HELECs

Higher Education Language Educator Competences

A framework of competences for higher education language educators in Ireland

The HELECs Framework

Contents

Introduction

The Higher Education Language Educator Competences (HELECs) Framework has been developed by an inter-institutional team of language teachers and applied linguists in Ireland. The project was funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and supported by the four partner institutions, University College Cork (lead), Dublin City University, Maynooth University and Waterford Institute of Technology. The aims of the HELECs framework are:

- To work toward the goals of the national languages strategy, *Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education* (2017)*,* with particular reference to increasing capacity and enhancing the learning environment.
- To provide a tool for language educators and their managers with which they can self-assess and articulate their competences.
- To work toward a professionalisation of the field of language teaching and learning in higher education in Ireland.

In the following sections we outline our target audience for this framework, describe the development process, and provide the details of the framework including the competence identifiers, the competence domains and the competence descriptors.

Who is this framework for?

The HELECs Framework is primarily aimed at language educators. It is a tool that educators can use to assess and articulate their specific competences for the purposes of teaching language in the Irish higher education (HE) context. It recognises the multiplicity of language educators' roles and aims to be flexible and adaptable within this diversity. The HELECs Framework adopts an approach which encourages a positive attitude to self-assessment and professional development, similar to that outline in the Eaquals Teacher Development Framework (2020) and the European Language Portfolio (for details see https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/home). Educators can identify areas of competence that they would like to develop; this is supported by the bank of resources which is available on the project website, www.helecs.ie.

This framework offers management at Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) a tool to support the recruitment and progression of language teaching staff. Managers of language provision units can use it to survey the professional development needs of their staff as a whole and to support professional development activities appropriately.

As this framework is specific to the Irish higher education sector, we hope that it can inform policy relating to language education in HE. The national languages strategy, *Languages Connect* (2017)*, has played a significant role in the development of this framework as we have attempted to address some of the strategy's aims, particularly in relation to increasing language teaching capacity, diversifying the languages offered and the enhancement of the learning environment.

We contend that the use of frameworks of competence is beneficial for the professionalisation of language education but that the specificity of context is crucial for their usefulness. We hope that our project will inspire similar projects which may be developed for language education in different education systems, and, indeed, in different disciplinary contexts. We see the value of a context-specific approach to competence frameworks. We have made the process of our work visible and hope that it may result in similar research in other higher education contexts.

Approach

The HELECs (Higher Education Language Educator Competences) Framework is the only competence framework we are aware of which focusses on the specific context of higher-education language teaching and learning in the non-immersion setting. Our starting point for the framework is the National Forum's *National Professional Development Framework for All Staff who Teach in Higher Education* (2016). Our aim was to develop this framework to make it specific to the challenges of language education. We are also aware of many frameworks for language teachers which are generic, e.g., the EAQUALS Teacher Development Framework (EAQUALS, 2016), or specific to contexts other than the teaching of language in the non-immersion higher-education setting, e.g., *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (BALEAP, 2008). We contend that, although both higher education frameworks and language education frameworks are useful in their own right, an approach which combines both aspects of education would provide a more relevant and effective tool for the complex context in which we work. We also recognised that the complexity of the landscape in Ireland required considerable investigation in order to make the HELECs Framework inclusive and fit-for-purpose. The graphic below illustrates our approach. In the following paragraphs, we summarise the survey of existing frameworks we conducted and outline the empirical research we undertook to gain this necessary insight.
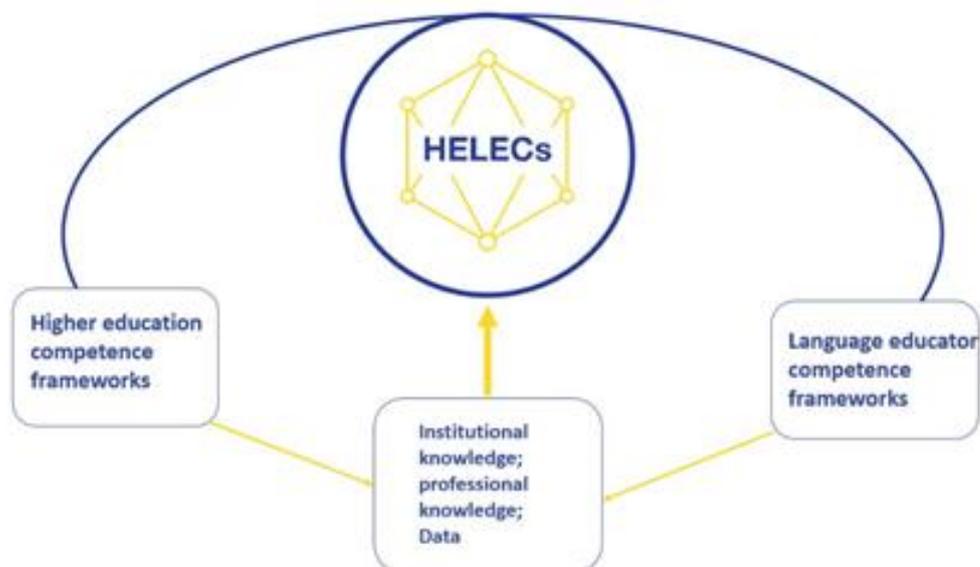
Existing frameworks

