



Co-funded by
the European Union



DigiLang Project

Summary

on digital technologies and tools in language training

Developed within the project:

**“Digital technologies in language training of students
with different mother tongue: Skilled teachers
wanted”**

2023-1-BG01-KA220-SCH-000152954



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room for learning



2024

This publication is prepared within the scope of the project “Digital technologies in language training of students with different mother tongue: Skilled teachers wanted” 2023-1-BG01-KA220-SCH-000152954, which has been co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission.

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The publication is a collaborative work of the partner organizations to the project. The names of the organizations partnering in the project which contributed to this publication are as follows: Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski – Bulgaria, Private Profiled High School "Edmund Burke" – Bulgaria, Secondary School "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bulgaria, Romanian Free Trade Union in Pre-University Education (USLIP) – Romania, Gelibolu District National Education Directorate – Turkey, ipcenter.at GmbH – Austria, Elderberry AB - Sweden.

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Chapter 1. Digital competencies in the 21st century

1.1. Introduction

Digital competence is a relatively modern concept that has emerged alongside the rapid development of digital technology, reflecting broader societal shifts toward increasingly technology-driven environments. The history of digital competence begins in the late 1980s and 1990s with the popularization of personal computers and the internet. During this initial phase, basic computer literacy—understanding how to operate a computer and use software like word processors—was the primary focus. Schools and workplaces began incorporating computer skills into their essential criteria as foundational elements of digital competence.

As the internet became more accessible worldwide in the 1990s and early 2000s, the scope of digital competence expanded to include the ability to navigate the web, use search engines, and engage in basic digital communication, such as email. Educational systems worldwide started to recognize the necessity of integrating digital skills into curricula, not just as a separate subject but as a tool for learning across all disciplines.

With the rise of broadband and mobile internet access, digital competence started to encompass more advanced skills, including the use of social media, digital collaboration tools, and cloud-based applications. The concept of "digital citizenship" also emerged, emphasizing the need for ethical behaviour online, awareness of digital footprints, and understanding of internet safety and cybersecurity.

In the early 2010s, the European Union developed the Digital Competence Framework (DigComp), which played a pivotal role in defining and disseminating the concept across member states. DigComp identified key areas of digital competence, including information literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving. Digital competence became a critical component in educational policies, with schools increasingly incorporating these skills into their teaching methods, supported by government initiatives.

As technology continues to advance in the 2020s, digital competence now includes emerging areas such as data literacy, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT). The focus has shifted towards lifelong learning, recognizing that digital skills need continuous development and adaptation to keep pace with technological changes. There is a growing emphasis on making digital competence accessible to all, including marginalized and elderly populations, to ensure full participation in a digital society. As digital landscapes continue to evolve, so too will the definitions and expectations of digital competence, ensuring that individuals are equipped to navigate and succeed in digital domains.

1.2. Digital literacy and media literacy

In the contemporary educational landscape, the integration of digital competencies into language learning has transformed from a supplementary enhancement to a fundamental necessity. The rapid advancement of technology has reshaped teaching methodologies and the way languages are learned. Today, educators and students are equipped with a vast array of digital tools and resources, making digital competence crucial for effective language education. This comprehensive discussion explores the various dimensions of digital competencies, emphasizing critical tools, methodologies, and ethical considerations central to modern educational practices.

At the heart of digital competencies in language learning lie digital literacy and media literacy. These foundational skills enable learners to access, utilize, and critically evaluate digital resources effectively. Digital literacy extends beyond mere familiarity with digital tools; it involves understanding how to strategically use these tools to enhance language acquisition. Complementing this, media literacy equips learners with the ability to analyse and interpret multimedia content critically, an essential skill in language learning where cultural nuances and contextual subtleties are often conveyed through various media formats.

Digital literacy and media literacy are integral components of modern education, serving as essential skills that enable individuals to effectively navigate the increasingly digital world. As technology becomes more embedded in everyday life, these literacies are pivotal in equipping learners with the tools they need to manage, understand, and critically assess digital content and communications.

1.3. Digital Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate, and create information using a range of digital technologies. It encompasses a variety of skills and competencies that are essential for participating in a digital society. These include the ability to use digital devices, communication tools, and networks appropriately to manage and integrate digital information, construct new knowledge, and communicate with others. When applied to language learning, digital literacy becomes a powerful tool that enhances the acquisition and mastery of new languages.

At the core of digital literacy is proficiency in using digital devices. This involves understanding how to operate computers, smartphones, tablets, and other digital gadgets. It also includes knowing how to use operating systems, software applications, and internet browsers. Basic digital skills extend to tasks such as creating and managing files, using word processors, and understanding how to troubleshoot common technical issues. For language learners, this means being able to navigate various digital platforms and tools designed for language education, which offer interactive lessons and exercises.

Beyond basic technical skills, digital literacy involves the ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information. This requires a critical understanding of how to use search engines effectively to locate information online, assess the credibility of digital sources, and distinguish between reliable and unreliable content. For language learners, this includes identifying credible websites, online dictionaries, grammar guides, and language forums. Being digitally literate means knowing how to assess the reliability of these sources and integrating them into a cohesive learning strategy.

Communication is a vital aspect of digital literacy. This includes knowing how to use email, social media platforms, and messaging apps to interact with others. It also involves understanding the norms and etiquette of digital communication, such as maintaining professionalism in work-related emails or respecting privacy and consent in social media interactions. For language learners, this extends to participating in online language communities and engaging with native speakers and other learners through forums, social media, and language exchange websites in online discussions, joining virtual language classes, and participating in language exchange sessions are all part of being digitally literate in language learning.

Another important component of digital literacy is the ability to create digital content. This can range from writing blogs and creating videos to developing websites and designing digital graphics. It involves not just technical skills but also creativity and an understanding of how to use digital tools to effectively convey messages and ideas. For language learners, this could involve writing blog posts, recording language practice sessions, or even creating videos in the target language. This not only helps in practicing the language but also in receiving feedback from a broader audience.

Digital literacy also entails a keen awareness of digital security and privacy issues. This includes understanding the importance of strong passwords, recognizing phishing attempts, and knowing how to protect personal information online. Being digitally literate means being vigilant about digital threats and taking proactive steps to safeguard one's digital presence. For those learning a language, this means understanding how to protect their personal information when using online platforms and being aware of the potential risks associated with digital interactions.

Furthermore, digital literacy is about understanding the ethical and legal implications of digital activities. This includes respecting intellectual property rights, avoiding plagiarism, and understanding the legal ramifications of online behaviour. Language learners should respect intellectual property rights, avoid plagiarism, and understand the implications of sharing and using copyrighted materials. When using online resources for language learning, it is important to give proper credit to original authors and creators and to use materials in accordance with licensing agreements.



1.4. Media Literacy

Media literacy builds upon digital literacy by adding a layer of critical analysis. It involves the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication. In today's media-saturated world, media literacy is crucial for understanding the context and credibility of the information consumed. It empowers individuals to decode media content, assess its purpose, and recognize the techniques used to create media messages.

For language learners, media literacy skills help in dissecting complex multimedia content in different languages, enabling them to understand and critique the cultural nuances and implicit messages found in media from different cultural backgrounds. It helps learners distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information, an essential skill in an era of global misinformation.

To access media literacy means having the ability to locate and use media content across different platforms and devices, including understanding how to find information and resources in both traditional and digital media. Analysing media involves understanding and interpreting media messages by recognizing the techniques used to attract attention, convey messages, and influence audiences. This also includes understanding the context in which media is produced and consumed.

Evaluating media requires assessing the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of information. It involves using critical thinking skills to discern biases, identify misinformation, and determine the quality of media content. Creating media as part of media literacy involves producing media content responsibly and ethically. This includes skills in writing, video production, graphic design, and other forms of media creation, as well as understanding the ethical implications and copyright laws associated with media production.

Acting on media literacy refers to using media for effective communication and participation in society. It includes engaging in online and offline communities, advocating for issues, and contributing to public discourse through various media channels.

To critically evaluate media content, you need several key skills. First, it's important to be able to identify the source of the information. Knowing who created the content and understanding their background or potential biases helps in assessing the reliability of the information.

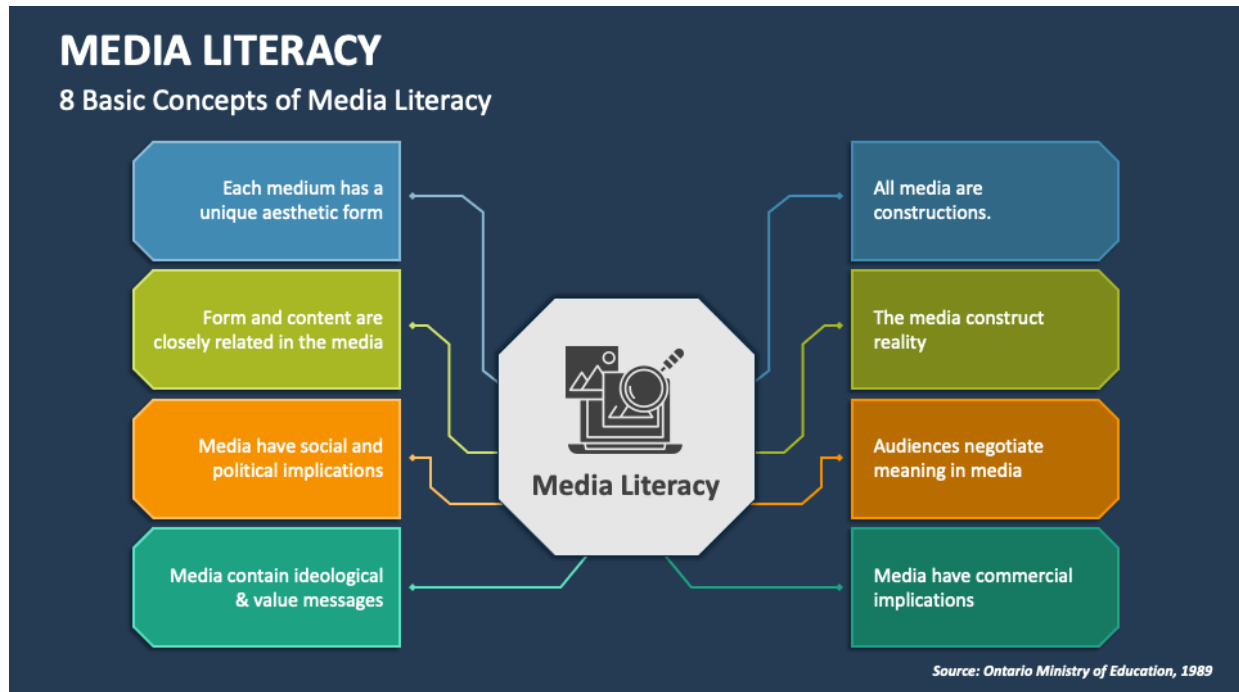
Next, you should examine the evidence presented in the media content. This involves checking the facts, looking for credible sources, and verifying the information through cross-referencing with other reputable sources. Being able to distinguish between opinion and fact is also crucial, as it allows you to separate subjective viewpoints from objective data.

Another important skill is understanding the techniques used in media to influence audiences. This includes recognizing persuasive language, emotional appeals, and various rhetorical strategies that might be used to sway your opinion. By identifying these techniques, you can better understand the intent behind the content and how it might be trying to shape your views.

Additionally, you need to be aware of the context in which the media content is produced and consumed. This means considering the cultural, political, and social background that might influence how the content is created and how it is received by different audiences. Understanding context helps in interpreting the meaning and relevance of the information.

Critical thinking is at the heart of evaluating media content. This involves questioning assumptions, considering multiple perspectives, and reflecting on your own biases. Being open-minded yet sceptical allows you to assess the content more thoroughly.

Media literacy plays a crucial role in combating misinformation and promoting informed citizenship. It equips individuals with the skills needed to critically evaluate the vast amount of information encountered daily across various media platforms. By doing so, media literacy helps people discern fact from fiction, thereby reducing the spread of false information.



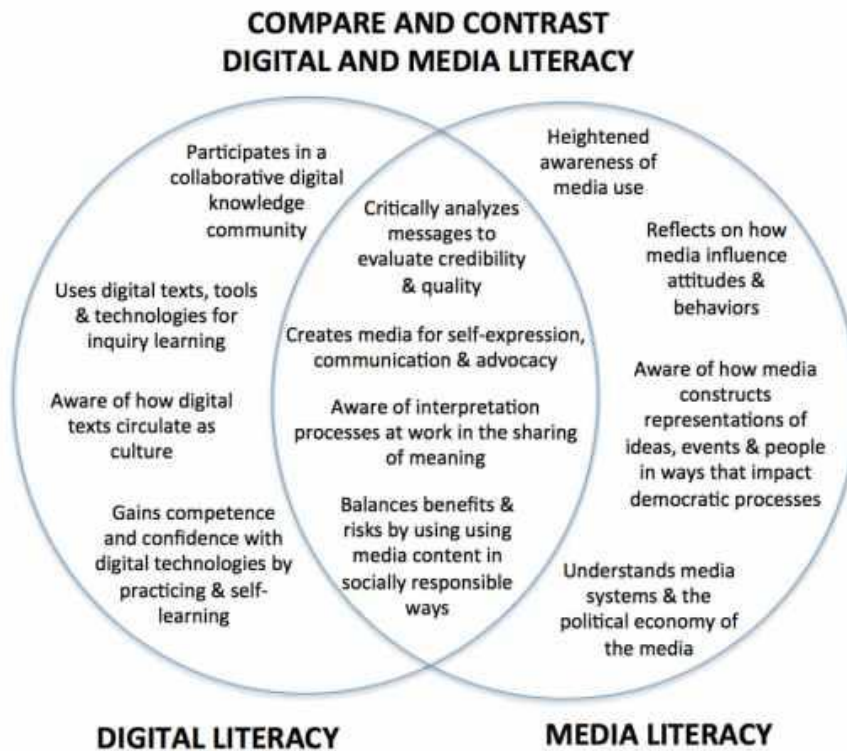
Firstly, media literacy enables individuals to identify reliable sources and assess the credibility of the information. This involves understanding who created the content, recognizing potential biases, and verifying the facts presented. With these skills, people are less likely to fall for fake news or misleading information, which is essential in an age where misinformation can spread rapidly through social media and other online platforms.

