



Italy

Arabic is closely tied to Italy through history, recent migration trends, and the exchange of goods and services with neighboring Arab countries. Italian schools have long offered Arabic instruction, though its delivery has developed considerably in the last two decades. While Arabic is the second most spoken foreign language among native speakers in Italy (after Romanian) ([Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2017](#)), its presence in schools remains extremely marginal, primarily experimental, and dependent on local initiatives. It comprises a combination of curricular courses offered in select schools and extracurricular projects.

Formal qualifications for Arabic instruction exist for teachers, and some secondary schools with a linguistic focus (*Licei linguistici*) may offer Arabic as a subject of study. Despite this, implementation is limited, often unsupported, and, when it does occur, highly dependent on local circumstances. There is currently no national language policy addressing the issue; though initiatives promoting Arabic courses have increased in recent years, driven by the efforts of teachers and school administrators.

Research Sample

Twenty-six Arabic language programs participated in the SALP: 22 public and 4 private programs. Prior to the survey, the team conducted grounded interviews with key stakeholders knowledgeable about Arabic teaching in Italy. After the survey, the research team conducted six interviews for in-depth case studies. The findings that follow represent the realities and perspectives of this sample of programs only.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY OVERVIEW	
Arabic Programs	26
Courses	75
Learners	1,226
Teachers	57

Key Findings

• Policy and Provision

- Language education policies are primarily implemented at the school level as bottom-up initiatives, while aligned with the Ministry of Education and regional regulations. The national policy in 2010 (D.P.R. n. 107) permits the introduction of Arabic as a foreign language at the upper secondary level, reflected in the survey findings, which show a high concentration of Arabic courses at the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 3. Arabic language programs remain marginalized as no standardized syllabus, national guidelines, or dedicated teacher training programs are available.
- Due to historical and political contexts, including a lack of national language policy addressing the language, Arabic language programs in Italy are unevenly distributed in a limited number of schools in certain regions, leading to unequal access for students.

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• Enrollment and Access

- Arabic language programs across Italy included more than 1,200 learners enrolled in 75 courses across ISCED Levels 1 through 3. Most learners (56%) had an elementary level of language proficiency.
- A range of Arabic language programs was offered in public schools, encompassing lessons during or after school instructional time, weekends, and school breaks. Private schools delivered lessons only during instructional time.
- Arabic plays an influential role in determining a school's attractiveness and its connection to the surrounding area. The presence of an Arabic course often signals exclusivity and innovation, positioning the school as internationally oriented and capable of offering a broader, more diverse curriculum.

• Curriculum and Instruction

- While there is gradual alignment of Arabic teaching materials with the CEFR, the absence of a national Arabic language-specific curriculum continues to generate uneven practices. Teachers play a compensatory role, bridging curricular and material gaps through personal initiatives and creativity. There is a lack of shared standards and long-term curricular coherence.
- Almost all programs taught MSA (96%), while Qur'anic and regional varieties of Arabic were left to a scant minority. Over half (60%) of programs reported that they always or often used MSA, also as a language of classroom communication.
- Arabic instructors designed innovative instructional resources and activities. Most instructors (77%) developed their own handouts, introduced games, playful activities, and technologies to meet students' learning needs and maintain lesson engagement.

• Teacher Workforce

- The proportion of full-time and part-time instructors was evenly distributed when looking across all schools. However, private schools relied predominantly on part-time instructors (80%).
- Overall, the programs were delivered by qualified teachers: 73% held an Arabic teaching certification, and 65% had access to professional development opportunities. The majority of instructors were native speakers (57%), followed by second-language speakers (31%). ■

Implications and Recommendations

- **Italy should begin promoting support programs for mother tongue education, at least at the primary school level, and for so-called “newcomers,” who may not have adequate knowledge of the Italian language.** Language planning measures are needed to address the growing presence of young Arabic-speaking communities, distributed heterogeneously across the country.
- **Establish an Arabic teacher network that explores and highlights various program models within Italy to enhance teachers' access to knowledge and resources for teaching different learner profiles.** Given the demand from learners of Arabic as a second language alongside recent migration trends, Italy is poised to expand Arabic language instruction, catering to both learner profiles and has existing successful models from which to build.
- **Establish more full-time Arabic teacher positions to provide qualified teachers with stable, full-time positions.** This investment in teacher employment will enable programs to expand access and enhance current courses.