



S.P.A.R.K.L.E

INCLUSIVE LITERACY

What Works in the Classroom: Teachers' Good Practices for Inclusive Language Learning



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Good Practices Report from Language Teachers

The S.P.A.R.K.L.E. project aims at improving language learning opportunities for low-literate and illiterate refugees and migrants by promoting innovative teaching methods and the use of Easy-to-Read (ETR) materials. At the same time, the project seeks to empower teachers and educators working in this area by equipping them with practical tools, training, and support. Through collaboration across several countries, S.P.A.R.K.L.E. strives to create sustainable and wide-reaching impact in the field of inclusive language education.

In January, February, and March 2026, we held workshops with educators in Cyprus, France, Spain, and Italy to gather insights into their experiences in language teaching for migrants and refugees. Across six sessions, we engaged with 31 participants from diverse professional backgrounds, including language teachers, NGO volunteers, and intercultural mediators. They shared the challenges they face daily in multilingual and multicultural teaching contexts, their teaching practices, and their expectations for the future.

A key finding was their strong adaptability and intuitive ability to respond to learners' needs. While they are often able to overcome challenges independently, they would benefit significantly from more structured tools and support, allowing them to focus more fully on learners. This is precisely where S.P.A.R.K.L.E. aims to provide added value: by systematising existing good practices and transforming them into accessible, practical resources for educators.

Throughout the project, teachers' perspectives and experiences will form the foundation of our work. Their active involvement at every stage ensures the relevance and practical applicability of the outcomes, ultimately increasing the project's overall impact. Indeed, many of the practices shared during the workshops directly shaped discussions around the development of the S.P.A.R.K.L.E. syllabus, trainer toolkit, and practical user guide. In this sense, the project follows a participatory and practice-based approach, recognising teachers not simply as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of knowledge and innovation.

Good Practices Identified by Teachers

Our teachers across the partner countries provided us with an insight into their daily lives and how they already cope with challenges such as mixed-level classrooms, missing time, or a lack of resources. Interestingly, many of the approaches described by educators closely align with evidence-based and learner-centred pedagogies commonly discussed in language education literature, even when the teachers themselves did not explicitly refer to them by their formal names. Here is a collection of some of the good practices that they use and how this connects to our work:

Station Rotation (Cyprus): Four stations are set up for learners to practice different aspects of language learning, usually listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The stations can be adapted to learners' proficiency levels, focus on specific topics such as food or history, and integrate digital tools or other methodologies. Thanks to its flexibility, this activity can easily be implemented in different contexts and combined with additional teaching strategies.

This practice reflects differentiated instruction approaches, which emphasise adapting teaching methods and materials to diverse learner needs – a particularly important aspect in mixed-level migrant classrooms.

TPR (Total Physical Response) (Cyprus, France, Italy): This methodology combines movement with learning the language through the usage of short instructions like “open the door”. TPR is standing out for its easy accessibility, adaptability, and communicative approach, helping learners memorise vocabulary through physical action. The workshop at Ballafon's premises confirmed that TPR is used daily – "apri la porta, chiudi la porta" were common classroom commands. One key insight was that teachers in Cyprus expressed interest in extending TPR beyond basic classroom management and exploring more dramatic and embodied teaching approaches.

The widespread use of TPR across countries highlights the importance of multi-sensory learning approaches, especially for learners with limited literacy skills. By connecting movement, memory, and language, teachers intuitively support comprehension without relying exclusively on written text, making this a highly inclusive approach.

Communicative simulations (Cyprus, France, Italy, Spain): through simulations of everyday situations, the learners can practice their speaking and listening skills. Significantly, educators in all participating countries reported using highly similar communicative methods, despite working in different institutional and cultural environments. This suggests that experiential and communicative approaches naturally emerge as effective responses to the needs of low-literate migrant learners.

The focus is on active language usage, while mistakes are being put in the background. The simulations can go from simple small talk to more complex scenarios, such as a job interview. The high usage of these simulations has taught us how important real-life examples are for the learners and underlined the need to integrate simulations connected to employment, such as job interviews.

