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Transformative Approach to Language Education for Work and Life Skills Development

Florence Iyabo ADENIRAN
Primary Education Department,
School of ECPA Education,
Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo.
08033720355
adeniranflorence1967@gmail.com

Abstract

Language education has evolved beyond the traditional goal of teaching learners how to read, write, listen, and speak. In today's rapidly changing world, it is expected to equip individuals with practical competencies that prepare them for the workplace and everyday life. This paper explores the transformative approach to language education as a learner-centred and skill-oriented model that promotes effective communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving. It examines how language learning can be connected to real-life experiences through interactive teaching strategies, project-based learning, digital literacy, and authentic communication tasks. The paper argues that when language education is transformed from a purely theoretical exercise into a practical and meaningful learning experience, learners become better prepared for employment, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and lifelong learning. Furthermore, it highlights the responsibilities of educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in creating learning environments that foster both linguistic competence and essential life and work skills. The study concludes that adopting a transformative approach to language education is vital for producing confident, adaptable, and productive individuals who can contribute meaningfully to personal, social, and national development.

Keywords: transformative approach, language education, work, life, skills development

Introduction

Language is one of the most important tools for human interaction, learning, and societal development. It serves as the primary medium through which individuals communicate ideas, express emotions, acquire knowledge, preserve culture, and participate meaningfully in social, economic, and political activities. Consequently, language education occupies a central position in every educational system because it equips learners with the communication competencies required for academic success, productive employment, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. In contemporary society, however, the objectives of language education have expanded

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beyond the traditional emphasis on reading, writing, listening, and speaking to include the development of practical skills that enable learners to function effectively in rapidly changing personal and professional environments (Richards, 2022). The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented technological advancement, globalization, digital transformation, and changes in the nature of work. These developments have altered the competencies required for success in modern societies and labour markets. Employers increasingly seek individuals who possess not only sound language proficiency but also critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving skills. As a result, educational systems across the world are being challenged to redesign their curricula and instructional practices to prepare learners for both employment and everyday life (Partnership for 21st Century Learning [P21], 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

Transformative language education has gained increasing attention among educators, curriculum specialists, and policymakers. Transformative language education moves beyond the conventional transmission of grammatical rules and vocabulary to emphasize meaningful communication, learner participation, critical reflection, experiential learning, and the practical application of language in authentic contexts. Rather than viewing language as an isolated academic subject, this approach positions language as a dynamic tool for knowledge construction, social interaction, innovation, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning (Mezirow, 2000; Cummins, 2021). Learners are encouraged to use language to solve real-life problems, collaborate with others, express ideas confidently, and participate actively in community and workplace activities. In Nigeria, the need for a transformative approach to language education has become increasingly urgent. Despite various educational reforms, concerns persist regarding graduates' communication competence, employability skills, creativity, and ability to adapt to workplace demands. Many learners perform reasonably well in written examinations but experience difficulties applying language effectively in professional settings, interpersonal communication, public speaking, teamwork, and problem-solving. These concerns suggest that language instruction in many schools still emphasizes theoretical knowledge and examination preparation rather than practical language use and skill development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Transformative Language Education and Work and Life Skills

Language education has traditionally focused on developing learners' proficiency in the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While these skills remain fundamental,

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contemporary educational reforms emphasize that language learning should extend beyond linguistic competence to include the acquisition of practical knowledge, attitudes, and competencies required for effective participation in work, society, and lifelong learning. This paradigm shift has given rise to the concept of transformative language education, which seeks to make language learning meaningful, learner-centred, and responsive to the realities of the twenty-first century.

Transformative learning was popularized by Mezirow (1991, 2000), who described transformative learning as a process through which individuals critically examine their assumptions, beliefs, and experiences, leading to new ways of understanding themselves and the world around them. Applied to language education, transformative learning goes beyond helping learners acquire grammatical competence; it enables them to use language as a tool for critical reflection, social interaction, problem-solving, creativity, and personal empowerment. Learners become active participants who construct knowledge through dialogue, collaboration, inquiry, and authentic communication rather than passive recipients of information. According to Freire (1970), education should liberate learners by enabling them to question existing realities, develop critical consciousness, and become agents of positive social change. His philosophy of dialogic and participatory education strongly supports transformative language education because it views language as a means of reflection, communication, and social transformation.

Similarly, Cummins (2021) argues that language education should empower learners to use language effectively for academic achievement, identity formation, and active participation in society. Within the Nigerian educational context, transformative language education aligns with the objectives of the National Policy on Education, which emphasizes the development of individuals who are intellectually capable, morally sound, socially responsible, and equipped with appropriate skills for self-reliance and national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013).

