

**TITLE: Language and Cultural Mediators in Northern Italy: Bridging the gap between Chinese learners and equitable inclusive education**

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In Italy, Chinese nationals are a large and long-standing foreign group. However, many still face challenges due to limited language skills, hindering access to public services such as education. Language and Cultural Mediators (LCMs) are employed to facilitate intercultural communication between Chinese learners, families, and educators. While the value of LCMs in assisting cultural adjustment in schools is well-documented, their role in supporting Chinese learners to receive equitable and inclusive education is less explored. This study aims to address this gap by investigating current LCM practices in educational settings in the Veneto region of Italy. Specifically, the study examines the experiences of LCMs, their perceived organizational inclusion, and well-being in providing services to Chinese children and their families. Through qualitative methods, data collection consists of semi-structured interviews with Chinese nationals and Italian LCMs who speak Chinese as a foreign language. Preliminary results from our critical discourse analysis suggest that there is fragmentation, and under-utilization of LCMs, hindering equal access to and inclusive education for children and their families. A major transformation in the working environment of LCMs requires in-depth reconstruction of organizational relationships within educational settings, alongside the proper consideration of the cultural perception and value of these professionals in society. This study contributes to the application of socio-psycholinguistics and organizational frameworks for the training and support of LCMs within the broader Italian context. The value of the study is in understanding the role of LCMs in bridging the gap between public services and increasingly superdiverse societies.

**Keywords:** Language and Cultural Mediators, Chinese learners, Inclusive education, Northern Italy