

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme: Referencing selected IB DP English, French, German, and Spanish subjects to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Ecctis

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Executive Summary

Ecctis has conducted a benchmarking and comparative analysis of selected International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB DP) Language A and Language B subjects (in English, French, German, and Spanish) to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR). Group 1 subjects (Language A) focus on developing critical thinking skills in relation to different texts and the way in which language is used in them; Group 2 subjects (Language B) focus primarily on the development of language competence.

Language A findings

The results show that B2 CEFR level (commonly required for university admission) in **Language A: language and literature** and **Language A: literature** is reported at the threshold of IB grade 4 at both Standard Level (SL) and Higher Level (HL). In the Language A: language and literature and Language A: literature, all analysed subjects were found to report between B1 and C2 at HL and between B1 and C1 at SL. The figures below provide a summary, for the Language A subjects analysed by Ecctis, of the relationship found between IB grades and reported CEFR levels of language proficiency.

CEFR Level	English A: Language and Literature		English A: Literature		French A: Language and Literature		French A: Literature		German A: Language and Literature		German A: Literature		Spanish A: Language and Literature		Spanish A: Literature	
	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL
C2	*	7	*	7	*	7	*	7	*	7	*	7	*	7	*	7
C1	7 6	6	7 6	6	7 6	6	7 6	6	7 6	6	7 6	6	7 6	6	7 6	6
B2	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
B1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
A2	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
A1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

* CEFR level not reported by any IB grade in this subject

Language B findings

Regarding Language B, students achieving a grade 5 in HL or a grade 6 (English, French, Spanish) and 7 (German) in SL will have attained CEFR B2 proficiency. In most **Language B** languages analysed – English, French, and Spanish – Ecctis also found grade 6 to report B2 level proficiency at SL. German B was the only language found to report B2 at only grade 7 at SL. Although some variation between languages was found at specific grades in Language B, Ecctis concluded that all Language B languages report a CEFR proficiency range between A2+ and C1 at HL and between A2 and B2+ at SL.

The figures below provide a summary, for the Language B subjects analysed by Ecctis, of the relationship found between IB grades and reported CEFR levels of language proficiency.

CEFR Level	English B		French B		German B		Spanish B	
	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL
C2	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C1	*	7	*	7	*	7	*	7
B2+	7	6	7	6	*	6	7	6
B2	6	5	6	5	7	5	6	5
B1+	5	4	5	4	6	4	5	4
B1	4	3	4	3	5	3	4	3
A2+	3	2	3	2	4	2	3	2
A2	2	*	2	*	3	2	2	*
A1	*	*	*	*	2	*	*	*

* CEFR level not reported by any IB grade in this subject

Context

Ecctis was commissioned by the IB to undertake an independent comparative study of a selection of DP language subjects (in English, French, German, and Spanish) to the CEFR.

The CEFR was published by the Council of Europe in 2001.¹ It is widely used in the development and referencing of language syllabi, qualifications, assessment, and other learning materials. It is also commonly used by universities to express language proficiency requirements for admission to undergraduate and postgraduate study. The CEFR is

¹ Council of Europe. (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Language Policy Unit, Strasbourg.

designed to provide a common and neutral basis for all languages to define levels of language proficiency.

