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2022-06-04

pý Kossakowska-Pisarek , S , Siddall , R & Zwierk , M 2022 , ' Mediation and Perceptions of Needs at European Universities in the Context of EU Language Policy ' , Sustainable Multilingualism , vol. 20 , no. 1 , pp. 129-153 . <https://doi.org/10.2478/sm-2022-0006>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/346396>

<https://doi.org/10.2478/sm-2022-0006>

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publishedVersion

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MEDIATION: TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF NEEDS AT EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF EU LANGUAGE POLICY

Summary. Mediation is a novel concept in language teaching and learning, and the needs and attitudes of language teachers towards it are largely unexplored. This article provides a brief overview of European language policy and discusses the action-oriented approach in the context of this paradigm shift in language learning and teaching. Finally, an exploratory study is presented that examined the needs and attitudes of language teachers from four European universities regarding mediation, as it has been formulated in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) and redefined in the CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors (Council of Europe, 2018). The participating teachers were from the language centres of Charles University in the Czech Republic, Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania, the University of Helsinki in Finland, and the University of Warsaw in Poland. The study survey measured the strength of (dis)agreement of the teachers with 12 statements concerning various aspects of mediation in the context of their teaching practice. These related to understanding what mediation is and its importance, mediating a text, mediating concepts, mediating communication, and mediation strategies. In addition, two open questions concerned the practice of promoting multilingual and intercultural education and the needs of teachers in the area of mediation. Although the vast majority of the 79 participating teachers (91%) agreed that mediation is vital in language learning and teaching, only a third of them claimed that they understood the concept. Furthermore, the findings indicate that some aspects of mediation are more challenging for the teachers to embrace than others and that some fundamental aspects of mediation do not seem to be part of the current teaching practice of all teachers. Overall, the present study confirmed some of the challenges with the implementation of the CEFR into teaching practice at the higher education level.

Keywords: language policy; mediation; university teacher; needs; attitudes.

Introduction

Recent developments in language learning and teaching have heightened the need to explore the needs and attitudes of the teachers in the area of mediation as defined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR): Companion*

volume (2020). Introducing mediation into language learning is part of a paradigm shift in the field of language education, which is related to the new, more dynamic vision presented first in the CEFR (2001), and then extended in the CERF/CV (2018, 2020). The concept of mediation has a long tradition in philosophy, law, and psychology, but it has not been extensively used in second-language acquisition (SLA) and it is not clear among language teachers. Linguistic mediation is a relatively new concept, directly connected with quite a few implications for language learning and teaching, which may impact the beliefs of language teachers with regard to the use of L1 in tasks or the plurality of languages to accomplish tasks and may require a significant change of attitudes with regards to these areas for some language teachers. However, no previous studies have examined the readiness of teachers for the paradigm shift or the issues faced when implementing mediation activities and strategies into their teaching practice. This paper seeks to critically examine the beliefs about the teaching practice related to mediation as formulated in the CEFR/CV (2020) and to trace the problematic areas regarding mediation. The article reports on a questionnaire study conducted at four European universities among language teachers, related to their views on mediation as part of their teaching practice. The controversial issues connected with mediation are explored in the context of mediation activities and strategies.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part provides a brief overview of the language policy in Europe with the key documents pertaining to mediation. In the second part, the action-oriented approach is discussed in the context of the paradigm shift in language learning and teaching. It examines the contentious areas for language teachers. The practical part presents a study on the beliefs and attitudes of language teachers towards mediation activities and strategies. Finally, conclusions are drawn and implications are examined.

Paradigm Shift in the Council of Europe Documents Relating to Mediation

Over the past decades, there has been an increasing interest in describing what it means to learn languages and how it could be operationalized and aligned in

order to enhance the effectiveness of language learning, teaching, and assessment. However, the Council of Europe set out a specific goal to promote and facilitate communication among Europeans of various native languages as part of its language policy. The Council of Europe's language policy is based on the political and social realities of forming a single European education space for its citizens (Bärenfänger & Tschirner, 2008). The objectives of the policy are based upon three principles set forth in the preamble to Recommendation R (82) 18 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CEFR, 2001, 2–3). The first principle refers to the protection and development of the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures and how this diversity should not be regarded as a barrier. The second specifies that only through better knowledge of European modern languages can the communication and interaction of Europeans be facilitated in order to overcome prejudice and discrimination and to promote European mobility, mutual understanding, and cooperation. The third principle emphasizes the need for greater convergence of national policies in the field of modern languages. Therefore, as languages are the most direct expression of culture and linguistic diversity is a fundamental value, language policy has become a pivotal means to achieve the objectives.

