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Developing classroom mediation awareness and skills in pre-service language teacher education

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The introduction of mediation as the fourth mode of communication into the CEFR has the potential to revolutionise language teaching. The development of teachers' competence in this area has become a challenge for teacher training. The paucity of curricula and courses aimed at developing pre-service teachers' awareness and competence in mediating communication has motivated this research, and the article is intended to serve two main purposes, namely, to identify mediation activities performed by in-service teachers and to outline strategies of training pre-service teachers. Research methodology included both qualitative analysis of 15 video-recorded lesson transcripts and quantitative analysis of a survey of 100 pre-service teachers of English in Russia. The lessons by Russian in-service teachers of English were analyzed to find evidence of classroom mediation and the survey was conducted to discover their familiarity with the CEFR and to elicit their views on the changes needed in teacher training after the appearance of the CEFR Companion Volume. The results indicate that communicating ideas and concepts lies at the core of classroom interaction, and thus special training is needed for language teachers to perform it. The practical implications of this study include a sample of piloted tasks for various proficiency levels aimed at facilitating the pre-service teachers' awareness of mediation and the ability to perform it in the classroom.

Keywords: CEFR/CV, mediation, teacher training, awareness, professional communicative competence, in-service teachers, pre-service teachers

1 Introduction

The concept of *mediation* has again attracted the attention of ELT researchers recently due to the release of the *CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (2018), henceforth referred to as the CEFR/CV. The newly introduced descriptor scheme for mediation activities and strategies shifts the focus of ELT from developing the traditional set of reception and production skills to cultivating a complex unity of four interrelated modes of communication that are required for successful socializing in the modern multicultural world, mediation being the key mode of inter- and intra-cultural communication. "Although it is not stated explicitly in the 2001 text, the CEFR descriptive scheme de facto gives mediation a key position in the action-oriented approach, similar to the role that other scholars now give it when they discuss the language learning process." (Council of Europe (CoE) 2018: 33)

Mediation is hardly a new phenomenon for language teacher education despite its recent appearance in the CEFR/CV. Although it was not conceptualised and generalised at its current level, many of its strategies have long been part of language teacher education. Interestingly, before the introduction of the CEFR/CV, mediation strategies were mainly seen as a part of teachers' pedagogical rather than professional communicative competence. The new framework for mediation allows us to overcome this artificial divide and see mediation as an integral part of both the pedagogical and professional communicative competences of a language teacher.

2 Literature review

The notion of mediation was not clearly stated in the original 2001 version of the CEFR, though its main communicative functions were evident:

> In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third-party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. (CoE 2001: 14).

According to Dendrinos (2006), mediation is "a purposeful social practice, aiming at the interpretation of (social) meanings which are then to be communicated/relayed to others when they do not understand a text or a speaker fully or partially". It is also stated that mediation aims at "some sort of reconciliation or compromise between two or more participants in a social event" (Dendrinos 2006: 12).

As Coste and Cavalli (2015) have put it: "mediation can be defined as any procedure, arrangement or action designed in a given social context to reduce the distance between two (or more) poles of otherness between which there is tension". In such a situation, the role of a mediator can be described as "simply to act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly—normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages" (CoE 2001: 87-88).

Pavlovskaya and Lankina (2019: 33) state that "mediation is partly a hard skill because it is firmly based on proficiency in a foreign language as well as on the relevant professional knowledge, but it also covers the top 10 soft skills that are so attractive for employers".

The variety of approaches to treating the concept of mediation is justified by the variety of scientific contexts in which it is used on a regular basis: "mediation can mean many things to many people. ... It embraces a broad spectrum of dimensions and connotations and it is interpreted in so many various ways in different disciplines" (North and Piccardo 2016: 16).

The modern tendency of knowledge production prevailing over the production of goods creates a constant need for mediating knowledge. Since knowledge is a set of ideas, which cannot be transferred from one person to another without some languaging or any other form of verbal or non-verbal representation, several mediation activities and strategies have been introduced in the CEFR/CV (CoE 2018: 104) (Figure 1), and they need to be included into academic curricula. Otherwise, their development will be left to chance.
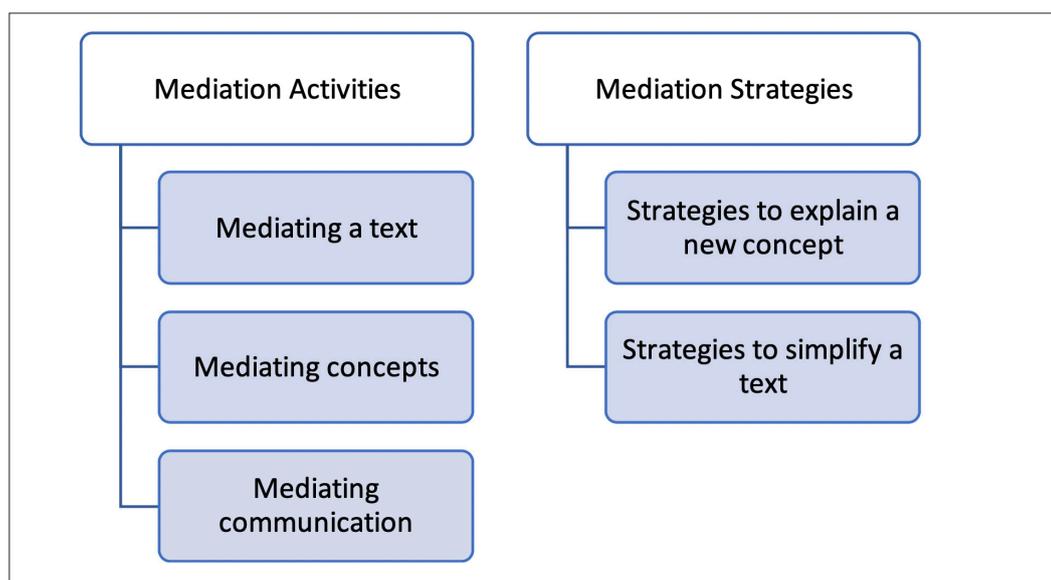

