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Building Bridges: Educators' Perspectives of Mediation in Language Education

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Abstract

Mediation has emerged as a crucial component of language education in response to the growing demand for multilingual, intercultural collaboration, particularly following its inclusion in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This study investigates how primary school foreign language educators conceptualize mediation and perceive its role in the context of early language education. Data (N = 60) were collected from primary school foreign language educators through an online questionnaire in four countries and analysed using deductive qualitative content analysis. Results indicate that although some educators demonstrate a thorough grasp of mediation, most have only partial or unclear understandings of the concept. Additionally, while mediation is already being incorporated into many classrooms, its role is not fully recognized and carried out. This incomplete understanding suggests the need to broaden educators' awareness of mediation's scope and significance in diverse educational contexts. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of targeted professional development and explicit pedagogical strategies to guide teachers in systematically applying mediation. By revealing that mediation is already present in classroom practices, though not explicitly recognized as such, this study emphasizes the need for a more systematic application of mediation to enhance students' communicative competence and learning outcomes. The results further point to the growing imperative for teachers to refine their mediation knowledge to better support students in increasingly diverse and multilingual classrooms.

Keywords: ***mediation in foreign language education, primary school language taching, early language education, teacher perspectives on mediation***

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1 Introduction

Over the past decades, as the world becomes progressively more global, multilingual, and multicultural, so has the framework of language learning. Within that framework, there has been an immense effort to rapidly adjust within a short period to cope with the various changes that foreign language teaching and learning have entailed. In the European context, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001, 2020) was created as a comprehensive reference tool that provides standard educational guidelines which describe the learners' language skills and their abilities at distinct stages of their learning process. Recently, the European Commission has been working on the best ways to develop language learning through the CEFR from 2001, and its Companion Volume (CEFRCV) from 2020, in different educational settings by supplying a foundation for the mutual recognition of language qualifications and supporting educators to collaborate (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020). All this aims to facilitate communication, mobility and recognition in the language learning process, including qualifications, courses, and curricula (Byram & Parmenter, 2012).

The CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020) outlines production, reception, interaction, and mediation as the new communicative modes. *Mediation* focuses on how to adapt the way one conveys a message to the interlocutor (Council of Europe, 2020), and this concept has been strengthened through the descriptors provided in the CEFRCV to facilitate its practical application.

Among language education practitioners, there is an evident ambiguity about the meaning of mediation as a concept and how it should be applied to language teaching (Inha et al., 2021). Furthermore, when it is considered in different European countries, a language barrier often exists when "mediation" is translated into the respective native language (Council of Europe, 2020). As an example, in Finland for a long time, the word mediation has been translated as *mediaatio,* a term that has no specific meaning in the Finnish language in general or in the context of language education. However, in the latest national core curriculum for upper secondary education (Finnish *lukio*) mediation in language education has obtained a more visible role and it has been translated into Finnish as *rakentava vuorovaikutus* (EDUFI, 2019), which means *constructive interaction* in English. According to Inha et al. (2021), constructive interaction can be understood as being based on giving one another space for self-expression, actively listening to, and respecting each other's different ways of communication, and being open to divergent opinions.

Mediation is clearly present in the CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018, 2020) as an important ability of action-oriented language proficiency and in that sense as a part of the language teaching and learning processes. According to the CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90), "In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning." This can happen from one language to another (cross-linguistic) or within one and the same language (intra-linguistic). It can also happen across modalities, for example from written to spoken language or vice versa. The role of mediation is highlighted in communicative scenarios where communication becomes hampered by cognitive or social distance, thus creating a gap (Dendrinos, 2006). To be able to interact, an individual must search for and deepen the meanings of different texts and messages and at the same time negotiate the format of the message to understand it and be understood (Inha et al., 2021).

The CEFRCV framework moved away from a traditional, individualistic skills-based approach to language teaching/learning to adopt an approach based on the co-construction of meaning (Council of Europe, 2020). Evaluating communication skills in language learning only using writing, speaking, listening, and reading ignores the interactive nature of communication at the heart of this meaning co-construction: we

should therefore include strategies that encompass a full repertoire of the language learner's skill profile. The action-oriented approach (AoA) to language education (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018, 2020) views learners as language users who co-construct meaning by utilizing their plurilingual and pluricultural competences and available resources (Cores-Bilbao et al., 2019). These learners act as social agents, using languages in everyday situations to complete meaningful, real-life tasks that are personally relevant. The primary focus is not on learning about foreign languages but on learning to use the languages (see also Kohonen, 2020; Takala, 2015).

