Building Global Competence in French Language Education: A Competency-Based Curriculum Framework Aligned with CEFR Standards and International Best Practices

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Abstract- *This paper examines global competence development in French language education through a competency-based curriculum framework aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standards and international best practices. The study highlights the importance of global competence, which encompasses linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, empathy, and critical thinking. The theoretical foundations of competency-based education and the CEFR framework provide a robust basis for designing effective language curricula. Case studies from Quebec, Finland, and the Alliance Française demonstrate the successful integration of CEFR standards with competency-based approaches, emphasizing practical language use, continuous assessment, and cultural immersion. Comparative analysis of these programs reveals the benefits of flexible, student-centered learning environments and authentic assessment methods. Recommendations for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers include incorporating cultural immersion activities, adopting a student-centered approach, implementing continuous and formative assessment, emphasizing practical language use, utilizing multimedia resources, and providing professional development for teachers. This paper aims to offer a comprehensive framework for enhancing French language education and preparing students to become proficient and globally competent language users.*

Indexed Terms- Global Competence, French Language Education, Competency-Based Curriculum, CEFR Standards, Cultural Immersion, Language Proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, communicating effectively across cultural and linguistic boundaries is more critical than ever. Global competence, which encompasses the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to understand and engage with diverse cultures, has become a fundamental goal of education (Byram, 2020). This is particularly true in language education, where the aim is not merely to teach linguistic proficiency but to prepare students to navigate and thrive in a multicultural global environment (Barili & Byram, 2021). The importance of global competence in language education is underscored by the need to foster mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration among people from different cultural backgrounds. As students learn new languages, they also gain insights into the cultures, values, and perspectives of the speakers of those languages, which enhances their ability to function as global citizens (Porto, 2021).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a comprehensive framework developed by the Council of Europe to provide a common basis for developing language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, and European textbooks (Piccardo, 2020). The CEFR describes language proficiency in six levels: A1 (Beginner), A2 (Elementary), B1 (Intermediate), B2 (Upper Intermediate), C1 (Advanced), and C2 (Proficient). Each level is defined by specific listening, reading,

speaking, and writing competencies, which are further broken down into detailed descriptors (Tono, 2019). The CEFR's primary aim is to promote transparency and coherence in language learning and assessment, facilitating the recognition of language qualifications across different countries and educational contexts. By providing clear and objective criteria for language proficiency, the CEFR helps educators design curricula that are aligned with learners' needs and goals (Anggoro & Nguyen, 2021).

This paper aims to explore the development of a competency-based curriculum framework for French-language education that aligns with CEFR standards and international best practices, with the ultimate goal of building global competence among learners. This exploration recognizes that language education should go beyond traditional grammar and vocabulary instruction to encompass the broader skills and attitudes necessary for effective intercultural communication. The paper addresses several key questions: How can a competency-based approach to French language education enhance global competence? What are the essential components of such a curriculum, and how can they be effectively integrated with CEFR standards? What can be learned from international best practices in language education to inform the design and implementation of this curriculum?

To answer these questions, the paper is structured into several sections. Following this introduction, the theoretical foundations of global competence and competency-based education will be examined, providing a conceptual framework for the subsequent discussion. The third section will outline the proposed curriculum design framework, detailing the key components and instructional strategies that align with CEFR standards. The fourth section will review international best practices in French language education, drawing on case examples to highlight effective approaches and lessons learned. Finally, the paper will summarize key findings, recommendations for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers, and suggestions for future research and practice

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Global Competence and Its Relevance in Language Education

Global competence refers to the capacity to understand and act on issues of global significance. This involves a blend of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that empower individuals to understand the world beyond their immediate environment, engage in respectful dialogue, and collaborate across cultures (Mansilla & Jackson, 2022). In the context of language education, global competence is particularly pertinent. Learning a new language opens doors to different cultures, histories, and worldviews, fostering a deeper appreciation for diversity and promoting mutual understanding (Bagea, 2023).

Language education aimed at developing global competence equips students to communicate effectively in multicultural settings, understand cultural nuances, and address global challenges collaboratively (Papadopoulou, Palaiologou, & Karanikola, 2022). This competence extends beyond linguistic skills, including empathy, critical thinking, and the ability to view issues from multiple perspectives. These skills become indispensable as globalization continues to shrink the distances between cultures. Globally competent students are better prepared to participate in an interconnected world where the ability to navigate cultural complexities is as crucial as professional expertise (O. O. Osawaru & Gbenedio, 2020; T. A. Osawaru & sawaru, 2022)..