Secondly, media literacy helps individuals recognize the techniques used to manipulate and persuade audiences. By understanding how emotional appeals, sensational headlines, and other rhetorical strategies are employed to influence opinions, people can better guard against being swayed by manipulative content. This critical awareness allows them to approach media with a more questioning and analytical mindset.

Moreover, media literacy fosters informed citizenship by encouraging people to seek out diverse sources of information and consider multiple perspectives. This broadens their understanding of complex issues and promotes a more nuanced view of the world. Informed citizens are better equipped to participate in democratic processes, make reasoned decisions, and engage in meaningful discussions about societal issues.

Additionally, media literacy promotes ethical media consumption and production. It teaches individuals about the responsibilities of sharing information and the potential consequences of spreading false or harmful content. This awareness encourages more responsible behaviour online and helps create a more informed and respectful digital community.

1.5. The Interplay Between Digital and Media Literacy



While digital literacy provides the skills to use technologies, media literacy provides the critical thinking skills necessary to understand and evaluate content critically. Both are indispensable in a world where technology and media are omnipresent. Together, they help learners not only to consume digital and media content but also to produce it effectively and responsibly.

In educational settings, fostering these literacies can significantly enhance learning by integrating technology in a way that promotes active engagement and critical thinking. Educators can leverage these skills to create a more dynamic learning environment where students are not only passive recipients of information but also active participants in the learning process. They can engage students in projects that require them to use digital tools to create content, collaborate with others, and engage with global audiences.

In language education, digital literacy and media literacy are particularly important because they allow learners to access a vast array of resources that can improve language skills and cultural understanding. From video clips showing conversational language in context to articles written in the target language about current global issues, digitally and media literate learners can take advantage of a world where learning extends beyond the classroom walls. They can connect with native speakers through social media, participate in language forums, and use interactive platforms to practice and hone their language skills in real-world contexts.

Digital literacy covers a wide range of skills related to technology, from basic tasks like using software to more advanced ones like coding. Media literacy, however, focuses on understanding the messages conveyed through these technologies. It's about recognizing biases, understanding the purpose behind media messages, and being able to tell fact from opinion. Both literacies involve critical thinking, but media literacy emphasizes evaluating the credibility and impact of media messages. It's about understanding how media shapes our views and recognizing when information might be misleading or inaccurate. Digital literacy, meanwhile, includes skills like online safety and privacy management, along with ethical considerations when using digital tools.

While digital literacy involves creating digital content, media literacy focuses more on creating media messages that are clear, ethical, and responsible. It's about understanding the effects of media on society and being able to produce content that contributes positively to the conversation. In essence, digital literacy is about using technology effectively, while media literacy is about understanding and engaging with the content delivered through these technologies. Both are crucial in today's digital world, helping us navigate the vast amount of information available and make informed decisions.

To effectively navigate, evaluate, and create information using digital technologies, several essential skills are needed. Firstly, having technical proficiency is crucial. This involves being able to operate digital devices like computers and smartphones, using software applications, and navigating the internet competently. Being skilled at searching for information online and troubleshooting technical issues is also important.

Secondly, information literacy is essential. This skill encompasses the ability to find, evaluate, and utilize information effectively. It involves critically assessing the credibility and reliability of sources, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and synthesizing information from various sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of a topic. Additionally, knowing how to search for information online, judge the relevance and authority of sources, and cite information correctly are all crucial aspects of information literacy.

Critical thinking skills are also vital. Critical thinkers are adept at evaluating information and making informed judgments. They question assumptions, analyze arguments, and recognize biases and logical fallacies in media content. Critical thinking enables individuals to assess the validity and reliability of information, identify misinformation and propaganda, and consider diverse perspectives when evaluating complex issues.

Effective communication skills are necessary for creating and sharing information digitally. This includes clear and persuasive writing, organizing information logically, and using multimedia tools to enhance communication. Additionally, being able to engage in respectful and constructive online communication, collaborate with others on digital projects, and tailor communication for different audiences are important aspects of digital communication skills.

Moreover, media literacy is crucial in understanding and critically evaluating media content. This skill involves analyzing media messages for bias and persuasion, recognizing different media formats and genres, and understanding the ethical considerations involved in media production and consumption. Media literate individuals can navigate the complex media landscape, discern between reliable and unreliable sources, and engage critically with media content to form informed opinions.

Ethical considerations are paramount when navigating and creating information using digital technologies. This involves respecting intellectual property rights, adhering to copyright and fair use laws, and protecting personal privacy and data security. Being aware of the potential consequences of sharing information online, understanding digital citizenship responsibilities, and engaging in ethical online behavior are important aspects of digital literacy.

Digital literacy is crucial in different areas like education, the workplace, and personal life. In education, students and teachers alike need digital skills. Students rely on these skills to access online resources, do research, collaborate on projects, and complete assignments using digital tools. Educators use digital literacy to integrate technology into teaching, create engaging digital learning materials, and communicate effectively with students through digital platforms. It also helps in lifelong learning by giving access to educational resources beyond traditional classrooms, like online courses and webinars.

1.6. Enhancing Language Learning in the Digital Age

The digital age has introduced specialized tools designed to facilitate language learning. Interactive software and apps provide structured learning experiences adaptable to individual learning paces, while online dictionaries and translation tools offer immediate support for vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. Platforms integrating video conferencing and instant messaging enable interactive and collaborative learning experiences remotely, making language learning more accessible and engaging by allowing learners to participate in real-time interactions with peers and instructors worldwide.

Blended learning strategies, which combine traditional classroom instruction with digital resources, offer a dynamic approach to language education. This model caters to various learning styles and preferences, making education more inclusive and effective. Within this framework, adaptive e-learning content adjusts to the learner's performance and needs, providing personalized learning pathways. Multimodal learning incorporates text, audio, video, and interactive digital tools to enhance engagement and aid retention by appealing to different sensory learning channels, reinforcing language skills and enriching the learning experience with diverse content formats.

The validity and recognition of online language certifications have become increasingly important in global education and professional contexts. These certifications provide learners with recognized credentials that can open doors to higher education and career opportunities

worldwide. Understanding the different types of certifications, along with their testing formats and recognition standards, is crucial for learners who wish to validate their language proficiency credibly. These certifications are often administered through sophisticated platforms that ensure the testing process's integrity and security.

In digital education, issues of data privacy, cybersecurity, and ethical use of technology are paramount. Effective language learning platforms must provide robust security measures to protect user data and ensure that the digital tools used adhere to ethical standards, including the responsible handling of personal information and providing a safe online learning environment free from misconduct and exploitation.

Cross-cultural online collaborations enhance linguistic proficiency and deepen cultural understanding and empathy among participants. These collaborations, facilitated through digital platforms, involve interactions with native speakers and peers from different cultural backgrounds, simulating real-life communication scenarios and providing practical language practice in a controlled yet diverse environment.

By leveraging these comprehensive digital tools and strategies, educators can significantly elevate the efficacy and enjoyment of language education. This detailed approach underscores the importance of integrating digital competencies into language learning, ensuring that both educators and learners are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of a globalized, digital-centric educational landscape.

1.7. Bulgaria's Digital Path: Education Reforms and National Strategies for the Future

In Bulgaria, there are several key documents that address the topic of digital competence, particularly within the educational sector. These documents aim to integrate digital literacy and competence across the curriculum, enhancing students' ability to interact effectively and safely in a digital world. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to modernize the educational system and prepare students for the digital challenges of the future.

The central document in this field is the Vision for the Digitalization of Education. Developed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, this vision focuses on increasing the use of technology in learning environments, promoting digital literacy across all subjects, and providing necessary support and resources for educators. This initiative underscores the importance of not only using technology for educational purposes but also teaching students to navigate the digital world with critical thinking and ethical responsibility.

These efforts are aligned with Bulgaria's commitment to enhancing digital infrastructure and skills as part of its national development strategy, ensuring that educational policies keep pace with technological advancements and societal needs. The comprehensive approach taken by Bulgaria aims to foster a digitally competent and literate generation, ready to contribute to and thrive in an increasingly digital world.

The National Program "Digital Bulgaria 2025" is a strategic initiative by the Bulgarian government aimed at fostering comprehensive digital growth and modernization across various sectors of the economy and society. This program is an extension and refinement of earlier digital strategies, reflecting updated European guidelines and the evolving digital landscape. Its objectives are designed to promote the development and accessibility of digital networks and services, enhance the digital economy's dynamism and growth potential, and improve digital competencies and skills among the Bulgarian population.

The program also emphasizes the importance of high-quality public e-services, the promotion of a secure cyber ecosystem, and effective internet governance. These goals are aligned with creating an environment conducive to the widespread adoption of ICT, establishing uniform standards, and ensuring a high level of network and information security. "Digital Bulgaria 2025" serves as a crucial component of Bulgaria's broader efforts to achieve smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth by leveraging digital technologies to enhance the quality of life and economic opportunities for its citizens.

1.8. Europe's Digital Journey: Educational Reforms and Strategic Initiatives for the Future

Analysing the most important European documents related to digital competencies provides a comprehensive understanding of how these skills are defined and promoted across Europe. Key documents include the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) and related initiatives like the Digital Education Action Plan.



The European Commission has established a comprehensive suite of frameworks and tools to address digital competence across various sectors and demographics within the European Union. These initiatives are designed to ensure that all EU citizens are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate and contribute to the digital age effectively, and they cater to general citizens, educators, and the broader workforce.

DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens

DigComp 2.2 is an enhanced version of the original DigComp framework and provides a detailed understanding of what digital competence entails. It expands the framework to include more than 250 examples of competencies across five areas:

Information and data literacy - Understanding, evaluating, and managing data and information in a digital context.

Communication and collaboration - Engaging in digital communication, collaboration, and participation.

Digital content creation - Being able to create and edit digital content effectively.

Safety - Protecting devices, personal data, and privacy in digital environments while understanding health and environmental impacts of digital technologies.

Problem-solving - Solving technical issues, innovating, and creatively using technology.

The framework is aimed not only at individuals seeking to enhance their own skills but also at organizations and policymakers as a tool to assess and enhance the digital competence of populations.

DigComp: The European Digital Competence Framework

The original DigComp framework lays the foundational competencies necessary for effective and safe participation in the digital world. It identifies and categorizes 21 individual competencies into the same five areas as DigComp 2.2, providing a structured methodology for curriculum development, skill assessments, and the creation of training and development programs across the EU : information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving. Information and data literacy involve the ability to search for, assess, and use digital information effectively, including skills such as browsing, searching, filtering data, and evaluating information sources. Communication and collaboration cover the use of digital tools to interact, communicate, and collaborate with others, encompassing skills such as sharing information, participating in online communities, and collaborating through digital tools. Digital content creation focuses on creating and editing digital content, involving an understanding of copyright and licenses, creating multimedia content, and programming. Safety involves protecting devices, personal data, and privacy, which includes understanding cyber threats, managing privacy settings, and using digital technologies responsibly. Problem-solving covers the use of digital tools to solve technical problems, innovate, and identify digital needs and solutions. DigComp provides a detailed progression of skills from basic to advanced levels, making it useful for both individuals and organizations to assess and develop digital competencies.

The Digital Education Action Plan is another key document from the European Commission, aiming to support the effective use of digital technologies in education and training. The plan has several key objectives, including enhancing digital skills and competencies at all levels of education, ensuring that both educators and students can use digital tools effectively. It also aims to improve education systems through digital tools, integrating

them into teaching and learning processes to enhance educational outcomes. Additionally, the plan promotes the creation and dissemination of high-quality digital learning content and platforms. Emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning and continuous professional development in digital skills, the action plan aligns with the broader goals of DigComp.



DigCompEdu: The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators

DigCompEdu specifically targets educators, focusing on enhancing their ability to integrate digital tools into teaching. The framework is structured around six areas:

Professional Engagement: Using digital technologies for communication, collaboration, and professional growth.

Digital Resources: Finding, creating, and managing digital resources to support learning.

Teaching and Learning: Conducting and orchestrating digital-rich learning.

Assessment: Leveraging digital tools to enhance formative and summative assessments.

Empowering Learners: Utilizing digital technologies to foster active engagement and inclusion in diverse educational contexts.

Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence: Encouraging students to develop their digital skills comprehensively.

This framework is essential for educators' professional development and for educational institutions planning curriculum enhancements.

DigCompSat

DigCompSat is a tool that allows for the empirical testing and assessment of the competencies outlined in the DigComp frameworks. It caters to a broad range of users and is crucial in identifying proficiency levels in digital competencies, helping tailor educational and training programs to meet specific needs.

The European e-Competence Framework (e-CF) provides a reference framework for ICT professionals, defining 41 ICT-related competences across five areas. These areas cover strategic alignment of IT with business goals, development and implementation of IT solutions, operation and support of IT services, support and improvement of IT processes, and management of IT projects and teams. The e-CF is particularly useful for organizations and professionals in the ICT sector, helping to standardize skills and competencies across Europe.



The European Skills Agenda is a broader initiative that includes digital competencies as a key focus area. It aims to improve skills across the EU by providing opportunities for continuous learning and skills development, ensuring that people have the skills needed by the labor market, including digital skills. Additionally, it supports inclusive education and training, making sure that everyone has access to high-quality education and training, with a strong emphasis on digital literacy.

The European Skills Agenda has 12 actions:



DigComp-Based Digital Competence Assessment Tools

Derived from the DigComp frameworks, these tools are designed to help various stakeholders—educational bodies, workplaces, and policymakers—develop specific assessments of digital competences. These tools are integral in standardizing the measurement of digital skills across the EU, facilitating consistent and effective educational and training strategies.

