

Teaching Materials for Plurilingual Practices: Insights from Austrian Vocational Schools

Michaela Rückl

University of Salzburg, Austria

Abstract

This article explores how plurilingualism is reshaping educational language policy by shifting the focus from monolingual proficiency to an integrative model that draws on learners' full linguistic and cultural repertoires. European language policies and perspectives are described, highlighting goals such as promoting global citizenship through plurilingual education. Specific attention is placed on Austria's innovative curriculum for vocational schools, which embeds plurilingual, pluricultural, and transversal competences in the new subject "International Communication with Focus Language" (InCo). Preliminary findings from a pilot study emphasize the value of activating learners' linguistic resources, incorporating real-life tasks, and using AI tools to enhance foreign language enjoyment and learner engagement. The article presents the framework for the design of the InCo curriculum and descriptions of instructional materials that place a strong emphasis on cognitive activation and foreign language enjoyment with tasks that encourage learner reflection, knowledge transfer, and a sense of achievement.

Keywords: Educational language policy, plurilingual approaches, evidence-based development of teaching materials

Background

Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism represent a paradigm shift in language education, moving beyond traditional monolingual frameworks to embrace the dynamic interplay of linguistic and cultural resources. This article examines the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of plurilingualism in educational language policy and its implementation in Europe in general and Austria in detail. Austria's innovative response to the plurilingual global trend is exemplified in the development of a new subject "International Communication with a Focus Language" (InCo) for vocational secondary schools. This curriculum integrates plurilingual, pluricultural, and transversal competences, preparing students for multilingual professional and personal contexts. A pilot study conducted in Austrian schools highlights the effectiveness of this approach, revealing that tasks emphasizing real-life communication, cognitive activation, and AI integration significantly enhance foreign language enjoyment and learner engagement.

The article concludes by discussing the implications of these preliminary

findings for future research and policy development, advocating for sustained collaboration among educators, policymakers, and researchers to scale plurilingual education across diverse contexts. By bridging theory and practice, this work offers a roadmap for creating inclusive, future-ready language curricula that reflect the realities of our increasingly interconnected world.

Reflections on the role of plurilingualism in educational language policy

Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism mark a significant shift in language education, moving away from the traditional focus on isolated, monolingual competences toward an integrative approach. This perspective emphasizes the dynamic use of an individual's entire linguistic and cultural repertoire to negotiate meaning across diverse contexts. While multilingualism refers to the coexistence of multiple languages within a society, institution, or individual—often viewed as separate systems—plurilingualism highlights the interconnected and flexible use of these languages by an individual. Similarly, multiculturalism describes the coexistence of distinct cultures, whereas pluriculturalism focuses on how individuals dynamically combine and draw on elements from different cultures (Council of Europe, 2001).

Multilingualism thus is often associated with societal or institutional contexts, where different languages are used in specific settings, such as official documents or community interactions. It does not necessarily imply that individuals are proficient in multiple languages. In contrast, plurilingualism is centered on the individual's ability to integrate and use partial competences in various languages to navigate social interactions. Plurilingual competence is understood as “the capacity to successively acquire and use different competences in different languages, at different levels of proficiency and for different functions” (Council of Europe, 2007, p. 116). For example, a plurilingual person might switch between languages or dialects depending on the audience and context, leveraging their linguistic and cultural resources in a cohesive manner.

In educational contexts, plurilingualism is viewed not only as an objective but also as a foundational condition for successful language teaching (Council of Europe, 2022; Hu, 2004). Each student brings a distinct profile—age, gender, cognitive strengths (whether broad intelligence or a particular flair for languages) and socioaffective factors (motivation, emotions, attitudes, personality traits). On top of this, they contribute their home languages and any additional languages they already know. Far from being mere background knowledge, this prior experience serves both as point of departure and the instructional goal of activating and reinforcing each learner's individual linguistic repertoire to enhance their confidence and maximize the effectiveness of their language learning.

Hence, plurilingual education aims to foster interlingual transfer, language awareness, and intercultural understanding by encouraging learners to reflect on and compare languages and cultures. This approach values partial competences and promotes the use of real-life tasks to build sustainable linguistic and cultural skills. It also integrates learners' developmental trajectories, allowing them to draw on their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge and experience (Schröder-Sura, 2018). By adopting plurilingual and pluricultural methodologies, education

can better prepare learners to participate in a globalized and linguistically diverse world. Despite its potential, the implementation of plurilingual approaches faces challenges, as traditional curricula and teaching materials often prioritize singular language proficiency.