It has been recognised that teachers need support in acquiring knowledge and skills on how to develop and assess mediation competences for their students (Pedregosa & Cuadrado, 2022). The METLA project (Mediation in Teaching, Learning, and Assessment) of the European Centre for Modern Languages published a guide for primary and secondary foreign language teachers in 2023, to enhance integrating linguistic mediation in language teaching (Stathopoulou et al., 2023).

Considering the diverse needs of multilingual and intercultural communication and the need to cooperate in everyday life, it is relevant to study how the concept of mediation is defined and understood among educators. In this article, we focus on educators' perspectives by examining the following research questions:

1) How do language teachers understand the concept of mediation in the context of language education?
2) What is the role and added value of mediation in language teaching and learning from the teachers' perspective?

2 Theoretical framework: Mediation in language education

2.1 Action-oriented approach

The AoA, introduced in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) and expanded in the CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2020), redefines language learning as a socially situated process. It moves beyond traditional grammar-focused instruction by emphasizing the use of language in authentic, real-world contexts (Piccardo & North, 2019, 2022). In this framework, learners are viewed as social agents who construct meaning through collaboration and purposeful communication, with mediation considered central to communicative competence (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020; Piccardo & North, 2016, 2019).

Building on earlier sociocultural theories of learning, particularly Vygotsky's perspective (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978), AoA sees language as a mediating tool that supports learning through social interaction (Piccardo & North, 2016). Learners engage in tasks that require authentic problem-solving and decision-making, applying these abilities to achieve tangible outcomes (North, 2022; Piccardo & North, 2019). In this process, support from a more knowledgeable individual is essential. This aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Lantolf, 2007; Piccardo & North, 2019), where they can achieve more with guidance than independently. The notion of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976) further explains how structured support helps individuals progress beyond their current level of competence.

Complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 2011) adds another dimension, viewing language as an emergent process shaped by interaction among learners, tasks, and environments (Piccardo & North, 2019). Learners use strategies such as paraphrasing or code-switching to mediate meaning, illustrating the adaptive and situated nature of language use (Piccardo & North, 2019).

These perspectives support AoA's emphasis on mediation as essential to language learning. Through real-life, action-oriented tasks, learners develop not only linguistic

competence but also the ability to mediate meaning across languages and cultures (Piccardo et al., 2024; Stathopoulou et al., 2023).

2.2 Mediation as a vehicle for communication

According to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020), the leading role of mediation for foreign language educators is to create a suitable environment with appropriate conditions to foster students' learning and communication, motivating them to collaborate with each other in constructing or understanding new language meanings. Mediation is used in any language learning setting to help learners resolve conflicts, improve communication, and build relationships. Therefore, the CEFR adopts the concept of mediation as a way of helping learners to understand the language and takes an innovative stance by conceiving language as a "vehicle for communication" and not as a course to be studied, consequently perceiving learners as social agents. It supports teachers in centering the ability to mediate in students' learning: they are the users of the language preparing to act in the social world and as such, they hold the most fundamental role in the language learning process (Council of Europe, 2018).

The latest CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2020) renews the importance of adopting a plurilingual vision rather than a multilingual approach. *Multilingualism* is the use of more than one language within the same society, whereas *plurilingualism* encompasses the development and dynamism of the linguistic repertoire used by the individual: it is the simultaneous presence of two or more languages and the interrelation between them (Grommes & Hu, 2014). It is the ability to mediate without having a common language by alternating types of expression and using linguistic modalities in different languages, dialects, or simplifying the use of a language (Council of Europe, 2001). As a result, proficiency in one, two or more languages considered in isolation is no longer a desired learning objective, but rather the learning focus is on developing a linguistic repertoire to exercise the various linguistic capacities that an individual possesses.

Plurilingual learners build this repertoire from different languages in which they have partial competencies and strategies for carrying out given tasks (Council of Europe, 2001). Thus, the simultaneous development of plurilingualism and interculturality emerges as a natural process by mediating linguistic and cultural competencies in each of the languages. These competencies interact and are enriched by the knowledge of other languages, contributing to the development of intercultural competencies, skills, and attitudes necessary for daily life experiences.

2.3 Mediation according to the CEFRCV 2020

The CEFRCV mediation scales are shown in three separate groups to explain how the mediation process develops and tends to arise in language learning. The first group is called *mediating a text* which refers to the term cross-linguistic mediation that "involves passing on to another person the content of a text to which they do not have access, often because of linguistic, cultural, semantic or technical barriers." (Council of Europe 2020, p. 91). Mediating a text also includes expressing personal reactions and constructive criticisms of literary texts.