Overall, these European documents collectively emphasize the importance of digital competencies in education, employment, and personal development. They provide structured frameworks and action plans to ensure that individuals across Europe can develop and maintain the digital skills necessary for the 21st century. By promoting a consistent approach to digital competencies, these documents help foster a digitally literate and competitive workforce, enhance educational outcomes, and support inclusive and safe participation in the digital society.

Conclusion

Digital competencies encompass a wide array of skills essential for navigating the digital landscape effectively. They're vital in today's world, enabling individuals to succeed in education, employment, and personal growth. Key European documents like DigComp provide frameworks for developing and assessing these competencies.

Media literacy involves critically analysing and understanding media messages, while digital literacy encompasses skills needed to navigate digital technologies and the online environment. These competencies intersect and reinforce each other, empowering individuals to manage digital information effectively.

These competencies have significant implications for lifelong learning and professional development. They enable individuals to adapt to the ever-changing digital landscape, stay informed, and excel in their personal and professional lives. In essence, digital competencies are foundational for success in the modern era, enabling individuals to thrive in the digital age.

Looking ahead, the future of digital competencies is influenced by several key trends and challenges. The ongoing evolution of technology will introduce new digital tools and platforms, demanding individuals to continually update their skills to stay relevant. This includes emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and the Internet of Things. Data literacy will also become increasingly important as data-driven decision-making continues to gain prominence across various sectors. Individuals will need to develop skills in data analysis, interpretation, and visualization to derive insights from large datasets and make informed decisions. Cybersecurity and digital privacy will remain top priorities in an increasingly interconnected world. Individuals will need to prioritize cybersecurity awareness, adopt secure online practices, and protect their personal information to mitigate cybersecurity risks. Addressing the digital divide, particularly in underserved communities and developing regions, will be crucial. Efforts to ensure equitable access to digital technologies and training opportunities will be necessary to reduce disparities in digital literacy and access to digital resources. Moreover, integrating digital skills into educational curricula at all levels will be essential. Educational institutions will need to adapt their teaching methods and resources to ensure that students graduate with the digital competencies needed for success in the modern workforce. Lifelong learning will become indispensable as technology advances rapidly. Individuals will need to embrace a mindset of continuous skill development, seizing opportunities for upskilling and reskilling to remain competitive in the digital economy.

Chapter 2. Digital Tools and Resources for Language Learning

2.1. Introduction

The aim of this research is to show an overview of information and communication technology (ICT), specifying on digital tools and resources for language learning. The study will show the advantages of using digital tools and resources in a multilingual classroom, but also point out the challenges in using ICT in general. Further the paper will list several practical examples for digital tools and resources used in, or for language learning.

In the last part this desk review will show the specific situation in Austria in relation to the experience of language trainers from ipcenter.

2.2. Language training and ICT

The advent of digital tools and resources has revolutionized the landscape of language training. These resources offer unparalleled accessibility and convenience, allowing learners to access materials at any time and from any location with an internet connection. This flexibility enables learners to integrate language study into their busy schedules and progress at their own pace, choosing content that best fits their needs and interests.

The diversity of learning materials available on digital platforms is another significant advantage. These platforms provide a wide range of content, including videos, audio recordings, interactive exercises, and games, catering to different learning styles. Additionally, learners can access authentic resources such as news articles, podcasts, and videos, which help them understand real-life language usage and find a way to learn according to their leaning types

Interactivity and engagement are crucial in effective language learning, and digital tools excel in this area. Many include interactive elements like quizzes and language games, which make learning more engaging and effective. Furthermore, these platforms provide learners with immediate feedback on their exercises.

The Journal article Digital Skills and the influence of Students' Socio Economic Background from Jana Heinz highlights the implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in German elementary school. Her study focuses on how teachers tailor their instruction to students' prior digital knowledge and the influence of students' socio-economic backgrounds on their motivation and digital competence. Findings show that teachers align ICT instruction with students' digital media familiarity, interests, and socio-economic contexts, but students' access to ICT at home and their motivation vary by socio-economic status. Digital competency development is closely linked to other skills, especially literacy. Low-achieving students benefit from adaptable digital learning programs but often

require additional support. Teachers also need assistance to effectively integrate ICT into their teaching and address diverse student backgrounds (Heinz 2016:, p.186)

On one hand respondents of the study noted that ICT is utilized in both project-based activities and regular teaching routines to almost the same extent. In a few schools, digital media is systematically incorporated with a mandatory curriculum that spans all subjects and grade levels. Some schools, particularly those serving as reference schools for media education, have comparable curricula for ICT integration, though these are often recommendations rather than strict guidelines, allowing teachers flexibility in their implementation. On the other hand, teachers recognize the importance of relating instruction to students' experiences and interests, using ICT as a tool to achieve learning objectives outlined in school curricula. (2016: p. 197f.)

Despite that the study found a wide variety of ICT use among teachers, ranging from project-based activities to regular classroom instruction. About half of the teachers observed that most students have considerable digital media experience, primarily acquired at home. However, this experience varies, with some students only familiar with passive activities like watching videos or playing games. The heterogeneity of students' digital competencies suggests the need for educational policies and modules that accommodate different levels of digital skills across ages and subjects. The study confirms that students' socio-economic backgrounds significantly affect their access to ICT and their development of digital skills. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often have more, but less supervised, access to digital media compared to their middle-class peers. The acquisition of digital skills is also linked to other competencies, such as literacy and persistence, which are influenced by socio-economic factors. Teachers observe that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds face disadvantages in these areas, indicating a need for targeted support and resources to bridge these gaps. (2016: 207f.)

2.3. Learning types

As already mentioned, ICT offers a wide range of different tools, and multimedial learning options for different learning types. If the learning type of a person can be defined the right tool can be selected according to personal requirements. Therefore an optimal learning effect can be generated.

In the illustration the different learning types are listed to give an overview. There are also various tests to be found on the internet, where it is possible to define your own learning type. Of course you can also have the qualities of more than one different learning type, but still such tests can offer a good orientation on what tools to choose on your learning journey.



7 DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING STYLES

When people identify the learning style that suits them best, they tend to stick with it. However, research has shown that the most effective study comes from blending different learning styles together.



VISUAL

Visual learners do well when they use symbols, boxes, charts and colours in their notes. If you find that you learn better by reading and looking at pictures, diagrams and graphs etc. the chances are you're a visual learner.



VERBAL

Techniques used by verbal learners are reciting information out loud, writing your own notes and highlighting the key points. Having a passion for words, writing, tongue twisters, rhymes, may indicate that this learning style is for you.



AURAL

Aural learning involves using sound and music. Auditory learners develop understanding and memory by hearing and listening. If you find it easier to understand spoken instructions rather than reading, aural learning will benefit you.



PHYSICAL

Physical learning involves using your body and sense of touch to learn. Physical learners learn by doing, touching, moving, building, and are described as a 'hands-on'. If you find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time, chances are you're a physical learner.



LOGICAL

Logical learners often learn by asking a lot of questions. Logical learners want to understand the whole picture. They are natural thinkers who learn by classifying, categorising and thinking abstractly about patterns & relationships etc.



SOCIAL

Social learners prefer to learn in groups rather than on their own and like generating ideas by brainstorming with others. If you like taking part in group sports and prefer social activities than doing things on your own, you may be a social learner.

SOLITARY



Solitary learners tend to be more independent and introspective, spending a lot of time on their own, enjoying their own company. If you enjoy spending time alone, keeping a journal and engaging in self-analysis to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, you may be a solitary learner.

Figure 1Why take this test? | Immigration to the UK & university application in the UK and elsewhere | Professional certification | Professional certification | University application in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, UK or Canada | Institutional testing & university application in the UK |
Price	US \$200-\$300	US \$125-\$200	free	US \$100-\$320	US \$150-\$250
Length	175 minutes	120 minutes (receptive) or 80 minutes (productive)	50 minutes	90 minutes (Essentials) or 180 minutes (iBT)	110 to 236 minutes, depending on test version
Result report	6 to 13 days	3 to 15 days	immediate	6 to 10 days	2 to 40 days
Test location	authorized test centers	authorized test centers	open online access	authorized test centers or online	authorized test centers
Score validity	2 years	2 years	forever	2 years	forever

Figure 5 Test comparison

Online course providers

Online education platforms have partnered with prestigious language institutions to provide learners with a vast array of certifications. These certifications can range from beginner to advanced levels, and cover a variety of languages, including English, Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Italian.

[Coursera](#) is a major player in the world of online learning, offering a massive range of courses to students everywhere. Founded in 2012 by Stanford professors Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller, Coursera partners with universities and other organizations to provide courses, certifications, and even degrees in all sorts of subjects.

Coursera courses are flexible, ranging from 4 to 12 weeks long with 1-2 hours of weekly video lectures. They offer a mix of assessments, including quizzes, exercises, assignments with peer review, and optional challenges. Some courses even culminate in a final project or exam.

Coursera offers a tiered pricing structure to accommodate different learning needs. A large selection of courses (over 2,900 as of 2023) are available for free enrolment, allowing learners to audit the content at their own pace. It's important to note that these free enrolments do not include graded assignments, instructor feedback, or certificates of completion. Students seeking a more comprehensive learning experience with assessments and credentials can upgrade to the paid versions of specific courses. Paid enrolments typically include graded

assignments, instructor feedback, and certificates upon successful completion. Additionally, some Coursera offerings, such as projects and specializations, are only available through paid enrolment. These programs may offer introductory free trials to allow users to explore the content before committing to a purchase.

edX collaborates with leading universities, nonprofits, and corporations to offer online courses and certifications. They have a strong selection of language learning courses, including: *Introduction to Mandarin Chinese* from Peking University, *Italian for Beginners* from Dartmouth College, *Japanese Language and Culture* from Waseda University.

edX courses utilize a structured learning approach with weekly modules. Each module incorporates short video lectures followed by interactive exercises, allowing students to immediately apply the learned concepts.

To enhance understanding, some courses provide tutorial videos that resemble small group discussions, along with an online textbook and discussion forum. This forum facilitates peer-to-peer and student-to-teaching assistant interaction through questions and comments.

edX offers various options for course completion and recognition. Learners can choose to audit courses for free, gaining access to the content without earning a certificate. For those seeking credentials, edX offers verified certificates upon successful completion of paid courses. Fees vary depending on the specific course.

Additionally, edX provides XSeries Certificates. These are earned by completing a bundled set of two to seven verified courses within a particular subject area. The cost also varies based on the included courses. It's important to note that in some courses, assessments may only be available to paying students.

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are designed to equip non-native speakers with the necessary English language proficiency to navigate various aspects of life in English-speaking environments. These programs cater to learners of all ages and proficiency levels, employing a variety of instructional methods to foster effective communication in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

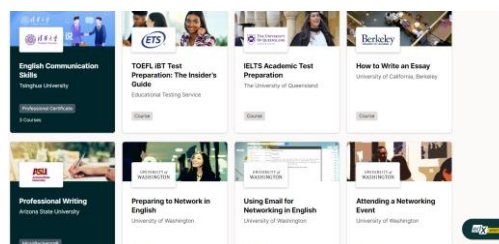
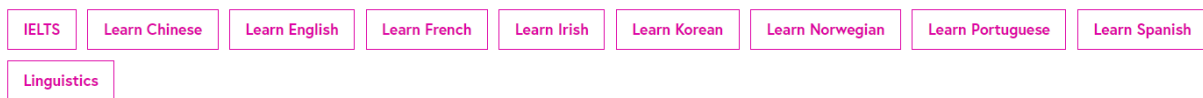


Figure 6 Some edX Language courses

[FutureLearn.com](https://www.futurelearn.com) is a **British online learning platform** that offers a variety of educational opportunities, including:

- **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs):** These are free or paid courses available to many participants at once. FutureLearn partners with universities and institutions around the world to provide MOOCs on a wide range of subjects.
- **Microcredentials:** These are short, focused courses that provide learners with specific skills or knowledge.
- **Degrees:** In partnership with universities, FutureLearn offers some degree programs that can be completed online.

In their catalogue, in the Language section, there are more than 100 courses:



Courses 127 Courses

FutureLearn.com offers certifications for some of its courses, but not all. The platform utilizes two main methods to acknowledge course completion:

- **Certificates of Achievement:** These are available for many courses launched after May 9th, 2016. To earn a Certificate of Achievement, learners must upgrade the course (which incurs a fee) and demonstrate engagement by completing over 90% of the course steps and achieving a score of over 70% on any included tests.
- **Statements of Participation:** These acknowledge a learner's enrolment and completion of courses that do not offer Certificates of Achievement.

The availability of a specific certification is always detailed within the course description on the FutureLearn platform. In some cases, FutureLearn may offer learners **microcredentials**, which are similar to certificates but focus on targeted skills or knowledge acquired within a course.

Overall, while not every course provides them, certifications are a possibility on FutureLearn.com for those seeking formal recognition of their learning achievements.

Beyond the realm of general online learning platforms offering language courses and certifications, there exists a niche market of platforms dedicated solely to language testing and certification. These platforms cater to individuals seeking official recognition of their language

proficiency for various purposes, such as **academic pursuits** (gaining entry to universities or programs requiring language proficiency demonstrations), **professional advancement** (qualifying for jobs that necessitate language skills in a specific field), **immigration purposes** (fulfilling language requirements for visas or citizenship applications).

These **specialized platforms** often leverage advancements in technology to deliver efficient and standardized testing experiences and they have some specific characteristics:

- **Focus on assessment:** unlike general learning platforms, these platforms concentrate solely on evaluating language skills. They offer standardized tests designed to gauge proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- **AI and speech recognition:** many platforms incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) and speech recognition technologies to automate portions of the assessment process. This can involve tasks like evaluating written responses or analysing spoken language accents and fluency.
- **Standardized scoring:** These platforms typically employ well-defined scoring systems that ensure consistent evaluation across different test-takers and administrations.
- **Official certifications:** Upon successful completion of the tests, users receive official certificates recognized by educational institutions, government agencies, or professional bodies.