2.2 Review of Competency-Based Education Principles

Competency-based education (CBE) is an instructional approach that focuses on learning outcomes—what students know and can do—rather than the traditional emphasis on time spent in class or the number of credits earned (Khanna & Mehrotra, 2019). This model is built on several core principles:

- Clear, Measurable Competencies: CBE programs define explicit learning outcomes or competencies that students must demonstrate. These competencies are broken down into specific, measurable skills and knowledge areas.
- Personalized Learning: CBE allows for a personalized approach to education, recognizing

that students learn at different paces and have diverse needs. It often involves flexible learning pathways and varied instructional strategies to accommodate individual learning styles.

- Assessment for Mastery: In CBE, assessment is ongoing and formative, providing continuous feedback to students. Summative assessments require students to demonstrate their competencies proficiently before moving on to the next stage.
- Student-Centered Learning: This approach places students at the center of the learning process, encouraging active engagement, self-direction, and reflection.

CBE can significantly enhance the learning experience in language education by aligning instructional practices with real-world communication needs. For example, rather than merely memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, students engage in authentic language that mirrors their challenges outside the classroom. This approach ensures learners develop practical, transferable skills that contribute to their global competence (Açıkgöz & Babadoğan, 2021).

2.3 Alignment of CEFR Standards with Global Competence Goals

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provides a robust framework for language proficiency that aligns well with the goals of global competence. The CEFR's six levels of language proficiency (A1 to C2) offer detailed descriptors of what learners can do in listening, reading, speaking, and writing at each stage. These descriptors emphasize linguistic accuracy and the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in various contexts, which is essential for global competence (Ahmad Afip, Hamid, & Renshaw, 2019).

The CEFR framework supports the development of global competence in several ways. CEFR descriptors emphasize the importance of using language in context. This focus helps learners develop the ability to communicate in real-life situations, taking into account cultural norms and expectations. The CEFR highlights the role of intercultural awareness in language learning. Proficiency at higher levels includes mediating between different cultural perspectives and handling intercultural communication effectively (Yurtsever & Özel, 2021).

The CEFR's structured levels provide a clear progression path, ensuring learners build on their skills systematically. This structured approach aligns with competency-based education's emphasis on mastery and ongoing assessment. It can be adapted to various educational contexts and learning needs, making it a versatile tool for developing globally competent language users. It supports personalized learning pathways, accommodating learners' diverse backgrounds and goals (Piccardo, North, & Goodier, 2019).

Incorporating CEFR standards into a competency-based curriculum for French language education ensures that learners achieve linguistic proficiency and the broader competencies required for global competence. This alignment promotes a holistic approach to language education, where students are prepared to engage thoughtfully and effectively with the world around them (O. O. Osawaru & Aziegbe, 2024).

III. CURRICULUM DESIGN FRAMEWORK

3.1 Key Components of a Competency-Based Curriculum for French Language Education

A competency-based curriculum for French language education is structured around explicitly identifying and developing essential skills and knowledge that students must acquire. This approach focuses on outcomes, ensuring learners achieve specific competencies through their educational journey. The key components of such a curriculum include:

- Defined Competencies: At the heart of a competency-based curriculum are clearly defined competencies that outline what students need to know and be able to do. These competencies are aligned with real-world communication needs and cover various aspects of language use, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For French language education, competencies might include engaging in everyday conversations, understanding and producing written texts, and navigating cultural contexts.
- Learning Objectives: Each competency is broken down into specific learning objectives that provide a roadmap for instruction and assessment. These objectives are measurable and attainable, guiding teachers and students in learning. For example, an

objective under the speaking competency might be the ability to order food in a French restaurant or conduct a brief interview.

- Curriculum Content: The content of a competency-based curriculum is carefully selected to support the achievement of the defined competencies. This includes linguistic elements like vocabulary and grammar and cultural content that enhances learners' understanding of French-speaking cultures. Authentic materials, such as news articles, films, and songs, are often incorporated to provide context and relevance.

- Assessment Methods: Assessment in a competency-based curriculum is ongoing and formative, providing continuous feedback to students. Summative assessments are used to evaluate whether students have achieved the competencies. These performance-based assessments require students to demonstrate their skills in realistic scenarios. For instance, a speaking assessment might involve participating in a simulated business meeting or presenting.

- Instructional Support: Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating a competency-based curriculum. They provide guidance, resources, and feedback to help students achieve the competencies. Professional development and collaborative planning are essential to ensure that teachers are equipped to implement the curriculum effectively.

3.2 Integration of CEFR Levels and Descriptors into the Curriculum

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) offers a valuable framework for structuring a competency-based curriculum in French language education. By integrating CEFR levels and descriptors, educators can ensure that the curriculum is aligned with widely recognized language proficiency standards.

