

Language education, multilingualism and inclusion: Insights from Italian University Language Centres and students' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

EN The paper outlines the role of Italian University Language Centres (ULCs) in promoting multilingualism, multiculturalism, and inclusive practices in higher education. It presents a mixed-methods study combining corpus-informed and discourse-based analysis of English-language websites of the AICLU (Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari) with questionnaire data collected from students enrolled in ESP courses at the University of Calabria. Findings indicate that inclusive practices, particularly those addressing disability, accessibility, and diverse learner needs, are not represented consistently across institutions. Student responses highlight the need for greater interaction, more flexible learning pathways, expanded language offerings, and more visible support systems. The study advocates for a more holistic, inclusive, and student-centred model of language education that integrates multilingual and inclusive values at both institutional and pedagogical levels.

Keywords: INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION, MULTILINGUALISM, STUDENT-CENTRED LANGUAGE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE CENTRES (ULCS), INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE, *AICLU - ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA CENTRI LINGUISTICI UNIVERSITARI.

ES El artículo describe el papel de los Centros Lingüísticos Universitarios (CLU) italianos en la promoción del multilingüismo, el multiculturalismo y las prácticas inclusivas en la educación superior. Presenta un estudio de métodos mixtos que combina un análisis basado en corpus de los sitios web en inglés de la AICLU (Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari) con datos de un cuestionario al alumnado de cursos de inglés para fines específicos (ESP) de la Universidad de Calabria. Los resultados indican que las prácticas inclusivas, en particular las relacionadas con la discapacidad, la accesibilidad y las diversas necesidades del alumnado, no se aplican de manera uniforme en todas las instituciones. Las respuestas ponen de relieve la necesidad de una mayor interacción, itinerarios de aprendizaje flexibles, una oferta más amplia de cursos de idiomas y sistemas de apoyo más visibles. Se aboga por un modelo de enseñanza más holístico, inclusivo y centrado en el estudiante, que integre los valores multilingües e inclusivos tanto a nivel institucional como pedagógico.

Palabras clave: educación superior inclusiva, multilingüismo, enseñanza de idiomas centrada en el estudiante, centros lingüísticos universitarios (clu), discurso institucional, aiclu - associazione italiana centri linguistici universitari.

IT Il contributo analizza il ruolo dei Centri Linguistici d'Ateneo (CLA) italiani nella promozione del multilinguismo, del multiculturalismo e delle pratiche inclusive nell'ambito dell'istruzione universitaria. Lo studio adotta una metodologia mista che combina l'analisi corpus-informed e discourse-based dei siti web in lingua inglese dell'AICLU (Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari) con i dati raccolti tramite un questionario rivolto a studenti iscritti ai corsi di English for Specific Purposes (ESP) dell'Università della Calabria. I risultati evidenziano che le pratiche inclusive, in particolare quelle relative alla disabilità, all'accessibilità e alle diverse esigenze degli apprendenti, non sono rappresentate in modo uniforme. Le risposte degli studenti mettono in luce la necessità di maggiore interazione, di percorsi formativi più flessibili, di un ampliamento dell'offerta linguistica e di sistemi di supporto più visibili ed efficaci. Lo studio suggerisce l'adozione di un modello di educazione linguistica più olistico, inclusivo e centrato sullo studente, capace di integrare i valori del multilinguismo e dell'inclusione a livello sia istituzionale sia pedagogico.

Parole chiave: ISTRUZIONE UNIVERSITARIA INCLUSIVA; MULTILINGUISMO; EDUCAZIONE LINGUISTICA CENTRATA SULLO STUDENTE; CENTRI LINGUISTICI D'ATENEIO (CLA); DISCORSO ISTITUZIONALE, *AICLU - ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA CENTRI LINGUISTICI UNIVERSITARI.

1. Introduction

In a world of increased international mobility, multilingualism has become of paramount significance among academic communities. Recent studies have extensively examined the role of University Language Centres in advancing the internationalisation of Italian universities (Argondizzo et al., 2025). Over the last few decades, the field of higher education has witnessed radical change due to increased globalization, academic mobility, and the development of international collaboration. The role of universities is becoming increasingly transnational, with linguistic and cultural diversity being not an exception but a rule. In this dynamic environment multilingualism is now one of the salient dimensions of higher education, as it defines institutional policy, pedagogical practices and the academic pathways of students. Instead of being limited to the process of learning languages, multilingualism infiltrates the fields of teaching, research, administration, and digital communication, posing critical questions concerning access, equity, and participation. However, the conflict between multilingualism and monolingual standards still exists. On the one hand, universities facilitate internationalisation and diversity; on the other hand, institutional practices usually favour a small number of academic languages, most often English. This tension can be detrimental to students from linguistic minority groups or international students whose language competences are often undervalued. Consequently, in order to attain inclusive higher education, the role of languages in defining access to knowledge, practices of assessment and institutional communication must be critically addressed.

Multilingualism and inclusive education are therefore central institutional priorities, particularly within the European context, where linguistic diversity is recognized as both cultural wealth and a key policy objective. Inclusive higher education becomes a tool of empowerment and a chance for equality that requires institutions to take strategic responsibility in meeting the diverse needs of their students. University Language Centres (ULCs) play a key role within this paradigm. They actively foster intercultural communication, learner autonomy, social inclusion and align with the European Parliament's goals of linguistic diversity in terms of providing equal opportunities and avoiding discrimination.

