

Towards identification of adequate CEF levels for vocational trainings in Germany

Hella Klemmert
Research and Development Section of the Psychological Service
German Federal Employment Agency, Nürnberg

Hella.Klemmert@Arbeitsagentur.de

Context

Adult clients of the Psychological Service of the German Federal Employment Agency often plan to start a vocational training. If the client has immigrant background, the consulting psychologist sometimes has to decide whether the client's German language skills are sufficient for successful completion of the intended training. Estimates of CEF-levels of German language skills sufficient for selected vocational demands are very useful for the psychologists to take these decisions.

Language requirements in Germany

In Germany, requirements for general language proficiency exist only in few areas. Important examples are:

- A1 for the spouse whose partner already lives in Germany
- B1 for foreign-nationals who want to acquire the German citizenship
- B2 for pursuing a healthcare profession (academic as well as non-academic)
- C1 for studying at an university

Aims of the project

- establishment of initial ratings, which CEF level of German language proficiency is sufficient for successful completion of selected vocational trainings
- intended output for each vocational training:
 - sufficient CEF level out of A2, A2+, B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C for listening, reading, speaking and writing
 - training-specific remarks useful for the consulting psychologists
- reasonable effort for the intended range of use
- first step, open to further development

Process

The establishment of the initial ratings was performed by 5 psychologists with different professional backgrounds (psychological assessment, personnel assessment, language teaching, language testing, psychometrics). The process was based on the manual of the Council of Europe encompassing the five phases:

- (1) Familiarisation & (3) Standardisation Training:
 - coordinator of the 3-day training sessions was an expert from TestDaF (Test German as a foreign Language)-Institute
 - practice examples similar to the intended ratings
- (2) Specification:
 - collection of linguistic material (e.g. text books, practice tests) for the selected vocational trainings
 - sorting the linguistic requirements according to the involved skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing)
 - extraction of workplace related descriptors for CEF levels from the COE scales and the German Reference Level Descriptions (Profile Deutsch)
- (4) Standard Setting:
 - each group member separately rated the CEF level of each skill for each vocational training
 - agreement on final ratings in the working team
 - additional remarks for each vocational training

(5.1) Internal validation: inter-rater reliability

Data: 5 rater, 28 items = trainings,
7 levels = A2, A2+, B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C

Differences between individual ratings and final consensus rating:

	Identical	½ CEF level	≥1 CEF level	N
Listening	62.90 %	30.70 %	6.40 %	140
Reading	61.60 %	32.60 %	5.80 %	138
Speaking	62.60 %	36.00 %	1.40 %	139
Writing	61.70 %	31.60 %	6.90 %	133
Mean	62.20 %	32.73 %	5.13 %	

Intra-class correlations (ICC):

	Variance due to items	Total variance	ICC = items/total
Listening	0.84	1.16	0.72
Reading	1.69	2.07	0.82
Speaking	1.16	1.48	0.78
Writing	2.31	2.71	0.85

Example results

Final ratings of sufficient CEF levels for general language skills:

Training	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Physician assistant	B2	B2	B2	B2
Truck driving license	B1+	B1+	B1	B1+
	Overall = max (level per skill)			
Physician assistant				B2
Truck driving license				B1+

(5.2) External validation

- 4 small studies with adult apprentices to validate selected ratings: industrial mechanic (Industriemechaniker) (N₁=10), freight forwarders (Speditionskaufmann) (N₂=17) and geriatric nurse (Altenpfleger) (N₃=7, N₄=4),
- global German language skills tested with a written C-Test
- results show a tendency that actual skills are below the overall ratings based on the collected linguistic material
- different reasons but no firm conclusions are possible

Summary & conclusion

- successful establishment of initial ratings, which CEF levels of German language proficiency are sufficient for completion of selected vocational trainings
- good inter-rater reliability
- first small empirical validation studies show a tendency towards lower skill levels in practice
- height and explanations for these tendency are subject to future research