

Transforming adult L2 education through translanguaging and multimodal co-creation across the classroom and the museum

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ABSTRACT

EN Educational linguistics increasingly focuses on holistic approaches; however, research involving adults remains scarce, particularly regarding translanguaging pedagogy and arts-based approaches. This study addresses this gap by describing the project "Io vado al museo" ("I go to the museum"), a collaboration between a university in Italy and a local museum. The project involved a group of learners in museum-based interactions with artworks and the subsequent classroom production of artifacts as creative responses to themes encountered at the museum. These artifacts eventually became formal museum objects through the creation of a virtual museum on IZI.TRAVEL. By adopting a qualitative critical ethnography, data were collected through student focus groups, teacher interviews, and the analysis of the artifacts. Findings demonstrate a positive impact across four dimensions: linguistic, personal/affective, social, and civic/democratic.

Keywords: TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGY, MUSEUM-BASED EDUCATION, L2 LEARNING, ADULT EDUCATION

ES La lingüística educativa se centra cada vez más en enfoques holísticos; sin embargo, la investigación sobre adultos sigue siendo escasa, especialmente en lo que respecta a la pedagogía del translenguaje y los métodos basados en las artes. Este estudio aborda esta laguna describiendo el proyecto "Io vado al museo" ("Voy al museo"), una colaboración entre una universidad italiana y un museo local. El proyecto llevó a un grupo de aprendices a interactuar con obras de arte en el museo y a la posterior producción de artefactos en el aula como respuestas creativas a los temas encontrados en el museo. Estos artefactos se convirtieron finalmente en piezas de museos formales mediante la creación de un museo virtual en IZI.TRAVEL. El estudio adoptó una etnografía crítica cualitativa; los datos se recogieron a través de grupos focales de estudiantes, entrevistas a docentes y el análisis de los artefactos. Los resultados demuestran un impacto positivo en cuatro dimensiones: lingüística, personal/afectiva, social y cívica/democrática.

Palabras clave: PEDAGOGÍA DEL TRANSLenguaje, EDUCACIÓN EN MUSEOS, APRENDIZAJE DE LA L2, EDUCACIÓN DE ADULTOS

IT La linguistica educativa si sta orientando sempre più verso approcci olistici; tuttavia, la ricerca che coinvolge gli adulti rimane scarsa, in particolare per quanto riguarda la didattica del translanguaging e gli approcci basati sulle arti. Questo studio affronta questo bisogno della ricerca attraverso la descrizione del progetto "Io vado al museo", una collaborazione tra un'università italiana e un museo locale. Il progetto ha coinvolto un gruppo di apprendenti in attività di interazione e osservazione di opere d'arte e nella successiva produzione in classe di artefatti come risposte creative ai temi emersi al museo. Questi artefatti sono diventati infine oggetti museali a tutti gli effetti, attraverso la creazione di un museo virtuale su IZI.TRAVEL. Adottando un'etnografia critica qualitativa, i dati sono stati raccolti tramite focus group con gli studenti, interviste agli insegnanti e l'analisi degli artefatti. I risultati dimostrano un impatto positivo su quattro dimensioni: linguistica, personale/affettiva, sociale e civica/democratica.

Parole chiave: DIDATTICA DEL TRANSLANGUAGING, EDUCAZIONE MUSEALE, APPRENDIMENTO L2, EDUCAZIONE DEGLI ADULTI

1. Introduction

L2 learning is widely recognised as an essential element to facilitate communication and encourage the full participation of adults with a migratory background in society (see the Council of Europe's LIAM - Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants Guidelines). Mastering this language grants greater access to education, employment, and public services, thereby supporting their role as new citizens. However, it is equally important to recognise the value of maintaining one's L1(s); this fosters a sense of cultural identity and connection with one's community of origin while promoting more effective L2 literacy. Alongside this plurilingual perspective, another important aspect is the need to provide adult learners with embodied learning experiences that are better tailored to their motivations and needs (Morrice, 2017). In this context, cultural spaces and the arts play a transformative role. As Vlachou (2017, 8) notes, they have the power to create open, non-threatening spaces of encounter that promote knowledge, allow one to get to know the 'Other' and their humanity, and help construct a different image from the one often presented by politicians and the media.

The need for such inclusive, non-formal spaces becomes even more apparent when considering that the profile of these learners is highly varied. While some are employed in manual and low-skilled activities resulting in lower wages, others are well-educated individuals who want to enter the job market or enrol in university. Despite these differences, all of them need access to quality L2 education to fully integrate into host societies. Unfortunately, as Pennycook (2021) points out, current L2 education primarily focuses on language skills that are tailored almost exclusively for low-skilled job acquisition. This narrow approach emphasises specific tasks relevant to primary needs, thereby hindering the development of broader skills essential for a diverse range of professional and non-professional opportunities. Consequently, while learners with low levels of literacy might be at risk of poverty and social exclusion, highly educated ones often grapple with profound emotional and professional challenges caused by the mismatch between their qualifications and available jobs. This scenario underscores the necessity for an approach to L2 education that flexibly addresses diverse aspirations and promotes true social inclusion. Specifically, there emerges a need for a democratic approach that goes beyond mere preparation for work and sees adults with a migratory background as "whole persons with hearts, bodies and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities" (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251) and with a rich linguistic and cultural repertoire. While several documents have provided guidelines for their linguistic integration (Beacco et al., 2017; LASLLIAM Reference Guide, 2022), a significant gap remains: more training and resources are needed to raise organisations' awareness and educators' competencies regarding the integration of translanguaging and arts-based approaches for L2 literacy development across formal and non-formal education (Minuz et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2020; Waterhouse, 2022).

To address this gap, this article introduces the *Io vado al museo (I go to the museum)* project that is currently active in Venice, Italy. Designed to bridge the gap between formal language instruction and cultural spaces, the project positions museums as a central environment for language learning, social and emotional development, and civic engagement.

Specifically, this paper presents ethnographic research that was conducted during the project's implementation of the project, from January to June 2025. By observing and interacting with 22 adult students with a migratory background of Italian L2¹ from a local adult education centre (CPIA of Venice), this study examines their experiences as they navigated museum spaces and utilised their full linguistic repertoires to engage with art. The research further explores how these non-formal, multimodal environments foster language acquisition, emotional learning, socialisation, and a deeper sense of social belonging.

This article is structured as follows. First, it will outline the theoretical framework underpinning the study, focusing on the intersections of translanguaging pedagogy, arts-based approaches, and non-formal museum education. Next, it will detail the methodology of the ethnographic research conducted within the project, describing the participants, setting, and methods of data collection. Following this, the article will present the core findings, illustrating how arts-based activities, multimodal co-creation, and the strategic use of the learners' L1s facilitated the L2 learning process, with an impact on four main dimensions: linguistic, personal/affective, social, and civic/democratic. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections will synthesise these insights, offering both theoretical reflections and practical implications seeking to implement more inclusive, holistic language programs for adults with a migratory background.

¹ In this article, L2 refers to an additional language learned in a country where it serves as the dominant language. In the Italian context, this definition emphasises that Italian is not just a subject of study, but a vital tool for navigating the host society's systems.

2. Translanguaging pedagogy in adult language education

In the landscape of educational linguistics, translanguaging pedagogy has emerged as a transformative approach that challenges the traditional separation of languages. Rather than viewing the learner's L1 as an obstacle to acquiring a L2, translanguaging posits that plurilingual speakers draw from a single, unitary linguistic repertoire to make meaning of their multilingual worlds (García & Li, 2014; García, 2017). Pedagogically, this means moving beyond the monolingual bias to create learning environments where students are encouraged to leverage their full range of semiotic and linguistic resources (see, among others, Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; García et al., 2017; García & Kleyn, 2016; Paulsrud et al. 2017). For adult learners, whose identities are deeply rooted in their life histories, this approach validates their complex lived experiences (García, 2017).

In this context, recent empirical studies in the field of adult education reveal that when translanguaging pedagogy is embraced, it yields consistent benefits across three primary dimensions: linguistic, affective, and democratic.

Regarding the linguistic dimension, this pedagogy appears to impact several key aspects of language acquisition. Park and Valdez (2018) demonstrate how translanguaging supported a class of adult refugee students in both the creation of meaning and the development of cross-linguistic awareness. Also, valuing the students' existing linguistic repertoires and skills was found to have a positive impact on vocabulary learning and written production competence. Choi and Nayer (2017) suggest that these practices allow refugee women attending English courses in Australia to engage meaningfully in listening, writing, and speaking activities. Additionally, Franck and Papadopoulou (2024) provide evidence that this approach enhances morphological awareness through comparative activities that encourage students to reflect on the roots and affixes of the L2. Finally, Beiler and Dewilde (2023) emphasise the crucial role of this pedagogy as a scaffold, allowing students to express complex thoughts in and across familiar languages first, before doing so in the new language.

In addition to linguistic outcomes, the literature highlights the profound impact of translanguaging pedagogy on the affective dimension of learning. Burgess and Rowsell (2020), in their study involving newly arrived refugee students in an ESL course in Canada, found that translanguaging practices expanded opportunities for students to invest emotionally in their target language learning process and, more broadly, in their resettlement in the new country. This finding is echoed by Cox (2021, 2023), who noted that strategic L1 use with a group of newly arrived refugee women in Scotland led to increased empowerment and self-esteem, necessary steps to rebuild oneself within the host community. Franck and Papadopoulou (2024) further argue that this approach reduces negative emotions, such as anxiety, while fostering a sense of enjoyment and curiosity. This alleviation of negative emotional reactions is seen to be crucial to learning trajectories. Dryden, Tankosić and Dovchin (2021) demonstrate how translanguaging fosters the creation of "safe spaces" that are essential for identity negotiation and participation. Their research showed that leveraging a collective linguistic repertoire created a space where students could authentically share their experiences, face-to-face challenges, and language-related anxiety, thereby encouraging them to communicate more frequently.

Moving to a more democratic dimension, Wedin and Berg (2024) conclude that translanguaging pedagogy creates safe spaces that give students the voice to express their views and relate the teaching to their everyday lives and earlier experiences. This negotiation of meaning via diverse linguistic resources allows students to navigate their new environments with greater confidence. This aligns with findings from Kitsiou et al. (2021), who noted that such workspaces in Greece allow participants to develop a heightened awareness of their plural identities, transforming the classroom into a democratic space that honours the totality of the learner's experiences.

Collectively, these studies suggest that translanguaging pedagogy acts as a catalyst for both learning and being, allowing adults with a migratory background to navigate their new environments with greater confidence and as whole individuals.