Platform-specific certifications are offered by online language learning platforms like Duolingo or Babbel. Earning them typically involves completing their courses. While valuable for tracking progress within the platform and showcasing your dedication, they might not hold significant weight externally for academic institutions or employers. Platform-specific certifications function primarily as a measure of your progress within a particular language learning platform's curriculum. Earning one signifies you've completed a certain level or set of courses using their specific structure and materials. This demonstrates your dedication and progress in learning the language through their framework. Their recognition is often limited to the platform's ecosystem, meaning they might not be a standardized measure of proficiency recognized outside that specific environment. While valuable for personal satisfaction and tracking your learning journey, platform-specific certifications might not be sufficient for demonstrating language proficiency in academic applications or professional settings.

Platform-specific certifications come with benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, they provide a sense of accomplishment and serve as a motivational tool, encouraging you to

keep learning. Additionally, they act as a basic benchmark within the platform's framework, allowing you to track your progress against its specific curriculum.

However, the recognition of these certifications is often limited to the platform itself. This means they might not be enough to demonstrate your language proficiency in academic applications or professional settings where standardized tests or certifications are typically required.

Platform-specific certifications are valuable for personal tracking and motivation within a particular language learning platform, but they might not be a substitute for standardized tests or certifications required for academic or professional settings.

Duolingo - Duolingo Test Center (DTC): The Duolingo English Test (DET) is a measure of English language proficiency for communication and use in English-medium settings. It assesses test-taker ability to use language skills that are required for literacy, conversation, comprehension, and production.



Duolingo, a popular language-learning platform, offers both free and paid subscription options. While the free version of Duolingo provides access to most of its core features, a paid subscription, called Duolingo Plus, offers several additional benefits.

Duolingo English Test (DET) is *not* part of the Duolingo language learning app. While some students may use the app to practice their English skills, the DET is a separate entity. It is designed to assess English proficiency and can only be taken on a computer, not on a mobile device. DET was launched years before the pandemic in 2016 and is now accepted at over 5,000 universities and institutions.

Scores on the Duolingo English Test are reported on a scale from 10–160. Each certified test also receives four subscores that measure your proficiency in specific areas. While reading, writing, speaking, and listening are important language components, research shows that combined skills can better represent how language is used in real life. Effective language use requires people to employ multiple skills simultaneously.

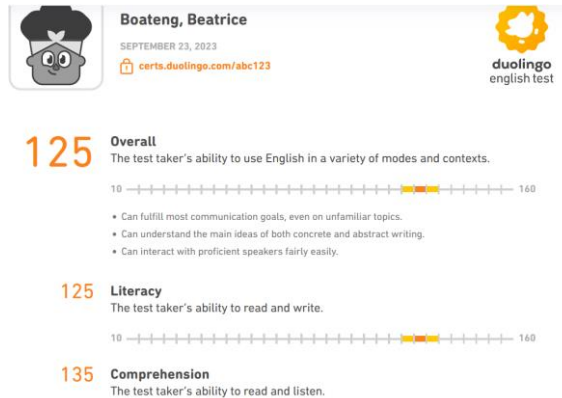


Figure 7 Duolingo test report

Babbel, a subscription-based online language learning platform designed to help users acquire new languages through interactive course, and Cambridge English, the global gold-standard in language assessment, launched in 2017 the Babbel English Test powered by Cambridge English. This online language assessment allows adult learners of English to assess their listening and reading skills online from level A1 (beginner) up to and including B1 (intermediate). Test takers will earn a certificate of achievement, which can be downloaded and used to demonstrate English skills to potential employers, for self-assessment, when warming up for an exam, or to enhance an online career profile.

Certificate of Achievement

Ms. Babbler

has shown ability at

Council of Europe Level B1 or above
Babbel English Test powered by Cambridge English

Can understand reading and listening texts on a range of topics as well as understanding the main points of texts about less familiar topics

The holder of this certificate has taken a 45 minute online multiple choice test. The test is designed to assess reading and listening skills at CEFR levels A1, A2 and B1.

Figure 8 Babbel certificate of achievement

Verbling, while offering some AI-powered language assessment tools, differs slightly from the core concept of strictly test-oriented platforms mentioned previously. Its primary function is offering an online language learning platform that connects learners with qualified teachers for live, personalized language instruction via video chat. Unlike platforms solely dedicated to testing, Verbling prioritizes language acquisition through interactive classes with native-speaking tutors.

Verbling itself may not directly offer official language certifications. However, the platform can be a valuable tool to prepare for standardized language exams by providing practice and personalized feedback through live lessons.

Verbling serves as a language learning environment, while the platforms discussed earlier specialize in language proficiency assessment and certification.

5.3. Comparing Online vs. Traditional Language Certification

Choosing between online and traditional (in-person) language certification processes involves weighing several factors, like convenience, cost, accessibility etc.

When it comes to convenience, online certifications offer a clear advantage. They allow you to take the test from the comfort of your own home (or anywhere with an internet connection) at a time that perfectly suits your schedule. This eliminates the need to travel to a designated testing location at a specific time, a hassle that can be particularly problematic for busy individuals or those living far from testing centers.

The **cost** factor can significantly impact the choice between online and traditional certification. Online certifications often present a more budget-friendly option. They eliminate the need for travel and accommodation expenses, which can be a major cost factor if the testing center isn't located near. Additionally, some traditional exams come with higher administrative fees compared to online platforms.

Compared to traditional exams, online certifications offer greater **accessibility** for a wider range of test-takers. This includes individuals with disabilities who might require specific accommodations, as well as those living in remote locations where traveling to a testing center would be a significant challenge. Online platforms can also cater to different learning styles by offering computer-based testing formats, further increasing inclusivity.

While online certifications offer convenience, a potential concern lies in test security. The online environment might be more susceptible to cheating compared to the strictly controlled atmosphere of traditional in-person exams. Additionally, human proctors present in traditional settings can provide a more nuanced assessment of speaking fluency, which can be challenging to replicate entirely through AI-powered online testing methods.

The acceptance of online certifications is evolving, with widely recognized platforms like the Duolingo English Test gaining traction among universities, employers, and government agencies. However, some institutions may still hold a preference for traditional certifications. To avoid any roadblocks, it's crucial to thoroughly research the specific accreditation and recognition associated with the chosen online platform before taking the test. This ensures the certification will be accepted by the institution or organization you need it for.

When considering online certifications, it's important to acknowledge the dependence on technology. Technical glitches or internet connectivity problems could disrupt the testing process. Additionally, accurately assessing spoken language fluency can be more nuanced in a traditional setting with human proctors, as AI-powered online evaluations might not capture the full range of speaking skills.

5.4. Benefits of Online Language Certifications

The world of language certification is evolving rapidly, with online platforms offering a strong alternative to traditional testing methods. These online certifications are attracting learners for several **key reasons**.

Firstly, online certifications boast unmatched flexibility. Imagine taking a language proficiency test entirely on your own schedule, from the comfort of your own home. This eliminates the stress of juggling work schedules or coordinating travel around a specific test date. Learners can choose a time that best suits them, allowing for maximized focus and minimized anxiety.

Secondly, online certifications often represent a more cost-effective option compared to traditional exams. Traditional exams can incur significant financial burdens, especially if travel and accommodation are necessary. Online certifications frequently come at a lower price point, removing these additional expenses. This makes language certification a more accessible option for a wider range of learners.

Beyond simply obtaining a certificate, online certifications can act as a catalyst for continuous learning. The inherent flexibility allows learners to integrate language learning seamlessly into their ongoing professional development. Preparation for the test can be broken down into smaller, dedicated study sessions, easily fitting around existing commitments. This approach fosters continuous learning and ensures that language skills remain sharp.

Furthermore, some online platforms go beyond just testing. These platforms may offer learners a variety of valuable resources. This could include personalized learning materials, practice tests, and ongoing feedback mechanisms. This comprehensive approach empowers continuous learning and allows individuals to refine their language skills progressively.

In conclusion, online language certifications offer a winning combination of convenience, affordability, and support for continuous learning. They empower individuals to validate their language proficiency and remain competitive in a globalized world, all while seamlessly integrating into their busy lives.

5.5. Challenges and Considerations

While online language certifications offer a multitude of advantages, some concerns linger regarding their credibility, test security, and accessibility.

One concern is the perceived **lack of credibility** compared to traditional, in-person exams. Certification providers are actively addressing this by ensuring their tests are aligned with internationally recognized language proficiency benchmarks. Additionally, many online platforms collaborate with reputable educational institutions, lending legitimacy to their certifications.

Another concern is the **potential for cheating** in an online environment. To combat this, certification providers are increasingly utilizing proctoring technologies. These technologies can involve webcam monitoring, screen recording, and real-time identity verification to ensure test-takers are who they claim to be and are not receiving unauthorized assistance. However, proctoring technologies raise concerns about user **privacy**. Certification providers are working to implement these technologies in a responsible manner, ensuring data security and user privacy are maintained throughout the testing process.

A third concern is the **technological barrier** for some learners. Online testing requires access to a reliable internet connection and a suitable device. To address this, some providers offer alternative testing methods for those with limited technological resources. Additionally, the increasing availability of affordable internet access and technology is gradually mitigating this concern.

Beyond these challenges, online certification providers are exploring innovative ways to enhance the security and value of their offerings. One such innovation is the use of digital verification badges. These badges are secure, tamper-proof credentials issued electronically upon successful completion of a certification. They can be easily shared with potential employers or educational institutions, showcasing language proficiency in a verifiable and convenient manner.

5.6. Impact on Language Learning and Career Advancement

Obtaining an online language certification offers a multitude of benefits. From enhancing language learning to facilitating career advancement and global mobility, these certifications empower individuals to unlock their full potential in a multilingual world.

The process of preparing for an online language certification can significantly enhance **language learning**. Studying for the test typically involves targeted practice across all skill areas – reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This focused approach can identify areas of weakness and prompt learners to address them, ultimately leading to a more well-rounded understanding of the language. Having a clear goal, like obtaining an online language certification, can act as a **powerful motivator**. Setting a specific target date for the exam compels learners to stay on track and dedicated to their studies. The sense of accomplishment upon achieving certification further reinforces the value of language learning and encourages continued progress.

In today's globalized workplace, multilingualism is a valuable asset. Earning a recognized online language certification demonstrates a candidate's proficiency to potential employers. This can give them a competitive edge in the job market, particularly for positions requiring strong language skills in specific fields. Online language certifications can broaden **career prospects** beyond just individual companies. By demonstrating language proficiency, individuals become eligible for a wider range of job opportunities across different sectors and geographical locations. This can be particularly beneficial for those seeking international career paths.

For individuals seeking to work, study, or volunteer abroad, language proficiency is often a prerequisite. Online language certifications can fulfill these requirements, allowing individuals to pursue **opportunities across borders** with greater ease. This can open doors to enriching experiences and career advancements on a global scale.

The process of acquiring and demonstrating language proficiency can be highly **confidence-boosting**. Earning an online language certification validates a learner's hard work and commitment. This newfound confidence can translate into improved communication skills and a greater willingness to engage in cross-cultural interactions.

The pursuit of language learning is often a lifelong journey. Online language certifications can serve as stepping stones on this path. They provide a valuable benchmark of progress and can motivate learners to continue expanding their language skills throughout their lives.

Chapter 6. Data privacy, cybersecurity and ethical considerations

6.1. Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, digital technologies have become indispensable tools in teaching and learning. These technologies have not only transformed traditional teaching approaches but also opened new ways of engaging students' creativity. By integrating multimedia resources, interactive software, and various online platforms, educators can create immersive and engaging learning environments that harness creative thinking and expression. Digital tools facilitate a more interactive and collaborative learning experience, enabling students to participate in creative assignments, collaborate with peers in real-time, and apply their language skills in authentic, context-rich scenarios. The dynamic nature of digital technologies plays a crucial role in mediating students' creative actions, enhancing their engagement, and promoting collaborative knowledge creation.

As digital technologies become increasingly integral to education, it is essential to address the associated concerns of data privacy, cybersecurity, and ethical considerations. The use of digital tools in classrooms necessitates the collection and management of student data, making it imperative for educators to understand and comply with data protection laws to safeguard student information. Cybersecurity measures are also critical in protecting this data from unauthorised access and cyber threats. Beyond technical safeguards, ethical considerations such as digital citizenship, inclusivity, and responsible use of technology must be emphasised to ensure a safe, respectful, and equitable digital learning environment. Educators must equip students with the knowledge and skills to navigate the digital world responsibly, stressing an awareness of the ethical implications of their online actions and the importance of maintaining digital security and privacy.



Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives for a course on Data Privacy, Cybersecurity, and Ethical Considerations tailored for children aged 3-18 years who are learning a second language.

Children 3 – 8

1. Basic understanding of personal information: Pupils can identify what personal information is and why they should keep it private. Do not give their name, address, telephone, number, birthday, send photos etc online to people they do not know.
2. Using the internet safely. Pupils should know some simple rules and regulations for online security. Don't go to sites that state 18 +, ask adults for permission to visit new sites or share their personal information.
3. Pupils should be shown how to recognise and use safe websites and apps for learning a second language. They should be shown how to recognise websites and apps that are approved by their teachers.

Children 9 – 12

1. Understand what a digital footprint is and that anything they publish online will leave a lasting record of their actions.
2. Understand how to create a strong and secure password to protect their online information
3. Understand the importance of good ethical routines and behaviour. Show respect to others, don't copy other peoples' work (plagiarism), understand what happens to people who have experienced or participated in cyber bullying.

Children 13 – 18

1. Gain an understanding of data privacy laws (GDPR and COPPA). Understand their own rights to digital privacy. Understand the consequences of not following data privacy laws.
2. Understand advanced cyber security practice. For example, how to recognise phishing, using two factor authentication, and making their digital devices secure.
3. Develop critical thinking skills to evaluate online teaching and learning resources they will use for learning a second language. Look at the security aspects of the resource. The quality for learning a second language – is it fun, interesting and challenging, or boring and repetitive.

4. Understand the ethical implications of online learning and technology. Understand data mining, privacy concerns. The impact of A.I. on personal data. The impact of A.I. on learning in general, copying and how to use it ethically.

