European Frameworks of Reference for Language Competences

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Contents

Abstract

Describing language competences has been in recent years the subject of several projects, among them three major European developments: the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) developed within the "Education and Training 2010" work programme of the European Commission, and the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Within each of these projects descriptions of language proficiency have been produced:

- PISA – reading literacy (in "mother tongue"), in addition to literacy in mathematics and science;

- EQF – key competences for lifelong learning (communication in the mother tongue and communication in a foreign language, in addition to mathematical literacy and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning-to-learn, interpersonal and civic competences, entrepreneurship, and cultural expression);

- CEFR – descriptive scheme and scales for foreign language use/learning

In my paper I present the results of a comparative study analysing the approaches and the descriptive parameters used within these three frameworks.

In conclusion, I indicate the relevance of the findings of these projects for the development of a European framework of reference for language(s) of school education.

1. Documents analysed

The following documents were analysed:

- Council of Europe, 2001: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment;*[1]

- OECD, 2003: *The PISA 2003 Assessment Framework* (OECD 2003);[2]

- Commission of the European Communities, 2005: *Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, SEC(2005) 957* (EC 2005a);

- Commission of the European Communities, 2005: *Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, COM(2005)548* (EC 2005b);[3]

- Commission of the European Communities, 2005: *Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, COM(2006) 479* (EC 2006).[4]

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[1] www.coe.int/lang
[2] www.pisa.oecd.org/document/29/0,2340,en_32252351_32236173_33694301_1_1_1_1,00.html
[3] www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/keyrec_en.pdf
[4] www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

2. Aspects analysed

The analysis of the frameworks proposed in the documents focuses on the following elements:

- Function;
- Approach;
- Parameters / categories of description;
- Descriptors;
- Levels.

3. The Council of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR)

The CEFR was developed by a Council of Europe international working party with a view to promote transparency and coherence in language learning and teaching in Europe. After a pilot scheme, it was officially published in 2001[5], the European Year of Languages. In addition to the two official Council of Europe versions in English and French, the document is now available in 34 languages. Further versions are in preparation.

The document consists of two parts:

- The *Descriptive Scheme* is a tool for reflecting on what is involved not only in language use, but also in language learning and teaching. Parameters in the descriptive scheme include: skills, competences, strategies, activities, domains and conditions and constraints that determine language use;

- The *Common Reference Level* system consist of scales of illustrative descriptors that provide global and detailed specifications of language proficiency levels for the different parameters of the descriptive scheme. The core of the Common Reference Level scales is a compendium of 'can-do' descriptors of language proficiency outcomes.

Through the CEFR learners, teachers, examiners, administrators, policy makers, educational institutions are stimulated to refer their efforts to a common European framework. The scales of illustrative descriptors can be used in the support of self-directed language learning (e.g., raising self-awareness of own language skills and strategic actions to be taken by the learner). In order to facilitate co-operation between educational institutions in Europe and to provide a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications the CEFR can be used in the planning of examination content and the specification of assessment criteria. It is also used in policy making as a means of ensuring coherence and transparency through the different sectors or stages in language education. Many European countries have used the opportunity of the appearance of the Framework to stimulate curriculum and examination reforms in different educational sectors.

3.1 The Descriptive Scheme of the CEFR

The CEFR adopts an action-oriented approach towards language use, embracing language learning. The descriptive scheme focuses on the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of *general* and *communicative language competences*.

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[5] *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages : Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge University Press 2001. Online www.coe.int/lang

General competences of a language user/learner comprise four sub-categories:

- *Declarative knowledge* ('savoir') resulting from experience (i.e. empirical knowledge) or formal learning (i.e. academic knowledge);

- *Skills and know-how* ('savoir-faire'), implying the ability to carry out tasks and apply procedures;

- *Existential competence* ('savoir être') comprising individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes towards oneself and others engaged in social interaction;

- *Ability to learn* ('savoir apprendre') is the ability to engage in new experiences and to integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge.

Communicative language competences of a user/learner involve knowledge, skills and know-how for each of the following three components:

- *Linguistic competence* deals with formal characteristics of a language such as phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax;

- *Sociolinguistic competence* concerns the socio-cultural conditions of language use such as e.g. politeness rules or social group repertoires;

- *Pragmatic competence* covers the functional use of language, for example the use in specific scenarios of how to act in a given social event or how to participate in a job interview.