The present study aims to explore how Language Centre websites, (affiliated with AICLU – Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari), address multilingualism, accessibility, and inclusivity, and to evaluate the extent to which linguistic diversity and inclusive measures are prioritized. The first part of the study presents preliminary findings¹ on European Language Centres (EULCs) as multilingual communities of practice. Through the analysis of their websites, the project investigated how academic institutions communicate services and concepts to their users, including international students, administrative staff, academics, and citizens. By analysing the English, Italian, and Spanish versions of EULCs websites, the project investigated the role EULCs play in promoting multilingualism, multiculturalism, and social inclusion. The second part focuses on a reflective study conducted in 2025 at the University of Calabria among university students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, exploring their perceptions, experiences, and needs regarding language course offerings and inclusivity. This study proposes a pedagogical and institutional shift that would view multilingualism as an asset and not a challenge. This is crucial in order to align higher education practices with European language policies to ensure that linguistic diversity provides academic success, social inclusion and intercultural communication in an increasingly diverse multicultural society which will have to centre around students' needs.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Multilingualism, plurilingualism, and translanguaging

Before discussing the theoretical framework, it is important to clarify the use of the terms “multilingualism” and “plurilingualism” in this study. Although the distinction between the two concepts is theoretically significant, the present article adopts multilingualism as its primary analytical term when examining the websites of University Language Centres. This choice is deliberate and reflects the terminology that is most commonly used in the institutional discourse under analysis, particularly in the English-language versions of the websites. At the same time, plurilingualism remains an important conceptual reference for understanding language competence at the level of the individual, especially in relation to linguistic repertoires, mobility, and translanguaging practices.

¹ These results were presented as part of the Italian national research project PRIN entitled *European Language Centres as a Multilingual Community of Practice: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Academic, Cultural and Social Growth Conveyed through the Language of Websites*.

Modern conceptualizations of multilingualism do not conceive it as a rigid system of discrete languages, but as a dynamic interaction of linguistic competences which is subject to social factors (CEFR - Companion Volume, 2020). A distinction must nevertheless be made between the concepts of multilingualism and plurilingualism. Multilingualism generally denotes the coexistence of multiple languages within a society or institution, whereas plurilingualism emphasizes the individual's dynamic, interconnected, and flexible repertoire of linguistic resources. Rampton (2019) indicates that the development of such competence is based on lived experiences, as well as contexts in which several languages are used. In this sense, plurilingualism has a close relationship with identity, social participation, and mobility.

Translanguaging theories conceptualise language not as a set of discrete systems, but as a fluid, multisemiotic, and multimodal resource used for cognitive and communicative purposes (Li, 2018). Rather than viewing the individual as using completely separate languages, translanguaging emphasizes dynamic practices that transcend traditional boundaries between named languages, language varieties, and other semiotic systems (Li, 2018). Going beyond traditional code-switching, translanguaging adopts an internal perspective to describe the lived languaging experiences of bilingual and multilingual speakers (Vogel & Garcia, 2017). It is therefore concerned with a much wider range of communicative, educational, and social issues. In academic contexts, translanguaging embraces a transformative pedagogical practice where students are encouraged to fluidly access their full linguistic and semiotic resources to build meaning, negotiate identity, and participate in academic education. By removing rigid boundaries between named languages, this approach allows linguistically diverse students to draw upon their complete repertoires, therefore improving their academic achievements and bridging the gap between their home languages and institutional discourse. As Wei (2018) notes, translanguaging “empowers both the learner and the teacher; transforms the power relations, and focuses the process of teaching and learning on making meaning, enhancing experience, and developing identity” (p. 15). Ultimately, it demonstrates how language users navigate tensions among different signs both within and beyond academic settings and leverage their diverse resources to understand, engage with, and challenge the social world (Wei & Lin, 2019).

2.2. Linguistic diversity

European policy documents explicitly support the principle of linguistic diversity as the key to democratic participation and intercultural interaction (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2022).

Over time, the Bologna Process (1999) has played a central role in promoting mobility and cooperation across national systems, reinforcing the need for multilingual competence within European higher Education Institutions. Alongside structural reforms, European initiatives such as Erasmus+ have significantly increased student and staff mobility, further intensifying linguistic diversity within universities and foregrounding the need for inclusive language policies that support academic integration and success. In this regard, European institutions are willing to find a balance between internationalisation and linguistic diversity (Keeling, 2006).

Although English has become the lingua franca of academia, especially with the growth of English-Medium Instruction (EMI), the EU language policy emphasises the need to safeguard multilingualism and prevent linguistic homogenization. Both the European Parliament and the Council of Europe point out that linguistic diversity is an essential element of democratic participation and social cohesion, as well as equal access to education. Language is not a neutral medium, but rather one of the strongest factors in shaping power relations, inclusion, and institutional belonging. Multilingualism at the European level has been associated with social inclusion, non-discrimination, and equal access to information. In the context of higher education, institutions are required to offer fair opportunities for language learning and cater to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

2.3. Diversity and inclusion in University Language Centres

University Language Centres (ULCs) play a pivotal role in the promotion of language education. Research in the field highlights how ULCs enhance pedagogical innovation, learner autonomy, and the development of intercultural competence (Argondizzo, 2015; Bickerton & Gotti, 1999; Little, 1999, 2000). Language policy, pedagogy, and institutional practise specifically intersect in University Language Centres (ULCs). They gradually broadened their scope in line with the linguistic requirements of internationalised higher education. In fact, ULCs have become strategic agents of institutional multilingualism, promoting academic literacy, intercultural competence and learner autonomy in more than one language. Their work aligns with European aims in regard to lifelong learning, social inclusion and linguistic diversity (Argondizzo,

2015; Bickerton & Gotti, 1999; Ingram, 2001). In addition, ULCs play a greater role in language planning, mediating between global and locally based national and minority language commitments. They also offer linguistic assistance to students and members of staff that participate in mobility programmes or international research projects and meet accessibility requirements, such as those for students with disabilities or special learning needs. In this respect, Language Centres are not just service units, but spaces where multilingualism is practised as a social and educational process.

Recently, inclusion in higher education has become a subject of scholarly interest, especially in the case of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Inclusive education is widely acknowledged as a way to achieve equal opportunities and empowerment, which calls for the removal of structural, communicative, and attitudinal barriers (Al-Hassan, Bani-Hani & Al-Masa'deh, 2023).

2.4. Sign language as a multimodal and inclusive tool

The theoretical foundation of this study incorporates the concepts of inclusion, signing, and socialization. While previous literature on signing (Heslinga & Nevenglosky, 2012) has often focused on elementary educational settings, adapting these principles to higher education requires careful contextualization. In a university classroom, integrating sign language does not mean that a class of mostly non-signers must learn it to the point that it becomes the language of instruction. Instead, the strategic incorporation of basic signs and visual-spatial communication can foster a more supportive learning environment by engaging multiple learning modalities, including visual, spatial, tactile, and kinetic dimensions.

