

ZORNOTZAKO BARNETEGIA

Dedicated to Basque language acquisition among adults for the last 25 years

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The main objective of the Basque Country government's language policy following the Francoist dictatorship was the revitalisation and normalisation of the Basque language among the population (young and old). This article provides a comprehensive overview of how Zornotzako Barnetegia created a recipe for success in Basque language acquisition among adults with the implementation of a residential language programme in 1993.

Following the establishment of the regional Basque Country government at the end of the 1970s, it was decided that a language policy needed to be developed and implemented in order to revitalise and normalise the use of the Basque language. The point of departure was intricate – the use of the Basque language was declining, but fortunately public favour leaned towards its revitalisation.

One of the central strategies of the language policy was the implementation of Basque language education among the population. There were two areas in particular that needed to be tackled in order for this objective to materialise. Firstly, it was necessary to promote and strengthen the teaching of the Basque language and teaching in the Basque language within the education system. Secondly, it was necessary to roll out initiatives in the social sphere and offer Basque language learning opportunities to adults.

At the end of the 1980s, Basque government language policymakers decided that the creation of residential Basque language learning centres for adults was a necessary strategic move to ensure the revitalisation of the Basque language. Two residential language centres were built in the Basque Country Autonomous Community, one in Lazkao (Gipuzkoa) and the other in Amorebieta-Etxano (Bizkaia). They would remain open all year round.





The residential language centre of Zornotzako Barnetegia (Amorebieta-Etxano, Bizkaia).

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- The residential language centre of **Zornotzako Barnetegia** opened its doors in 1993 to offer Basque language courses to adults in the municipality of Amorebieta-Etxano (Bizkaia). The centre is housed in a building exclusively set up for this purpose. The initiative was driven by H ABE (the Adult Re-Basquisition and Literacy Institute), an independent body under the Basque Country government that is committed to Basque language education and literacy among adults. **Aurten Bai**, a private non-profit organisation, was awarded the tender to manage the centre's operations.
- Zornotzako Barnetegia is open all year round and offers several different language learning levels. Pupils can choose between a full-board programme (which includes overnight stays) or half-board programmes (which only include lunch).
- One of the main advantages of registering for the full-board programme is that it provides **intensive**, full immersion. Classes during the winter session include 6 classes a day and during the summer session 8. The benefit of doing the full board is that pupils live and breathe in Basque, day in and day out. Once classes are over, pupils attend an extracurricular activity of their choice (dance, music, crafts, film, etc.) that are entirely given in Basque and supervised by one of the teachers at the centre.
- The centre relies on two streams of **funding**: government grants and tuition fees. The Aurten Bai Foundation files the necessary documentation to obtain regional government grants available to organisations managing Basque language education centres, and pupils pay tuition fees on registration.
- **Pupil profiles** have varied over the years. Basque Country public administration employees represent a high percentage of pupils at Zornotzako Barnetegia. In recent years, we have seen more pupils come through our doors who are not public administration employees and who want to learn Basque in order to access the job market. There are also foreign pupils who come to the centre to learn the language because it is part of their family heritage or out of scholarly interest.



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There are also numerous Basque language lecturers who come from universities from around the world to reinforce their language skills at the centre. These pupils come through the collaboration agreement we have in place with the **Instituto Etxepare**, a Basque Country government institution dedicated to the promotion of the Basque language and culture around the world.

We also have a collaboration agreement with the non-governmental international cooperation organisation **Garabide** and have worked with associations that promote the Mapuche language. We have sent technical support to a residential centre in Chile to help them with their endeavours and we have hosted several Mapuche language teachers so they could learn about how we operate the centre.

The operational model we have been using for the last 25 years is based on two key components: quality education and an enjoyable stay. Our pupils are adults who make a significant commitment in terms of time and money to be part of the programme. They set aside a minimum of **2 to 3 weeks** of their time and we want to ensure they are comfortable throughout their stay. We strive to offer a high-grade quality education and we do so by continuously improving our methodology. This includes creating digital learning support resources, such as the online BOGA Basque language learning method; refresher course content; and equipping the centre with the latest technological solutions.

During academic year 2018-19, we gave 13,710 hours of class, and had 12,452 full board registrations and 6,149 half-board registrations.

We are convinced that the residential learning model is a key strategy in ensuring Basque language acquisition among adults. We have seen how a residential stay constitutes an important pillar in pupils' learning curve. The residential environment provides a wholly-integrated language component whereby pupils are immersed in both controlled language practice groups as well as informal settings. It substantially increases the speed at which pupils internalise the language, making it easier for pupils to see the fruit of their efforts and encouraging them to continue their learning progression.

The Aurtien Bai Foundation has been a member of the NPLD since 2012 and was a member of the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL) before that. Our affiliation is a reflection of our commitment to the conservation of linguistic diversity in Europe. Should you wish to learn more about our experience in managing Zornotzako Barnetegia, please feel free to contact us. //

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