



Language Learning and Assessment in Europe

This paper is written by **ALTE, the Association of Language Testers in Europe**, and intends to provide a brief overview of:

- what ALTE is
- why language learning is important now
- previous studies on language learning in Europe
- the usefulness of other languages as well as English
- conditions for successful language learning
- the role of assessment
- the future of language learning

What is ALTE?

[ALTE](#) is an association of language test providers who work together to promote the fair and accurate assessment of linguistic ability across Europe and beyond. ALTE organises [courses](#) and [conferences](#) on aspects of language assessment, and operates a [quality auditing system](#) of European language examinations. It currently has 33 [full member organisations](#) representing 25 European languages. ALTE is a non-profit organisation, and has Participatory Status as an NGO with the Council of Europe. ALTE has been pleased to work with both the European Parliament and the European Commission to celebrate the European Day of Languages since 2008.

Why is language learning important now?

The European Council's 2019 adoption of the [European Commission's recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages](#), the 2020 publication of the [Common European Framework of Reference \(CEFR\)'s Companion Volume](#), as well as the Commission's current (30 September 2020) communication on the European Education Area highlight the continued current focus on successful language learning throughout Europe as a whole.

How has language learning in Europe been studied?

Previous studies that ALTE has participated in ([European Survey on Language competences, 2012](#); [Study on comparability of language testing in Europe, 2015](#)) have shown the large extent of English language provision in schooling. Nevertheless, there has not been a full empirical study of the level of language learning in Europe for some time, which is important given the OECD's plan to include foreign language learning as part of its PISA programme from 2025.

Are other languages beyond English useful?

English is highly important in today's global society, but it is also crucial that other languages are not forgotten. Following on from the 2002 Barcelona declaration, the [2019 comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages](#) also stressed the importance of three languages at school which may include the home language, the language of schooling, English and other 'foreign' languages. Having access to even partial competence in other languages increases multilingualism, 'plurilingualism' (an individual's access to their own linguistic repertoire) and thus better chances for employability. The promotion of plurilingualism and at least three languages in education is highlighted in many resources, some of which are noted in the [Commission's Staff Working Document accompanying the Council Recommendation](#).

What helps successful language learning?

The [CEFR](#) (with its [Companion Volume](#)) is a key tool in implementing an action-oriented approach to language learning. This puts language *use* for communication at the heart of pedagogy. Meaningful communication builds learning factors such as motivation and learner autonomy and is key to success in language learning. This might be called *Everyday lived languages*, grounded in real communication in use – both inside and outside of schools. Furthermore, language learning should be promoted as a lifelong journey, not only for schoolchildren.

What about assessment?

Assessment is crucial for successful language learning as it is a means to prove ability and should also lead into further learning. ALTE's mission is to promote [quality in language assessment](#) – of all languages, not just English, as part of a [plurilingual repertoire](#). That's why the languages represented in ALTE include less widely spoken and regional languages such as Basque, Catalan and Luxembourgish, among others.

What is the future of language learning?

The use of digital technology and AI tools will undoubtedly assist language learning, teaching and assessment, but this must be done in tandem with face-to-face teachers. [Write&Improve](#) is one such free-to-use tool, which employs AI to give English learners a CEFR grade of their writing performance, but more importantly provides feedback to guide the next steps of learning, something of value to both learners and their teachers.

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