The second group, *mediating concepts* is concerned directly with teaching roles: facilitating access to concepts and knowledge for students, especially if for some reason they cannot acquire them directly on their own (Council of Europe, 2020). In this respect, teachers and guardians have a responsibility to encourage the conceptual exchange and construction of meanings by providing suitable conditions for mediating in different languages.

Lastly, there is *mediating communication* which "aims to facilitate understanding and shape successful communication between users/learners who may have individual,

sociocultural, sociolinguistic or intellectual differences in standpoint" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 91). For instance, the role of the mediator is to promote a positive atmosphere that provides dynamism and "openness" to develop relationships between all individuals and themselves, to lead to stimulating skills such as conflict resolution, critical thinking, empathy, and communication of ideas in an effective way to work cooperatively. Thus, the skills involved are related to personal encounters and global citizenship competencies.

2.4 Mediation strategies according to the CEFRCV 2020

It is indispensable for language learners and users to develop skills to use pertinent mediation strategies regarding the conditions, conventions, and limitations of the communicative context. Thereby, supplementary to mediation activities, there are the *mediation strategies,* i.e., "techniques employed to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding." (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 117; see North & Piccardo, 2016). The research of North and Piccardo (2016) demonstrates how mediation expands the traditional focus of CEFR on language proficiency to include the ability to mediate meaning and foster social cohesion, reflecting the complex communication demands of today's globalized world. Learners, users, and mediators often need to change language, discourse type or modality, to adapt to a given context. Therefore, these are communication strategies that help the language user to better understand the language during the process of mediation activities, having at their disposal additional strategies to rely on and support their comprehension.

Mediation strategies are divided into two groups: *strategies to explain a new concept* and *strategies to simplify a text* (see Coste & Cavalli, 2015). The first group is related to the elaboration of concrete examples to create connections or comparisons between prior knowledge and everyday experiences. In addition, other language strategies that may be used are to adapt language by adopting a different vocabulary and including modalities such as paraphrasing, or finding similes or synonyms to modify the content of the language used and make it accessible. Likewise, one can divide complex information into separate parts as a strategy, to create bullet points or simple steps to follow and then form a relationship between them (Council of Europe, 2020).

The second group, *strategies to simplify a text,* explains mediation strategies related to the use of texts in foreign languages. These strategies consist of adding helpful details to texts by repeating or paraphrasing in diverse ways, elaborating explicit examples and expanding background information. We can take this into consideration along with the opposite strategy mentioned, which implies summarizing the key elements of a text excluding what is not relevant for the group targeted, and regrouping the source ideas to contrast and compare, highlight important points, and draw conclusions (Council of Europe, 2020).

Mediation in the context of language education has been approached via several mediation activities (mediating text, mediating concept, mediating communication) as well as the mediation strategies (strategies to explain a new concept and strategies to simplify a text) (Council of Europe, 2020). Naturally, in the language classroom, mediation activities and strategies tend to overlap, since they are inherently intertwined, which means that they cannot be separated from each other in practice. As a result, language users are free to use the categories according to their needs and adapt the descriptors to their own context and perspectives.

2.5 The role of language teachers in mediation

Language teachers are individuals who provide language education by developing activities and establishing the conditions necessary to immerse learners in a meaningful

context, enabling and assisting them in practicing the target language. The teacher acts as a resource person, facilitator, mediator, and language model for the foreign language classroom. The teacher's role is fundamental from the perspective of the cultural dimension of language since it raises the student's awareness of cultural aspects and prepares pupils to embrace them in intercultural encounters. These contributions consist of teaching knowledge as well as skills needed in daily life (Gohard-Radenkovic et al., 2004). The teachers' mediating role fosters learners' aspiration to participate in language activities and reinforces meaningful practices that nurture creativity, autonomy, and reflection (Jiménez Raya, 2017; Piccardo et al., 2019).

Classrooms have become linguistically and culturally more diverse, making it indispensable for teachers to be trained in pedagogy for approaching students with different languages and sociocultural contexts. Coste and Cavalli (2015) highlight teachers' vital role in fostering student success through cognitive and relational mediation, both of which are essential in plurilingual and pluricultural classrooms. Cognitive mediation involves guiding students to actively construct knowledge, while relational mediation addresses group dynamics, prevents conflicts, and strengthens social cohesion. To bridge equity gaps, teachers need to recognize diverse student backgrounds and provide targeted support, especially to those who may be disadvantaged due to their background. It is also important for teachers to create a positive, inclusive climate that values each student's cultural and linguistic identity, intervening when misunderstandings arise and encouraging respectful dialogue, enabling equitable access to learning (Coste & Cavalli, 2015).