In addition, it is essential to clearly differentiate fully developed sign languages from mere paralinguistic gestures. Sign languages are complete, grammatically complex linguistic systems. Recognizing them as such within the academic linguistic repertoire aligns with the broader goals of translanguaging and plurilingualism. When sign language is recognized as an integral component of a speaker's plurilingual repertoire, it transcends its traditional categorization as merely a compensatory accommodation. Instead, it becomes an active dimension of multimodal translanguaging, enabling individuals to fluidly interconnect spoken, written, and visual-spatial modalities to build meaning and negotiate identity. By rejecting strict boundaries, students are empowered to draw upon a richer, interconnected array of semiotic resources. This integration validates the diverse linguistic backgrounds of all students and bridges communicative gaps between deaf and hearing communities, treating their respective languages as complementary rather than separate. Ultimately, normalizing sign language as part of the classroom's shared translanguaging practices reduces communicative pressure and fosters a highly interactive, inclusive environment where the diverse repertoires of all speakers are dynamically interconnected and equally valued. In terms of inclusive education, sign language implementation in regular classrooms may be thought of as a universal design for learning (UDL) strategy instead of a compensatory intervention (Al-Hassan et al., 2023; Burgstahler, 2015; Moore, Rose, & Meyer, 2002). Rather than focusing on a particular group of students, signing practices help increase access and inclusion of the entire classroom community.

The development of sign language in higher education institutions is embedded in the international human rights systems. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes that reasonable actions should be taken to enable the acquisition of sign language and to support the linguistic identity of the deaf community. In this context, inclusive higher education is understood as an issue of equal opportunity and empowerment and institutions are asked to strategically act on meeting the various needs of their students. In many institutions, inclusion remains framed within legal compliance discourse. Although procedural accommodations (extra exam time, assistive technologies) are essential, they do not automatically transform pedagogical cultures. A more holistic model requires proactive design, flexible learning structures, and recognition of diversity as a resource. Yet the extent to which these commitments are visible in institutional discourse and perceived in educational practice remains underexplored.

2.5. Students' perspectives for an inclusive education

Universities have the power to eliminate barriers to effective communication, enabling individuals with disabilities to fully participate in civil, economic, and social spheres. Institutional websites represent a particularly revealing domain for examining such commitments since they perform both informative and identity-building functions. They specify missions, describe services, and project institutional values. Analysing their language provides insight into how multilingualism and inclusion are discursively constructed and prioritised. Analysing English-language versions of websites is particularly relevant, as these pages often target

international audiences and therefore represent a curated version of institutional identity. At the same time, institutional discourse cannot be fully understood without incorporating student perspectives. Students are not passive recipients of educational provision but active agents whose experiences shape the effectiveness of inclusive initiatives. Prioritizing students' voices is essential for higher education institutions to fulfil their role in fostering environments where inclusion becomes a true cultural legacy.

Moreover, Osborne (2019), and Vickerman and Blundell (2010) argue that effective support systems must consider students' experiences. Therefore, as a questionnaire phase of the study reveals, it is necessary to incorporate students' perspectives into language education to achieve a more inclusive education and meet the Council of Europe's requirements regarding language development, multilingualism, and social inclusion.

2.6. Research questions

This study investigates Italian University Language Centres affiliated with the Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari (AICLU). It combines a corpus-informed discourse analysis of English-language websites with questionnaire data collected from students at the University of Calabria. By integrating institutional representation and learner perception, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1) How are multilingualism and inclusion represented in the English-language websites of Italian University Language Centres?
- 2) To what extent do these representations foreground accessibility measures?
- 3) How do students perceive inclusivity within their language education experiences?
- 4) Where do alignments or mismatches emerge between institutional discourse and student expectations?

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

The present study adopts a mixed-methods design combining a corpus-informed discourse analysis of institutional websites with questionnaire data collected from students. The integration of institutional discourse and student perception allows for triangulation between representation and lived experience. The first phase examines how multilingualism and inclusion are represented in the English-language websites of Italian University Language Centres affiliated with AICLU. The analysis combines corpus tools with qualitative interpretation in order to identify patterns of meaning across institutional texts. More specifically, a targeted keyword approach, rather than a fully corpus-driven procedure, was adopted: selected lexical items associated with the core research themes, such as multilingualism, diversity, and inclusion, were intentionally chosen as representative analytical categories. Their occurrences were identified and calculated using Sketch Engine. In addition to frequency analysis, concordance lines were examined to investigate the contextual use, co-textual patterns, and discursive framing of these terms across the corpus. By identifying recurring lexical patterns, thematic clusters, and discursive choices, the analysis explores the ways in which universities frame and promote their values and identities.

The second phase draws on questionnaire responses from students enrolled in language courses at the University of Calabria in order to investigate their perceptions of language provision, accessibility, and inclusion. The two phases are complementary. Website analysis provides insight into institutional self-representation, while questionnaire data make it possible to compare that discourse with students' reported experiences and expectations.

3.1.1. AICLU Websites data collection

In the first phase, 51 Language Centres affiliated with AICLU were examined. This involved collecting web data from these Language Centres to identify the content sections of the websites, such as about us, news, placement tests, international relations, offered language courses, certification services, and affordances for inclusivity like audio versions of websites or other accessibility options for the visually impaired. The methodology comprised three distinct steps: manual web data collection, automated text collection for corpus compilation, and subsequent textual analysis. Among these, 24 centres provided English-language versions of their websites that were suitable for analysis. The decision to focus on English-language versions was motivated by two factors: (1) English pages typically address international audiences and therefore reflect strategic

institutional positioning; (2) they provide a comparative lens for examining how multilingual and inclusive values are framed in a lingua franca context.

A quantitative approach was used to compare information density and term occurrences. An automated text-collection was carried out to compile a specialised corpus which included 149,454 tokens and 8,799 types. A subsequent qualitative analysis investigated lexical strategies and compared the Italian and English website versions. The objective was not to produce statistical generalisation but to identify discursive patterns and priorities in institutional self-representation.

