

## Complex learning environments

[Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec \(2022\)1 on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture](#)

### Measures

5.b. xi. create conditions that are favourable to the organisation of complex learning environments, including those that fully integrate the use of digital media.

5b xiii-xiv: encourage pedagogical approaches that empower learners by developing their autonomy and their critical thinking skills, [... as well as ] learners' language and cultural awareness and equip them to engage in intercultural dialogue.

5b xiv: encourage pedagogical approaches that develop 5b xvii. encourage learning mobility, whether physical or virtual, on the part of teachers and learners.

### What is it about?

Complex learning environments (CLE) refer to vibrant spaces where many languages and cultures thrive. CLEs involve dynamic real-world interactions and cater to diversity by being adaptable. Students are not forced to fit the room or activity; the room or activity changes (physically, socially, and digitally) to fit the student. Digital tools empower learners to step outside the physical classroom walls, giving them access to real-world resources and opportunities to experience different language encounters not available locally. Learning languages is about connecting with different cultures in a meaningful way. By integrating different technologies, including AI, different learning spaces and multimodal, adaptable learning activities, CLEs address the reality of today's classrooms, i.e. their linguistic and cultural heterogeneity and the resulting need for flexible teaching methods. In this way, CLEs reflect and best prepare learners for the real plurilingual, complex world outside the classroom.

### Why is this important and what can be done?

Plurilingual and intercultural learning depends on ... [complex] "learning environments where languages flourish" ... [which] ... provide access to learning opportunities in a wide range of languages (See Explanatory Memorandum p. 32). Thus, there is a need to:

- design curricula and learning environments that prioritize dynamic, real-life interactions in multiple languages, and move beyond traditional methods and learning spaces;
- integrate digital tools into teaching practices that create virtual connections, allowing students access to authentic tasks and interaction with global resources and communities;
- ensure that digital tools and AI encourage critical reflection and are used in ethically and socially responsible ways;
- create authentic action-oriented activities for increasingly diverse learner groups to engage with diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, essential for developing the plurilingual and pluricultural competencies needed for democratic societies.

See also Toolbox Entries on the [Action-oriented approach](#), [Learner autonomy](#) and on [Democratic classrooms](#).

## Council of Europe resources for policy/decision makers

Resource 1: [Rethinking language education after the experience of Covid](#)

Especially: Executive summary, Parts 3 & 4, and [Policy Guidelines](#)

This ECML survey and publications reflect the impact of the pandemic on language education with observations drawn from the rapid shift to digital resources that are extremely relevant to complex learning systems. Key findings stress the need for enhanced digital literacy, learner autonomy, adaptable assessment methods, and hybrid learning models to ensure equitable and effective future language education systems. Policy-makers can use this ECML report and the [policy guidelines](#) (in particular sections E, F, L, and M) as a strategic roadmap to modernize language education, specifically leveraging the lessons learned during the pandemic about the necessity of digital integration. By adopting the report's recommendations on hybrid and remote learning models, they can justify funding for digital infrastructure and teacher training, ensuring that "complex learning environments" become a permanent, resilient feature of schools rather than just an emergency measure.

Resource 2: [E-lang citizen - Digital citizenship through language education](#)

"E-lang citizen" connects digital citizenship with language learning. It provides a pedagogical framework and resources for teachers to help students use digital tools creatively and critically. The goal is to develop language skills while fostering responsible, active online participation and cross-cultural interaction in a real-world digital context. Policy-makers can draw on the "E-lang citizen" resource to ensure that the integration of digital tools within complex language learning environments promotes responsible digital citizenship. [The profile of the "digital citizen" as a user of languages and digital tools](#) offers guidance for developing curricula that not only use digital media but also educate learners on critical engagement, online safety, and ethical interaction, thereby adding a vital dimension of societal readiness to digital language learning. The [teaching and didactic framework document](#) defines a socio-interactive approach that merits consideration when integrating CLEs into language teaching

Please note: this resource is also useful for teacher educators.

## Council of Europe resources for teacher educators/ pedagogical advisors

Resource 1: [Enriching 21st century language education: The CEFR Companion volume in practice, 2022 \(Case studies in implementation\)](#)

This publication is highly relevant for teacher educators and policy advisers because it serves as a practical bridge between the theoretical updates in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion volume (2020) and real-world implementation.

The resource provides concrete examples and case studies (from primary to adult education) that educators can use to update training modules. This helps future teachers understand how to move beyond traditional "four skills" teaching to concepts like mediation and plurilingualism. It offers educators tangible scenarios to train teachers on how to facilitate communication and meaning-making in diverse classrooms and complex learning scenarios. It also offers pedagogical strategies for valuing and utilizing students' diverse linguistic backgrounds, a crucial skill for modern teachers that needs to be embedded in initial teacher training.

Sections that are particularly relevant for teacher educators and policy advisers when reflecting CLEs are section 1.4.2 on the action-oriented approach, 1.4.4 on plurilingualism, and 1.4.5 on online, digital interaction and transaction. Specific samples of practice relevant to online learning and CLEs are presented in chapters 9 and 11. In essence, this resource translates the "what" and "why" of the CEFR Companion Volume into the "how," enabling both educators and policymakers to modernize language education systems effectively.

Please note: this resource is also useful for policy makers.

Resource 2: [CEFR Website – key concepts - Online interaction](#)

Resources available on this website outline the distinct characteristics of the types of agency language users need to effectively interact in digital environments. Digital spaces, now used naturally in personal and professional communication and networking, are key elements when creating and managing CLEs. and digital tools and resources used in them have become recognized as valuable in language learning.

In addition to access to workshop materials and relevant publications, the site offers videos explaining and exemplifying, for example, how the CEFR-Companion Volume informs the creation of (digitally-mediated) collaborative learning environments as well as on how learners as social agent benefit from the affordances of digital spaces. There is also a detailed section on concrete [ideas for implementation](#).

A similar resource is available on the principles and practical implementation of [action-oriented learning](#) as described in the toolbox entry on the action-oriented approach.