The teachers' facilitating role is a continuous task in which they must mediate in the preparation of certain contents and arrange those stimuli that support the children's needs to achieve their success. Feuerstein and Feuerstein (1991), through their theory of mediated learning experience (MLE), worked with youth from disadvantaged and culturally diverse backgrounds, arguing that the interaction between the environment and the teacher has an important influence on the learner's cognitive level. What is more, they found that for a mediated interaction to be successful, four components must be considered: mediation of meaning, transcendence, intentionality, and reciprocity (Tan, 2003). Other researchers (e.g., Lantolf et al., 2015) support this theory of mediated learning experiences as a method that can stimulate learners' willingness to learn languages. They argue that it is the experiences of socialization and interaction that contribute holistically to formative learning encounters, helping transcend the mere acquisition of concepts (Lantolf et al., 2015).

3 Materials and methods

3.1 Data collection tool and context

This small-scale study was conducted in four countries, Finland, Russia, Spain, and Sweden. For data collection, an electronic questionnaire designed by the researchers was used, based on an earlier small-scale study implemented among Finnish teachers (Salo et al., 2020) and a review of existing literature and previous research in the field. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions related to demographic information and short-answer questions that probed whether the participants were familiar with the concept of mediation and where they had learned it. In addition, it included a section of open-ended questions, elaborated to investigate the teachers' perspectives on the concept of mediation. The questionnaire was created in English via the Webropol 3.0 platform. Target group participants were language educators (language teachers and/or classroom teachers) working at the primary school level, who were contacted during March 2021 by e-mail and social media in Finland, Russia, Spain, and Sweden. They

received the necessary ethical information related to the research and its data collection in the electronic questionnaire (TENK, 2019). The questionnaire was open from the 22nd of March to the 9th of April 2021.

3.2 Materials

The questionnaire answers were received from 60 primary school foreign language educators from: Finland (n = 28), Russia (n = 13), Spain (n = 14), and Sweden (n = 5); countries where the CEFR is assumed to be familiar and to some extent in use among professionals of language education. The reason for collecting data from different countries was to obtain a broader perspective of linguistic mediation in the field of education, though at no time did the researchers intend to carry out a comparative study between the selected countries. Of the 60 participants, 24 provided detailed responses to the open-ended question regarding what mediation can offer to language teaching and learning in the primary school setting. Consequently, the analysis of this question is based solely on the 24 responses obtained. Teachers were coded T1-T60 in the order of received responses. The coding is used to identify the statements from different individuals in presenting the results.

3.3 Analysis

The data was analysed from the perspective of four distinct roles of mediation in the context of language education mentioned in the CEFRCV version (Council of Europe, 2020). The questionnaire responses regarding teachers' perspectives of the meaning of mediation in language education were processed following systematic qualitative content analysis methods (Bengtsson, 2016) with a deductive approach. The data were studied and discussed by all co-authors both individually and collaboratively throughout the analysis process. Initially, three co-authors independently coded the data and then met to discuss and agree on an initial coding scheme based on the CEFRCV mediation descriptors. The preliminary coding categories included providing conditions and context for communication, co-constructing meaning, encouraging understanding, and conveying new information appropriately. Example codes within these categories include giving comfortable and open communication, attuning communication to the audience, explaining concepts to others, and teacher-student collaboration. To further ensure coding reliability, another three co-authors independently reviewed the classifications. Interrater reliability was assessed through discussion and consensus rather than statistical measures. Any discrepancies were resolved collaboratively among all co-authors during multiple team meetings, enhancing both the transparency and consistency of the coding process. This joint analysis led to the identification of the main findings matching the definitions and descriptions of mediation in the CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2018, 2020). Those definitions are here summarized into four main points:

1. to provide the conditions and context for communication or learning to communicate,
2. to work together towards building new meaning,
3. to encourage the construction and understanding of new meaning, and
4. to appropriately convey new information (Council of Europe, 2020).

4 Results

The present study explored foreign language teachers' perspectives on mediation in language education. Special attention was on the language educators' familiarity with the concept of mediation and its role and usefulness in language teaching practice. During the data collection phase, the participants (N = 60) worked as foreign language

educators at the primary school level, teaching one, two or three of the following languages: English (n = 47), Spanish (n = 11), Swedish (n = 9), Finnish (n = 6), German (n = 4), Russian (n = 4), French (n = 3), or Bosnian (n = 1), Catalan (n = 1), Chinese (n = 1), Italian (n = 1), Serbian (n = 1).