The first step in integrating the CEFR into the curriculum is to map the defined competencies to the appropriate CEFR levels. This involves identifying which competencies correspond to each level, from A1 (Beginner) to C2 (Proficient). For example, basic conversational skills might be mapped to A1 and A2 levels, while more complex tasks like writing a formal report might correspond to B2 or C1 levels. CEFR

descriptors describe what learners can do at each proficiency level. These descriptors can inform the development of learning objectives and assessment criteria. For instance, a descriptor at the B1 level for speaking might state that the learner can "deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken." This can guide the creation of relevant learning activities and assessments (Zaki & Darmi, 2021).

The CEFR's structured levels provide a clear progression path, allowing educators to design a curriculum that supports continuous development. By aligning competencies with CEFR levels, the curriculum ensures that students build on their skills systematically, moving from basic to more advanced language use. This progression is essential for maintaining motivation and providing a sense of accomplishment. It emphasizes the importance of intercultural awareness and competence. Integrating cultural elements into the curriculum aligns with CEFR standards and enhances global competence. Lessons can include cultural studies, comparisons between French-speaking countries, and discussions on cultural norms and values. This helps students develop a more holistic understanding of the language and its cultural context (Nagai, Birch, Bower, & Schmidt, 2020).

a. Instructional Strategies to Foster Global Competence in Language Learners

Fostering global competence in language learners requires instructional strategies that go beyond traditional teaching methods. These strategies should engage students actively, promote critical thinking, and encourage intercultural understanding (Mansilla & Jackson, 2022). Project-based learning (PBL) is an effective strategy for developing global competence. In PBL, students work on real-world projects that require the use of French in authentic contexts. For example, students might research and present on a global issue affecting a French-speaking country or create a multimedia project about French culture. This approach promotes collaboration, problem-solving, and practical application of language skills (Owens & Hite, 2022).

Facilitating intercultural exchanges, such as virtual pen pals or exchange programs with students from

French-speaking countries, provides learners with direct exposure to different cultures. These interactions help students practice their language skills in real-life situations and develop a deeper understanding of cultural diversity.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) involves using tasks as the central unit of planning and instruction. Tasks are activities that have a clear outcome and require meaningful use of language. For instance, planning a trip to a French-speaking country, conducting interviews, or participating in debates can be effective tasks. TBLT encourages active use of language and helps students develop the ability to perform specific tasks in French (Bula-Villalobos & Murillo-Miranda, 2019).

Cultural immersion activities, such as cultural simulations, role-plays, and immersion days, allow students to experience French culture firsthand. These activities can simulate environments where French is spoken, providing opportunities for students to practice language skills in culturally relevant contexts. For example, an immersion day might involve students preparing and sharing French cuisine, watching French films, and engaging in cultural discussions (Stunell, 2021). Encouraging students to reflect on their learning experiences and cultural encounters fosters critical thinking and self-awareness. Reflective practices can include journaling, discussions, and self-assessment. These activities help students articulate their learning process, recognize their growth, and identify areas for improvement (Jackson, 2022).

IV. INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

4.1 Examples of Effective Competency-Based French Language Programs Worldwide
To understand the effectiveness of competency-based French language programs, examining several exemplary cases from around the world is valuable. These programs illustrate how different educational systems have successfully implemented competency-based approaches aligned with CEFR standards to enhance language proficiency and global competence. One notable example is the French language program in Canada's province of Quebec, which has a robust competency-based curriculum designed to accommodate both native French speakers and those learning French as a second language. The program emphasizes practical communication skills, cultural immersion, and continuous assessment. Students engage in activities that reflect real-life situations, such as participating in community events and conducting interviews, which help them develop both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness (O. O. Osawaru, 2023).

In Finland, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education integrates CEFR standards into its foreign language instruction, including French. Finnish schools emphasize student-centered learning and flexible pathways, allowing students to progress independently. The curriculum includes a variety of interactive and experiential learning activities, such as collaborative projects and cultural exchanges with French-speaking countries. This approach not only enhances language skills but also fosters intercultural competence (Tikkinen, 2020).

Another example is the Alliance Française network, which promotes French language and culture globally. The Alliance Française uses a competency-based approach aligned with CEFR standards, offering courses that cater to different proficiency levels. Their programs incorporate multimedia resources, immersive experiences, and a strong focus on cultural context. This holistic approach ensures that learners develop a comprehensive set of skills, including the ability to understand and appreciate French culture (Vogopoulou, Sarakinioti, Sifakakis, & Tsatsaroni, 2024).