Figure 1. The overview of mediation activities and strategies.

While mediation activities and strategies are thoroughly described in the CEFR/CV and exhaustive descriptor schemes are introduced, the types of mediation need to be defined and classified according to different criteria.

North and Piccardo (2016: 13-15) introduce four types of fundamental mediation that include: linguistic, cultural, social and pedagogic. Pedagogic mediation is the most relevant in the context of this research as it encompasses the actions presented in Figure 2.
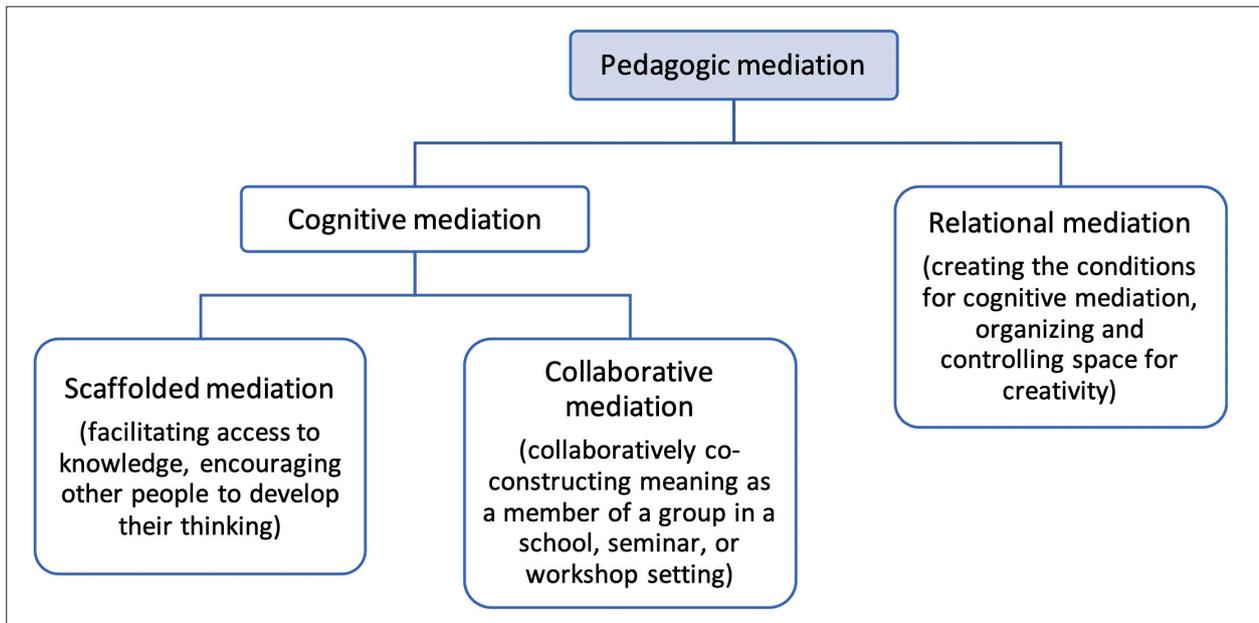

Figure 2. The overview of pedagogic mediation.

As seen above, pedagogic mediation can be either cognitive or relational: "Mediation is seen either as aiming to provide access to information and knowledge and competence building (cognitive mediation), or as contributing to interaction, the quality of exchanges and the resolution of conflicts (relational mediation)" (Coste and Cavalli 2015: 13). These two types of mediation are not mutually exclusive and are mostly used simultaneously in the classroom. Thus, teachers should have full awareness of pedagogic mediation and possess the necessary mediation skills as they are a part of teachers' overall professional pedagogic competence.

North and Piccardo (2016) state that "successful teaching is a form of mediation" and point out that there are no publications available that would include any descriptor scales related to teacher-centred mediation activities. "Since ... facilitating access to knowledge is a core aspect of the way mediation is conceived in psychology, this lack seems regrettable" (North and Piccardo 2016: 15). Thus, this article tackles the problem of evaluating and describing teachers' mediation competence in order to eliminate this deficiency.