Language policy may be defined as a long-term sustained and conscious effort to alter a language or change a language's functions in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems (Weinstein, as cited in Beer & Jacob, 1985). The CEFR (2001) "is intended to promote quality plurilingual education, facilitate greater social mobility and stimulate reflection and exchange between language professionals for curriculum development and in teacher education" (CEFR/CV, 2020, p. 11). It is also often highlighted that the CEFR provides a metalanguage for all citizens in a multilingual Europe. Thus, learning languages is not just an objective for people to communicate better, but it becomes a foundation upon which European society can build its future. The key documents that relate to the language policy are discussed in detail in the next sections with regard to mediation.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001)

As stated at the beginning of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001), the aim of this document is to provide a common basis for the “elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (2001, p. 1). It aims at promoting international cooperation in the field of modern languages. The CEFR is recognized as a contribution to the implementation of the Council of Europe’s language education principles (CEFR/CV, 2020, p. 13).

The CEFR replaced the traditional model of four skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with four modes, i.e. reception, production, interaction, and mediation. Mediation was introduced into the CEFR together with interaction in order to include communicative language activities that are not covered by reception and production (North & Piccardo, 2017, p. 84), which means that it covers the co-construction of meaning emphasizing the importance of the social dimension of learning. The basic division into mediating activities and strategies was presented in the CEFR (pp. 87–88), but no illustrative scales were provided.

Moreover, the CEFR established the notion of plurilingualism as “the interrelation and interconnection of languages – particularly but not exclusively at the level of the individual – in relation to the dynamic nature of language acquisition” (Piccardo, 2018, p. 7). As Piccardo (2018, p. 13) emphasizes, the notion of mediation is core in plurilingualism, as it permits learners to make sense of complex social exchanges in increasingly diverse societies. It is highlighted that mediating/making communication possible beyond linguistic barriers is part of plurilingual and pluricultural competence (CEFR, 2001, p.135). Piccardo (2018) also argues that in a plurilingual classroom, both teachers and students pursue an educational strategy that enables them to embrace and exploit linguistic diversity in order to maximize communication.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment: Companion Volume with New Descriptors (CEFR/CV, 2018, 2020)

Mediation in CEFR/CV is informed by various theories based on the work of Vygotsky, i.e. sociocultural theory and socio-constructivist theory. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that cognition develops through social interaction and is mediated by language. Mediation is recognized as a more complex mode than the other three (reception, production, and interaction) since it often encompasses all of them (North & Piccardo, 2018) and is an important concept that assumed even greater importance with the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of our societies. Specific descriptors were developed for mediating a text, mediating concepts, and mediating communication. In addition, descriptor scales were provided for the related mediation strategies.

As Piccardo (2018, p. 14) argues, focusing on mediation has allowed for a reconceptualization of language pedagogy. Traditionally, language learning was perceived as a cognitive process occurring at the level of the individual, focused on learning grammatical or lexical knowledge (North & Piccardo, 2016), while mediation is a core feature of social processes. Constructing meaning is equally important to communication.

Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018/C 189/01)

In recent years, the European Council has drawn attention to the importance of learning processes. In May 2018, the updated version of the recommendation was published, defining eight key competences for lifelong learning. As stated, the development of competences is pivotal in realizing the vision to achieve "European identity in all its diversity" (Council of Europe, 2018). There are eight key competences: literacy, multilingual competence, mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, digital, personal social and learning to learn competence, citizenship, entrepreneurship, cultural awareness, and expression. Both literacy competence and multilingual competence directly

relate to mediation activities and are two of eight key competences that all EU citizens need to acquire. The former implies the ability to communicate and connect appropriately and effectively with others in the mother tongue, the language of schooling, and/or the official language. The latter refers to using various languages and relies on "the ability to mediate between different languages and media". It is based on a positive attitude towards the appreciation of cultural diversity and intercultural communication, which is also a focus of mediating communication. However, in the fifth competence, personal, social, and learning to learn, we can also trace mediation aspects. Part of this competence relates to managing conflict in an inclusive and supportive context and understanding the code of conduct and rules of communication. The skills include the ability to communicate constructively in different environments, collaborate in teams, and negotiate. Moreover, this competence relates to showing tolerance and expressing and understanding different viewpoints. We can see these aspects as crucial both in mediating concepts and communication. Furthermore, the sixth citizenship competence concerns awareness of diversity and cultural identities in Europe, which is also a focal point of mediation activities. The eighth competence, cultural awareness and expression, is related to an understanding of and respect for how ideas and meaning are creatively expressed and communicated in different cultures, which is linked with mediating text activities. Overall, five out of the eight competences are connected to mediation. Next, we consider the action-oriented approach and its implications.

