
Language-learning services — Requirements

Services de formation en langues — Exigences

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 232, *Education and learning services*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 29991:2014), which has been technically revised.

The main changes to the previous edition are as follows:

- minor changes to align with ISO 29993;
- changes in terminology to reflect the new scope and title of ISO/TC 232, 'Education and learning services'. When originally developed, ISO 29991:2014 was aligned with the scope and title of the TC at that time, which encompassed learning services outside formal education.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

The objective of this document is to set minimum requirements for language-learning services. This document uses the term 'learning services' rather than 'training' in order to encourage a focus on the learner and the results of the learning process, and to emphasize the full range of options available for language learning.

The aims of the document are

- a) to improve transparency and enhance the credibility of the language-learning services market;
- b) to protect consumers by preventing prejudicial practices;
- c) to improve the quality of language learning for all interested parties.

Entities interested in using this document will include language-learning service providers of all kinds and any size, as well as associations or consortia of language-learning service providers.

This document is necessary because although in some countries the quality control of language-learning services is well established, the standards applied vary greatly, and in many other countries there is limited or no regulation.

This document incorporates the broad interdisciplinary expertise of various organisations involved in standardization – quality assurance, educational technology, programme evaluation, second language acquisition and applied linguistics, at both national and international levels.

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Language-learning services — Requirements

1 Scope

This document specifies requirements for language-learning services. These include any language-learning services that are addressed to language learners themselves as well as to interested parties who are acquiring the services for the benefit of learners. The key features of any such service are that the goals of learning are defined and evaluated, and that it involves interaction with the learner. The instruction may be delivered face-to-face, be mediated by technology or be a blend of both.

In cases where the language-learning services are provided by an organization that delivers products (goods and services) or other learning services in addition to language-learning services, this document only applies to language-learning services.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

assessment

<language-learning services> gathering of language data to determine the language ability of an individual language learner or group of learners

3.2

authentic material

<language-learning services> material not originally produced for language-learning purposes but for purposes of real communication

3.3

award

<language-learning services> designation given by a language-learning service provider to a learner, in order to indicate a level of performance or attainment, or the completion of a learning programme

3.4

blended learning

combination of face-to-face learning with e-learning

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 2382-36:2019, 3.1.5, modified.]

3.5

competence

<language-learning services> ability to apply knowledge and skills to achieve intended outcomes

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 17024:2012, 3.6, modified.]

3.6

continuous professional development

ongoing intentional enhancement of professional knowledge or of professional competence

3.7

curriculum

<language-learning services> plan of study prepared by the language-learning service provider which describes the aims, content, learning outcomes, learning and teaching methods, and assessment processes

3.8

e-learning

learning facilitated by information and communications technology

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 24751-1:2008, 2.18]

3.9

evaluation

<language-learning services> systematic gathering of information in order to make decisions about possible adjustments to the language-learning service

3.10

language-learning service

processes or sequence of activities designed to enable language learning

3.11

language-learning service provider

LLSP

organization or individual providing language-learning services, including any personnel involved in the provision of the language-learning service

3.12

learner

<language-learning services> person engaged in language learning

3.13

learning

<language-learning services> acquiring knowledge, behaviour, skills, values, preferences or understanding in the language domain

3.14

learning environment

classrooms, multimedia rooms and other physical spaces used for language learning, as well as furniture and equipment they contain

3.15

sponsor

<language-learning services> organization or individual that acquires language-learning services on behalf of learners, provides financial or other support for them, or has a vested interest in the outcome of the language learning

Note 1 to entry: Sponsors include corporations, government agencies and persons.

3.16

teacher

person whose job is to provide instruction and facilitate learning, whether in an educational institution or professional training environment

4 Determining language-learning needs

4.1 Designated and qualified LLSP personnel shall determine the learner's or sponsor's language-learning needs.

4.2 Where relevant and available, national or international frameworks for proficiency in language learning shall be referred to when determining the learner's and sponsor's needs.

NOTE See [Annex A](#) for examples of national and international frameworks.

4.3 The needs analysis shall include:

- a) the assessment and analysis of the learner's language-learning needs, including:
 - i) the desired language skills (e.g. reading, writing, listening, speaking), the desired level of competence in the language and the time frame, i.e. the goal of the language learning;
 - ii) the purposes for which and contexts in which the learner needs to use language outside the course (e.g. socially, in the domain of work or study);
- b) assessment of the learner's existing level of competence in the language being taught using techniques such as internal tests, third-party tests or self-assessment;
- c) reference to the LLSP's definition of language competence levels (see [3.4](#));
- d) identification of other aspects of the learner's background and situation which may bear on the learner's language-learning needs (e.g. age, first language, cultural, educational and professional background, language-learning history, literacy level, cognitive and physical abilities).

