

EFFECTIVE

LANGUAGE LEARNING

BASED ON THE
SCIENCE
OF LEARNING

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the intricate tapestry of human skills and endeavors, the acquisition of language stands out as one of the most profound. It's not just a matter of vocabulary, grammar, or syntax; it's an immersion into a cultural, historical, and cognitive realm that shapes how we perceive and interact with the world. But what are the underlying principles that truly drive effective language learning? How do we navigate the complex confluence of traditional practices and emerging pedagogies to ensure that learners not only acquire a language but also become an intrinsic part of its living legacy?

At Lengua, our mission is to demystify these questions and delve deep into the science of learning. This white paper is a testament to our exploration of the multifaceted elements of language learning, underpinned by cutting-edge research and empirical evidence. Through its pages, we examine the interplay of active engagement, the transformative nature of flipped and blended learning, and the profound impact of fostering a growth mindset. More importantly, we emphasize how these elements converge to form our signature approach: "Personalized Language Learning."

As we traverse this academic journey, our aim is not just to present methodologies or pedagogies in isolation. Instead, we hope to paint a holistic picture, demonstrating how these strategies, when woven together, can create an unparalleled learning experience. Rooted deeply in the science of learning, informed by decades of research, and inspired by countless success stories, this white paper offers insights into Lengua's commitment to reshaping language education for the modern era. Join us in this exploration, as we bridge the past with the present, tradition with innovation, and learner with the language. Welcome to the future of language learning at Lengua.

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HOW IS LANGUAGE LEARNED

Language learning is not a straightforward journey; rather, it involves a rich tapestry of neurological, cognitive, social, and emotional processes. To truly appreciate how a language is learned, it is pivotal to interlink various theories and elements that elucidate this complex undertaking.

Neurological Foundations

At the heart of language acquisition lies the brain. It's where sounds are transformed into comprehensible words, and structures are formed to convey meaning. The Critical Period Hypothesis, as introduced by Penfield and Roberts (1959), suggests that younger brains, due to their higher plasticity, are more adept at acquiring languages with native-like fluency. This plasticity ensures both Broca's and Wernicke's areas of the left hemisphere, responsible for language production and comprehension, respectively, are highly involved. However, the right hemisphere also contributes, especially in understanding tone and context. Mechelli et al. (2004) discovered that becoming multilingual can also cause changes in the brain's structure, emphasizing the profound relationship between language and neurology.

The Role of Input and Interaction

While the brain provides the hardware, it requires the right software in the form of comprehensible input. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) underlines the necessity of context and meaningful communication. This input becomes even more valuable when woven with Vygotsky's Social Interactionist View (1978). Here, it is not just the passive reception of language that's essential, but active engagement with it. Interactions, especially with native or more proficient speakers, act as stepping stones, guiding learners through their Zone of Proximal Development - the difference between what learners can do with help and without it.

Emotional and Cognitive Interplay

Learning isn't solely a cognitive act. Our emotions are intricately linked to our ability to grasp and retain new knowledge. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) postulates that a learner's emotional state can significantly impact their language absorption capability. Motivation fuels the drive, confidence bolsters the spirit, and reduced anxiety ensures that the mental barriers (or filters) are lowered, allowing for optimal learning. This emotional component of learning is closely tied to the cognitive processes. As per the Constructivist Approach, Piaget (1952), every individual constructs knowledge based on their unique experiences. Hence, positive emotional experiences with a language can lead to more robust cognitive associations. Moreover, the Cognitive Load Theory, Sweller (1988), reminds educators that balance is key. Just as a cup overflows if filled too rapidly, overwhelming a student's cognitive capacity can hinder their learning process.

Synthesis

When we piece these theories together, a holistic picture of language acquisition emerges. The brain, ever-adaptable, lays the groundwork. It thrives on meaningful input, actively seeking patterns and structures. As learners immerse themselves in interactions, they not only grasp linguistic nuances but also cultural undertones, enriching their language experience. Their journey is further shaped by their emotions and prior experiences, which, in turn, inform their cognitive processes. Every conversation, every error, every eureka moment is a step forward, guided by this complex interplay of factors.

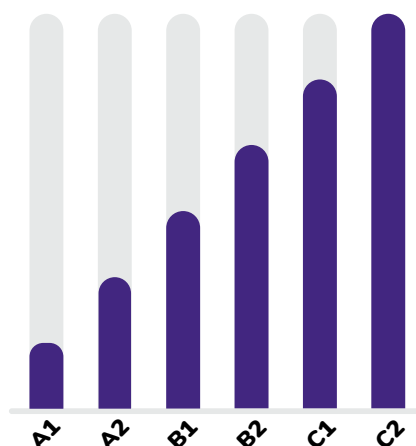
Language learning is complex

Language learning is a journey that intersects the realms of biology, psychology, and sociology. It is neither linear nor uniform, varying across individuals based on a myriad of factors from neural wiring to socio-emotional environments. The intricate blend of brain functions, meaningful interactions, emotional responses, and cognitive processes formulates the essence of language acquisition. Recognizing this intricate interplay not only underscores the profundity of language learning but also signals the urgency for pedagogies that are both scientifically rooted and holistically crafted. As we move forward, it becomes imperative to mold teaching methodologies that are adaptive, responsive, and cognizant of these multifarious dimensions of language learning.

THE CEFR AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The CEFR divides language proficiency into three broad divisions, which are further split into six levels.

This standardization facilitates mutual recognition of language qualifications across different countries and educational institutions, fostering mobility and integration in an increasingly globalized world.



A (Basic User)

A1: Breakthrough

A2: Waystage

B (Independent User)

B1: Threshold

B2: Vantage

C (Proficient User)

C1: Effective Operational Proficiency

C2: Mastery

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is not just another grading scale for language proficiency. Developed with painstaking diligence by the Council of Europe, it's a comprehensive and dynamic tool designed to reframe the way language education is approached, assessed, and appreciated. Drawing insights particularly from its Companion Volume, the CEFR's implications are vast and influential.