3. Arts-based methodologies in language education

Another field that is gaining more attention in language education is that of arts-based methodologies and multimodality to redefine the boundaries of how learners acquire, process, and perform languages (Bradley, 2025; Burke & Field, 2023; Hirsu, Zacharias, & Futro, 2021; Kalaya & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019, 2024; Lytra et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2020),

This represents a shift toward a recognition of the learner as a whole person engaging with the world through diverse sensory channels (New London Group, 1996). In fact, by positioning meaning-making as a fundamentally multimodal, embodied, and creative process, arts-based approaches acknowledge that communication is rarely just about words. Instead, learners navigate a rich tapestry of semiotic repertoires that include the visual, gestural, performative, and digital dimensions. When a student engages with paintings (Anderson, 2022; Fazzi, 2025; Futro, 2022), drama (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2019; Tavares & Benediktsson, 2024), drawings (Carbonara, 2023; Chik, 2018; Melo-Pfeifer & Chick, 2020; Niemelä, 2025), (digital) collage (Prada, 2022; Prasad, 2018; Romero, 2023), digital storytelling (Anderson & Macleroy, 2016; Chung & Macleroy, 2022; Fazzi, 2022), or photos (Honeyford, 2014; Tavares, 2025), they are not merely practicing a language, they are inhabiting it. Such embodied engagement transforms the classroom into a vibrant space of relations. Consequently, teachers are ethically prompted to navigate classroom assemblages by attuning to affective forces and leveraging disruptions to develop inventive, relational pedagogies that foster learners' transformative becoming (Waterhouse, 2022, p. 282).

To better understand this integration, we can look to the framework proposed by Bradley and Harvey (2019), who conceptualise creative inquiry in applied linguistics through three distinct lenses: research “with the arts,” “into the arts,” and “through the arts.” While each dimension offers unique value, the following discussion focuses primarily on the third, exploring how the arts serve as a vital tool to enrich the educational environment. Specifically, I will examine how the “through the arts” approach manifests in two transformative contexts: language learning within the museum space and through the strategic use of multimodal artifacts to foster deeper linguistic, cultural, affective, and civic resonance.

3.1 Language learning at the museum

Recent scholarship in educational linguistics suggests that museum spaces, when paired with intentional pedagogical design, serve as powerful catalysts for L2 acquisition (Fazzi, 2025). By shifting learning from the traditional classroom into these multisensory, non-formal environments, educators can provide a unique context that yields significant benefits.

A primary benefit identified in the literature is the significant impact on vocabulary consolidation. Research by Labadi (2018) across various museums in Denmark and the United Kingdom demonstrated that students recalled new vocabulary more effectively when learned in situ compared to traditional classroom settings. This “situated learning” allows words to be anchored to physical objects and visual stimuli. Similarly, Ruanglertbutr (2016) explored how students in Australia used English L2 to engage with artwork. The study found that they did not just learn object labels but they began experimenting with sophisticated literary devices, such as alliteration and similes, to describe the intrinsic properties of the art. This suggests that the museum environment encourages a more creative, nuanced use of the target language.

Beyond grammar and vocabulary, museums offer a unique venue for overcoming the limitations of monocultural teaching. Parra and Di Fabio (2015) argue that museum-based linguistic activities push teachers and students to engage in critical intercultural reflection. When discussing museum objects, students do not just examine the target culture; they are forced to confront their own cultural biases and beliefs (Berhó & Defferding, 2005). In Scotland, Clarke (2013) found that museums could become vital social spaces for adult learners. In these spaces, they engage in the construction and reconstruction of the self, building confidence as L2 speakers while navigating their new social landscape. Research in Canada by Cloutier, Ibrahim, and Pratt (2016) mirrors this, suggesting that English L2 activities in museums allow for the emergence of subversive identities.

Recent work by Fazzi and Meneghetti (2024) synthesises these benefits through two case studies: one involving adults learning Italian L2 and another involving Italian high school students learning English. Their findings categorise the impact into four distinct domains:

- *Linguistic Domain.* There is a marked improvement in socio-pragmatic competence (using language appropriately in specific contexts) and metalinguistic reflection. Students expanded their vocabulary specifically through interaction with multimodal stimuli.
- *Affective Domain.* Students reported feeling freer to communicate. The focus on objects reduced the anxiety often associated with “getting it right” in a classroom. This led to increased confidence, particularly among learners with lower proficiency levels.

- *Cognitive Domain*. Learners were able to bridge the gap between formal schooling and informal experience, linking new museum-acquired knowledge to their own life histories.
- *Intercultural Domain*. The discussion of physical artifacts stimulated a "deep dive" into cultural nuances, fostering a more sophisticated intercultural awareness.

In this research field, specific studies on translanguaging pedagogy, spanning different contexts and participants, are also emerging. Lehman, Phillips and Williams (2018) demonstrated that by supporting students' literacy skills in multiple languages and encouraging their use in public spaces, educators can significantly increase students' pride in their plural identities. As Cárdenas Curiel, McHolme, and Lundeen (2023) show, using art objects as mediators for translanguaging practices is highly effective. Their study of bilingual primary art lessons reveals that this approach not only fosters cross-linguistic awareness but also helps students develop a sense of identity and positionality, ultimately empowering them to challenge linguistic inequality. Furthermore, Deroo (2022) highlights the value of community-university partnerships in helping future teachers move beyond discrete language systems toward an awareness of multilingual and multimodal resources as part of their communicative repertoires. Engaging with museum objects allows these pre-service teachers to negotiate meaning and empathise with the challenges multilingual students face in traditional school settings. This creative and identity-affirming potential is also observed at the university level. Arshavkaya (2021) found that allowing ESL students to use their languages when writing about their own interpretations of museum art objects helped them connect different cultural perspectives and express meanings that might otherwise remain hidden.

This shift toward valuing translanguaging extends into specialised fields through the Multi-STEM project led by Moraru and Chisari (2025), which promotes the participation of plurilingual children in STEM through the creation of multilingual object labels and exhibitions. While this project notes challenges such as varying literacy levels and initial mismatches in student expectations, it underscores the museum's role in inclusive education.

Ultimately, as Meneghetti (2024) concludes regarding adult education, these museum-based activities span personal, socio-relational, civic, and linguistic dimensions, contributing to self-expression, socialisation, and civic awareness while specifically yielding positive impacts on lexical learning and interactional competence.

3.2. Creating multimodal and multilingual compositions

Multilingual multimodal compositions represent an innovative pedagogical shift in language education, integrating diverse expressive modes (including written text, visual imagery, and sound) to reflect the dynamic, multifaceted nature of communication (New London Group, 1996). Rather than treating language as a static set of rules, this approach encourages students to combine their full linguistic repertoires with diverse modes (e.g., drawing, photo, video, or digital design) to describe concepts, narrate personal experiences, and express complex emotions. This process enhances the construction of plural identities (Cummins et al., 2015; Cummins & Early, 2011; Hafner, 2015) and allows students to reposition themselves through transcultural perspectives (Honeyford, 2014; Omerbašić, 2015). By leveraging their existing linguistic repertoire to create content, learners develop deeper metalinguistic awareness and a more meaningful connection to the curriculum (DeJaynes, 2015; Jiang & Luk, 2016).

Furthermore, these compositions serve as effective resources for language teaching by offering a flexible, engaging response to the linguistic and cultural challenges of modern society. By integrating diversity and creativity, they foster the development of linguistically competent and culturally aware individuals. This impact is often amplified when students share their products online, an action that frequently strengthens student motivation (De Los Ríos, 2018; Meneghetti & Fazzi, 2025).

At its core, multilingual multimodal artifact making involves pedagogical designs where learners produce tangible or digital artifacts (such as poems, linguistic portraits, identity texts, or digital stories) by strategically combining multiple languages and modes. In this framing, artifacts are not merely "products" but critical sites of interaction, identity negotiation, assessment evidence, and social inclusion. This is particularly salient for adults with a migratory background who find themselves navigating integration regimes that frequently prioritise monolingual, standardised competencies (García, 2017; Minuz et al., 2020; Pennycook, 2021; Waterhouse, 2021). Such multilingual multimodal approaches conceptualise learners' repertoires as

fluid and hybrid, calling for pedagogies that deliberately mobilise all available resources to promote learning and social justice (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2024).

While empirical research involving (young) adults with a migratory background is still emerging, several studies highlight the potential of these compositions within a translanguaging stance. Many of these explorations begin with visual arts, such as the collage activities analysed by Bradley and Atkinson (2020). Their work demonstrates how creative methods facilitate a *translanguaging space* (Li, 2018), that is, a fluid environment where participants mobilise their full communicative repertoires to make their voices visible in the linguistic landscape. Similarly, Burgess and Rowsell (2020) found that refugee students in Canada used collage to narrate their resettlement stories, allowing them to invest emotionally in the language learning process through personal creativity rather than scripted lessons. This use of visual narrative is echoed by Melo-Pfeifer and Fidalgo Schmidt (2019), who observed that drawings served as a “multimodal voice” for students lacking a common language, enabling them to sidestep linguistic barriers and envision their futures within the host society.

The impact of these practices extends into performative and narrative modes. Brownlie (2021) investigated a creative writing group for Congolese refugee women, finding that translanguaging practices and public performances significantly enhanced participants’ agency and transformed their marginalised social positions. This sense of agency is further supported by Pöyhönen et al. (2020), who utilised collaborative photography with unaccompanied minors in Finland to explore belonging and life trajectories. Their findings emphasise that creative practices open pathways to lived experiences.

Identity affirmation through artifact creation is also central to the Greek case study by Kyrlikitsi and Mouti (2023), where language portraits and identity texts allowed adults with a migratory background to render their plurilingual profiles visible, serving as tools for needs analysis and dialogic classroom work. This shift in perspective, that is, viewing them as creative agents rather than deficient learners, is a hallmark of the pluriliteracies program in Barcelona described by Albuquerque and Moore (2024). In this project, secondary students and adult new citizens collaboratively crafted multilingual poems, using “co-artistry” to expand opportunities for language learning and identity work.

Finally, transitioning into digital media, Meneghetti and Fazzi (2025) demonstrate that student-generated podcasts inspired by museum artworks can foster critical language awareness, cooperation, and agency, pointing to the transformative potential of this tool.

Collectively, these studies suggest that multimodal composing offers a powerful means for adult learners to reclaim their agency and integrate their complex linguistic and cultural identities into their learning process.

4. The study context: the *Io vado al museo* project²

Born from a collaboration between the Ca' Foscari University of Venice's MILE (Museums and Innovation in Language Education) research group and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection³, one of the most important museums of European and American art of the twentieth century in Italy, this project reimagines the museum as more than a space for aesthetic appreciation. Instead, it serves as a laboratory for linguistic and social negotiation. By synthesising museum-based methodologies (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994) with a translanguaging framework (García et al., 2017), the study utilises direct observation of works of art to foster the co-construction of meaning. The following core objectives define the project:

- *Promote translanguaging strategies in language education*: To valorise the collective linguistic repertoire of the group, encouraging students to identify similarities and differences between languages and cultures while developing cross-linguistic flexibility and metalinguistic strategies.
- *Foster shared knowledge*: To draw upon and build collective funds of knowledge encompassing museum content and “language-making” through collaborative interpretation and meaning co-creation.

² Link to the “Io vado al museo” project’s web page: <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/learn/programs-for-accessibility-and-inclusion/i-go-to-the-museum/>.

³ Link to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection’s website: <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/>.

- *Empower migratory backgrounds*: To increase the engagement of individuals with migratory backgrounds by promoting their personal agency and affirming their unique identities within the educational space.
- *Enact a transformative vision*: To encourage both schools and museums to adopt a perspective where all languages hold equal value, involving participants in a process that transforms their relationship within linguistic and cultural hierarchies.

4.1. The pedagogical framework

The framework utilised in the project (Meneghetti 2024, adapted from Fazzi 2020) is structured around three distinct pedagogical phases: the pre-visit at school, the visit to the museum, and the post-visit session held back at school.

