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Exploring Prospective English Language Teachers' Engagement in Mediation: Insights from a Practicum Study

İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Aracılık Olgusu ile Etkileşimi: Öğretmenlik Uygulaması Çalışmalarına Yakın Bir Bakış

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Abstract

The study, in line with the view of teachers' professional identity development as socio-cultural engagement, aims to explore how prospective English language teachers respond to the concept of mediation in theory and practice during their practicum study. Drawing on a broader vision of mediation anchored by critical-reflexivity, the study investigates the dynamics influencing prospective teachers' conceptualization of mediation and their potential as well as enacted ways of relating their emerging professional vision to teaching. Grounded in case study methodology, qualitative corpora comprise reflective tasks, lesson plans, macro-teaching experiences as well as audio-recording of class discussions. Data is analysed in the progression of the course by applying content analysis and the emerging themes are discussed in relation to new descriptors on mediation proposed by the Council of Europe. The research findings reveal sensitized awareness of the versatile role mediation plays in relating to interculturality and inclusion in education but also show gaps in student teachers' conceptualization of mediation and this raises questions on their pedagogical readiness to enact mediation in practice. In tune with socio-constructive view of teacher identity development, the study addresses personal, social, historical and political factors influencing the processes of mediation and invites further thought in defining and researching mediation in social sciences from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Keywords: Mediation, English Language Teacher Education, Practicum, Professional Identity Development, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Öz

Öğretmenlerin mesleki kimlik gelişimini toplumsal-kültürel katılımcılık olarak değerlendiren bir bakış açısını benimseyen bu çalışma, İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının aracılık kavramına kuram ve uygulama boyutuyla yaklaşımını öğretmenlik uygulaması çalışmaları kapsamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Eleştirel- yansıtmalı bir anlayışla aracılık kavramını daha geniş bir eksende ele alan çalışma, öğretmen adaylarının aracılık unsurunu kavramsallaştırmada ve gelişim sürecindeki pedagojik öngörülerini eylem ve planlarında uygulamaya yansıtmada etki payı olan dinamikleri araştırmaktadır. Durum çalışması yöntemini benimseyen çalışmada nitel veri bütününü yansıtma raporları, ders planları, makro uygulamalar ve sınıf içi tartışmaların ses kayıtları oluşturmaktadır. Veri ardışık olarak dersin ilerleyişi içerisinde incelenmiş, ortaya çıkan temalar Avrupa Konseyinin önerdiği yeni aracılık tanımlayıcıları ile ilişkilendirilerek tartışılmıştır. Çalışmada elde edilen bulgular öğretmen adaylarının aracılık kavramının eğitimde kültürlerarasılık ve katılımcılık konularına bağlı olarak üstlendiği çok yönlü role ilişkin farkındalık geliştirdiklerini ancak kavramı tanımlama ve öğretime yansıtma yetkinliklerinde boşluklar bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Toplumsal-bilişsel yapılandırmacı yaklaşımla öğretmen kimlik gelişimine bakan bu çalışma, aracılık süreçlerini etkileyen kişisel, toplumsal, tarihsel ve politik etmenlere değinmekte, sosyal bilimlerde disiplinlerarası bir bakışla aracılık kavramının tanımlanması ve araştırılması yönünde çağrıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aracılık, İngilizce Öğretmeni Yetiştirme, Öğretmenlik Uygulaması, Mesleki Kimlik Gelişimi, Diller için Avrupa Ortak Başvuru Metni.

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Exploring Prospective English Language Teachers' Engagement in Mediation: Insights from a Practicum Study

In today's educational realms marked by plurality, complexity, and transience it becomes increasingly important to reconsider professional identity development of teachers from a broader perspective to embrace multifaceted aspects of teacher development. Interactivity, both at an individual and collective level, navigates teachers' ways of defining themselves with respect to the teaching profession (Wang & Dai, 2024). Envisioned from this perspective, professional development involves not only knowledge and skills to understand and learn the dynamics of teaching but also attitudes, beliefs, values, and emotions evolving through socio-cultural interaction with peers, mentors, colleagues, learners, and connections with the wider society. Weger (2025), therefore, with reference to the work of König et al (2022) on teacher noticing discusses how teacher actions are informed by the general socio-cultural context. The interplay between these different aspects of teachers' professional identity development necessitates a deeper focus on the concomitant role of mediation in teacher education, which not only scrutinizes the ways teachers respond to the concept of mediation but also questions their means of operationalizing mediation in their teaching contexts. Based on these theoretical underpinnings, the present study aims to provide an analytical lens to investigate prospective English language teachers' engagement in mediation during their practicum study at a Turkish state university. Towards this end, the study uses the new descriptors on mediation proposed with an interdisciplinary vision in the Companion Volume of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), (The Council of Europe, 2018) as a reference to invite further thought on how mediation might potentially inform teacher education in various disciplines, at different levels, and educational contexts. In this respect, the study aims to pinpoint a gap in literature in defining mediation from a more integrated perspective and addresses the need for empirical research in its exploration. For a more nuanced understanding of unfolding and emergent aspects of mediation in teacher preparation, the study draws on case study methodology and reports on the findings attained from the content analysis of rich qualitative data involving class audio-recordings, autobiographical writings, reflection reports, model lessons created by prospective English language teachers, and field notes in the fall term of 2023-24 academic year.