The project *Higher Education Language Educator Competences* (HELECs) has developed a competence framework for language educators in higher education in Ireland. In this section, we highlight existing competence frameworks for language education, and the extent to which the HELECs framework differs from established frameworks. In doing so, we assess the ability of these frameworks to account for the professional needs of language educators in the higher-education sector in Ireland.

We start by looking to a recent and impressive taxonomy elaborated by the project *Teachers Competences in Language Education* (2019), housed in the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), which reviewed 40 professional development frameworks in the field. The review is comprehensive and highlights the commonalities between the array of frameworks. However, it appears that none of the frameworks target higher-education language educators specifically. One exception is the *Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes* (BALEAP, 2008). However, the BALEAP document is concerned with the context of initial teacher education and English for Academic Purposes predominantly in the immersion setting. The HELECs project is concerned with the teaching of European, Asian, heritage and minority languages in the non-immersion setting of Irish HEIs. The authors of the 2019 ECML project advocate further research for a more specific and context-focussed approach when defining the descriptors of these competences. The need for this research was deemed 'urgent' (p. 33). The HELECs team has acted upon this urgent need by conducting a system-wide empirical study of higher-education language educators' experiences and needs.

Independent of the abovementioned review, the HELECs team conducted its own review of existing frameworks. This process confirmed that, with regard to a context-focussed approach to language educator competences, the tertiary sector is not specifically considered. Given the attention currently afforded to teaching and learning in higher education in Ireland, e.g. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education's Strategy (2019-21), the objectives of the national languages strategy, *Languages Connect* (2017) and the urgency in

addressing specific contexts in language education at European level (Bleichenbacher *et al*, 2019), the framework we present in the current report is clearly a timely initiative.

Our independent review of existing frameworks and the literature surrounding them led us to following conclusions:

1. Competences-based, professional development frameworks that have been devised for higher-education contexts do not target in any specific or clear way the case of language educators in HE.

2. Existing competence frameworks aimed at language educators do not take account of, or address, the specific context of those working in higher-education settings.

In response to this, the HELECs framework seeks to bridge these two collections of relevant frameworks and devise a framework that meets the empirically investigated needs of Irish higher-education language educators, while adhering to the values expressed in the *National Professional Development Framework for All Staff who Teach in Higher Education* (2016) in Ireland.

Scoping exercise

The project team includes language educators and applied linguists from four different HEIs (University College Cork, Maynooth University, Waterford Institute of Technology and Dublin City University) and four different languages (German, French, Italian and Irish) so that we have a general understanding of the processes of language provision in Irish HEIs. However, we are also aware that the language teaching context is complex and varied so that the need to survey the landscape emerged as a vital element of the scoping exercise for the project. Therefore, the initial phase of the project aimed to map the teaching and learning of languages in HE in Ireland. It became immediately apparent that structures and practices vary widely between and even within institutions. The official websites of the HEIs where languages are offered as well as the data gathered by Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) regarding the programmes on which languages are offered were interrogated. Team members investigated their own institutions to gather more granular data by accessing each HEI's publicly available information and augmenting this with their own institutional knowledge. Particular areas of complexity identified are described in the following:

The array of degree programmes and disciplinary areas within which languages are offered:
Many students who attend university in Ireland have come from the Irish post-primary system having completed their Leaving Certificate Examinations. The secondary and tertiary education sectors are closely linked in that many language programmes in HE require students to have a Leaving Certificate or equivalent qualification in that language. Irish is a compulsory subject at post-primary and, therefore, the most widely studied language at post-primary level; however, French is by far the most popular foreign language, followed by German and Spanish (see https://data.cso.ie/ for more details). There are no centralised data for the numbers of students studying languages at higher education but our experience suggests that the numbers largely reflect those at post-primary level. Chinese, German and Spanish are offered at *ab initio* level widely within the system. The majority of the degree programmes where languages can be taken as a major are Bachelor of Arts and Business programmes a number of which include a sojourn abroad. Arts programmes may have a specialisation. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of language specialist degree programmes, such as the BA in World Languages at UCC, while other such programmes have existed for over 20 years like the BA in Applied Languages at UL. French, German and Spanish are widely offered in a minor capacity and there are a number of languages are offered only as minors or

electives at degree level e.g., Dutch, Polish, Korean, Portuguese, Breton and Catalan. Extra mural programmes are also part of the system.

The schools, departments, disciplines and other units within which languages are housed:

According to publicly available information and HELECs team members' institutional knowledge, language provision units at the universities differ in how they are organised. However, at each university there is a School for Languages within which language, culture, linguistics, literature and other subjects are taught. At some universities, the individual languages within a School are designated subjects, disciplines, departments or sections. The School is the digital access point through which information on language teaching and learning is accessed and shapes the identity of language provision staff. At others, the Department of a specific language seems to be the stronger with the School being an umbrella for these. The position of the Irish language within the Irish education sector has traditionally been and continues to separate from the modern/foreign languages in their own School or Department. There are 11 Institutes of Technology in Ireland and currently two technical universities and these vary widely in where language is housed ranging from integration with other Arts/Humanities subjects like Law and Sociology to Schools of Business.

The plethora of designations for language educators:

The diverse and complex arrangement of language teaching at HE level in Ireland is further reflected in the categorisations used to describe the status and role of staff members both within and across institutions. In terms of categorisations, we have established 3 meta-cohorts based on our substantial data: academic staff, teaching-focussed staff and "other" staff. The "other" category here relates predominately to staff who are currently pursuing their doctoral studies and those being paid hourly, on an occasional/part-time basis etc.

In many HEIs, language is taught predominantly by academic staff members whose research interest may lay in literature studies, cultural studies, translation or similar fields. The range of labels associated with the academic hierarchy is more homogenous and clearly delineated within each HEI but still differs somewhat across the system (e.g., Lecturer/Lecturer above the bar/Assistant Professor) although they are clearly aligned.

The second category we identified was that of teaching-focussed staff. The labels and specifications assigned to these roles at the various HEIs exhibit a high degree of heterogeneity across the system. These include "teaching assistant", "university tutor" and "college language teacher" to "lector", "language instructor/assistant", and "language demonstrator". At some HEIs in the system language teaching is supported by language teaching roles which are funded by external organisations e.g., the German Academic Exchange Service, the Confucius Institute, the Catalan Government in order to deliver on their language teaching provision alongside the cohort of contracted university staff.

The "other" category of staff has been identified across the system and relates to those staff members without a precarious contractual relationship with the university for language teaching purposes. This relates hourly-paid staff members, occasional staff members, PhD students, post-doctoral researchers and research assistants. This role may be the entry point for individuals wanting to pursue language teaching at HE level as their career.

The diverse qualifications of language educators and the disciplines in which they were awarded these qualifications:

 In examining the educational profile of language educators within each of the three categories, clear differences and concentrations of disciplines occur. While the vast majority of teaching-focussed staff hold Bachelor-level qualifications in the languages they teach, Masters-level qualifications are more varied relating to, for example, Applied Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies and Education. Just under half of teaching-focussed staff in our sample already hold or are pursuing PhDs with the majority in the area of Literature. Turning to academic staff the large majority hold a doctorate in Literary/Cultural Studies, followed by those with a small minority with doctorate in Applied Linguistics. This suggests that language teaching is not just limited to those academic staff members with training and/or interest in language teaching as an area of specialism and research.

Data collection

Data collection for this project is concerned with exploring the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the competences of HE language educators. The primary focus here is on language educators themselves as they are best placed to identify the competences that they have already developed and aspire to develop further. The team interviewed a total of 19 language educators from the four project partner institutions. The range of participants' role designations is worth noting. A total of eleven different titles were captured.

A further method used in the exploratory phase of the study was the focus-group interview with language students. These focus-group interviews were also conducted by team members from an institution other that the students' own in order to avoid any conflict of interests or indeed risk of skewing the data. One focus group of up to five language students was conducted at each of the partner HEIs and students were invited to reflect on their experiences of language teaching and learning in HE as well as their perceptions of language educators' competences.