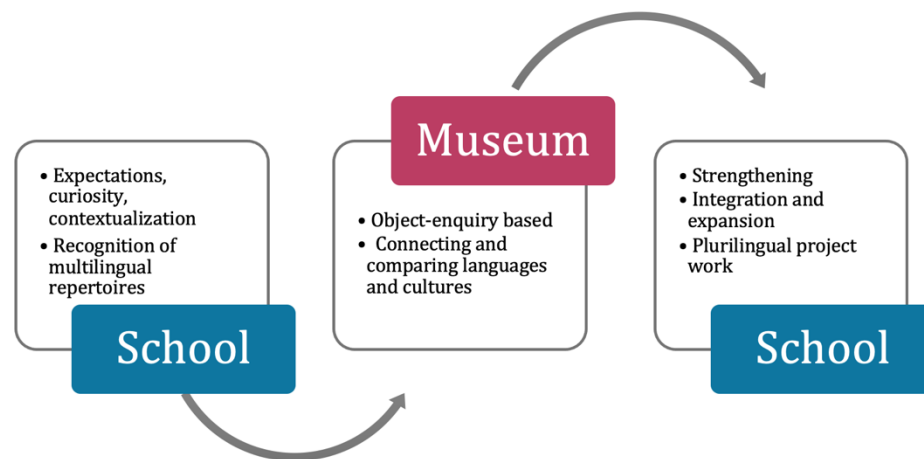


Figure 1. Framework for the project (Meneghetti 2024, adapted from Fazzi 2020)

In the following sections, I will describe the objectives of the three phases, while describing the specific activities of the workshop entitled “Simboli” (Symbols) that was attended by the participants of this study. The overarching objective of this workshop is to utilise the discovery of original museum artworks and cultural artifacts (such as tarot or card decks) to explore how symbols assume diverse and shifting meanings based on the viewer’s unique perspective. This process serves as a powerful exercise in art mediation, where the visual encounter becomes a catalyst for plurilingual and intercultural negotiation. By encouraging students to draw upon their full linguistic and cultural repertoires, the framework stimulates the collaborative construction of new meanings, transforming the museum experience into a site of active democratic participation.

4.1.1. The pre-visit at school: a first approach to translanguaging pedagogy and art mediation

This initial phase is conducted within the school environment and is designed as a co-facilitated experience involving both museum educators and classroom teachers. By transitioning from the museum galleries to the classroom, educators decentre the traditional museum space to meet students in a familiar setting, which facilitates rapport-building and group cohesion.

The objectives of this initial phase are multifaceted and fundamentally essential for the success of the overall project. This stage is strategically designed to establish a collaborative bridge between the museum staff and the classroom, fostering an inclusive atmosphere where students can align their expectations with the project’s broader goals. Central to this preparation is the intent to activate students’ prior knowledge through inductive art mediation strategies, which serve to bridge the gap between their lived linguistic realities and the artistic themes they will encounter in the museum.

Furthermore, the pre-visit acts as a crucial methodological scaffold, ensuring that the subsequent museum workshop is not a fragmented experience but a continuation of a coherent pedagogical journey. By identifying and documenting the collective linguistic repertoire of the group in situ, the facilitators create a “safe space” where translanguaging is positioned as the primary tool for negotiating artistic meaning.

Ultimately, these objectives aim to transform the classroom into a preparatory ‘contact zone’, ensuring that students are empowered to engage with the collection through both a critical aesthetic lens and the full breadth of their personal linguistic resources.

The pedagogical activities implemented during this session are strategically designed to move from the initial phase of art mediation toward more complex translanguaging practices, utilising the visual encounter with the artwork as a semiotic bridge to activate and negotiate the participants’ diverse linguistic repertoires. These activities include:

- An introductory multilingual collaborative session focused on the term “museum” and other thematic keywords to establish a shared conceptual framework.
- An interpretative exercise centred on Victor Brauner’s painting, *The Surrealist*. Students engage in a comparative study between the painting and its semiotic inspiration (“The Magician” card from the Tarot of Marseilles) to understand the artist’s use of symbolic self-representation.
- A revised version of the language portrait (Bush 2012), adapted to incorporate the artistic elements of Brauner’s painting that was introduced during the previous activity (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Revisited language portrait

The multimodal artifacts generated during this phase remained displayed on the classroom walls. This intentional modification of the schoolscape (Gorter 2018) serves to provide permanent visibility to the plurality of linguistic repertoires within the group, reinforcing the value of the students’ identities beyond the duration of the workshop. By transforming the physical environment of the school into a space that reflects their diverse backgrounds, the project ensures that the linguistic validation initiated during the pre-visit becomes an enduring element of their educational experience.

Ultimately, this phase establishes the necessary critical and emotional foundation for students to enter the museum not as outsiders, but as authorised co-interpreters of the collection.

4.1.2. The visit at the museum: the ‘Simboli’ workshop

The “Simboli” workshop, conducted at the museum, is a ninety-minute pedagogical intervention designed to provide participants with an expansive view of the museum rooms through the focused analysis of four core works of art. The workshop is structured around a set of macro-objectives designed to harmonise the diverse facets of the project, ranging from art historical content to translanguaging practices. These objectives are categorised into three primary domains, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
Pedagogical macro-objectives of the "simboli" workshop

Objectives	Pedagogical Goals
Content-Based Objectives	Equipping students with interpretive strategies to engage with both figurative and abstract art. Facilitating the construction of personal interpretations (museum content). Introducing foundational art historical data, including artist intent, technique, and intertextual connections.
Linguistic Objectives	Introducing and implementing target lexis tailored to the group's proficiency level, focused on specific thematic clusters (e.g., words to talk about symbol or about emotions). Utilizing linguistic structures to facilitate the description of persons, settings, and affective states. Developing fluency in the "microlanguage" of art (e.g., painting, sculpture, painter, etc.).
Translanguaging objectives	Valorising collective linguistic repertoires. Identifying cross-linguistic similarities and differences at the lexical and structural levels. Eliciting recurrent semantic elements across diverse languages. Producing collaborative, multilingual short texts.

Building upon the framework of museum education as a participatory experience (Hooper-Greenhill 1994), the workshop encourages continuous, active observation. This is achieved through activities that leverage the students' linguistic-cultural backgrounds as assets rather than barriers. Table 2 provides a detailed description of the art mediation and multimodal activities centred on the specific core works of art.

Table 2
Overview of museum-based multimodal and translanguaging activities

Work of Art	Description of the activity
The Surrealist ⁴ Victor Brauner 1947	Associated Stimulus: The magician (Tarot of Marseilles) Participants are presented with suit aces from Italian or Marseille tarot decks. They are tasked with identifying corresponding symbols within the artwork (e.g., swords, cups, coins, batons). This comparative analysis between the painting and the cards facilitates an intercultural discussion on symbolic meanings. The activity concludes with the collaborative creation of an alternative multilingual title for the paintings.
Landscape with Red Spots, No. 2 ⁵ Vasily Kandinsky 1913	Associated Stimulus: The bridge (Hanafuda – Japanese deck) The educator facilitates a visual analysis of the Japanese card to elicit the concept of a "bridge". Participants provide the corresponding term in their respective L1s and discuss the diverse symbolic connotations of "the bridge" in their cultures. Learners then analyse the painting to identify Kandinsky's representation of a bridge, followed by a mediated discussion based on student-led hypotheses.
Maiastira ⁶ Costantin Brancusi CA. 1912	Associated Stimulus: The Bird (Loteria Mexicana deck) Following the introduction of the 'Bird' stimulus from the Lotería Mexicana deck, participants are prompted to identify the specific work of art within the gallery that, from their perspective, symbolises a bird. After a mediated observation of the sculpture, students engage in the collaborative construction of a multilingual poster. Each participant selects a lexical item from their linguistic repertoire that encapsulates the symbolic essence of the bird, subsequently articulating their cultural and personal motivations during the concluding plenary session.
The Moon Woman ⁷ Jackson Pollock 1942	Associated Cards: The moon + The sun (Tarot of Marseilles) Participants isolate the moon symbol on the tarot card before identifying its presence in the painting. The mediation focuses on the title and the traditional gendered associations of the moon. The educator introduces the Rebis (alchemical marriage) as a representation of the union of solar (masculine) and lunar (feminine) principles. In small groups, students redesign a "symbol-free" Rebis by selecting new icons for man and woman, documenting their choices and meanings through multilingual annotations.

⁴ <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/the-surrealist/>

⁵ <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/landscape-with-red-spots-no-2/>

⁶ <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/maiastira/>

⁷ <https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/the-moon-woman/>

By utilising diverse cultural stimuli, such as the Tarot, Hanafuda, and Lotería decks, as semiotic bridges, the project's pedagogy empowers students to articulate complex and abstract aesthetic interpretations while simultaneously validating their diverse linguistic and cultural identities. This phase of direct interaction with the museum is foundational for the subsequent post-visit stage.

4.1.3. The post-visit at school: creating a virtual museum on izi.TRAVEL

The post-visit phase serves as a critical synthesis of the entire pedagogical pathway, designed to integrate and expand upon the insights that emerged during the previous sessions at school and the museum. In this final stage, the focus shifts from the mediation of existing artworks toward the collaborative production of original creative responses, allowing students to crystallise their personal interpretations while actively valorising their collective plural repertoires. By producing a tangible final product, students are encouraged to mobilise both their newly acquired art-historical knowledge and their diverse linguistic resources to achieve an authentic communicative purpose.

This phase aims at fostering inclusive participation through group work and facilitating a dialogue that extends beyond the classroom, engaging the broader school community and, where possible, an extra-scholastic audience. The primary outcome of this session was the creation of their own museum hosted on izi.TRAVEL, a platform that enables the development of multimedia audio guides or virtual museums. One of the most unique aspects of izi.TRAVEL is that it is an open platform. This means that anyone can publish and use the platform at no cost, as most tours are free to stream and the basic creation tools require no subscription. Furthermore, it can be used by schools and universities as a tool for students to create their own digital storytelling projects (Compagnoni, 2022; Fazzi, 2021, 2022; Spaliviero, 2022).

The post-visit phase was structured as a series of five distinct meetings, each lasting approximately ninety minutes, designed to guide students through a specific developmental sequence that bridged artistic creation with digital storytelling. This process allowed participants to gain familiarity with the digital platform while deeply engaging with the creative synthesis of their museum experience.

Phase 1. Artistic Creation. Working in pairs or small groups (3/4 people), students designed their personal cards inspired by the symbolic themes encountered at the museum. Participants were granted the agency to select individual symbols or synthesise multiple icons to represent their perspectives. This phase concluded with a plenary session where students shared their artifacts, fostering a collective dialogue on the shifting meanings attributed to diverse symbols. In this phase, a total of seven cards were produced, one for each couple/group.

Phase 2. Multilingual Composition. Following an initial introduction to the izi.TRAVEL platform, students began drafting the multilingual texts intended to serve as descriptive digital captions for their original artworks. A structured storyboard was provided to provide essential methodological scaffolding for this complex task. This tool featured a series of guiding questions, prompting participants to reflect deeply on the specific meaning of their symbols, their cultural relevance in their countries of origin, and the personal motivations that guided their artistic choices. Throughout this composition phase, the pedagogical focus transitioned directly from art mediation toward translanguaging practices. This process culminated in the preparation of a final text that integrated Italian L2 and the diverse languages spoken within the group, transforming the descriptive caption into a collaborative multilingual text.