Language policy in Europe

Language policies in Europe and the United States reflect divergent historical trajectories and sociopolitical priorities, yet both are increasingly attentive to the potential of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as educational assets. In Europe, plurilingual ideals are enshrined in supranational frameworks such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001, 2018) and the European Commission's multilingual strategy, which aim to cultivate citizens capable of operating across linguistic boundaries for enhanced social cohesion, economic mobility, and democratic engagement (European Commission, 2021). Conversely, the United States had traditionally foregrounded English-only ideologies, with bilingual education often framed instrumentally as a bridge to English monolingualism rather than as an enduring multilingual competence (Crawford, 2020; Wiley & Lukes, 2019) with gradual shifts toward valuing multilingualism and heritage language maintenance (Aguirre & Chou, 2024; Escamilla et al., 2021). Some current U.S. initiatives, such as the Seal of Biliteracy (Aguirre & Chou, 2024; Escamilla et al., 2021) and Dual Language Immersion (Farley, 2022; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2019), share key features with European plurilingual policies, including an emphasis on learner autonomy, intercultural competence, and the integration of learners' home languages as cognitive resources (Saunders, 2022).

Language policy in Europe: A commitment to plurilingualism

Europe's commitment to plurilingualism and pluriculturalism is manifested in both policy frameworks and classroom practices. The Council of Europe's CEFR (2001) originally introduced the notion of a plurilingual competence profile for individuals, which was expanded in the 2018 *Companion Volume* to include detailed scales that valorize partial competences, mediation, and flexible language use (Council of Europe, 2018). These descriptors underpin national curricula and teacher training programs across member states, embedding tasks that require learners to negotiate meaning across languages, to mediate cultural differences, and to adapt register and style for diverse audiences (Favretti, 2023; Kostouli, 2020).

At the European Union level, the Barcelona Objective "first language(s) plus two,"—advocating mastery of at least two languages besides the mother tongue(s)—remains a guiding principle (Europäische Kommission, 1996, and more recent resolutions made by the European Parliament, 2009, 2018), reinforced through Erasmus+ funding for transnational teacher exchanges and professional development (Müller & Höhne, 2023). The *European Centre for Modern Languages* (ECML) offers research-informed toolkits for integrating plurilingual pedagogies, such as portfolio-based assessment and project-based learning that valorizes community languages (ECML, 2024). To counter the widely held view that learning just one foreign language, as long as it is English, is sufficient, the Council of Europe issued a high-profile recommendation on the importance of plurilingual and pluricultural

education for a democratic culture (Council of Europe, 2022). Yet implementation varies; while multilingual settings in Luxembourg and Switzerland, which is not an EU member, feature systemic support for intercomprehension and pluricultural projects, more monolingual-oriented countries often display inconsistent or fragmented adoption.

Realizing the potential of plurilingual education requires systemic alignment of policies, curricula, and assessment practices that capture the dynamic interplay of languages and cultures in learners' repertoires (Valcke et al., 2022). Curricular developments show, however, that the *Barcelona goal* cited in the earlier text is still not within reach, although language policy goals and related plurilingual approaches have been positively connoted and explicitly mentioned in curricular preambles and general didactic principles for years. What is still missing is their specification in the descriptions of the school subjects, which continue to focus on singular language competences. The promotion of life-life plurilingualism, as a goal especially in primary education, and intercomprehension and interlingual transfer in the field of typologically closely related languages also fall far short of expectations (cf. European Commission, 2012 for claims regarding national measures; see Mayer & Plikat, 2022 for an exemplary overview of the situation in Germany; Rüdcl, 2018 for Austria). Furthermore, current analyses show a striking discrepancy between curricular goals and school reality and an increasing number of students learning only one foreign language (Fäcke, 2022 for Germany).