Pedagogical Implications

A Shift to Action-Oriented Approach

At the heart of the CEFR is the action-oriented approach, emphasizing language as a tool for action (Council of Europe, 2018). Pedagogically, this implies moving away from a curriculum solely centered on grammatical competence to one that promotes real-world tasks and activities. As a result, language educators are impelled to design lessons and activities that simulate real-world scenarios where linguistic competencies are applied in tangible contexts.

Comprehensive Skills Assessment

Rather than just a focus on traditional language skills like reading, writing, speaking, and listening, the CEFR introduces mediation, wherein learners process and relay information in various modes (Council of Europe, 2018). This necessitates a rethinking of assessment strategies, demanding more holistic tools that consider these diverse skills and the interrelation between them.

EMBRACING

PLURILINGUALISM & BILINGUALISM

The CEFR's acknowledgment of plurilingualism underscores the intricate interplay between an individual's multiple linguistic and cultural repertoires (Council of Europe, 2018). As a pedagogical consequence, it emphasizes the importance of bilingual materials and teaching approaches that harness this interplay for effective language learning.

Bilingual Materials

Bilingual Materials: By using bilingual resources, educators can tap into students' pre-existing linguistic knowledge, thereby building bridges between known and new linguistic structures. Such materials not only provide clarity and context but also help reduce the cognitive load, especially for complex topics, by offering students a familiar linguistic anchor. Research suggests that understanding linguistic concepts in one's mother tongue can facilitate the grasp of similar ideas in a second language, creating an interconnected cognitive framework (Cummins, 2007).

Bilingual Educators

Bilingual Educators: Teachers fluent in both the mother tongue and the target language bring a unique advantage to the learning environment. They can seamlessly switch between languages to explain intricate concepts, draw parallels, and even use contrastive analysis to highlight similarities and differences between the two languages. Such bilingual instruction can lead to deeper comprehension and more meaningful internalization of language structures (Baker, 2011).

Mother Tongue as a Learning Tool

Mother Tongue as a Learning Tool: Leveraging the mother tongue in second language instruction is grounded in the idea that all languages in a learner's repertoire are interconnected resources. Instead of viewing the mother tongue as an impediment, it is seen as a scaffold, aiding the acquisition of the second language. For instance, teaching grammatical structures by drawing comparisons with the learner's native language can lead to quicker understanding and retention. This approach, often termed 'translanguaging', capitalizes on learners' full linguistic repertoire, promoting fluidity and flexibility in their language use (García, 2009).

Prioritising Plurilingualism & Bilingualism

By prioritizing plurilingualism, the CEFR implicitly advocates for an educational setting where bilingual materials, educators, and methodologies are integral. Such an approach not only recognizes and values learners' linguistic backgrounds but also utilizes them as potent tools for effective language acquisition. This reshapes language education into a more inclusive, contextual, and holistic endeavor.

THE CEFR MORE THAN 6 LEVELS

Many institutions, in their quest for simplification, have reduced the CEFR to a mere six-tier proficiency scale. This has inadvertently led to a compartmentalized approach, grouping grammar, vocabulary, and topics within specific levels. Such a narrow interpretation can diminish the CEFR's broader pedagogical value.

Reception, Production, Interaction & Mediation

Rather than just a focus on traditional language skills like reading, writing, speaking, and listening, the CEFR introduces four holistic competencies: understanding, interpreting, and mediating. These four competencies ensure a learner is equipped for real-world communication:

Reception

Understanding spoken or written content.

Production

Crafting coherent messages in speech or writing.

Interaction

Engaging in live exchanges with others.

Mediation

Acting as an intermediary between speakers of different languages, simplifying and relaying information as needed.

Communicative Language Competencies

In addition to the 4 competencies, we must take into account 3 additional competencies:

Linguistic Competence

Knowledge and control of the linguistic system, encompassing lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic, and orthoepic elements.

Sociolinguistic Competence

Ability to use language appropriately across different sociocultural situations.

Pragmatic Competence

Mastery of discourse, functional use, and design of spoken or written texts.

The Imperative of a Competency-Based Approach

For educators and institutions, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the CEFR is crucial. Planning language education through competencies ensures a more comprehensive, practical, and integrated learning experience. It shifts the focus from what students know to what they can do and emphasizes real-world applicability, fostering not just linguistic ability but also cultural competence and communicative adaptability.

The Holistic Framework of the CEFR

All these elements – from plurilingual competences to can-do descriptors – interweave to form a tapestry of language learning that is far richer than a mere six-level scale. The CEFR envisions learners as active participants in social contexts, utilizing their language skills to navigate diverse communicative challenges.

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The CEFR, in its true essence, is a robust and holistic framework that champions a multifaceted approach to language learning. While the six levels provide a structured progression, the depth of the CEFR lies in its competencies, communicative abilities, and its vision of the learner as an active, culturally attuned communicator. Institutions, educators, and learners must delve deeper, leveraging the full spectrum of insights offered by the CEFR and its Companion Volume to truly revolutionize language education.

A shift to an Action-Oriented Approach

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The action-oriented approach can be seen as an evolutionary step in language pedagogy. It builds upon the principles of communicative language teaching, but while the latter focuses primarily on communication, the action-oriented approach emphasizes action and agency. Historically, as educators recognized the need for learners to use language as a tool to achieve tangible objectives, this approach emerged as a natural progression, putting learners in the driver's seat of their language journey.

ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH

The action-oriented approach, as underscored by the CEFR Companion Volume, represents a shift in the paradigm of language learning. Prioritizing the learner as a social agent, this approach emphasizes the functional use of language to accomplish specific tasks. But what sets it apart, and why is it considered foundational to the CEFR's ethos? Let's unravel its nuances.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The action-oriented approach finds its foundation in a confluence of educational and linguistic theories that emphasize the dynamic nature of learning. Central to this approach is the constructivist perspective, postulated by Vygotsky (1978), which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through engagement, hands-on activities, and interactions with their surrounding environment. Complementing this is the sociocultural theory articulated by Lantolf & Thorne (2006), which foregrounds the idea that language acquisition is not a purely cognitive endeavor. Instead, it is intricately woven with social interactions, deeply influenced by cultural and societal nuances. Furthermore, the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as delineated by Ellis (2003) resonate with the action-oriented ethos. TBLT emphasizes the pragmatic use of language, viewing it not just as a system to be studied but as a functional tool deployed to achieve specific, tangible goals. Together, these theories provide a robust theoretical scaffold for the action-oriented approach, underscoring its emphasis on active, context-aware, and purpose-driven language learning.