6.2. How children are influenced by digital media and its effect on language development and learning

Growing up with media



The European study **EU Kids Online 2020 Survey** [[Eu-kids-online-2020-international-report.pdf \(eukidsonline.ch\)](#)] reports that 68% of tweens aged 12-14 use a smartphone multiple times a day to access the internet. This percentage increases as for youth aged 15-16 it is 81%.

The EU Kids Online 2020 Survey focused on researching the time that children and youth spend online. They report that children are using 192 minutes on average (a little above 3 hours). For the age group of 15-16-year-olds, it is 229 minutes (a little under 4 hours). In comparison to 9 to 10-year-olds the average time spent online nearly doubles for children between 14 to 16. **The EU Kids Online Survey** focuses on children's online activities, opportunities, risks, and safety across several European countries.

The time spent using digital media also changes with age. According to **The Common-Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Children** [[census_researchreport.pdf \(commonsensemedia.org\)](#)] the age group children spent daily 8 hours and 39 minutes on average with screen media use in 2021. For eight to twelve-year-olds, this number was 5 hours and 33 minutes. **The Common-Sense Census** is American-based research focused on different age groups. The research focuses on the total time spent consuming specific media and devices used. It provides age group comparisons that allow for the identification of the main differences and shifts between tweens and children.

Internet, online learning and socialising

Most children can now easily access the internet using readily available mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. The number of children who can access computers is also increasing, meaning the number of children using the internet is bound to grow rapidly as well. According to the 2019 report from Digital Information World, more than six hours of our day

is spent online with the world's average internet time being 6 hours, 42 minutes per day. But how do children spend this time online?

Children are online mainly without supervision; they **need to be able to identify acceptable and unacceptable online content independently**. They also need to know how to behave respectfully online and avoid online risks.

These are some examples of the activities that children might do online:

1. They Use Social Media

Children like socialising online more than adults. A considerable percentage of social media users are children, who use social networking sites to keep in touch with their friends. One reason why children spend so much time online is to make new friends and to keep in touch with people. They also spend their internet time keeping updated on the latest gossip about celebrities and influencers. Children might value social media metrics more than others, such as likes and comments on their posts.

2. They Play Video Games

Video games are another popular activity children like to do online. Online gaming has fast become popular over the years with the growth of live stream gaming and esports tournaments. Online gaming is not only fun entertainment for children, but it also helps them to connect more with their friends, improve on their gaming skills and enjoy some downtime.

3. They Gamble Online

As well as online gaming, the children also spends some of their time on the internet gambling on online slots or browsing on sports betting websites. With many games and online casinos readily available on the internet, more and more people are interacting with these and gambling on slot games or betting on popular sporting events. While gambling laws and regulations vary in different countries around the world (many legalising gambling for only those older than 18, or in some case, 21), one of the most important factors that needs to be considered is how to address problem gambling. In The Pogg's guide to "[Safer Gambling: Addressing The Issue Of Problem Gambling](#)," accessibility, celebrity endorsements and gambling advertisements are just some factors that have a big impact on problem gamblers.

4. They Access Useful Information and News Updates

A lot of children use the internet as they are interested in looking on websites about the latest TV shows, movies, music, and celebrity gossip. Rather than listening to the radio or buying a newspaper, the children also uses the internet for regular news updates. One of the main advantages of the internet is having access to information at your fingertips.

5. They Do Online Shopping

The growing popularity in online shopping has seen more and more companies set up online stores. With fast delivery and a wide catalogue of products, many children spend a

considerable amount of their online time shopping, especially on popular websites like Amazon and ASOS.

Internet safety risks for children

There are four main kinds of internet risks for children.

1. Content risks

For children, these risks include coming across material that they might find upsetting, disgusting or otherwise uncomfortable, especially if they encounter it accidentally. This material might include:

- pornography or sexually explicit content in music videos, movies or online games
- real or simulated violence
- hate sites
- terrorist sites
- fake news that seems believable
- harmful user-generated content like sites about drug use, self-harm, suicide or negative body image.

2. Contact risks

These risks include encountering adults posing as children online, strangers who persuade children to meet them in real life, and online scammers.

3. Conduct risks

Conduct risks include behaving in inappropriate or hurtful ways or being the victim of this kind of behaviour. Examples include:

- cyberbullying
- sexting
- misusing people's passwords and impersonating people online
- making unauthorised purchases using other people's financial details
- creating content that reveals information about other people
- having trouble regulating online time, which can develop into problem internet use.

4. Contract risks

Contract risks include children signing up to unfair contracts, terms, or conditions that they aren't aware of or don't fully understand. As a result, children might:

- be open to identity theft or fraud
- get inappropriate digital marketing messages or scam emails

- have their personal data collected from apps and devices like fitness trackers.

Protecting children from internet safety risks

It's important to **help your child manage internet safety risks**. This lets your child build digital resilience, which is the ability to respond positively and deal with risks they come across online.

You can do this by:

- being a role model for healthy internet use
- talking with your child about online content and behaviour
- reminding your child about privacy and personal information
- teaching your child about online purchases.

It's all about trusting your child to become a **responsible digital citizen**.

6.3. Privacy and Data Protection

Big data and artificial intelligence are making our devices and homes smarter. Smart homes, digital assistants and smart devices accompany us through our everyday lives - and collect user data every day. It is important to protect this data.

Many everyday items are now connected to the internet: we explain how to use them safely.

Smart devices are the everyday items that connect to the internet. This can include both 'hi-tech' items (think smart speakers, fitness trackers and security cameras), and household items (such as fridges, light bulbs and doorbells). Unlike conventional household items, you can't just switch on a smart device and forget it; you'll need to check a few simple things to protect yourself.

Just like a smartphone, laptop or PC, smart devices can be hacked to leave your data and privacy at risk. Very rarely, devices have been controlled by somebody else managing the device - often to frighten the victim.

Before you buy, check reviews of the product and the manufacturer. For information about how to set up a specific device, refer to the manufacturer's documentation, such as a manual or 'getting started' guide that came with the device, the manufacturer's website (check the 'support' area first) or within the app itself.

Setting Up Your Device

Some smart devices will work without being connected to the internet. Others may need an internet connection, a smartphone app, or for you to create an account. Again, check their website for details.

Check the Default Settings

Some devices may be insecure when they are first switched on, so you'll need to take some quick steps to protect yourself.

- If the device comes with a password that looks easily guessable (for example admin or 00000), change it
- Easily guessable passwords can be discovered by cyber criminals, so make sure you choose a secure one

Managing Your Account

If the device or app offers [Two Factor Authentication \(2FA\)](#), turn it on. 2FA provides a way of 'double checking' that you really are the person you are claiming to be and makes it much harder for criminals to access your online accounts, even if they know your password.

Some products can be controlled when you're away from your home Wi-Fi, by creating an online account linked to your device. You can also often back up your settings and data, so you can recover them if you need to wipe your device. However, accessing your device like this can make it easier for other people online to access them without your permission, so make sure you have changed default passwords and enabled 2FA if available.

Keeping Your Devices Updated

As with your computers and smartphones, installing software updates promptly helps keep your devices secure. For each of your smart devices, you should:

- switch on the option to enable automatic updates, (if available)
- install any manual updates when prompted
- make sure your device's operating system is up to date

If Something Goes Wrong

If you're aware of an incident e.g. in the media and you think your device is affected:

- visit the manufacturer's website to see if there's information available on what you should do check
- If you think someone has malicious control/access of a device in your home, you should perform a factory reset

Getting Rid of Your Device

If you decide to sell or give you device to someone else, you should first perform a factory reset. This will return the device to its original settings and should also remove all your personal data from the device. Check your manufacturer's website if you need to find out how to perform a reset.

6.4. The Role of the Family and the Social Environment

As children grow older, they become increasingly independent and autonomous in their media use. According to the academic article [How Parents Mediate Children's Media Consumption](#) by Uhls and Robb, the media themselves become the social environment of youth. That is why they can also be called super-peer as media connect children with their peers. Through media children also establish, similarly to adults, so-called parasocial relationships*. That doesn't mean children's media use gets completely out of hand and parents cannot and should not engage.

According to Uhls and Robb children can still very much benefit from parental mediation. In fact, children can draw from this mediation as they age, and it can provide them with a useful base as they become independent and autonomous in adolescence. During adolescence, parents should still care about their children's media use and experience. They should be able to engage in a conversation and together with their children find ways to not let media impact other important aspects of life.

*Parasocial relationships are the ones that we establish with our favourite media characters (both fictional and real),

Advertising and its Influence on Children

Children interact with advertising in many forms - on TV, YouTube, Internet, mobile apps, radio, billboards, magazines, newspapers, movies, Internet, advergames, text messaging, social media and more.

To attract the attention of children, advertising uses many techniques such as **colour, sound, images, rhymes, brevity and clarity of messages**, influencing the emotional choice of the children. Once the message of an advertisement is persistent in the mind of a child, it leaves a lasting impression. Loyalty to a brand means a lot of money for the manufacturer.

How children interact with advertisements can depend on several things, **including their age, knowledge and experience**. As a teacher/educator you can help them learn to cope with the impact of the ads. Encourage them to ask questions and talk about their feelings and perceptions when exposed to ads.

Advertising Media and Forms and their Perception by Children

Brand and product advertising uses a wide variety of media, such as newspapers, radio, television or websites to create needs and trigger interest. Below are listed the main forms of media advertisements:

Online Advertising

On **websites** there are advertising banners that use colour effects, sounds or changing content. On **social networks**, advertising is usually displayed in a personalised form between the postings or at the edge of the page, while audiovisual advertising clips are inserted upstream and downstream in videos. On social networks there are certain forms of advertising that are

deliberately designed so that they are not immediately recognised as advertisements, they seem to be part of the content/news feed and have just small print saying, for example, ‘*sponsored*’.

On **social networks** like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, there are certain people, that are branded as ‘*influencers*’ that usually advertise certain brands, services, etc. This advertising might also not be explicitly labelled as such and even adults could be confused whether this is part of the content or advertisement. On **You Tube** there are also similar advertising strategies, as used in the social networks.

There is also this popular practice of ‘*unboxing*’ where these influencers show their shopping hunts. This could also be a form of advertising if certain brands pay to the influencers to do unboxing with their goods. Read the article *Why Children Are the Most Elusive and Valuable Customers in Tech* that we have linked in our resources section to learn more about the importance for online advertising for this age group.

Advertising in Apps

In free apps one can often find advertisements in the form of faded-in pictures, as recorded videos or as small advertising banners. The full paid versions are usually without advertising. A separate form of advertising in apps are the so-called "in-app purchases" or "in-app items". This means that, for example, in a free game app, additional materials can be purchased to help the player reach the goal of the game faster. While big advertisements in apps such as banners, videos or pop-ups can usually be identified by differences in appearance and content, corresponding purchase recommendations for in-app items can usually only be identified by careful reading of the message and are therefore often not clearly perceived as advertising by the adolescent audience.

6.5. Legal Framework and Control Bodies

Law on Radio and Television

General regulations for Bulgaria.

Partners adapt for Sweden, Turkey, Austria (change as applicable when translating)

In Bulgaria, according to the Radio and Television Act, Article 75, advertising must not involve or encourage discrimination, it must not encourage behaviour that endangers health, safety or the environment, it must not harm or mislead the interests of consumers and it must not violate human dignity.

Regulations with special consideration of children

Under the law, there is a higher level of protection about advertising to children. For example, television programmes for children cannot be interrupted by advertising at intervals shorter than 30 minutes. Advertisements must be broadcast separately from editorial content for children and children if they relate to potentially harmful products. Alcoholic beverages may also not be advertised specifically to children and adolescents.

Council of Electronic Media (CEM)

CEM is a regulatory body and among its main functions are the protection of the public interest and ensuring a safe environment for the children. CEM follows closely if the media (mostly private television channels) observe the stipulations related to children protection in the Radio and Television Act.

National Council for Self-Regulation (NCSR)

The National Council for Self-Regulation (NCSR) is the non-governmental self-regulatory body of the advertising industry. Its task is to ensure that legally permitted advertising does not cross ethical boundaries. Its objectives include promoting responsible action and eliminating complaints in the advertising industry. Members of the public themselves can point out statements and content that are deemed inappropriate (for all age groups of the society) and lodge complaints.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to use reliable control mechanisms or technical measures because of the large number of media and the confusing transnational, mainly electronic, distribution channels. On the other hand, protective measures are becoming necessary due to the increasing amount of content related to the protection of children and children.

Advertising and Media Education

Advertising accompanies children in their everyday lives and should therefore be addressed by teachers, parents and guardians, in an effective way.

Skills and competences that are important to support this age group:

- Teachers, parents and guardians, should recognise the influence of advertising in children buying wishes.
- The attention of parents and children in this age group should not only be focused on advertising messages, but as children are also highly influenced by the ideas and lifestyle portrayed in advertising.
- Teachers, parents and guardians should support young adults to discover and to uncover the most common advertising strategies. They should talk to them about advertisements they see and encourage them to think about what advertisements are trying to do.

Which skills should children have developed and in which area do they still need support?

- Children can identify advertisements and distinguish them from content in various media.
- They can usually understand the purpose of advertising and use the advertised information to make a purchasing decision.

- Young adults might not yet fully understand how advertising makes products more expensive; this should be discussed.
- Not all children might recognise tricky product placement strategies.
- Young adults might not know that clicking an advertisement on social media sends data to the makers of the advertisement. What social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat collect user data, which they use to target advertising to users should be critically discussed and explained.
- They might not have the skills to make judgments about political advertisements, particularly during election campaigns.

6.6. The Importance of Media Characters and Celebrities for Children

For today's Children social media influencers, sometimes also dubbed micro-celebrities are of utmost importance. The following are some areas to explore further:

- Why are Media Characters / influencers so important for children - today's youth is completely immersed in the media world and leans towards media characters not only for entertainment but for gathering information, recommendations, companionship and comfort.
- The Role of Media Figures as Companions - children face challenges when growing up and media characters support and accompany them in coping with the world around them.
- Media Figures for Orientation - children are particularly fond of watching media characters in social situations they encounter themselves and those they find challenging. This enables them to get confirmation or inspiration for their own actions.
- The Most Popular Media Figures - Social media influencers and Youtubers along with other celebrities are extremely popular with children. Parents should keep connected to their children and seek out opportunities to communicate with them about the content they follow.