On the basis of general and communicative language competences the language user/learner applies skills and strategies that are suitable to perform tasks in the following oral/written language activities:

- *Reception*
- *Production*
- *Interaction*
- *Mediation* (i.e. summarising, paraphrasing, interpreting or translating)

The contextualization of these language activities in specific domains implies activating language processes of producing and receiving spoken/written discourse (texts). The language activities happen within domains of language use such as:

- *Public domain*
- *Personal domain*
- *Educational domain*
- *Occupational domain*

In performing language activities the language user/learner needs to activate those strategies that seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished in the pertinent domain. Ultimately the (self-)monitoring of the process of language use and language learning results in the reinforcement or modifications of competences.
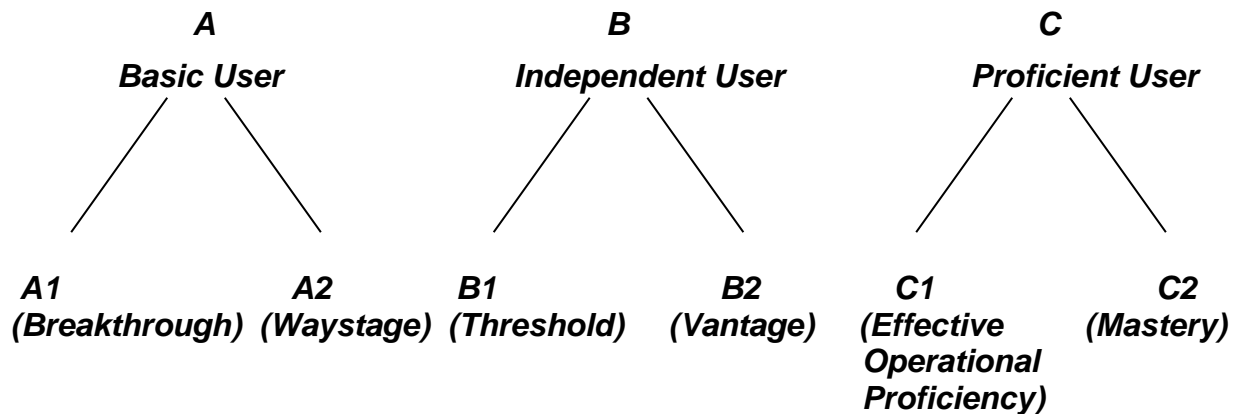
3.2 Common Reference Levels of language proficiency

With a view to enhancing the usability of the CEFR a simple and global division is made with three main user levels:

- The *basic user* has the most elementary expressions; in communication is dependent of the willingness on the interlocutor to adapt to the attained level – interlocutors assistance is necessary;

- The *independent user* can handle the daily language practice, is mostly able to interact without too much effort and generally is able to follow a normal speech tempo – some consideration needs to be given to the fact that it is not his/her native tongue;

- The *proficient user* has hardly any or no difficulty in the use of the target language – no consideration needs to be given to the fact that it is not his/her native tongue.

A 'hypertext' branching approach (see below) is proposed to define finer levels and categories to suit local needs while still relating back to a common system:

A		**B**		**C**	
Basic User		**Independent User**		**Proficient User**	
A1 (Breakthrough)	**A2** (Waystage)	**B1** (Threshold)	**B2** (Vantage)	**C1** (Effective Operational Proficiency)	**C2** (Mastery)

The six ascending proficiency levels are specified in terms of "can-do' statements which were the result of a project of the Swiss National Science Research Council that took place between 1993 and 1996.[6] The starting point of the project was a detailed analysis of 41 scales of language proficiency from the internationally available sources. Those 'can do' descriptors were selected which would fit into the different parameters of the descriptive scheme. They were then scaled through a combination of intuitive, qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, the descriptive scheme of the CEFR could be enriched with two illustrative Reference Scales with varying degrees of specificity:

- a global scale for the Common Reference Levels;

- a self-assessment grid.

The following is an example of the global specification for the levels B1 and B2 (Independent User):

B2	*Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.*

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[6] North, B.: 2000, *The development of a common framework scale of language proficiency*, New York: Lang.