Historical Context and Emergence

The action-oriented approach can be seen as an evolutionary step in language pedagogy. It builds upon the principles of communicative language teaching, but while the latter focuses primarily on communication, the action-oriented approach emphasizes action and agency. Historically, as educators recognized the need for learners to use language as a tool to achieve tangible objectives, this approach emerged as a natural progression, putting learners in the driver's seat of their language journey.

While both the communicative and action-oriented approaches value functionality, the latter extends beyond mere communication. The action-oriented approach accentuates the learner's role in social actions, emphasizing broader societal participation and real-world accomplishments using language.

Deep Dive into the Key Components of the Action-Oriented Approach

The action-oriented approach, rooted in contemporary linguistic pedagogy, shifts the traditional paradigms of language learning from mere acquisition to application. This transformation posits that language isn't just a set of rules to be memorized, but a tool for communication within real-world contexts. Herein, we discuss the significant components of this approach and its implications for pedagogical implementation.

Tasks as Communicative Instruments

Traditional language pedagogy often employed tasks as mere exercises to practice specific linguistic forms. However, the contemporary, action-oriented approach transforms these tasks into authentic communicative events. Willis & Willis (2007) argue that tasks should resonate with real-world activities, like ordering in a restaurant or negotiating in a business meeting. Such tasks inherently demand the integration of multiple linguistic skills, reflecting the real-world complexity where listening might seamlessly transition into speaking or reading might culminate in writing (Skehan, 1998). Beyond language, these tasks serve as platforms for learners to hone their metacognitive strategies, emphasizing planning and evaluation, elements crucial for successful real-world communication (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Learners as Active Social Agents

Long gone is the passive student paradigm. The action-oriented approach, as the name suggests, positions learners as central, active agents in their linguistic journey. This perspective emphasizes the negotiation of meaning, promoting richer peer interactions, discussions, and clarifications (Long, 1983). As learners traverse through varied linguistic landscapes, they not only garner language skills but also imbibe a sense of autonomy (Benson, 2001). Furthermore, as active participants, they develop a heightened sensitivity to the sociocultural facets of language, becoming attuned to the subtle cultural nuances and societal contexts influencing linguistic choices (Kramsch, 1993).

Navigating the Authenticity of Real-World Contexts

The crux of the action-oriented approach is its unwavering commitment to authenticity. This isn't limited to task authenticity but extends to exposing learners to the kaleidoscopic variability of language in the real world, encompassing diverse accents, colloquialisms, and cultural nuances (Cook, 2001). Such exposure amplifies learners' contextual understanding, helping them discern how extralinguistic elements like tone or body language modulate meaning (Bachman, 1990). Consequently, this engagement with varied and often unpredictable scenarios fosters adaptability, arming learners with the dexterity to navigate multifarious linguistic environments (Lantolf, 2000).

Pedagogical Ramifications

Classroom Dynamics

This approach necessitates a reimagining of classroom activities. Collaborative endeavors become central, underscoring team-based projects and role-playing that stimulate genuine linguistic interactions (Storch, 2002). The role of problem-solving emerges as paramount, casting language as an analytical tool to address real-world challenges (Dewey, 1933). Furthermore, reflective practices gain prominence, where learners continuously introspect on their linguistic journeys, evaluating their strategies and choices (Schön, 1983).

Curriculum Design

Traditional syllabi, often fragmented by grammar topics, are rendered obsolete. Instead, curricula inspired by the action-oriented approach gravitate towards real-world thematic units, intertwining linguistic skills rather than isolating them (Oxford, 2001). An added layer of cultural immersion ensures that learners emerge not just linguistically competent but also culturally versed (Byram, 1997).

Assessment Paradigms

Assessments in this paradigm shift from rote memorization to demonstrable skills. Portfolio assessments, where learners curate their work and reflections, become an insightful tool, capturing their longitudinal growth (Paulson et al., 1991). Simultaneously, performance-based evaluations, such as interviews or role-plays, gauge learners' real-world application capacities (McNamara, 1996). In an empowering move, self-assessments are also foregrounded, ushering learners into a space of self-awareness and accountability (Oscarson, 1997).

In conclusion, the action-oriented approach demands an intricate weave of authenticity, active learner participation, and adaptability. Its adoption necessitates profound pedagogical shifts, challenging educators to craft learning environments that mirror the multifaceted dynamism of real-world language use.

One pivotal insight from embracing the action-oriented approach in language education is that the passive, content-centered classroom must evolve into an active, learner-centric ecosystem. This transformation goes beyond mere methodological adjustments; it fundamentally challenges the very ethos of language teaching. Language, in this approach, is not a mere set of rules to be memorized but a dynamic tool for real-world interaction, problem-solving, and cultural immersion. Consequently, educators are called upon not just to teach language, but to design holistic, authentic experiences that prepare learners for the complex, unpredictable demands of genuine communication. This change champions the idea that true linguistic competence arises from meaningful interactions and not just textbook knowledge.

Impacts on Online Teaching

The implications of the action-oriented approach on online language teaching are profound and multi-faceted. Online platforms, with their inherent flexibility and technological capabilities, are uniquely positioned to harness the potential of this approach. Yet, the challenge lies in ensuring that the digital environment supports genuine interaction and real-world immersion. Here's an exploration of the impact:

Authentic Material Integration

Online platforms can seamlessly integrate authentic materials like news articles, podcasts, videos, or even social media feeds, allowing learners to engage with real-world linguistic content. This fosters a more organic understanding of language in context, as opposed to contrived textbook examples.