When CEFR (2001) first introduced mediation as one of the four modes of communication alongside reception, production, and interaction (Council of Europe, 2001), the construct was viewed as rather vague and even "elusive", which led to a variety of interpretations and operationalizations (Kremmel et al., 2023, p.73). With the publication of the Companion Volume of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR-CV) (The Council of Europe, 2018), a more enhanced conceptualization of mediation together with the corresponding scales and descriptors have become available (Lenz, 2022). Yet, this expansion has also generated new challenges, particularly regarding what mediation entails and how mediation can be meaningfully translated into instructional practices. As Liddicoat (2022) argues, mediation is still conceptually under-defined and has been operationalized in teaching and research in a variety of ways. In a similar vein, Kantarcıoğlu (2022) notes that the mediation descriptors in the CEFR-CV are too many and too long at times, which makes their operationalization challenging, and thus "research is needed to determine how teachers can establish mediation in the classroom" (p. 172). Dendrinos (2022) also underscores the need for primary research into "what people are really required to do, what and how they are expected to mediate in different contexts, for different social purposes" (p.109), since the CEFR-CV descriptors, as with the original CEFR, are based largely on expert judgment rather than empirical evidence of what mediation actually entails in real contexts (Dendrinos, 2022). Similarly, Kantarcıoğlu (2022) calls for further research into the construct validation of mediation tasks, so that a common understanding of mediation can be

developed as well as the confusion over the categorization of activities into modes of communication can be resolved. The CEFR-CV has also generated "new challenges as to how mediation scales may be exploited for assessment purposes" (Kremmel et al., 2023, p.74). In this context, Lenz (2022) argues that "an overarching test construct and a corresponding 'test of mediation' are inconceivable" due to its vast descriptive system (p. 113). This ambiguity is further compounded by the lack of empirical comparisons between the original CEFR and the CEFR-CV, which creates uncertainty for practitioners and highlights the need for first-hand research (O'Sullivan, 2022).

These challenges are particularly salient in the Turkish context characterized by the ongoing hegemony of monolingualism in both heritage language and English language teaching policies (Gezer & Dixon, 2021), language-as-problem policy stance that is generally subtractive and seeks to limit or eliminate multilingualism (Atmacasoy, 2025), as well as teacher-centred instructional traditions (Kırkgöz, 2007) and highly centralized policies governing both English language education and teacher education (Ördem, 2021). Against this backdrop, this study situated within the case study methodology and geared towards understanding the ways prospective English language teachers conceive and enact mediation becomes particularly significant. By integrating the new descriptors on mediation proposed with an interdisciplinary vision in the CEFR-CV with socio-cultural perspectives on professional identity development through a Mediation-based Framework for Prospective Teachers' Socio-Cultural Engagement, and analyzing a rich qualitative dataset, this study contributes a theoretically grounded and multi-layered, data-driven approach to understanding the emergent and evolving aspects of mediation in teacher preparation.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Mediation

The word mediation has multiple meanings and apart from disciplinary variation in its use (Busch, 2023) has semantically broadened its meaning, from an original sense of being divisive to having an intermediary position. As Corbett (2021) notes, this semantic shift indicates that the word has now the sense of being in the middle "for the purpose of bringing opposing phenomena into some kind of alignment" (p.8). It is this sense of the word which causes it to be associated with problem solving, reconciliation of opposition, conflict resolution, crisis management in various disciplines. In the field of translation studies and intercultural studies, the word mediation traditionally relies on an understanding of a mid- position, a third-party assistance to negotiate and overcome gaps and conflicts in communication. This view has largely been challenged in language studies and now implicates the existence of a "third space" (Kramsch, 1993), rather than a third person, where different linguistic codes and /or cultural codes and practices are re-considered, rephrased, elaborated, and co-constructed in the processes of meaning making without residing in dichotomies. This is a process which Kramsch (2009a) defines as symbolic competence, "ability to find the most appropriate subject position, ability to grasp larger social and historical significance of events and to understand cultural memories evoked by symbolic systems, ability to perform and create alternative realities by reframing the issues" (p.113). While still preserving the emphasis on mediation as a cross-linguistic endeavor to facilitate communication, this broader understanding of mediation addresses "learning as well as social and cultural mediation" (North et al., 2017, as cited in Corbett, 2021, p.9), involving "social aspirations as much as linguistic realisations" (Corbett, 2021, p.11). The current study is based on this integrated understanding of mediation and its implications on language teaching.

Mediation in Language Education: CEFR Descriptors on Mediation

Mediation is identified as a core aspect of language learning and communication in line with the Council of Europe's (2018) policy of helping individuals in the processes of "acting in the social world and

exerting agency in the learning process" (p.26). The recognition of language learner as intercultural speaker/ mediator (Byram, 2021) emphasizes a paradigm shift where native-speaker is no more taken as the norm and the language learner is the one who has the ability to de-centre from pre-assumed and rather entrenched views to discover ways of relating to the other and/or otherness. In this context, foreign language education which traditionally frames communication with respect to four skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing now becomes grounded in a new descriptive scheme of communicative activities which are categorized as reception, production, interaction, and mediation (Council of Europe, 2018, p.30). As North & Piccardo (2016) rightly argue, mediation is not a fifth skill but a centralized aspect of communication, emphasizing "the constant link between the social and individual dimensions in language use and language learning" (p.5). In this context, mediation encompasses all aspects and channels of communication and addresses all domains of language use, including public, personal, educational and occupational (Council of Europe, 2018, pp. 122-123) (See Appendix A for the schematic organization of descriptors on mediation).