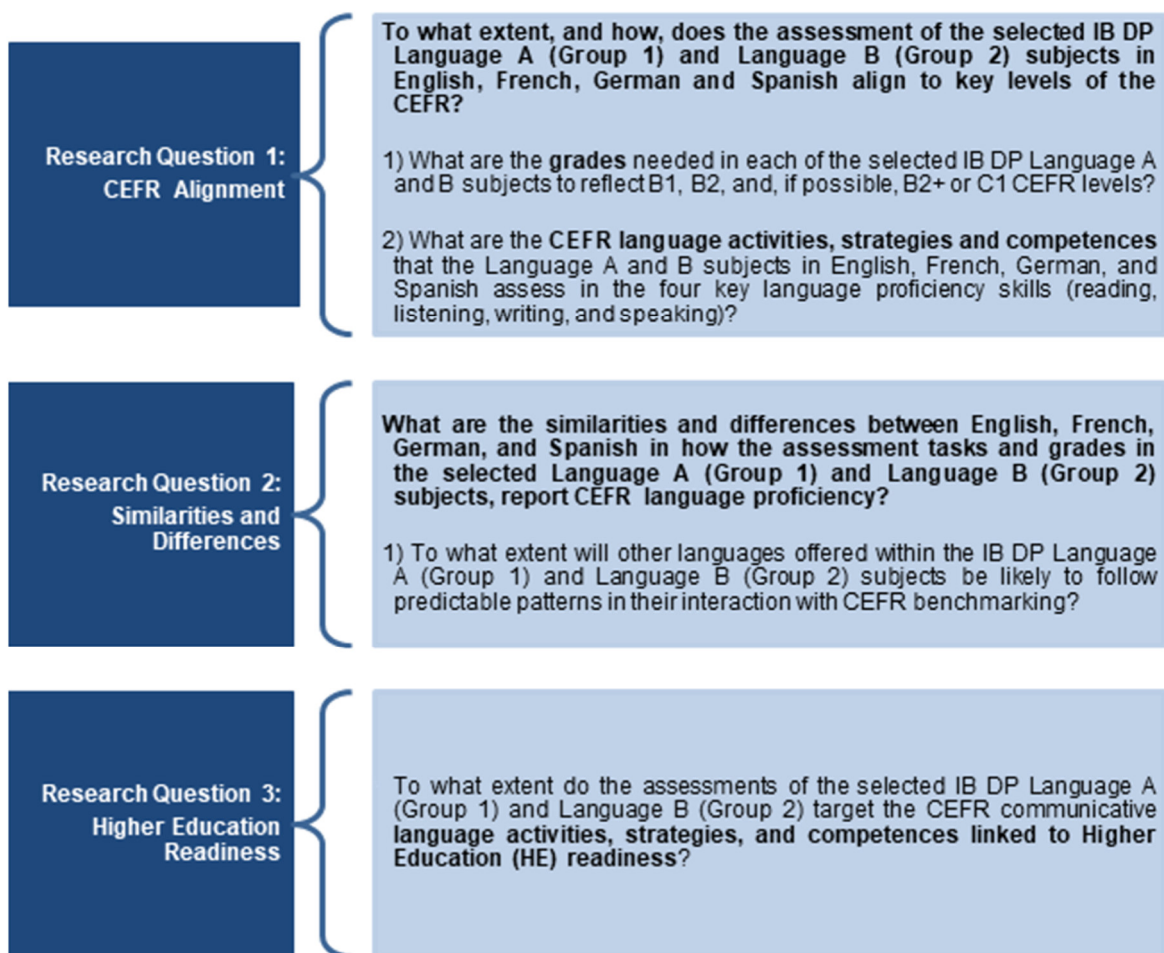
The subjects reviewed in this project are presented in the table below. All subjects were analysed at both SL and HL.

Subject group	Subject	English		French		German		Spanish	
		SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL	SL	HL
Studies in language and literature (Group 1)	Language A: literature	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Language A: language and literature	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Language acquisition (Group 2)	Language B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Aims and Research Questions

The aim of the study was to establish how the level of English, French, German, and Spanish language proficiency reported by each subject, and indicated by associated subject grades, compared to CEFR levels. The overarching goal was to support greater stakeholder understanding of the level of language proficiency assessed by these subjects. In benchmarking the selected subjects against the CEFR, the study focused on establishing the grades needed in each of the selected IB DP subjects to reflect B1, B2, and, if possible, B2+ or C1 CEFR levels, with B2 being the level most typically sought for university entry.