The third phase of the study was a questionnaire which was distributed nationally through mailing lists, social media and professional contacts. We received almost 80 responses. It is not possible to calculate precisely what percentage of the overall language educator staff this represents as there is no centralised data available on this. However, the data from this survey again reinforced the diversity of the community and provided valuable data on the competences that educators exercise within their role as well as the professional development activities that they undertake.

Furthermore, the Team held a discussion forum comprising colleagues from across the HE system where the project was presented, and participants offered feedback on the domains, identifiers and descriptors of the framework. A total of 34 language educators from 10 different HEIs registered for the event. We incorporated elements from the discussion into the refinement of the framework.

Competence Identifiers

Based on these reviews of existing frameworks and empirical research, the HELECs Team recognized the need for differentiation within the competences achievable for language educators. Moreover, a strength of the HELECs Framework is its close relationship to the language education context of higher education in Ireland. The Competence Identifiers we have devised relate to the roles and responsibilities of language educators which were uncovered during our empirical research. As a result, we do not necessarily view this as a progressive model. For example, a lecturer operating within the Practitioner Identifier may not aim to become an expert in language education as their research focus may be in another area such as literary or cultural studies. However, it is important to emphasise that the core competences of the Practitioner Identifier are contained within Expert Identifier which are in turn contained within the Leader Identifier as illustrated in the figure below:

Leader — Contributes to the theory and practice of language education. Leads innovation

Expert — Designs and delivers language curricula. Supports practitioners

Practitioner — Delivers language courses. Implements curricula

In the following sub-sections, we describe each identifier in more detail. Next we outline the competence descriptors associated with these identifiers within each of the competence domains.

Practitioners

Practitioners deliver language teaching at various proficiency levels, according to the needs of their unit. They are familiar with a range of approaches, methods and techniques for language teaching and apply these in their language classrooms. Practitioners follow curricula which have been designed by others for the courses that they teach. They are not responsible for the development of the curricula nor for the design of the assessments, except where assessment is used for or as learning within the classroom context. Practitioners have broad-ranging skills that they develop within a teacher education programme or professional development activities, or through mentoring. Their competences are focussed on the delivery of language teaching in the classroom and the related preparation.

Experts

Experts have the competences of the Practitioner Identifier as a baseline. They are experienced language educators with broad knowledge of the field of language teaching, learning and assessment. Experts design, develop and revise language curricula. They are typically coordinators of language modules who support and facilitate the educators that teach on that course. Experts actively seek out new and innovative ways of teaching language in HE and are up to date with developments in the field. Experts mentor less-experienced colleagues and communicate the goals of language learning to colleagues and students alike.

Leaders

Leaders have the competences of Practitioners and Experts as a baseline. Leaders go beyond the teaching of language in their context and seek to contribute to the body of knowledge on language education in HE, and to create new opportunities for language education within their HEI and beyond. Leaders are aware of the broader context regarding policy, theory and practice of HE language education. They are motivated to improve and innovate on a national and international scale.

Competence Domains

The seven competence domains of the HELECs Framework were identified through the review of relevant competence frameworks and an analysis of the HE language education context as outlined above. Five of these domains (professional knowledge, digital capacity, professional communication & cooperation, professional values & identity and the self) reflect those outlined in the National Forum's *National Professional Development Framework for All Staff who Teach in Higher Education* (2016)*.* Two further domains were identified which are not encompassed by those five. We contend that the competences related to language and communication as well as metalinguistic and (inter)cultural understanding are of utmost importance to language educators in HE contexts.

The above graphic illustrates the domains of competences which comprise the HELECs Framework. We are aware that none of these domains can exist in isolation as many of the competences described are interdependent or indeed somewhat overlapping. However, it is useful to catalogue them in this format so that the framework is comprehensive without losing clarity. In the following sections we outline the specificity of each with regard to the HE language teaching context and elaborate on the detailed descriptors in each domain and within the Competence Identifiers of Practitioner, Expert and Leader.