B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

The Common Reference Levels are specified further through 'can-do' descriptors for understanding, speaking and writing, that is, for each of the following six language activities in the descriptive scheme:

- Listening;

- Reading;

- Spoken Interaction;

- Written Interaction;

- Spoken Production;

- Written Production.

Relating these six language activities to the six proficiency levels results in a self-assessment grid with general descriptors of learning outcomes. For example, the general descriptor for listening comprehension on *Breakthrough Level* (or level A1) is formulated as follows:

> *I can recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family, and my immediate concrete surroundings, when people speak slowly and clearly.*

Below is an example of the general descriptor used for reading comprehension on *Mastery Level* (or level C2):

> *I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles, and literary works.*

The global scales of the Common Reference Levels are exemplified in detail by a set of 54 specific descriptors that provide detailed information and insight. Some examples of specific descriptors for listening comprehension skill of the basic language user/learner (*Breakthrough* or level A1) are the following[7]:

> *I can understand simple directions for how to get from X to Y, on foot or by public transport.*

> *I can understand numbers, prices, and times.*

The CEFR has been developed as a common reference tool across languages; it is non-language specific, i.e. it does not refer to a specific language but describes what one **can do** in a foreign or second language. The Common Reference Levels are described for individual languages in linguistic detail in separate documents, referred to as "*Reference level descriptions for national or regional languages*" (such as *Profile Deutsch* or *B2 pour le français*, etc.). The Common Reference Levels are also

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[7] More detailed information on general and specific descriptors can be found in the studies of North & Schneider (1998) and North (2000).

illustrated for a number of languages on DVDs and CD-ROMs (samples of oral and written performances and items for testing comprehension skills, all calibrated against the Common Reference Levels). These documents and tools are part of the *toolkit* currently being developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe[8]. The European Commission contributes to this development through its current project aimed to produce a reading and listening item bank at level B1 in English, French and German.

4. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardised assessment scheme developed jointly by participating countries and administered to 15-year-olds in schools. The survey was implemented in 43 countries in the first assessment in 2000 and in 41 countries in the second cycle in 2003. At least 58 countries are expected to participate in the third assessment in 2006. Tests are typically administered to between 4,500 and 10,000 students in each country. The assessment takes place in three-yearly cycles. The first two cycles, PISA 2000 and PISA 2003 have been completed. The PISA 2006 cycle is well underway and further assessments beyond 2006 are being planned.

In all PISA cycles the domains of reading, mathematical and science literacy are assessed. The main focus of PISA 2000 was on reading literacy (in mother tongue or language of school education), in the sense that it included an extensive set of tasks in this specific domain (with the other domains sufficiently represented). In PISA 2003, the emphasis was on mathematical literacy and an additional domain on problem solving has been introduced. For the PISA 2006 cycle, the focus is on scientific literacy.

PISA assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are considered essential for full participation in society. The assessment is based on *"a dynamic model of lifelong learning in which new knowledge and skills necessary for successful adaptation to a changing world are continuously acquired throughout life"* and focuses on "things that 15-year-olds will need in the future" and seeks to evaluate *"what they can do with what they have learned"*[9]. The Programme was developed with the following aims:

- to monitor outcomes of educational systems;
- to provide a basis for collaboration on educational policy;
- to provide input for standard-setting and evaluation;
- to support a shift in policy focus from educational inputs to learning outcomes

The results are reported with reference to five identified levels of proficiency (reading literacy levels). The reference levels are presented on five separate subscales and one combined scale. In addition, illustrative task descriptions (similar to the can-do statements of the CEFR) are given for each level.[10]

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[8] More information on these and related projects ca be found on: www.coe.int/lang and www.coe.int/portfolio
[9] OECD 2003: 9
[10] More information on PISA can be found on: www.pisa.oecd.org/

4.1 PISA – defining literacy

PISA is based on a concept of *'human capital'* defined by the OECD as *"the knowledge, skills, competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to personal, social and economic well-being"*[11]. The aim of PISA is: *"to measure how well young adults, at the age of 15 and therefore approaching the end of compulsory schooling, are prepared to meet the challenges of today's knowledge societies".* Literacy is defined in general as mastery of processes, understanding of concepts and ability to function in various situations (contexts).