It is challenging to integrate mediation into practice especially when the concept is conceived to be "developmental" in essence involving linguistic, cultural, social and pedagogic dimensions (North & Piccardo, 2016, p.9). Teaching itself is an act of mediation, emerging in the dialectic between teacher cognition and socio-cultural engagement in practice. In other words, language teachers are expected to bestow on learners' mediation-sensitive practices for cultivating a collaborative culture of learning while mediating their own lingua cultural resources, dispositions, pedagogical stances, and emotions in a critical and reflexive frame to achieve dialogic interaction in educational contexts. This raises a series of thought-provoking questions: How do (prospective) teachers relate to mediation? In what ways do the social and the individual interact in their case to build their trajectories of educational theory and practice? How is their socio-cultural engagement as language learners, users, and mediators in educational settings influenced by ideologies, institutional constraints, policies, power structures inherent in their contexts? There are no easy answers to these questions. Nevertheless, the following section explores the possibility of adopting a wider view of mediation in teachers' professional identity development.

Mediation in Teacher Education and Development

Liddicoat (2022), based on his exploration of Byram's work on mediation, suggests that when mediation is conceived as socialization into a culture, it involves both learners' and teachers' engagement for its realization. Language has an important role to play in this process. As Kramsch (2009b) discusses, from a Vygotskian perspective, culture is "*the way language mediates our relation to the world, as participation, activity, collaborative task, and ultimately, as inner speech*" [emphasis in the original text] (p.227). Mediation, therefore, cannot merely be taken as a problem-solving task entailing linguistic processes and communication in general but needs to be conceived from a broader perspective, involving dialogic engagement with others and with oneself.

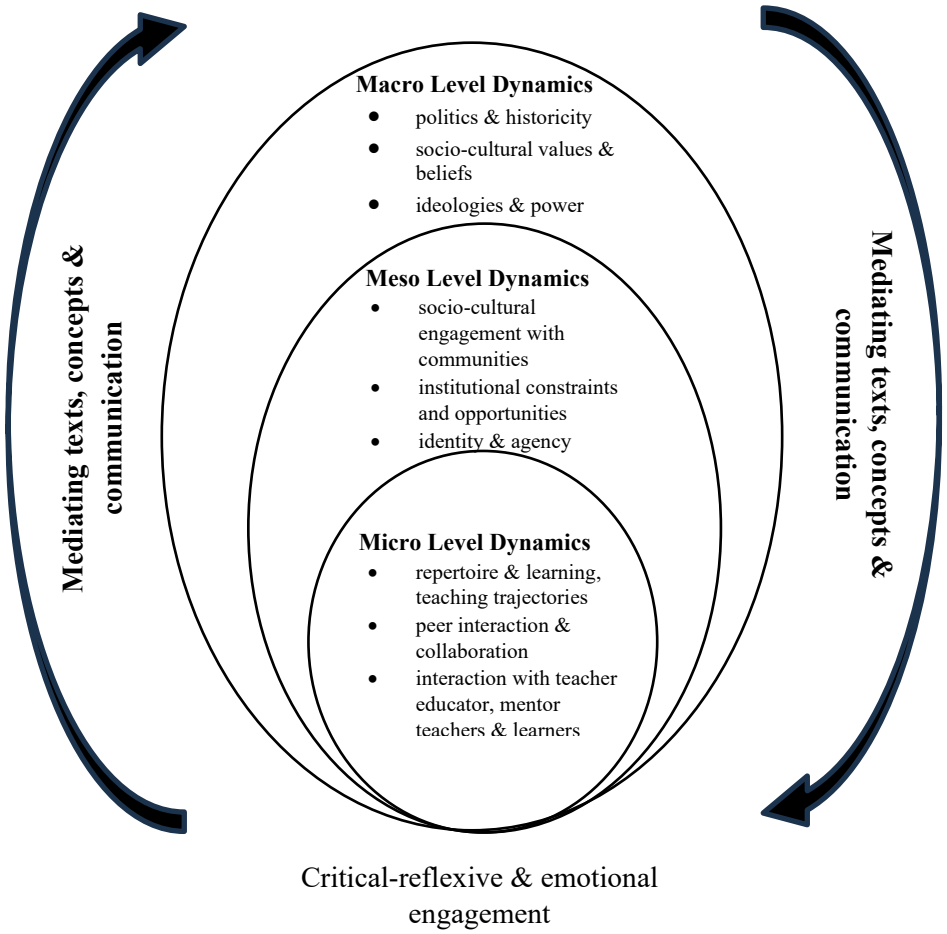
In the CEFR Companion Volume learners' and teachers' roles as mediators and their critical awareness of these attributed roles are discussed in a very limited way, only with reference to building pluricultural repertoires. There is the expectation that the mediator takes a balanced and neutral position and remains "less concerned with one's own needs, ideas or expression, than with those of the party or parties for whom one is mediating" (Council of Europe, 2018, p.106) especially in cases of dispute or conflict. This issue needs further elaboration especially with reference to intercultural mediation. How will teachers balance, and in many instances reconcile their multiple roles and dispositions (i.e engaging in co-constructive dialogue with learners for knowledge building on mediation, creating pedagogical opportunities for teaching mediation in conflict resolution by taking an impartial stance, developing a

meta awareness of macro structures influencing meaning-making in intercultural encounters) in their endeavor to enact mediation?