The most evident part of mediation that has been well-described in the literature on language teaching is adapting language, which has been known under the term *language grading*. It has been traditionally defined as "the way teachers simplify their classroom language in the interests of intelligibility" (Thornbury and Watkins 2007: 207), but then expanded to include not only linguistic features such as simplification of forms but also interactional patterns and pedagogical choices of what is appropriate and how to interact effectively with students. A significant amount of research has been published on mediating text and concepts in the classroom. Generally, it can be seen as part of the *classroom interactional competence* which involves "using a range of appropriate interactional and linguistic resources in order to promote active engaged learning" (Walsh 2011: 3). It is essential to understand that no matter how decentralised and free the classroom environment is, the teacher still designs and controls it. In other words, it is the responsibility of the teacher to create a discourse that would allow for mediation.

3 Research

The purpose of this study was to determine if EFL teachers in Russia implement the CEFR descriptive scheme as a guideline in their classrooms and to identify both in-service and pre-service EFL teachers' awareness of mediation activities and their competence in using mediation strategies in class. Therefore, we addressed the following central research questions:

1. Are in-service EFL teachers in Russia engaged in mediation activities? What mediation strategies do they implement?

2. What do pre-service EFL teachers in Russia know about mediation as a mode of communication and its aspects?

The research was organised in two parts. The first part included a qualitative analysis of 15 lesson transcripts. The videos were not specifically recorded for research purposes, but permission from the English Language Office of the US Embassy in Moscow was obtained to use the set of videos *Shaping the way we teach English in Russia* for linguistic, interactional and pedagogical analysis. This is a DVD-set of video-recorded lessons distributed among teacher trainers in Russia to be used with pre-service teachers of English. It includes video recordings of 15 lessons conducted by experienced in-service English teachers in different cities of Russia. The students' CEFR levels ranged from A1 to B2, and the age of the students from 8 to 18, so the videos included lessons at the primary, secondary and high school level, as well as one English lesson at the university level. This set is considered representative of the best practice in language teaching in Russia because it was developed for teacher training purposes and was reviewed by the leading experts on language teaching in Russia. The original videos were cut where students were performing drills or preparing to present, so the total length of the analyzed data was 358 minutes and the length of the sequences ranged from nine to 43 minutes. All videos were transcribed, establishing a mini-corpus of 117 pages of classroom discourse in Russian state schools. The aim of the qualitative study was to find patterns of interaction in the lessons that would match some of the mediation descriptors and to describe to which extent the target communicative behaviour (the use of mediation strategies) can be observed in each case. Another aim of this analysis was to find empirical material to develop mediation tasks for pre-service English language teachers. This paper contains five extracts that illustrate common interactional patterns that were also observed in other lessons and that were found to be most characteristic.

The qualitative analysis of the lesson revealed several situations where teachers managed or did not manage to demonstrate some of the mediation activities and strategies. Interestingly enough, primary school teachers were the group that demonstrated the most numerous mediation strategies when they decided to conduct the lesson solely (or mostly) in English. This can be explained by the necessity to adapt any language input to the target level and age of primary school students.

Extract 1. Primary school. Grade 3 (9-10 y. o.).

Teacher: So, this is a story about Mr. Wiggle (the teacher shows the thumb of her right hand) and Mr. Waggle (the teacher shows the thumb of her left hand and then plays with her fingers representing Mr. Wiggle and Mr. Waggle by them, the children repeat). Mr. Wiggle lives in a house over here. And Mr. Waggle lives in a house over here. So, one day Mr. Wiggle decides to visit Mr. Waggle. He opens the door, and he goes out of the house … Then one day Mr. Wiggle and Mr. Waggle decide to visit each other!

Student: Вместе с домиками? ('With their houses?' – Russian)

Teacher: No. So, they open the door, go out of the house, close the door. And they go up the hill, down the hill … – Hello, Mr. Wiggle! (the children laugh) – Hello, Mr. Waggle! How are you? What would he answer?

This short warm-up activity includes some evidence of both monolingual and bilingual mediation. The teacher managed to mediate the text by relaying specific information in speech (A2 according to the CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales) and used the strategies of simplifying the text by conveying the main information in another way and by repetition and illustrations (B1-B2). The teacher also demonstrated the ability to adjust (answering the student's spontaneous question) and decided to integrate this comment into the classroom discourse.

The next extract illustrates how the teacher manages group interaction with a class of young teenagers to lead them to the concept "food wise". (In the previous activity, students were working with cards, explaining the words written on the cards to each other.)

Extract 2. Secondary school. Grade 8 (13-14 y. o.).

Student 1: I have 'diet'!

Student 2: 'Fat'!

Student 3: 'Dairy products'!

Teacher: What are dairy products?

Student 4: Dairy products, they are made from milk and eggs.

Teacher: Good! So, what is the topic of today's lesson?

Students: Food!

Student 5: Helicopter!

Teacher: Helicopter (laughs). … But not just food, what kind of food?

Student 6: Healthy!

Teacher: Healthy food.

It is important to note that the activity preceding the one shown in Extract 2 was also aimed at developing students' mediation skills. Our main focus, however, is the ability of the teacher to employ mediation strategies of explaining a new concept by paraphrasing it in simpler language, asking simple questions and encouraging students to make connections to previous knowledge (B1-B2). Another important interactional element here is how the teacher acknowledges the joke by Student 5 but then moves on without spending much time on it. The extract above also demonstrates an example of elicitation, a mediation activity that has long been considered an important skill for a language teacher.