Action-Oriented Approach (AoA) and Controversies

The action-oriented approach was first defined in the CEFR (2001) as a very general view of language use and learning, taking into account cognitive, emotional, and volitional resources (p. 9). As Piccardo (2018) highlights, the core of action learning is the task (p. 15). According to Piccardo and North (2019, 137), the action-oriented approach has developed from task-based language teaching (TBLT), which in turn is an example of a "strong version" of the communicative approach. However, as van den Branden et al. (2009) emphasize, using tasks does not necessarily mean a specific model of task-

based learning. This approach is directly connected with the co-construction of meaning, as it recognizes the role of the social dimension in language learning. As Willis and Willis (2007) note, learners are not limited to one or two forms and can use any form that allows them to complete the task. This is as opposed to traditional language learning, where learners need to use a specific form, thus explicitly focusing on form. In accordance with the approach defined in the CEFR (2001), tasks should be purposeful and collaborative, and their primary focus should not be language. In this way, students are able to develop real-world language skills.

Piccardo and North (2019, 137) draw our attention to the fact that language use has manifold purposes and includes not only interactional and transactional aspects but also pleasure, creativity, and imagination. The action-oriented approach is conceptualized as a broader and strategic vision, which makes agency, and not any curricular organization, the defining construct (van Lier, 2007, 62). Moreover, this perspective marks the shift from the traditional product-oriented acquisition to process-oriented *participation* (Sfard, 1998). In this way, we treat learners as social agents, who have their own lives, aspirations, identities, and voice and who need to articulate more than just language forms or practice pronunciation. In addition, active learners who initiate their actions become stronger with regard to their intrinsic motivation and autonomy (Ushioda, 2003). This is why it is vital to consider how we use mediation activities and strategies, and not only if we use them in teaching foreign languages. Implementing pedagogy is also related to the language used by educators in the classroom, and as Bernstein (2000) points out, pedagogical discourse is linked inextricably with social inclusion, the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally, and personally. Thus, the activities, needs, and emergent purposes of learners are crucial and part of the broader view of teaching and learning practices. As the AoA aims at transforming these practices, this is not simply a question of whether a teacher uses a specific mediation activity or strategy, but how it is applied and if this application promotes the development of key competences, *inter alia*, the autonomy of the learner or multilingual/plurilingual pedagogy, which is discussed in the next section.

A shift in approaches to *language learning*, *learners*, and *language* from

monolingual to multilingual has taken place in recent years. This is a critical movement in education, as it significantly impacts how we understand the concepts, which in turn draws upon underlying beliefs about what language teachers and learners do in the classroom. It promotes *learners* as diverse multilingual and social practitioners and *learning* as a multilingual social practice (Meier, 2017, p.131). *Language* is perceived as part of the multimodal repertoire and socially constructed as "a web of interlinked socio-political and historical factors that shape one's identity and voice" (Kumaravadivelu, 2005, p. 72). According to this conceptualization, language learning is supported by the use of other languages, such as a first language (Moore, 2013). The use of L1 remains a controversial issue, as the communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology promoted the "English only" classroom and perceived the use of L1 as a "problem" (Moore, 2013, 239). However, translanguaging is a discursive practice that may help to complete a task efficiently and effectively, and as such should be permitted in the L2 classroom, at least to a limited extent. L1 use is, according to Moore (2013, 251), a naturally occurring phenomenon in the L2 classroom, and in the context of task-based activities, especially in the context of developing metalinguistic competence, the "English only" policy should not be enforced. This view is supported by Piccardo (2018), who points out that introducing mediation descriptors facilitates liberating practitioners from monolingual bias and constraints (p. 14). According to Piccardo et al. (2021, 130), multilingualism views languages as separate or co-existing, while plurilingualism views them as interrelated and interconnected. The researchers identify plurilingualism, the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner (CEFR/CV, 2020, p. 30), as an alternative pedagogy and highlight that some teachers are resistant to innovation. They provide the following reasons for these attitudes: firstly, individual beliefs, secondly, pervasive public discourses that position students' plurilingualism more as a problem than as an asset, and thirdly, the lack of support for plurilingual pedagogical innovations (Piccardo, 2018, p. 132).