4.2 PISA – reading literacy

Within PISA, reading literacy is understood as *"the capacity to understand, use and reflect on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's own knowledge and potential, and to participate in society"*[12]. Reading proficiency of the candidates is measured in relation to processes, contents, and contexts of application (identical to the 'domains of language use' of the CEFR), with the following sub-categories used to set the test tasks:

- Processes (aspects of reading literacy):
    - Forming a broad understanding;
    - Retrieving information;
    - Developing an interpretation;
    - Reflecting on content of text;
    - Reflecting on form of text.
- Content (knowledge and understanding):
    - Continuous texts (narrative, expository, descriptive, argumentative/persuasive, injunctive/instructive);
    - Non-continuous texts (charts, graphs, diagrams, maps, forms, advertisements).
- Context of application (situations):
    - Personal
    - Educational
    - Occupational
    - Public

4.3 PISA – levels of reading literacy

The analysis of the first round of PISA carried out in 2000 produced a framework of five levels of reading literacy. It turned out that 2/3 of candidates in PISA 2000 scored between 400 and 600 points, so the mean score was set at 500 points, with the following cut-off scores for the levels:

- Level 1: 335 – 407 points
- Level 2: 408 – 480

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[11] OECD 2003:14
[12] OECD 2003:15

- Level 3: 481 – 552

- Level 4: 553 – 625

- Level 5: over 625

The five identified levels were then specified by global descriptors derived from test tasks with the corresponding difficulty scores to produce a reading literacy levels map. The above listed categories of description (processes – content – context) have been collated to five groups of descriptors used to define a level – three of them related to reading processes/aspects, two to text format/type:

- Retrieving information;

- Interpreting texts;

- Reflecting and evaluating;

- Continuous texts;

- Non-continuous texts.

Description of Level 2 of the map[13]:

Retrieving information	Interpreting texts	Reflecting and evaluating
Locate one or more pieces of information, each of which may be required to meet multiple criteria. Deal with competing information.	*Identify the main idea in a text, understand relationships, form or apply simple categories, or construe meaning within a limited part of the text when the information is not prominent and low-level inferences are required.*	*Make a comparison or connections between the text and outside knowledge, or explain a feature of the text by drawing on personal experience and attitudes.*
Continuous texts: *Follow logical and linguistic connections within a paragraph in order to locate or interpret information; or synthesise information across texts or parts of a text in order to infer the author's purpose.*		
Non-continuous texts: *Demonstrate a grasp of the underlying structure of a visual display such as a simple tree diagram or table, or combine two pieces of information from a graph or table.*		

Based on the results of PISA 2000, a composite test item map was produced to illustrate the relation of the test tasks to the descriptive categories and to document the difficulty level of a specific performance. Two examples of Level 2 items follow[14]:

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[13] OECD 2003: 127
[14] OECD 2003: 124

Score[15]	Item	Types of Processes (Aspect)			Text format	
		Retrieving information	Inter-preting	Reflecting and evaluating	Conti-nuous	Non-continuous
477	*UNDERSTAND the structure of a TREE DIAGRAM*		○			■
447	*INTERPRET information in a single paragraph to understand the setting of a NARRATIVE*		○		■	

5. European Qualifications Framework

The concept of a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) was developed within the "Education and Training 2010" work programme of the European Commission as a meta-framework of reference for educational qualifications as outcomes of lifelong learning. It was published by the Commission as a Staff Working Document in 2005[16].

The objective of the planned implementation of the EQF is to facilitate the transfer and recognition of qualifications held by individual citizens by linking qualifications systems at the national and sectoral levels and enabling them to relate to each other internationally, too. The EQF is intended to facilitate citizens' mobility for work and study alongside the European Credit Transfer System and Europass. The Commission conducted a Europe-wide consultation on the EQF in 2005. During a conference co-hosted by the Commission and the Hungarian Ministry of Education in Budapest in February 2006, an analysis of stakeholder responses to the consultation was presented and generated recommendations, which have been taken into account by the final proposal on the EQF. Particular emphasis has been given to the refinement and simplification of the reference level descriptors. In September 2006, the Commission adopted the final version of the proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the European Council on the establishment of the EQF[17]. The recommendation foresees that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2009. The Member States are asked to designate a national centre to support and coordinate the relationship between the national qualifications system and the EQF. The adoption of the EQF proposal by the European Council and the European Parliament is expected before the end of 2007. In the meantime, a call for proposals was issued to develop and test the principles and mechanisms of the future EQF as well as to exchange experiences in developing national and sectoral frameworks, and test the principles and mechanisms of such frameworks, using the EQF as a common reference point.