(Foreign) language learning in the context of current curricular developments in Austrian vocational schools

The recommendations outlined above—clearly aimed at fostering plurilingual and pluricultural competence—have so far made little operational impact. As a result, the teaching of second (and further) foreign languages after English has declined in importance in Austrian schools (Bergmann et al. 2022). This shift became particularly evident in 2023, when the Austrian Ministry released a preliminary curriculum draft for vocational secondary schools (Kaufmännische höhere Schulen) that replaced second foreign languages (2nd FL)—with a general *International Communication* subject offered in a severely limited timeframe of two weekly lessons for two school years. In April and May 2023, consultative forums were held to discuss this draft of a vocational school curriculum without a second foreign language. After a heated debate, in June 2023 an interinstitutional expert group on second language learning—including the author of this article—was convened to design an innovative, integrated language education framework for these schools—40 % of whose students do not speak German as their mother tongue. This plurilingual reality heightens the need to value learners' existing linguistic competence and to build an integrated curriculum that meets their concrete needs in both private and professional contexts. In a globalized world, English is certainly a key communication tool—but it does not fully reflect the complexity of today's economy. On the contrary, corporate multilingualism extends far beyond English including clients' languages, international and regional lingua francas, and local languages; it has become a genuine cultural practice within companies (Hall, 2021;

Settelmeyer, 2020). Teaching must take these multilingual realities into account (King, 2018). Integrated didactic approaches to languages are therefore especially vital for Austria's 108 vocational secondary schools, which together serve some 37 600 students.

After the approval of the conceptual framework for integrated language education at vocational secondary schools in September 2023 (Atzlesberger et al., 2023) the core elements for the new subject "International communication with a focus language" (InCo) were collaboratively defined in conjunction with the Ministry's curriculum development group. To meet both European guidelines and the requirements of vocational secondary schools, functional communicative competence in a chosen second foreign language (the so-called "focus language," e.g. the traditional second foreign school languages French, Italian, Spanish, or Russian) is fostered by employing plurilingual approaches that draw on each learner's full linguistic and cultural repertoire. This empowers students to adapt flexibly to professionally and personally relevant multilingual communication situations, while continuously embedding real-world multilingualism and digital transformation into instruction.

From January to November 2024, the detailed curriculum was written based on this integrated conceptual framework. In parallel, teaching materials were designed and an empirical classroom study was launched. The pilot phase, from September 2024 to March 2025, involved three vocational schools for data collection, and since April 2025 these results have been undergoing in-depth analysis to revise the materials according to field feedback. This process has not only reintroduced second foreign languages into the curricula but has also turned vocational secondary schools into genuine laboratories of pedagogical innovation, placing an integrated approach at the very heart of foreign language instruction. Since theory-informed instructional resources are essential for embedding innovative, plurilingual curricula sustainably in the classroom, teaching materials play a crucial role in both research and practice. Furthermore, the evidence-based development of appropriate textbooks remains an urgent priority, requiring close collaboration among researchers, classroom practitioners, and textbook publishers (Egli Cuenat et al., 2018; Kofler et al., 2020; Rückl, 2023).

The following section presents the competence model for the new subject "International Communication with a focus language" (InCo), grounding it in the principal theoretical and methodological foundations of language acquisition and didactics. It then delineates the expected learner outcomes in three domains—plurilingual and pluricultural competence, communicative-functional competence in the focus language, and transversal competences. The empirical design of the pilot study is also described, with the aim of supplying teachers, teacher educators, and textbook developers with empirically validated exemplar task sequences to support effective classroom implementation.

A new subject beyond target language acquisition

The Austrian Federal Ministry's new curriculum for vocational secondary schools promotes a more integrated, interdisciplinary approach to reduce the segmentation of isolated courses and strengthen higher-order cognitive abilities

such as problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. Grounded in resource-based language education, it leverages learners' prior knowledge, intercultural reflections, and transfer-oriented comparisons to make language learning more efficient and sustainable (Candelier & Manno, 2023). Empirical research shows that activating previously acquired languages and cultural experiences boosts motivation and accelerates progress (Eibenstein et al., 2022; García García et al., 2020), while a strong focus on individual resources and learner activity enhances the efficiency and sustainability of learning processes (Behr, 2007; Rückl, 2022; Rückl, 2023).

Specific task sequences guided by input-processing theories can further enhance acquisition (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; VanPatten et al., 2015). This learner-centered approach aligns with CEFR principles by emphasizing real-world tasks, communicative goals, and strategic language awareness. Intercomprehensive methods foster receptive competence across related languages, whereas integrative plurilingual approaches systematically coordinate students' full linguistic repertoires—standard German, family and regional languages, and foreign languages—to build durable, action-oriented plurilingual competence.

