

CEFR Implementation: Adapting to Learner Characteristics

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Abstract

Successful implementation of the CEFR framework requires adaptation to the characteristics of the target population. The CEFR framework was developed for populations with specific characteristics – educated adults with high literacy in their first language who need immediate integration into contexts where the target language is spoken. When implementing this framework for populations with different characteristics, a reconceptualization of expected outcomes and pathways to achievement is required.

This paper presents a conceptual analysis of the CEFR framework's applicability to minority children in Israel, illustrated through case studies of Arab, Druze, and Circassian learners. Elementary school students from these minority groups in Israel learning Hebrew as an additional language represent a unique case study for this issue. Understanding their characteristics is essential for successful implementation of the CEFR framework in Israel. Moreover, the Israeli case may serve as a model for understanding the need for adaptation to unique learner groups worldwide, emphasizing the importance of analyzing learner characteristics as a prerequisite for implementing any pedagogical reform.

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Introduction

In 2024, The Israeli Ministry of Education initiated a reform in Hebrew language instruction for non-Jewish minority school students whose first language is not Hebrew, and developed a new curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2024). This curriculum defines expected learning outcomes in terms of learner competencies, structured according to CEFR proficiency levels, and mandates instruction aligned with the action-oriented approach.

The competency-based framework for language acquisition centers on the learners and focuses on what they should be able to accomplish in real-life situations. The action-oriented approach views language primarily as a means of communication rather than an end in itself. Four core principles underlie the action-oriented approach: (1) the four communicative modes (reception, production, interaction, and mediation) rather than the traditional division (listening, speaking, reading, and writing); (2) product-oriented learning, in which each instructional unit results in a tangible outcome; (3) assessment and instruction based on real-life scenarios; and (4) learner autonomy, with students encouraged to be responsible for their learning (Council of Europe, 2023).

Learner characteristics are a central consideration in planning a language instruction program, one that cuts across all phases of planning and implementation, calling for establishing realistic objectives throughout the learning stages and when selecting the instructional approach. Disregarding learner characteristics, or treating them as secondary, may lead to program failure, even when objectives are clear and the instructional approach is well defined. This article argues that the Hebrew curriculum for minority students in Israel, while it clearly articulated the learning objectives and the instructional approach, gives insufficient attention to learner characteristics and their impact on the students' ability to learn Hebrew. The CEFR itself is explicitly designed to be flexible and adaptable to diverse populations, contexts, and literacy levels; the argument advanced here is therefore not a critique of the framework, but of the way it has been operationalized for this particular population. As the analysis below seeks to demonstrate, the curriculums' descriptors at the lower proficiency levels embed assumptions drawn from second-language and adult-learner contexts that do not fit minority children for whom Hebrew functions as a foreign language with no immediate, present need.

Minorities in Israel constitute approximately 20% of the country's population and include Muslim and Christian Arabs, Bedouins, Druze, and Circassians. Although greatly diverse, these groups share an increasing difficulty among younger generations across all groups in acquiring Hebrew (Tehawkho et al., 2020), as evidenced by their declining test scores (RAMA, 2024).

Understanding the shared characteristics of minority students in Israel and adapting instruction to these characteristics, could lead to significant improvement in outcomes. Attending to the specific characteristics of local learner populations is essential (Savski, 2021), as such adaptation enables bridging the gap between international standards and the unique abilities and needs of local learners (Uri, 2021). This article demonstrates this through an analysis of three groups of minority students learning Hebrew. While the focus is on the Israeli case, the insights are relevant to other countries facing similar challenges, emphasizing the importance of analyzing learner characteristics as a foundation for any educational reform.