The Research Questions of the study were as follows:

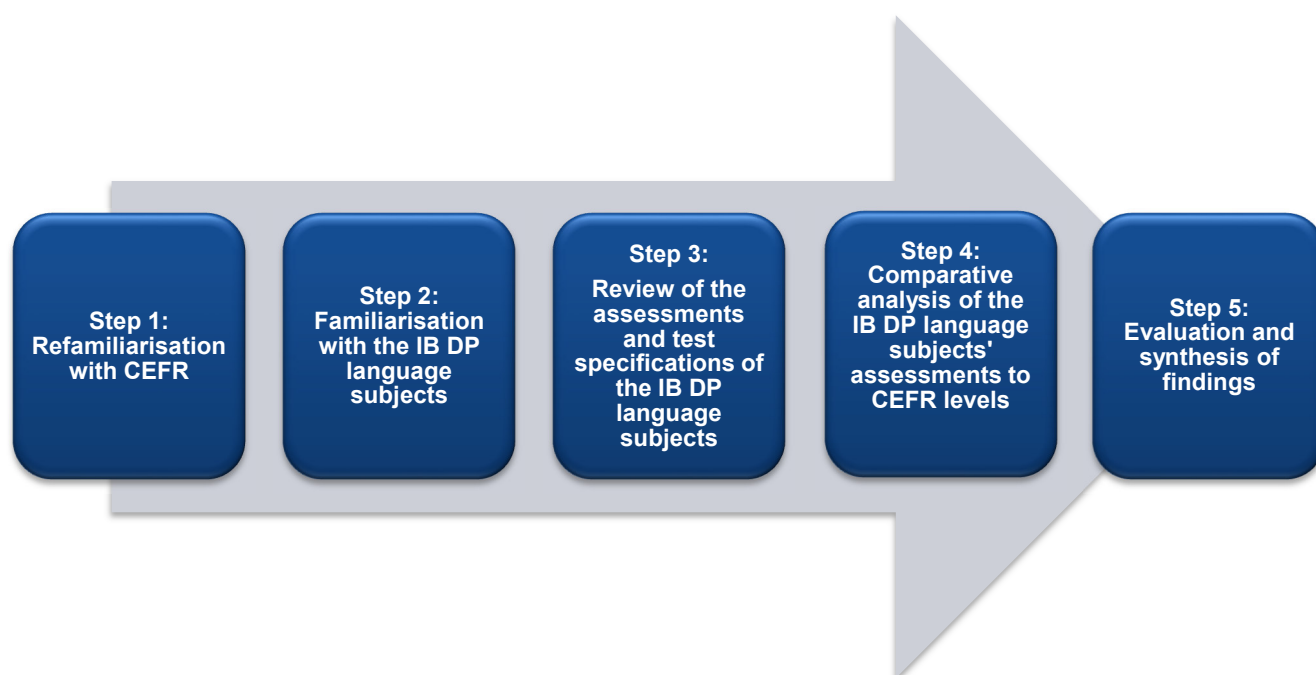


Methodological approach

The methodology employed by Ecctis in this study has been informed closely by the *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment – A Manual* (Council of Europe, 2009). The comparative analysis and benchmarking of the IB DP Language A and Language B subjects to the CEFR made reference to a wide range of CEFR communicative language activities, communicative language competences, and communicative language strategies for reading and listening comprehension, spoken and written production, interaction and mediation.

The assessment papers reviewed were from the May 2021 examination (M21) for the Language A subjects (Language A: language and literature and Language A: literature) and the November 2020 (N20) (reading and listening), November 2022 (N22) (reading and listening) and May 2021 (M21) (speaking and writing) examinations for the Language B subjects. Looking across multiple assessment cycles for Language B, supported Ecctis to build confidence in the overall findings.

The methodological approach of the study is outlined in the diagram below.



Key findings

RQ1: To what extent, and how, does the assessment of the selected IB DP subjects align to the key levels of the CEFR?

The independent review and analysis of the Language A and Language B assessments and test specifications found that all analysed subjects have sound assessment in place to assess students' skills. Specifically, each subject assesses the skills shown in the table below. All analysed subjects also have a threshold grade that reports CEFR B2 proficiency – this is also shown in the table below.