4.1 Educators' understanding of the concept of mediation in the context of language education

4.1.1 Educators' familiarity with the concept of mediation

Half of the participants stated that they do not know how to define or describe elements associated with the concept of mediation particularly in relation to language education: "Haven't heard of it, so can't say anything about it." Less than half of the participants (n = 24) responded to the open-ended questions by explaining extensively and profoundly what mediation meant to them. They had recognised that the concept of mediation materialized in diverse ways as a natural part of their everyday work environment. In this limited data from four different countries, primary school language educators' familiarity with the concept of mediation varied from complete unawareness of the concept to quite exact and multi-faceted knowledge about its content and role in the context of language education.

The results revealed that 45 % of all the participants (N = 60) had never heard of the concept of mediation in the context of language teaching (see Table 1). A bit more, 48 %, of the respondents had heard of it, but its definition, purpose, or implementation remained at least partly unclear. A clear minority of the teachers, 7 % (n = 4), indicated that they fully understood the concept of mediation in the context of language teaching.

Moreover, more than half, 51 %, of the teachers named the source from which they had got the information and familiarity regarding the concept of mediation. Some (n = 10) had learned about it in teacher education or professional development courses, and some (n = 7) of the teachers reported they had learned about the concept through reading the CEFR 2018 and 2020 editions. Some (n = 10) had obtained information through a colleague or administrator, and half a dozen individual respondents mentioned other means such as their own postgraduate studies, practices used within their own children's schools, or searching and finding information about the concept from the internet.

In addition, 18 % of respondents indicated that the concept of mediation was present in their country's national education policies and curricula concerning language education, while 28 % indicated this was not present. As many as 54 % of the participants said that they were not aware if the concept was present in their national language education policy or curricula.

TABLE 1. Foreign language educators' familiarity with the concept of mediation (N = 60).

Questionnaire item	Option	Number of responses (N = 60)	Rate (%)
Is the concept of mediation visible in your country's official language education documents (e.g. national education policies, curriculum)?	No	17	28
	I don't know	32	54
	Yes	11	18
How familiar are you with the concept of mediation in the context of language teaching?	Never heard of it	27	45
	I have heard of it, but its definition, purpose, or implementation remain unclear	29	48
	I fully understand the concept	4	7

4.1.2 Educators' perceptions of the concept of mediation

The main purpose of the study was to explore foreign language educators' perspectives of mediation in the context of language education. The 24 teachers who provided explanations defined the concept of mediation through concrete examples from their daily work contexts. A couple of teachers (5/24) connected their experience-based examples explicitly to the CEFR documents and their contents. In addition, two teachers illustrated their understanding of mediation using examples taken from outside language education. Mediation was described using a variety of terms, with "skill" mentioned three times, and "resource", "strategy", and "tool" mentioned twice each. Other descriptions, such as activity, task, category, concept, process, reflection, approach, scaffolding, affordance, and means, were each mentioned once. These descriptions suggest mediation as a connecting element, first in communication, including both linguistic and cultural aspects, and second in problem-solving, relevant not only to language education but to broader educational contexts. These two do not exclude each other; rather, they partly overlap and are interconnected.

Mediation was also described by two teachers as a pedagogical resource that facilitates teachers and supports learners in their learning process. At the same time, it can be used as a skill to confront difficulties that are encountered in the daily life practices of language teachers as described in Teacher 44's responses (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. Quotes illustrating educators' perceptions of mediation.

Teacher	Quote
T38	"Very much; it is a basic skill that all non-native language speakers need when communicating with other people in the target language."
T44	"Mediation can offer a variety of strategies for students and teachers who see barriers when it comes to teaching or learning. They can implement debates based on everyday life experiences this way language can be implemented as the mean of communication but indirectly teach adequate problem solving skills which are a need in today's learning system."
T56	"This concept is loaded with resources and strategies that language teachers can implement in their classes when students are not able to communicate in the target language."

4.2 Educators' perspectives on the role of mediation in the context of language education

The findings from the teachers' responses suggest that mediation plays an important role in supporting effective language teaching and learning. Although 60 primary school foreign language educators completed the overall questionnaire, only 24 provided detailed responses to the question focusing on the role of mediation. Guided by the definitions outlined in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90), four central themes emerged from the analysis of language educators' perspectives on the role of mediation in language teaching and learning: (1) creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, (2) collaborating to construct new meaning, (3) encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and (4) passing on new information in an appropriate form.