4.4 Information shall be provided showing the equivalence of the LLSP's definitions of language competence levels with a widely known national or international scale and indicating how these competence levels relate to the goals of instruction.

NOTE See [Annex A](#) for examples of scales of proficiency for language learners.

4.5 Information about learners' relevant education and training history and prior learning, including language qualifications and credentials awarded to them, shall be obtained and used with the legitimate consent of the learners.

4.6 The specific aims, wishes, goals and requirements of sponsors commissioning the language-learning service shall be determined.

4.7 Where relevant and feasible, learners shall be provided with the support they need in understanding their own language-learning needs and goals.

4.8 Where relevant and feasible, learners or sponsors should be consulted as to how they expect the language skills, competences and awareness developed as a result of the language-learning service to transfer to the learners' work-related tasks and responsibilities, and about what the sponsor will consider to be indicators of success.

4.9 An agreement shall be reached between the LLSP and the learner or sponsor on the findings of the needs analysis, and on the nature and intended goals of the language-learning service that would best meet the learner's or sponsor's needs.

4.10 Learners or sponsors shall be given information about the available learning services that correspond to their needs, including about aspects such as outcomes, certificates as applicable, scheduling, teacher selection, class size, curriculum, method and cost.

4.11 Teachers shall be fully informed about the findings of the needs analyses relating to the learners placed in their courses.

5 Design of the language-learning services

5.1 The language-learning and teaching methods and learning materials used and the modes of learning (e.g. classroom, blended learning, e-learning, autonomous or AI-enabled platforms) shall correspond to the aims and requirements of the curriculum and shall meet the agreed goals (see [4.10](#)), as well as the needs, background and situation of the learners. The materials shall be accurate in terms of content.

5.2 The specific aims and planned outcomes of the language-learning service selected to meet the needs of learners and, where applicable, of sponsors shall be clearly specified and communicated to the learners or their sponsors and to teachers.

5.3 The principles, learning and teaching methods and the modes of learning to be used shall also be specified and made known to the learners and, where applicable, their sponsors.

5.4 The roles and responsibilities of the LLSP, the learners and their sponsors relating to the delivery of the language-learning services and to the monitoring and assessment of learning shall be clearly specified.

5.5 A curriculum and means of assessment reflecting the intended goals of the language-learning service (see [4.9](#) and [4.10](#)) shall be designed and developed.

5.6 Curriculum design and development shall be carried out by professionals who are experienced or trained in the design and development of curricula for language-learning services.

5.7 In the design of language courses, the following shall be taken into account:

- a) the background and situation of the learners [see [4.3 d](#)]);
- b) the language-learning needs and language-learning goals of the learners or sponsors;
- c) the language(s) that learners have previously acquired or studied;
- d) the characteristics of the target language and, where necessary, the characteristics of the learners' first language;
- e) the proposed intensity and duration of the course, and the mode and context in which it is to be delivered (e.g. classroom learning, blended learning, e-learning, or autonomous and AI-enabled platforms);
- f) best practice and latest research in language learning and teaching.

5.8 The learning goals and curriculum documents shall be made available to learners and, where applicable, to their sponsors prior to and during delivery of the language-learning services.

5.9 The teachers, including those not permanently or exclusively employed by the LLSP, shall implement in their teaching the language teaching principles and methods specified by the LLSP.

5.10 The LLSP shall ensure that the curriculum and learning materials are reviewed, internally or otherwise, at least annually and, if necessary, are updated.

6 Teachers appointed by the language-learning service provider

6.1 LLSP teachers shall be one of the following:

- a) experienced and have a qualification or training in teaching a foreign language that is recognized within the country where the LLSP offers its services;
- b) experienced and have a tertiary degree combined with a recognized professional qualification to teach the target language that was awarded in another country;
- c) novices without the type of qualification or training specified above. Novice teachers shall have necessary language teaching capabilities, shall undergo training and shall work under the supervision of experienced language teachers with recognized qualifications or training.

NOTE Professional qualifications can be recognized by, for example, a governmental authority, an industry-created self-regulatory body or an accredited university or college. In the absence of such recognition bodies, professional qualification can be deemed acceptable by those LLSPs in the country providing courses in the language in question.

6.2 All teachers, including novice teachers, shall have the necessary competence in the target language to undertake the language teaching and related duties assigned to them.

6.3 All teachers shall engage in continuous professional development covering at least the following:

- a) pedagogic principles, best practice and current research in language teaching methodology and language learning relevant to the curriculum;
- b) cultural and intercultural competences relevant to the target language and teaching context;
- c) learning and teaching competences, and use of aids and resources relevant to the curriculum, including instructional and informational technologies;
- d) competence in classroom management;
- e) assessment procedures for language learning;
- f) the maintenance and enhancement of their competence in the target language.

NOTE See [Annex B](#) for details of a sample competence grid for language teaching.