Phase 3. Audio Production. During this stage, the focus shifted from written composition to oral expression as students utilised their mobile devices to record the audio components of their guides within the school environment. This phase was characterised by a high degree of collaboration, functioning as a communal effort where participants provided mutual support. Technical and linguistic assistance was provided by peers, classroom teachers, and the researcher to ensure the quality and clarity of their narrations.

Phase 4. Digital Curation. Participants downloaded the application and created personal accounts to facilitate the direct upload of their texts and audio files. During this phase, the students collectively decided on the titles for their digital collections (*Arte della Fortuna* and *I Simboli della Vita*) through a democratic process of brainstorming and voting.

Phase 5. Implementation. The project culminated on the final day of the school term with the official public launch of the virtual museum, successfully transitioning the students' work from a private classroom activity to a globally accessible digital resource. By doing so, these multilingual multimodal artifacts stand as a testament to the students' role as active cultural producers, successfully bridging the gap between museum-based aesthetic observation and creative expression.

Figure 3 shows three screenshots of the virtual museum to give an idea of what the final product looks like, using the app izi.TRAVEL⁸.

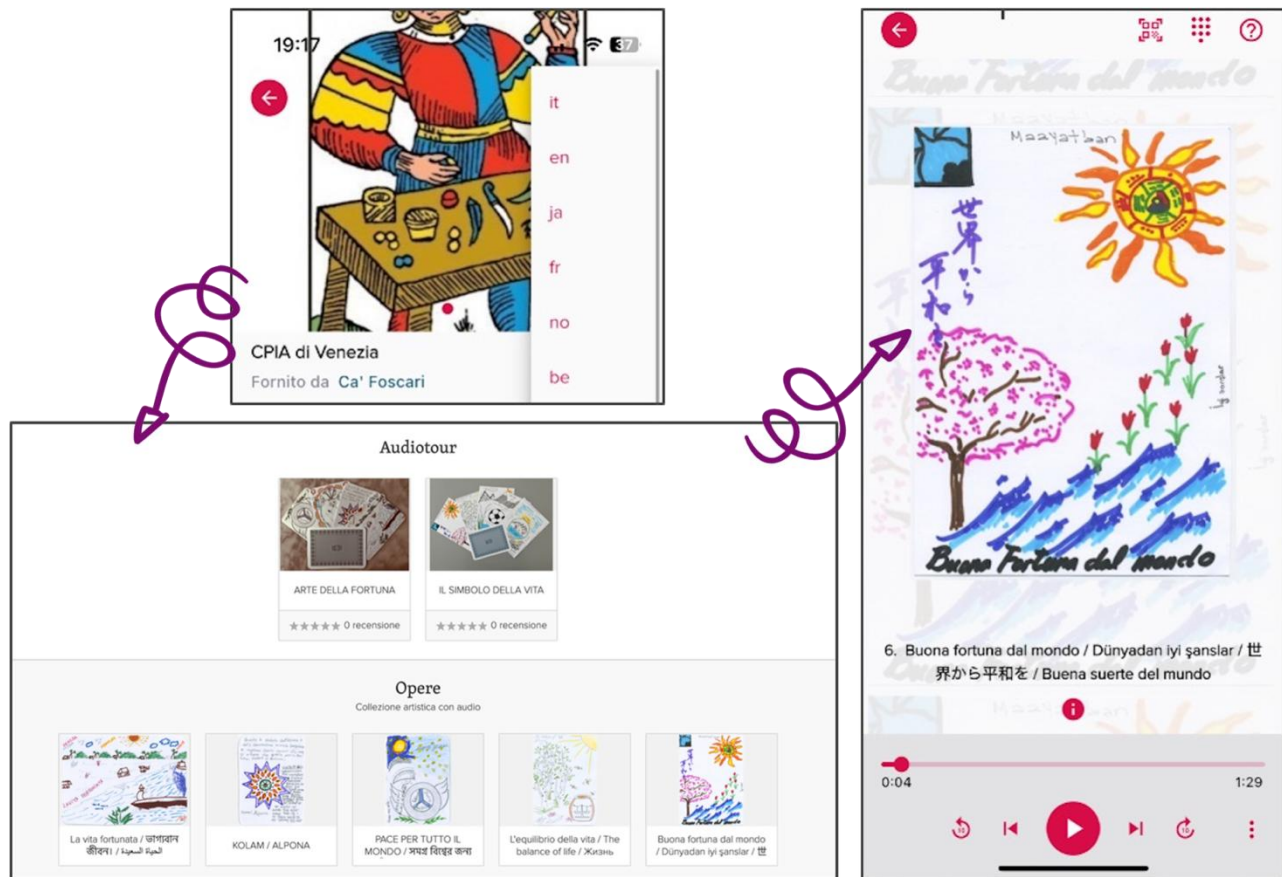


Figure 3. Screenshots for the virtual museum on izi.TRAVEL

5. The study

Building upon the project's theoretical and pedagogical framework, this study investigates the potential inherent in establishing arts-based plurilingual Italian L2 programs that bridge formal school settings (specifically, a school for adult education) and non-formal museum environments. The study aims to evaluate the project's influence on the school's educational practices and explore its transformative effects. At its core, the study addresses a single primary question regarding the project's impact on the students' learning process, specifically seeking to highlight the most significantly affected aspects.

5.1. Methodology

The perspective guiding this research is fundamentally transformative in nature. In accordance with Mertens (2009), this worldview is defined by several key traits that prioritise social equity and the deconstruction of systemic barriers:

- Central importance is placed on the lives and experiences of traditionally marginalised groups. Within this framework, it is essential that the investigation not be limited to the participants' lives but also extends to how oppression is structured and reproduced. As Mertens (2015, 70) notes, "studying oppressed people's lives also includes studying the oppressors' means of dominance."

⁸ The virtual museum can be visited at this link, <https://izi.travel/it/dd3f-cpia-di-venezia/it>. For a better experience, we recommend downloading the app from the link and searching for 'CPIA DI Venezia'.

- The study analyses how and why injustices are reflected in asymmetric power relations.
- The approach examines how research findings can be explicitly linked to subsequent social and political actions.
- A transformative theory is elaborated to develop the research approach, allowing for a focused analysis of the beliefs influencing a program's progress or the root causes of specific problems.

Research situated within this perspective is strictly connected to power and social justice, which are inextricably intertwined with political questions and the objective of proposing programs for social change (Mertens, 2007). In the context of this study, this involves the integration of both educational and political elements, positioning social justice as a cardinal principle in the teaching of Italian L2.

Among the available qualitative designs, critical ethnography was selected for its capacity to provide an approach that is context-linked, participatory, and interpretive. This design allows for the surfacing of multiple perspectives while maintaining a critical stance on the pedagogical practices used with adults. As Talmy (2012, p. 1) states, a critical ethnographer must maintain “a critically reflexive stance toward the relationships between researcher, the researched, and knowledge production, representation, and dissemination,” acknowledging the complex interactions between social structures and human agency. By adopting this design, the study seeks to document the ‘transformative process’ within the project, where the validation of diverse linguistic repertoires and creative meaning-making serves as a catalyst for broader social participation and fosters a more democratic ‘contact zone’ for new citizens.

5.2. Participants

The study involved a heterogeneous group of 22 adult students with a migratory background enrolled in the project at the CPIA (Provincial Centre for Adult Education) of Venice. The participants were divided in two different classes, one attending in the morning and the other in the afternoon, according to their personal study or work commitments. Both groups were at the same language proficiency level, that is A2, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

As detailed in Table 3, the sample was predominantly female (73%) and exhibited a wide age range, spanning from 18 to 56 years. The group was characterised by significant linguistic and cultural diversity, with participants from 14 different countries. This diverse composition provided a rich environment for observing translanguaging practices and the mobilisation of varied cultural repertoires throughout the project.

Table 3
Socio-demographic profile of the student participants

Group (CEFR Level)	No. + Gender	Age	Nationality	Collective repertoire
Group 1 (A2) Afternoon [St 1-11]	11 (6 F + 5 M)	18 - 54	Afghanistan (1), Bangladesh (5), Morocco (1), Sri Lanka (1), Ukraine (3).	Standard Arabic, Darija (Moroccan variety of Arabic), French, Bangla, English, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, Sinhalese, Romanian.
Group 2 (A2+) Morning [St 12-22]	11 (10 F + 1 M)	21 - 56	Belarus (1), Canada (1), Cameroon (1), Honduras (1), Japan (2), Philippines (1), Norway (1), Russia (1), Turkey (1), Ukraine (1).	Ukrainian, Russian, Tagalog, English, French, Japanese, Chinese, Norwegian, Turkish, Spanish, Belarusian.
Total	22 (16 F + 6 M)	18-56	14 Nationalities	20 Languages

It is important to note that the participants' attendance during the project was irregular, primarily due to personal or professional commitments. Consequently, the number of students participating in individual sessions of the project is lower than the total cohort. Specifically, 13 participants were present at the pre-visit, 15 at the visit, and 21 at the post-visit.

The study also involved two teachers who were responsible for the two different classes. Both voluntarily agreed to take part in the research. These educators had experience with the project with cohorts

before those included in the current study; however, their participation involved different pathways and activities than those delineated in the various phases of this project. Furthermore, one teacher (Teacher 2) had been involved in the production of a promotional video created by the museum to disseminate the objectives, methodology, and actions undertaken within the project. Aside from this specific experience, neither of the two participating teachers had previously been involved in initiatives aimed at promoting Italian as a second language (L2) through a translanguaging lens. Detailed information regarding their professional backgrounds is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Teachers' profile

Teacher	Class	Educational Background	Professional experience	Experience at Cpia	Subject
Teacher 1 [T1]	Liv. A2	Diploma magistrale (Teaching Diploma)	> 20 years	5 years	Italiano L2
Teacher 2 [T2]	Liv. A2+	Degree in Humanities/Literature (Laurea in Lettere)	15-20 years	10 years	Italiano L2

5.3. Researcher's role and positionality

I occupied an internal position within the project, underpinned by a long-standing collaboration with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection that began in 2018. This sustained engagement has facilitated the development of specialised expertise in cultural mediation within museum contexts, which complements the focus of my research on translanguaging pedagogy and language education across diverse formal and non-formal settings. Within the *Io vado al museo* project, this role was highly participatory, since I was directly involved in the co-creation of pedagogical activities and worked in close consultation with both museum staff and classroom teachers.

Throughout the implementation phase, I worked alongside museum educators to facilitate sessions, maintaining a transparent dual role as both an educator and a researcher. This duality, encompassing both the active execution of the activities and the systematic collection of data, was explicitly communicated to the students at the outset and consistently reaffirmed throughout the project.

Within the transformative paradigm adopted for this project, my internal position allowed for a reflexive approach that bridged the gap between theory and practice by ensuring that I was deeply embedded in the realities of the participants' contexts.

5.4. Data collection

During the research, data were collected using various types of instruments for qualitative research: interviews (with the teachers and in focus groups with the students) and materials (artifacts). While the materials were collected throughout the study, the interviews were conducted at the end of the project.

