



Council of Europe
Language Policy Unit
DGII – Education Department
www.coe.int/lang-migrants

Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants



CEFR and the development of training schemes for adult migrants

The 2001 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) is a reference frame of programmes to help member States which wish to introduce plurilingual education. It facilitates the creation of language programmes that are mutually comparable because they are based on a finite set of common elements (competences, activities, levels, etc). At the same time, however, it facilitates adaptation of such programmes to the particular context and purposes, given that the “basic elements” are open to multiple combinations. Therefore, as shown by the example of school programmes, the CEFR is no standard teaching programme for training schemes aimed at migrants predefining the levels to be attained.

The CEFR is an instrument for devising programmes rather than a programme in itself

The CEFR is specifically geared to facilitating the implementation of curricula for plurilingual education (see Chapter 8 CEFR), to the extent that it defines language knowledge neither directly (good, poor, lesser knowledge of a language, etc.), nor even in terms of levels (which are only abstract benchmarks), but instead via a set of nested interlinked descriptors which use a closely monitored terminology in order to characterise language knowledge in detail.

On these bases, the CEFR constitutes a common analytical instrument to help language professionals specify concrete goals in accordance with needs and expectations vis-à-vis a specific set of learners, in terms interpretable by all.

Therefore, for both migrants and other target groups, the CEFR should not be used “the wrong way round”, for instance by selecting a level to be achieved which is deemed reasonable and relevant and setting it as objective. Instead of this a priori and top-down approach, recourse should be had to the diversity of acquired repertoires for adult migrants and their employment in the host society, their personal, social, professional, cultural and other integration in the host society, and therefore the potential diversity of corresponding training goals.

As the CEFR has spread, it has given rise to restrictive uses or uses which are contrary to its spirit: only six levels are used, even though it allows the user to establish and modulate more levels; priority is given to identical competence levels (eg B1 for written reception, oral interaction, written production, etc), whereas differentiated competence profiles would be more appropriate.

At all events, deciding that (eg) “level A2” is an objective for all migrant adults and that any course (or form of assessment) on this levels is suitable (courses which they might attend with foreign students or vocational trainees) denotes a conception of the CEFR which is very far removed from the principles on which it is based.

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The CEFR and teaching methodologies

The CEFR is also deemed to have triggered a “revolution” in teaching methodologies in view of the new teaching strategy which it proposes, via the action-oriented approach to teaching. This term appears prominently (p. 15) in the form of action-oriented approach, which the Framework of Reference itself adopts. The latter does, however, specify that “it has been a fundamental methodological principle of the Council of Europe that the methods to be employed in language learning, teaching and research are those considered to be most effective in reaching the objectives agreed in the light of the needs of the individual learners in their social context” (p. 142). Furthermore, task-based learning has been widespread since the 1980s (Task-based language learning or teaching), constituting a variant of the communication-oriented approach. This is an important point in teaching adult migrants, who have learning habits and educational cultures which no doubt differ from those used in the host country. Their training provides a forum for encounters between different educational cultures, and the latter’s efficiency probably depends on striking a balance between “active” approaches geared to increasing efficiency and the traditional approaches (grammar, memorisation, prioritising writing, etc).

The CEFR is one of the necessary instruments for designing adult migrant training courses, but language training engineering (whatever the target group) must also draw on other instruments (analysis of needs, RLD, discourse analysis, interlanguage description, etc). The need has also emerged for a “top-down” complement to the CEFR based on new descriptors for the level A1.1 communication competences (below the A1 benchmark, which would then become A1.2). These competences are not included under A1.1, and they have proved useful for characterising the first competences acquired, which are limited but not useless. They can be acquired autonomously without teaching, and the decision was taken to describe them in order both to enhance migrants’ language acquisitions (making the easy to certify) and to set a proximal objective for initial teaching.

JCB

Related Resources

- *The linguistic integration of adult migrants and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, David Little, 2012.
- *ELP for adult migrant language learners: A Guide for Teachers*, Barbara Lazenby Simpson, 2012
- *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities*, Brian North, 2007, in *Report of the Intergovernmental Forum “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities”*, Council of Europe, 2007
- *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)*. 2001, Council of Europe/Cambridge University Press (available in 38 language versions)
- *Niveau A1.1 pour le français* (publics adultes peu francophones, scolarisés, peu ou non scolarisés). Référentiel et certification (DILF) pour les premiers acquis en français, 2006, J .C. Beacco et alia, Paris, Didier