IB DP Subject	Language A: language & literature		Language A: literature		Language B	
CEFR B2 threshold grade	HL: 4 (English, French, German, Spanish)	SL: 4 (English, French, German, Spanish)	HL: 4 (English, French, German, Spanish)	SL: 4 (English, French, German, Spanish)	HL: 5 (English, French, German, Spanish)	SL: 6 (English, French, Spanish) SL: 7 (German)
Skills assessed:						
Reading	✓		✓		✓	
Listening	✗		✗		✓	
Writing	✓		✓		✓	
Speaking	✓*		✓*		✓	

* Language A subjects assess spoken production; mark schemes do not specifically reward spoken interaction.

The analysis of the IB DP Language A subjects (Language A: language and literature and Language A: literature) found that the B2 level threshold is reported at IB grade 4 for both SL and HL subjects across English, French, German, and Spanish. For the IB DP Language B subjects, the comparative analysis indicated that the B2 level threshold is reported at IB grade 5 for HL across English, French, German, and Spanish. The B2 level threshold is reported at IB grade 6 in the English, French and Spanish Language B SL but it is reported

at the IB grade 7 in the German Language B SL. Therefore, Ecctis' judgement that can be applied generally across all languages is that B2 proficiency is reported by at least grade 7 in Language B SL. The boxes below present the summary of the key findings for Research Question 1.

Key Finding i – Language A Grades & CEFR Levels

In English, French, German, and Spanish, the Language A subjects analysed report different CEFR levels at SL and HL. At SL, all four languages report proficiency at B1 to C1 levels and the grade threshold for B2 proficiency is 4. At HL, all four languages report proficiency at B1 to C2 levels and the grade threshold for B2 proficiency is also 4.

Key Finding ii – Language A Skills Assessed

In all four languages analysed here, both Language A courses fully assess reading and writing skills. Listening skills are not directly assessed and although spoken production skills are assessed, spoken interaction is not specifically rewarded in the marking criteria. Both Language A curricula include assessment of a wide range of CEFR-related activities, strategies, and competences within these assessed skill areas.

Key Finding iii – Language B SL Reading

Despite some variety between the 2020 and 2022 assessment cycles, Language B SL Paper 2 (reading comprehension) was found in English, French, and Spanish to have tasks pitched between CEFR levels A2+ and B2. German B SL was found to have tasks pitched between A2+ and B1+, as Text C (reading comprehension) in German B SL did not reach B2 level in either assessment cycle.

Key Finding iv – Language B HL Reading

Language B HL Paper 2 (reading comprehension) was found to have tasks pitched between CEFR levels B1+ and C1 in English, French, German, and Spanish.

Key Finding v – Language B SL Listening

In Language B SL Paper 2 (listening comprehension), English, French, German, and Spanish all contained tasks pitched at B1 and B1+, but the presence of A2, A2+, and B2 varied between languages and between the 2020 and 2022 assessment cycles.

Key Finding vi – Language B HL Listening

In Language B HL Paper 2 (listening comprehension), English, French, German, and Spanish all contained tasks pitched at B2 level. The presence of B1, B1+, B2+, and C1 tasks varied between languages. English, French, and Spanish contained a steady progression of demand, whereas German B heavily deployed B2 and B2+ tasks.

Key Finding vii – Language B SL Writing

From CEFR mapping of the Language B SL Paper 1 (writing) marking criteria – and detailed analysis of student samples – the paper was found to assess between CEFR levels A2 and B2+ in all criteria. Some criteria also rewarded performance at A1 and C1 levels. These findings applied consistently to English, French, German, and Spanish.

Key Finding viii – Language B HL Writing

From CEFR mapping of the Language B HL Paper 1 (writing) marking criteria – and detailed analysis of student samples – the paper was found to assess between CEFR levels A2 and B2+ in all criteria. Some criteria also rewarded performance at A1 and C1 levels. These findings applied consistently to English, French, German, and Spanish.