Study

Motivation for This Study

This study was conducted in order to assess the needs, perceptions, and attitudes of language teachers in the area of mediation and focused on exploring teaching behaviours and beliefs. As mediation is a novel concept in language learning, the needs and attitudes of language teachers towards it are largely unexplored, and too little attention has been paid to this most prominent concept in the CEFR, which was referred to as the most relevant and controversial document in the field in the twenty-first century (Figueras, 2012, 477). Moreover, as the paradigm shift impacts the beliefs of teachers, there is a need to explore the controversies related to including mediation as part of language teaching practice. This study was conducted as part of a needs assessment for an Erasmus+ KA203 project, Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices in higher education, entitled "Mediation in Language Learning and Teaching"¹.

Research Questions

This exploratory study examined the needs and attitudes of language teachers from four European universities in the area of mediation, as it has been formulated in the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) and redefined in the *CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (Council of Europe, 2018). These universities were Charles University in the Czech Republic, Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania, the University of Helsinki in Finland, and the University of Warsaw in Poland. The research questions were as follows:

Q1: What are the needs of the teachers in the area of mediation?

¹ Mediation in Language Learning and Teaching (MiLLaT), Erasmus+ project, Strategic Partnerships for higher education, 2019-1-PL01-KA203-065746.

Q2: What are the attitudes of the teachers towards various mediation activities and strategies and their use in the classroom in accordance with the action-oriented approach?

Method

Instrument

A survey was conducted to assess the needs of language teachers from the language centres of the four European universities and their attitudes towards mediation in relation to their teaching practice. It was based on the scales of mediation activities and strategies as described in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR): Companion volume with new descriptors* (2018) and the action-oriented approach.

The survey instrument consisted of three sections (Appendix 1). It collected demographic data from respondents in the first section, including gender, age, nationality, country of residence, and university. The second section comprised 12 statements concerning various aspects of mediation in the context of the teaching practice. The survey items measured teachers' strength of (dis)agreement with the items using a 5-point Likert-type scale, asking the respondents to consider the statements about their teaching practice and choose the response that best represented their opinions, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The items related to understanding what mediation is and its importance (Q1, Q12), mediating a text (Q4, Q5), mediating concepts (Q2, Q3, Q7, Q8, Q11), mediating communication (Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10) and mediation strategies (Q4, Q5, Q8). In addition, in the third section, there were two open questions. The first concerned the practice of promoting multilingual and intercultural education: "*Does your university offer opportunities for interaction with students of different cultural and social backgrounds?*". The second related to the needs of teachers in the area of mediation: "*Do you believe that teachers are prepared to train students in the area of mediation? Why/why not?*".

The Pilot Study

The instrument was piloted with 12 teachers from the University of Warsaw during a project meeting in January 2019. During this meeting, the discussion was carried out on the most salient aspects of mediation for teachers that need to be taken into account. The readability and content validity of the survey items concerning mediation were discussed, the open questions were added and some issues concerning mediation and its novelty for teachers were discussed. After the project meeting, five items were reworded and, overall, all items were deemed as clear in terms of understanding.

Procedure

The survey (N = 79) was carried out during January and February 2019 in the form of online questionnaires for teachers with open- and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was translated into Polish, Czech, and Lithuanian by the partner universities, and the answers to open questions were translated into English for the sake of this study. The Finnish partner conducted the survey in English.

Participants and Setting

All language teachers from four partner universities were invited to participate in the survey online. Altogether, 79 teachers completed the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data were collected and analysed descriptively. Univariate analyses of the data identified participants' attitudes and perceptions of their needs in the various areas of mediation according to the strength of their (dis)agreement with the items. A numerical value was assigned to each response on a Likert scale: 1 (I strongly disagree), 2 (I don't agree), 3 (I am not sure), 4 (I agree), and 5 (I strongly agree). The analyses comprised percentages, measures of central tendency, and standard deviations. Analysis

of the numerical data was performed using SPSS v.7.0. As the questionnaire was composed of 12 items, the internal consistency reliability was measured with Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was calculated for the 12-item questionnaire ($\alpha=0.722$), and its reliability was confirmed.