The new subject “Intercultural Communication with focus language” (InCo) exemplifies this vision, using metalinguistic comparisons at lexical, structural, and pragmatic levels to deepen awareness and unlock access to Romance and Slavic language families. Ultimately, the curriculum views linguistic diversity as a resource, aiming to develop learners' ability to mobilize and expand their cultural and language repertoires (Beacco et al., 2016) alongside transversal competences such as digital literacy, social interaction, and lifelong learning (Newby et al., 2022). To date, three sequences per language (French, Italian, and Spanish) are available in German online, with at least eight more to come in June, 2026, found at: <https://sprachenspassplus.soe-sbg.at/internationale-kommunikation-mit-fokussprache-2/>.

Competence model and learning outcomes

The competence model of the new mandatory subject “International Communication with a focus language” (InCo), implemented on an organizational basis of ten weekly lessons in years 1–4 and an optional three in year 5, specifies the learning outcomes that students are expected to achieve upon completing the course in three interconnected competence domains (Rückl, 2025; Rückl, 2026):

- plurilingual and pluricultural competence as a basis for interacting in multilingual and multicultural situations (“M-competence”),
- competence in the chosen focus language (“F-competence”),
- transversal competences—including personal and social competence, methodological and language-learning strategies, and digital literacy specific to foreign languages (i.e. the purposeful, reflective use of digital and AI-based tools in professional contexts and the critical revision of AI-generated language (“T-competences”).

These domains overlap to support the gradual construction of each learner's individualized plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire. Students draw on their full linguistic and cultural resources—school-taught languages, family and community

languages, and informally acquired varieties—to communicate effectively in private and professional multilingual settings, continuously expanding that repertoire for further language learning. As to the “M-competence,” learners will be able to:

- acquire the focus language by building on their entire plurilingual and pluricultural experience;
- use that repertoire to understand texts in related languages (especially within the focus-language family);
- mediate across speakers of different languages in multilingual and multicultural interactions.

Instruction in the focus language (“F-competence”) aligns with the economic orientation of vocational secondary schools. It emphasizes realistic professional communication scenarios, prioritizing receptive and oral tasks to prepare students for practical workplace interactions. By the end of year 4, students are expected to reach CEFR level A2+ and B1 by year 5 in both receptive and productive competences, enabling them to handle situations encountered while traveling, in international customer interactions, or with non-German-speaking colleagues. They will:

- understand written and spoken texts on a range of familiar topics (A2+ in year 4; B1 in year 5);
- communicate orally on familiar subjects at these levels;
- produce simple written texts across familiar themes, communicate flexibly and efficiently, and employ AI tools critically to draft, reflect on, and revise their output.

Transversal competences are universally applicable across the curriculum and transferable to various life and learning contexts, developing continuously in both formal and informal settings throughout life (European Council, 2018). These competences include personal well-being through mental and emotional awareness; cognitive and methodological competences such as self-reflection, autonomous learning, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving; social competence like cooperation and interaction; global competence such as intercultural awareness, democratic participation, and global citizenship. Digital competence, particularly the strategic and critical use of AI tools is also part of the “T-competences” (Newby et al., 2022).

By embedding EU and Council of Europe frameworks that emphasize plurilingual and pluricultural competence, the InCo-subject actively cultivates core transversal competences, such as empathy, flexibility, resilience, critical thinking, problem-solving, self-management, teamwork, negotiation, openness to diverse perspectives, and foreign language specific digital literacy, thereby equipping learners for success in education, profession, private life, and as citizens of a globalized world (Gössling et al., 2022).

Empirical pilot study to investigate students’ perspectives on learning materials

As part of the Austrian Ministry-funded project *Rethinking Language Learning*, prototype task sequences for first-year students of the new InCo-subject

with French, Spanish, and Italian as focus languages were developed and piloted at three Austrian vocational schools ($n = 54$ students; $n = 3$ teachers; 110 tasks for each focus language; duration September 2024–March 2025). The study is guided by three primary research axes:

i. **Learners' emotions and attitudes towards language learning and multilingualism:** This axis examines how different task types influence enjoyment, anxiety, and motivation, with a particular focus on “foreign language enjoyment” (FLE, Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) in multilingual settings.

ii. **Reception and adoption of the prototype materials:** This axis investigates task load and characteristics that make tasks more accessible and engaging for students.

iii. **Integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools:** This axis explores how these technologies can enhance flexibility, personalize learning, and foster critical thinking among students.