5.4.1. Students' focus groups

The primary objective of the focus groups was to gain a deeper understanding of the students' opinions, attitudes, and expectations, providing insight into the group's collective perceptions regarding the activities and strategies that were implemented both in the classroom and at the museum. Special attention was paid to the perceived impact the project had on their learning paths, outlining the aspects that were particularly significant for their educational development and broader personal growth.

The discussion guide was adapted and simplified starting from the framework proposed by Baldry (2005). To accommodate the participants' diverse profiles, characterized by low linguistic proficiency in Italian, heterogeneous educational backgrounds, and varied personal experiences, the questions were designed to be clear, accessible, and engaging. Furthermore, conversational aids such as multilingual keyword sheets and emoticons were employed to facilitate peer-to-peer and group discussion (Richards, 2003). Final open-ended questions allowed students to contribute additional reflections and insights relevant to their perspectives.

To further engage participants in a context characterized by linguistic asymmetry (Ganassin & Holmes, 2013), I adopted a flexible multilingual approach during the focus groups. This strategy leveraged the competencies and strategies naturally present within the research context, creating spaces where the diverse linguistic repertoires of all participants—including my own—could find expression. For instance, I utilised

simplified language when posing questions and frequently paraphrased or reformulated participants' responses when the meaning was unclear or not shared by the entire group. Moreover, I made every effort to utilise the following linguistic resources available within the group:

- When necessary, students freely assumed the role of mediators, not only supporting their peers and the researcher in achieving more fluid communication but also fostering a climate of "linguistic hospitality" (Phipps 2012). This allowed for a form of translation that respected the linguistic practices and choices of all participants.
- As a plurilingual individual, I utilised my own full linguistic repertoire to facilitate and mediate communication within the group.
- Throughout the focus groups, participants were invited to freely use Google Translate or other familiar applications to better express complex ideas and ensure their verbal contributions accurately reflected their thoughts.

The four focus groups (two for each class) took place in May 2025, at the end of the project. Each session was audio-recorded using two devices, with durations ranging from 16 to 55 minutes (totalling 2 hours and 26 minutes) and involving 3 to 5 participants per group. Out of 22 students, a total of 16 participated in the focus group (4 were absent and 2 declined). The timeframe was deemed sustainable, balancing the class schedules with the need to maintain focus among students who were less proficient in Italian or unfamiliar with this type of research methodology. Finally, to foster an informal and inclusive atmosphere, each session began with a discussion of conversational ground rules, emphasising the freedom to use translators, online resources, peer support, or assistance from the researcher.

5.4.2. Teachers' interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participating teachers to complement the data gathered from students. This format was selected because of its exploratory nature, allowing the researchers to follow a pre-defined set of questions while providing the interviewees with the flexibility to elaborate on emerging themes. The interview protocol was adapted from Dörnyei (2007) and built upon both theoretical literature and preliminary reflections from field notes and student focus groups.

The interviews consisted of an opening prompt, six core content questions, and a concluding remark to allow for final reflections. The discussions primarily focused on:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the project across personal, relational, civic, and linguistic dimensions.
- The perceived impact of the project on the students' overall learning processes.

To foster a collaborative and comfortable atmosphere, a joint interview with the two teachers was carried out. This approach encouraged shared reflection and allowed the participants to discuss the specific group dynamics unique to their diverse students. The session took place in early June 2025, after the virtual museum was published online, and was audio recorded.

5.4.3. Students' multimodal artifacts

In addition to the verbal data, the study incorporated the collection and analysis of multimodal artifacts produced by the students during the various phases of the project. These artifacts served as a non-verbal record of the students' learning trajectories. Following the principles of social semiotics (Halliday 1978; Hodge & Kress 1988; Kress 2010), these products were treated as 'meaning-making resources' that allowed students to express complex conceptual understandings that might have been constrained by their developing proficiency in the target language.

The collection process was longitudinal, capturing artifacts both from the initial pre-visit activities and the post-visit stage. During the pre-visit 13 linguistic silhouettes were collected (5 for the first group and 8 for the second one), while the post-visit yielded 7 cards (3 for the first group and 4 for the second one). Each card was paired with a descriptive script in all the languages spoken by the group. These scripts functioned as an 'artwork caption', reflecting deeply on the specific meaning of symbols, their cultural relevance in the students' countries of origin, and the personal motivations behind their artistic choices.

These artifacts provided a vital form of data triangulation, offering a tangible counterpoint to the retrospective accounts provided in the students' focus groups and teachers' interview and ensuring a more holistic understanding of the participants' engagement with the project.

5.5. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using an integrated qualitative approach to synthesise findings from interviews, focus groups, and multimodal artifacts. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure data fidelity. The resulting textual corpus and visual materials were managed and coded using MAXQDA 24 software.

The analysis of the transcripts followed the principles of thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell 2018). The process involved two main stages: initial coding to identify emergent themes, and second-level coding to organise these codes into broader conceptual categories aligned with the research question (Dörnyei 2007). Specifically, I read through the data to get a collective sense of the project experience, then I coded using emerging codes that were later grouped into four main themes. To provide an overview of the main codes and of the subcodes I created throughout the analysis, a snapshot of the final codebook is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Snapshot of codebook with main codes/ subcodes and operational definition

Main codes	Subcodes	Operational Definition
1. Linguistic Dimension	1.1 Interactional competence 1.2 Vocabulary acquisition	Focus on 'willingness to communicate' and the use of specialised language (e.g. language of art) or less traditional vocabulary topics in the language classroom
2. Personal/Affective Dimension	2.1 Expressing complex emotions 2.2 Subjective externalisation 2.3 Connection with the past 2.4 Identity negotiation 2.5 Emotional scaffolding	Identifying moments where participants share subjective feelings/emotions, personal history or their role in the new life
3. Social Dimension	3.1 Socialisation 3.2 Interaction/Connections 3.3 Knowledge exchange/Intercultural dialogue 3.4 Sharing understanding	Instances of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, collaborative meaning-making and cohesive group identity.
4. Civic/Democratic Dimension	4.1 Active cultural engagement 4.2 Contributing to city's narration	Instances where claiming "ownership" of the city or act as active contributors to local cultural narration

The students' multimodal artifacts were also analysed through the lens of social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006), focusing on the interplay between visual semiotic resources (such as symbols and colours) and the accompanying textual captions.

Finally, findings from all data sources were triangulated to ensure interpretative validity and to provide a holistic understanding of the participants' engagement and learning trajectories.

6. Results

This section presents the findings of this study, organised according to a thematic structure (Creswell & Creswell 2018). This organisational choice reflects the outcomes of the thematic analysis conducted on the data, ensuring that the results are presented coherently and systematically. Specifically, the analysis revealed a complex interplay of factors which have been categorised into four primary dimensions: linguistic, personal/affective, social, and civic/democratic. Each of these dimensions represents a core theme that emerged during the coding process and serves to illuminate the participants' experiences within the educational context. In the sub-sections that follow, each dimension is explored in detail, supported by representative excerpts and analytical commentary to provide a comprehensive overview of the phenomena under investigation, as well as descriptions of relevant aspects of students' multimodal artifacts.

To facilitate the interpretation of the data excerpts, the following labels were employed in the transcription of the focus groups and teacher interviews: ‘St’ designates students, ‘T’ represents teachers, and ‘R’ refers to the researcher. Furthermore, individual students and teachers are identified by numerical codes (e.g., St1, T2) to maintain anonymity while allowing for the tracking of specific participant contributions. Also, I used pseudonyms when participants referred to other students or teachers within the excerpts. Finally, to preserve the authenticity of the participants’ voices and provide visibility to the linguistic choices made by students during the focus groups, all excerpts are reported in their original form (Andrews et al. 2020). These are accompanied by English translations to ensure greater intelligibility for the reader.

6.1. Linguistic dimension

According to the perceptions of both students and teachers, the project appears to have had a significant impact on L2 learning, particularly regarding interactional competence and the acquisition of new vocabulary. This development is characterised by a transition from a traditional “focus on form” to a “focus on meaning”. The arts-based approach and the specific setting encouraged students to speak without becoming overly fixated on formal correctness, effectively leveraging their “willingness to communicate”.

The following exchange illustrates this shift from textbook-driven constraints to a more communicative orientation, driven by the need to share their ideas and emotions.

Excerpt 1, FG 3

St18: Mi piace perché, non so, it moves the focus.	St18: I like it because, I don’t know, it moves the focus.
R: Ha cambiato il focus?	R: Did it change the focus?
St18: Sì, ha cambiato il focus da regole, da libro, da parlare perfetto, è cambiato il focus.	St18: Yes, it shifted the focus away from rules, from the textbook, from speaking perfectly; the focus has changed.
[...]	[...]
St15: Voi dovete studiare, voi dovete sapere le regole tutte.	St15: You have to study, you have to know all the rules.
St18: È molto, è molto, yeah, helpful, yes.	St18: It’s very, very, yeah, helpful, yes.
T: Ok. Provo a dire una cosa e mi dite se è vero o no. Quindi l’idea è che in questa attività l’importante era parlare e non parlare correttamente, giusto?	T: Okay. I’ll try to say something, and you tell me if it’s true or not. So, the idea is that in this activity, the important thing was to speak, rather than to speak correctly, right?
St21: Sì.	St21: Yes.
T: Quindi per voi era più importante dire la vostra idea, dire la vostra emozione.	T: So, for you, it was more important to express your ideas, to express your emotions.
St18: Comunicare, sì sì.	St18: To communicate, yes, yes.

The teacher’s reflections in Excerpt 2 deepen this understanding by highlighting two pivotal structural aspects of the project that diverged from typical classroom dynamics. First, the presence of external figures, specifically the museum educators, heightened the stakes of oral production, as students had to explain concepts to individuals outside their immediate peer group and teaching staff. Second, the nature of the task itself was pivotal; the activity integrated both oral and cooperative written production centred on a topic that was not pre-given. This created an “information gap” because the specific subject matter was not shared among all participants (students, teachers, educators, and researcher), forcing students to use the language strategically to manage and convey unfamiliar information.

Excerpt 2, Teachers’ Interview

T2: Per quanto riguarda l’apprendimento linguistico, a parte appunto la produzione orale che era importante ed era importante questa produzione orale anche davanti all’operatore del museo quindi non era solo tra di loro ma spiegare al resto della classe, spiegare all’operatore del museo ma anche la produzione scritta cooperativa era interessante. Anche perché l’argomento non era un argomento dato, era un argomento che noi [gli insegnanti e gli educatori] non conoscevamo e che loro dovevano riuscire a far capire.	T2: Regarding linguistic learning, apart from oral production, which was important, especially given that they had to speak in front of the museum educator, not just among themselves, to explain things to the rest of the class and the museum staff, the cooperative written production was also interesting. This was particularly because the topic was not a pre-given one; it was a subject we [the teachers and the educators] were unfamiliar with, and which they had to manage to make us understand.
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A similar perspective emerges from the words of another student, who notes that the complexity of writing and sharing their ideas with classmates demanded deep reflection on the meanings they intended to

convey. Since Italian was the only common language available, the student felt that navigating this challenging interaction significantly enhanced their learning process.

