1st REPORT
JUNE 2025

Unleashing second-language learning

Bilingov
Bilingual through Improv

No inhibjtions, just play!

Project Baseline

AURION ITALY
desincoop PORTUGAL
globers SPAIN

Funded by the European Union

Partners

AURION

is a social enterprise based in Verona, Italy. AURION trains teachers to adopt play based methodologies, helping them engage learners and make them feel seen, valued and connected. This leads to a more impactful and sustainable learning experience.

DESINCOOP

is a cooperative based in Guimaraes, Portugal that promotes economic, social, educational, and cultural initiatives through innovative and inclusive solutions. It supports people at risk of social exclusion due to ethnicity, age, gender, or disability.

GLOBERS

is a non-profit organization based in Roda de Barà, Tarragona, Spain. Globers fosters societal improvement through education, training, volunteering, and active citizenship. Their work is particularly targeted at young people in fragile circumstances.

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Funded by the European Union

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Abstract

More Engaging, Meaningful, Impactful Lessons for Adult Learners

BILINGOV (short for “Bilingual through Improv”) is a European collaboration project aimed at empowering adult language educators (second or foreign languages) by introducing innovative, engaging, and accessible methodologies. The heart of the project lies in one simple but powerful idea: l**earning is more effective when it’s engaging, personal, and meaningful, when it’s based on play and on activities that involve the whole person and the entire group.** By using drama techniques and improvisational games, learners break down psychological barriers, build confidence, and retain language more naturally.

BILINGOV’s goal therefore is to help teachers overcome their barriers and embrace these teaching techniques with confidence and openness.

Who’s Behind the Project?

BILINGOV is powered by a diverse team of European partners:

Aurion s.r.l. (Italy)
Desincoop (Portugal)
Globers (Spain)

Final Outcome

BIILINGOV runs from September 2024 to August 2026 and is organised into 4 Work Packages (WP), corresponding to the main steps of the project.

The final outcome will be a manual including an analysis of needs and the state of the art, a proposed methodological approach, lessons learned from the pilots and recommendations for successful implementation. The Manual will be a practical tool, allowing anyone who teaches languages to adults to implement play-based classes, or to incorporate play in their activities.

> *“a practical tool, allowing anyone who teaches languages to adults to implement play-based classes*

Impact

Teachers will find tools to make their lessons more engaging, meaningful and impactful. They will receive support in line with the needs expressed both by teachers and by learners. Most of all, they shall receive instructions that help them adopt play based techniques and drama games even if they do not have any direct experience of drama, improv and theater. A medium and long-term feedback system will allow BILINGOV to optimise and continue developing the methodology.

Team

Letizia Quaranta has over 15 years of experience teaching English to young children and has developed a unique methodology, Learn with Mummy, that actively involves parents in the learning process. She is also a teacher trainer and an improviser, and is among the few Europeans trained in the Spolin methodology. Her work focuses on breaking down the barriers that prevent educators from fully embracing play as a powerful professional tool.

Nazareth Peral is a dedicated youth worker, social entrepreneur, and project manager with extensive experience in international cultural exchanges and social entrepreneurship. She co-founded Educa y Cine, a social enterprise, and is Project Manager for Tabala, a Spanish non-profit cultural association. Nazareth oversees EU projects and community workshops that foster intercultural collaboration. With a Master's in Business Administration and a strong commitment to non-formal education, she empowers communities through strategic planning and sustainable development initiatives.

Luísa Oliveira studied Philosophy, but the passion for Social Work finally prevailed and led to a postgraduate specialisation in Intercultural Relations, later, Public Health and the International Master's in Humanitarian. She worked internationally as a human rights representative for Médecins du Monde and as a national volunteer for UNICEF. In the past 43 years, she has been involved with institutions and CSOs from Portugal and most EU countries. As a Desincoop founder, for over 20 years she has written, coordinated and implemented projects in various social fields under European and national grants.