6.4 The continuous professional development plans shall take into account the results of the evaluation of the language-learning service (see [9.2](#)) and teachers' own views about their continuous professional development needs.

6.5 If substitution is required, arrangements shall be made to ensure that qualified teachers (see [6.1](#)) are available, and that such teachers are guided in the preparation and delivery of the lessons they are asked to teach.

7 Availability and accessibility of language-learning materials

7.1 Language-learning materials that are compatible with the learning and teaching principles and methods and with the course objectives shall be selected or developed by the LLSP as required.

7.2 These language-learning materials shall be available to learners in sufficient quantity, and learners or their sponsors shall be guided in the acquisition of those that are needed.

7.3 The language-learning resources shall include, but not be limited to, authentic materials which are up-to-date and reflect current usage of the language being learned.

7.4 The language-learning resources shall include materials that are adapted to the needs of the learners, and compatible with the language-learning and teaching principles and methods specified by the LLSP.

7.5 The social and cultural needs, as well as the background and situation of the learners, shall be considered when selecting, designing and using language-learning materials.

7.6 In addition to language-learning resources, access or guidance shall be provided concerning other relevant language-learning materials such as, but not limited to, dictionaries, reference tools and computer-assisted language-learning resources.

7.7 The learning resources and information relevant to the language-learning service shall be made available to the teachers before delivery of the language-learning service.

7.8 LLSP teachers and learners shall be informed of relevant rules about the photocopying and use of printed and digital material.

NOTE Many countries have strict rules about copyright and the reproduction and use of printed and digital materials or arrangements for licensing the controlled use of such materials by LLSPs. These rules could apply to materials developed by the LLSP based on already published works.

7.9 The sources of language-learning resources used or developed by the LLSP shall be properly indicated.

7.10 Teaching aids and equipment that correspond to the requirements of the type of language-learning service and the approach and method being used shall be made available to LLSP teachers and learners and kept in good order.

NOTE Teaching aids and equipment can include audio equipment, video equipment, projection devices, information technology equipment and teaching tools such as flip charts, flash cards, models, puppets and whiteboards.

8 The language-learning environment

8.1 The language-learning environment shall be:

- a) large enough to accommodate the number of learners enrolled in the groups as well as their teachers;
- b) laid out in such a way as to facilitate interactive language learning, taking into account the needs of the learners concerned;
- c) well lit and clean;
- d) heated or cooled if necessary, and well ventilated;
- e) protected or insulated from noise interference.

8.2 The necessary safety facilities and equipment shall be put in place and maintained, and potential safety hazards in the learning environment shall be minimised. Procedures for dealing with emergencies and security issues shall be made known to teachers, other personnel and learners.

9 Assessment of language learning

9.1 Prior to the beginning of the course, an assessment shall be made of the learner's existing level of competence in the language being taught [see also [4.3 b](#)].

9.2 The progress of learners participating in the language-learning service shall be assessed during the course, and their achievement shall be measured at the end of the course. See 4.3 b) for examples of assessment processes. The outcomes of assessments of progress and achievement shall be discussed with the learner.

9.3 Learners or, where applicable, their sponsors shall receive reports or certificates informing them of the processes and results of assessments.

9.4 Learners who require specific assistance with learning shall, where possible, be given support by experts in the relevant field.

10 Evaluation of the language-learning service

10.1 Regular evaluation shall be carried out in order to determine whether the language-learning service is meeting the needs of the learners and, if applicable, their sponsors, and whether they are satisfied with the service.

10.2 Such evaluation shall include:

- a) observation of teaching and learning for quality-assurance purposes;
- b) review of the results of the assessment of learning (see 9.2 and 9.3);
- c) analysis of learners' and sponsors' feedback on the quality of the language-learning services and their suggestions.

10.3 The results of such evaluations shall be taken into account in improvements and changes to the language-learning service, for example, in the curriculum, course programmes, the methodology used and continuous professional development.

11 Promotion and advertising of language-learning services

11.1 To enable learners or their sponsors to make an informed decision before enrolment, and before delivery of the language-learning service begins, at least the following information related to the service shall be provided:

- a) the title, level and aims of the language-learning course(s);
- b) dates, location, duration and timetable;
- c) the proposed number of hours of instruction and how these are divided between different modes of learning (e.g. classroom learning, blended learning, e-learning);
- d) course objectives;
- e) any prerequisites, technical or otherwise, such as a required level of language proficiency;
- f) the language-learning and teaching principles and methods and the assessment processes to be used, with an explanation in terms which are understood by the LLSP's clients;
- g) maximum group size and the age range of students;
- h) any software licenses and technical equipment required by the learners;
- i) the cost of tuition fees, examination fees, the purchase of learning materials and any other charges;
- j) cancellation, withdrawal and refund arrangements;

- k) any policy for enabling learners to audit or observe courses before enrolment;
- l) the means and procedures used for obtaining feedback about learners' and their sponsors' satisfaction, and for handling their requests, suggestions and complaints;
- m) information about the general profile of the teachers, such as their teaching qualifications, teaching experience and background.