The CEFR mainly considers *pluricultural* as having representatives of various national cultures inside one classroom. However, it can be claimed that to some extent people of different generations inside one cultural space may also act as representatives of different cultures (or subcultures) and, therefore, any kind of classroom interaction, especially during a foreign language lesson, should be considered pluricultural with a high level of mindfulness and mediation skills required by the teacher.

Another important observation that was made during qualitative analysis was that communication in a language classroom can often lead to disagreements and 'delicate situations', especially if the lesson is designed communicatively and stimulates interaction between students. The most evident example of this can be seen in debating activities. The extract below shows how a teacher had to manage a situation where one student started to ignore the rules of debating and turn-taking and interrupted other students. (The names of the students have been changed. The students are not referred to as 'Student 1/2' in this extract to show where the teacher used names.)

Extract 3. Secondary school. Grade 7 (12-13 y. o.).

Tom: Sugar is in the vegetarian food because the trees and plants they need sugar.

(Tim is shouting all the time.)

Teacher: The idea is that this is polite debate.

Tim: There are a lot of tablets, vitamin tablets you could buy it in magazine.
Teacher: Shop.
Tom: In shop, yeah. The tablets with vitamins, phosphor.
Teacher: Pills.
Tom: Yes. So, you could not eat meat or fish but …
Teacher: … You can buy pills.
Tim: Pills are not healthy.
Teacher: We have finished.

In this case, the teacher had to manage a situation that was spiralling out of control, while his other points of focus at that moment obviously were control of language and providing facilitation and prompting to the other student (Tom). The teacher demonstrated the ability to mediate communication in a delicate situation and mediate concepts in group work simultaneously by both using simple phrases to seek compromise and agreement (A2) and intervening in the group work to encourage more even participation (B2). Overall, mediating communication seemed the most challenging task to most of the teachers whose lessons were video-recorded, and the target level of this particular mediation activity in teacher education should probably be set at C1-C2 because of the complexity of the classroom environment.

Unfortunately, there have been a lot of situations where the communication in the classroom did not seem natural or the teacher did not incorporate student responses into the overall lesson discourse. This was observed in four of the 15 lessons, and three other lesson scripts contained single episodes where the teacher used some information obtained from the student. Sometimes it seemed that the teacher was too focused on the planned development of the lesson and therefore ignored some of the students' responses.

Extract 4. Primary school. Grade 4 (10-11 y. o.).
Teacher: Yes, right. And have you read this story, this book, have you read this book? Have you read?
Student 1: Yes, I have read this book.
Teacher: How many? …
Student 1: I think it's book is very interesting …
Teacher: How many? …
Student 1: … and funny.
Teacher: Yes. How many stories have you read?

In Extract 4 the teacher was focused on eliciting the target response and did not pay attention to the student who wanted to share emotions after reading the book. The teacher was engaged in the mediation of concepts and constructing meaning by providing simple questions (A2), but did not demonstrate any relational mediation skills. It should be noted in the discussion of the extract above that some of the lessons (or parts of the lessons) we observed seemed to have been rehearsed and staged. The teachers in those lessons demonstrated fewer mediation strategies probably because their students had already known the answers to the questions they were asked. Such rehearsed lessons posed a particular challenge to the identification of whether a teacher was able to adapt their behaviour or to interpret the emotional state of their students based on the information obtained while listening. An important conclusion can be drawn from these two observations. Although the lesson plan should allow for various forms of interaction in the classroom, the teacher's mediation skills are often demonstrated in more spontaneous classroom interactions and are connected with the ability of the teacher to focus on both the plan and the classroom discourse development at the same time.

Another observation that was made was that the teacher's use of mediation strategies may be closely connected with their listening skills. The classroom presents the teachers with a number of specific listening situations and tasks that they need to deal with in order to perform mediation strategies afterwards. These may include understanding students' answers and remembering and summarizing information. The last element was one of the least frequently observed in the lesson and might, therefore, be the most challenging mediation activity in the classroom.

Extract 5. Secondary school. Grade 5 (11-12 y. o.).
Student 1: We can collect pictures.
Teacher: Pictures. Very nice. ...
Student 2: We can collect badges.
Teacher: Badges ... So, let's check. So, we can collect coins, stamps, badges, books, pictures.

In Extract 5 the teacher had to listen to the students' responses and sometimes echoed them, and then summarised all the answers that were received during this activity. In this case, when collaborating to construct the meaning of the concept, the teacher summarised the points of view in a group discussion (B2), but sometimes the summary was more conceptual in its nature:

Teacher: ... Well, we have some guitar players, some piano players. We can have a band, OK?

All of the empirical evidence obtained in the classrooms showed that an English language classroom in Russia is a very dynamic and often bilingual environment that requires a wide use of mediation strategies by the teacher. The more effective and natural communication in the classroom was, the more opportunities for mediation were presented. Unfortunately, the method of this study did not allow us to evaluate thoroughly to what extent the teachers were capable of mediating texts. Nonetheless, the analysis of video-recorded lessons revealed several activities and strategies of mediating concepts and mediating communication that may be important for effective classroom interaction.