Results

Findings

The respondents (10 males, 69 females) were teachers from the language centres of the partner institutions in the project, i.e. Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, the University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania, and the University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland. The teachers were between 32 to 67 years old and were mainly Polish 37 (47%), Czech 18 (23%), Lithuanian 8 (10%), British 4 (5%) and Finnish 3 (4%), and also included Irish, American, Azerbaijani, Kyrgyz, German and Russian participants. The majority of the teachers ($n = 51$; 65%) had previously taken part in an exchange programme.

Descriptive statistics for responses to the 12 items relating to mediation, in the second section of the questionnaire, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for a 12-item questionnaire ($N = 79$ for all questions) as listed in Part Two of the questionnaire (Appendix 1)

Item	Mean	SD
Q1	3.28	0.82
Q2	3.78	0.98
Q3	3.72	0.90
Q4	3.86	1.12
Q5	2.97	0.94
Q6	3.99	1.08

Item	Mean	SD
Q7	3.99	0.98
Q8	4.24	0.85
Q9	3.33	0.76
Q10	3.30	0.74
Q11	4.70	0.46
Q12	4.54	0.76

Note. The mean and standard deviation are presented for the responses to 12 statements (Q1–Q12) on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Needs of Teachers and the Importance of Mediation

The first statement directly relates to the needs of teachers in the area of mediation: Q1: *I understand well what mediation in language teaching is and how to develop my students' mediation strategies.* Only a third of teachers agreed with the statement that they understand mediation in language teaching well (36%), while the majority of teachers were either uncertain (44%) or disagreed (14%). Overall, it is obvious that teachers did not perceive mediation as a clear concept ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.82$), and an extremely high percentage of the teachers were uncertain. On the other hand, the perceived importance of mediation was assessed based on Q12: *I believe that mediation (processing and communicating meaning) is important in language teaching.* The majority (91%) of teachers agreed with this statement, while only 5% of teachers were uncertain and 4% disagreed. On a Likert-type scale, a mean response of 4.54 ($SD = 0.76$) was reported (Table 1), and this is the second-highest mean overall, with the lowest SD, which clearly confirms that the concept is perceived as vital.

Mediating Concepts

The second and third items mainly referred to mediating concepts. Q2: *In courses I teach, students often work in groups and can create their own*

materials, photographs, texts. They compare, contrast, and discuss them. In this case, 72% of teachers agreed with the statement, but 9% were uncertain and 15% disagreed (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.98). Q3: *My students are prepared to process a text and information well e.g. they can describe a table, diagram, report, graph, etc. They can talk about it and write e.g. an email/ a report, process info from a poster or a recipe, etc.* Altogether, 68% of teachers agreed with this statement, but 13% of teachers were uncertain and 14% disagreed (M = 3.72, SD = 0.90). As we can see in both cases, the majority of teachers claimed that they include such activities in their teaching practice (see Table 1), and there is quite a high level of agreement for teachers implied by the small SD values. However, it is noteworthy that many teachers are uncertain.

Mediating a Text While Using Mediation Strategies

Similarly, in the case of mediating a text while using mediation strategies, i.e. Q4: *I ask my students to explain in simple words scientific terms/issues related to their field of study*, 70% of teachers agreed with the statement, but 8% of teachers were uncertain and 20% disagreed. However, in the case of Q5: *I make sure that my students can use different strategies to take notes effectively during lectures and while reading more complex texts. Their notes are well-structured and could be used by other students*, 32% of teachers agreed with the statement, but 25% of teachers were uncertain and 38% disagreed. The mean of the responses was 3.86 (SD = 1.12) in the case of Q4, which is the highest standard deviation, and 2.97 (SD = 0.95) in the case of Q5, which is the lowest mean.

Mediating Communication

Three items in the survey related to mediating communication. The first item directly relates to the practice of translanguaging and using plurilingual competence: Q6: *Sometimes I let my students use their mother tongue during language classes to help them see the differences between language grammatical and vocabulary items.* According to the results, 81% of teachers

agreed with this statement, while only 1% of teachers were uncertain and 18% disagreed (Table 1). The second-highest standard deviation was recorded for the responses to this statement ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.08$), and as we can see, the teachers were polarized, with one-fifth of them disagreeing with the statement.

The second item in this category was Q9: *My students have the necessary skills and resources to help other people in disagreements to better understand each other and negotiate possible solutions.* Altogether, 76% of teachers agreed with this statement, but 11% of teachers were uncertain and 17% disagreed. A mean of 3.33 ($SD = 0.76$) was recorded for this item.

