

# PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TO MEDIATION ACTIVITIES IN A RUSSIAN-SPEAKING EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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## Abstract

After the changes in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) and the publication of its Companion Volume in 2018 (CEFR/CV), a revision of the curriculum of pre-service teachers of English at Kazan Federal University, Russia has been done.

CEFR describes four 'modes' to reflect the process of real life communication:

- Reception: comprehension in listening and reading;
- Production: formulating something new to say or write;
- Interaction: engaging in conversation or written exchanges;
- Mediation: adjusting the message for the recipient.

The last concept has been significantly updated in the CEFR/CV. Mediation implies passing on new information in an appropriate form, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and creating space and conditions for communicating and/or learning. Teachers mediate every day, therefore these skills pre-service language teachers will need the most. With this idea in mind, the authors have analysed current situation with language teaching in terms of Master programs at Kazan Federal University that have recently undergone significant changes and rethinking.

The aim of the article is to provide an overview of the concept of mediation and its' new descriptors as well as the activities and strategies it presupposes. The research question is as follows: how can we effectively integrate such mediation activities as mediating the text, mediating concepts and mediating communication in pre-service English language teachers' training at Kazan Federal University?

At the following stage of our prolonged research, a special survey was designed to define students' attitudes to mediation activities. The main result is that shift to mediation in teaching English has increased students' collaboration in developing new ideas, encouraged conceptual talk and improved their social skills and autonomy.

Keywords: Common European Framework of Reference, pre-service teachers' training, mediation, mediation strategies and activities.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The major contribution of the Council of Europe in 2001 was the establishment of different language proficiency levels (A1–C2) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The essential changes were introduced in the CEFR Companion Volume in 2018 [1]. In particular, the concept of linguistic mediation was developed. This change is due to diversity (language, cultural and etc.) increasing in the 21st century classroom.

So, what is 'mediation'? Th. Kiddle provides the following definition of the concept: "Mediation is when we use language to explain something to someone who doesn't fully understand it without our help." [2].

In the CEFR Companion Volume, the Council of Europe categorizes mediation activities in three subgroups: mediating a text, mediating concepts and mediating communication.

According to CEFR Companion Volume (figure 1), mediating a text includes relaying specific information in speech / writing, explaining data (e.g. in graphs, diagrams, charts, etc.) in speech / writing, processing

text in speech / writing, translating a written text in speech / writing, note taking (lectures, seminars, meetings, etc.), expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature), analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature). Collaborating in a group, facilitating collaborative interaction with peers, collaborating to construct meaning, leading group work, managing interaction and encouraging conceptual talk are the constituting parts of mediating concepts. Facilitating pluricultural space, acting as an intermediary in informal situations, facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements develop mediating communication. [Adapted from CEFR 2018, p.104].