3.1.2. Questionnaire study

In the second phase, the questionnaire was administered to students enrolled at the University of Calabria, with 181 students participating. Data collection took place in May 2025 during class sessions, and participants completed a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The sample was composed of 73% Bachelor and 27% Master students. The participants belonged to different academic backgrounds, with the largest groups coming from Computer Engineering (46%), followed by Political Science (15%), Electronic Engineering (12%), Public Administration (9%), Media Studies (8%), Primary Education (3%), and 7% was not specified. The questionnaire was organized into five sections: general information, course offerings and accessibility, inclusivity and representation, personal experience and needs, and future perspectives. It combined Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice items, ranking tasks, and open-ended questions. The inclusion of qualitative responses enabled deeper insight into students' lived experiences and perceptions. Quantitative responses were analysed descriptively to identify trends in preferences and perceptions. Open-ended responses were coded thematically using inductive categorisation. Emerging themes were grouped into broader dimensions: interaction and participation, accessibility and infrastructure, multilingual expansion, flexibility and scheduling, cultural and intercultural engagement. This mixed analysis allows both numerical tendencies and nuanced perspectives to inform interpretation.

4. Results

4.1. Website and corpus analysis

Based on the 24 AICLU centres, Figure 1 illustrates differences in information density between the Italian (IT) and English (EN) versions of their websites across key institutional sections. Information density was operationalised through a binary coding procedure based on the presence (yes) or absence (no) of specific informational sections on the websites. The frequency with which each section appeared across Italian and English versions was then compared. The data shows a consistent pattern. In fact, Italian-language versions display substantially greater informational coverage across nearly all sections. The most evident discrepancies emerge in structurally significant areas such as courses, placement tests, international certifications, international relations (e.g., Erasmus), and timetables. These sections, which relate directly to academic organisation and service provision, contain considerably more detailed information in Italian. By contrast, the English-language versions appear more condensed and selective. On the one hand, core institutional identity sections, such as about us sections, are relatively well represented in both languages; on the other, operational and procedural content tends to be abbreviated in English. Dynamic sections, such as news and events, show greater discrepancies, suggesting less alignment in promotional communication. This distribution suggests differentiated audience targeting. Italian versions seem to be oriented towards internal users, such as domestic students and staff, requiring detailed operational information. English versions, conversely, function primarily as international gateways, prioritising visibility and general institutional presentation over procedural depth. From a discourse perspective, the asymmetry in information density may also reflect implicit hierarchies in communicative investment. While multilingualism is institutionally promoted, the reduced depth of English-language content raises questions about the extent to which multilingual accessibility is fully operationalised in digital practice. The findings therefore support the interpretation that multilingual representation, although symbolically foregrounded, may not always translate into equivalent informational accessibility across languages.

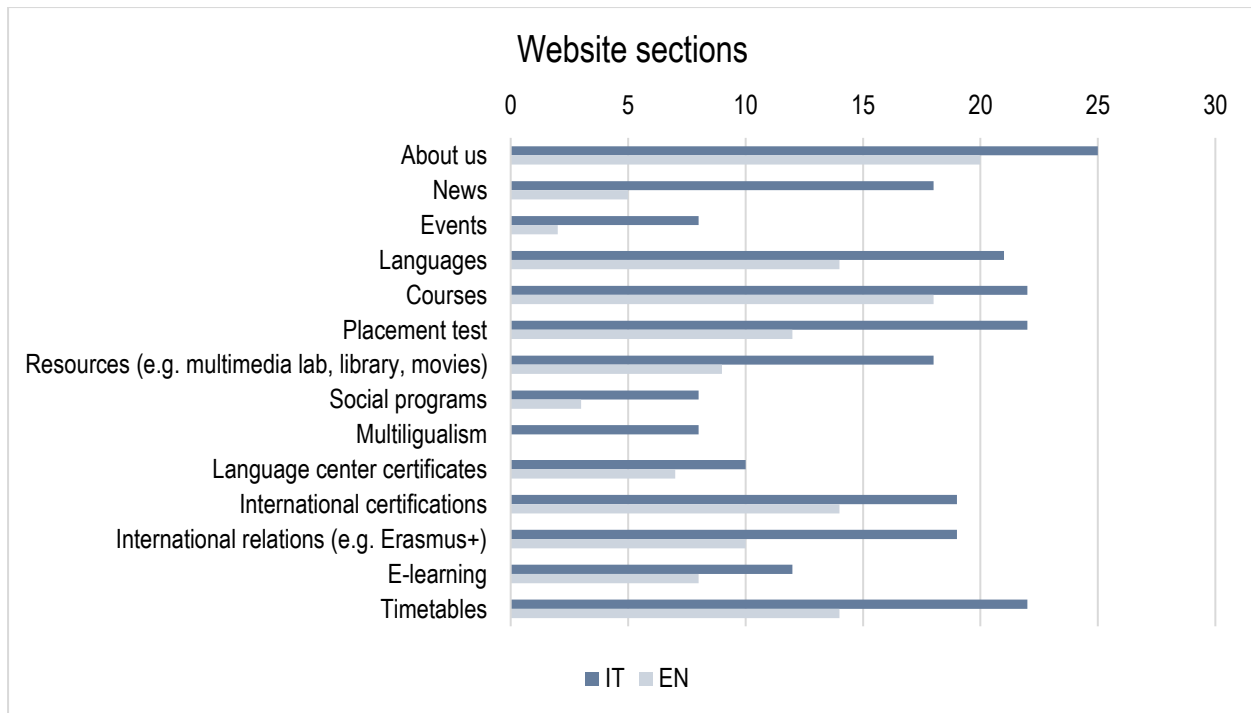


Figure 1. Information density – AICLU (Italian and English versions)

The corpus-informed analysis, based on the English-language corpus compiled from the institutional texts of the 51 Language Centre websites, revealed a significant gap in the terminology related to the project's core values, as shown in Table 1. The keyword analysis was not corpus-driven; rather, it followed a targeted approach in which specific lexical items, such as multilingualism, diversity, and inclusion, were intentionally selected as representative indicators of the study's core research themes. The occurrences of these items were subsequently identified and calculated using Sketch Engine. In addition, concordance lines were examined to analyse the contextual use and discursive framing of the selected terms across the corpus. For instance, the term "multilingualism" is mentioned only four times across three centres, and "diversity" appears only once. Nevertheless, as shown in the examples below, reference to multilingualism is framed as a contribution to European integration, a response to global mobility, a mechanism for intercultural dialogue, and a pathway to recognized qualifications. References to "less widely spoken languages" indicate alignment with European policy objectives aimed at linguistic equity. Some websites explicitly highlight workshops on intercomprehension across Romance and Germanic languages, positioning Language Centres as innovative and collaborative spaces.