For item Q10: *My students can clarify misunderstandings and misinterpretations during intercultural interaction without any problems,* 76% of teachers agreed, but 11% of teachers were uncertain and 16% disagreed ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.74$).

Mediating Concepts and Communication

Finally, the survey queried teachers' attitudes towards group work in connection with mediating concepts and communication. Regarding Q7: *I offer my students a lot of opportunities to work in a group on project work and develop skills useful in teamwork.* Altogether, 77% of teachers agreed with the statement, but 10% of teachers were uncertain and 13% disagreed ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.98$).

Item 8 referred to collaboration with other students: Q8: *I offer my students a lot of opportunities to take part in group discussions when they can report what others have said, summarize the discussion and elaborate on it.* Altogether, 84% of teachers agreed with this statement, but 9% of teachers were uncertain and 5% disagreed ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.85$).

As far as mediating concepts is concerned, in the context of showing respect and expressing views, i.e., Q11: *I encourage my students to express their views and opinions in class on a variety of topics and they feel respected by other students and the teacher,* 100% of teachers agreed with the statement, and no teachers were uncertain or disagreed ($M = 4.70$,

SD = 0.46). This is the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation reported, which confirms the strong agreement of the teachers with this statement.

Open Questions for Teachers

The questionnaire contained two open-ended questions pertaining to the opportunities for intercultural interaction and attitudes towards teaching mediation. Responses to the open-ended questionnaires were analysed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The responses were translated into English before coding them. They underwent multiple readings to develop initial codes, which were extended into themes and reviewed. Table 2 provides coded responses to Q1: *Does your university offer opportunities for interaction with students of different cultural and social backgrounds?*

Table 2

Opportunities for interaction with students of different cultural and social backgrounds

University	Yes	No	I don't know	Limited (n)	Opportunities for interaction (n)
University of Warsaw	26	2	1	Not all (5) Mainly for students from Ukraine (2)	Common classes (6) Language classes (2) Foreign students (6) Erasmus exchange (11) Foundation Year (3)
Charles University	15	1		Foreign students are in groups only for them (1)	Foreign students (6) Erasmus exchange (4) Language classes (3) Language buddy programme (2) Student clubs (2) Tandem language learning (1)
Vytautas Magnus University	7				Foreign students (4) Common classes (2) Language classes (2) Tandem language learning (1)
University of Helsinki	4	1	3	Not all departments	Language classes (2) Language buddy programme

University	Yes	No	I don't know	Limited (n)	Opportunities for interaction (n)
				(1)	(2) Erasmus exchange (2) Foreign students (1) Study groups (1) Language clubs (1) University functions in three languages: Finnish, Swedish, English (1)

As we can see from the replies, the most frequent themes are common to all universities participating in the project and include foreign students, Erasmus exchange students, common classes, and language classes, but also some additional activities such as student clubs, tandem learning, and buddy programmes. Overall, intercultural interaction is part of formal education at the universities, and also some voluntary organisations and programmes at the universities.

Table 3 provides coded responses to the second open question, Q2: *Do you believe that teachers are prepared to train students in the area of mediation? Why/why not?*

Table 3

Readiness of teachers to train students in the area of mediation

University	Yes	No	I don't know	Limited (n)	Readiness issues (n)
University of Warsaw	3	22	1	Some are prepared (2) Depends on the skills of the teacher (1) Partly (1)	Need for training (2) Lack of training (1) Limited knowledge (2) New concept (1) Need for reflection on mediation (1) Not popular (1) It is a non-linguistic skill (1)
Charles University	4		3	Not all (4) depends on the skills of the teacher (1)	Need for training (6) Need for materials (1) Limited knowledge (1) It is a non-linguistic

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University	Yes	No	I don't know	Limited (n)	Readiness issues (n)
				Trying to do so (1) Not all consider it important (1)	skill (1)
Vytautas Magnus University	4	1	2	Depends on the teacher's skills (1) and experience (1)	Need for training (2) Open for training (1)
University of Helsinki	3	2		Not all (2) Partly (1)	Limited knowledge (2) New concept (1) It is a non-linguistic skill (1)

The data indicate that there are serious issues concerning the extent to which teachers are prepared to train students in the area of mediation. It can be seen that teachers do not perceive themselves as prepared and a range of problems was raised in the replies to the open questions. First of all, as the concept is novel and not well understood by teachers, there is a need for training. Moreover, some teachers are not sure if mediation is in fact part of language learning.