The conceptual analysis methodology enables critical examination of the theoretical assumptions underlying the CEFR framework and evaluation of their relevance to the specific characteristics of minority learners in Israel. This article is a conceptual analysis rather than an empirical study: it does not report newly collected field data, and it makes no such claim. It draws on the existing research literature, on policy documents (the 2024 curriculum, RAMA assessment data, and Ministry of Education guidelines), and on the author's professional familiarity with the field, in order to test the fit between the framework's assumptions and the documented characteristics of these populations. A further distinction should be made explicit: the analysis does not conflate shortcomings in field-level implementation with flaws in the theoretical framework. The claim is that the CEFR is valid and flexible, whereas its application to a population of children learning a foreign language is what requires adaptation. The case studies of Arab, Druze, and Circassian students serve as illustrative profiles, built from existing sources and professional knowledge, to demonstrate how learner characteristics shape the implementation of international frameworks. This approach facilitates a deeper theoretical understanding of the gaps between the framework's foundational assumptions and the realities of diverse learner populations, providing a basis for principled adaptations.

The first part of this article presents the key learner characteristics that influence the acquisition of an additional language. The second part examines three groups of minority elementary school students in Israel learning Hebrew, aiming to highlight their shared characteristics. The third part explains how these characteristics affect language acquisition and proposes adaptations that policymakers and curriculum developers can continue to develop and refine within the CEFR framework in order to best help the students.

Learner characteristics that influence acquisition of a new language

General background and connection to the new language are the two categories that affect students' ability to learn a new language.

A. General background

Biological age

Age directly impacts learning. Younger students demonstrate higher levels of cognitive flexibility, allowing them to quickly absorb new information. However, as they have not yet reached the stage of formal operational thinking typical of adults, they are unable to hypothesize about imaginary situations, engage in abstract or complex reasoning, or understand theoretical relationships that are not anchored in concrete situations. This stage of cognitive development entails difficulty working with large numbers beyond their concrete experience, a limited capacity to engage with distant historical dates, partial comprehension of sophisticated humor that demands complex cognitive processing, and challenges in fully grasping criticism or implicit messages. During their elementary school years, students begin to develop basic planning and strategic abilities but still rely on tangible examples and struggle with theoretical concepts.

When students reach middle school and high school age, they begin to develop formal operational thinking characteristics of adult cognition. They acquire the ability to think abstractly, hypothetically, and systematically. At this stage, they can analyze theoretical situations, understand complex cause-and-effect relationships, and plan long-term strategies. This is also when metacognition, or the ability to reflect on one's own thinking processes and evaluate the quality of personal learning, emerges. High school students can understand sophisticated humor, criticism, and irony, work with abstract mathematical concepts such as

infinity or imaginary numbers and comprehend complex connections between historical events. However, their thinking may still, at times, be characterized by one-sidedness and relatively binary reasoning, and they may struggle to grasp uncertainty and the complexities of the real world.

Adult students develop more flexible thinking, which allows for uncertainty and contradictions. They can integrate different perspectives, understand that at times there are not always clear-cut answers, and cope simultaneously with emotional and cognitive complexity. Their ability to process information is grounded in rich life experience, enabling them to link new knowledge to existing knowledge in a more sophisticated way. However, they exhibit lower levels of cognitive flexibility than children, which may make it harder for them to acquire a new language or technological skills. They may also be less open to new opinions and to experiences in which they risk making mistakes.

A student's age affects the way a new language is acquired (Adar, 1981). Young children benefit from high brain plasticity, which allows them to absorb language patterns naturally through imitation and play, but they require a concrete approach that includes images, hands-on activities, and repetition. High school students can learn grammar systematically and understand abstract linguistic rules, yet they still tend to struggle with multilayered meanings and linguistic ambiguity. Adult learners possess rich life experience and well-developed analytical skills, which help them navigate complex environments despite a decline in cognitive flexibility. Contemporary accounts of age effects caution against reducing these differences to a single biological "critical period." Caldwell-Harris and MacWhinney (2023) note that although ultimate attainment tends to decline with age of acquisition, no genetic or neurobiological mechanism limiting language learning has been identified; younger learners' advantage rests substantially on contextual factors such as simpler input, social support, and more immediate rewards, while older learners benefit from drawing on existing knowledge. This matters for the present case because the age factor operates differently in foreign-language and second-language contexts. As Singleton (2003) argues, age may have a broad influence on second-language acquisition, but in foreign-language settings contextual factors moderate that influence and must be weighed carefully. The point is therefore not that younger is simply better, but that the conditions under which young minority learners

encounter Hebrew differ fundamentally from the immersion conditions that an early start is usually assumed to provide.