Excerpt 3, FG 2

St8: Perché quando devono scrivere qualcosa, noi devono pensare tanto che cosa posso usare, cosa significa, perché ho scelto questa cosa... in questo tempo io ho parlato con la mia compagna. Anche io non ho capito la sua parola, lui non ha capito la mia parola, per quello noi usato la lingua italiana.

St8: Because when we have to write something, we have to think a lot about what I can use, what it means, why I chose this thing... during this time I talked with my classmate. I didn't understand her word, he didn't understand my word, and because of that we used the Italian language.

Beyond interactional competence, this perceived new focus also impacted the acquisition of domain-specific vocabulary. As evidenced in Excerpt 4, students perceived a tangible increase in their lexicon due to the specific need to seek out new words while expressing themselves in the museum setting.

Excerpt 4, FG 3

St12: Per me, tutto il tempo in classe, io penso futuro, passato prossimo, infinitivo, altre cose. Durante studiare. Ma in museo, cercando nuove parole. Perché quando studio, penso solo con regole. In museo, cercando nuove parole.

R: E queste nuove parole, Emilia, adesso le ricordi? Ti ricordi le nuove parole?

St12: Non tutti, ma poco poco, sì.

R: Quindi secondo te, Emilia, il tuo vocabolario in italiano è cresciuto? È diventato più grande?

St12: È cresciuto perché questo evento, sì.

St12: For me, during the whole time in class, I think about the future tense, the present perfect, the infinitive, and other things. While studying. But in the museum, I was looking for new words. Because when I study, I only think in terms of rules. In the museum, I was looking for new words.

R: And these new words, Emilia, do you remember them now? Do you remember the new words?

St12: Not all of them, but bit by bit, yes.

R: So, in your opinion, Emilia, has your Italian vocabulary grown? Has it become larger?

St12: It has grown because of this event, yes.

Finally, teachers noted that this lexical enrichment occurred naturally through the description of artworks rather than through traditional lessons on standardised topics like work or restaurants. By engaging with paintings, students encountered and retained specific terms (such as “symbol,” “magic wand,” or “magician”), which, while not typical of everyday language, became a permanent part of their linguistic repertoire and the language-learning process itself.

Excerpt 5, Teachers' Interview

T1: C'è anche tutta la parte di arricchimento del lessico perché non fai la classica lezione per imparare le parole che riguardano che ne so il ristorante piuttosto che il lavoro, ma con la descrizione di un quadro emergono un sacco di parole, che sicuramente adesso rimangono fissate perché “simbolo”, “bacchetta magica”, “mago”, tutte queste cose qui magari non le useranno nel linguaggio quotidiano, però sono cose che comunque adesso fanno parte del loro apprendimento, insomma della lingua.

T1: There is also the aspect of lexical enrichment because you are not doing a traditional lesson to learn words related to, I don't know, a restaurant or work; instead, through the description of a painting, a great deal of vocabulary emerges. These words surely remain fixed in their minds now, because “symbol”, “magic wand”, “magician”, all these things, they might not use in everyday language, they are now part of their learning, and ultimately, of the language itself.

6.2. Personal and affective dimension

As regards the personal and affective dimension, data appear to confirm that the project had a profound impact on the participants' capacity for self-expression. This was achieved through the strategic use of their diverse linguistic repertoires and the opportunity to employ alternative, multimodal forms of communication to ensure they were understood.

In the first excerpt, a student explains how the freedom to use their own languages in the classroom and at the museum allowed them to express complex emotions that they felt were only expressible through their first language (L1).

Excerpt 6, FG 3

St21: Noi possiamo lasciare qualcosa del nostro cuore in questo museo, in questo progetto e per me utilizzare tutte le lingue che tu conosci e che tu parli è molto importante. Non solo 'Ok studente, noi parlare italiano e tu o voi dovete parlare solo l'italiano e praticare'. Ma noi abbiamo emozioni e emozioni è difficile esplicare solo nel una lingua.

Perché la prima parola che io dico, io dico nel mio madrelingua, penso.

St21: We can leave something of our hearts in this museum, in this project, and for me, using all the languages that you know and speak is very important. Not just: 'Ok student, we speak Italian and you or all of you must speak only Italian and practice.' But we have emotions, and it is difficult to explain emotions in only one language. Because the first word I say, I say in my mother tongue, I think.

In the following excerpt, another student goes further, describing a sense of surprise at the group's collective ability to externalise their inner worlds. This process of "bringing out from inside" allowed participants to identify with one another and feel comfortable with sharing intimate aspects of their identities.

Excerpt 7, FG 4

St20: Y esto podría ser como una expresión para mí interesante, sorprendida. Sorprendida de lo que pudimos expresar, que lo sacamos de adentro. En mi caso, el caso de ella de hablar de su país y sacar esa parte de su identidad. [...]Y yo pude sacar parte de mi identidad. Entonces, me sorprendí porque de lo que pudimos expresar todos, que sacamos algo de adentro y que nos identificó y nos hizo sentir cómodas compartiendo parte de su identidad.

St20: And this could be, for me, an interesting, surprising expression. Surprised by what we were able to express, what we brought out from inside. In my case, and in her case, talking about her country and bringing out that part of her identity. [...] And I was able to bring out part of my identity. So, I was surprised because of what we were all able to express—that we brought something out from within that identified us and made us feel comfortable sharing part of our identity.

Furthermore, the activities seemed to bridge the gap between the participants' current lives and their pasts, enabling them to rediscover parts of themselves and describe their previous lives, passions, and activities. This autobiographical connection served as a powerful motivator for engagement during the activities both in class and at the museum.

Excerpt 8, FG 1

St5: Mi piaciuto perché dieci anni fa prima I used to paint.
R: Quindi tu dipingevi?
St5: Sì, dieci anni fa sì, adesso no. [...] When I was doing the painting I was ricordando questo.

St5: I liked it because ten years ago I used to paint.
R: So, you used to paint?
St5: Yes, ten years ago I did, but not now. [...] When I was doing the painting, I was remembering this.

These personal narratives were also facilitated using specific pedagogical tools, such as the language portrait, which were modified from the framework proposed by Busch (2012). As noted by one of the teachers, these visual representations of the linguistic repertoires, combined with the placement of symbolic objects on a table, allowed students to visualise their linguistic repertoires while providing a semiotic bridge to describe their desires, aspirations, and the roles they envision for themselves in their new lives.

Excerpt 9, Teachers' Interview

T1: Quando hanno messo sul banco dei simboli, lì andavano proprio a parlare di sé. Parlare dei propri desideri, per esempio penso ai ragazzi un po' più giovani che parlavano di ciò che vorrebbero diventare nel futuro. [...] Quindi sì sono andati un pochetto più a fondo su quelli che sono i propri desideri, le proprie aspirazioni, le proprie passioni.

T1: When they placed the symbols on the desk, they really started talking about themselves. Talking about their own desires—for example, I'm thinking of the younger students who spoke about what they would like to become in the future. [...] So yes, they went a bit deeper into what their own desires, their own aspirations, and their own passions are.

While the silhouettes and symbols generally facilitated the expression of positive life aspects, the project also seemed to provide a safe space for the expression of trauma and negative experiences. A significant case involved a Ukrainian refugee student who used the activity to share the painful reality of her displacement due to the war. In her work, she utilised the colour black as a pervasive symbol for her home, her country, and her lack of hope for the future, as stated in Excerpt 10, which provides the transcription of the description of

her silhouette during the pre-visit activity. Figure 3, on the other hand, displays the actual silhouette described by the student.

Excerpt 10, Audio recording, pre-visit

St12: Mia arte non è felice. Voi volete vedere?

T2: Sì. Anche perché da qua io vedo che è in bianco e nero e questo è molto interessante.

St12: Questo è simbolo per mio paese. Questa è la mia casa... nera. Questi sono i miei fiori vicino alla mia casa... neri. Queste montagne quando io viaggio in mio paese... nero. Il sole... nero. In mia testa zero, in mio cuore zero. in mio tavolo zero, in mio occhi c'è zero... non vedo futuro per mia terra perché è guerra.

T2: Per questo hai scelto il nero?

St12: Sì.

St12: My art is not happy. Do you want to see?

T2: Yes. Also, because from here I can see that it is in black and white, and this is very interesting.

St12: This is a symbol for my country. This is my house... black. These are my flowers near my house... black. These mountains when I travel in my country... black. The sun... black. In my head zero, in my heart zero. On my table zero, in my eyes there is zero... I see no future for my land because there is war.

T2: Is that why you chose black?

St12: Yes.

Figure 4. below, on the other hand, displays the actual silhouette described by the student.

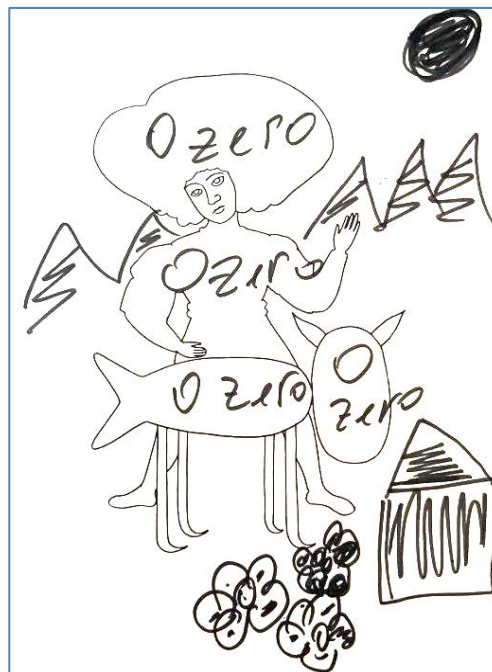


Figure 4. Language portrait drawn by the Ukrainian student

As the teacher observed, the student's powerful expression of negativity was not a sign of disengagement; rather, she became more consistently present and involved precisely because the project allowed for such authentic, albeit painful, personal involvement. Although she could have "bluffed" or approached the task in a thousand different ways, her choice actually fulfilled a deep need to express her own narrative and tell her story. This need likely matured at that exact moment, providing her with the necessary outlet to finally let her thoughts and feelings come out. By choosing to satisfy this internal requirement for self-expression, she established a profoundly intimate connection with the project. Ultimately, according to the teacher's words, this personal bond is why she remained committed and cared so deeply about the project whenever she was present.

Excerpt 11, Teachers' Interview

T2: Alla fine lei questa carta la poteva disegnare in mille modi, cioè poteva bluffare e fare altro, quindi probabilmente questa scelta rispondeva a un'esigenza di narrarsi, di raccontarsi e quindi una volta fatto questo ha creato anche una relazione intima con questo progetto per cui lo ha sentito forse suo e ha continuato a venire. Quando c'era, ci teneva e quindi io penso sì nel momento in cui è una scelta risponde a un'esigenza e quindi forse poi questo crea anche un legame proprio perché probabilmente per lei era giunto il momento di buttare fuori questa cosa... e poi ha stabilito un legame con il progetto.	T2: In the end, she could have drawn this card in a thousand different ways, she could have bluffed or done something else, so this choice probably met a need to express herself, to tell her own story. Once she did that, she also created an intimate relationship with this project, which is why she perhaps felt it was hers and continued to show up. When she was there, she cared about it; so I think that when a choice meets a need, it perhaps creates a personal bond because it was likely the right time for her to let this thing out... and then she established a connection with the project.
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Finally, the analysis of the multimodal artifacts created by the students during the post-visit phase, specifically the “cards” they created for the virtual museum, provides further insight into the personal dimensions and subjectivities they chose to foreground during the project. These artifacts serve as semiotic evidence of the students' ability to synthesise their cultural backgrounds with the themes encountered at the museum. As illustrated in the table below, the themes emerging from these works range from the comparison of traditions and cultural traits to the expression of universal values and reflections on what constitutes a sustainable and meaningful life.