Transformative Approaches to Language Education for Work and Life Skills Development

The rapidly changing demands of the twenty-first century have necessitated a shift from traditional teacher-centred methods of language instruction to more transformative approaches that actively engage learners in meaningful communication and practical problem-solving. Conventional language teaching, which often emphasizes memorization of grammar rules, vocabulary lists, and examination preparation, has become insufficient for preparing learners for the complexities of

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modern workplaces and everyday life. Contemporary language education must therefore adopt instructional approaches that develop not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, adaptability, leadership, digital literacy, and effective communication. These competencies are increasingly recognized as indispensable for employability, entrepreneurship, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning (Richards, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

Learner-Centred Instruction

Learner-centred instruction represents one of the most fundamental principles of transformative language education. Unlike traditional classrooms where teachers dominate instruction and learners passively receive information, learner-centred teaching actively involves learners in constructing knowledge through discussion, questioning, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection. Teachers function primarily as facilitators who create supportive learning environments, guide classroom interaction, and encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has become one of the most effective transformative approaches for integrating language education with work and life skills development. Project-based learning engages learners in investigating authentic problems or real-life situations over an extended period while producing meaningful products, presentations, reports, or solutions. Throughout the project, learners communicate, collaborate, conduct research, analyse information, and present their findings using appropriate language skills.

Collaborative Learning

Collaboration is an essential competency for success in modern workplaces where employees frequently work in multidisciplinary teams to solve complex problems. Transformative language education therefore promotes collaborative learning through group discussions, cooperative learning activities, peer tutoring, and shared problem-solving tasks.

Problem-Based Learning

Problem-Based Learning (PrBL) is another transformative instructional approach that encourages learners to use language as a tool for inquiry, reasoning, and decision-making. Rather than memorizing information presented by teachers, learners investigate realistic problems, identify possible solutions, gather evidence, discuss alternatives, and communicate their conclusions using appropriate language.

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Digital Literacy and Technology-Enhanced Language Learning

Digital transformation has significantly altered the ways in which people communicate, learn, and work. Consequently, transformative language education incorporates digital technologies to prepare learners for communication within technology-driven societies. Teachers increasingly utilize online discussion forums, educational blogs, podcasts, digital storytelling, virtual presentations, collaborative writing platforms, language learning applications, and multimedia resources to enrich language instruction. These technologies provide learners with opportunities to communicate across geographical boundaries while developing digital communication skills required in contemporary workplaces.

Authentic Communication Tasks

One of the defining characteristics of transformative language education is the use of authentic communication tasks that reflect situations learners encounter in everyday life and professional environments. Instead of relying exclusively on textbook exercises, teachers engage learners in meaningful communication activities such as writing job application letters, preparing curriculum vitae, conducting interviews, participating in meetings, negotiating solutions, delivering speeches, writing business correspondence, producing newsletters, and making public presentations.

Benefits of Transformative Language Education for Work and Life Skills Development

The adoption of a transformative approach to language education offers numerous educational, social, economic, and personal benefits. By moving beyond the traditional emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and examination performance, transformative language education equips learners with practical competencies required for effective communication, productive employment, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. It prepares learners not only to become proficient language users but also to become confident, creative, adaptable, and innovative individuals capable of responding effectively to the demands of the twenty-first century. The major benefits of this approach are discussed below.

Improves Effective Communication Skills

One of the most significant benefits of transformative language education is the development of effective communication skills. Communication is the foundation of learning, workplace success, interpersonal relationships, and civic participation. Through learner-centred instructional strategies such as discussions, debates, presentations, storytelling, collaborative writing,

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interviews, and role-playing, learners develop confidence in expressing their ideas clearly and appropriately in different contexts.

Effective communication involves more than speaking fluently; it includes active listening, critical reading, purposeful writing, non-verbal communication, and the ability to adapt language to different audiences and situations. These competencies enable learners to participate confidently in academic activities, professional environments, community development, and democratic processes. In the workplace, employees who communicate effectively are better able to collaborate with colleagues, negotiate with clients, resolve conflicts, and contribute to organizational success.

Enhances Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Another important benefit of transformative language education is the promotion of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Traditional language teaching often encourages learners to memorize grammatical rules and reproduce information during examinations. In contrast, transformative language education engages learners in inquiry, reflection, analysis, and authentic communication tasks that require higher-order thinking.

Promotes Creativity and Innovation

Creativity has become one of the most essential competencies in the twenty-first century. Modern societies require individuals who can generate new ideas, adapt existing knowledge to new situations, and develop innovative solutions to complex challenges. Transformative language education creates opportunities for learners to express their imagination through creative writing, storytelling, drama, poetry, digital media production, and collaborative projects.