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[15] indicating the difficulty level of the item
[16] Commission of the European Communities SEC (2005) 957. Here: EU 2005b
[17] Commission of the European Communities, COM(2006) 479. Here: EU 2006

The functions of the EQF will be:

- to enable for qualifications to be related to each other;
- to facilitate transfer and recognition of qualifications;
- to increase transparency and support mutual trust among stakeholders;
- to promote quality assurance.

The EQF level descriptions are based on learning outcomes. These are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and wider competences – personal and professional, such as: autonomy and responsibility, learning competences, communication and social competences[18]. The outcomes are specified on an eight-level scale reflecting stages in a lifelong learning process. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. The levels are presented on three scales specifying each level in terms of description of abilities, educational context in which they are usually provided and their value (recognition)[19]. A set of eight **key competences** to be learned, updated and maintained throughout life is integrated in Level 2.

5.1 EQF – elements

The overarching concept of the EQF is based on the following three elements:

- Common reference points;
- Tools and instruments;
- Set of common principles and procedures (addressing quality assurance, validation of formal and informal learning, guidance and counselling, and promotion of key competences).

The common reference points are provided in the form of eight levels, each presented on the three scales. Their implementation is foreseen by a set of the following tools and instruments:

- An integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning (ECTS[20] for higher education and ECVET[21] for vocational education and training);
- The Europass Scheme, encompassing:
  - CV;
  - Language Passport;
  - Certificate Supplement;
  - Diploma Supplement;
  - Europass Mobility;[22]

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[18] In the final version of the proposal 'competence' is described only in terms of 'responsibility and autonomy', EU 2006:17

[19] In the final version of the proposal only one scale is used – specifying learning outcomes in terms of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competence' , relevant to each of the eight level. EU 2006:Annex I

[20] www.ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html

[21] www.ecvetconnexion.com/

[22] By 2011, all new qualifications and Europass documents, in particular the diploma supplement and the certificate supplement, should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level. For more information on Europass please consult: www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu/

- A database on learning opportunities (the Ploteus internet Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space[23]).

5.2 EQF – levels and scales

The EQF specifies 8 levels of qualifications, related to educational stages:

– Level 1-2: compulsory education;

– Level 3: upper secondary or adult education;

– Level 4: end of upper secondary / post- compulsory education, „a gateway" to higher education;

– Level 5: completion of post-secondary or „short cycle" within the first cycle of higher education;

– Level 6: higher education, first cycle (B. A.);

– Level 7: higher education, second cycle (M. A.);

– Level 8: higher education, third cycle (Ph. D.).[24]

Three scales provide specifications for each of the levels:

– reference description (ability descriptors);

– supporting information (educational context);

– indicators of qualification (recognition value).

5.3 EQF – Key Competences

The EQF at Level 2 includes a sub-framework of reference for competences to be acquired at the end of compulsory schooling but also learned, updated and maintained throughout life[25]. It was developed with the aim of supporting national policies as part of EU Lisbon strategy "Education and Training 2010".

The following eight qualifications have been identified as key competences:

1. Communication in mother tongue[26];

2. Communication in foreign languages;

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;

4. Digital competence;

5. Learning to learn;

6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, civic competence;

7. Entrepreneurship;

8. Cultural expression.

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[23] www.europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp

[24] Levels 5-8 contain a clear reference to – without being identical with – the levels defined in the framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the context of Bologna process (www.bologna-bergen2005.no/).

[25] Listed initially under 'skills' on Level 2 of the eight reference levels of the EQF and subject for a separate recommendation proposal - COM(2005) 548 (here: EU 2005b)

[26] "*It is recognised that the mother tongue may not in all cases be an official language of the Member State and that ability to communicate in an official language is a pre-condition for ensuring full participation of the individual in society.*" (EC 2005b: 13)

Each key competence has been specified in terms of three categories:

- Knowledge;
- Skills;
- Attitude.