The Self

 The HELECs project's data suggests that language educators in HE recognise the affective and personal nature of language teaching. Key words derived from educator and student interviews, such as *passion, enthusiasm, caring* and *encouragement* as well as *anxiety* and *(de)motivation*, highlight the deeply personal nature of language teaching and learning in HE. We highlight in this domain the complexity of a plurilingual identity and the relevance of this for language teaching. From our data and personal experience of language education in HE, we are aware that educators have diverse relationships to the target language and its culture(s). Our questionnaire data showed that just over half of our respondents (n=44) identified as native speakers of the language that they teach and 17% (n=13) of respondents identified themselves as native speakers of more than one language.

The domain of The Self emphasises a language educator's competences regarding their awareness of their own personal characteristics and attitudes, including their personal relationship to the target language and culture(s), which may influence their effectiveness in language teaching.

The Practitioner Identifier contains competence descriptors relating to a language educator's fundamental awareness of their own personal characteristics, their ability to reflect on these attributes, and the effect they might have on their teaching. A language educator's ability to reflect on this experience is vital to the development of their teaching practice. Central to a language educator's teaching practice is also their relationship to the target language and its culture(s), and their own identity as a plurilingual individual. Within the Expert Identifier, we recognize an educators' ability to articulate their language education philosophy based on their own experiences, and an expert's role in developing and encouraging this reflection in less-experienced colleagues. We highlight also the competences an expert has as representative of the target discourse community, its language and culture(s). In the Expert Identifier, we also note the importance of an awareness of the emotional factors associated with language learning and teaching. These may be particularly influential when it comes to designing and developing curricula and lessons. In the Leader Identifier, the competences refer to a broader understanding of the personal attributes and how these fit in with the contextual and theoretical contexts. The ability to promote this type of personal reflection is also of great importance.

Practitioner	Expert	Leader
Has an awareness of personal characteristics that make a good language educator.	Can articulate their language education philosophy and approach.	Can contextualise their personal language education philosophy within institutional and disciplinary contexts.
	Reflects on their role as a representative of the target language and culture(s), particularly in the non-immersion setting.	
Reflects on their own prior learning and how it affects them as a language educator.		Can relate their language education philosophy referencing relevant educational theory.
	Is aware of the impact of affective factors, such as motivation, anxiety and empathy, in language learning and language teaching in HE.	
Reflects on a. their relationship to the target language b. their relationship to the target-language culture(s) c. their plurilingual and pluricultural identities and how these impact their teaching practices.	Encourages less experienced educators to reflect on a. their relationship to the target language b. their relationship to the target-language culture(s) c. their plurilingual and pluricultural identities and how these impact their teaching practices.	Promotes reflective practice as a core activity of HE language teaching.

Professional values & identity

The domain of professional identity and values comprises the competences that a language educator has which enable them to reflect on their disciplinary and professional identities. Our research has demonstrated the diversity of roles and responsibilities of language educators in HE: our empirical research captured a wide array of job titles for language educators in various HEIs across the system. This highlights the particular importance of a language educator's ability to develop their own identity within the institutional and disciplinary context. In addition, a significant part of a language educator's identity is bound to their role as plurilingual individuals operating within a multilingual context. A language educator is *themself* a representative of a target language user. As representatives of this identity for their students, a language educator must reflect on this and also promote these social values within their institution and beyond. As such language educators play an important role in the development of these values and identities in their students, and in education and society in general. Key competences in this domain include critical reflection, evaluation of their own and others' teaching practices, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the promotion of disciplinary values.

The Practitioner Identifier comprises core competence descriptors which allow language educators to develop their language educator identity through reflective practice and professional development. This identifier also includes the practitioner's understanding of their role within their institution and their ability to develop a professional development learning plan. The ability to maintain and develop their own target-language proficiency, particularly in the non-immersion setting, is also important within the Practitioner Identifier. In the Expert Identifier, a more advanced understanding of the role of language education in itself in HE can be demonstrated. The Expert Identifier also comprises descriptors which outline competences relating to more focussed and structured professional development. It describes competences that allow a language educator to promote language awareness and plurilingualism within the institution. As previously mentioned, the Leader Identifier contains the competences described in the Practitioner and Expert Identifiers. In this way, the understanding of language education in HE evolves into a contribution to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning of languages while the ability to engage with professional development is augmented by a promotion of these values within the discipline as well as the promotion of language learning and the value of plurilingualism in society.