Table 5

Specific themes and symbolic meanings attributed by the students to their artefacts

Title of the artifact	Core Theme & Symbolic Expression
La vita fortunata / ভাগ্যবান জীবন / السعيدة الحياة	Represents a collective desire for a calm, stress-free existence, utilizing symbols as a direct expression of this aspiration.
Kolam / Alpona	Highlights symbols of good fortune that act as a common thread among the group; despite their diverse origins, participants identified these traditional patterns as shared cultural bridges.
Pace per tutto il mondo / সমগ্র বিশ্বের জন্য শান্তি / جهان تمام برای صلح / мир для всего світу	Focuses on the universal longing for peace and victory. Students selected symbols that they perceived as having a global resonance, transcending individual borders.
L'equilibrio della vita / The balance of life / Жизнь / Équilibre de la vie	Explores the description of fundamental life values. This work stemmed from both the etymological meaning of the students' own names and specific symbols rooted in their heritage.
Buona fortuna dal mondo / Dünyadan iyi şanslar / 世界から平和を / Buena suerte del mundo	Positions symbols as culture anchors, reflecting how specific objects can transport traditional meanings across different geographic and social contexts.
Il mondo con le imperfezioni è bello / Неідеальны свет выдатны / Hiraya manawari	Explores the description of fundamental life values. Symbols are used here to express shared perspectives about how people could approach life.
Sol og neige / Soleil et sno	Employs symbols to describe and compare the characteristics and traditions of two distinct countries.

In conclusion, these artifacts demonstrate that the experience did not merely provide new vocabulary but rather a visual vocabulary through which students could negotiate their identities and beliefs. By externalising their desires and values through symbols, the participants transformed the task into a profound exercise for personal expression and shared reflection.

6.3. Social dimension

The social dimension emerged as a primary outcome, characterised by a significant shift from individual isolation to a cohesive group identity. Participants consistently identified the opportunity to learn about and connect with their peers as the most rewarding aspect of the program.

The first significant finding concerns the fundamental change in how students perceive their daily interactions. In Excerpt 12, participants describe a shift from a state of mere physical presence to active social

engagement. Student 5 (Masud) reflects on his initial six months at the school as a period where no greetings were exchanged, and silence was the norm. The project appears to have broken this cycle, facilitating a transition where everyone in class is friends with each other. The recognition of the term “socialisation” indicates a conscious awareness among students that one of the values of this project lies in its ability to foster interpersonal bonds.

Excerpt 12, FG 1

St5: Perché adesso in classe sono tutti amici. Noi parliamo... we talk to each other.	St5: Because now everyone in class is friends. We talk... we talk to each other.
R: Ok, quindi Masud dice che dopo questa attività voi parlate di più.	R: Ok, so Masud says that after this activity you all talk more.
St3: Sì, sì. Lui ha ragione.	St3: Yes, yes. He is right.
R: Sei d'accordo? Anche tu adesso parli di più con i tuoi compagni?	R: Do you agree? Do you also talk more with your classmates now?
St3: Sì, sì, sì.	St3: Yes, yes, yes.
St 5: Ok. I primi sei mesi, quando io sono arrivato per scuola, ho finito la classe e dopo vado via. Non c'è 'ciao', niente. Adesso, quando ho visto lei fuori 'Ciao, come stai tu?' Adesso, amici, è questa socializ... social...	St5: Ok. During the first six months when I arrived at school, I would finish class and then just leave. There was no 'hello,' nothing. Now, when I see her outside, it's 'Hi, how are you?' Now, friends, it's this socializ... social...
R: È una parola difficile in italiano. socializzazione.	R: It is a difficult word in Italian. Socialization.
St5: Sì, socializzazione.	St5: Yes, socialization.
[...]	[...]
St5: Ok, E questo è molto importante per questo programma.	St5: Ok, and this is very important for this program.

As socialisation increased, there was a perceived improvement in the students' emotional well-being and sense of security within the learning environment. Initially, the unfamiliarity of the environment caused a sense of “fastidio” (discomfort or awkwardness), leading to hesitation when asked to participate. However, as the project fostered a deeper knowledge of one another, this anxiety was replaced by confidence. The metaphor of the class becoming “like a family” suggests that the social dimension of the project provided a “safe place” that mitigated the stress that can be associated with L2 learning for adult learners.

Excerpt 13, FG 1

St3: Lui voleva dire che quando era prima fatto in classe, lui sempre fastidio quando insegnante chiede qualcosa, quando lui vuole rispondere qualcosa lui fastidioso perché lui non conosce nessuno. Però adesso lui conosce tutti e non fa fastidio più.	St3: He wanted to say that before, in class, he always felt bothered (or awkward) when the teacher asked something. When he wanted to answer something, he felt bothered because he didn't know anyone. But now he knows everyone and doesn't feel bothered anymore.
R: Quindi adesso in classe siete più tranquilli? Siete più con...	R: So now you are calmer in class? You are more con...
St5: Confidenti, sì!	St5: Confident, yes!
St2: Per me è come la famiglia adesso.	St2: For me, it is like a family now.

The students' perceptions are validated by the observations of the teachers. In Excerpt 14, a teacher reflects on how the specific pedagogical tools used during the project served as catalysts for interaction. The teacher notes that these activities drew out students who were traditionally silent or socially withdrawn. By providing a shared task and a physical focal point (the card), the project created different dynamics that allowed for connections to form between individuals who previously had no social contact.

Excerpt 14, Teachers' Interview

T2: Secondo me questo è stato uno spunto interessante perché li ha coinvolti e ricordo quando erano tutti in piedi davanti alla carta per cercare i simboli per poi agganciarsi, ho sentito parlare delle persone che in genere non parlano, non interagiscono ed è stato veramente interessante.	T2: In my opinion, this was an interesting starting point because it involved them; I remember when they were all standing in front of the map to look for symbols to then connect with. I heard people talking who generally do not speak or interact, and it was truly interesting.
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The social dimension was deepened by the intercultural nature of the exchanges. The project did not just encourage talking; it encouraged learning from others. As St21 reports, the activities facilitated

connections that transcended prior social boundaries. By sharing topics related to their respective cultures, students like Mila (St21) and Camille were able to bridge the gap between being strangers and becoming partners. This suggests that the project's success in socialisation was intrinsically linked to its ability to foster genuine intercultural dialogue.

Excerpt 15, FG 3

St21: E anche, per esempio, la mia coppia, Camille, non ho parlato con Camille molto prima. Ma quando noi facciamo questo progetto insieme, noi parliamo del mio paese, del Filippine. Noi abbiamo the chance... la possibilità di studiare qualcosa del nostro paese e anche della persona con cui tu studi in classe. E per me è molto interessante. Molto importante.

St21: And also, for example, with my partner, Camille, I didn't talk to Camille much before. But when we do this project together, we talk about my country, about the Philippines. We have the chance... the possibility to study something about our own country and also about the person you study with in class. And for me, it is very interesting. Very important.

The project also helped students realise that cultural differences do not preclude personal commonalities. Excerpt 16 highlights a student's reflection on the intercultural exchange. The student expresses that, while it is stimulating to hear from those who think differently, the collaborative process ultimately revealed a common ground. This dynamic allowed participants to understand that, despite having diverse origins that may initially lead to divergent visions, it is possible to find shared values.

Excerpt 16, FG 3

St15: Perché ho lavorato con un'altra persona e questa persona straniera è per me molto interessante sentire, capire e sapere altre persone che non pensano come io, per esempio. Ma alla fine la ragazza con cui lavoravo io, lei pensa uguale come io. E lei piace anche le cose che piacciono a me.

R: Ok, quindi avete trovato dei punti comuni anche se siete due persone diverse, differenti.

St15: Sì sì.

St15: Because I worked with another person, and as a foreigner, it is very interesting for me to hear, understand, and know other people who do not think like I do, for example. But in the end, the girl I was working with, she thinks the same as I do. And she also likes the things that I like.

R: Ok, so you found a common ground even though you are two different, distinct people.

St15: Yes, yes.

To conclude, the social dimension of the project seemed to act as a transformative force within the classroom. By moving beyond a purely academic focus, the program addressed the fundamental human need for connection and belonging. From the initial breaking of silence to the discovery of common ground, the project fostered an environment where students felt secure, confident, and socially integrated.

6.4. Civic and democratic dimension

Beyond fostering interpersonal relationships, the project also seemed to facilitate a significant expansion into the civic-democratic dimension. By moving the learning process outside the traditional classroom and into the city's cultural heritage sites, the program encouraged adult learners to open up to new possibilities while living in the new city and recognise their own cultural backgrounds as valuable contributions to the democratic life of their new home, transitioning from passive observers to active participants.

The first step toward civic engagement involved breaking the physical and symbolic barriers that often isolate new citizens from the host city's cultural life. As shown in Excerpt 17, the project provided students with the opportunity to visit cultural institutions that had previously felt inaccessible. For many, this was not merely a "new" experience but a restoration of a lost identity. During the first focus group, one student (St5) reflects on how he frequently went to museums in his home country yet had spent two years in Italy without entering a single cultural space due to a lack of time or access. By facilitating this visit, the project entitled students to enjoy and participate in the city's heritage.

Excerpt 17, FG 1

St5: Quando io andato in museum that one was beautiful because that is a new place for us. [...] Quindi è questa nuova esperienza per noi. Perché mi piace il museo. Mi piace library. Ma qua I didn't have time to go anywhere. Quando io andata in museo perché mi piace in mio paese... Io sempre andato in museum. E qua in due anni non c'è

St5: When I went to the museum, that was beautiful because it is a new place for us. [...] So it is this new experience for us. Because I like the museum. I like the library. But here, I didn't have time to go anywhere. When I went to the museum [it was] because I like it in my country... I always went to the museum. And here, in two

niente... I didn't go anywhere. Quindi è questa nuova esperienza per me. I think per tutti also. This is a new experience for noi.	years, there has been nothing... I didn't go anywhere. So this is a new experience for me. I think for everyone else too. This is a new experience for us.
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The democratic dimension was further realised through the creation of the virtual museum, an activity that allowed students to exercise their agency by contributing to the city's narrative. Students began to see themselves as part of a "mix of cultures" that enriches the local environment. Rather than just learning about Venetian culture, they felt they were developing and carrying on the culture through their own contributions. St21's observation that their work on the app has a small impact on the city marks a crucial democratic shift: the student is no longer just a guest in Venice, but a producer of cultural content whose voice carries weight in the public sphere.