Mediation informs different stages of teacher identity development, starting with teacher preparation. The following model (see Figure 1), which draws on the multidisciplinary framework for language learning and teaching (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016), is an attempt to invite collective thinking on how mediation can be mapped out to teacher preparation during practicum study. In its meta-framing the model is grounded in an understanding of teacher cognition as socially constructed, dynamic and evolving through interactivity (Li, 2017), and therefore, always anchored by critical-reflexive and emotional engagement. This view delinks with a limited understanding of teacher knowing as a cognitive phenomenon to embrace the pivotal role emotions, aspirations, motivation, self-efficacy and well-being play in helping teachers develop a sense of belonging and establish (self)-trust in their own teaching potential. This provides a fertile ground for analyzing how teachers can "shuttle between people, between texts, between types of discourse and between languages, depending on the mediation context" (Council of Europe, 2018, p.126). The model aims to bring into focus micro, meso, and macro dynamics which influence the processes of mediation in a reciprocal manner. Prospective teachers' mediation processes at a micro level are constantly shaped by meso and macro level dynamics including their socio-cultural engagement in wider societies, institutional policies and practices, larger ideologies, grand narratives, power, and historicity operating at a local and global scale.

Figure 1

Mediation-based Framework for Prospective Teachers' Socio-Cultural Engagement during Practicum Study



Following this theoretical framework, the present study adopts case study approach to investigate prospective English language teachers' engagement in mediation during one semester practicum study to address the following research questions:

1. How do prospective English language teachers relate to mediation during their practicum-based studies?
2. If and to what extent CEFR new descriptors on mediation are addressed in their co-constructive dialogues, lesson plans and teaching in school contexts?
3. How do prospective English language teachers' approaches to mediation influence their professional identity development? Are there any note-worthy changes in their views and practices?

Method

Background of the Study

The study was pursued with the voluntary participation of eight senior prospective English language teachers who were enrolled in a practicum course in a four-year English language teaching degree programme during the fall term of the academic year 2023-24. The course, in line with the regulations of The Higher Educational Council in Türkiye, comprises two credit coursework with a teacher educator at the campus and six hours of classroom-based work at schools on weekly basis for a period of 12 weeks, accounting to 72 hours of work in schools with two or more in-class teaching (model lesson) to be accomplished during the term. In order to achieve parallel progression with other practicum courses offered to different groups, a general curricular frame involving topics on learners, teachers, spoken and written interaction, lesson design and assessment was followed. Nevertheless, a consensus was reached to keep practicum course design flexible especially in the choices and adaptation of course reading, materials and task assignment considering the situated nature of school experiences. The prospective teachers were doing practicum in two different post-secondary schools in İstanbul. Five of them were doing practicum in a state Anatolian high school with a deep-rooted history in Türkiye and the others were pursuing their school-based studies in a co-educational school where only top-grading students in the national centralized entry exam find placement. The two schools revealed a considerable difference in their educational culture, the former adopting more traditional approaches with little room for collaborative work and the latter taking collective work as a central aspect of the whole educational process.

Prospective English language teachers were informed about the aim of the study, data collection procedures and received assurance that their spoken and written contributions and course work would not be assessed and graded in their evaluation for course accomplishment. Adopting a project-based approach to practicum study with collaborative evidence-based exploration of professional identity development was well received by the prospective teachers and the approval of the social and human sciences research ethics committee of the university was taken on 21 November 2023 (Protocol Number: 2023/421).

Participant Profile

There were 5 male 3 female prospective English language teachers participating in the study and the age span for the majority was between 21 and 23, except for a 30-year-old participant who was studying at the ELT department for his second degree. Half of the group were speakers of Turkish and English and the other half, in addition to these languages, possessed a rich array of linguistic sources, including German, Finnish, Japanese, Zaza, Russian and Polish. They had varying proficiency levels in these languages and two of the participants had German and Zaza as home languages. All of the prospective

teachers studied English from 4th grade onwards in state schools in Türkiye. There was only one participant who continued with his English studies in post-secondary education at a private school and later at another state university. Apart from formal schooling experiences, prospective teachers had a flexible contact with English through various social media platforms and digital sources such as games, films, and music. Data showed that mediation was a natural part of their lives. As two participants shared, English was among their home languages. Cross-linguistic mediation was also a daily practice for a participant; that is, when she learned a new English word or expression in school, she would initially share this with the family in Zaza language, which was the only contact language in her communication with the elder members of her family. Nearly all prospective teachers had experiences in teaching in nonformal and informal contexts. One of the prospective teachers also had professional experience as a translator. From the whole population, there was only one participant who noted that she had no former teaching experience. This profiling showed that they had a vast array of experiences with different linguistic and cultural resources in their learning and teaching trajectories. The specifics of the participant profile are offered in the following table with pseudonyms for confidentiality reasons.

Table 1

Participant Profile

	Age	Languages	English Learning Experience	English Teaching Experience
SUZAN	21	Turkish (L1) English (advanced) German (intermediate) Polish (beginner)	State school (immersion)- Early exposure in the family	Online courses (International groups) private and group teaching in nonformal education institutions
KEREM	30	Turkish (L1) German (L1) English (advanced)	State school Private school (upper secondary) Preparatory School (University)	Private tutoring
DENİZ	21	Turkish (L1) English (Advanced)	State school	Private tutoring
SİBEL	21	Turkish (L1) English (Advanced) Zaza (L1)	State school	Private tutoring
ALİ	21	Turkish (L1) English (Advanced)	State school	Private tutoring
ASLI	23	Turkish (L1) English (Advanced)	State school Private Courses	--
EGE	21	Turkish (L1) English (Advanced)	State school	Private tutoring
AHMET	22	Turkish L1, English (Advanced) Finnish (Advanced) German (Intermediate) Japanese (Intermediate) Russian (Beginner)	State school Early exposure in the family	Private tutoring

Data Collection and Analysis

Pursuing a case study methodology (Negretti & Khuder, 2024), qualitative data was collected from multiple sources at different phases of the practicum study. The qualitative data comprised six written reflective tasks, lesson plans, field notes on practicum course, one-to-one meetings as well as observation notes from participants' in-class teaching practices, and the selective transcription of 9 hours of practicum course audio- recordings. Further elaboration on these tools is given below.