Practitioner	Expert	Leader
Can demonstrate an awareness of their role and responsibilities as a language educator in HE.	Understands the role of language education within Higher Education.	Contributes to the scholarship of language teaching and learning in Higher Education.
Develops reflective practice which incorporates student feedback and input from more experienced colleagues.	Develops a reflective practice which incorporates peer-to-peer evaluation.	Promotes a culture of PD in language learning and teaching in HE.
Develops a reflective, evidence-based professional development learning plan.	Can identify and avail of structured pathways through mandatory and credited CPD programmes.	Promotes language education and plurilingualism in all sectors of society.
Recognises the importance of maintaining and developing their own language proficiency.	Increases the visibility of languages in HE institutions.	Creates and promotes opportunities for colleagues to maintain and develop their language proficiency.
	Helps to establish a culture of plurilingualism in the institution.	
	Supports colleagues in maintaining and developing language proficiency.	

Professional communication and cooperation

The HELECs project has recognised the diversity in language education in Irish HE regarding the languages taught, the structure of language education units and the roles of language educators within their institutions. Communication between these individuals and units is essential to the development of practices within units and across the system. Communication and cooperation among this disparate group may also lead to a further professionalisation of the discipline of language teaching in higher education, whereby language educators can interact with colleagues to better conceptualise the role of language educator in HEIs. The domain of Professional Communication and Cooperation emphasises the importance of an individual language educator's competences in exchanging ideas on best practice and fostering communities of language practitioners within the discipline of language education.

Key competences in this area include networking, written/verbal/visual communication and dissemination of best practice. This domain concentrates on the skills and attitudes that allow an educator to engage with language education-specific professional communication and cooperation.

The Practitioner Identifier in this domain comprises curiosity about other educators' approaches and the ability to exchange ideas informally on teaching practice as a core competence for all language educators. In the Expert Identifier, we include the participation in inter-institutional exchanges in terms of their personal connections to language educators outside of their home HEI and through participation in communities of practice for the language they teach, or for a specialist area of teaching such as business language. In the Leader Identifier, competences have a wider scope and involve the contribution a language educator can make to the discipline of language education in HE through the development of inter-disciplinary programmes, the dissemination of good practice, contribution to language policy be it within their institution or on a national level, and the establishment and development of communities of practice. This category also comprises the competences required to use international connections to promote language education in Ireland.

Practitioner	Expert	Leader
Demonstrates curiosity about language teaching practices of other language educators.	Exchanges ideas on language teaching practice with other language educators **outside** of their institution e.g., by attending and organising workshops or seminars.	Collaborates with experts in other domains to develop subject-specific language programmes.
Informally exchanges ideas on language teaching practice with other language educators **within** their institution.	Participates in teaching and learning communities relating to the language they teach.	Disseminates good practice in language education (e.g., professional and research conference presentation, published teaching material, research papers).
	Mentors (formally or informally) less experienced language educators.	Contributes to the development of language policies.
		Develops teaching and learning communities and collaborate with colleagues in other institutions and organisations in language education.
		Exploits international HE educational connections to promote language learning and intercultural communication competences.

Professional knowledge

This domain emphasises the importance of approaches to language teaching, learning and assessment in the HE context. Our experiences as language educators and researchers have demonstrated that there are constant developments in our knowledge of language pedagogical practice. Language education is an extremely complex process which requires high levels of learner engagement both in classroom activities and in autonomous learning. Professional knowledge in language education supports an active student role in the learning process, moving toward a partnership in the language teaching and learning process, essential in the higher education environment. Planning, designing, and implementing creative and innovative language teaching approaches at various levels of the curriculum requires a range of knowledge and skills of language educators. Our data suggests that language educators engage with this knowledge in formal and informal professional development activities.

The focus in this domain is on the pedagogical knowledge and skills of a language educator in relation to the fundamental principles of language teaching and learning.

As can be seen from the Practitioner Identifier, we outline core competences that are essential for any educator to teach in a language classroom. In this category of competences, we have identified five descriptors which relate to the knowledge and skills a language educator needs to deliver language teaching. This includes relevant knowledge of approaches to language education, managing and delivering language teaching, and the provision of feedback. The Expert Identifier includes these core competences. However, expert competences also extend to the knowledge of the design of these activities in terms of the development of resources, materials, lesson plans, curriculum and assessment. A more in-depth knowledge of the CEFR is also required to align assessment (and by extension teaching) with proficiency levels as well as knowledge of other related frameworks. Within the Leader Identifier, the competences relate to a critical engagement with knowledge in language education. In this identifier, competences allow a language educator to evaluate language teaching approaches and drive enhancement of language teaching, learning and assessment within their institution and beyond.