The data collection process involved the theory-based development of prototype learning materials for the first semester in the three focus languages. Online questionnaires captured learner variables such as demographic data, language learning biographies, and attitudes, alongside task-specific metrics like cognitive load, solution rates, strategy use, and emotional factors. Teacher logbooks documented task organization, classroom management, and observed student behaviors.

The gathered data underwent a dual analysis. Quantitative methods, including descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, were used to create general performance and emotional profiles and to test correlations, such as those between cognitive load and learning strategies (Larson-Hall, 2015). Qualitative methods, specifically structured content analysis of student comments and teacher logbook entries (Kuckartz, 2016), provided insights into student perceptions, recurring challenges, and conditions that foster engagement. These findings informed a rigorous revision of the prototype task sequences, ensuring that the formats and tasks maximize both learning effectiveness and language learning enjoyment.

Key milestones in the project include the release of webcasts for schools and publishers in September 2025, online access to prototype task sequences for French, Italian, and Spanish in December 2025, and the launch of in-service teacher training in the 2025–2026 school year. The goal is to provide teachers and textbook authors with evidence-based task sequences that facilitate the efficient implementation of curriculum guidelines for the new subject “International Communication with a focus language” (InCo).

Task types for operationalizing the competence domains of ‘InCo’

Resource-oriented plurilingual approaches seek to establish sustainable learning processes. To this end, instructional materials are crafted to be both authentic and engaging, activating learners' prior knowledge through tasks like interlingual comparisons, hypothesis generation, and intercultural reflection, thereby promoting cognitively demanding, autonomous work. The strategic integration of digital and AI-based tools further personalizes learning environments.

Well-designed plurilingual materials—particularly textbooks, given their

guiding role in the language classroom—can initiate lasting cycles of comparison, transfer, and reflection, thereby enhancing language awareness, intercultural learning, and target-language proficiency. Exploratory, hypothesis-driven tasks rooted in topics of direct relevance to the student's life illustrate how existing knowledge can facilitate new learning (Meißner, 2017). Multilingual grammar tables and glossaries serve as memorization and systematization aids, guiding learners to detect formal bridges between languages during individual or collaborative reflection phases. Vocabulary-expansion activities leverage learners' diverse linguistic repertoires, using inferring strategies to introduce new words; when these activities are linked to intercultural content, they can spark curiosity and deepen cultural sensitivity.

Phases of autonomous, hypothesis-guided formalization can target misconceptions directly, while a CEFR-endorsed culture of risk-taking and self-correction can nurture deeper language awareness. Receptive intercomprehension tasks, benefiting from steeper progressions, can prepare students more rapidly for understanding related languages, whereas productive tasks, demanding a more gradual ramp-up, can allow for more creative, individualized output. This scaffolded sequencing underscores the conviction that emphasizing learners' full resources and active engagement yields more efficient and durable learning gains.

These fundamental principles of task design are essential for effectively implementing the three competence domains of the InCo curriculum in classroom practice.

- F-competence tasks encompass language reception (listening, reading, audiovisual comprehension) and productive interaction alike (spoken and written, analog and digital), enabling students to handle every day, business-oriented, and trade-fair communication in the focus language.
- M-competence tasks activate and expand learners' full linguistic and cultural repertoire—drawing on family, regional, and school-taught languages—to support intercomprehension, mediation between speakers of different languages, and intercultural understanding. Specific tasks are designed to help learners leverage this repertoire to acquire focus language structures.
- T-competence tasks emphasize personal, social, methodological, and language-learning aspects while fostering foreign-language-specific digital literacy. This involves reflecting on learning strategies and critically, purposefully using digital tools, including AI-based technologies.

Together, these tasks exemplify a competence-oriented, plurilingual pedagogy that values all of the learner's languages, prioritizes real-life oral communication, adapts professional language use to authentic contexts, streamlines written work to reinforce core grammar and vocabulary, and embeds reflective AI use within a framework that promotes lifelong, globalized language learning.