4.2 Comparative Analysis of Different Approaches and Their Outcomes
Comparing the competency-based French language programs in Quebec, Finland, and the Alliance Française reveals several commonalities and differences in their approaches and outcomes. All three programs emphasize practical communication skills, cultural immersion, and alignment with CEFR standards, yet they vary in their instructional methods and assessment practices.

In Quebec, the emphasis on community engagement and real-life application of language skills leads to high linguistic and cultural proficiency levels among

students. The continuous assessment approach allows for regular feedback and adjustments to meet individual learning needs. This results in students who are proficient in French and confident in using the language in various social and professional contexts (Guida, 2020).

Finland's approach, characterized by student-centered learning and flexible pathways, ensures students can progress according to their abilities and interests. This flexibility, combined with interactive and experiential learning activities, fosters a deep understanding of the language and its cultural context. Finnish students benefit from a supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and critical thinking, leading to high levels of engagement and language proficiency.

V.

The Alliance Française's global network provides diverse learning experiences, from traditional classroom instruction to immersive cultural activities. This variety ensures that learners are exposed to different aspects of French language and culture, enhancing their overall competence. The use of multimedia resources and cultural immersion activities helps students develop a well-rounded skill set, including the ability to understand and navigate cultural nuances (O. O. Osawaru, 2015, 2019).

4.3 Lessons Learned and Transferable Practices for Curriculum Development
The experiences of these successful programs offer several lessons and best practices that can be applied to curriculum development for French language education in other contexts.

- Integrating cultural immersion activities into the curriculum is essential for developing global competence. Programs should include opportunities for students to engage with French-speaking communities, participate in cultural events, and experience French culture firsthand. This helps students better understand the language and its cultural context.
- Flexibility in the learning process, allowing students to progress at their own pace and according to their interests, can enhance engagement and motivation. Personalized learning pathways and various instructional methods cater to diverse learning styles and needs, ensuring that all students can achieve their full potential.
- Implementing continuous and formative assessments provides regular feedback and helps identify areas for improvement. This approach allows for timely interventions and supports the development of language proficiency over time. Assessments should be performance-based, requiring students to demonstrate their skills in realistic scenarios.
- Emphasizing the practical application of language skills in real-life situations prepares students for effective communication in various contexts. Activities such as role-playing, simulations, and community engagement projects help students apply their knowledge and develop confidence in language use.

CONCLUSION

Exploring competency-based French language education, aligned with CEFR standards and international best practices, reveals several critical insights into the development of globally competent language learners. Firstly, the significance of global competence in language education is underscored by its ability to prepare students for effective communication and collaboration in a multicultural world. As highlighted, global competence involves linguistic skills, cultural awareness, empathy, and critical thinking—essential components for navigating today's interconnected global landscape.

The theoretical foundations of competency-based education and the CEFR framework provide a robust basis for designing effective language curricula. Competency-based education, with its focus on clear, measurable outcomes and personalized learning paths, aligns well with the CEFR's structured proficiency levels and detailed descriptors. This alignment ensures that language learners develop practical communication skills that are both contextually relevant and culturally informed. Case studies from Quebec, Finland, and the Alliance Française demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating CEFR standards with competency-based approaches. These programs emphasize practical language use, continuous assessment, and cultural immersion, resulting in high linguistic proficiency and

intercultural competence levels. The comparative analysis of these programs highlights the benefits of flexible, student-centered learning environments, authentic assessment methods, and the use of multimedia resources.

Based on these key findings, several recommendations can be made for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers aiming to enhance French language education through a competency-based approach aligned with CEFR standards. Firstly, incorporating cultural immersion activities into the curriculum is crucial for developing global competence. Educators should create opportunities for students to engage with French-speaking communities, participate in cultural events, and experience French culture firsthand. This can include exchange programs, virtual pen pal projects, and cultural simulations, all of which help students better understand the language and its cultural context.

Adopting a student-centered approach is essential for catering to diverse student needs and learning styles. Curriculum developers should design personalized learning pathways that allow students to progress at their own pace, achieved through differentiated instruction, varied learning activities, and the use of technology to support individualized learning experiences. Implementing continuous and formative assessments provides regular feedback and helps track student progress over time, with an emphasis on performance-based assessments to ensure that students can demonstrate their competencies in authentic contexts. Moreover, the curriculum content should prioritize the practical application of language skills in real-world situations, utilizing multimedia resources to enhance the learning experience and provide diverse opportunities for language practice. Finally, effective implementation of competency-based language education requires well-trained teachers, thus ongoing professional development focusing on the use of CEFR standards, instructional strategies, and assessment methods is necessary. Furthermore, fostering collaboration and sharing best practices among educators and curriculum developers can continuously improve French language education.

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