Promotes Lifelong Learning and Personal Development

Transformative language education encourages learners to become lifelong learners who continuously seek new knowledge, develop new skills, and adapt to changing circumstances. Through reflective learning, independent research, collaborative inquiry, and self-directed learning activities, learners cultivate curiosity, resilience, adaptability, and a positive attitude toward continuous personal improvement.

Challenges of Implementing Transformative Language Education for Work and Life Skills Development

Despite the numerous benefits associated with transformative language education, its effective implementation in many educational institutions, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria, remains constrained by several challenges. Although educational policies increasingly

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emphasize competency-based learning, learner-centred pedagogy, and the acquisition of twenty-first-century skills, classroom practices often continue to reflect traditional methods that prioritize rote learning and examination success. These limitations reduce opportunities for learners to acquire the practical communication, work, and life skills required in contemporary society. The major challenges are discussed below.

Predominance of Traditional Teaching Methods

One of the greatest obstacles to transformative language education is the continued reliance on traditional teacher-centred instructional methods. In many schools, language teaching remains dominated by lectures, note-taking, grammar drills, memorization, and examination-oriented instruction. Teachers often spend much of the lesson explaining concepts while learners passively listen and reproduce information during examinations.

Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Teachers are central to the successful implementation of transformative language education. However, many language teachers have limited exposure to learner-centred pedagogies, project-based learning, digital technologies, and competency-based instructional strategies. Most teacher preparation programmes have historically emphasized content knowledge and examination preparation, with insufficient attention given to work skills, life skills, and innovative teaching practices.

Overcrowded Classrooms

Large class sizes remain a significant challenge within many Nigerian public schools. In several primary and secondary schools, a single teacher may be responsible for teaching fifty to one hundred learners in one classroom. Such overcrowded learning environments make it extremely difficult to organize learner-centred instructional activities such as group discussions, role-playing, debates, presentations, project work, and individualized feedback.

Addressing this challenge requires increased investment in educational infrastructure, recruitment of qualified teachers, and improved teacher-to-learner ratios to facilitate interactive teaching and meaningful learner participation.

Inadequate Instructional Resources

Effective implementation of transformative language education depends largely on the availability of appropriate instructional resources. These include language laboratories, libraries, multimedia facilities, internet connectivity, audio-visual materials, digital learning platforms, and authentic

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reading materials. Unfortunately, many schools, particularly those in rural communities, lack these essential resources.

Investment in modern educational technologies and learning resources is essential for creating language classrooms that support interactive, practical, and technology-enhanced learning experiences.

Examination-Oriented Educational System

Nigeria's educational system has traditionally placed considerable emphasis on high-stakes examinations as the primary measure of academic success. Consequently, many teachers focus their instruction on preparing learners for external examinations rather than developing practical communication competence and transferable skills.

This examination culture often discourages innovative instructional practices because teachers feel pressured to complete the prescribed syllabus and maximize learners' examination performance. Classroom activities that promote creativity, collaboration, public speaking, project work, and experiential learning may receive less attention because they are perceived as contributing little to examination success.

Limited Integration of Digital Technology

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed communication in education and the workplace. Nevertheless, the integration of digital technologies into language classrooms remains limited in many schools due to inadequate infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, insufficient technological resources, and limited teacher competence.

Strengthening digital infrastructure and promoting teachers' digital competence are therefore essential for advancing transformative language education.

Curriculum Limitations

Although recent curriculum reforms have introduced competency-based elements into education, language curricula in many schools still emphasize linguistic knowledge more than practical communication and workplace competencies. Greater attention is often given to grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, and literature than to entrepreneurship communication, workplace interaction, digital literacy, leadership, and life skills.

Resistance to Educational Change

Educational innovations frequently encounter resistance from teachers, administrators, parents, and even learners who are accustomed to conventional instructional practices. Some teachers may

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hesitate to adopt learner-centred approaches because they require greater preparation, classroom management skills, and professional flexibility. Others may fear that innovative teaching methods could reduce learners' examination performance.

Creating awareness among stakeholders regarding the long-term benefits of transformative language education is therefore essential for promoting acceptance and sustainable implementation.

Strategies for Promoting Transformative Language Education for Work and Life Skills Development

The successful implementation of transformative language education requires deliberate efforts from governments, educational institutions, teachers, curriculum developers, parents, and other stakeholders. As the demands of the twenty-first century continue to reshape education and the labour market, language teaching must evolve from a predominantly examination-oriented practice to one that equips learners with practical communication, work, and life skills. This transformation demands not only curriculum reform but also sustained investment in teacher capacity, instructional resources, technology integration, and supportive educational policies. The following strategies are essential for promoting transformative language education for work and life skills development.