Adaptive Learning Paths

Digital platforms often come with analytics and AI capabilities. These can be harnessed to offer personalized, adaptive learning experiences. As students engage in tasks, the platform can analyze their performance, offering tailored feedback or suggesting specific areas for improvement.

Feedback and Assessment

The shift towards performance-based and competency-based evaluations in online language teaching signifies a more holistic, skill-centric approach to assessment. The digital platform provides a myriad of tools to facilitate these evaluations, each aiming to assess not just what learners know, but how they apply this knowledge in genuine contexts.

Automated tools, like speech recognition, can play a pivotal role in real-time feedback, highlighting areas of proficiency and those in need of refinement in terms of pronunciation and intonation. This immediate feedback aligns with the principles of formative evaluation, allowing learners to iteratively work on their skills before they become ingrained habits.

Central to this paradigm shift is the concept of iterative coaching. Traditional summative evaluations, often seen as high-stakes, one-off events, are de-emphasized. Instead, continuous formative evaluations gain prominence, where educators, leveraging digital tools, provide ongoing, constructive feedback. This coaching model, rooted in real-time feedback, aims to develop skills, enhance competencies, and reinforce learning in a supportive, growth-centric environment.

Flexibility and Autonomy

The action-oriented approach celebrates learner autonomy. Online platforms inherently offer flexibility—learners can engage with materials, participate in tasks, or interact with peers at their convenience. This empowers them to take charge of their learning journey.

While the digital space presents vast potential to actualize the action-oriented approach, it's imperative for educators and platform designers to remain vigilant. The risk of reduced interpersonal connection in online environments must be counteracted with intentional design and pedagogy, ensuring that the essence of real-world interaction and immersion isn't lost in the virtual realm.

ASSESSMENT REDEFINED

Performance-Based Evaluation

The trend towards performance-based evaluations (PBE) in language pedagogy is not merely a fashionable shift, but a fundamental change in how educators view language proficiency and its assessment. Grounded in the idea that linguistic competence is as much about application as it is about knowledge, PBEs strive for a comprehensive evaluation that is more aligned with the ethos of modern language instruction (Ellis, 2003).

Understanding Performance-Based Evaluations

Performance-based evaluations critically assess learners' efficacy through tasks designed to emulate genuine linguistic requirements. They delve beyond the mere scope of 'what' learners know, seeking insights into 'how' they apply this knowledge in real-world contexts.

A hallmark of PBE is its authenticity. McNamara (1996) emphasizes that tasks within this evaluation framework replicate genuine situations that learners might encounter. For example, an assessment of speaking abilities might transcend traditional reading of passages to include simulations of business discussions or spontaneous conversations with native language users.

Moreover, PBEs often eschew the isolationist approach of traditional tests (like discrete vocabulary quizzes) and adopt an integrative stance. As Ellis (2003) notes, a performance-based task may seamlessly blend reading, listening, and producing a coherent written or spoken response.

Equally crucial is the process-oriented nature of PBE. While the outcome, such as a written report, remains paramount, the journey towards that outcome, replete with strategies, decisions, and problem-solving avenues, is also a focal point of assessment (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Pedaogical Implications and the PBE Paradigm

Embracing PBE signals a need for an instructional paradigm recalibration. Classrooms must resonate with the ethos of performance evaluations, underscoring task-based learning, real-world simulations, and problem-solving (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Feedback, a cornerstone of effective instruction, gains new dimensions with PBE. Beyond linguistic correctness, educators can offer learners nuanced insights on communicative efficacy, context appropriateness, and even the strategic choices they made during tasks (McNamara, 1996).

Furthermore, the very fabric of PBE, with its real-world anchored tasks, grants learners agency, nudging them towards autonomy. Learners find themselves at crossroads, making decisions on strategies, tools, and approaches (Benson, 2001).

Advantages of Performance-Based Evaluations

While traditional evaluations often narrow down on specific skills, say grammar, PBE casts a wider net. It recognizes and values diverse abilities, from pure linguistic skills to nuanced competencies like cultural adeptness or negotiation tactics (Lantolf, 2000). Learners, when faced with authentic tasks, often find a renewed motivation, given the visible real-world applicability of what they're learning (Dörnyei, 2001). Moreover, the unpredictable nature of real-world tasks, mirrored in PBEs, preps learners for real-life's linguistic unpredictabilities, refining their adaptability (Cook, 2001).

Yet, the path to effective PBE is strewn with challenges. Designing tasks that strike a balance between authenticity and standardized assessment is intricate. Evaluations can be more prolonged, and the specter of subjectivity looms, necessitating consistent and rigorous evaluator training (McNamara, 1996).

Looking Forward

In the evolving landscape of language pedagogy, Performance-Based Evaluations, with their nuanced and holistic approach, seem poised to play a pivotal role. They promise to narrow the chasm between classroom constructs and real-world linguistic exigencies, shaping learners who are not just repositories of linguistic knowledge but adept, nimble communicators in the real world.

Competency-Based Evaluation

The move towards competency-based evaluations (CBE) in language education signifies a deeper understanding of what it means to be proficient in a language. It's not just a fleeting pedagogical trend; it's a profound shift towards recognizing that true language proficiency isn't just about knowledge, but about the ability to effectively use that knowledge in varied contexts. Central to this is the idea that learners progress by demonstrating mastery over specific competencies or skills, irrespective of the time it takes (Spady, 1980).

Understanding Competency-Based Evaluations

At its core, competency-based evaluations prioritize the learner's ability to perform specific linguistic tasks or demonstrate particular skills, rather than simply recalling theoretical knowledge. This approach appreciates that 'knowing' a language is different from being able to 'use' it effectively in different scenarios.

Authenticity is also paramount in CBE, much like in performance-based evaluations. However, the emphasis here is on ensuring that learners can demonstrate mastery over specific competencies, whether that's holding a casual conversation, writing a formal report, or understanding cultural nuances (Le Boterf, 1994).