Reflective Tasks

Mediation above all necessitates critical-reflexive engagement with the concept itself. It is enacted through de-centering, which Holliday (2023) explains as distancing oneself from presuppositions to arrive to a nuanced understanding of hybridity involved in socio-cultural engagement by focusing on observation. Based on this rationale, prospective teachers are offered a series of reflective tasks (see Appendix B for a detailed account of guiding questions) in a progressive manner to help them build links with their perspectives and observation-based reflections. The 6 different tasks, with the very first one having pre and post observation components, address separate dimensions of professional identity development; namely, autoethnographic account of language and language learning trajectories, reflection on teaching styles, learner autonomy and the influence of school experiences on professional decision-making, self-assessment of their own macro-teaching experience, mapping CEFR new descriptors to lesson design and the rationale behind their choices, and the influence of practicum-driven experiences in professional identity development. The aim of the study is to capture the way prospective teachers relate to the concept of mediation. In this context, the task prompts avoid using framed definitions and direct questions (i.e. what is mediation?).

Lesson Plans

The study mainly draws on two lesson plans proposed by the prospective teachers, both including specific aspects of their planning for an individual lesson with 40 or 80-minute time slot. The plans included specific information on class profile, aims, objectives, focus on language skills and topic, procedures with organizational principles, materials, and additional scaffolding measures to overcome anticipated problems. The first lesson planning is for their macro-teaching practice in schools. This planning is achieved under close inspection of the practicum advisor and also the mentor teacher at schools to ensure their planning aligns with the current teaching unit and the curriculum the school follows. Prospective English language teachers are given the opportunity to integrate their own materials and preferred methodologies to the teaching process but this situation is subject to variation, depending on the dynamics of the context at the time of teaching. At the end of the practicum study, prospective English language teachers were, therefore, offered a free ground to project their takeaways to a new lesson design. They were left free to address any new descriptor or a combination of descriptors in the CEFR companion volume, including but not restricted to mediation-specific descriptors to see if and to what extent they relate to mediation in their vision of teaching.

Field Notes

Audio-recording of actual teaching in classes is not collected so evidence on prospective teachers' classroom teaching experiences is limited to the field notes taken on site by the teacher educator as the researcher. These field notes were mainly anchored by mediation-specific aspects of their macro-teaching; to cite a few, focusing specifically on ways of shifting between languages and different modalities in their use of realia, questioning techniques asking for further elaboration and participation, achieving inclusion in group works, creating a democratic learning environment by enabling students to draw on their own linguistic and cultural repertoires, dealing with conflict and critical incidents, restoring failures or gaps in communication, and other pedagogical interventions for helping students

activate their own mediation mechanisms for understanding, collaborative knowledge building, and communicating. Field notes taken during individual post-teaching reflection meetings with prospective teachers were also used to enable further enquiry on the aspects of their teaching mentioned above. Field notes taken immediately after practicum lessons at the university were used as snippets to enable framed focus on the emergent aspects of mediation in the audio-data collected during the class.

Audio Recording

The main motivation in using practicum course audio recordings as data is to address the emergent aspect of mediation in prospective teachers' dialogic engagement in meaning making and capture instances of enacting mediation in their own discussions. Mediation cannot be conceived as a set of competencies to be achieved, or skills to be employed with straight measurable outcomes. In alignment with interactional and social-constructivist approaches to teacher identity, the data is used to capture the momentaneous, context-dependent, dynamic aspects of mediation to elaborate on prospective teachers' agency. Audio-recording also provided further data on peer feedback prospective students received on their teaching experience in schools as the ones doing practicum in the same school had the opportunity to observe each other's lesson. Last but not least, data collected from practicum audio-recording enabled the researcher to dig deeper on the macro-level processes and ponder how norms, entrenched discourses on language education, deeply rooted beliefs, normalized habitual practices, routines, the dynamics of local and global contexts, and power mechanisms influence micro-level engagement on the concept of mediation, a perspective which Risager (2025) defines as ideology-infused "geopolitical position" (p.30).

Data is not collected in schools so evidence on prospective teachers' classroom teaching experiences is limited to their post reflective tasks and the field notes taken by the teacher educator as the researcher. The rich qualitative data were analyzed both progressively and in the whole corpora following content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Saldaña, 2021) where mediation as the core theme guided the coding process. Selective transcription was applied to audio-recordings for the analysis of mediation-specific interactions, and towards that end, spoken as well as written data were analyzed with reference to CEFR descriptors on mediation. Practicum study addressed a wide spectrum of topics, and therefore the aim was to see how mediation informs their professional identity development and how they relate mediation to other centralized themes (i.e autonomy, teacher style, motivation) in their (future) language teaching in the progression of the course. This process enabled triangulation and also allowed space for capturing emerging results and change in perspectives. The first-round reading of classroom interactions and reflective tasks were done on regular basis to create further chances for data-informed discussion, cross-checking with prospective teachers for emerging themes and/or asking for elaboration when needed. The research process, in this sense, involved teacher educator mediation at multiple levels to achieve a nuanced understanding of interconnections between mediation and different facets of teacher identity development.