World knowledge

World knowledge refers to the general, cultural, and social information that students accumulate over the course of their lives and draw upon in the classroom. This knowledge spans a wide range of topics, from familiarity with social institutions, daily life practices, and cultural norms, to knowledge in areas of history, geography, science, and technology. World knowledge is acquired both through personal experiences and through exposure to information via formal education, media, and popular culture.

World knowledge influences the ability to acquire a new language because it determines the cognitive resources required for learning. When students with extensive world knowledge encounter familiar topics, situations, or contexts, they can focus on the required linguistic effort without being cognitively overloaded by the need to understand the content. In comparison, students with limited world knowledge struggle when both the language and the content are unfamiliar. For example, a student who is familiar with the process of opening a bank account can concentrate on learning the relevant words and expressions in Hebrew, while a student who has never been exposed to the banking system must simultaneously understand the process *and* the language, resulting in cognitive overload and making learning more difficult.

Learning habits

Learning habits are behavioral patterns, attitudes, and strategies that students develop over time to acquire new knowledge and skills. These habits include organizational skills such as time management and the ability to maintain concentration for extended periods, social skills such as independent work and teamwork, and attitudes such as openness to feedback and a willingness to cope with challenges. Learning habits are shaped by prior experiences, such as the learning and teaching environments that students have encountered, and the educational culture in which they were raised.

The presence or absence of learning habits has a direct impact on the acquisition of a new language, as language learning requires patience, perseverance, and the ability to cope with a gradual, long-term process. Students with positive learning habits understand that learning involves time and effort, and that they must do the assignments on their own. They do all the tasks, out of full awareness that only by doing the assigned work will they achieve their goal. In contrast, students without good learning habits, who have been taught to believe that the final product matters more than the process, do not truly learn. They quickly reach a point where they either give up on learning altogether or they begin to fall behind. For example, when asked to conduct a simulation, discussion, or conversation they will not engage; when working in pairs, they will split the tasks between them instead of collaborating; and in group work, they will let others do the work while their attention wanders elsewhere.

First language literacy

Literacy refers to the capacity to use language in complex cognitive tasks, including interpretation, reasoning, explanation, and calculation. These cognitive activities are expressed primarily through language, and language is manifested in words and linguistic structures.

Levels of first-language literacy have a decisive impact on the ability to acquire a new language (Olshtain, 2000). The more literate students are in their first language, that is, the more capable they are of using it for various cognitive activities, the better they will be able to function in a new language, provided they have the appropriate vocabulary and know the linguistic structures. If students cannot perform cognitive tasks in their first language, they will not be able to perform them in the new language, even if they already know the new vocabulary and are familiar with the relevant linguistic structures.

The following hypothetical example illustrates the impact of literacy on performing functions in a new language; it offered as a conceptual illustration rather than as observed data. Three Muslim middle school students are asked by their Hebrew teacher to explain why people fast during the month of Ramadan. The first student did not know the reason and therefore could not answer the question, even in Arabic, his first language. The second student knew the answer but could only answer in Arabic. While the third student struggled to provide a

coherent explanation, he was able to respond to a series of questions posed by the teacher. These three students differ in significant ways. The first lacks knowledge of the subject matter. The second possesses the relevant knowledge but his level of Hebrew proficiency does not suffice to express it in that language. The third both knows the answer and has sufficient proficiency in Hebrew, but is unable to give a coherent explanation, indicating a literacy-related difficulty.