Different paths, one purpose.
Three women committed to education and equality

timeline

WP1:
November 2024
May 2025

Needs and Best Practices

- Assessment of teachers' and learners' needs via surveys in 4 languages
- Research and analysis of best practices
- Portugal Study Visit

WP2:
June - November 2025

Proposal

- Proposal for methodology: Pre-Alpha manual
- 4 Surveys:
  - 2 of pre-assessment (teachers and learners)
  - 2 of assessment (teachers and learners)
- Spain Study Visit

WP3:
November 2025
May 2026

Testing

- 1 Pilot in each partner organisation of up to 10 sessions, engaging both students and learners
- Assessment, feedback, lessons learned
- BILINGOV Manual
- Italy Study Visit

WP4:
September 2024
August 2026

Dissemination

- Website, EPALE articles, blog, webinars, newsletters, local events, and BILINGOV Manual

We shared ideas, sparked each other's curiosity, and challenged one another in a space where we felt completely safe. We wish learning to be this joyful for every learner.

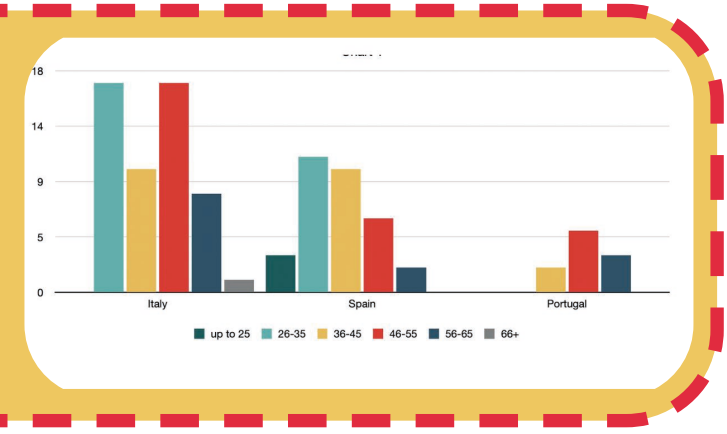
Analysis and Research

Understanding Learners' and Teachers' Needs to Formulate a Meaningful Proposal

Methodology and Data Collection

We created 2 surveys, one for learners and one for teachers and operators, both digital and multilingual (partner languages + English). The study's participants were 110 learners living in the three countries (Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and 96 teachers from different countries, as a result of sharing the survey on social media. The topics and questions of both surveys were organised in 3 parts: 1. understanding the subject's profile and experience in teaching or learning languages, 2. capturing their feelings about teaching and learning, 3. identifying the constraints and challenges for teachers and learners.

Unfortunately we did not manage to extract from the surveys all the information we were hoping for, we realised that it was not possible to re-assemble multiple-answers questions from surveys in different languages. We therefore recommend repeating the exercise in a follow-up project with a better design or a suitable tool. Nevertheless we found statistically relevant aspects when we analysed the responses country by country.



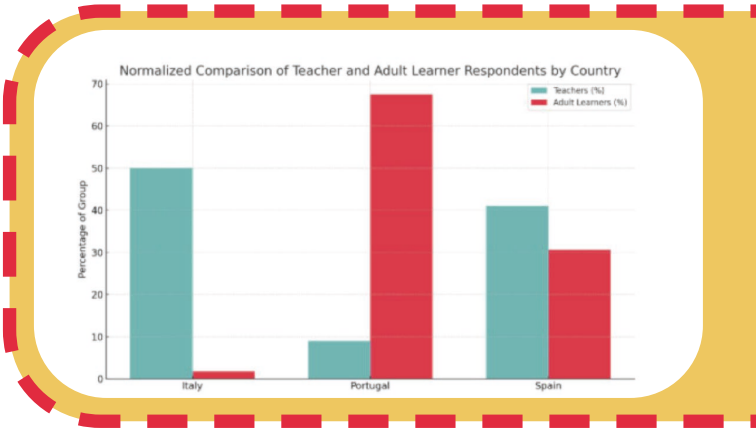
While Spain collected a balanced number of replies from learners and teachers, Italy collected mostly answers from teachers, and Portugal mostly from learners. This is a result of the partners' different networks and communication strategies, and indicates a possible imbalance in representation. It's worth noting that teachers and learners mostly come from separate groups (i.e. teachers do not teach the learners who answered the survey).