Limitation of the Study

In alignment with qualitative inquiry, the present research was purposefully designed to focus on depth, process and interpretation rather than prediction and broad generalizability. Nevertheless, several methodological limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, data were not collected within prospective teachers' actual teaching environments, which limits the ability to capture authentic instructional behaviour. Furthermore, the question of how prospective students foreground CEFR descriptors on mediation in task-driven group works of the students could not be analyzed in the absence of recordings of group works. An understanding of the teaching practices is derived from written reflections and observation-based field notes. These notes are only based on the prospective teachers' interaction with the whole class. This reduces validity, but it is consistent with the study's aim, which centers on internal

and external processes of mediation in professional identity development, which emerge through narrative and reflection (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Mediation in teacher identity development is a process not an outcome with tangible results and there will also be spaces between beliefs, attitudes, practices, and dispositions (Shoffner et al., 2014); these spaces are indicators of dynamism and change. Secondly, the roles of the researcher as both teacher educator and participant observer bear the risk of role conflict and interpreter's bias. However, this positioning also enables prolonged engagement (Dado et al., 2023; Lincoln et al., 2011) and recursive meaning-making. The researcher's role as an educator during the practicum course allowed participants to act and think in a natural way, making it more likely that their activities were similar whether the researcher were there or not. In addition, dialogic feedback from participants during data analysis strengthened the study's trustworthiness and reduced the risk of unilateral interpretation. Thirdly, the study involved a relatively small group of pre-service teachers within a single practicum context. Although such single-site, small sample design research limits generalizability in the conventional sense, it fits the logic of a case study which values depth and context over breadth. The goal here is analytic generalization, seeking to develop conceptual insights that can be transferred to similar settings (Yin, 2018). Finally, the study adopted a progressive and whole-corpus content analysis, where the coding process was guided by an explicitly defined framework (mediation through CEFR descriptors) but did not include inter-rater coding. While this could be viewed as a limitation, it is consistent with reflexive thematic analysis where analytic precision is ensured through researcher reflexivity, transparency and iterative engagement with the data rather than inter-coding.

Results

A close analysis of qualitative data revealed several mediation-informed themes in prospective teachers' socialization into the teaching community as traced in different aspects of their work. In order to achieve structured reflection on findings, the different facets of their practicum-based work are taken into consideration for the organization of titles and the related themes and sub-themes are discussed as affordances and constraints under each section. The research question on how prospective teachers relate to mediation is discussed in the following section with reference to dialogic interaction with peers.

Emerging Aspects of Mediation in Dialogic Engagement

Prospective English language teachers' self-activation of mediation in their own co-constructive meaning making in the practicum class revealed that mediation activities and strategies are employed in a dynamic way, one aspect influencing the other with emergent outcomes. When mapped on the CEFR descriptors on mediation (Council of Europe, 2018, p.104), elaborating on graphical representations, translating, note-taking, relaying specific information were the main processes enacted in text mediation with complementary processes in mediation of concepts including collaboration in a group to construct meaning, prompts for conceptual talk. These mediation activities utilized in and through discursive practices in ongoing talk were regularly infused with meso and macro level considerations and understandings. For instance, mediation as a concept emerged from Ali's inadequate translation of the term autonomy as "*özgünlük*" [authenticity]. This triggered discussion on the challenges of cross-linguistic mediation. To address this gap, they gave the example of the word negotiation which is in many cases translated as "*pazarlık*" [bargaining] in Turkish, giving a profit-based understanding where "*arabulucu*" [negotiator] is taken as a distant party responsible for helping people reach an agreement. Echoing Corbett's (2021) remark that mediation "does not necessarily need to involve a neutral facilitator, a formal agenda or a harmonious outcome" (p.22). Sibel discussed that contextualizing negotiation as a "participatory process" for achieving a common ground of understanding rather than an act of compromising might be more relevant in an educational context. According to her, mediation can be operationalized in school contexts where peer interaction and collaboration are prioritized yet this might pose challenges in a Turkish context where "error correction

is the main responsibility of the teacher because we tend to see teacher as the only source of information" (CR-P5)[i]. Ahmet's critical remark on the way a teacher handled a delicate subject showed traditionally assigned roles of a negotiator. In his observation, the teacher left no room for helping learners employ mediation strategies but turned the class hour to a "therapy session" (RT2-P1). Aslı's class-based observation revealed an opposite case where "polite disagreement" among students provided an opportunity for inclusive practices by means of which students can "accept one another's uniqueness without being judgemental" but she still questioned the possibility of enacting mediation to get different perspectives. As she commented, "[y]et in Türkiye, it is something that requires huge attention because everything that you are doing or saying, whether or not you do it with good intentions, can be misunderstood instantly" (RT2-P7). The historically, socially, and politically framed descriptions of teacher roles set barriers against the realization of a participatory, inclusive approach to education. If teachers are assigned roles as transmitters of knowledge, this causes a significant setback to the mediating role of schools in building, as Byram and Sheils (2023) put "a democratic culture" (p.9) of learning for quality and equity in education.