Practitioner	Expert	Leader
Is familiar with and can apply language teaching approaches in line with the aims and objectives of the curriculum.	Can evaluate available language teaching resources for suitability in the HE language classroom.	Critically engages with the latest developments in the theory and practice of language teaching, learning and assessment.
	Can develop language teaching materials and activities for use in the classrooms.	
		Can contribute to the design and delivery of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
	Can design lesson plans for language teaching in HE.	
Can plan and sequence of language activities in the HE classroom to achieve the aims and objectives of the curriculum.	Can investigate learners' need for purposes of lesson and syllabus design and delivery.	Critically engages with the latest developments in assessment design and practices in line with the CEFR.
	Design syllabus by incorporating learners' aims for language use in the target context and learners' previous experiences of language education.	
Can provide appropriate feedback to support student learning.		Can share and use frameworks as a means of informing institutional networks, policy, materials developers, evaluators, teacher trainers, test developers, etc.
Is familiar with the CEFR and its relevance for the HE context.	Can develop assessment for/as/of learning.	
Can manage language classroom dynamics and diversity in the classroom.	Can identify HE learners' proficiency level according to the CEFR.	Can advance professional knowledge of HE language education in a national and international context.

Digital competences

Language teaching is necessarily a multi-modal process requiring learners to exercise the skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, interaction and mediation. Technology has long played a central role in language education and today HE language educators must continually develop their own digital skills create affordances for language learning through digital tools, such as, social media, online language exchanges and target language materials. The domain focusses on the development of personal confidence and professional competence in using digital skills for language learning, teaching and assessment. The domain also encourages the identification of opportunities for technology to support and empower language learners in higher education. Digital tools and media offer considerable potential for the enhancement of the language learning experience. However, we are convinced that these can only be exploited appropriately by a language educator with relevant competences in all the domains. Digital competences for teaching languages cannot replace, for example, the pedagogical skills, subject knowledge or values of a language educator. We are aware that the DigiCompEdu Framework (Redecker, 2017) outlines varied competences for educators in all levels of the education system and with respect to all disciplines. Here, we concentrate on those competences that are specific to language education in higher education.

At their core, competences for this domain focus on the ability to integrate digital tools into the classroom to support and enhance the learning experience. Within the Practitioner Identifier, digital competences are those that allow an educator to facilitate students' language learning and related soft skills such as teamwork and the development of digital literacies. In the Expert Identifier, the focus is on the design and development of digital materials, activities and assessment which support language learning and facilitate learner autonomy. In addition, the expert category entails knowledge of the principles of designing language provision using online and blended approaches. In the Leader Identifier, an educator can contribute to language education through digital learning in a broader sense. In this category, an educator may create online and blended modules or contribute to the digital knowledge of language educators. A leader also has the knowledge and skills required to take a critical approach to such innovations.

Practitioner	Expert	Leader
Can use digital tools as part of the HE language lesson.	Can identify and adapt existing relevant digital content for use in the language classroom.	Can develop online/blended modules for language learning integrating principles of, for example, Universal Design for Learning.
Can use digital tools for communicating with HE language students.	Can adapt, design and develop language learning activities and materials for online and blended learning.	
Can assign digital language learning activities for students to work on outside of the language classroom.	Can use technology for assessment and feedback as/of/for learning.	Can contribute to HE language educators' digital knowledge and skills on a national level through research dissemination, training and/or the creation of OERs.
Can assign digital language learning activities for collaborative student work (teamwork, group projects, etc.).	Can curate digital spaces for the purposes of language learning in HE.	Can critically evaluate and apply current approaches in online/blended HE language teaching, learning and assessment.
	Can exploit various approaches to online/blended learning to enhance language curricula and foster language learner autonomy.	
	Can use digital tools to enhance student engagement in synchronous and asynchronous language learning.	
	Can demonstrate knowledge of current developments in online/blended HE language teaching, learning and assessment.	

Language and communicative competence

A language educator in HE needs specific communicative competences to create a meaningful learning environment for their students. The national languages strategy *Languages Connect* advocates for the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001, 2018) as a standard in the HE language teaching, learning and assessment. We, therefore, refer to this extensive framework to characterise the language proficiency of a language educator. However, these communicative competences when applied to the HE language classroom require specific skills to support learner communication and language acquisition (for further detail and discussion of this see, for example, Riordan 2018). Therefore, we highlight skills that are specific to the HE language classroom. We recognise that language educators in HE in Ireland comprise colleagues who identify as native speakers as well as those who identify as non-native speakers of the language that they teach. We view the development and maintenance of language proficiency as vital for both of those groups.