Discussion

This study investigated the attitudes of language teachers from four European universities towards mediation as conceptualized in CEFR/CV (2020).

Although the vast majority of the participating teachers (91%) agreed that mediation is vital in language learning and teaching, only a third of them claimed that they understand the concept. This discrepancy shows that the concept of mediation is indeed a novel one and teachers need to be familiarized with it. At the same time, there is strong support for this concept. However, if we look at the open questions, we can see that there are doubts concerning whether mediation is in fact part of language learning. Traditionally, language learning has focused on the four skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and the new paradigm including mediation is not yet recognized by all teachers, and is definitely not well understood. The issue of whether

mediation is in fact part of language learning is fundamental, as the question arises as to whether, from the teachers' point of view, it needs to be included in their teaching practice

The findings indicated that some aspects of mediation are more challenging for the teachers to embrace than others. The key aspects that are recognized by teachers include the importance of the possibility for students to express themselves and feel respected (Q11) or the project work developing skills useful in teamwork (Q8). On the other hand, strategy training with regard to note-taking, as described in Q5, appears to be limited in teaching practice. Also, another mediation strategy, streamlining (Q4), has the highest SD, which indicates that there are teachers who do not include it in their language teaching. In the case of mediating communication, the lowest mean values were recorded for helping people in disagreements (Q9) and clarifying misunderstandings (Q10). These are the most important aspects of mediation, and the very reason why mediation was introduced into language learning. Another aspect that appears to be controversial is using the mother tongue (Q6). The controversy surrounding it may be related to the fact that this is a dramatic change from what was practised in classrooms in the past, and it seems that some teachers are not yet ready to adjust their attitudes.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, the results confirmed that mediation is a novel concept and that language teachers need training in this area, as they are uncertain or do not fully understand what mediation is. At the same time, the teachers seem to be aware of the importance of developing mediation in language learning and teaching. The answers to open questions confirmed that teachers recognize mediation as a new concept that needs to be embraced by language teachers, so training in this area is crucial to familiarize them with it. Moreover, uncertainty about what mediation is seems to be clearly visible. Some of the teachers directly expressed the need to be properly instructed, claiming that they would appreciate such training. However, it can be seen from the results that some fundamental aspects of mediation do not seem to be part of the teaching practice of all teachers.

There is still a tendency (20% of teachers) to perceive the use of the native language not as an opportunity, but as an obstacle. This is not in line with translanguaging, which is perceived as a benefit in today's plurilingual and intercultural education or the action-oriented approach to language learning. Although the CEFR (2001) is well known and has a worldwide influence on language assessment, its impact on teaching practice appears to be limited. The issue seems to pertain to the understanding of key concepts such as mediation and plurilingualism, their importance for language learning and teaching, and the practical application of them in the teaching practice. As there is a limited range of materials that introduce the practical aspects of mediation activities and strategies, some teachers are confused about the implementation of the theoretical concepts, such as mediation or plurilingualism, into their classrooms. It is striking that the philosophy behind the changes is not understood, as the key aspects of the language policy seem to be the most controversial for teachers. A question arises as to how the CEFR can be better integrated into the practices of language teachers.

There are limitations in the results obtained in this study due to the number of teachers (79), and their contextualisation (Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Finland). Further research is needed in the future, with semi-structured interviews. As this research is exploratory, a more thorough investigation is needed to focus on the obstacles to disseminating innovative pedagogies and sharing good practices, which is crucial in the terms of meeting the needs of the students relevant to the labour market. It is noteworthy that these are the aims of the Erasmus+ strategic partnership project MiLLaT (Mediation in Language Learning and Teaching). Nevertheless, the present study provides a basis for confirming some of the challenges with the implementation of the CEFR into teaching practice at the higher education level.

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Appendix 1

Mediation Needs Analysis Questionnaire for Teachers

This is a short needs analysis questionnaire in the area of language teaching mediation. It is prepared for research purposes. It is anonymous and there are no right or wrong answers. It will take about 5 minutes to answer all the questions. Thank you very much in advance!

Part One

Please answer the following questions:

1. I am ...

female male other

2. I am ... years old.

3. My nationality is ...

4. I live in ... (name of country)

5. I teach at ... (name of university)

6. I have participated in an Erasmus Exchange Programme.

Yes No

Part Two

Please choose a correct response to each statement* from the options below:

* Based on Council of Europe (2017) The CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors. <http://www.p21.org/our-work/p21-framework> accessed Dec. 2018.