The workshop in Spain particularly highlighted an “oral-first” approach to teaching, where listening and repetition are prioritised before reading and writing activities,

creating an inclusive environment for people of all literacy levels. This aligns with communicative and acquisition-oriented theories of language learning, which stress meaningful interaction and oral exposure as key foundations for language development.

Task-based learning (Cyprus, France, Italy): This method involves having the students do simple tasks in their target language. e.g., ordering ice cream in a gelateria. This approach is highly valuable for learners due to its applicability to a wide range of real-life scenarios, increasing engagement through its strong relevance to the learners.

However, despite this relevance, a teacher in Italy noted that larger group sizes make it difficult to carry out activities outside the classroom. Cyprus teachers expressed a strong preference for group-based and task-based learning practices, emphasising that activities involving collaboration, problem-solving, and real-life scenarios were particularly effective.

Task-based learning is widely recognised in language pedagogy for promoting authentic communication and learner autonomy. The examples shared by teachers demonstrate how these principles are already being applied intuitively in practice.

Board games (Italy): One particularly appreciated approach shared by Italian teachers involved the use of simple and adaptable board games for vocabulary learning. One specific game mentioned was *Spazzle*, where students use picture cards and respond to prompts that can be adjusted depending on learners' proficiency levels.

The game stands out for its adaptability, reusability, and ability to support vocabulary acquisition through interaction and visual support. While more complex games were considered too time-consuming, simple formats proved highly effective.

This practice strongly connects with theories of gamification and playful learning, which suggest that games can increase learner motivation, participation, and emotional engagement. Importantly, teachers highlighted that games need to remain simple, flexible, and accessible to be effective in low-literacy contexts.

Songs (France, Italy): Teachers in France and Italy reported using songs to increase interest in the language and help learners get accustomed to its sound. Some songs are even used to help with specific grammatical phenomena. However, teachers noted that it can be difficult for A0–A2 learners to make out the words, making it hard for them to gain new vocabulary from this approach.

Despite these challenges, music remains an important emotional and cultural tool in language learning, helping create a more engaging and less intimidating classroom atmosphere.

Real-world print materials (Italy): Some teachers in Italy used supermarket brochures and pizza menus to connect vocabulary, short sentences, and pictures for easier memorisation. This approach helps with understanding local culture and food options while connecting pictures and vocabulary in a way that mirrors the Easy-to-Read approach. It further stands out for its easy accessibility, high relevance for everyday life, and the opportunity for learners to use the method at home. The use of authentic materials is also consistent with learner-centred teaching approaches, which emphasise meaningful and context-based language exposure.

Although the methods of Total Physical Response, the communicative approach/simulations, and task-based learning were mentioned across all countries, teachers did not explicitly use these terms to describe their practices. Instead, they appeared to apply these methods intuitively rather than as approaches formally learned or studied. This demonstrates that many evidence-based teaching approaches are already naturally embedded within educators' daily practice. Collectively, these activities emphasise interaction, accessibility, repetition, real-life communication, and adaptability – all core principles that will guide the development of S.P.A.R.K.L.E.'s educational resources.

In the end, all these practices are designed to be accessible since they do not require a lot of materials, thus making them perfect for underfunded programmes.

Digital Tools: Opportunities and Barriers

Digital tools are particularly relevant within discussions of innovative teaching methodologies because they can increase accessibility, learner engagement, flexibility, and opportunities for independent learning. At the same time, the workshops revealed that innovation does not simply depend on technology itself, but on how tools are adapted to the realities and needs of learners. The use of digital tools varied significantly across the four countries, with the highest level of integration reported in Cyprus.

The Cypriot educators reported extensive use of a wide range of digital tools in their teaching practice. For example, platforms such as **Quizlet** support vocabulary learning by enabling teachers to create flashcards that combine images and words tailored to the learner's needs. This approach aligns closely with the Easy-to-Read methodology we are using within the S.P.A.R.K.L.E project, as it reinforces the connection between visual and textual elements. Additionally, **YouTube** is

frequently used to enhance listening comprehension through exposure to authentic audio-visual content.