B. Connection to the new language

Prior experience in language acquisition

Prior experiences of success or failure directly shape the motivation to continue learning. Students who have experienced success in the past develop self-confidence, belief in their abilities, and a positive attitude toward acquiring a new language, leading to greater motivation and a willingness to work harder. In contrast, students with negative experiences in acquiring a new language may develop a negative attitude toward the language and toward learning it; in some cases, they may even come to believe that they will never be able to master it.

Attitude toward the new language

Attitudes toward a new language can be based on viewing the language as a means for personal, professional, or academic advancement, support from the social and familial environment for learning, and general perceptions of the language and its speaking community. Such attitudes may also be influenced by political, social, or cultural aspects associated with the language and the country or countries where it is spoken.

These attitudes directly impact learning success and motivation levels (Adar, 1981). Students who perceive the language as a tool for advancement and enjoy support from those around them develop strong intrinsic motivation leading to greater investment and persistence. Conversely, students who do not see the value of acquiring the language, or who are surrounded by people with negative attitudes toward the language, tend to develop negative attitudes that could impede the learning process.

The role of the new language in students' lives

The role of language in students' lives addresses the distinction between second language and foreign language acquisition contexts. A second language is acquired through exposure and use both in formal educational settings and in natural contexts outside the classroom, while a foreign language is limited to exposure and use exclusively within formal educational frameworks (Brown & Lee, 2015). The distinction between second language and foreign language is not necessarily dichotomous, certainly not in Israel's complex reality, and is therefore better conceived as a continuum.

This distinction significantly influences the learning process (Golan Ben-Uri, 2023). When a language functions as a second language, a feedback loop emerges – formal classroom learning is applied in authentic contexts (during breaks, extracurricular activities, social media), and experiences outside the classroom enrich formal learning. This process accelerates language acquisition. In contrast, when a language remains foreign, practice opportunities are limited to the classroom alone, which may slow progress and affect proficiency levels (Cook, 2016).

The purpose and timeframe for using the new language

The Why and When refer to the reasons for learning the new language. Is there need for it immediately or are they learning it as a compulsory school subject for future purposes such as admission to academic studies or integration into the job market when they mature?

The Why and When significantly influence motivation and investment in learning. Students learning the new language for immediate use understand the necessity of its acquisition, see the immediate benefit from any improvement in their linguistic abilities, and can test their progress in real-life situations, which increases their learning motivation. However, those learning the new language for distant and vague future goals, or those studying it merely as a compulsory subject, may experience difficulty understanding the relevance of learning and struggle to remain motivated.

The educational framework in which the new language is learned

The educational framework refers to the nature of learning – whether voluntary or mandatory – and to the organizational structure in which it occurs. Are these students in a compulsory education system, moving from class to class throughout the day, or adults choosing to learn voluntarily in focused sessions?

The educational framework influences the emotional and motivational relationship learners develop toward the new language. Students learning in a mandatory framework may perceive the language as merely another subject among many, as a task imposed upon them. The frequent transitions between subjects – from mathematics to Hebrew to history – make it difficult to develop learning depth. In contrast, adults who choose to learn a language develop an entirely different relationship – the free choice creates a sense of ownership over the process, and extended sessions enable immersion in the language and the formation of a meaningful connection to it.

Hebrew-language studies in minority-sector schools in Israel Three very different minority groups have been chosen for this article. The underlying assumption is that great diversity will, in fact, highlight similarities between them.

Arab students, Jerusalem

Students from East Jerusalem belong to a population that transitioned from British to Jordanian rule in 1947 and subsequently to Israeli rule in 1967; they are permanent residents of Israel, but not citizens (Ramon & Lehrs, 2014). This complex political and social situation, which many East Jerusalem residents view as a violation of international law (Ronen, 2018), affects their attitudes toward Hebrew and the opportunities for its acquisition. The struggle for separate identity (Abbasi, 2013) continues to influence cultural and linguistic separation.