11.2 The information shall be distributed via relevant channels of communication, which may include the internet, telephone, meetings, mail and e-mail.

11.3 At the time of publication, the information shall be accurate. The information shall be continuously updated and, where necessary, provided in print or digital versions.

11.4 All descriptions and images in information and publicity, including any digital and internet-based versions, shall give a realistic and current view of the learning services and facilities offered.

11.5 Designated LLSP personnel shall be available to provide enrolment consultation and information.

12 Information about the language-learning services for enrolled learners and their sponsors

Commencing with, or prior to, delivery of the language-learning service, learners or, where applicable, their sponsors shall be informed in writing of the details, terms and conditions of the learning service as specified in [11.1](#), as well as, for example:

- a) the purpose(s), mode and content of the language-learning services being provided, including the instruments and criteria to be used for assessment, and the nature of the award or report to be issued upon completion;
- b) the language learners' commitments and responsibilities;
- c) the LLSP's commitments and responsibilities to the learner and, where applicable, the sponsor;
- d) the teachers' responsibilities to the learner, and where applicable, the sponsor;
- e) the procedures to be used in case of learner or sponsor dissatisfaction, or disagreement between them and the LLSP;
- f) support for language learning, such as access to self-directed computer-assisted language learning, a hotline, counselling services, dictionaries, reference books or mentoring;
- g) the processes and schedule for assessing learning;
- h) the LLSP's designated contact person(s);
- i) procedures for complaints, suggestions and dispute resolution.

13 Invoicing

13.1 Invoices for language-learning services shall be clear and contain all the details needed to enable learners or, where applicable, their sponsors to understand precisely what is being paid for and what period of time is covered by the invoice.

13.2 The LLSP shall provide the learner or sponsor with proof of payment if requested.

Annex A (informative)

Examples of scales of language proficiency for learners

A.1 European Union

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) (https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Cadre1_en.asp) developed by the Council of Europe through a process of scientific research and wide consultation, the CEFR provides a practical tool for setting clear standards to be attained at successive stages of language learning and for evaluating outcomes in an internationally comparable manner. It describes in a comprehensive manner:

- a) the competences necessary for communication;
- b) the related knowledge and skills;
- c) situations and domains of communication.

The illustrative descriptor scales and other descriptors related to the CEFR are available in a databank of descriptors at https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/cefr_scale_EN.asp.

The CEFR has been translated into at least 39 languages. Details are available in a document to be found under 'language versions' at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/publications_EN.asp?#P109_3569.

A.2 USA

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has developed:

- a) *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012*: these provide descriptions of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening and reading in real-world situations. These written narratives supported by multimedia examples can be found at: <https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012>
- b) *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*: these are "content standards" defining what language learners should know and be able to do. An overview can be found at: <https://www.actfl.org/publications/all/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages>
- c) *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners 2012*: these describe language performance that is the result of explicit instruction in an instructional setting. They can be found at: <https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-performance-descriptors-language-learners>

Interagency Language Roundtable (IRL) (<https://www.govtilr.org>): *Descriptions of proficiency*.

The proficiency levels 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 characterize spoken-language use. Each higher level implies control of the previous levels' functions and accuracy. The designation 0+, 1+, 2+ and so on are assigned when proficiency substantially exceeds one skill level and does not fully meet the criteria for the next level. The "plus-level" descriptions, therefore, are subsidiary to the "base-level" descriptions.

These descriptions can be found at: <https://www.govtilr.org/Skills/IRL%20Scale%20History.htm>

A.3 Australia

Australia's Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES) uses the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) which provides ratings from 0 (no English) to 5 (natural speaker) for each of the four language skills areas: speaking, listening, reading and writing. An outline description can be found at: <https://www.govtilr.org/Skills/ILRscale1.htm>

A.4 China

Chinese Language Proficiency Scales for Speakers of Other Languages (CLPS) is a guideline document for teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages. The scales provide a five-band all-round description of learners' ability to use their knowledge of and skills in the Chinese language for communication. It is an important basis on which the language proficiency of learners of Chinese can be measured. The scales can serve as a reference standard for drawing up a syllabus for teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages, for compiling Chinese textbooks and for assessing the language proficiency of learners of Chinese.

A.5 Japan

The JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education defines levels of language proficiency in Japanese by describing what a person can do in the language. It is a tool for thinking about Japanese language teaching and learning and the evaluation of learning outcomes. It can also be used for designing courses and developing learning materials and examinations. A description is available at: http://jfstandard.jp/pdf/jfs2010_all_en.pdf.