The integrative nature of CBE ensures that assessments don't just focus on isolated skills. Instead, tasks may require learners to combine multiple facets of language use, showcasing their comprehensive linguistic competence (Tardif, 2006).

Pedagogical Implications of the CBE Approach

Adopting a competency-based evaluation requires a significant instructional overhaul. The focus shifts from teaching generalized content to honing in on specific skills and competencies, ensuring that learners can apply these in real-world situations (Barnett, 1994).

Feedback becomes even more nuanced under CBE. Educators don't just comment on right or wrong answers but delve deeper into how well learners are mastering specific competencies, offering guidance on areas of improvement (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

A significant advantage of CBE is the empowerment of learners. By focusing on competencies, learners have clearer objectives and can take more ownership of their learning, setting personal goals and tracking their progress (Long, 1990).

Merits of Competency-Based Evaluations

CBE offers a more personalized learning trajectory. Since learners progress by mastering competencies, they move at their own pace, ensuring a deeper understanding and application of skills (Wehlburg, 1997).

This approach recognizes the varied abilities of learners. Traditional tests might miss out on some of the more subtle competencies, but CBE ensures a broader recognition of a learner's strengths, from linguistic capabilities to intercultural understanding (Byram, 1997).


Furthermore, by aligning assessments with real-world tasks, learners often find their motivation bolstered, seeing the direct relevance and applicability of their studies (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Challenges of Competency-Based Evaluations

Designing CBE is complex. There's a need to define competencies clearly, ensuring they align with real-world demands. Additionally, while personalizing learning paths, it's crucial to maintain consistency and fairness in assessments (Mansilla & Duraisingh, 2016).

Concluding Thoughts

Competency-Based Evaluations, with their focus on real-world skills and learner empowerment, offer a promising direction in language pedagogy. They seek to ensure that learners are not just theoretically knowledgeable but are truly competent users of the language, ready to navigate the multifaceted linguistic challenges of the real world.



PERSONALISED LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, personalisation has emerged as more than just a buzzword; it's the heartbeat of contemporary language learning. As we stand at the crossroads of globalisation, with cultures intermingling and borders becoming increasingly porous, embracing personalisation in language education is no longer optional—it's an absolute necessity. Rooted in the ethos of the CEFR Companion Volume and bolstered by cutting-edge pedagogical research, personalised learning is redefining the contours of language education, reshaping it from a one-size-fits-all model to a tailor-made experience that celebrates the individual learner.

The Inadequacies of the Traditional Model

Historically, language education often followed a linear, standardised path. Learners were typically ushered through a fixed curriculum, irrespective of their prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, learning styles, or aspirations. Such a monolithic approach, akin to an assembly line, often led to disengagement, lack of motivation, and a limited understanding of the rich cultural tapestry underpinning languages. In essence, the traditional model, with its rigidity and lack of adaptability, is ill-equipped to cater to today's diverse student populace, rendering it outdated and ineffective.

The Personalised Learning Revolution

Personalised language learning heralds a paradigm shift. It recognises that each learner is unique, bringing to the table a mosaic of experiences, aptitudes, and ambitions. Here's how this approach is revolutionising the language learning industry:

Holistic Development: Beyond just linguistic acquisition, personalised learning fosters holistic growth. It takes into account learners' emotional, cognitive, and cultural dimensions, paving the way for a deeper, more meaningful learning experience (Vygotsky, 1978).

Enhanced Engagement: By tailoring learning experiences to individual needs and interests, learners find greater resonance with the content. This boosts motivation, engagement, and, ultimately, retention (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Cultural Relevance: Personalised learning isn't just about the language; it's also about the myriad cultures it represents. By weaving in cultural nuances that resonate with each learner, it bridges the gap between mere linguistic proficiency and genuine cultural appreciation (Byram, 1997).

Flexibility and Adaptability: In the personalised model, learning is no longer confined to the four walls of a classroom. With the aid of technology, learners can access customised resources, practice at their own pace, and interact with native speakers from around the globe (Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

Empowerment: Personalised learning shifts the balance of power, positioning learners as co-creators of their educational journey. They set goals, make choices, and take ownership of their progress, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-directed learning (Holec, 1981).

Looking Forward

As we delve deeper into the 21st century, it's clear that the future of language education lies in personalisation. It's not just a pedagogical shift; it's a clarion call for educators to recognise and celebrate the individuality of each learner. In doing so, we're not just equipping them with linguistic skills; we're cultivating global citizens who appreciate the beauty and diversity of our interconnected world. In essence, the revolution of personalised language education is not just about teaching languages—it's about shaping the future, one learner at a time. However, one of the main tasks we face in this personalisation journey is in the implementation of personalisation, what it looks like and how it is achieved, we explore some of the most promising areas below.

Language Goals

Each learner embarks on their language journey with distinct objectives. Some might seek fluency for business networking, while others are motivated by the desire to comprehend foreign literature or media. Aligning instructional content with these diverse objectives ensures that the learning remains relevant and purposeful.

Language Needs

Context is key in languages, and where and how we use language is all important. The development of needs profiles allows us to determine exactly which of the hundreds of competencies a learner needs to develop, and to what level. Learner profiles aren't just about strengths or weaknesses, they encompass a matrix of sociocultural factors, prior linguistic experiences, and specific needs arising from these backgrounds. A truly personalised approach requires an in-depth understanding of these needs profiles, paving the way for more nuanced and responsive instruction.

Interests

Language doesn't exist in isolation; it's intertwined with culture, history, art, and myriad other domains. By aligning language learning with a student's intrinsic interests, educators can boost motivation, ensuring a deeper and more sustained engagement. This could be achieved through thematic units, project-based learning, or integrating cultural elements that resonate with the learner's passions (Pardo, 2018).

Depth of Learning

The extent of language mastery sought varies widely among learners. While some may wish to acquire just a functional understanding for short-term goals, others might aspire for a profound grasp, delving into the intricacies of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Recognizing and accommodating this variance in depth ensures optimal resource allocation and learning outcomes (Long, 2015).