Certain platforms, such as **TikTok**, are perceived ambivalently. On the one hand, teachers express concerns about their potential contribution to reduced attention spans; on the other hand, features such as subtitles are seen as beneficial for language learning. Both TikTok and YouTube are standing out for their easy accessibility and the option for students to engage with them on their own terms.

While the use of digital tools was most prominent in Cyprus, educators in **France** and **Italy** also reported integrating them where possible. However, their use is often constrained by **limited resources** within the classrooms.

Gamification tools are widely used across contexts. In **Cyprus**, for instance, **Kahoot** is employed both as an application and via its online platform to create interactive language-learning games. These tools are valued for their high adaptability and their effectiveness in maintaining learner engagement. Similarly, educators in all countries reported using various forms of gamification to support learning. However, more complex games can be difficult to implement, and not all formats are equally adaptable to different learning needs. For S.P.A.R.K.L.E., this means moving beyond traditional teacher-centered instruction and creating learning experiences that actively engage and motivate learners to participate.

These findings reinforce S.P.A.R.K.L.E.'s emphasis on creating resources that are interactive, motivating, and adaptable, rather than relying exclusively on traditional teacher-centered (front-facing) teaching approaches.

In **France**, teachers highlighted the use of **TV5MONDE (FLE)**, a free online platform offering authentic video content for French language learning from A1 to C1/C2 levels. By combining visual and textual elements, it reflects principles similar to Easy-to-Read materials, demonstrating how educators are already applying comparable approaches in their teaching, even without formal terminology.

Google Maps (Italy) Some teachers are using Google Maps (or other digital maps) to teach the learners about their location in the country and give them the opportunity to find their home country. This task can then be combined by teaching vocabulary, e.g., North, close to. It can also be a way to connect with the students and have them open up more.

Beyond language learning itself, these activities also created moments of personal connection and storytelling, supporting trust-building and intercultural exchange within the classroom.

Across all contexts, the issue of the digital divide was highlighted, particularly at a very basic level. Educators noted that some learners lack fundamental digital skills, such as downloading applications or using translation tools, which further hinders the effective use of digital resources in the classroom.

In all countries, there is a clear interest in increasing the use of digital tools. However, teachers also emphasized several constraints and challenges, **including institutional restrictions (such as bans on smartphone use) and limited access to adequate technological resources within the classroom.**

Easy-to-Read Materials (Cyprus, France, Italy, Spain)

Although only two teachers in Spain explicitly referred to their practices as **Easy-to-Read (ETR)**, educators across all countries are already applying its principles in their teaching. These include simplifying sentence structures and vocabulary and using visual support to enhance comprehension. However, a key insight emerging from the workshops is that even Easy-to-Read approaches require further adaptation for completely illiterate learners. **Teachers consistently noted that, for some individuals, ETR materials remain too complex.**

This indicates that while the approach is already embedded in classroom practice, it could be further strengthened through S.P.A.R.K.L.E.'s teacher training and the development of more tailored ETR materials. **By supporting teachers in understanding and applying ETR methodologies more systematically, the project aims to increase educators' confidence in adapting texts and creating accessible learning environments.**

At the same time, educators highlighted the need for simplified versions of administrative forms and official documents. Such adaptations would better support migrants and refugees in navigating bureaucratic processes, while also benefiting other groups who struggle with complex language.

In **Spain**, additional practices were identified that extend beyond the classroom. For example, educators reported the creation of **Easy-to-Read reading clubs**, where participants who cannot read can listen to stories read aloud by others and engage in collective discussion. These non-formal, community-based spaces—often bringing together individuals with varying literacy levels, such as illiterate participants and those with limited reading habits—have proven particularly effective. The combination of listening and shared reflection fosters inclusion and encourages active participation, especially among those who have not attended school or lack established reading practices.