- 1) The CLA also does workshops on Intercomprehension: multilingual conversations, IC across romance languages, IC across Germanic languages, and IC across both romance and Germanic languages together.
- 2) The proposed program aims to strengthen communicative skills in Italian, develop soft skills, and promote collaboration in multilingual and multicultural contexts through the completion of a project work: students will be divided into groups, each composed of participants from different languages and cultures.
- 3) In a multicultural Europe, which is characterized by a wide variety of languages and institutions; it is important to develop recognised qualifications in the language sector.
- 4) Intercomprehension fosters diversity, multilingualism, respect of difference and well-being.

Table 1
Data-informed analysis

Items	Occurrences	N° LCs
Multilingual	4	2
Multilingualism	4	3
Multicultural	2	2
Plurilingualism	5	3
Diversity	1	1
Disability	33	9
Disabled	5	3

On the other hand, references to disability were more prominent, with 33 occurrences across nine Centres. Moreover, the data shows that Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) is the most frequently mentioned inclusive measure (24%) out of 51 Language Centres, while mentions of hearing disabilities (4%) and visual impairments (4-6%) are very limited. These occurrences are typically embedded within procedural contexts, such as examination accommodations, legal compliance references (e.g., “Law 104/1992”) and administrative instructions for requesting support.

Table 2
Accessibility features across 51 Language Centres

Accessibility	AICLU
Accessibility for visual impairment	6%
Age inclusivity	2%
Audio version of website	4%
Autism spectrum disorder	2%
Disability (physical)	16%
Emotional support	0
Ethnicity	2%
Facilities	0
Hearing disability	4%
LGBTQI+	4%
Peace	0
SLD (Specific Learning Disorders)	24%
Visual impairment	4%
None	65%

In addition, the qualitative analysis found that some Centres explicitly state the procedural guidelines that are applied to facilitate inclusion. Qualitative extraction from the corpus shows specific inclusivity procedures. For example, disabled students are expected to inform the centre at least two months before they take an exam to receive supplementary assistance. Support for Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) results in the provision of a 30% extension of their exam time; students with other disabilities may receive a 50% extension and even financial support if their disability has been assessed to be in the range of 66 per cent or above, as shown in the following examples:

- 5) Candidates with disabilities who require additional aids or time to take the exam must notify the CLA at the time of booking and in any case at least two months before the date of the exam.
- 6) Financial benefits are provided to participants with disabilities equal to or greater than 66% and/or with disabilities ascertained in accordance with Article 3 of Law 104/1992.
- 7) Students with disabilities or SLDs Students with disabilities or with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) must contact SLAM through the InformaStudenti Service in order to receive special arrangements and support for the test (students with disabilities: 50% more extra time; students with SLDs: 30% more extra time).

However, inclusive pedagogy is less visible in the reviewed English-language webpages. Explicit reference to universal design principles, inclusive classroom methodologies, proactive accessibility planning, and representation of diversity in course content appear less frequently. Therefore, while accessibility measures are present, they are framed in terms of student support service and accommodation. Overall, English-language pages tend to emphasise internationalisation and certification more strongly than accessibility measures. This suggests strategic audience targeting: international mobility and language credentials are foregrounded for global visibility, whereas inclusion may be perceived as internally regulated and therefore less prominently showcased.

4.2. Questionnaire administration

The questionnaire results, based on responses from all 181 participants, indicate that 77 respondents had enrolled in at least one language course, with 95% of these students selecting English. This confirms the central role of English within the Language Centre's offerings. Nevertheless, a smaller number of students reported studying other languages, including Italian (6 students), Spanish (3), Japanese (2), Chinese (2), and French (1). Although these figures remain limited compared to English enrolment, they suggest the presence of broader linguistic interests extending beyond dominant language provision. Overall, most respondents rated the clarity of online information as high. However, 19% reported encountering barriers when accessing information or services. Technological barriers were mentioned most frequently (24 references), followed by linguistic barriers (12 references) and physical barriers (8 references). These findings suggest that, despite generally positive evaluations, access challenges persist for a notable proportion of students. As regards representation and inclusion, 52% of respondents felt that courses reflected the diversity of students' backgrounds. Nevertheless, only 39% agreed that teaching materials were inclusive in terms of ethnicity, gender, and nationality, while 55% expressed no clear opinion on this issue. Awareness of disability support services also appeared limited: 41% of students were unsure whether such services were available, and 27% reported having no knowledge of them. Taken together, these results reveal both positive perceptions and significant gaps in visibility and awareness concerning inclusive provisions. However, the questionnaire did not collect information regarding participants' disability status. Therefore, it cannot be established whether this lack of awareness concerned students who might actively require such accommodations or students for whom the information may not have been perceived as immediately relevant.

Similarly, in the qualitative feedback, students report mixed experiences regarding inclusivity. Positive experiences include professors using gender-inclusive language, encouragement of participation in class, and respect for diverse perspectives, as indicated in the following examples:

- 8) The course encouraged participation from all students and valued diverse perspectives.
- 9) Perhaps the methods of execution of the activities (technologies available in the lab, tasks accessible to all on the basis of their own needs).
- 10) I think the element that was inclusive was that the course of Italian was available for everyone who wants to join.

- 11) The professor was very inclusive in terms of gender inclusivity, starting from the type of language used in class and the topic talked.
- 12) I'm not sure if there was an elevator in the building where lessons were given. If not, this would certainly be an exclusive element for all people with disabilities or with specific needs.