Enacting Mediation in Practicum Studies

The second research question on how prospective teachers translate understandings of mediation to teaching skills and practices can never offer a full account of the experience, mediation drawing on both internal and external processes. The absence of in-class teaching recordings is also another important factor which limits findings on operationalizing mediation in teaching contexts. Keeping these limitations in mind, the following section offers facets of experience under two headings; momentaneous instances of mediation in teaching and lesson designs.

Mediation in Teaching Practice

The findings attained from the analysis of prospective teachers' reports and field-notes revealed that mediation was approached in a spontaneous way, finding space in classroom interaction on an ad hoc basis. Prospective teachers noted that they operationalized mediation in particular phases of their teaching without having a compass for an informed and systematic integration of this competence to their teaching agendas. The findings revealed affordances and challenges of using mediation in teacher talk.

Textual Mediation. Focusing on a topic and elaborating on its meaning by responding to graphs, figures and visuals (i.e. describing graphic material) was the most commonly utilized mediation activity. The following example by Kerem showed that he created meditational space by his appeal to metaphorical conceptualization:

> There was a point at my lesson when I came to teach the word immerse. First, I explained it in an abstract way. They were confused. So I said, imagine yourself swimming, if you are at the surface you are not completely immersed in. So, if you are completely immersed let's say in the story, you are totally in it. (CR-P2)

Nonetheless, data drawing on field notes showed that there were various unsuccessful attempts, leading to partial learning and even at times resulting in mis-conceptualization of a topic. For instance, Ege's investment on the topic of sustainable housing with eco-friendly and energy-efficient housing types were merely taken as a condominium with multi-storey houses in the suburbs when he failed to activate mediation for explaining, exemplifying, associating, and co-constructing meaning (FN-P8-20.12.23). Similarly, Ahmet's graphic supported investment on the concept of urban sprawl found response in the students' understanding of the analogy between sprawl and densely populated urban sites, yet remained inadequate in helping students distinguish between inner and outer suburbs, the former being misunderstood as inner city (FN-P1-20.12.23). As he also commented in his post reflection, a word

essential for topic comprehension was mistakenly associated with "building size" rather "building type" (RT4-P1). These examples show that prospective teachers need specific pedagogical tools to deal with the processes of mediation. As Baraldi (2023) discusses, when mediation is seen as a communication system, one important role of the mediator is to achieve "*reflexive coordination*" (p.321) [emphasis in the original text] to seek alternatives and create further opportunities for communication among the participants. These cases showed that students could not relate to the concepts of sustainable housing and inner-outer suburbs to their everyday experiences and the prospective teachers could not turn the problem situation to an opportunity for opening alternative routes in communication. Furthermore, cross-linguistic mediation as proposed by CEFR for creating linguistically rich learning environments remained thoroughly unaddressed in the presence of English-only school policies. Thus, establishing connections between languages and culture-specific understandings were not sufficiently operationalized in these instances.

Investing on Interculturality. Findings indicate that literature-based teaching opened a relatively more direct path for activating mediation especially with respect to three descriptors; "processing text in speech / in writing" and "expressing a personal response to creative texts" (including literature) and "facilitating pluricultural space" (Council of Europe, 2018, p.104). In this context, Deniz's work was mainly grounded in the theme of conflict in literary texts and created spaces for mediation when he asked students to share cases of conflict they encountered in their daily experiences. Likewise, Kerem's lesson focusing on the creation of superhero/God characters (i.e Thor, Zeus) offered a rich platform in helping students act on their cultural repertoire. These successful examples of the use of mediation in classes showed that prospective teachers do not just draw on their pedagogical skills but also their individual traits, personal interests and content knowledge in their mediation-informed practices. Long-term acquaintance with these participants enables the researcher to offer insider view on this issue. Deniz always integrates an interdisciplinary perspective to his discussions, giving examples from other fields. For instance, when talking about the role of mediation in creating a democratic climate through shared responsibility, he noted that "we see a transition even in the corporate world, from a leader assigning tasks to inviting collective thought by asking, what do you think about it?" (CR1-P5-00:22). He, therefore, used conflict in literature as a platform to help learners bring in different perspectives. Likewise, Kerem's expertise in digital technologies and his skill in creative writing as an author of short stories found voice in his actual teaching experience. These cases also show that prospective teachers' linguistic, cultural, personal, and pedagogical investment on mediation is also dependent on the school context. Both Kerem and Deniz found abundant opportunities to achieve literature-inspired creative and personal engagement in tune with the school's educational vision, curricular planning, and culture of learning and teaching whereas there was nearly no space for literature in the other school.

Findings show that prospective teachers involved mediation skills to their teaching plans on other competencies rather than addressing *per se*. As Kearney (2019) discusses, any instance of engaging students for cultural meanings obliges teachers to "set up a meaningful context for interpretation, provide any terms and concepts students will need to perform the interpretation, identify symbolic forms, invite hypotheses about the meaning of the text, scaffold students' interpretation through questioning, and so on" (pp. 264-265). Student teachers in these particular cases accomplished many of these parameters yet without having an explicit and transparent roadmap for teaching and assessing.

Envisioning Mediation in Teacher Identity Development

Qualitative data obtained during the practicum study showed that prospective teachers' mediation-sensitive experiences were not merely based on school experiences but embedded in their visions, aspirations and emotions as future practitioners. The following part focuses on the third research question which explores the role of mediation in professional identity development in relation to three

thematic categories ; integrating mediation to future plans in lesson design, mediating one's own trajectories in becoming a teacher, mediating emotions.