Arab students in East Jerusalem comprise approximately 40% of all students in the city and study in a separate education system. The educational framework is characterized by a traditional pedagogical approach based on frontal teaching, learning by rote, and testing. On

international assessments, these students' literacy achievements in Arabic, their mother tongue, are low.

Hebrew is taught as a separate subject, typically beginning in third grade, following initial exposure through songs in lower grades. Instruction focuses on text decoding and grammar exercises. Technology and interactive teaching methods are not integrated into the curriculum. Hebrew teachers are selected primarily based on language proficiency rather than specialized pedagogical training, and learning materials are not adapted to the language's place in students' lives.

For students in East Jerusalem, Hebrew functions as a foreign language rather than a second language (Golan Ben-Uri, 2024).² Students are not exposed to the language outside Hebrew classes – not in other subjects, during breaks, or in their social environment. Public services are available in Arabic, and the cultural sphere (television, social media, computer games) operates in Arabic or English. The absence of shared social frameworks with Hebrew speakers prevents natural exposure to and use of the language.

Students struggle to identify the relevance of learning Hebrew to their lives. While teachers present the language as a future tool for academic integration, employment, or accessing services, the students' familial and social environments send contradictory messages.

The combination of learning in a mandatory framework without supportive context, lack of natural language exposure, and low motivation leads to limited outcomes. Most students complete elementary school with basic technical reading ability but without functional communicative competence in Hebrew.

Druze Students, Isfiya

The Druze community comprises 1.5% of Israel's population. Druze are Israeli citizens and have an official "blood covenant" with the state, yet many Druzes feel discriminated against, especially since the Nation-State Law, was passed in 2018. The law downgraded Arabic from being an official language in Israel to being a language of "special status". This complexity

² This article deals with Arab students from East Jerusalem. Preliminary results of a study now in progress reveal that the situation in other parts of the country is similar

affects attitudes toward Hebrew – the state language in which they are supposed to be equal partners but do not feel as such.

Druze students study in state schools, often in all-Druze schools. The language of instruction is literary Arabic (Arabic is a diglossic language, with daily life conducted in colloquial Arabic). Exposure to Hebrew begins in kindergarten through a “Taste” program featuring songs and games, and it then advances gradually: the early grades are devoted to oral language and to building reading readiness and basic vocabulary, the systematic acquisition of reading and writing develops over the course of the first grades, and by the end of third grade students are expected to reach A1 proficiency. By “formal” learning we therefore mean the graded, assessed instruction of the language itself that consolidates in third grade, rather than the preparatory work of the earlier grades—learning does take place in first and second grade, and those years form the foundation on which later acquisition rests. Hebrew teachers demonstrate high language proficiency, and most receive supplementary training in teaching Hebrew as an additional language alongside their work. Learning materials combine traditional approaches with attempts at innovation.

For Isfiya students, Hebrew functions as a foreign language despite geographical and cultural proximity. While adults (parents, teachers) master Hebrew and use it in public spaces, students are not exposed to the language in their daily lives. The only exposure is passive – occasional hearing when Jews visit the village – but without genuine interaction. Students do not use Hebrew in social activities, digital media, or gaming, where English dominates. This paradox – adults who speak the language and children who do not use it – prevents natural intergenerational language transmission.

The intergenerational gap regarding Hebrew is reflected in how the older generation, having experienced the language's practical utility, views it as essential. The younger generation, which does not need it for its everyday life, believes one can manage without it and that English is preferable. A distinction should be drawn here between a present, lived need and a projected future one. For these elementary-school children, Hebrew carries no present need: the uses that do require it – employment, academic study, and public services-materialize only around the age of eighteen, with military service or academic studies. The need is thus

genuinely future rather than immediate, and a young child does not organize present motivation around who they will be a decade or later. The absence of immediate need and competition with English as a "global language" weakens learning motivation.