Profiles of Teachers and Adult Learners

Most teachers have a first-level higher education in language teaching (Bachelor's Degree), but many have specialised in different areas (Master's Degree). They mostly teach Italian (39%), Portuguese (5%), Spanish (13%) and English (23%), though other languages are also represented. They teach to a wide range of levels of proficiency in L2.

The teacher's age vary, Italy's teachers are on average older than Spain's.

Learners are in general very young, with more than 50% of Spain's cohort and 36% of Portugal's cohort being less than 25 yo. More than 80% of learners are less than 45 years old, which explains why they are mostly interested in learning more than 1 language. Almost all learners report knowing at least one second language.



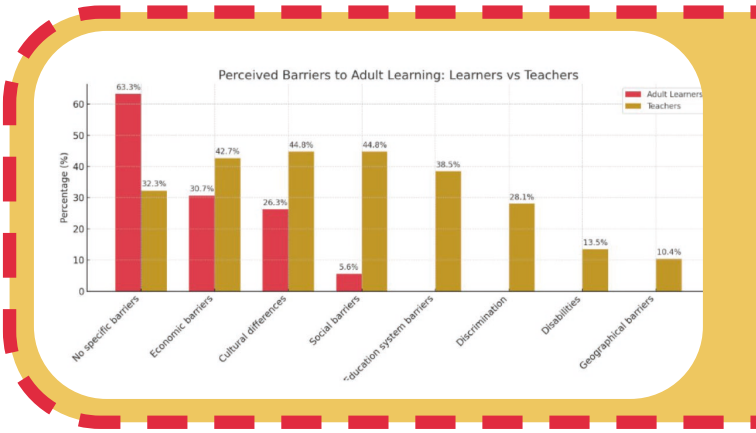
With the exception of a group of Spanish learners whose mother tongue is Spanish and who are learning English as a second language, the mother tongues of the learners are extremely diverse and multiple language groups are represented.

Barriers to Learning

Adult learners and teachers have very views of the barriers to learning.

While all Adult learners identify several personal barriers to learning (ranging from limited time available to limited access to quality materials and economic constraints, just to name a few), but for the vast majority, 63.3%, they say they don't face specific barriers. Yet only 32.3% of teachers say they don't work with disadvantaged groups.

Adult learners may underreport or underestimate barriers they face, possibly due to normalisation of challenges or limited self-awareness. Teachers, on the other hand, are more likely to identify economic and systemic barriers, possibly because they are aware of broader structural issues like income inequality, hidden costs, or a lack of resources.



Teachers perceive cultural differences as a greater challenge than learners themselves do. Social barriers (like exclusion, isolation, and lack of support) are vastly under-recognised by learners, suggesting a potential disconnect or lack of terminology/awareness to name these challenges.

This gap suggests the need for better dialogue and assessment tools to help adult learners recognise and articulate their challenges.

Teaching and Learning Challenges

Teachers and learners also identify different reasons why the lessons do not achieve the optimal learning outcome.

Learners mostly lament:

- Limited speaking opportunities
- Fear of making mistakes
- Difficulty applying learning in real life
- Decreased motivation
- Lack of personalised support
- Not enough time

Teachers on the other side report that difficulties lie in:

- Keeping student's attention
- Making the experience relevant to the learners
- The teacher's boredom because of repetitive lesson structures (mostly in Spain)
- Managing behaviours
- Creating opportunities for oral production (mostly in Italy)

Interpretation

Both teachers and learners identify that traditional teaching methods fail to engage the learners or to provide them with learning that is directly relevant to their daily life. Low motivation is an issue for both groups, probably because frontal teaching techniques see the learners as passive recipients of knowledge and are strongly dependent on text books, hence repetitive.

Conclusion:

The reported low effectiveness of methods, techniques and tools in traditional didactics reveals the need to introduce innovative approaches and the need for teachers training.