Differentiated Learning

Given the spectrum of learner profiles and objectives, differentiated instruction emerges as a critical component of personalised language education. This involves employing a diverse array of pedagogical strategies, catering to varied learning styles, cognitive capacities, and even emotional factors. The goal is to ensure that instruction resonates, regardless of where a learner stands on their linguistic journey (Eisenclas, 2013).

BLENDDED LANGUAGE LEARNING

The contemporary educational narrative has witnessed unprecedented oscillations, with technology firmly entrenched as both the catalyst and the conduit of change. Within this dynamism, blended learning emerges as a harmonious confluence of the digital and the traditional, particularly resonant in the realm of language education. By orchestrating the virtues of face-to-face instruction with the vast expanse of digital platforms, blended learning crafts a nuanced pedagogical tapestry, rich in flexibility and attuned to the variegated rhythms of learners. Blended learning is not merely a juxtaposition of online and offline modalities; it's a deliberate intertwining, a dance where each step complements and enhances the other. It marries the immediacy and tangibility of classroom encounters with the expansive and asynchronous realm of online resources. Central to this approach is the recognition of the student's agency, allowing them a degree of autonomy in navigating their learning journey, be it in terms of pace, place, path, or time (Staker & Horn, 2012).

In the intricate arena of language acquisition, the blended approach unveils multifaceted advantages. Foremost among these is the gift of flexibility. As students oscillate between the structured cadence of the classroom and the adaptive rhythms of online platforms, they find spaces to delve deeper, to revisit, to challenge, and to assimilate at their own pace (Boelens et al., 2018). This digital realm, vast and ever-evolving, offers a cornucopia of multimedia treasures. Whether it's the auditory learner seeking solace in podcasts or the visual learner captivated by video narratives, the online sphere in blended learning caters to a spectrum of preferences (Torres & Gómez, 2020). Moreover, the immediacy of digital feedback mechanisms fosters a culture of reflection and recalibration, with adaptive platforms molding content to resonate with individual proficiencies (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Perhaps most compelling in the context of language learning is the promise of authentic interactions. No longer confined by geographical or logistical constraints, students in blended environments can immerse in genuine dialogues with native speakers or peers scattered across the globe, thereby deepening their linguistic and cultural horizons (Blake, 2016).

Yet, as with all pedagogical innovations, blended learning brings its own set of challenges. The promise of a digital utopia is contingent upon equitable access—a stark reminder of the persisting digital divide that institutions must address with urgency (Bonk & Graham, 2006). Furthermore, the mere amalgamation of digital tools doesn't spontaneously yield blended learning's full potential. The essence lies in crafting a seamless pedagogical narrative, ensuring that the digital and the traditional are in dialogue, not in duplication (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005). And while autonomy is a prized outcome, the reality is that not every learner arrives equipped with the metacognitive tools to thrive in such an environment, necessitating scaffolds and supports to nurture their online journey (Benson, 2011).

In distillation, blended learning stands as a beacon of modern pedagogy in language education. It is an ode to the timeless virtues of traditional teaching while simultaneously embracing the boundless potential of technology. For educators poised to embark on this journey, the blended model offers a landscape rich in possibilities, demanding only an open mind, a reflective spirit, and a commitment to weaving the best of both worlds into a cohesive, enriching educational tapestry.

FLIPPED LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the evolving mosaic of pedagogical frameworks, flipped learning has carved a distinctive niche, ushering in a paradigmatic shift from conventional classroom dynamics. Particularly within the crucible of language education—an arena where the boundaries between passive reception and active expression are critically thin—the flipped model presents a potent alternative. It transposes the rhythm of traditional teaching, fostering spaces where in-class interactions are driven by prior engagement, thereby nurturing deeper linguistic immersion. At its heart, flipped learning is not merely a strategy—it's a pedagogical reinvention. While convention dictates that direct instructional sequences dominate classroom hours, the flipped paradigm transposes this, entrusting learners with the autonomy of initial exploration outside the classroom confines. Through video lectures or meticulously curated digital resources, foundational concepts are introduced to students. The classroom, then, metamorphoses into a vibrant crucible where these foundational blocks are deconstructed, examined, and reconstructed through exercises, dialogues, collaborative endeavors, and more (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

In the context of language education, the advantages of this inversion are profound. By disentangling from the shackles of passive receptivity, students find themselves enveloped in a milieu where discussions, debates, role-plays, and collaborative ventures become the norm. Such active engagements foster holistic linguistic skills, from articulation to aural comprehension (Tucker, 2012). Furthermore, the liberation from traditional lecture modalities empowers educators to sculpt instruction that resonates with individual proficiencies. Whether it's tailoring nuanced challenges for the advanced linguist or scaffolding support for those grappling with foundational concepts, differentiated instruction thrives in the flipped landscape (Lo & Hew, 2017). And as students immerse themselves in these classroom tasks, the immediacy of feedback becomes invaluable. They find their linguistic faux pas being rectified in real-time, bridging gaps between knowledge and application (Huang & Hong, 2016). Beyond this, the nature of pre-class materials, often digital, gifts learners the autonomy to modulate their pace, revisiting and revising at will, fostering self-driven mastery (Bishop & Verleger, 2013).

Yet, the very strength of the flipped model—its reliance on pre-class autonomy—can also be its Achilles' heel. Equitable access to digital resources is paramount; without it, the model risks perpetuating disparities (Kim et al., 2014). Ensuring that students consistently engage with pre-class materials becomes pivotal, for without this foundation, the classroom activities risk becoming rudderless ventures (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015). Moreover, the onus of curating or selecting top-notch pre-class resources weighs heavily on educators; sub-par materials could inadvertently hamper the very efficacy of the model (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

Flipped learning is not just another pedagogical tool—it's a reimagination of the language education landscape. By championing student autonomy and foregrounding active classroom engagement, it aligns harmoniously with contemporary emphases on student-centricity. Yet, like all innovations, its brilliance is interwoven with challenges. For educators poised on the cusp of this paradigm shift, the journey demands meticulous planning, acute awareness of potential pitfalls, and an unwavering commitment to delivering an enriched linguistic experience.

ACTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

The panorama of educational methodologies has witnessed myriad shifts, with approaches waxing and waning in prominence. Yet, in this kaleidoscope of pedagogies, active learning emerges as a beacon, underscoring the indispensable role of learners in the education equation. Particularly within the tapestry of language education—a discipline where interactivity is not just beneficial but essential—active learning illuminates a pathway where students become architects of their linguistic journey. This pedagogical lens invites students to be more than mere spectators; they are summoned to produce, reshape, and deeply imbue the language.

Active learning isn't just a term; it's an ethos. It challenges the conventional classroom dynamic, replacing passive absorption with dynamic interaction. This transformative approach envelops a plethora of activities, be it collaborative projects, critical reflections, or immersive problem-solving tasks. However, the unifying thread weaving these activities together is the student's proactive engagement, urging them to process and wield the information, instead of being mere repositories (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

In the realm of language education, the dividends of active learning are manifold. When learners grapple with language actively, the neural pathways associated with retention are fortified, leading to enhanced recall of lexical items, syntactic structures, and even cultural intricacies (Prince, 2004). Beyond the walls of the classroom, active learning tasks like role-playing metamorphose into simulacra of real-world linguistic encounters, prompting learners to deploy their linguistic arsenal in authentic scenarios (Freeman, et al., 2014). But the benefits aren't just linguistic; they transcend language. Active learning cultivates a suite of meta-skills, from critical analysis to collaboration, equipping learners for the multifaceted demands of genuine communication (Michael, 2006). Furthermore, the sheer act of participation, of being integral to the learning narrative, can catalyze motivation, making the learning process both enjoyable and resonant (Millis, 2012).

However, any educational renaissance comes with its set of challenges. The vibrancy of active learning, while infectious, demands a novel approach to classroom orchestration, necessitating educators to navigate the dynamic, and at times cacophonous, landscape of active participation (Meyers & Jones, 1993). Crafting this participative tapestry can also be labor-intensive, requiring meticulous planning that eclipses traditional instructional design (Felder & Brent, 2009). Moreover, the diversity of the student populace means varied receptivities, with some students potentially grappling with this shift, especially if their prior educational experiences were anchored in rote learning (Felder & Brent, 2009).

Active learning in language education surfaces as a paradigm of unparalleled potential. Its essence, which prioritizes learners' engagement, promises not just comprehension but deep-rooted internalization. While the journey to full integration might be punctuated with challenges, the outcomes—in terms of depth of understanding, linguistic retention, and sheer enthusiasm—underscore the transformative potential of active learning in shaping the linguists of tomorrow.

COMPETENCY-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING

Competency-based learning (CBL) has carved a niche within the educational landscape, distinguishing itself from traditional models through its unwavering focus on the mastery of specific skills. Particularly within the realm of language education, where the need for tangible proficiency is paramount, the allure of CBL is evident. This approach not only challenges the traditional paradigms of education but also represents a tectonic shift from mere progression-based pedagogy to a model anchored in genuine skill acquisition.

At its heart, competency-based learning transcends the confines of time and content coverage. The modus operandi of CBL hinges on explicit, measurable outcomes, where competencies are clearly delineated, offering students a transparent roadmap to mastery (Watson, Gemin & Ryan, 2010). This clarity paves the way for flexible pacing, allowing learners the autonomy to traverse the curriculum at a rhythm congruent with their individual capacities. Such fluidity ensures that every learner's journey is uniquely tailored, with instruction modulating itself to bridge any gaps in competency acquisition (Patrick & Sturgis, 2011).

One of the most salient features of CBL, especially within language education, is its alignment with tasks that resonate with real-world applications. Whether it's navigating a conversation in a bustling market or dissecting the intricacies of a foreign newspaper, the competencies designed within this framework are palpably authentic (CEFR, 2001). Such an alignment doesn't merely enhance the relevance of instruction but ensures that assessments serve as true barometers of proficiency, offering insights that are both precise and actionable (Nodine, 2016).

However, while the merits of CBL are numerous, its integration isn't devoid of challenges. Crafting a curriculum that's genuinely competency-based demands an intricate tapestry of resources, encompassing time, expertise, and instructional materials (Nodine, 2016). Additionally, without meticulous oversight, there's a lurking danger of inadvertently fostering inequity, particularly for learners whose pace might be more measured (Patrick & Sturgis, 2011). The very essence of CBL, which celebrates mastery over memorization, also mandates a rethinking of assessment strategies, necessitating tools that capture genuine competence over rote recall (Redding, 2014).

In synthesizing the discourse, competency-based learning emerges as a transformative force in language education. It promises not just progression but proficiency, ensuring that learners are equipped with linguistic tools that resonate with real-world contexts. While the journey to integrate CBL might be intricate, the potential rewards, encapsulated in genuine linguistic mastery and real-world readiness, underscore its unparalleled significance in contemporary language pedagogy.

GAMIFIED LANGUAGE LEARNING

The realm of language education, traditionally viewed as a structured and rigorous field, has experienced innovative disruptions with the advent of technology. Among the most transformative developments is the concept of gamification. Rooted in the mechanics and motivational structures of games, gamification has been integrated into educational contexts to amplify learner engagement and commitment (Deterding et al., 2011).

Gamification, in its essence, brings together game-design elements and principles into non-game contexts, aiming to invigorate the learning experience. Central to this is the introduction of points, badges, and leaderboards. These mechanics are no mere frivolities; they provide learners with a tangible sense of progress and achievement. The narrative structure of challenges and quests has also been integrated, with tasks framed as missions or obstacles to be overcome, adding a layer of contextual authenticity (Anderson, 2012).

In the context of language learning, gamification's potential shines brightly. Learners' engagement with the target language is significantly enhanced when embedded within gamified environments. The immersive nature of games means prolonged exposure to the target language, enriching the acquisition process (Landers, 2014). Further, gamified tasks often simulate real-world scenarios, making the linguistic context more genuine and thereby bridging the gap between classroom instruction and practical application (Gee, 2007).