These initiatives further demonstrate how inclusive language learning extends beyond formal teaching and can contribute to social participation, confidence-building, and community engagement. **More broadly, these initiatives highlight the proactive efforts of teachers to develop adapted materials and inclusive methodologies, often compensating for limited systemic support.**

Emerg ed patterns:

There were many similarities among the four countries. These include the usage of evidence-based methods by the teachers, without necessarily being able to name them. This highlights that these methods are already intuitive for the teachers. The first step in each country is to teach orally first, often with a focus on essential topics for the migrants and refugees, to create a survival basis for them.

While the teachers mentioned many different games, the tool of gamification was central in all countries. For this, the games must be short, simple, and easily adaptable to several contexts.

Challenges:

Throughout the workshops, many challenges in teaching low-literate and illiterate refugees and migrants emerged. In all three countries, the teachers mentioned a **short attention span**, which necessitates a frequent change of activities and makes it difficult to integrate longer or more complex tasks. To adapt to this, the teachers mentioned using at least four different activities in a two-hour lesson.

Other struggles are the **lack of understanding or knowledge of classroom etiquette**. Therefore, before being able to do any teaching, the educators have to explain these aspects, which means there is less time to focus on language learning. This issue stems from a lack of formal education in their home for some learners, making this their first time experiencing a classroom.

Across all workshops, the teachers reported coping with mixed-level classrooms where learners with vastly different educational backgrounds are brought together. In some classrooms, the teachers mentioned having learners with a university degree next to someone who has never attended school. Similarly, the literacy levels vary, as well as the existing knowledge of the host country's language. This heterogeneity makes it challenging for teachers to prepare for the classes and to adjust to everyone's needs.

In Italy, a teacher noted that larger group sizes make it difficult to carry out activities outside the classroom. Teachers in Cyprus highlighted that teaching

methods were limited by a lack of resources, with one recalling that traditional tools like whiteboards were the only alternatives available. Teachers emphasised that teaching cannot follow a fixed structure – it must be continuously adapted in real time. This was further hindered by irregular attendance and the continuous arrival of new learners to the class.

One specific challenge arose in Spain. The teachers in our workshops are teaching Catalan; however, they reported a lack of available materials for teaching the language to adults. This led to one school creating its own materials called Oralfa. On the one hand, this indicates the great motivation and dedication of the teacher and school; on the other hand, it clearly highlights systematic problems in language teaching. It should not be on the schools or teachers to create these materials, and official documents and materials are urgently needed.

What Teachers Need

Across all workshops, teachers expressed a strong demand for **practical, ready-to-use resources**. Key requests included **adaptable lesson templates, step-by-step activity guides, multilingual visual materials, editable Easy-to-Read formats, short demonstration videos, and digital activities accessible via smartphones**.

They also highlighted the need for strategies to create safe and inclusive learning environments, greater cultural awareness, methods for simplifying texts, guidance on digital and multi-sensory teaching approaches, and opportunities for peer exchange through communities of practice.

Importantly, teachers showed a clear preference for **ongoing, long-term training** rather than one-off sessions, with space to reflect on and share real classroom experiences.

Conditions for Success

Effective implementation requires **supportive conditions**, including a safe classroom atmosphere, **sufficient preparation time, curricular flexibility, and institutional support** that allows experimentation. Clear guidelines and practical examples for working with diverse, mixed-level groups are also essential.

Conclusion

The workshops demonstrated that teachers in Cyprus, France, Italy, and Spain already apply a wide range of effective practices developed through hands-on experience with vulnerable learners. The added value of the S.P.A.R.K.L.E. project lies in systematising these practices, enhancing them with practical tools, and providing a shared professional framework.

Based on the insights gathered, we will develop a syllabus, a teacher toolkit, and a practical guide. Through ongoing collaboration with educators, these resources aim to directly address classroom challenges and improve learning outcomes for refugees and migrants.

We will continue sharing updates via EPALE and welcome your feedback, experiences, and insights. You can also follow our work on [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), or through our [website](#).



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