We think that learners' self-reported fear of making mistakes is very important, it should be brought to teachers' attention and should be specifically addressed.

Play based methodologies would improve both learner's engagement and motivation and increase their opportunities to practice speaking the language they are learning while at the same time making the lessons more fun and engaging also for the teachers. However it should be noted that class management is an issue for a relevant portion of teachers, hence this should be considered both in proposing activities and in organising training and instructions for the teachers.

Portugal Study Visit

Focused on Team Building, Collaboration, and Shared Work Experiences

During 3 days (March 31st to April 2nd), all partners met in Desincoop's facilities. The project promoter AURION and GLOBERS participated with two members from Italy and two from Spain. The hosting organisation also had two participants who welcomed their colleagues, meeting in person for the first time.

The arriving day was used to introduce the region, particularly the city of Guimarães, a historical city, considered the cradle of nationality. The Historic Centre of Guimarães has been on UNESCO's List of World Heritage Sites since 2001, the exceptional restoration and a consistent cultural programme also led to the city being named European Capital of Culture in 2012, European City of Sport in 2013 and European Green Capital 2026. This contextualisation, along with the quality of the University of Minho's training offer, is critical to understand why the city attracts newcomers of 101 nationalities.

The first day was dedicated to planning BILINGOV's communication, to discuss the results of the Learners' and Trainers' Surveys and to plan WP2 according to the Surveys' results. In the evening, Desincoop planned a meeting with learners and teachers of Portuguese as a Second Language at Francisco de Holanda School, and partners planned a practical activity to share with the project's target public.

Agrupamento de Escolas Francisco de Holanda (AEFH), Desincoop local partner, offers Portuguese for Speakers of Other Languages (PFOL) courses. PFOL aims to provide non-native speakers with the tools and knowledge they need to communicate in Portuguese, thus facilitating their integration and social inclusion. PFOL courses are attended by students from different nationalities and social backgrounds, promoting a meeting of cultures.

"I had a lovely time during the experience. It helped me get to know myself a little better

Florence

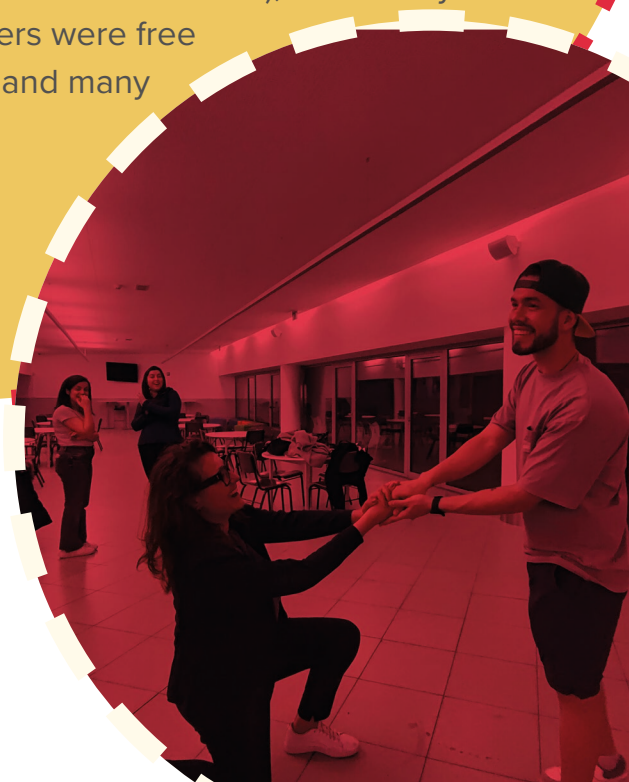
During the second day, partners discussed the main points observed in the school activity and reflected on the best practices encountered. Learning points concerned:

- the choice of the space where activities are held
- the importance of trusting the process
- the importance of supporting and engaging the teacher
- the need for a learning path
- the importance of turning the teacher into a facilitator and learners into allies
- the importance of the debriefing
- the use of tools to support participation of learners with limited proficiency