4.2.1 Creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning

Eleven out of twenty-four teachers described mediation as an important foundation, enabling learners to engage meaningfully with language and with one another, even when linguistic gaps or cultural differences arise. Through mediation, they could adapt and enrich instructional strategies, methodologies, and resources to prioritize meaningful communication over rote language practice, thereby supporting learners' communicative competence. Three teachers emphasized how mediation helps to create comfortable, open environments that make learning more accessible and teaching more effective. By acting as mediators, teachers create a learning environment that feels supportive and inclusive rather than strictly following a rigid sequence of lessons. Illustrative quotations reflecting both aspects of this broader theme are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Quotes illustrating theme 1 (creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning).

Teacher	Quote
T31	"It helps to reach the main goal of language teaching and learning: get students to communicate for a real purpose."
T42	"It is supposed to give more comfortable and open communication and thus easier learning."

4.2.2 Collaborating to construct new meaning

Another key theme emphasized the collaborative nature of meaning-making. Two teachers described mediation as a channel through which students, teachers, and peers come together to negotiate understanding. Rather than transmitting fixed linguistic knowledge, mediation encourages a joint effort where all participants contribute their interpretations and cultural references to construct shared meaning. One teacher (Teacher 47) observed that children often rephrase concepts in ways that better resonate with their peers, making understanding easier and broadening their perspectives (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. Quotes illustrating theme 2 (collaborating to construct new meaning).

Teacher	Quote
T46	"Helps to enhance new competences of language teaching through knowing what the other person wants to communicate. Also, can be a tool to find a balance between two or more cultures that have different points of views."
T47	"When it comes to young kids, they sometimes/often explain things to each other in a different way than the adult/teacher. I am often stuck with the belief that my way of describing a concept is the only/clearest way but sometimes a student understands it differently, and when explaining theirs to others, their way of understanding makes it simpler for other students as well. Also, a student might add their view on top of my description, and this makes the concept wider (sometimes also more complicate, since they also add tricky questions and point out certain illogicalities, which English language is full of !)"

4.2.3 Encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning

The third theme, supported by two teachers, centers on mediation to motivate pupils, with teachers providing strategic support to help pupils comprehend and construct new meanings. Teacher 53 (see Table 5) viewed mediation as a form of scaffolding (see Wood et al.,1976) that offers targeted assistance, allowing pupils to complete tasks and achieve their goals. This teacher also recognized that the effectiveness of mediation is context-dependent: certain strategies may enhance learning in one scenario but hinder it in another. Consequently, teachers emphasized the importance of continuously monitoring pupils' progress and adapting mediation techniques as needed to ensure the best possible support.

TABLE 5. Quote illustrating theme 3 (encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning).

Teacher	Quote
T53	"Mediation can play as scaffoldings according to ZPD, and offer learners assistance to achieve tasks as they need it. Meanwhile, the mediation means can be affordances or constraints under specific circumstances, therefore, the teachers should be aware of and make necessary adjustments when the mediation means constrain learner's learning process."

4.2.4 Passing on new information in an appropriate form

Finally, six teachers recognized that mediation involves presenting information in accessible, relevant, and comprehensible ways. By tailoring communication to suit different audiences, contexts, and proficiency levels, mediation allows pupils to process and use the new language effectively. Among the teachers, three emphasized the importance of designing mediation tasks and activities that align with pupils' interests and goals, noting that such alignment fosters more meaningful engagement with the target language and finally improves both teaching and learning outcomes. Illustrative quotations from the teachers supporting this theme are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Quotes illustrating theme 4 (passing on new information in an appropriate form)

Teacher	Quote
T43	"It helps pupils to attune their communication to a certain audience."
T45	"Language teaching has always included mediation activities so it is nothing new per se. The researchers should keep this in mind. Having a collective term might however raise the teachers' awareness of all the different kinds of activities that include mediation. In my opinion, the concept of mediation also encourages focus on the context/receiver/goal of the communication, which should be important in task/exercise planning."

5 Discussion

5.1 Interpreting language educators' perspectives on the concept of mediation

The first research question explored how language educators conceptualize mediation. The findings reveal a limited familiarity with the term, while some educators were able to describe mediation in practical terms, nearly half had never encountered the concept in the context of language education. Only a small minority linked their understanding directly to CEFR documents. These results must also be understood within the broader curricular and policy contexts in which these educators work.

Mediation in A1-level primary school language education varies across the four countries studied, though there is reason to assume its implicit presence in all of them. During data collection, it was noted that mediation, although not explicitly named as a concept, was often embedded in communicative and intercultural goals, encouraging students to interact and convey meaning. For example, Spain explicitly integrates mediation as a core skill in its curriculum, aligned with the CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2020). In contrast, Russia does not formally include mediation in A1-level language education, though communicative and cultural competencies are emphasized, which may indirectly support mediation-related skills. These observations are further supported by the authors' professional insights and direct educational experience in the countries examined.