It is worth distinguishing here between a community's expressed preference and the present reality of its children's learning. Among the Druze, as among the Circassians, there is a clear communal wish for children to begin Hebrew early. Yet that wish does not establish that today's children acquire the language as earlier generations did. The conditions have shifted: learning has become more demanding for children everywhere, and in Israel Hebrew has moved, for this generation, from the status of a second language toward that of a foreign one, as English has taken its place in the young people's world. A substantial portion of Druze youth now believe they can manage without Hebrew altogether. Communal preference and the actual conditions of present-day learning are therefore two distinct things, and recognizing the gap between them is itself part of the case for adaptation.

In Hebrew assessments, Druze students from Isfiya manage to achieve slightly better results relative to other minority groups, though still below required standards. On international assessments, students' achievements in Arabic, their mother tongue, are low.

Circassian students, Kfar Kama

Students from Kfar Kama belong to the Circassian community, an ethnic group comprising 0.05% of Israel's population. The Circassians, a Muslim group, arrived from the Caucasus region in the 1870s and currently reside in two villages – Kfar Kama (exclusively Circassian) and Rehaniya (mixed – Circassian and Muslim Arabs). The community has preserved spoken Circassian, but as it is not a written language, there is no written literature. Additionally, Circassian culture emphasizes action over words.

The education system in Kfar Kama serves the Circassian community exclusively. In kindergarten, the official language is Circassian. Beginning in first grade, Hebrew is the language of instruction for all subjects. Until recently, students were required to learn to read and write in Hebrew, although they neither spoke the language nor had learned to read and write in their mother tongue. Hebrew was taught as a first language despite being a foreign language for the students, and they were assessed using the same language tests as native

Hebrew speakers. From first grade, students learn Arabic (for religious purposes), and from second grade, English. Formal Circassian studies begin only in fifth grade. At age 15, students transfer to an Israeli Hebrew-speaking high school outside the village, where they disperse among regular classes as a small minority.

For Kfar Kama students, Hebrew presents a paradox. It is the official language of instruction from first grade, yet in practice it remains a foreign language. There is no natural exposure to Hebrew outside the classroom – not at home, in the community, or in media, which they consume in English. Children do not hear stories in Hebrew, do not play in it, and do not use it in daily life. The only exposure occurs in class, in the formal context of learning academic content in a language they do not understand. The genuine need for the language emerges only at age 15 with the transition to high school, a transition accompanied by cultural and linguistic shock.

Adults in the village are proficient in Hebrew and regard it pragmatically as the state language. Teachers speak Hebrew at a high level but until recently taught it using methods intended for native speakers.

The result of this system was a consistent decline in Hebrew proficiency over the years. Students did not acquire the language, failed to learn academic content effectively, and did not develop study habits. Last year, a pilot program was initiated that recognizes Hebrew as an additional (i.e., both second and foreign) language and implements adapted teaching approaches in an attempt to change the situation.

Implications for CEFR framework implementation

The Israeli Ministry of Education's new curriculum is based on the CEFR framework. The program details required achievements for different educational stages and establishes the action-oriented approach as mandatory. To implement these goals, the Ministry is making selective changes to some exams and providing supplementary professional training for interested teachers. However, there is a lack of comprehensive preparatory work that would encompass professional training for all teachers, development of learning materials, and creation of aligned assessments as required (Khair & Shah, 2021). Above all, the entire

curriculum lacks reference to the unique characteristics of minority students in Israel: young age, limited world knowledge, basic learning habits, developing literacy in their mother tongue, negative prior experience with Hebrew acquisition, often negative attitudes toward the language, mandatory learning frameworks, short and fragmented lessons, Hebrew remaining a foreign language with distant prospects for natural use. These unique characteristics require specific adaptations as detailed below.

Required Outcomes – Competencies

Level A1 was designed for adults who must function immediately in a new linguistic environment, and the required outcomes were formulated accordingly. The competency list assumes that learners can perform similar functions in their mother tongue. However, elementary school students learning Hebrew as a foreign language differ from the original target population in three key aspects: First, they have no immediate need to use the new language; second, Hebrew is a foreign language for them rather than an environmental language; and third, some of the required competencies are not age-appropriate. At level A1, the gap between students' actual ability to use the language and the requirements is at its greatest.