> *I really enjoyed the experience! We talked, exercised, danced, and laughed a lot. It was a fun and memorable time. What I enjoyed most was the positive energy and the chance to connect with others*
>
> **Benyamin**

21 learners and one Portuguese teacher participated in the activity at AEFH, which was so structured:

- A. Letizia Quaranta (AURION) led the whole group through 3 warm-up exercises of increasing linguistic complexity, all conducted entirely in Portuguese:
  - 1 warm up exercise, very energetic, with minimal language input, and performed by the whole group in unison
  - 1 exercise requiring no language but requiring every member of the group to share a sound and a gesture, and for the group to accept and repeat each proposal
  - 1 exercise requiring every member of the group to share a personal sentence (aided by gestures), and for the group to accept and repeat each proposal.
- B. Jorge Ruiz Conde (GLOBERS) led the whole group through the Revelation of Santa Teresa (see Best Practice #7), the activity was conducted in English but learners were free to participate in any language, and many chose to do so in Portuguese.



15 Best Practices

To Bring Joy and Engagement to Second-Language Teaching and Learning

> *"I liked that the group was from different countries, but we were able to connect during the activity*
>
> **Laila**

We conducted a Best Practice analysis in order to base our approach on proven methodologies.

We learned a lot from the experience, more than we expected, as we approached this analysis from very different points of views.

One partner brought to the table their best practices, i.e. techniques and methodology they already use in intercultural and multilingual environments. The other partners conducted a research of existing literature on the use of drama in second language teaching and acquisition.

We spoke about these different points of view at length and eventually we came to the following agreement:

- To choose practical, ready to implement, best practices
- To prioritise brevity over quantity

With this in mind, this is the selection of 15 Best Practices we chose to guide our work:

1. What's in the Box? Improv Game by NISE (National Informal Science Education)

Step-by-step guide for teachers to use a classic improv game, with suggestions for adapting it, ideal even for those with no improv experience.

2. Free Drama Games from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 2

We include this as an encouragement to teachers to bring children games to their classroom, for any ages, to boost engagement and language learning.

3. Big Foot Drama Game

A collection of games for older children with varied goals, emphasizing the value of physicality and concise instructions.

4. Augusto Boal's FORUM THEATRE for Teachers

Introductory guide to Boal's methods with simple, impactful games that support teacher practice, though some may need further explanation.

5. What Are You Doing? Improv Exercise by NISE

An adaptable, detailed improv activity ideal for language learning when paired with specific linguistic goals and instructions for the teacher.

6. Nonviolent Communication

Highlights the importance of emotional safety in play, offering communication tools to foster empathy and reduce judgment in classrooms.

7. Santa Teresa Revelation by Boal

A powerful activity that reshapes classroom dynamics and boosts learner engagement, highly recommended for teachers.

8. CON-SENSUAL – Performing Consent, Rejection & Connection
Games that explore safety within physical play, helping both learners and teachers set boundaries and build trust.

9. What's the Word for This? – Performing Emotions, Feelings, and Moods
Activities that build emotional awareness and a supportive group dynamic through expressive play.

10. Performing Hierarchies and the Nature of Power
Exercises that explore status and power dynamics, fostering inclusion and deeper learner participation.

11. Improvisation Theater Facilitation Guide
A practical manual on using improv to develop creativity, empathy, collaboration, and confidence in learning settings.

12. TOOLKIT: Improv Theatre for Non-Formal Education
A categorized collection of improv exercises aimed at youth work, focusing on skill-building through structured play.

13. A Theatre Experiment: A Research Paradigm for Second Language Learning?
Describes a study using gesture-enhanced play performance to support second language acquisition over seven weeks.

14. Exploring Learners' Perceptions Through Drama in Foreign Language Learning
Shares tested drama-based activities from secondary schools that helped students learn grammar and vocabulary collaboratively.

15. Theatre as a Means for Teaching a Second Language
Presents project-based activities where students research and perform fairy tales to deepen cultural and language learning.

Unleashing second-language learning

Tchau!

Bilingov
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