Why are Media Characters so Important for Children?

For today's children, social media is a natural part of life through which they communicate with their friends. Most of them have their own accounts on different social media platforms and spend a lot of time liking, sharing and commenting on social media content. The reason why the content of social media influencers has such a big impact in their life is that children seek social contact and are in active search for identification figures. Influencers seem extremely appealing as they are alike to their viewers. Sometimes, they are like a familiar girl or boy next door.

Media Education for Teachers in Relation to Internet use and Big Data

Today's children are growing up in an increasingly complex world, living their lives seamlessly on and offline. This presents many positive and exciting opportunities, but also challenges and risks. We want schools to equip their pupils with the knowledge needed to make the best use of the internet and technology in a safe, considered and respectful way, so they can reap the benefits of the online world.

Media can be used in almost any discipline to enhance learning, both in class, and for out-of-class assignments. Short film and television clips, written articles, and blog postings can be viewed to reinforce concepts and spark discussion. Songs and music videos, especially when the lyrics are made available, can be used to the same effect.

The Advantages of Using Media

- Many media sources (feature films, music videos, visualizations, news stories) have very high production quality capable of **showcasing complex ideas** in a short period of time.
- Media offers both cognitive and affective experiences. It can **provoke discussion, an assessment of one's values, and an assessment of self** if the scenes have strong emotional content.
- The use of media sources helps **connect learners with events that are culturally relevant**. As a result, a positive consequence of utilising media is that instructors must keep their materials and examples up to date.
- News stories can be used to **connect theories taught in the classroom with real world events and policies**.

The Advantages of Media for pupils

- Popular media (films, music, YouTube) are a familiar medium to students that helps gain attention and **maintain student interest** in the theories and concepts under discussion. Students can see the theories and concepts in action. In more than a figurative sense, theories and concepts leap from the screen.
- Students can **hone their analytical skills** by analysing media using the theories and concepts they are studying.
- The use of media in the classroom **enables students to see concepts and new examples** when they are watching television, listening to music, or are at the movies with friends.
- Students can **experience worlds beyond their own**, especially if the media is sharply different from their local environment.

Social media and Instant Messaging

The term social media refers to a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Social media is

a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Some popular examples of general social media platforms include *Snapchat, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok*

Instant messaging is a form of text-based communication in which two persons participate in a single conversation over their computers or mobile devices within an Internet-based chatroom. The software establishes a direct connection between users so they can talk to each other synchronously, in real time.



Types of Social Media

- Social Networking.
- Photo Sharing.
- Video Sharing.
- Interactive Media.
- Blogging/Community Building.
- Social media refers to any digital platform, system, website or app that enables people to create and share content and connect with each other. Here are a few of the most popular sites that children use, and how they work:

- **Facebook:** A free site where registered users (aged 13 and up) can share pictures, links, videos, and other content with their 'friends'. Friends are other registered users you have connected with within the network. Most of the time, anything you share will only be seen by the people you have 'friended'.

- **Instagram:** A free image sharing service that is used mainly on mobile devices. On Instagram, it's common to connect with people you don't know but share common interests with (for example, The Rock). You can have a public account or a private account where only friends can see your posts.

- **Snapchat:** A mobile phone messaging application that allows you to send video or picture messages to one or more people at a time. The messages are only viewable for a few seconds at a time, as determined by the sender.
- **TikTok;** A free video sharing platform where users can shoot, edit and share short videos. Like other social media apps, users can follow, like and comment on everything they see. The bulk of TikTok users are 24 and younger.
- **Tumblr:** A blogging website where people can publish their own articles and share it with people who follow their blog or profile. They also view the content of people they follow.
- **WhatsApp:** WhatsApp and messaging applications let you contact friends using internet data (or Wi-Fi) instead of your mobile carrier, which reduces the cost of messaging. It can be used without a sim card if connected to a Wi-Fi network. It is popular because it allows you to send messages to a group of friends at one time.

6.7. Digital Language Learning - Making and Understanding Media Yourself



Media education and the promotion of media literacy cover a wide range of areas. Topics such as media habits, social media and advertising look primarily at teaching responsible and safe media use and consumption.

Another area – media arts education - uses media as a tool for producing one's own media products to support a critical and responsible use of media. Digital media are used here as a tool for design and expression. Through independent experimentation with media, children can participate in their social environment, and they learn how media can be used, for example,

to publish information and their own opinions. They change from being mere media consumers to active producers. In creative media work, digital meets analogue

There are numerous possibilities, such as taking photographs, producing music, making videos or stop-motion films, where digital media are used actively and creatively. Especially the creation of own videos is very popular among children in times of *YouTube* and *TikTok*.

What do children learn through digital language programs?

Through their own and creative use of digital media, children can experience them directly. They learn not only how media work, but also what they intend and how they work. The fact that media only show a section of reality can be directly experienced, for example, when taking photos independently. Children understand how easily photos can be manipulated when they edit photos themselves with Photoshop.

Conclusion

Adopting digital technologies into language teaching and learning offers profound opportunities for enhancing creativity, engagement, and collaborative knowledge creation. These tools transform traditional educational approaches, enabling students to engage in interactive and meaningful learning experiences. By utilising multimedia resources, interactive software, and online platforms, educators can create a dynamic environment where students' creative actions are mediated and stimulated.

However, the integration of digital technologies also brings crucial considerations regarding data privacy, cybersecurity, and ethical practices. Ensuring the protection of student data, implementing robust cybersecurity measures, and enhancing responsible digital citizenship are essential components of a safe and effective digital learning environment.

Finally, data privacy, cybersecurity, and ethical considerations are increasingly critical in the digital age, as vast amounts of sensitive information are collected, stored, and processed by various entities. Ensuring data privacy involves safeguarding personal data from unauthorised access and misuse, while cybersecurity focuses on protecting systems and networks from digital attacks. Ethical considerations encompass the responsible use of technology, ensuring that data collection and usage practices respect individual rights and do not exploit or harm users. Balancing these aspects is essential for building trust, maintaining compliance with regulations, and to create a secure and fair digital environment.

Chapter 7. Enhancing language proficiency through cross-cultural online collaborations

Objective:

The chapter is to give an insight on development of a thorough exploration of how cross-cultural online collaborations enhance language proficiency. This broad topic focuses on the intersection of language learning with intercultural communication, facilitated through digital means. The chapter will highlight the pedagogical strategies, technological tools, and outcomes associated with employing cross-cultural collaborations in language education programs.

7.1. Introduction to Cross-Cultural Collaborations in Language Learning

A significant event for language teaching was the publication of the CEFR by the Council of Europe in 2001. This document aims to harmonize references and practices in the teaching of modern foreign languages and to promote these last. This also reveals a new European conception of language: it is no longer simply a subject of learning like any other but rather a means of communicating with others. Therefore, this parameter had to be taken into account in language teaching, which had to respond by proposing a new way of teaching: the action-based approach. This no longer considers the language learner only as a user with a certain language level to achieve, but rather as a social actor. In order to grant it this new status, the learner must no longer simply use the foreign language with the aim of learning it, but rather with the aim of accomplishing tasks which allow them to establish real communication with others. Indeed, we now know that communication does not rely exclusively on the linguistic domain. The action-oriented approach therefore does not perceive language as a goal but rather as a means of carrying out various activities which go beyond the language domain and which make it possible to develop in the learner "a set of general skills and, in particular, a skill in communicating linguistically" (Council of Europe, 2001, p.15). It is then a matter of language teachers proposing tasks to learners. These are defined by the Council of Europe as "any action goal that the actor represents as having to achieve a given result based on a problem to be resolved, an obligation to fulfil, a goal that we set ourselves. » (Ibid., p.16). This definition is illustrated by examples of tasks: "It may involve (...) moving a cupboard, writing a book, winning the decision in the negotiation of a contract, playing a game of cards, order a meal in a restaurant, translate a text in a foreign language or prepare a class newspaper as a group" (Ibid.). The tasks which punctuate the language courses therefore go well beyond the academic and language framework by falling within areas that are larger, more complex and more representative of the reality with which the learners will be confronted and for which they must be able to mobilize a multitude of skills to achieve a given result.

The text distinguishes two main categories of skills: communicative language skills (linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics) and general skills in which we find in particular a

descriptor called "Intercultural awareness", explained as being "Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relationships (similarities and distinctive differences) between “the world one comes from” and “the world of the target community” (Ibid., p.83). The term “awareness” is interesting because it presents the intercultural approach as a way of perceiving the world from which we can no longer detach ourselves once we have grasped it, consciously or not, and which accompanies for the rest of our experiences. Intercultural awareness is then detailed in a more concrete way as:

- the ability to establish a relationship between the original culture and the foreign culture
- awareness of the concept of culture and the ability to recognize and use various strategies to establish contact with people from another culture
- the ability to play the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and foreign culture and to effectively manage situations of misunderstanding and cultural conflicts
- the ability to go beyond stereotypical superficial relationships (Ibid., p.84)

We can therefore note that this aspect of language learning - intercultural - is also taken into account in an institutional framework such as the CEFR and that this is not limited only to linguistic skills. A Complementary Volume of the CEFR was published in 2018 in which the idea of mediation is added. Indeed, the Council of Europe wishes to emphasize plurilingual and intercultural education and this takes the form of new descriptors such as “establishing a pluricultural space” (Council of Europe, 2018, p.129) for example, for which level A1 requires being able to “facilitate an intercultural exchange” (Ibid.) and level C1 to “play the role of mediator in intercultural encounters” (Ibid.). The text then considers the language learner, regardless of their level, as a real social actor in a multicultural context, where the participation of everyone is necessary in order to achieve living together. Concerning interculturality, Chaves et al. (2012) add “This learning is also transversal; it concerns all subjects taught in the school system and does not end with the end of schooling. On the contrary, it continues throughout life. » (p.18). Indeed, the CEFR and its complementary volume are definitely intended to be transversal, like language learning itself which allows the reinvestment of acquired knowledge in a multitude of other areas.

To summarize, the Council of Europe has been able to take into account intercultural aspects in the teaching and learning of languages, as shown by the CEFR and its Supplementary Volume. To include this aspect in teaching, a new approach has been put in place: the action-based approach, which grants the learner a new role, much more social and closer to reality. Communication is therefore understood in its complex form, which encompasses a multitude of language skills as well as general ones. The cultural dimension of language is then more perceptible than ever and intercultural competence appears necessary to communicate with others. However, interculturality is not limited to modern languages and school but is also essential throughout life.

Telecollaboration is commonly defined as “the use of online communication tools to bring together classes of geographically distant language learners to develop their foreign language and intercultural skills through collaborative tasks and projects.” There are numerous works devoted to the use of digital technology in language teaching. The development of intercultural competence through telecollaboration, a subject which dates back to the end of the 20th century, gave rise to projects such as Cultura in the United States, eTandem in Europe, Le français en line in France. One of the main reasons for this craze for digital technology is the following: space, once physical, has become virtual, thus allowing direct access to a society other than that which surrounds us physically. The necessary condition for development, according to Vygotsky, is the asymmetry caused by the differences between what we already know how to do and what we do not yet know how to do. This difference will ensure that there will always be progress, individual development which will be part of societal development. The role of society in individual development is of paramount importance. In this sense, new technologies increase the potential of interactions in language learning and correspond perfectly to Vygotsky's first idea, that is, learning situated in a social setting using interactions. Vygotsky's second idea about the importance of culture in the learning process took on even greater importance with the advent of the Internet. Indeed, “the emergence of the social web” (Ollivier, 2012) means that “on the one hand, the Internet itself is based on specific cultural principles and values, and, on the other hand, its users bring their own cultural norms and specific behaviors”³ (O'Dowd, Ritter, 2006). Thus, the Internet offers a space which is not culturally neutral and which is conducive to the development of intercultural competence⁴. The fundamental question raised in the rest of the article is to know what are the advantages of telecollaboration for students and how the teacher can “implement activities tending to go from linguistic/semantic understanding to understanding human” (Beacco, 2013).

A telecollaboration is a project involving several classes, sometimes in different countries, and communicating via the Internet. Tools that enable telecollaboration include electronic emails, discussion forums, wikis, chat, audio conferencing, video conferencing and virtual worlds.

Telecollaboration embodies the idea to address the “native” speakers directly in order to carry out the final task. Before moving on to an explanation, an important remark is needed: in order to avoid generalization and discrimination, we will use the term “native” in quotation marks, alternating it with the word specialist, their granting the very general meaning of a 'person with in-depth knowledge and skills in a language-culture'. In contrast, we will speak of learners and apprentices, defining them as people ‘in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills in a language-culture’. Videoconferencing has the advantage of facilitating oral and visual interactions between apprentices and specialists, giving a social dimension to learning. The first advantage of videoconferencing is the possibility of exchanging live in order to check understanding of the situations in which expressions can be used and to better understand the specific intonation and gestures with which they are often endowed. Thus, the information provided by the “natives” makes it possible to update the expression in speech. The second

advantage is that, being synchronous, videoconferencing allows for a discussion with partners, which helps clarify missing information in the resources. Finally, the third advantage, which is discussed in the following part, is the explanation of the cultural part by the “natives”.

By learning an idiomatic expression, it is not vocabulary that we acquire but another vision of the world, which contributes to the process of decentration, a distancing from one's maternal culture, the ability to understand the other and not judge them according to the values of their own culture. Our hypothesis is as follows: to learn a language-culture, it is necessary to understand how the image is perceived by the “native” speaker. This idea is consistent with the notion of the shared cultural charge of Robert Galisson who speaks of the “added value to the meaning of the word [which] serves as a mark of cultural belonging and identification” (1991: 119) and “words which magnetize a certain form of culture and are identifiable and observable” (idem: 120). Indeed, the images behind the words are identifiable, observable and add “added value” to the expression. Unscientific and naive, this explanation has a double interest. For learners, the advantage of completing the semantic description with “added value”. Indeed, only “natives” can possibly answer the question: why this or that image? For “natives”, the verbalization of their perception allows them to reflect on their own language-culture, in other words a metalinguistic reflection, and also on the question of universals, that is to say on the question: Are there concepts that can be found in all the languages of the world? The explanation of images can therefore prove beneficial for L2 speakers but also for L1 speakers.