The necessary adaptation involves two stages: First, deferring the competencies tied to immediate immersion in a Hebrew-speaking environment, such as navigating public spaces, checking prices, and completing official forms. These are not lowered or discarded but postponed to the stage at which they become relevant, when the learners are older and can address such contexts naturally rather than for survival. Second, adding competencies appropriate for young learners acquiring the language in a non-natural environment without an established literacy foundation in their mother tongue, such as functioning in their natural environments – school, family, and peer groups.

Content

Certain A1-level topics target adult learners' ability to manage in the real world, focusing on areas such as spatial orientation, prices, times, and professions. These are not relevant for young children, necessitating age-appropriate adaptation that recognizes learners' conceptual and social worlds.

It is recommended to replace adult-oriented topics with content from children's worlds, such as school interactions, relationships with friends and family, leisure activities, sports events, and extracurricular activities. At the same time, this could serve as an opportunity to enrich world knowledge in areas such as culture, science, sports, health, and more that will broaden their general education – a goal not relevant for adult learners who arrive with established world knowledge.

Teaching approach and methods

The action-oriented approach assumes language exposure in authentic situations, and when these are not possible, it proposes creating scenarios simulating possible realities – current or future. Young minority students in Israel lack exposure to Hebrew-speaking environments, making authentic learning impossible. Future scenarios such as job interviews or spatial navigation are not age-relevant, and ostensibly current scenarios, such as meetings with Israeli children, are unrealistic in their lived reality. Therefore, the action-oriented approach in its original form is unsuitable for this population.

Instead, it is recommended to develop a teaching approach based on action within students' natural environments. At this age, students can be engaged in role-play naturally and spontaneously, without need for complex explanations. Play at this age remains an integral part of their world and is natural and authentic. There is no need to instruct "imagine you're going to the mall" – simply play "mall."

Teaching methods implementing the action-oriented approach assume developed learning abilities: autonomous learning, taking responsibility for the learning process, and understanding educational needs. Young minority students in Israel have not yet acquired learning habits, their world knowledge is limited, and mother tongue literacy is in early developmental stages.

Therefore, teaching methods must accommodate these characteristics. This means instruction will occur in the classroom, in small increments with direct instruction, while instilling learning habits and expanding world knowledge alongside language acquisition. This

requires developing dedicated learning materials, appropriate teacher training, and strengthening mother tongue literacy.

The purpose of all these adaptations is to create a learning environment, albeit somewhat artificial, where students can function naturally, rather than trying to function artificially in an ostensibly natural environment. Thus students will acquire genuine competence to function in the language while simultaneously developing from the first moment a sense of competence that will enhance learning motivation. This is the most effective way to achieve successful language acquisition in this population.

Summary

The cases examined reveal a paradox: both absence of exposure (Jerusalem) or partial exposure (Isfiya) and full but unsuitable exposure (Kfar Kama) lead to failure. Israel's minority students are not unique. Similar groups exist worldwide: second-generation immigrant children learning their parents' language, indigenous peoples learning the national majority language, students in border regions learning the neighboring country's language, or adults who are products of an education system that neither fostered mother-tongue literacy nor properly taught the additional language. All share similar challenges of complex motivation, limited exposure, and gaps between formal requirements and life reality.

The starting point for successful implementation of an international framework such as the CEFR is the learners' life reality. This is not about technical translation but requires deep understanding of learner characteristics and precise adaptation of goals, approaches, and methods. Only such adaptation will lead to success. It should be emphasized that this is not a call to lower expectations. The target remains future mastery at B1 level and above; what is proposed is an adaptation of the path toward that same goal. Because survival-oriented competencies are not needed at elementary-school age, they can be resequenced and recontextualized – deferred and rebuilt on a broader foundation – rather than removed or diminished.

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