The tasks presented later in this article will be based on some real-life situations that were captured in the lesson videos and will prepare trainee teachers for the situations that they might encounter in their classrooms. Overall, there are two main stages when the language teachers should demonstrate their awareness of mediation and use their mediation strategies and skills:

- when they are planning the lessons and interaction inside the classroom (the design stage);
- when they are functioning as teachers, facilitators, communicative partners, and "communication mediators" in the language classroom (the interactive stage).

In the second part of our research, we designed and conducted a survey to analyze the familiarity of pre-service EFL teachers with the CEFR and to discover what curricular improvements are necessary for training them to implement mediation strategies in language teaching (see Appendix). The survey contained three sets of questions aimed at (1) indicating the familiarity of respondents with the CEFR/CV and mediation, (2) revealing the ability of respondents to define mediation activities in a language classroom context, (3) encouraging the respondents to do a self-assessment of their mediation abilities. One hundred pre-service EFL teachers aged 20-22 participated in the survey.

The first set of questions was aimed at checking the respondents' general knowledge of the CEFR, their familiarity with the CEFR/CV, and their understanding of mediation as a concept (see Appendix, questions 1-4). We asked the respondents to evaluate their familiarity with the CEFR and found out that 45% of the respondents considered themselves to be experienced users of the CEFR and its descriptor scale, but were not familiar with the CEFR/CV and the updated CEFR illustrative descriptors.

At the same time, 52% of pre-service teachers had only basic knowledge of the CEFR as an international standard for describing language proficiency, with three pre-service teachers stating that the CEFR was a completely new topic for them. This self-evaluation question was followed by three concept questions which checked whether the respondents, specifically those who described themselves as experienced users of the CEFR, were familiar with the four modes of communication described in the CEFR/CV and could demonstrate the understanding of mediation as a concept (see Appendix, questions 2-4). We found out that only 5% of the respondents were aware of the change in terminology from the 'four skills' to 'four modes of activity', namely reception, interaction, production, and mediation, and 83% of them misunderstood the concept of mediation, considering it to be synonymous with 'interpretation' and 'translation'. The answers to these three concept questions that we received demonstrated that our respondents overestimated their knowledge of the CEFR and experienced some difficulties in the use of terminology, though the majority of pre-service teachers who participated in the survey (78%) demonstrated a general understanding of the context for mediation and the awareness of its nature.

In the second part of our survey, pre-service teachers faced six situations, some of which required the teacher to engage in mediation activities (see Appendix, question 5). The respondents were asked to indicate which of the described teacher-centred activities were considered to be mediation, and 17% of pre-service teachers successfully defined the cases when the teacher facilitated students' collaborative interaction to construct meaning, explained data and presented new information by organising it in a table, and paraphrased a definition of a new concept to simplify it. However, most of the respondents did not manage to recognise the mediation activities that may be encountered in foreign language teaching (61% identified two mediation activities, and 22% identified only one mediation activity). This observation correlates with the results we arrived at when analyzing lesson scripts. One possible reason behind in-service teachers' avoidance of stimulating mediation activities and using mediation strategies in their classes may be the paucity of curricula and courses aimed at developing pre-service teachers' awareness and competence in mediating communication.

Thus, the third section of the survey focused on the self-assessment of pre-service teachers' mediation abilities, and we asked for their opinion about the necessity to provide teacher training sessions on the general use of the CEFR and its application in practice (see Appendix, questions 6-8). The respondents assessed their abilities to use mediation strategies in the classroom, and we applied the CEFR descriptor scale to identify their level of proficiency in using both strategies to explain a new concept and strategies to simplify a text (progressing up the scale from B1 to C2). To answer, pre-service teachers used the 1–4 rating scale corresponding to the descriptors for each of the mediation strategies: linking to previous knowledge, adapting language, breaking down complicated information, amplifying a dense text, and streamlining a text. Most respondents in our survey considered their skills to be developed at B levels (Figure 3).
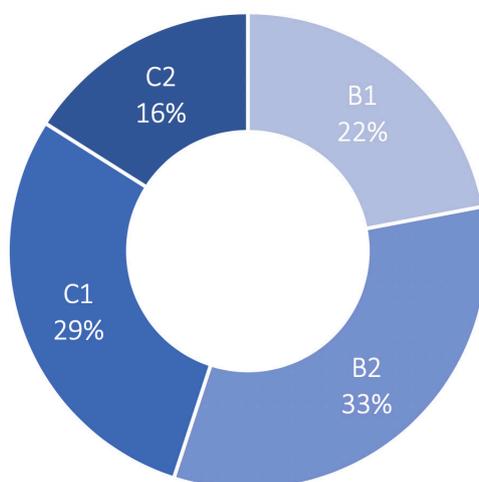

Figure 3. Self-assessment of pre-service teachers' mediation skills

We predicted that the participants' self-assessment of their abilities to use mediation strategies would shape their attitude toward training sessions for pre-service teachers about implementing the CEFR. We used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the attitudes and opinions of our respondents and, as we anticipated, 97% of the participants recognised the necessity to receive professional training in applying the CEFR in teaching context and 99% of the respondents named several courses in pre-service language teacher training that would benefit from including the development of mediation skills in their curricula.