Videoconferencing can be approached in several ways: on an ad hoc basis in order to clarify the nuances of an expression or by devoting one or more sessions to it, when the objective is to learn, for example, a set of expressions grouped around a theme. Ultimately, a system combining face-to-face and distance learning could be considered, combining class work, videoconference sessions and online written exchanges. This hybrid mode allows everyone to work at their own pace, which facilitates individual progress.

7.2. Platforms and tools facilitating cross-cultural collaborations

7.2.1. Communication and Collaboration Tools

Cross-cultural collaborations are increasingly facilitated by a diverse array of platforms and tools designed to surmount barriers such as language differences, geographical distances, and time zone discrepancies. These tools play a crucial role in fostering effective communication, coordination, and collaboration among teams comprised of individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

Firstly, collaboration tools like Asana, Trello, and Basecamp serve as virtual hubs for teams to organize tasks, track progress, and share files. These platforms offer features such as task assignment, deadline setting, and file sharing, enabling seamless collaboration regardless of team members' locations or cultural contexts. By providing a centralized platform for

communication and project management, these tools help bridge cultural gaps and facilitate efficient teamwork.

Secondly, communication tools such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom play a vital role in facilitating real-time communication and collaboration among culturally diverse teams. These platforms offer instant messaging, video conferencing, and collaboration features, allowing team members to communicate effectively regardless of language barriers or geographic distances. Whether it's brainstorming ideas, conducting virtual meetings, or sharing updates, these tools provide a platform for cross-cultural collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Moreover, translation tools like Google Translate and Microsoft Translator play a crucial role in overcoming language barriers in cross-cultural collaborations. These tools provide instant translation of written and spoken communication, enabling team members who speak different languages to communicate effectively. By facilitating multilingual communication, translation tools promote inclusivity and ensure that all team members can participate actively in discussions and decision-making processes.

In addition, collaborative editing tools such as Google Docs, Microsoft Office 365, and Dropbox Paper enable real-time collaboration on documents, presentations, and spreadsheets. These platforms allow multiple users to edit the same file simultaneously, fostering teamwork and creativity among geographically dispersed teams. By providing a shared workspace for collaborative work, these tools promote transparency, accountability, and efficiency in cross-cultural collaborations.

Furthermore, cultural training and awareness platforms like CultureWizard and GlobeSmart offer resources and training programs to help individuals navigate cultural differences effectively. These platforms provide insights into cultural norms, communication styles, and business practices, equipping team members with the knowledge and skills needed to work harmoniously in diverse teams. By promoting cultural competence and sensitivity, these tools help build trust and collaboration across cultural boundaries.

Through leveraging various platforms and tools, teachers and learners can facilitate cross-cultural collaborations and harness the diverse perspectives and talents of global teams. Whether it's a class project, communication, translation, or cultural training, these tools play a crucial role in breaking down barriers and fostering collaboration in today's interconnected world.

7.2.2. Digital platforms and social media

Digital platforms and social media have revolutionized direct communication and collaboration between learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering cross-cultural exchange and learning. These platforms serve as virtual meeting spaces where individuals can interact, share knowledge, and collaborate regardless of geographic distances or cultural differences.

Video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft Teams enable learners to engage in real-time communication and collaboration through video and audio calls. These platforms allow participants to see and hear each other, facilitating rich, face-to-face interactions that transcend cultural barriers. Whether it's group discussions, virtual lectures, or collaborative projects, video conferencing platforms provide a dynamic environment for learners to connect and learn from one another's cultural perspectives.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn play a vital role in connecting learners from different cultural backgrounds and fostering community engagement. These platforms offer various features such as groups, forums, and hashtags, where learners can join communities of interest, share resources, and participate in discussions on diverse topics. Social media enables learners to build networks, exchange ideas, and gain insights into different cultures through interactions with peers from around the world.

Messaging apps like WhatsApp, WeChat, and Telegram facilitate direct communication and collaboration among learners through text, voice, and multimedia messaging. These apps provide instant communication channels that enable learners to ask questions, seek clarification, and collaborate on projects in real time, irrespective of time zone differences or language barriers. Messaging apps also support group chats and voice calls, allowing learners to engage in collaborative learning activities and discussions with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Online collaboration platforms like Google Workspace and Slack enable learners to collaborate on documents, presentations, and projects in real time. These platforms offer features such as shared document editing, file sharing, and task management, allowing learners to work together seamlessly regardless of their geographic location or cultural context. By providing a virtual workspace for collaborative learning, online collaboration platforms empower learners to exchange ideas, co-create knowledge, and achieve common learning goals.

Digital platforms and social media play a crucial role in facilitating direct communication and collaboration between learners from different cultural backgrounds. Whether it's through video conferencing, social networking, messaging apps, or online collaboration tools, these platforms provide opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, collaboration, and learning in today's interconnected world. By leveraging the power of technology, learners can connect with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, broaden their perspectives, and enrich their learning experiences.

7.2.3. Project Management and Sharing Tools

Project management solutions are essential tools that project teams must use to stay organized, communicate effectively, and stay on track. Thanks to them, they can coordinate tasks, manage resources and monitor progress in real time.

Among the advantages of project management managed via a dedicated tool, we include:

Increased efficiency

Project management tools make it easier for teams to track progress, identify issues, and make quick adjustments if necessary. This helps reduce the time and effort spent on different tasks, resulting in increased efficiency and productivity. Without proper organization, teams can become overwhelmed and unable to manage tasks.

Improving communication

Project management tools help teams communicate more effectively. Using built-in features like automatic notifications, task tracking, and progress reporting, teams can stay in touch, be fully aware of potential issues, and ensure everyone is on the same page wave.

Cost reduction

By tracking progress in real time and making rapid adjustments, teams can save money on project resources. And above all, do not exceed the budget and planned deadlines, and thus avoid penalties. Additionally, project management tools can help identify potential savings and spot areas where costs can be reduced.

Improving collaboration

Project management tools make it easier to collaborate and share information between teams. This helps ensure that everyone has the right information, at all stages of the project.

Better compliance with deadlines

Lack of clarity on deadlines can lead to confusion and missed deadlines. It is important to establish a clear schedule and use project management tools to track progress and ensure deadlines are met.

Increased motivation

Project management tools help motivate teams by providing visibility into the progress of operations. This can help keep teams focused on the same goal.

The advantages of project management tools

However, with the multitude of project management tools available on the market, it can be difficult to choose the right one. Generally speaking, the ideal tool must:

Be friendly

The tool should be easy to use and understand. This will help teams quickly get up to speed and start using it effectively.

Have features tailored to your needs

It must offer functionalities adapted to the specific needs of your project or your sector of activity.

Have strong security

It must be based on strong security with a clear promise regarding data hosting and offer the possibility of assigning specific roles and rights to each person.

Enable collaboration

It must have functions that facilitate collaboration between team members (annotations, comments, notifications, sharing, delegation of tasks, etc.).

Be customizable

Customization allows for better handling and rapid adoption of the tool.

The best project management tools for organizing tasks

Organizing tasks is an essential element to the success of your projects and the best tools

Asana, to communicate better and meet deadlines

Asana is a powerful management tool that makes it easy to organize tasks, assign tasks to team members, and track projects. Intuitive and easy to use, Asana integrates valuable reporting tools, lets you create or edit tasks from almost any project view, and makes goals clearer with better communication between teams.

Trello, to have a clear view of your deadlines

Trello is a versatile tool that allows you to manage projects, organize tasks, assign them to certain team members, pace them over time and communicate with other team members using a thread discussion integrated into each project. But the whole point of Trello lies in its integration capabilities with your existing tools (messaging, drive, calendar, etc.) as well as other apps (Slack, Google Drive, Salesforce, etc.).

Miro, to manage complex projects

Miro brings together all the essential ingredients for managing complex projects and their stakeholders. From mind mapping (to generate new ideas and organize dependencies with mind maps, concept maps and brainwriting), to task tracking (to have an overview of the status, priority and dependencies of each task so that nothing slips through the cracks). From user story modeling (to show how your work will impact the client), a planning tool (to clarify the steps needed for project success) and online workshops (to bring together in one (customer meetings and process improvement events).

Wrike, a solution for structuring interactions between teams

Acquired by Citrix last year, Wrike boasts that it can reduce the dark matter of work. Understand all these tasks carried out in an anarchic manner within different asynchronous applications which have no real added value and these communications done sometimes by

email, sometimes by chat, sometimes by video which exhaust employees and harm their efficiency.

This project management tool helps organize all of your company's project updates, deadlines, and documents in one convenient, accessible space. It helps reduce the number of easily lost company emails, improve collaboration with team members working onsite or remotely, automatically update deadlines for interdependent tasks in case of delay.

Monday, to put projects on “autopilot”

Simple, visual and intuitive, Monday is a management tool that makes it easy to define key steps, priorities, assign tasks, set deadlines and receive automated notifications. Flexible and customizable, it makes it easy to create and customize dashboards to track project progress, gain important insights, and get a holistic overview of work in progress.

Added to this are integration capabilities with Dropbox, Google Drive, Trello, Slack, Jira, etc. Note that Monday has had a data centre in Frankfurt (Germany) for almost two years, to allow European companies to store data within the EU.

7.3. Pedagogical approaches to cross-cultural collaborations

7.3.1. Background

Intercultural approaches are at the heart of educational policies and more generally of contemporary societies. Indeed, the presence of numerous migrant students or those from minority cultures poses educational and social challenges both for the educational institution and for the teachers.

During the 20th century, three factors gradually came to disrupt this well-established certainty of a monocultural school serving a nation conceived as culturally homogeneous: decolonization, the growing democratization of public life and the internationalization of migration. First of all, the achievement of independence in the 1950s and 1960s for most countries in Africa and Asia was achieved through a long liberation process. The school inherited from colonization was called into question in these newly independent countries, because it devalued local cultures and languages and was organized for the exclusive benefit of the colonizers. It constituted, as Kane (2003) points out for the case of Africa, an ambiguous adventure, both an instrument of cultural alienation but also a means of emancipation.

Second, the growing democratization of political and social life has externalized the cultural plurality of most human societies, including those that previously considered themselves ethnically or culturally homogeneous. In many countries, educational programs promoting minority cultures and languages were implemented during this period. In this regard, let us observe the essential contribution of the civil rights movement in the United States. This first developed within the black community to put an end to the long institutionally maintained

school segregation. In the wake of the civil rights movement, the Hispanic community was able to obtain the possibility of using Spanish in public bilingual education programs.

Third, increasing worker mobility and migration at the national and international levels have produced societies that are more diverse in their sociocultural composition. It is under the impetus of these three long-term structural factors that intercultural approaches have gradually spread throughout the world. It is an education reform movement which is therefore by nature international and polysemous. It affects countries and regions of the world differently depending on their socio-political, economic and historical contexts. This movement is undoubtedly one of the keys to the future of contemporary educational systems. The cultural factor is added to the social environment variable, which shows a change of perspective in the perception of the different student. The latter is no longer just the one who comes from a distant country or another continent but can be represented by his next-door neighbor with a different language, a different culture or a way of life. different.

According to Pagé (1993), intercultural approaches aim at three main objectives: (1) recognizing and accepting cultural pluralism as a social reality, (2) contributing to the establishment of a society of equal rights and equity and (3) participate in the establishment of harmonious inter-ethnic relations. Any conflicts must be resolved through negotiation and democratic debate.

It is therefore necessary to emphasize that intercultural approaches in education primarily aim for greater equality, more equity and more diversity at all levels of the education system. The danger of communitarianism, sometimes wrongly linked to intercultural approaches, does not make sense because their main objective is equal rights and not the search for difference and isolation at all costs. Ultimately, intercultural approaches in education refer to the necessary adaptations of educational systems to the multicultural reality. They underpin reciprocal efforts at understanding and acceptance between individuals, groups and countries. They presuppose a dynamic conception of culture. All cultures are subject to internal developments and external influences. The historically constituted and stable national culture is a myth incompatible with the very idea of opening the school system to cultural diversity.

The use of intercultural approaches in education cannot be done without the appropriation of a certain number of founding concepts (Robles de Meléndez & Beck, 2009). Here we could mention five main concepts: culture, ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, equality and difference. This list is obviously not exhaustive since many other concepts could have been presented such as otherness, diversity, dialogue, universalism.

7.3.2. Main approaches to intercultural education

Multicultural education

Multicultural education can be considered as an approach based on democratic values and beliefs. It affirms cultural pluralism in culturally diverse societies and an interdependent world. It allows you to develop intercultural skills, promote personal

development and fight against certain forms of discrimination such as racism (Bennett, 1999, p. 11). Multicultural education can give rise to reflection so that the student better understands what is happening in his or her life. group of belonging, develops a critical analysis of different cultural forms, situates its cultural identity in the recognition and acceptance of diversity, and tries to act to improve their living conditions (Garcia Castano & Granados Matinez, 1999, p.79).