Adoption of Learner-Centred Pedagogies

A fundamental strategy for promoting transformative language education is the adoption of learner-centred instructional approaches. Teachers should move away from excessive reliance on lectures and memorization towards methods that actively involve learners in meaningful communication and knowledge construction. Learner-centred classrooms encourage active participation, inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and practical application of language in authentic situations.

Strengthening Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development

Teachers remain the driving force behind educational transformation. Consequently, teacher education institutions should review their curricula to incorporate transformative pedagogies, competency-based education, digital literacy, and innovative language teaching strategies. Pre-service teachers should graduate with the practical skills required to facilitate learner-centred classrooms that promote communication competence alongside work and life skills.

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In addition, governments and educational authorities should organize regular in-service training, workshops, seminars, mentoring programmes, and professional learning communities for practising teachers. These programmes should focus on classroom innovation, authentic assessment, technology integration, inclusive education, and reflective teaching practices. Continuous professional development will enhance teachers' confidence, instructional competence, and willingness to adopt transformative approaches.

Curriculum Review and Competency-Based Language Education

The language curriculum should be reviewed periodically to reflect emerging societal needs, technological advancements, and labour market expectations. Rather than focusing predominantly on grammar and examination content, curriculum planners should integrate competencies such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, leadership, intercultural communication, and responsible citizenship into language education.

Learning outcomes should clearly emphasize what learners are able to do with language in practical situations rather than simply what they know about language. Authentic communication tasks such as report writing, presentations, interviews, public speaking, workplace communication, business correspondence, and digital communication should become integral components of classroom instruction and assessment.

Integration of Digital Technologies into Language Learning

Digital technologies have transformed communication in education, business, and society. Language classrooms should therefore integrate appropriate educational technologies that enrich teaching and learning while preparing learners for communication within digital environments.

Teachers should utilize multimedia presentations, podcasts, educational videos, language learning applications, collaborative writing platforms, virtual discussion forums, digital storytelling tools, and online learning management systems to support interactive language learning. These technologies encourage learner engagement, independent learning, collaborative communication, and information literacy.

Provision of Adequate Learning Resources

The availability of quality instructional resources significantly influences the effectiveness of language education. Governments, school administrators, and educational stakeholders should invest in well-equipped libraries, language laboratories, multimedia facilities, internet

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connectivity, instructional materials, and contemporary reading resources that support interactive language learning.

Authentic learning materials such as newspapers, magazines, business documents, digital media, literary texts, community publications, and workplace communication samples should be incorporated into classroom activities. Exposure to diverse language resources enables learners to appreciate the practical relevance of language while improving reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and communication competence.

Reforming Language Assessment Practices

Assessment should move beyond measuring learners' ability to recall grammatical rules and reproduce memorized information. Transformative language education requires assessment methods that evaluate learners' practical communication competence and their ability to apply language in authentic contexts.

Teachers should incorporate presentations, oral interviews, debates, portfolios, reflective journals, project reports, peer assessment, collaborative tasks, and performance-based assessments into language evaluation. These assessment approaches provide more comprehensive information about learners' communication abilities, creativity, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving competencies.

Promoting School–Community Partnerships

Transformative language education becomes more meaningful when learning extends beyond the classroom into the wider community. Schools should establish partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, media houses, cultural institutions, and professional bodies to provide learners with authentic communication experiences.

Community-based learning activities such as interviews, field visits, volunteer services, cultural festivals, entrepreneurship projects, and workplace observations enable learners to apply language skills in real-life situations. These experiences strengthen communication competence while promoting civic responsibility, leadership, and social engagement.

Strengthening Educational Policy and Government Support

Government has a critical responsibility in creating an enabling environment for transformative language education. Educational policies should clearly recognize language education as a strategic instrument for human capital development, employability, and national competitiveness.

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Federal and state governments should allocate adequate financial resources to teacher development, curriculum innovation, educational technology, instructional materials, and language education research. They should also encourage collaboration among educational institutions, universities, professional associations, and development partners to support innovation and evidence-based educational reforms.

Encouraging Lifelong Learning and Reflective Practice

Transformative language education should cultivate positive attitudes toward lifelong learning among both teachers and learners. Teachers should engage in continuous professional reflection by evaluating their instructional practices, exploring innovative teaching strategies, and participating in professional development activities. Similarly, learners should be encouraged to become independent learners who continuously improve their communication skills through reading, research, collaboration, and self-directed learning.