Finally, the results were statistically analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics and descriptive statistics. The standard error of the mean, scale statistics, and the high value of Cronbach's alpha showed internal consistency and indicated the reliability of the survey.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics*

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation	Variance
Item1	2	0	2	1.42	.055	.554	.307
Item2	3	1	4	2.80	.057	.569	.323
Item3	3	0	3	1.59	.081	.805	.648
Item4	1	0	1	.78	.042	.416	.173
Item5	2	1	3	1.95	.063	.626	.391
Item6	3	1	4	2.312	.0908	.9085	.825
Item7	1	0	1	.97	.017	.171	.029
Item8	1	0	1	.99	.010	.100	.010

Table 2. *Scale statistics*

№ of Items	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
8	12.812	12.993	3.6046	.905

4 Discussion and tasks for pre-service teachers

Based on the findings of the two parts of our research we have concluded that there is a need to train pre-service teachers to use mediation activities and strategies in various classroom environments. The tasks below focus on developing trainee teachers' skills in mediating concepts. They seemed to be at the same time the most frequently exhibited and the least successfully used set of mediation activities demonstrated by in-service teachers. They begin with a contextualised presentation of mediation activities followed by the clarification of their meaning and the assessment of their level of difficulty. Then, at the stage of controlled practice, trainee teachers are given several tasks aimed at the development of their mediation skills. Finally, an opportunity to apply mediation skills in a simulated language classroom context is provided through free production activities, such as roleplaying.

The first task is aimed at developing the ability to recognise mediation activities related to collaborative work in a group. Trainee teachers are given three descriptions of situations (A-C) and three extracts from the lesson scripts. They are asked to match the descriptions of mediation activities to the abstracts. This task can be followed up by a discussion of how efficient the teacher's choice of pedagogical and linguistic tools was in each of the situations and what other tools trainees could use in a similar situation.

A. The teacher acts as rapporteur in a group discussion, noting ideas, discussing these with the group and later giving a summary of the group's view(s).

B. The teacher refocuses a discussion by suggesting what to consider next, and how to proceed.

C. The teacher presents his/her ideas in a group and poses questions that invite reactions from other group members' perspectives.

Situation 1.

Student 1: We can collect pictures.

Teacher: Pictures. Very nice.

Student 2: We can collect books.

Teacher: Right! It is very nice hobby, by the way.

Student 3: We can collect coins and stamps.

Teacher: Yes, you are quite right. So, we can collect coins, stamps, books, and pictures.

Situation 2.

Student 1: Ideally, I'd like to carry on with further studies.

Student 2: And I'd like to do another degree because I did English and I'd like to do one in History. History is more interesting to me at the moment.

Teacher: And how would you feel about studying abroad?

Situation 3.

Teacher: In general, Zero Waste is a lifestyle which intends to decrease the amount of rubbish to zero. In other words, you will live a life without creating unnecessary non-biodegradable wastes such as plastics. Personally, I can't see myself adopting a zero-waste lifestyle because plastic packaging and containers in modern life are nearly inescapable. Would you challenge yourself to minimise your waste? Is it possible to be completely zero-waste?

The second task involves reflection, and trainee teachers are asked to range various interaction activities that are connected with classroom management (intervening, redirecting talk, monitoring individual and group work, working non-intrusively, setting the group back on track, etc.) according to their level of difficulty (CEFR/CV, levels A2-B2). After that, pre-service teachers should fill in the table (Table 3) with the linguistic means that can be used to perform these activities.

Table 3. *Interaction activities connected with classroom management*

Interaction activities	CEFR level	Linguistic means necessary to perform interaction activities
The teacher intervenes diplomatically in order to redirect talk, prevent one person from dominating or confront disruptive behaviour.		
The teacher monitors individual and group work non-intrusively, intervening to set a group back on task or to ensure even participation.		
The teacher allocates turns in a discussion, inviting a participant to say something.		

The next task is aimed at developing trainee teachers' concept-building skills and encouraging conceptual talk. Trainee teachers are given a part of a transcript, which serves as the beginning of a conversation between the teacher and the students, and are asked to create scaffolding and concept-checking questions and then use them to help students develop a better understanding of a target concept.

Student 1: My hobby is ikebana.

Student 2: What is ikebana?

Student 1: Can I say it in Russian?

Teacher: Let's try to explain it in English. Ask Student 1 three questions that could help Student 2 understand what ikebana is. Introduce a new concept of 'flower arranging' and define it as an activity of creating attractive displays with cut flowers. Then ask your students appropriate concept-checking questions to check their understanding of the concept of 'flower arranging'.

The following activity deals with the ability of future teachers to grade their language and explain complex ideas in simpler words. Trainees are given vocabulary entries and they have to give explanations of various concepts using simpler language. In a similar activity, trainees are asked to perform the same task, but every second sentence that they plan must be a question directed to the student to further focus on the interaction and to further bind explanation, elicitation, and concept-checking. Trainee teachers are asked to use the following plan:

4. Think of the previously acquired concepts that the target concept can be linked with. Write them out.

5. Read the dictionary entry below and analyze the difficulty of the language in the entry.

6. Find simpler equivalents to all of the words that are above level B1.

7. Simplify the grammar of the entry to make it easier to digest.

8. Think of three examples to illustrate the target concept.

9. Formulate two CCQs to assess the understanding of the target concept.

Irony—the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect.