These responses indicate that inclusion is sometimes realised at the micro-pedagogical level, particularly through teacher practices. However, concerns emerged regarding limited interaction in laboratory sessions, physical accessibility of buildings, and insufficient clarity regarding available support services. Notably, some students expressed uncertainty about the presence of elevators or structural accommodations, suggesting that the presence of accessibility measures was not always clear within the university environment.

Within the multilingual and personal involvement perspectives, the need for increased interaction was a dominant theme across the responses. In general, learners reported feeling moderately prepared for multicultural communication, as reflected in their self-assessment ratings (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Students' readiness for communication in multicultural and international contexts.

However, students requested more speaking skills practice, opportunities to converse with native or international speakers, and smaller, discussion-based formats (examples 9 and 10). Flexibility also emerged as a key demand. Several participants suggested open or modular scheduling, allowing students to choose attendance times according to personal needs (example 11). This reflects a broader shift toward learner-centred expectations, as highlighted in the examples below:

- 13) Interact more to practise more in speaking.
- 14) Smaller groups.
- 15) English lessons should not be scheduled in a specific date/time but would be better if there are open lessons during the week and the student choose when participate based on their needs.

However, their primary motivations for enrolling in a language course were academic requirements (124 responses) and professional development (71 responses), as illustrated in Figure 3.

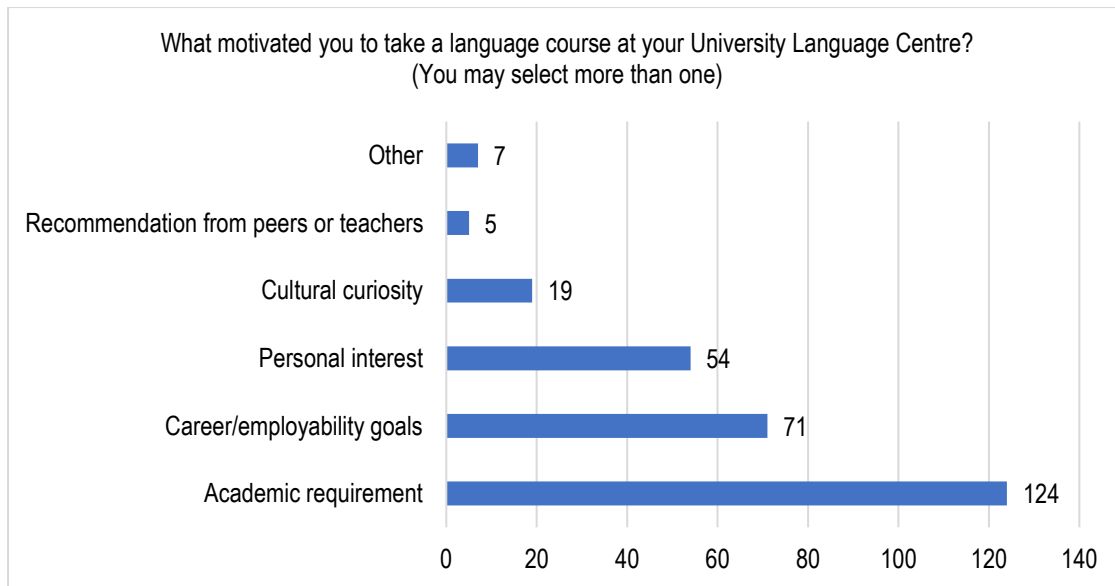


Figure 3. Students' motivation

Nevertheless, in the open-ended questions related to how language education at their university could become more inclusive or better reflect a multicultural society, students suggested increasing the variety of language courses, including less commonly taught languages and offering more courses and materials in different languages, particularly English. In addition, they highlighted the importance of promoting multilingualism through the organization of more multicultural events and meetings with international students, encouraging cultural exchanges and using materials and examples from diverse cultures, including discussions of topics such as cultural identity, migration, and social justice, as shown in the following examples:

- 16) I think that if the university promotes multilingualism and inclusivity through languages programs, there are many opportunities for students to improve their skills in an international society.
- 17) Preparing more programs and events for language learning and make it accessible for learners.
- 18) Language education could be more inclusive by using materials from diverse cultures and encouraging students to share their own backgrounds. This would make the learning environment more reflective of a multicultural society.
- 19) Less common or minority languages could be included in the curriculum, teacher training on issues related to inclusion and cultural diversity could be increased, and extracurricular activities such as language tandems or intercultural events could be encouraged.

Moreover, students expressed strong interest in expanding the range of languages offered, organising intercultural events, establishing language tandems, and supporting refugees and non-traditional learners. Interestingly, inclusion is framed not solely in terms of disability but as multicultural enrichment. Students view multilingualism and inclusivity as interconnected dimensions of personal and academic growth. In fact, several responses highlighted the importance of translating websites and documents into multiple languages, considering allowing exams to be taken in students' native languages and improving teacher training on inclusion and cultural diversity. This suggests that digital accessibility and linguistic inclusivity are perceived as indicators of institutional openness. Students' emphasis on communication transparency reinforces the importance of website discourse as a site of institutional credibility.

As part of the questionnaire, students were invited to rank a selection of languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, Japanese, and Italian Sign Language) according to their preference for future study at the university language centre. The ranking results reveal a strong preference for

English as the most desired language of study, with a markedly higher number of first-place rankings compared to all other languages. Spanish emerges as the second most preferred option, receiving the highest number of second-place rankings and maintaining relatively strong positioning across the upper ranks. French and German also show consistent mid-to-high preferences, suggesting sustained interest in major European languages. In the open-ended questions, the vast majority of respondents indicated that no additional languages were desired; however, Spanish and Japanese were the most frequently suggested. In contrast, languages such as Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, and Italian Sign Language are more frequently positioned in lower-ranking categories, indicating a more limited immediate demand for formal curricular enrollment. However, their distribution across multiple ranking levels points to a notable niche interest rather than complete marginalisation, suggesting that students recognize their value outside of purely instrumental or professional motivations. Overall, the data reflect a predominantly Eurocentric and instrumental orientation in language preferences, with English clearly occupying a dominant position. These findings align with earlier questionnaire results highlighting academic and professional motivations as primary drivers of language course enrolment.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal a tension in the representation of multilingualism across Italian University Language Centres. At a policy level, multilingualism is widely recognised within European higher education frameworks as a strategic objective associated with mobility, internationalisation, and linguistic diversity (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2022; Keeling, 2006). However, the institutional discourse analysed in this study presents a more complex picture. Although multilingual practices are visible through the provision of English-language webpages and references to international communication, explicit references to multilingualism as a pedagogical or ideological commitment remain relatively limited within the corpus. The low frequency of terms such as multilingualism and plurilingualism suggests that linguistic diversity may be enacted operationally rather than articulated discursively. The integration of corpus findings and student responses highlights both alignment and dissonance between institutional narratives and lived educational realities.