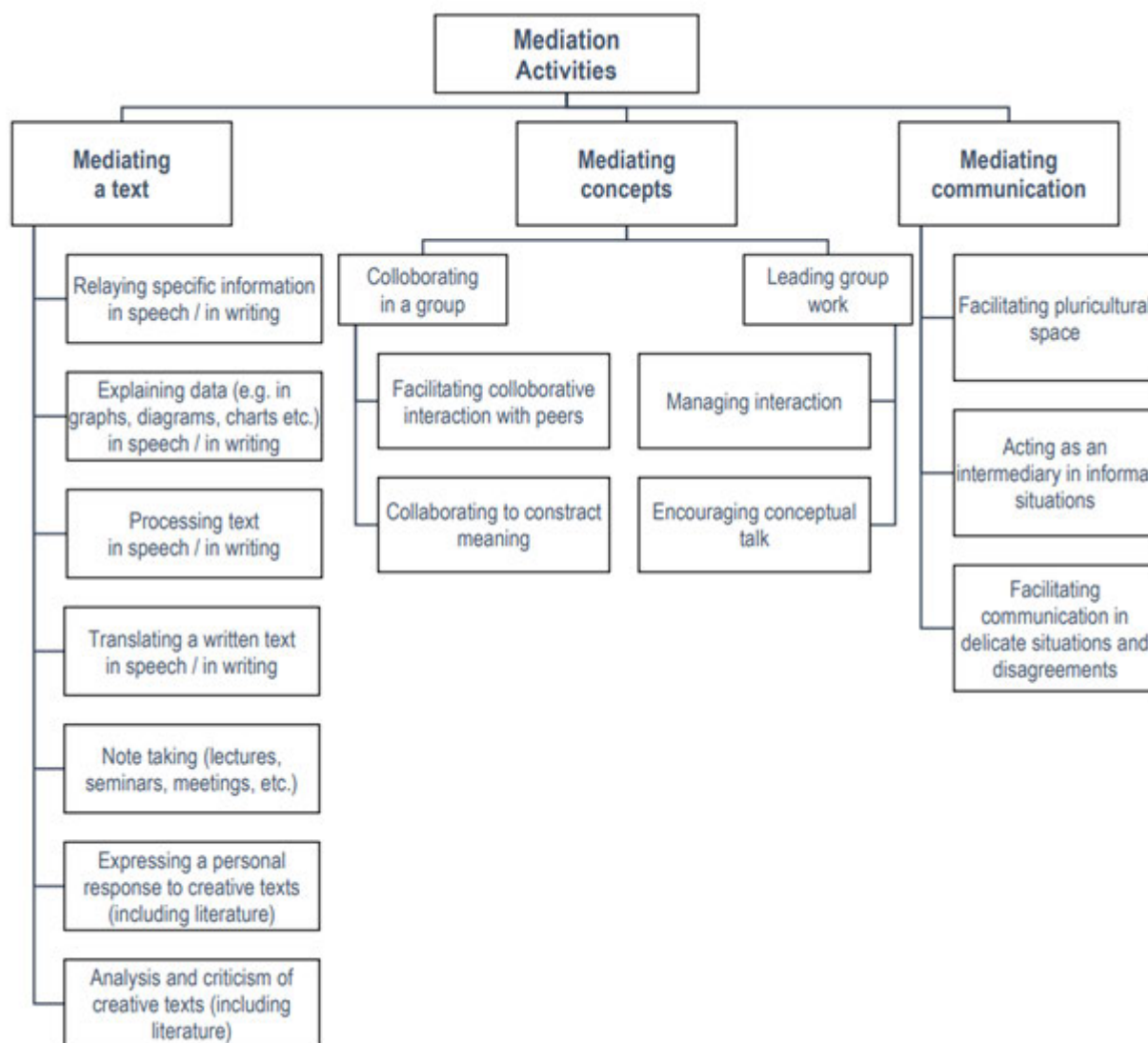


Figure 1. Mediation activities.

In our study, we consider mediation in foreign language teaching not only as communication and learning but also as social and cultural aspect [3]. Mediation competences are the making of a skilled teacher, because teachers should understand the challenges that different levels of language difficulty and complexity pose for learners. Our idea is to develop these mediation competences while training pre-service English language teachers at Kazan Federal University (Russia).

The research question is as follows: how can we effectively integrate such mediation activities as mediating the text, mediating concepts and mediating communication in pre-service English language teachers' training at Kazan Federal University and to define students' attitudes to mediation activities?

## 2 METHODOLOGY

To effectively integrate mediation activities in pre-service English language teachers' training special tasks were designed and implemented.

As an example, the following task was suggested to pre-service teachers to develop their ability to act as intermediary in informal situations.

✦ Task 1

You are going to tell high school students about your future profession. Prepare a short presentation (5-7 slides) explaining the main ideas and describing work perspectives to your listeners.

The second task was aimed at collaborating in a group, facilitating collaborative interaction with peers, collaborating to construct meaning, leading group work, managing interaction and encouraging conceptual talk.

✦ Task 2

Describing a process. Work in pairs. Student A gets a picture with an instruction of making a paper boat. She or he describes the process to Student B not showing the picture to the partner. Student B listens to the explanation and follows the instruction (making a paper boat). Student B can ask for clarification if necessary.