Within these varied policy contexts, the gap between official frameworks and classroom practice becomes evident. Despite this, teachers offered diverse and experience-based interpretations, referring to mediation as a "skill," "tool," "strategy," or "resource." These descriptions suggest that while formal knowledge may be lacking, teachers intuitively view mediation as a means to support communication, resolve challenges, and promote learning. Based on these responses, mediation can be interpreted as a connecting element, linking linguistic and cultural understanding, classroom tasks, and learner needs (Cores-Bilbao et al., 2019; Piccardo & North, 2016, 2019). This aligns with the AoA (Council of Europe, 2020), which frames mediation as a dynamic process that allows learners to act as social agents in real-world tasks (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo & North, 2019, 2022). Similarly, describing mediation as scaffolding reflects sociocultural theory's view of teachers as facilitators who structure collaborative learning within learners' ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). By providing targeted support, teachers enable students to mediate their knowledge and resources for communication and collaborative knowledge co-construction, a principle also foundational to AoA (North, 2022; Piccardo & North, 2019).

However, the scarcity of explicit references to the CEFR or AoA among participants raises questions about how these frameworks are implemented. Most teachers relied on informal sources, such as colleagues or internet searches, resulting in fragmented understandings of mediation. Without grounding in mediation theory, teachers will face

challenges when trying to (1) align curricula with frameworks such as the CEFR or AoA, (2) integrate mediation into classroom practice, and (3) systematically develop and assess students' mediation skills (Stathopoulou et al., 2023). This echoes Kumaravadivelu's (2006) critique of the post method gap, where pedagogical theories often fail to translate into classroom practice unless teachers actively engage with and adapt them to their local contexts. The widespread lack of awareness about mediation revealed in this study is an example of this. Despite its importance in CEFR, mediation remains underrecognized in practice because teachers have not yet reinterpreted or localized the concept within their specific educational settings.

To address this, the study suggests a need to provide customized documents and presentations on linguistic mediation to disseminate the term among foreign language teachers in their respective countries (Council of Europe, 2020). Reconceptualizing the term mediation in each country's educational context could be beneficial in bringing visibility and greater understanding to educators of what this term refers to in language education. For example, the Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education describes mediation as *rakentava vuorovaikutus* which translates to *constructive interaction* (EDUFI, 2020). This term aims at developing language learning skills where the learner deepens understanding of otherness and practices to construct knowledge from cultural and linguistic situations, among other aspects.

Overall, the findings reveal limited awareness of mediation among teachers, underscoring the need for clearer theoretical grounding and practical support to integrate it into language education.

5.2 Exploring language educators' perceptions of the role of mediation in language education

The second research question investigated how language educators understand and interpret the role of mediation within language education. Teachers emphasized mediation's role in establishing space and conditions that prioritize meaningful communication, reflecting AoA's focus on authentic interaction (Council of Europe, 2020). Their focus on creating comfortable, open classrooms also aligns with Feuerstein and Feuerstein's (1991) MLE, which underscores the foundational role of a supportive environment to cognitive and social development (Feuerstein & Lewin-Benham, 2012). This attention to building inclusive and collaborative environments contributes directly to promoting equity and plurilingual inclusion, where learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds are supported in accessing and constructing knowledge. Likewise, Coste and Cavalli (2015) reinforce the importance of relational mediation in teaching, arguing that intentionally designed collaborative conditions are crucial for knowledge co-construction, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms.

Teachers also emphasized mediation's collaborative nature, describing it as a scaffold that facilitates joint interpretation and fosters new meaning-making. This perspective aligns with the AoA's emphasis on social agency (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2022) and socio-constructivist theories, which hold that knowledge co-construction occurs when individuals actively participate in social interaction (Piccardo & North, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers' observation of learners rephrasing concepts for peers shows how mediation allows students to negotiate meaning across linguistic boundaries, paralleling the complexity theory's emphasis on language emerging adaptively through collaborative engagement shaped by dynamic interactions (Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Piccardo & North, 2019). In addition, teachers described mediation as context-dependent scaffolding designed to maintain learner motivation and achieve specific goals, reflecting sociocultural theory's ZPD, where guided collaboration enables learners to transcend their current abilities (Vygotsky, 1986). MLE further expands this idea by emphasizing scaffolding, dialogue, and the intentional framing of stimuli to promote

students' willingness to learn languages (Feuerstein & Lewin-Benham, 2012; Lantolf et al., 2015).