Key Finding ix – Language B SL Speaking and interactive skills

From CEFR mapping of the Language B SL Internal Assessment (speaking and interactive skills) marking criteria – and detailed analysis of student samples – the paper was found to assess between CEFR levels A2 and B2 in all criteria. Some criteria also rewarded performance at A1, B2+, and C1 levels. These findings applied consistently to English, French, German, and Spanish.

Key Finding x – Language B HL Speaking and interactive skills

From CEFR mapping of the Language B HL Internal Assessment (speaking and interactive skills) marking criteria – and detailed analysis of student samples – the paper was found to assess between CEFR levels A2 and B2 in all criteria. Some criteria also rewarded performance at A1, B2+, and C1 levels. These findings applied consistently to English, French, German, and Spanish.

Key Finding xi – Language B HL Grades & CEFR Levels

In English, French, German, and Spanish, Language B HL reports B2 proficiency at the grade threshold of 5. All four languages also report between A2+ and C1 levels.

Key Finding xii – Language B SL Grades & CEFR Levels

In English, French, German, and Spanish, Language B SL reports different CEFR levels in relation to receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (writing and speaking). Taking this into account, and the evidence drawn from considering multiple assessment cycles, overall, all four languages report between A2 and B2+ levels. The B2 grade threshold for English, French, and Spanish is 6, while it is 7 for German.

Key Finding xiii – Language B Assessment Consistency (across years)

Language B SL assessments in receptive skills (paper 2) demonstrate tasks pitched at different levels between 2020 and 2022. The IB has indicated to Ecctis that the 2022 pattern is representative of how the assessment design will be continued in future.

Key Finding xiv – Language B Skills Assessed

Language B assesses all four key language proficiency skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking). Furthermore, a wide range of activities, strategies, and competences described in the CEFR are actively assessed, including those related to production, reception, mediation, interaction, and others.

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences between English, French, German, and Spanish in how the assessments tasks and grades, in the selected IB DP subjects, report CEFR language proficiency?

The degree of consistency found between the four languages considered by Ecctis (English, French, German, and Spanish) varied between Language A and Language B. The Language A subjects had uniform top-level findings for all four languages, as the key CEFR-proficiency components are driven by the common marking criteria of the assessments. Language B showed some small, but also some more significant, differences and variations between languages. Particularly at SL, Language B demonstrated variability with the level of proficiency tested across the receptive skills.

Across all languages, the analysis found that grade 4 in Language B HL reflected B1+ level, grade 5 reflected B2 level, grade 6 reflected B2+ level and grade 7 reflected C1 level. Additionally, across all languages, the analysis indicated that grade 4 in Language B SL reflected B1 level. Grade 5 in English, French, and Spanish B SL reflected B1+ level whereas, in German B SL, grades 5 and 6 reflected B1+ level. Grades 6 and 7 in English, French and Spanish B SL reflected B2 level, whereas grade 7 in German B SL reflected B2 level.

Key Finding xv – Consistency Across Languages

The degree of consistency found between the four languages considered by Ecctis (English, French, German, and Spanish) varied between Language A and Language B. The Language A courses had uniform top-level findings for all four languages, as the key CEFR-proficiency components are driven by the common marking criteria. Language B showed some small, but also some more significant, differences between languages. Particularly at SL, Language B demonstrated variability with the level of proficiency tested across receptive skills.

RQ3: To what extent do the assessments of the selected IB DP subjects target the CEFR communicative language activities, strategies and competences linked to Higher Education (HE) readiness?

Key Finding xvi – Higher Education Readiness

Many components of language proficiency described in the CEFR are linked to Higher Education readiness, particularly at B2 level. Ecctis' detailed analysis of the Language A: language and literature, Language A: literature and Language B assessments found that the majority of the activities, strategies, and competences linked to HE readiness are notably present in the assessments of these subjects. However, there are also some areas where the IB assessments do not overlap with these particular aspects of the CEFR.