Through the examination of AICLU websites, it appears clear that, despite the role of University Language Centres (ULCs) as hubs for linguistic diversity, their online presence does not reflect the theoretical values of plurilingualism. The limited visibility of multilingual terminology suggests that Language Centres tend to foreground functional and service-oriented communication rather than explicitly articulate broader multilingual ideologies. This result indicates that ULCs tend to make themselves visible by functional content, including course listing and placement tests, but not by clearly promoting an ideology of language diversity. Also, the fact that not all 51 centres have an English version of their websites is rather a serious obstacle to equal access to information among international students and immigrants. Indeed, multilingualism should be framed as a strategic asset associated with mobility, employability, intercultural dialogue, and European integration. The use of terms such as plurilingualism, inter-comprehension, and multicultural Europe positions Language Centres as active contributors to supranational linguistic agendas. The aspirational and future-oriented framing of multilingual initiatives suggests that linguistic diversity is leveraged as part of universities' internationalisation strategies. This interpretation aligns with Keeling (2006), who argues that European higher education institutions increasingly negotiate tensions between internationalisation agendas and commitments to linguistic diversity. Similarly, Argondizzo (2015) highlights the strategic role of University Language Centres in mediating between institutional visibility and multilingual educational objectives. Yet this operational multilingualism appears to coexist with a strong centrality of English. English-language websites function primarily as institutional gateways for international audiences, while broader forms of multilingual diversity receive less explicit attention. This reveals a tension between multilingual accessibility understood as translation and international visibility, and multilingualism understood as a broader commitment to linguistic plurality.

In contrast, references to disability and accessibility exhibit a different discursive pattern. Rather than being integrated into mission statements or pedagogical philosophies, disability-related content is predominantly located in procedural or regulatory sections. The concordance analysis shows that terms such as disability and SLD are strongly collocated with extra time, notification, law, and certification. This suggests that inclusion is framed primarily as compliance with legal frameworks and not as a transformative educational principle. While procedural accommodations are indispensable, their discursive isolation may signal that

inclusion remains peripheral to the core identity of Language Centres. The distinction between procedural accommodation and broader pedagogical inclusion reflects wider debates in inclusive education, particularly between reactive support models and systemic approaches designed to anticipate learner diversity. This finding resonates with scholarship in disability studies (Baglieri, 2017; Meyer et al, 2014; Oliver, 2013), which distinguishes between accommodation-based models and systemic redesign approaches. An accommodation model responds to individual needs within an unchanged structure; a systemic model rethinks educational design to anticipate diversity. The analysed websites appear to reflect the former more than the latter. Importantly, this does not imply the absence of inclusive practices. To some extent, it indicates limited discursive integration of inclusion into institutional identity. In digital self-representation, what is foregrounded communicates priority. The relative marginality of inclusive pedagogy compared to multilingual promotion may inadvertently suggest that inclusion is secondary.

Questionnaire findings revealed a substantial awareness gap concerning support services. Such results suggest that the targeted student population is not being addressed through effective institutional communication strategies, which is why it is necessary to redesign the delivery of inclusive practices. Previous research similarly emphasises that effective support systems depend not only on the provision of accommodations but also on students' awareness and perceptions of accessibility practices (Fuller et al., 2004; Osborne, 2019). It appears that learners perceive inclusion less in terms of formal accommodations and more in terms of interaction, flexibility, and participation. This distinction is important because the present study does not treat multilingualism and disability as equivalent categories, but rather as interconnected dimensions of learner diversity within higher education. While formal accommodations for students with disabilities or specific learning disorders remain essential, inclusion may also be understood more broadly as the capacity of institutions to recognise and respond to diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational needs. In this perspective, multilingualism becomes relevant not only as a language policy objective but also as part of a wider framework of accessibility and participation. This broader understanding of inclusion aligns with socio-cultural perspectives that conceptualise language practices as socially situated and embedded in participation processes (Lantolf, 2006; Li, 2018). Both multilingual and accessibility-oriented practices raise similar questions concerning visibility, access to information, participation, and institutional responsiveness. In this sense, inclusion is perceived as the opportunity to actively participate, the possibility of adapting learning paths, the recognition of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and the creation of socially meaningful learning environments. This interpretation is consistent with studies highlighting the importance of students' lived experiences and participation in shaping inclusive educational environments (Osborne, 2019; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). Importantly, the findings suggest that students may increasingly consider language learning as extending beyond purely academic or instrumental needs and encompassing broader forms of personal and intercultural engagement. High levels of interest in initiatives such as intercultural communication workshops, peer language exchange (Tandem learning), and language support for refugees or asylum seekers indicate that students value opportunities for social interaction and cross-cultural participation alongside formal language learning. Although these findings do not directly demonstrate that learners conceptualise languages as socially embedded repertoires, they suggest that language learning may be understood not solely as the acquisition of isolated competencies but also as a means of engaging with diverse communities and experiences. In this respect, the findings can be considered in relation to Rampton's (2019) conceptualisation of multilingual repertoires as socially situated and biographically shaped. Interestingly, positive accounts of inclusion often refer to individual teachers' practices rather than institutional structures. Gender-inclusive language use, encouragement of diverse perspectives, and participatory classroom dynamics are highlighted at the micro level. This suggests that inclusive practices may be more visible in pedagogical interactions than in institutional discourse.