Teachers also highlighted that meditation allows students to effectively process and apply new language by tailoring communication to different target audiences, contexts, and levels of proficiency, which mirrors the dynamic interaction between learners, tasks, and environments described in complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Piccardo & North, 2019). To achieve this, teachers play a crucial role, not only by providing scaffolding and motivating the students but also by tailoring strategies and tasks to meet learners' individual needs. Their efforts align with the AoA's call for teachers to design meaningful action-oriented tasks that mediate knowledge and resources, promote effective communication, facilitate collaborative meaning construction, and support language internalization (North, 2022; Piccardo & North, 2019).

The findings suggest that mediation is implicitly integrated into language classrooms, but teachers' understandings of its role remain incomplete. As Tan (2003) emphasizes, effective mediation relies on four key components: mediation of meaning, transcendence, intentionality, and reciprocity, implying that excluding any of these elements may undermine the process. It is, therefore, crucial for teachers to develop a comprehensive understanding of mediation and learn how to integrate it effectively into classroom practice. Drawing on research into teacher cognition and reflective practice (Borg, 2017; Farrell, 2022), this study points to the importance of expanding educators' awareness of mediation's diverse roles. Targeted professional development that clarifies and integrates mediation tasks and strategies would align with AoA and broaden its impact. In addition to targeted professional development programs, workshops, and materials available on the official METLA project website can also serve as valuable resources for supporting teachers' understanding and implementation of mediation in practice. By fully acknowledging the role of mediation and applying effective mediation strategies and tasks, teachers can promote collaborative, inclusive, and learner-centered language classrooms where all students, including those from marginalized backgrounds, engage as social agents in knowledge co-construction (Coste & Cavalli, 2015; Fonseca-Mora & Gonzalez Davies, 2022; Lantolf et al., 2015; Piccardo & North, 2019).

6 Conclusion

This study explored how primary school foreign language educators understand the concept of mediation, as well as its role and added value in language teaching and learning. The findings suggest that while many educators incorporate mediation strategies and activities into their teaching, the concept itself remains largely unrecognized and underexplored. As a result, there is a pressing need to reconceptualize mediation in various educational contexts and to raise educators' awareness of its value.

In light of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in today's classrooms, teachers' mediation skills are more essential than ever. As the number of languages and the diversity of students grow, educators need to recognize and cultivate the potential that each student brings. They also need to find ways to help second-language learners and others who are still developing proficiency to acquire and use mediation strategies. Although the teachers in the present study did not explicitly relate mediation to equity, some of their responses emphasized its role in overcoming communication barriers and supporting problem solving and conflict resolution. This suggests that making such strategies more explicit and systematically applied could help promote more equitable language learning experiences. By doing so, these learners can more quickly integrate into both the classroom community and wider society rather than having to wait until they have fully mastered the new language. Therefore, a deeper understanding of multilingual classroom practices and the way in which mediation skills can facilitate students' linguistic and social integration is an important direction for future research

and teacher development. By making mediation more visible and better understood, teachers can more fully embrace their roles as mediators, strategically implementing its benefits to support learners' communicative competence and social integration.

7 Limitations and future research

Throughout the research, several themes were identified that opened new perspectives for the use of mediation not only in the realm of language teaching but also in various other educational practices. However, it is important to acknowledge that only 24 out of the 60 participants provided open-ended responses. While this limited response rate affects the generalizability of the findings, the data collected still offered insights that helped identify key themes in how teachers understand and apply mediation. Although some factors were left unexplored, further research will benefit by including the next phase of the study in which new questions can be formulated to address the themes that emerged during the data analysis. Moreover, for future data collection at the international level, it would be advisable to have the possibility to design a questionnaire or interview that allows teachers to explain their perspectives and thoughts in their own mother tongue. According to the research data and teachers' comments, one of the reasons for not answering the open-ended questions further was the language barrier, since the questions were provided and answered in English for all the teachers, and for most of them this was their second or foreign language.

The present research could serve as a starting point for an in-depth study of foreign language teachers' perspectives on mediation, in which the number of participants would be large enough to use quantitative research methods to triangulate some of the results of the present study. In addition, future research could focus on exploring specific methods of language mediation to develop concise and easy-to-use guidelines for language teachers in their daily practice. By emphasizing mediation in plurilingual and pluricultural classrooms, educators can better support their students' language development and social integration, ensuring that the evolving linguistic landscape of schools becomes a resource rather than a barrier.

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