In the practitioner Identifier, we do not provide a specific level of language proficiency. We are aware that there are significant differences in the needs of the language provision unit, particular target language and the proficiency of the learners being taught. We do, however, encourage the language units to discern a minimum level that is clearly delineated and relevant to the learning needs of the students in question. Nonetheless, the Practitioner Identifier highlights some aspects of language and communicative competence that are crucial to the educators' ability to communicate in the target language to support student learning. The Expert Identifier entails a linguistic proficiency descriptor of CEFR level C1 (or equivalent) as a minimum. In this identifier, there are also descriptors which relate to the educators' ability to analyse the target language with respect to appropriateness of target-language material and tasks for the purposes of supporting student learning. This ability to evaluate language difficulty from the perspective of the learner group requires a substantial sensitivity to the target language and to the learners' proficiency. The Leader Identifier takes these core language and communicative competences further in that it refers to the educator's ability to act as a role model for communicative competences not only for the learners but also for colleagues within an inclusive and supportive environment.

Practitioner	Expert	Leader
Can demonstrate a target-language proficiency at a CEFR level (or equivalent) appropriate to the needs of their teaching duties.	Can demonstrate a minimum target-language proficiency of CEFR level C1.1 (or equivalent) in all skills.	Acts as a role model for language educators' communicative competence.
Can model good phonological control using appropriate intonation, and articulate individual sounds clearly.	Can use the target language to explain difficult concepts to learners.	Creates an inclusive and supportive target-language environment for students and colleagues.
Can understand learners' difficulties with specific target-language phenomena.	Can discern if target-language use is too easy or too difficult for their learners to understand.	
Can model para-linguistic features of the target language (gesture, facial expression, intonation etc.).	Can discern if a target-language task (essay question, summary, etc.) is too easy or too difficult for their learners to complete.	
Can use the target language effectively in the HE language classroom.		
Can exercise codeswitching and code-mixing in the classroom in line with the aims and objectives of the language class.		

Meta-linguistic and (inter)cultural competence

This domain emphasises the importance of understanding language and culture at a meta-level and instilling such knowledge in students. Language educators need not only to be highly proficient in the target language and have experience of the target language culture(s); they also need sophisticated knowledge of the linguistic and cultural phenomena and to be able to articulate these to support student learning. The domain of metalinguistic and (inter)cultural competence emphasises a language educator's ability to reflect consciously upon the nature of the target language and culture in order to facilitate student learning. Key skills for language educators in this domain include the ability to manipulate the structural features of language, as well as communicate and compare cultural conceptualisations within and between home and target-language cultures.

The Practitioner Identifier comprises the core competences that are essential for any educator to engage with the target language, target culture(s) and interculturality in the language classroom. In this category of competences, we have identified four descriptors including knowledge of the fundamental structures of the target language and the metalanguage to articulate these to students, analysis of texts linguistically and culturally, awareness of beliefs, values and behaviours of the target-language culture(s), and the use of cultural artefacts to foster intercultural awareness. The Expert Identifier includes these core competences. However, expert competences also extend to knowledge of complex linguistic, discourse and genre features of the target language, and the ability to analyse and interpret cultural phenomena to support curriculum design. The Leader Identifier relates to having a critical perspective on meta-concepts which influence higher-education language teaching, learning and assessment.

Practitioner	Expert	Leader
Has knowledge of the fundamental structures of the target language.	Has knowledge of the complex linguistic structures of the target language.	Demonstrates critical perspectives on meta-concepts such as standard language, native speakerism, cultural essentialism, and intercultural communication, and their influence on language teaching and learning in HE.
Has knowledge of metalanguage relating to morphology, phonetics, pragmatics, semantics and syntax of the target language.	Has knowledge of the discourse features and text genres of the target language.	
Can analyse texts linguistically and culturally in the target language.	Can analyse phenomena from varied target language domains (such as business, technology, sociology).	
Is aware of beliefs, values and behaviours of the target-language culture(s).	Can analyse and interpret beliefs, values and behaviours of the target-language culture(s), and in relation to the home culture(s).	
Can use cultural artefacts from the target-language culture(s) in the language classroom to foster intercultural awareness.	Can develop curricula which foster students' intercultural awareness and sensitivity, for example, in preparation for a sojourn abroad or virtual exchange.	

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