Excerpt 18, FG 3

St21: Secondo me noi abitiamo a Venezia e piccolo... impact?	St21: In my opinion, we live in Venice and it's small... impact?
R: Un piccolo impatto.	R: A small impact.
St21: In questo posto c'è cultura e tradizione. Venezia è un mix di culture. E noi siamo insieme un mix di culture. Penso che è molto importante to develop e continuare la cultura. E questo [RIFERENDOSI AL MUSEO VIRTUALE] è un po' di nostra cultura.	St21: In this place, there is culture and tradition. Venice is a mix of cultures. And together, we are a mix of cultures. I think it is very important to develop and continue the culture. And this [referring to the virtual museum] is a bit of our culture.
T: Quindi tu Mila ti senti di avere un impatto sulla città, su Venezia?	T: So you, Mila, do you feel like you have an impact on the city, on Venice?
St21: Sì, sì, sì. Perché io posso vedere sull'app izi.TRAVEL Mila, Venezia, quadro, sì.	St21: Yes, yes, yes. Because I can see on the izi.TRAVEL app Mila, Venice, painting, yes.

This idea is further extended in the final excerpt, as students discuss the project's potential to inspire a shared spirit of communal contribution towards other future newcomers.

Excerpt 19, FG 3

St15: Perché secondo me noi siamo già una parte di questa città di Venezia, come ha detto Mila. Abitiamo qua. [...] Quando al museo [virtuale] visiteranno altre persone è importante che queste persone dicano magari 'Interessante questo progetto, abitano a Venezia, magari anch'io posso abitare qua.	St15: Because in my opinion, we are already a part of this city of Venice, as Mila said. We live here. [...] When other people visit the [virtual] museum, it's important that they might say, 'This project is interesting, they live in Venice, maybe I can live here too.'
R: Quindi secondo te può essere anche un'ispirazione per altre persone.	R: So in your opinion, it can also be an inspiration for other people.
St21: Per altri studenti per esempio l'anno prossimo sì, altro livello A2.	St21: For other students next year, for example, yes, [for] another A2 level.

The findings within the civic-democratic dimension suggest that this project did more than teach a language: it fostered a sense of political and cultural belonging. By facilitating access to cultural spaces and providing tools for creative production, the program empowered these adult learners to move to the centre of civic life.

7. Discussion

The ethnographic data collected during the project provides a comprehensive lens through which to evaluate the impact of arts-based and translanguaging pedagogy on adults with a migratory background. By analysing the students' experiences across socio-relational, personal/affective, civic/democratic, and linguistic dimensions, this study confirms that shifting the educational setting from the traditional classroom fundamentally alters the learning paradigm. It moves L2 acquisition from a strictly functional, vocational exercise toward a holistic process of identity negotiation and social justice, treating learners as whole persons (Kramsch 2006; Morrice 2017).

7.1. Building cohesion beyond the classroom: the socio-relational transformation

The socio-relational dimension emerged as the most widely discussed aspect among the participants, underscoring the shift from a purely academic focus to one that addresses the fundamental human need for connection and belonging. In a traditional classroom, learners are often constrained by formal, text-based instruction that frequently limits peer-to-peer interaction to artificial activities or highly structured exercises. In contrast, the collaboration between the school and the museum facilitated a more organic form of socialisation. By presenting museum objects as tangible focal points and encouraging students to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires, the project created a platform for reciprocal knowledge sharing. This environment allowed learners to not only learn “about the other” but, more importantly, to learn “from the other,” fostering a deep sense of group belonging.

These findings strongly corroborate Waterhouse’s (2021) assertion that integrating arts-based activities into adult L2 courses significantly heightens engagement and builds community cohesion beyond the physical walls of the classroom. While Cárdenas Curiel (2023) observed similar socialisation benefits in bilingual primary schools, this project demonstrates that such outcomes are equally vital for adult learners navigating the complexities of the new society.

Furthermore, the project actualised Vlachou’s (2017) vision of cultural spaces as “non-threatening arenas” that promote mutual understanding. This transformation of the learning environment into a “safe space” had a direct and positive impact on student well-being, as advocated by Dryden et al. (2021). By moving away from the high pressure of “speaking perfectly”, students entered a space where they felt secure and confident in their communicative attempts.

This dimension is also intrinsically linked to the fostering of genuine intercultural dialogue. As students engaged with art and artifacts, the objects acted as neutral mediators that invited diverse perspectives, allowing for a horizontal exchange between peers of different backgrounds. By recognising the linguistic and cultural diversity present within their own group, as advocated by Beacco et al. (2008), the participants moved from being strangers to being members of a plural community.

7.2. Expressing plural identities: the personal and affective shift

The findings concerning the personal and affective dimension highlight how museum-based and arts-based learning facilitates a profound negotiation of identity, allowing participants to move beyond the restrictive label of “language learner”. By engaging with museum artifacts through a translanguaging lens, students felt a renewed sense of empowerment and agency, as they were encouraged to use their entire linguistic repertoire to express complex internal states. This approach directly supports Kramsch’s (2006, 251) vision of these learners as “whole persons” whose “hearts, bodies, and minds” are deeply intertwined with their “memories, fantasies, and identities”. Such validation is not merely a psychological comfort; it is a pedagogical necessity that supports the preservation of cultural identity and facilitates a more effective, low-anxiety literacy process in the L2 (García, 2017).

Within this “safe space”, these persons were able to build a vital bridge between their past and present lives. Artifacts acted as a tool through which participants could externalise their desires, values, and beliefs. This process of sharing identities often involved the evocation of intense and sometimes even painful emotions, such as memories of war or the trauma of displacement. By acknowledging all their experiences, the project moved beyond the survival lexicon typical of vocational L2 programs and gave the students the chance to feel more engaged in their learning process.

The inclusion of these emotional narratives, facilitated by the multimodal nature of the museum and arts-based activities, allowed students to reclaim their humanity in the host society. The artifacts they produced demonstrate that the experience did not merely provide new vocabulary, but rather a “visual vocabulary” through which students could negotiate their identities and beliefs.

7.3. Claiming the “third space”: the civic and democratic imperative

The transition from the classroom to the city significantly expanded the civic and democratic dimension of the learning experience. Leaving the school allowed students to familiarise themselves with the territory and confront social realities they might otherwise have perceived as inaccessible. The museum, understood as a public space, became a resource for connecting with the new community and helped learners reimagine their roles as active citizens (Insulander & Öhman, 2021). This spatial transition seems to have

helped them reason on their role as active citizens, since they were able to discover new ways of living in the city, often in line with what happened in their home countries.

The democratic dimension was further realised through the co-creation of a virtual museum on the Izi.TRAVEL platform. This activity allowed students to exercise their agency by contributing directly to the city's narrative. Rather than simply learning about Venetian culture as passive observers, they felt they were developing and continuing that culture through their own contributions. This marks a crucial democratic shift: the student is no longer just a "guest" in the city, but a producer of cultural content whose voice carries weight in the public sphere. Furthermore, there was a visible transition from individual belonging to a sense of civic responsibility toward others. Participants expressed a desire for their work to serve as an inspiration for those arriving after them, imagining that their virtual museum might help future residents think, "Maybe I too can live here". By sharing their artifacts online, the project reached a broader community, ensuring that student-produced knowledge travelled from the classroom to the world (Meneghetti & Fazzi, 2025), as clearly emphasised in the framework of García et al. (2017).

7.4. From form to meaningful interactions: the linguistic dimension

From a strictly linguistic perspective, the project significantly impacted two core aspects of L2 learning: vocabulary and interactional competence. Students reported that the activities allowed them to acquire new vocabulary related both to the specific artistic content and the museum context, also anticipating lexical areas that would be covered later in the classroom. These findings align with previous research both on museum-based language education (Clarke, 2013; Fazzi, 2025; Fazzi & Meneghetti, 2021; Labadi, 2018; Ruanglertbutr, 2016) and on translanguaging pedagogy (Beiler & Dewilde, 2023; Choi & Nayer, 2017; Park & Valdez, 2018).

This development is characterised by a transition from a traditional "focus on form" to a "focus on meaning". The arts-based approach and the unique setting encouraged students to speak without becoming fixated on formal correctness, effectively leveraging their "willingness to communicate" (MacIntyre et al. 2001, in Ellis, 2015, p. 51). As Labadi (2018, p. 71) suggests, museum collections are unique because their meanings are not fixed but remain open to interpretation and negotiation, allowing each participant to bring their own cultural background and prior knowledge to the dialogue. In this project, the power of the museum's objects was amplified by the creation and sharing of students' multimodal multilingual artifacts.

Two aspects of the project seemed to be pivotal in this linguistic shift. First, the presence of external figures (museum educators) heightened the stakes of oral production, as students had to explain concepts to individuals outside their immediate peer group. Second, the nature of the task created a genuine information gap: because the specific museum subject matter was not pre-shared among all participants, students were forced to use the language strategically to manage and convey unfamiliar information to their teachers and peers. This authentic need for communication successfully bypassed the textbook-driven constraints that can smother oral production in formal settings.

8. Conclusions

The project provides compelling empirical evidence that adults with a migratory background language education must evolve beyond the vocational paradigms that often dominate the field. While current practices still prioritise L2 acquisition solely for labour market entry, at least in our context, this study demonstrates that treating language merely as a tool for survival risks ignoring complex identities and democratic potential. This represents a shift away from a conception of language as merely words toward a more nuanced vision. This perspective encompasses human factors (such as social relationships and emotions,) practical factors, (such as multilingual practices and iterative activities), and environmental factors, including physical objects and artifacts and their availability across time and space (Pennycook, 2023).

As advocated by Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer (2024), there is a clear need to challenge logocentric conceptions of communicative repertoires by interconnecting multilingualism with multisensorial, spatial, bodily, and semiotic dimensions. In doing so, arts-based language learning becomes a powerful tool for social justice and advocacy.

Moreover, the new stance discussed in this article requires a fundamental reframing of the "students with a migratory background". Following Morrice (2017), we must reject stable versions of culture and recognise that identities are not fixed but continuously shaped by individual histories of migration. In contrast, the museum-based and arts-based approaches intertwined with translanguaging pedagogy, allowing us to

focus on how and where these learners develop a genuine sense of belonging and fitting in within their new host community.

To ensure this within the *Io vado al museo* project, robust collaboration between the various participating institutions was paramount. This required creating dedicated opportunities for cross-sectoral dialogue to establish a rigorous alignment of pedagogical goals and expectations. Furthermore, professional development was a critical prerequisite; it was essential to provide prior training for museum educators on linguistic facilitation and the specific needs of L2 learners. Ideally, museum staff and language teachers should undergo joint training sessions focused on translanguaging strategies across formal and non-formal contexts to create a cohesive and supportive environment for the participants.

Nevertheless, practitioners must account for the fact that these interventions are inherently time-consuming. To ensure sustainability, the project must be harmonised within the broader instructional design of the language course, rather than being treated as an isolated or extracurricular activity. Practical transferability also hinges on digital access—specifically, the ability to use personal devices in the classroom and the management of digital accounts. Consequently, teachers must be specifically trained to navigate these technical and logistical dimensions to prevent them from becoming barriers to engagement.

To conclude, transcending the classroom walls is not merely a spatial shift, but a pedagogical imperative. By embracing plurilingual multimodal co-creation within the broader cultural landscape of the city, we offer new citizens an educational experience that honours their past, validates their present, and empowers their future as active, plural citizens, while simultaneously offering a novel and effective approach to mastering the L2.

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