One of the final integrated tasks is aimed at the development of the ability to organise the discussion in a group by reporting what others have said, summarizing, elaborating, and weighing up different points of view (mediating concepts: collaborating in a group). The first part of the task requires trainee teachers to listen to a recording where different students suggest their ideas, answering a question (e.g., What is a healthy diet?). The name of the student is given before every utterance. Every trainee is requested to summarise what the students have said and relate ideas to the people who have suggested them (e.g.: Mike and Tim mentioned fruit and vegetables, Irina added fish, Andrew spoke about the fact that eating fast food can be unhealthy). The second part of the task is a role-play where one trainee teacher has to elicit opinions on a certain topic from the other trainees in the classroom who are acting as students of a certain age and language level. The task of the trainee teacher is to elicit as many responses as possible from all of the students and summarise them.

One more roleplaying activity is aimed at the development of the ability to organise group work and manage potential conflict in the language classroom. Trainee teachers perform this activity in groups of three, where two of them act as students who perform their roles in a situation that is becoming increasingly confrontational. The students are given a description of their position and sample vocabulary, dialogue of what they should say (e.g.: You are dissatisfied with the fact that Student 1 has a lower language level than you and you must work in a pair with him/her. Complain about this to the teacher and use the words: I don't want to work with him/her; slow; useless; can I have a different partner). The nature of this task is both pedagogical and communicational, and it not only gives an opportunity to develop pre-service language teachers' group work organizational skills, but also helps them discuss how they can use difficult communicative situations in the classroom as opportunities to develop their students' mediation skills.

5 Conclusion

The two-part research of in-service and pre-service teachers' awareness of the CEFR/CV, of mediation activities and strategies, and of their ability to employ them has demonstrated certain limitations of professional competence in the area of mediation. The courses aimed at the development of mediation skills are not yet a part of teacher training curricula, and this might be one of the reasons why pre-service language teachers demonstrate a rather vague understanding of mediation strategies and activities even though the analysis of lesson scripts clearly indicates that a language classroom is an environment that requires mediation.

Our findings reflect the importance of mediation as an essential constituent of teacher-learner relationships and thus trainee language teachers should develop both the theoretical awareness of mediation and the practical skills of implementing mediation strategies that will allow them to perform effective cognitive and relational mediation in their classrooms. The case of concept mediation that was examined in this article shows that the right mediation strategies would help the teachers develop both as effective classroom communicators and as teaching professionals.

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7 Biographies

Marina Perevertkina is an Associate Professor at the Department of Modern Languages of Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia. She holds a PhD in Foreign Language Teaching from Herzen State Pedagogical University. Her primary research interests include foreign language education, pre-service EFL teacher training, and designing teacher-training programmes.

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Maria Zolotareva is a Master student at Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia and an in-service teacher of English. She completed her Bachelor at the Department of Modern Languages. Her research focuses on differentiation in ELT, student-centred learning environments, and the professional development of in-service foreign language teachers.

Appendix

Question 1. Select the choice best describing your familiarity with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Please mark ONE choice

- It's a completely new topic for me.

- I know it is an international standard for describing language proficiency on a six-point scale (levels A1 up to C2), but not much more than that.

- I have read about it and how it can be used to guide teaching and learning, but need to understand more about its relevance.

- I am an experienced user of the CEFR and its descriptor scale, but want to know more about the new CEFR Companion Volume.

- I am familiar both with the CEFR Companion Volume and the updated CEFR illustrative descriptors.

Question 2. According to the CEFR Companion Volume, there are four modes of communication. What are they? Please mark FOUR choices

- Listening
- Reading
- Reception
- Mediation

- Speaking
- Writing
- Production
- Interaction

- Grammar
- Vocabulary

Question 3. Regarding mediation in the CEFR, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please mark ONE choice in each row

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

- The term 'mediation' is synonymous with 'interpretation' and 'translation.

- In mediating activities, the language user is concerned with expressing his/her own meanings and not simply with acting as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly.

- The context for mediation can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic or professional.

Question 4. Please continue the following statement by marking ONE choice
In mediation, the user helps to construct or convey meaning ...

- within the same language

- from one language to another

- sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another

Question 5. Please indicate in which of the following situations the teacher is engaged in mediation activities. Drag and drop each of the following case descriptions into ONE of the columns

- The teacher shows an interview with a celebrity and asks the class to decide if the sentences in the following task are true or false.

- The teacher asks the students to repeat the words 'sheep' and 'ship'.

- The teacher gives the class some extra irregular verbs to learn for homework and says it is due tomorrow.

- The teacher asks the students to work with a partner and write down the names of as many animals as they can; then the teacher introduces the words 'domestic' and 'wild' using the students' examples.

- The teacher organises all new information about conditional sentences in a table.

- The teacher explains the word 'border' as a line separating one state from another. The students don't understand this explanation and the teacher paraphrases it and says a border is a line between two countries.

Question 6. Thinking of your own mediation abilities, to what extent are you capable of using mediation strategies in the classroom? Please mark ONE choice for each of the strategies listed below

- Linking to previous knowledge

- I can introduce complex concepts (e.g., scientific notions) by providing extended definitions and explanations which draw upon students' assumed previous knowledge.

- I can spontaneously pose a series of questions to encourage students to think about their prior knowledge and to help them establish a link to what is going to be explained.