To facilitate pluricultural space, act as an intermediary in informal situations, facilitate communication in delicate situations and disagreements these types of tasks were designed:

✦ Task 3

Work individually. Think of a simple process you can demonstrate. Prepare a plan of your demonstration explaining every step. Make a video of the process. Send it to the group chat for the rest of the class to enjoy. Students watch each other's presentations and provide at least three encouraging sentences for each presentation praising each other's work. Example activities and ideas: bullet journaling, creating a birthday card, baking a Tatar national pie, making your morning brighter, cutting paper snowflakes, using different life hacks for taking beautiful pictures, etc.

✦ Task 4

Students work in groups of three. Each group gets a set of cards with sentences written in either Present Continuous or Present Simple and put them on the table faces down. Students take it in turns to pick up a card and talk about the sentence they read explaining the idea without saying the exact sentence. Other students should try to guess the exact sentence.

e.g. I feel hot!

It's so sunny today! It's like 30°C. There is no wind and not a cloud in the sky. I'm so thirsty. Is there an air conditioner in here? Can you switch it on?

✦ Task 5

Speaking activity. In groups of three students are choosing a logo for a foreign language speaking club they are setting up. Design four logos and discuss the options. Choose one design or decide on the changes that should be made to make it appropriate. Use the language for dealing with disagreement and reaching consensus.

56 pre-service English language teachers of Kazan Federal University (Russia) were involved in the three-semester experimental training course aimed at developing mediating competences. At the end of this experimental training course it was interesting to define students' attitudes to mediation activities. In our research, we used survey as a method of studying attitudes. The survey consists of two independent sections including demographic profile questions and attitude questions. Attitude items were selected and adjusted from survey instruments developed by Samar Rukh and Sk. Abdullah al Mamun et al. [4-5].

In order to process and analyze the received data, the Likert scale and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient were used. The score method provided us with quantitative estimation of respondents' attitudes suitable for analyzing the intensity of concern in the studied aspect. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used in order to highlight the meaningful statements in the initial version of the questionnaire. The Likert scale is used to define respondents' attitudes towards the problem under study by showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements about the stimulus objects. The classical version of the Likert scale used in the research is the 5-point scale [6].

The examples of attitude questions are as follows:

- Is it important for the teacher to collaborate in order to develop new ideas?
- How likely are you to use mediation activities to encourage conceptual talk of your future students?
- Will you be able to act as an intermediary in informal situations?
- Will you be able to facilitate communication in delicate situations and disagreements?
- How likely are you to use mediation activities in your future work as a teacher?

### 3 RESULTS

The results of the research show that the students are rather motivated and feel positive about doing mediation activities and tasks in an English language class, they understand the benefits of mediation. Firstly, it allows them to become aware of difference and diversity in terms of culture, language, opinions and abilities.

Second, mediation allows them to think beyond language-as-a-subject teaching – where strategies for dealing with texts at different levels (discourse, sentence, phrase, word) make content engagement productive.

Thirdly, they appreciate the opportunity for participating in meaningful and authentic activities, for looking at language and communication based around mediation competences. This will potentially lead to more meaningful outcomes for participants.

However, 17% of respondents do not approve of using mediation activities, because their level of English language proficiency prevents them from taking part in discussions and collaborative tasks, expressing their opinions and even understanding the task and teacher's instructions. Apparently, mediation competences can be effectively developed starting with B2 level of English language proficiency.

In order to maintain the trend of implementing mediation activities and strategies in pre-service English language teacher's training at Kazan Federal University, it is vital to provide ample support for university staff in terms of new methodology and scaffolding techniques.

### 4 CONCLUSIONS

From the results of the analysis above, we can conclude that most students are aware of the need to increase the shift to mediation in teaching English, because it increases students' collaboration in developing new ideas, encourages conceptual talk and improves their social skills and autonomy. However, there is still a gap between positive attitude and their actions. Therefore, further studies should be conducted to develop more understanding of students' attitudes towards mediation activities and their implementation in English classroom [7].

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