I strongly agree / I agree / I am not sure / I don't agree / I strongly disagree

Q1. I understand well what mediation in language teaching is and how to develop my students' mediation strategies.

Q2. In courses I teach students often work in groups and can create their own materials, photographs, texts. They compare, contrast and discuss them.

Q3. My students are prepared to process a text and information well, e.g. they can describe a table, diagram, report, graph etc. They can talk about it and write, e.g., an email/a report processing information from a poster or a recipe etc.

Q4. I ask my students to explain in simple words scientific terms/issues related to their field of study.

Q5. I make sure that my students can use different strategies to take notes effectively during lectures and while reading more complex texts. Their notes are well structured and could be used by other students.

Q6. Sometimes I let my students use their mother tongue during language classes to help them see the differences between language grammatical and vocabulary items.

Q7. I offer my students a lot of opportunities to work in a group on project work and develop skills useful in teamwork.

Q8. I offer my students a lot of opportunities to take part in group discussions when they can report what others have said, summarize the discussion and elaborate on it.

Q9. My students have the necessary skills and resources to help other people in disagreements to better understand each other and negotiate possible solutions.

Q10. My students can clarify misunderstandings and misinterpretations during intercultural interaction without any problems.

Q11. I encourage my students to express their views and opinions in class on a variety of topics and they feel respected by other students and the teacher.

Q12. I believe that mediation (processing and communicating meaning) is important in language teaching.

Part Three

Please answer the following questions:

1. Does your university offer opportunities for interaction with students of different cultural and social backgrounds? Could you give some examples?
2. Do you believe that teachers are prepared to train students in the area of mediation? Why/why not?

Thank you for your cooperation!

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**TARPININKAVIMAS: MOKYTOJŲ POŽIŪRIS IR POREIKIŲ
SUVOKIMAS EUROPOS UNIVERSITETUOSE ES KALBŲ
POLITIKOS KONTEKSTE**

Santrauka. Tarpininkavimas yra nauja kalbų mokymo ir mokymosi sąvoka, o kalbos mokytojų poreikiai ir požiūris į jį iš esmės mažai tirti. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiama trumpa Europos kalbų politikos apžvalga ir aptariamas į veiklą orientuotas požiūris atsižvelgiant į šį kalbų mokymosi ir mokymo paradigmos pokytį. Tyrime nagrinėjami keturių Europos universitetų kalbų mokytojų poreikiai ir požiūris į tarpininkavimą aspektu, koks buvo suformuluotas Bendruosiuose Europos kalbų mokymo, mokymosi ir vertinimo metmenyse (BEKM) (Europos Taryba, 2001) ir naujai apibrėžtas atnaujintuose BEKM (Europos Taryba, 2018). Projekte dalyvavo Karolio universiteto (Čekija), Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto (Lietuva), Helsinkio universiteto (Suomija) ir Varšuvos universiteto (Lenkija) kalbų centrai. Tyrimo metu buvo įvertintas mokytojų požiūris į 12 teiginių apie įvairius tarpininkavimo aspektus jų mokymo praktikos kontekste. Teiginiai buvo susiję su supratimu, kas yra tarpininkavimas ir jo svarba, teksto tarpininkavimu, sąvokų tarpininkavimu, komunikacijos tarpininkavimu ir tarpininkavimo strategijomis. Be to, du atviri klausimai buvo orientuoti į daugiakalbio ir tarpkultūrinio švietimo skatinimo praktiką ir mokytojų poreikius tarpininkavimo srityje. Absoliuti dauguma iš 79 tyrime dalyvavusių mokytojų (91 %) sutiko, kad tarpininkavimas yra gyvybiškai svarbus kalbų mokymuisi ir mokymui, trečdalis teigė gerai suprantantys šią sąvoką. Be to, išvados rodo, kad vienus tarpininkavimo aspektus mokytojams sunkiau suvokti nei kitus ir kad kai kurie pagrindiniai tarpininkavimo aspektai nėra dabartinės visų kalbų mokytojų mokymo praktikos dalis. Apskritai šis tyrimas patvirtino kai kuriuos iššūkius, susijusius su BEKM įgyvendinimu aukštojo mokslo kalbų mokymo praktikoje.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: kalbų politika; tarpininkavimas; universiteto dėstytojas; poreikiai; požiūris.