Education for diversity

Interactionist sociology considers culture as a dynamic of organizing internal differences. In relation to this approach, intercultural education is thought of as the transmission of plural and critical knowledge, resulting from interactions, reciprocities or more generally intersubjectivities. It is aimed at all students, beyond their differences. Pluralism is promoted as a value and purpose of education, as a keystone between the human universal and the singularity expressed through differences. Intercultural psychology studies the interactions between individuals and different cultural groups based on stereotypes, values and attitudes that emerge during relationships. It involves starting from the individual in their context and determining the influence of their culture on their behaviour in multicultural situations. Interaction is defined by Cl. Clanet as interdependence between dominant and minority cultures, and as coherence of a globality. The objective of intercultural education is then to facilitate the operations of decentring and reframing resulting from otherness to construct new thought patterns that cannot be reduced to interacting cultures. By using these contributions from sociology and psychology, interculturality can be considered as an educational goal in terms of knowledge and interpersonal skills, while being part of a global approach to the treatment of plurality. C. Allemann-Ghionda develops a model of education for diversity from this definition. It consists of going beyond the logic of identification with the majority culture or the minority culture, and of promoting the reciprocity of the cultures present beyond their differences. This rational approach to diversity can be understood as preparation for intercultural education, in the sense that it is a pedagogy of otherness advocating openness to cultural, social, linguistic diversity, and acquisition of behaviours favourable to difference. It aims to reconcile the recognition of cultures with the principle of equality of individuals.

Intercultural education

Intercultural education considers heterogeneity as a norm and not as a handicap that must be compensated by aid. Likewise, homogeneity, through the negation of diversity or through authoritarianism, can be assimilated to coercion. Intercultural education considers that each individual constantly experiences a process of acculturation, while the culture of cross-breeding is becoming more widespread while producing more and more diversity. It is not a means to compensate for inequalities, but aims to learn equality in reciprocity. It allows you to decenter yourself to avoid the prejudices inherent in cultural difference and its supposed causal link with academic failure. It is constituted as a transversal learning of knowledge contents, practices and representations which govern interactions. It allows each student to feel involved and therefore motivate them, but also to favor similarities to work in a group, thus compensating for difficulties without stigmatizing differences. Intercultural education is not only aimed at foreign

or minority students, but at all students. It allows them to gradually open up to other cultures (starting with the host or origin cultures), to differentiate without discriminating, to recognize cultural diversity without unequal judgment, to understand it in the mode of reciprocity of perspectives, to fight against ethnocentrism, to structure their personality in pluralistic terms. Among the teacher, intercultural education promotes awareness that each student has a unique problem and that differences or diversity must not be approached in a monolithic way, including in what they can be considered as belonging to the same culture. He should then examine the latter as a plurality of individual references or an organization of internal differences (Garcia Castano & Granados Matinez, 1999, p. 79). According to Goodenough (1981), each individual has access to several cultures, but he can only acquire part of them through his experience. His personal version of culture, corresponding to the totality of these parts or successive identifications, is only a singular and subjective vision of the world. Intercultural education will thus lead students to develop skills in several cultures and allow them to construct a vision of the world that is both individual and collective. Interculturality concerns all students, whether they are immigrants or natives, from a majority group or minorities. Furthermore, in a society characterized by a multicultural reality, everyone's points of view can become interchangeable.

7.3.3. Instructional strategies for integrating cross-cultural collaborations into language learning

The foreign language classroom is one of the places where students are supposed to learn and train in intercultural competence, in order to develop it throughout their lives. Thus, it is part of the essential purposes of one of the best-known and most used Council of Europe policy tools, published in 2001 and available in 40 languages: the Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learn, teach, assess (CEFR). Aiming to found and disseminate plurilingual and intercultural education, considered essential for harsh realities and for social cohesion, the EU and the CoE offer numerous tools to motivate and support their Member States in their necessary changes to their education systems. With the foreign language class in the foreground, cross-curricular activities are now offered in all subjects; the CEFR, where intercultural competence is still poorly developed, is only the first stone laid to enable actors in education systems to collaborate in this endeavor (Beacco et al., 2016a; Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002; CoE, 2007, 2009, 2014, 2018a, 2018b, 2020, n.d. a, n.d. b, n.d. c).

Already from the start of the CEFR, the challenge of putting this language policy into practice is mentioned: “From this point of view, the goal of language teaching is profoundly modified. (...) All the consequences of such a paradigm shift still remain to be resolved and translated into action. » (CoE, 2001, p. 11). Teams of experts, working for the Council, then continued to enrich the material, published mainly in English and French, to guide language professionals. However, it is up to the players in the education systems of the Member States to organize themselves to benefit from this work and reflections. In addition, educational resources for addressing intercultural dimensions in the classroom have been developed and put online by researchers in language teaching, within the CoE and in schools around the world, since the 1980s. Informed teachers and trained for their use and capable of making local

adaptations, could use them concretely, if they are encouraged to integrate them into their courses.

According to one of the three Fundamental Guides of the Council (CoE, n.d. b; Beacco et al. 2016), the development and implementation of a curriculum involves a large number of activities at several levels of the education system, from the international level (“supra”), to the domain of teaching, the teacher, and the individual (“nano”). Actors at all levels must aim for the same goals and the initial training of teachers is essential.

7.4. Benefits of cross-cultural collaborations for language learning

Cross-cultural collaborations ensure a holistic and enriching language learning experience that goes beyond linguistic proficiency, thus fostering global citizenship and intercultural competence in general.

Cross-cultural competence refers to a culture-general skill set that includes awareness of one’s “self” in the context of culture, an open mind towards and appreciation of diversity, and the ability to apply “culture analytical models”. Important domain of cross-cultural competence are foreign language skills. While language proficiency may be more time-extensive to attain and sustain, the process of gaining such proficiency is uniquely capable of facilitating the development of character traits needed for true effectiveness in intercultural interactions.

Inherently, language and culture are both interrelated to and interdependent on one other. Without language, culture cannot be fully realized, understood, or transmitted to future generations. Concordantly, any definition of culture is incomplete without understanding the role of language in its genesis, development, and moment-by-moment expression. Given the strong interrelatedness and interdependency of language and culture, the importance of language proficiency in intercultural effectiveness becomes obvious.

The benefits of cross-cultural collaborations for language learning could be expressed in the following aspects:

Authentic language practice

Immersion is key to mastering a language. When learners engage in cross-cultural collaborations, they're not simply memorizing vocabulary or practicing grammar exercises; they're actively using the language in real-life situations. Whether it's conversing with native speakers, participating in group projects, or navigating everyday interactions, these authentic experiences help solidify language skills and build confidence.

Cultural understanding

Language is a reflection of culture, and vice versa. By interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, language learners gain insights into the customs, beliefs, and

values that shape language use. They learn not only how to speak the language but also how to navigate cultural nuances and understand the context behind certain expressions or gestures.

Enhanced communication skills

Effective communication is about more than just words; it's about understanding context, tone, and cultural cues. Cross-cultural collaborations challenge learners to communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers, forcing them to adapt their language use to fit different situations and audiences. This improves their overall communication skills and prepares them for diverse social and professional environments.

Expanded vocabulary and idioms

Languages are constantly evolving, and each culture has its own unique vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. By interacting with speakers from different backgrounds, learners are exposed to a wider range of linguistic nuances, slang, and colloquialisms. This exposure not only enriches their vocabulary but also helps them understand the cultural context behind the language.

Increased motivation

Learning a language can be challenging, but it's also incredibly rewarding, especially when learners can see the practical applications of their skills. Cross-cultural collaborations provide tangible opportunities to use the language in meaningful ways, whether it's making new friends, collaborating on projects, or exploring different cultures. This intrinsic motivation fuels their desire to learn and grow as language learners.

Cognitive Benefits

Cognitive science has shown that bilingualism and multilingualism can have numerous cognitive benefits, including improved problem-solving skills, enhanced creativity, and increased cognitive flexibility. Cross-cultural collaborations stimulate these cognitive functions by challenging learners to adapt to unfamiliar cultural contexts, think critically about language use, and navigate complex social interactions.

Global networking opportunities

In today's interconnected world, the ability to communicate across cultures is a valuable skill. By engaging in cross-cultural collaborations, language learners not only expand their language skills but also their global network. These connections can open doors to new academic, professional, and personal opportunities, whether it's studying abroad, pursuing international collaborations, or building friendships with people from around the world.

Cultural exchange

Language learning is as much about cultural exchange as it is about mastering grammar and vocabulary. Cross-cultural collaborations provide a platform for learners to share their own culture and traditions while learning about others. This reciprocal exchange fosters mutual

respect, empathy, and understanding, breaking down stereotypes and promoting cross-cultural appreciation.

7.5. Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

7.5.1. Intercultural approach in language teaching

The social changes brought about by globalization are forcing developing countries to quickly assimilate educational reforms, in particular those aimed at learning foreign languages. In bilingual or multilingual societies, this learning should be intrinsically linked to intercultural learning, given that the members of these cultures evolve in an environment marked by its pluricultural or plurilingual character. However, the conflicts produced by the meeting of different cultures persist in these countries as highlighted by Kech (2012) in his study “Interculturality in everyday life: testimonies of citizens' experiences Launch day of the Jorsala project”. For the author “the meeting of cultures, in their differences, is conflicting. Not only do multiple old misunderstandings persist, but new ones appear. The cohabitation of different cultural visions is most often first and foremost a source of misunderstanding” (2012, p. 2).

These intercultural misunderstandings are not exclusive across countries. As such, learning a foreign language is considered to involve intercultural education, that is to say the development of understanding, tolerance and appreciation of other cultural identities. Contact with other languages and other cultures reduces ethnocentrism and allows us to compare and appreciate the value of our own world.

The objective of intercultural education is to allow students a progressive opening towards other cultures, to establish differences without distinction, and without the prejudices which lead to inequality (Menieur, 2007). Intercultural education is not only intended for foreign students, it is also the objective sought in almost all bilingual education contexts.

This means that students benefiting from an intercultural education will have the opportunity to acquire the skills allowing them to have a new vision of the world both individually and collectively. In this sense, the values pursued by intercultural education must be mastered by teachers of foreign languages. Kerzil and Vinsonneau (2002) rightly underline the values that should prevail in intercultural education:

Empathy: each person must learn to understand others, to put themselves in their situation and to be tolerant by taking their difficulties into account.

Solidarity: intercultural education is a way of learning to live in a humanitarian society that advocates mutual aid.

Intercultural respect: intercultural education aims to eradicate all forms of domination of one culture over others by taking an equitable position between cultures.

Opposition to nationalism: intercultural education must be able to remove barriers between states and expand the horizons of citizens.

The intercultural objective requires the adoption of an “intellectual posture” evidenced by the way of seeing things and by the implementation of methodological principles. These principles in turn require educational action allowing acquisition, beyond learning, of the linguistic code or the learning of cultural aspects. These aspects are not linked to the acquisition of mechanisms of understanding, acceptance, and dialogue, specific to intercultural objectives.

7.5.2. Challenges related to cross-cultural collaboration in teaching foreign languages

Cross-cultural collaboration in teaching foreign languages can be incredibly rewarding but also presents several challenges. We can list some of those below:

Language barrier

The most obvious challenge is the language barrier itself. If teachers and students don't share a common language, communication can be difficult, leading to misunderstandings and ineffective teaching.

Cultural differences

Every culture has its own values, norms, and communication styles. These differences can affect teaching methods, classroom dynamics, and student expectations. Teachers need to be aware of and sensitive to these cultural nuances to ensure effective collaboration.

Pedagogical differences

Different cultures may have different approaches to teaching and learning. For example, some cultures emphasize rote memorization, while others prioritize critical thinking and creativity. Teachers must navigate these differences to create a learning environment that is inclusive and effective for all students.

Technology and infrastructure

In some cases, cross-cultural collaboration may involve using technology to connect classrooms across different countries or regions. However, disparities in technology access and infrastructure can pose challenges, such as unreliable internet connections or lack of access to necessary hardware or software.

Time zones and scheduling

When collaborating across different time zones, scheduling can be a major challenge. Finding mutually convenient times for meetings, classes, or collaborative activities can be difficult and may require flexibility from all parties involved.

Implicit cultural biases

Even well-intentioned teachers may hold implicit biases that can affect their interactions with students from different cultures. These biases can impact everything from classroom management to grading practices. It's essential for teachers to engage in ongoing reflection and professional development to address these biases.

Assessment and evaluation

Assessing students' progress and learning outcomes in a culturally sensitive manner can be challenging. Traditional assessment methods may not be appropriate or effective for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teachers need to develop culturally responsive assessment practices that take into account students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Parent and community involvement

In some cases, cross-cultural collaboration may involve working with parents and community members who may have different expectations or perspectives on education. Building trust and rapport with these stakeholders can take time and effort but is essential for successful collaboration.

While cross-cultural collaboration in teaching foreign languages can be challenging, it also offers valuable opportunities for cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and personal growth for both teachers and students. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments.

7.5.3. Strategies for overcoming challenges of cross-cultural collaboration in teaching foreign languages

Providing language support for teachers and students who may not share a common language. This could involve using translation tools, providing language learning resources, or arranging for interpreters when necessary.

Offering training and professional development opportunities for teachers to increase their awareness of cultural differences and develop strategies for effectively navigating them in the classroom.

Incorporating cultural exchange activities into the curriculum to promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures. This could include guest lectures, cultural presentations, or collaborative projects with students from other countries.

Adapting teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles and cultural preferences. Incorporating a variety of instructional approaches, such as group work, experiential learning, and multimedia resources, to engage students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Using technology to facilitate cross-cultural collaboration, such as video conferencing tools for virtual classroom exchanges, online forums for collaborative projects, or language learning apps for independent study.

Developing assessment methods that are culturally responsive and equitable. Considering alternative forms of assessment, such as portfolios, presentations, or performance-based tasks, that allow students to demonstrate their learning in ways that align with their cultural backgrounds.

Building partnerships with parents, families, and community organizations to foster support for cross-cultural collaboration initiatives. Involving parents and community members

in the educational process through activities such as cultural events, language workshops, or volunteer opportunities.

Collaborating with colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds to co-plan and co-teach lessons. This can provide valuable insights and perspectives, enhance cultural exchange, and promote mutual learning among educators.

Establishing clear communication channels and protocols for sharing information, coordinating activities, and resolving conflicts in cross-cultural collaborations. Emphasizing open communication, active listening, and mutual respect among all participants.

Encouraging ongoing reflection and evaluation of cross-cultural collaboration efforts to identify areas for improvement and make adjustments as needed. Creating opportunities for feedback from students, teachers, and other stakeholders to inform future initiatives.