the Government is processing a new way of accessing teaching, considering a qualifying degree or a one-year internship.

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