Based on the questionnaire findings, it may be assumed that a potential pedagogical shift is emerging, as reflected in several recurring patterns identified through the interpretation of students' responses. First, students appeared to express a need for greater interaction and flexibility in language learning. Such expectations reflect broader shifts toward learner-centred and socially interactive approaches to language education, in which autonomy and participation are considered central components of learning (Little, 1999, 2000). Many reported a preference for more open and participatory lessons and highlighted the importance of opportunities for direct language use, rather than relying primarily on passive laboratory-based activities with limited interaction. Second, responses suggested that technological support plays an important role in shaping accessibility and learning experiences. Although some students appreciated the use of inclusive language by lecturers, technological barriers were frequently identified as obstacles to access, indicating a possible need for

more effective and better-integrated digital tools within language learning environments. Third, students' responses appeared to reveal an interest in broadening linguistic opportunities beyond dominant language offerings. Less widely taught and minority languages attracted attention, while peer-led initiatives such as Tandem learning and intercultural workshops seemed to be increasingly valued. The findings suggest that learners' perspectives may play a crucial role in rethinking language education in more equitable and inclusive ways and indicate the need for professionals working within University Language Centres to engage with emerging educational paradigms. Institutions should therefore strengthen efforts related to social inclusion, the reduction of discrimination, and the development of intercultural communication competences. These findings also resonate with Universal Design perspectives, which advocate proactive and flexible educational environments capable of responding to diverse learner profiles rather than relying exclusively on individual accommodations (Moore, Rose, & Meyer, 2002; Burgstahler, 2015). Ultimately, fostering an inclusive academic community requires institutional strategies that respond to learners' needs, particularly for those preparing to work in increasingly multicultural contexts.

Furthermore, the students' emerging interest in Italian Sign Language (LIS), although representing a niche demand compared to dominant languages, reflects a qualitative shift in how linguistic diversity is perceived. Aligning with the theoretical framework of multimodal translanguaging discussed earlier, the recognition of sign language highlights a growing awareness that inclusion is not merely about procedural accommodations for disabilities. Instead, it involves embracing visual-spatial modalities as enriching semiotic resources for the entire academic community. By integrating sign language into their broader multilingual strategies, Language Centres could tangibly demonstrate their commitment to Universal Design for Learning, successfully bridging the gap between passive accommodation and transformative, student-centred pedagogy.

The integration of findings reveals what may be described as a discursive-experiential gap. Institutions discursively prioritise multilingualism as a strategic and symbolic asset. Inclusion, particularly disability-related inclusion, is addressed administratively. Students, however, articulate expectations that extend beyond both domains toward a holistic, student-centred model. This gap does not necessarily indicate institutional failure. To some degree, it reflects transitional dynamics within higher education. Language Centres historically focused on language proficiency and certification. However, contemporary learners increasingly expect language education to be flexible, participatory, socially responsive, technologically integrated, and culturally dynamic. The shift from standardised language instruction to inclusive, student-centred paradigms signals an emerging educational transformation. Language Centres are positioned at the forefront of this shift due to their cross-disciplinary and intercultural functions.

Overall, the findings suggest several implications. Hence, inclusion should be embedded within mission statements and pedagogical descriptions, and not confined to procedural sections. This means that Language Centres could adopt universal design principles, proactively framing diversity as an expected norm rather than an exception requiring adjustment. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to clearer and more accessible communication about available services in order to enhance perceived inclusivity. The future of Language Centres may lie in repositioning themselves not merely as certification providers but as hubs of socially responsive language education to respond to students' demand for minority languages and intercultural activities that broaden linguistic diversity.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how multilingualism and inclusion are represented in the English-language websites of Italian University Language Centres and how these representations align with student perceptions. Through a mixed-methods approach integrating corpus-informed discourse analysis and questionnaire data, the research provides a multidimensional view of institutional positioning and learner experience.

The study concludes that the Italian University Language Centres are at a crossroads between traditional conceptions of language teaching and an increasing demand of socially sensitive, inclusive education. The results of the AICLU website analysis and student survey point to the fact that the digital identity of the institutions and the real requirements of the student population differ significantly. Though theoretically, ULCs are designed to be a means of multilingualism and social-cultural awareness, and the limited number of terms in the corpus such as multilingualism and diversity indicate that these centres are more likely to position themselves as service-oriented rather than ideologically oriented. Moreover, the study reveals that there is a sharp disparity in the awareness of inclusion; students with disabilities and learning disorders may benefit from available support measures, but most students are not aware of them. This highlights the need for higher

education institutions to be strategically responsible when communicating such services, ensuring that students' right to equal access to information is fully achieved.

To this end, students' views are a crucial guide in redesigning language education. They are demanding a transition to more flexible, interactive learning environments with greater emphasis on speaking skills and the incorporation of new technologies. The emerging qualitative interest in Italian Sign Language (LIS) and peer-led programs such as Tandem learning indicates a need to make language education a means of personal multicultural development rather than a mere academic challenge. Although LIS may currently represent a niche demand compared to English or Spanish, its recognition by students emphasizes a broader shift towards valuing multimodality and interconnected linguistic repertoires. In this context, students call for increased interaction, flexible learning structures, expanded language offerings, and greater visibility of support systems. Inclusion, from their perspective, is relational, participatory, and culturally embedded.

To conclude, the study suggests that the future of language education is one which acknowledges the complexity of our globalized world, bridging the gap between institutional mission and the multi-faceted reality of the modern student population. It highlights a discursive-experiential gap between institutional self-representation and learner expectations. Addressing this gap requires integrating inclusive values more centrally into both communication practices and pedagogical design. As higher education becomes increasingly diverse, University Language Centres must navigate evolving demands and reimagine their role within socially responsive educational ecosystems. By foregrounding both institutional discourse and student voices, this research contributes to scholarship on multilingualism, inclusive higher education, and the evolving identity of University Language Centres. Future research may extend this analysis to comparative European contexts or incorporate longitudinal data to examine how discursive shifts translate into structural transformation.

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