Moreover, gamification's collaborative nature, especially in multiplayer scenarios, serves as a catalyst for peer interaction. This not only encourages learners to use the language for communication but also promotes socio-cultural competency, a vital aspect of holistic language learning (Reinders & Wattana, 2014). On the technological front, advanced gamified platforms possess adaptive capabilities, adjusting the challenge level to match individual learner proficiencies, ensuring an optimal learning curve (Hamari et al., 2014).

However, as with any instructional strategy, gamification isn't without its challenges. A notable concern is the potential overemphasis on rewards. While points and badges can motivate, an over-reliance might eclipse intrinsic motivation, leading to learners engaging with the process for rewards rather than a genuine interest in language acquisition (Nicholson, 2015). Additionally, the complexity inherent in designing effective gamified experiences that are pedagogically sound can be resource-intensive and requires expertise (Deterding, 2015). Also, issues of equity emerge, especially when considering access to advanced technological platforms across diverse learner populations (Barata et al., 2013).

In conclusion, gamification stands as a potent tool in the arsenal of modern language education methodologies. It has the capacity to transform the learning landscape, making it more engaging and contextually relevant. However, its successful integration necessitates a delicate balance: leveraging the motivational mechanics of games while ensuring core pedagogical objectives remain at the forefront.

GROWTH MINDSET

LANGUAGE LEARNING

In recent years, the realm of language education has seen an increased interest in the psychological and affective dimensions of learning. While linguistic competence remains at the forefront, educators and scholars alike have become increasingly attuned to the emotional, motivational, and cognitive facets that underpin language acquisition (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Amidst this expanded landscape, the concept of 'growth mindset,' as introduced by Carol Dweck, emerges as a profound influence on learners' journeys toward linguistic proficiency.

Dweck's seminal work elucidates the distinctions between two primary mindsets that individuals can foster about their abilities: the fixed and the growth mindset. The former posits abilities as static entities, with successes and failures serving as defining parameters of one's inherent capacities. Conversely, the growth mindset presents a dynamic view of abilities, framing them as malleable traits that can be honed and developed through consistent effort, suitable strategies, and feedback (Dweck, 2006).

The implications of this bifurcation are particularly salient in the field of language education. As language learning often involves navigating a labyrinth of complexities, challenges, and novelties, the mindset with which learners approach this journey can greatly shape their experiences and outcomes. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's (2008) portrayal of language learning as a dynamic system underlines the ebb and flow, the constant changes, and adaptations that characterize linguistic pursuits. With a growth mindset, learners are better equipped to grapple with these intricacies. They become more resilient in the face of linguistic challenges, viewing them not as insurmountable barriers but as essential facets of their evolving linguistic journey.

Moreover, the traditional apprehension surrounding mistakes in language acquisition undergoes a transformative shift under the growth mindset lens. Errors, rather than being mere indicators of failure, become instrumental in fostering deeper understanding and refinement (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). This shift not only emboldens learners to take linguistic risks but also creates classrooms where exploration and curiosity are celebrated.

The motivational dimensions of the growth mindset cannot be understated. Dörnyei (2005) underscores how intrinsic motivation can be a driving force in language learning, and the belief in one's capacity for growth can significantly bolster this intrinsic drive. When learners are convinced that their endeavors can lead to improvement, they exhibit heightened agency and proactivity in their learning process.

In conclusion, the confluence of growth mindset and language education presents a promising avenue, one that prioritizes the holistic development of learners. By integrating Dweck's (2006) insights into language pedagogy, educators have the potential to cultivate classrooms where learners are not just linguistically proficient but also resilient, adaptive, and intrinsically motivated.

In contemporary language pedagogy, customization and student-centric methodologies are no longer ancillary; they are paramount. Lengua, embodying the very essence of this evolution, stands as a beacon of "Personalized Language Learning," weaving together active learning, flipped learning, blended learning, and the growth mindset principle to create a unique linguistic odyssey tailored specifically for each individual.

Lengua's primary ethos revolves around the understanding that language acquisition is not a uniform journey. Just as every individual has a distinct voice, their path to mastering a language is idiosyncratic. This concept mirrors the assertions of scholars like Vygotsky (1978) and Lantolf & Thorne (2006), who elucidate that learning, especially language learning, is deeply intertwined with the learner's personal context and prior experiences.

A linchpin in Lengua's tailored approach is the active learning methodology. Supported by Bonwell & Eison's (1991) research, this methodology enables students to be architects of their learning experiences. By facilitating learners to produce, modify, and immerse themselves actively in the language, Lengua ensures that each student's learning journey is truly individualized.

Complementing this is the flipped learning paradigm, which shifts the onus of preliminary exploration onto the learner, allowing in-class time to focus on activities that resonate most with each learner's needs (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). This approach, when dovetailed with the blended learning model, provides learners with an expansive repository of resources. As Staker & Horn (2012) highlight, this combination empowers students to dictate the pace, place, and trajectory of their learning, ensuring a truly personalized experience.

Yet, tools and curricular structures are but a part of Lengua's approach. Central to its philosophy is the fostering of a growth mindset, inspired by Dweck's (2006) seminal work. By cultivating an ethos where challenges are embraced as growth opportunities, and abilities are understood to be malleable, Lengua ensures that its students remain adaptive, resilient, and more importantly, owners of their linguistic progression.

What truly sets Lengua apart, however, is its synthesis of these pedagogical strategies with its overarching vision: Personalized Language Learning. By interlacing each methodology's strengths, Lengua crafts a learning experience that is not only rooted in academic research but is also attuned to the unique needs, aspirations, and potential of each student.

In sum, Lengua's innovative approach to language education is emblematic of a new era, one where the individual learner is at the epicenter. By weaving together modern pedagogies with a commitment to customization, Lengua offers not just language proficiency, but a deeply personalized, transformative journey that resonates with the individual nuances of each student.



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Contact Us

info@lengua.com.co

www.lengua.com.co

(323) 207-0727