Preliminary results on learners' emotions and attitudes toward language learning and multilingualism

The intensity of students' learning emotions, attitudes toward multilingualism, and the factors that influence their engagement in language learning were self-

reported using a Likert scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Results show that students experience significantly more foreign language enjoyment (FLE, $M = 3.84$; $SD = 1.06$) than foreign language anxiety (FLA, $M = 2.87$; $SD = 0.97$), indicating that they derive more pleasure than anxiety from the tasks designed for piloting the implementation of InCo. Students also demonstrated a highly positive attitude toward multilingualism, with an average score of 3.78 ($SD = 0.81$). This reflects the relevance, importance, and enthusiasm for learning multiple languages. Furthermore, a Pearson correlation analysis found significant positive correlation between FLE and attitudes toward multilingualism ($r=0.37$, $p = 0.01$), suggesting that the more students enjoy learning languages, the more favorable their perspective on multilingualism becomes. Although the correlation coefficient $r=0.37$ indicates a moderate positive relationship between higher levels of enjoyment in language learning and more positive attitudes toward multilingualism, the significance level of $p=0.01$ reveals the finding is significant.

The study also identified that tasks targeting transversal competences are the most effective in triggering FLE. Classroom situations that foster the highest levels of FLE include interactive oral tasks, playful group activities, and tasks incorporating artificial intelligence tools (Frank, 2025). These preliminary findings highlight the importance of designing tasks that elicit strong emotional engagement while leveraging the potential of digital resources to support plurilingual learning. By fostering positive emotions and utilizing innovative tools, educators can enhance both the effectiveness and enjoyment of language learning.

Implications for the revision of the piloted tasks sequences

The development of task sequences for the new subject “Intercultural communication with a focus language” (InCo) has undergone significant refinement, transitioning from a theory-based piloted version to an empirically revised, modular format. The piloted version consisted of three scaffolded units designed for the first semester, containing 110 tasks per focus language (French, Italian, and Spanish). These units included tasks and solutions, a grammar section for the focus language, multilingual vocabulary and grammar glossaries, and a self-assessment grid. They were designed to promote an integrative approach to foreign language learning by incorporating the following key aspects:

- **Valorization of family languages:** By treating all languages as equally valuable, the materials encourage the use of learners’ full linguistic repertoire and prior language learning experiences as resources for acquiring foreign languages.
- **Real-life professional communication:** The materials align professional communication tasks with real-world applications, positioning language as a practical tool for engaging with customers and navigating professional environments.
- **Focus on reception and oral communication:** Emphasis is placed on developing receptive and oral communication competence in the focus language. Tasks are tailored to real-life scenarios, such as everyday interactions, business trips, small talk, trade fair discussions, and communication with multilingual colleagues.

- Reduction of written language: Written language tasks are minimized and primarily serve to reinforce linguistic competence, such as grammar and vocabulary, rather than being a central focus.
- Reflective use of AI: The materials integrate AI tools thoughtfully, such as for AI-supported written correspondence, to enhance learning outcomes while fostering critical reflection on the use of digital technologies.

While this version offered a rich variety of activities, feedback from the pilot phase highlighted the need for greater flexibility and targeted support.

The revised version still follows the original key aspects but introduces 14 modular task sequences tailored for A1/A2 levels, with a total of 140 tasks per language. These sequences integrate activities across the three competence domains (F-, M-, and T-competences). Two new tools accompany the modular and flexible design of the revised materials: A self-assessment grid, structured around the three competence domains, enables learners to monitor their progress in a more targeted and differentiated way. Complementing this, a concise teacher's guide supports the materials with theoretical background and hands-on teaching strategies to promote all three competence areas in everyday classroom practice. The modular design of the materials enhances flexibility, allowing teachers to adapt content to diverse classroom settings while benefiting from a clear structure, evidence-based guidance, and ready-to-use tools that support effective and engaging teaching.

The revised InCo materials place a strong emphasis on cognitive activation and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) by embedding tasks that encourage reflection, knowledge transfer, and a sense of achievement. Drawing on Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), the task design follows a progression from lower- to higher-order educational objectives. To give an example of the cognitive trajectory embedded in the task design, learners may begin by recalling new vocabulary related to hotel contexts through an interactive game. They then recognize recurring grammatical patterns across Romance languages, apply vocabulary in real-life role-plays, analyze structural differences between languages, and critically evaluate the use of AI tools when drafting written texts in the focus language. The sequence culminates in the creation of collaborative digital products, such as illustrated mini dictionaries developed with the help of AI assistants. Learners then review and comment on each other's contributions, reinforcing vocabulary retention and social interaction.

Further activities may include digital landscaping activities using platforms like Padlet, where learners can document and share local traces of target cultures, combining research with intercultural reflection. In pronunciation and research-focused tasks, learners can consult digital corpora or apps to refine their oral production while simultaneously strengthening methodological competences. All tasks are clearly signposted through icons, aligned with CEFR descriptors, and designed to sustain learner engagement, foster positive emotions, and promote deep, transferable language-learning strategies.