- I can formulate questions and give feedback to encourage students to make connections to previous knowledge and explain a new concept by comparing and contrasting it to one that students are already familiar with.

- I can explain how something works by providing examples which draw upon students' everyday experiences and can show how new information is related to what students are familiar with by asking them simple questions.

- Adapting language

- I can adapt the language of a very wide range of texts in order to present the main content in a register and degree of sophistication and detail appropriate to students.

- I can adapt my language in order to make a complex specialist topic accessible to students who are not familiar with it. I can paraphrase and interpret technical texts, using suitably non-technical language.

- I can explain technical topics within my field using suitably non-technical language and can make a specific, complex piece of information in my field clearer for students by paraphrasing it in simpler language.

- I can paraphrase more simply the main points made in short, straightforward spoken or written texts on familiar subjects to make the content accessible for students.

- Breaking down complicated information

- I can facilitate understanding of a complex issue by explaining the relationship of parts to the whole and encourage different ways of approaching it.

- I can facilitate understanding of a complex issue by highlighting and categorising the main points, presenting them in a logically connected pattern and reinforcing the message by repeating the key aspects in different ways.

- I can make a complicated issue easier to understand by presenting the components separately and breaking the process down into a series of smaller steps.

- I can make a short instructional or informational text easier to understand by presenting it as a list of separate points. I can make a set of instructions easier to understand by saying them slowly, a few words at a time, employing verbal and non-verbal emphasis to facilitate understanding.

- Amplifying a dense text

- I can explain the information given in texts on complex academic or professional topics by elaborating and exemplifying.

- I can make complex, challenging content more accessible by explaining difficult aspects more explicitly, adding helpful detail and modifying style and register.

- I can make the content of a text on a subject in my field of interest more accessible to students by adding examples, reasoning and explanatory comments and repeating the main points.

- I can make an aspect of an everyday topic clearer and more explicit by conveying the main information in another way or by providing simple examples.

- Streamlining a text

- I can redraft a complex source text, improving coherence, cohesion and the flow of an argument, whilst removing sections unnecessary for its purpose.

- I can reorganise a complex source text in order to focus on the points of most relevance to students.

- I can simplify a source text by excluding non-relevant or repetitive information and deleting the parts that do not add new information that is relevant for students.

- I can identify and mark (e.g., underline, highlight etc.) the essential information in a straightforward, informational text in order to pass this information on to students.

Question 7. Do you think your university should provide training sessions for pre-service teachers to understand the use of the CEFR better? Please mark ONE choice

- Definitely
- Possibly
- Definitely not
- Probably
- Probably not

Question 8. Please name ONE or SEVERAL university courses that should instruct pre-service teachers in the general usage of the CEFR and train them to apply the CEFR in practice (e. g. to use mediation strategies that are appropriate in relation to foreign language teaching)

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.

CEFR JOURNAL—RESEARCH AND PRACTICE
VOLUME 2

Submission (Call for Abstracts)

This journal attempts to fall somewhere in between an inaccessible academic journal (long waiting times, fairly strict guidelines/criteria) and a newsletter (practical in nature but lacking in theoretical support/ foundation), linking research of a practical nature with relevant research related to foreign language education, the CEFR, other language frameworks, and the European Language Portfolio. While the CEFR was introduced by the Council of Europe and intended for use, first and foremost, within Europe, the influence of the CEFR now has to be attested in many places beyond European borders. It has become a global framework, impacting a variety of aspects of language learning, teaching, and assessment across countries and continents beyond the context for which it was originally created. As such, there is a pressing need to create a quality forum for sharing research, experiences, and lessons learned from applying the CEFR in different contexts. This journal provides such a forum where people involved or interested in processes of applying the CEFR can share and learn from one another.

We are continuously seeking contributions related to foreign language education, the CEFR, other language frameworks, and the European Language Portfolio. We are particularly interested in specific contextual adaptations.

Currently, we have a new Call for Abstracts out. Due to current necessities and demand, we are looking to give your experiences with **online, remote, and e-learning in conjunction with the CEFR, the CEFR/CV, or portfolio work** the spotlight it deserves. In these months many practitioners are accruing valuable best and potentially also worst practice experience. We would like to offer a forum to share such valuable insights in future volumes. Until 30 November 2020 we are looking for abstracts at:

journal@cefrjapan.net

Guidelines

Submission:	30 November 2020
Contributions:	Articles (research), reports (best practice), news (work in progress), research notes, book reviews
Language(s):	English (British, American, international) preferred, but not mandatory. Other languages by request, with an extended abstract in English.
Review type:	Peer review, double blind

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2. Reviewers should declare any potential conflict of interest prior to agreeing to review a manuscript, including any relationship with the author that may potentially bias their review.

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4. Reviewers should provide a constructive, comprehensive, evidenced, and appropriately substantial peer review report. For your convenience, we are providing you with a 'reviewing matrix' you may choose to use at your own discretion. We would also like to kindly ask you to provide us in the journal editorial team with a final overall assessment of the text's publication potential – please, see bottom of this document.

5. Reviewers must avoid making statements in their report, which might be construed as impugning any person's reputation.

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Author instructions:

- Adapted version of deGruyter Mouton guidelines for Language Learning in Higher Education (CercleS) and style sheet.