5.3.1 EQF - Key Competences - Communication in mother tongue

Communication in mother tongue has been defined as *"the ability to express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate way in the full range of societal and cultural contexts – education, work, home and leisure"*[27]. The three descriptors specify this key competence in the following way:

- <u>Knowledge</u> of basic vocabulary, functional grammar and the functions of language; awareness of the main types of verbal interaction, a range of literary and non-literary texts, the main features of different styles and registers of language, and the variability of language and communication in different contexts;

- <u>Skills</u> to communicate in oral and written forms in a variety of communicative situations and to monitor and adapt own communication to the requirements of the situation; abilities to write and read different types of texts, search, collect and process information, use aids, formulate and express one's own arguments in a convincing way appropriate to the context;

- A positive <u>attitude</u> towards communication in the mother tongue: disposition to constructive and critical dialogue, appreciation of aesthetic qualities and a willingness to strive for them, and an interest in interaction with others.

5.3.2 EQF - Key Competences - Communication in a foreign language

This key competence has been defined in a similar way as communication in the mother tongue, supplemented by *"skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding"* . In addition, it is said that *"an individual's level of proficiency will vary between the four dimensions* (listening, speaking, reading and writing)*, different languages and according to their background, environment and needs/interests".*[28]

The three descriptors specify this competence similarly to the competence in mother tongue:

- <u>Knowledge</u> of vocabulary and functional grammar and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of language; of societal conventions, and the cultural aspect and variability of languages;

- <u>Skills</u> to understand spoken messages, to initiate, sustain and conclude conversations and to read and understand texts appropriate to the individual's needs; to be able to use aids appropriately, and learn languages also informally as part of lifelong learning;

- A positive <u>attitude</u> involves the appreciation of cultural differences and diversity, and an interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication.

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[27] EC 2005b: 13
[28] EC 2005b: 14. In a 2004 report of the Working Group it has been recommended that the levels of proficiency to be aimed at should be in accordance with those described in the CEFR.

6. A summary of findings

	CEFR	**PISA**	**EQF-Key Competences**
Function	descriptive meta-framework	international assessment framework	descriptive meta-framework
Approach	competence-based, action oriented	competence-based	based on learning outcomes
Subject for description	foreign/second language use and user/learner	reading literacy	language competence (in mother tongue and foreign languages) as qualification
Categories of description	general competences, communicative language competences, language activities and strategies, tasks and purposes, domains, text types, themes, situations (contexts of use), conditions and constraints	processes (aspects) of reading, knowledge and understanding of reading content, text types, context of application (situations)	knowledge, skills, attitude
Levels	6 main common reference levels (+3 sub-levels) of language proficiency	5 levels of reading competence	Level 2 (the end of compulsory schooling) on an 8-level scale of qualifications (related to educational stages)
Scales	Global scale, Self-assessment scale, 54 scales of illustrative descriptors	Reading literacy levels map, with 5 sub-scales; Composite item map	Three EQF scales: reference description (ability descriptors); supporting information (educational context); indicators of qualification (recognition value)

The set of European frameworks of reference for language competences is growing. Stakeholders in the field of language education can now refer to two descriptive meta-frameworks: one comprehensive one for learning, teaching and assessment of foreign languages (the CEFR), and one for competences in mother tongue and foreign language viewed as key qualifications in a lifelong learning process (the EQF-key competences). The third one, PISA, is an example of how language competences may be assessed internationally.

The CEFR and the PISA are competence based and the EQF focuses on learning outcomes. Their common target group of learners may be defined as young adults (at the end of compulsory education). They all refer to the educational concept of lifelong learning.

7. Conclusions

An analysis of the elements of the three frameworks produces the following overarching structure of a framework for language competences:

– A descriptive scheme;

– Reference levels and scales;

– Tools and instruments for implementation;

– Assessment scheme;

– Guidelines and procedures for quality assurance.

The need for closer cooperation on an international level regarding the integration of the various proposals for European reference frameworks seem to be apparent – not only because of some differences in the use of terminology (*competence, domain, situation, content, context, purpose, benchmark, etc.*) – but in order to provide stakeholders with a coherent, user-friendly educational concept.

While working on a possible framework of reference for language(s) of school education (LE), the following issues seem to be of importance in this context:

– To what extent is a competence based approach suitable for LE?

– Which elements of the overarching framework structure might be developed for LE?

– What other elements might be needed?

– How to relate an LE framework to the existing frameworks?