With regard to M-competence, the revised task sequences aim to make language learning more effective by activating, expanding, and interconnecting learners' entire linguistic and cultural repertoires. By drawing on related Romance

languages, students are encouraged to recognize similarities and deepen their linguistic awareness, effectively opening pathways into the broader Romance language family. Mediation tasks are directly anchored in learners' plurilingual and pluricultural backgrounds. They help students develop strategies for facilitating communication between speakers of different languages—an essential competence in both professional and intercultural contexts. These are complemented by brief, focused intercultural “flash” activities, which provide targeted cultural insights and encourage students to consider others' perspectives while reflecting on their own experience. Clear descriptors support this process by articulating expectations—for example, the capacity to use one's plurilingual repertoire to understand key structures in the focus language. Taken together, intercomprehension, mediation, and intercultural reflection work in concert to foster a robust, action-oriented plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

In the InCo curriculum, F-competence is operationalized through a diverse range of task types that collectively build comprehensive communicative proficiency in the focus language. Receptive tasks include listening to (authentic) audio texts, reading and interpreting written documents, and engaging with audiovisual content such as videos or films. Productive and interactive tasks encompass spoken interaction—through role-plays, presentations, and dialogues—as well as written communication, both handwritten and digital. To deepen language mastery, repertoire-expansion tasks encourage learners to activate prior knowledge in order to acquire new vocabulary and grammatical structures, which are then applied across varied communicative contexts. In addition, professionally oriented tasks simulate real-life scenarios—such as negotiations, business emails, report writing, or customer interactions—preparing students to navigate workplace communication with confidence. Taken together, these components promote the integrated development of language reception, production, and interaction, supporting learners in achieving communicative competence in the focus language.

T-competences—including personal, social, methodological, and digital competences—are increasingly acknowledged as essential for 21st-century learning, yet they remain underrepresented in many language teaching materials. The revised InCo task sequences address this gap by embedding digital and reflective elements throughout the curriculum. Firstly, dedicated digital tasks train learners in the critical use of AI-based tools. For example, students use pronunciation apps to improve their oral skills and AI writing assistants to draft, revise, and analyze texts—thereby deepening linguistic awareness through active error analysis. Digital extension tasks further engage learners with the focus language through online research projects (e.g., documenting local signs of target culture) or through the creation of multimedia presentations that integrate target-language content. Secondly, transversal flashes provide short, interactive prompts that target either strategic competences or digital literacies. A strategic flash may prompt learners to reflect on their personal learning strategies—such as note-taking, memory techniques, or collaboration—thereby supporting metacognitive awareness and self-regulated learning. A digital flash might introduce best practices for data privacy, responsible tool selection, or ethical AI use, fostering responsible digital citizenship. By weaving these components into the core structure of the curriculum, the InCo materials ensure that transversal competences

are not treated as add-ons, but as integral to plurilingual, action-oriented education. This holistic approach prepares learners not only to communicate effectively in multiple languages, but also to navigate the complex social, methodological, and technological demands of today's interconnected world.

Conclusion and outlook

In conclusion, the development and piloting of teaching materials for the new subject “Intercultural communication with a focus language” (InCo) in Austrian vocational schools demonstrate how resource-oriented plurilingual approaches can be effectively implemented in the classroom, bridging theory and practice. By integrating F-, M-, and T-competence tasks—clearly marked through iconography and aligned with CEFR descriptors—the materials promote deep cognitive engagement, positive emotional responses, and authentic language use. Preliminary findings from the pilot phase highlight the potential of activating learners' full linguistic repertoires, embedding digital and AI tools, and anchoring tasks in real-life contexts to enhance foreign language enjoyment and positive attitude toward multilingualism.

Moving forward, sustained collaboration among policymakers, educators, and researchers will be essential to adapt and scale this model across diverse sociocultural contexts and educational frameworks. In doing so, plurilingual education can become a central pillar of future-ready curricula that reflect the realities of a globalized world and prepare learners for academic, professional, and social success in a multilingual and interconnected society. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of plurilingual education on learners' academic and professional outcomes. Additionally, further studies are needed to explore the role of emerging technologies in supporting plurilingualism and to identify strategies for overcoming barriers to implementation.

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