Implications of Transformative Language Education for Teachers, Learners, Curriculum Developers, Policymakers, Employers, and National Development

The adoption of a transformative approach to language education has significant implications for all stakeholders in the educational process. Since language is central to communication, learning, employment, and social interaction, transforming language education extends beyond improving learners' linguistic competence. It influences curriculum design, teaching practices, educational policy, workforce preparation, national productivity, and sustainable development.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers occupy a strategic position in the implementation of transformative language education because they serve as facilitators of learning rather than mere transmitters of knowledge. The shift from teacher-centred instruction to learner-centred pedagogy requires teachers to rethink their instructional roles, classroom practices, and assessment methods. Rather than focusing primarily on grammar instruction and examination preparation, teachers are expected to create learning environments that encourage communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and practical problem-solving.

This transformation requires teachers to possess competencies in innovative instructional strategies, digital literacy, authentic assessment, classroom facilitation, and reflective practice. Continuous professional development therefore becomes indispensable if teachers are to respond effectively to emerging educational demands. Teachers who embrace transformative approaches

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are better positioned to prepare learners for productive employment, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and lifelong learning.

Implications for Learners

Learners are the primary beneficiaries of transformative language education. Through practical and learner-centred instructional experiences, they acquire communication competencies that extend beyond academic success to include employability, entrepreneurship, leadership, collaboration, creativity, and responsible citizenship. They become active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information.

The emphasis on authentic communication tasks enables learners to develop confidence in public speaking, report writing, negotiation, teamwork, digital communication, and interpersonal relationships. These competencies increase their readiness for higher education, workplace participation, and self-employment opportunities.

Implications for Curriculum Developers

Curriculum developers play a vital role in ensuring that language education remains relevant to contemporary societal and workplace needs. The shift towards transformative education requires curriculum planners to move beyond content-based syllabuses towards competency-based curricula that integrate language proficiency with work and life skills.

Implications for Policymakers

Educational policymakers have the responsibility of creating enabling conditions for the successful implementation of transformative language education. Effective policy formulation should recognize language education as a strategic instrument for human capital development, national competitiveness, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

Implications for Employers and the Labour Market

Employers are increasingly seeking graduates who possess strong communication skills together with critical thinking, teamwork, adaptability, creativity, digital competence, and leadership abilities. Consequently, transformative language education contributes directly to workforce development by preparing learners with competencies required for modern employment.

Graduates who have experienced transformative language education are more likely to communicate effectively, collaborate productively, solve workplace problems, adapt to technological changes, and demonstrate professionalism in organizational settings. These

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competencies reduce the gap between educational outcomes and labour market expectations while enhancing national productivity.

Implications for Parents and Communities

Parents and communities remain important partners in promoting language development. The home provides the first environment where children learn communication, values, and interpersonal relationships. Parents should therefore encourage reading, storytelling, meaningful conversations, and positive communication practices that complement classroom learning.

Implications for National Development

The implications of transformative language education extend beyond schools to the broader process of national development. Nations that invest in effective language education produce citizens who are capable of communicating ideas clearly, resolving conflicts peacefully, participating actively in democratic governance, embracing innovation, and contributing to economic growth.

Conclusion

Language education remains one of the most important instruments for developing human capacity because it provides the communication foundation upon which learning, employment, social interaction, and national development depend. However, the changing demands of the twenty-first century require language education to move beyond its traditional emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing to embrace a more transformative approach that equips learners with practical work and life skills. Such an approach recognizes that language is not merely a school subject but a dynamic tool for critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, innovation, leadership, and lifelong learning.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Educational institutions should adopt learner-centred instructional approaches** such as project-based learning, collaborative learning, experiential learning, role-playing, debates, simulations, and authentic communication tasks to promote practical language use and the development of work and life skills.
2. **Teacher education institutions should review their curricula** to integrate transformative pedagogies, competency-based education, digital literacy, authentic assessment, and

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innovative language teaching strategies into both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes.

3. **Governments at the federal and state levels should organize continuous professional development programmes** for language teachers to strengthen their competencies in learner-centred instruction, educational technology integration, classroom innovation, and competency-based assessment.
4. **Curriculum developers should periodically review language education curricula** to ensure that communication competence is integrated with critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, leadership, intercultural communication, and other twenty-first-century work and life skills.
5. **Schools should strengthen the integration of digital technologies into language instruction** by providing internet connectivity, multimedia facilities, language laboratories, educational software, and other digital learning resources that promote interactive and authentic communication.

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