Integrating Mediation to Future Plans in Lesson Design. A thorough analysis of lesson plans showed that they recognized the importance of mediation in language education. To give an example, Suzan discussed how descriptors on mediation can offer teachers a roadmap for calibrated progression in helping students exercise agency and personalize the learning experience as language users. For her, mediation informs the processes where self-expression as a fundamental skill gradually becomes more sophisticated with emotional responses, elaboration, and interpretation, paving the way for cultural engagement and self-discovery (RT5-P3).

Nevertheless, the findings also indicated that student teachers did not explicitly address mediation related descriptors in specifying their objectives but included mediation processes when working on descriptors for plurilingual, pluricultural competence and online interaction. This finding aligns with the way CEFR positions mediation in relation to other descriptors; as stated in the document "[b]oundaries are fuzzy and overlap is inevitable" (Council of Europe, 2018, p.52). For instance, Sibel invested on plurilingual competence and proposed an online collaborative task for creating a multilingual and multimodal text (i.e brochure, video, instagram story) on the topic of food waste, requiring mediation of texts (i.e getting the relevant statistical information from a text in another language), mediation of concepts (i,e collaborating by using multiple languages for answering scavenger hunt questions), as well as competency for mediating communication. It was a major transformative point in her professional identity development. She is a bilingual speaker with access to multiple languages yet she never felt the need to use this as an asset for designing plurilingual tasks and her former reflections and teaching practices were exclusively focused on English as the target language. Despite the change in her professional vision on creating linguistically rich learning environments, she continued to see mediation as an important aspect of teacher scaffolding rather than a target competence for learners (RT5-P5). Ahmet was more direct in explaining why he left descriptors on mediation outside claiming that descriptors on collaboration and showing empathy are not innovative but just "stating the obvious" (RT5- P1).

Mediation in Defining Language Learning and Teaching Trajectories. The thematic analysis of prospective teachers' written reflective task on the impact of practicum experience in their professional identity development was achieved by a two-round reading of all reflective reports with specific attention to final post-reflection on the practicum course for a comparative perspective; the first for mapping out the themes addressed, the second for identifying mediation-informed views in alignment with CEFR vision on mediation. The initial reading of reflective tasks offered eight major themes identified by both inductive and deductive approaches: bridging theory and practice, planning, inclusive understandings and practices, authenticity, learner autonomy, innovation for transformation, motivation, and rapport. The narrowed focus on data in the second-round reading showed that prospective teachers discussed mediation with respect to the theme of inclusive understandings and practice with strong links established with the theme of autonomy. According to them , inclusive education is rooted in an educational climate which "values students' diverse backgrounds and encourages active participation" (RT4-P3), "harvests culturally responsive environment" (RT4-P2), aims to "foster engagement and communal exploration" (RT4-P7), with the recognition that "learners have different strengths, interests, and ways of absorbing and processing information" (RT4-P8). They elaborated on these issues with respect to two core tenets of inclusive education; collaboration and flexibility. For Ege, cultivating a learning environment "where every student feels heard and safe" (RT4-P8) was largely dependent on the strategic planning for flexible grouping of students to ease exchange and communication. Suzan claimed that it is "fluidity" which offers "a refreshing openness to promote leadership" especially in

group activities where students are encouraged "to take the lead, deciding collectively on approaches, sharing responsibility, and getting a true sense of shared learning" (RT3-P3). These views align with the CEFR's descriptors on creating pluricultural spaces (Council of Europe, 2018, p.122).

Prospective English language teachers had fragmented and controversial views on the creation of a linguistically rich environment where mediation will be operationalized in cross linguistic processes, especially in cases where a mono-stance on target language use is the norm even outside the classroom. Many of the prospective teachers discussed mediation with respect to L1 use in school contexts. For some, strict monolingual policy on target language use sets linguistic barriers, for others this policy has affordances as it activates mediation where learners collaborate to fulfill gaps and try to clarify their points by using various communication strategies in the target language. A similar controversial issue was discussed with reference to collaboration, prospective teachers discussed the difficulty in keeping the class in control where spaces for collaboration gradually yield to chaos with L1 gradually becoming the main point of reference for task accomplishment. These discussions showed that a desired transformation cannot be achieved merely through the individual attempts of teachers but necessitates a new vision for schools where plurilingual education becomes a central aspect of the learning climate. Data revealed not only the behavioural dimensions of mediating processes but also emotional aspects that underscore intrapersonal engagement in mediation in professional identity development (Lazarides et al., 2025), a topic which will be explored in the following part.

Mediating Emotions in Professional Identity Development. Enacting mediation during practicum studies is largely dependent on a number of factors; relating theoretical concepts to teaching philosophies, reshaping understandings in the light of experiences, reconciling opposing views, policies and controversial applications for balanced progression, and preparedness for (transformative) action. All these dimensions have direct influence on the emotional aspects of professional identity development. Prospective teachers' reflective work also addressed emotional turmoil they have undergone in gaining expertise.

Suzan critically reflected on her former view of professional development as an end point to be reached after adequate training, it is rather the emotional load of "a continuous journey, always growing and adapting to give students the best education possible" (RT6-P3). Deniz also identified the whole process as an eye-opening experience; his former experience of language learning in a traditional setting with pre-determined routines made him initially keep all expectations low but then he enjoyed seeing that it is possible to develop a sense of a learning community where everyone receives recognition (RT6-P6). Nevertheless, he had reservations in pressurizing learners for peer interaction. He, in this context, re-questioned his role as a mediator and commented that he would not take this path as he would be "after all the reason why they are forced to work together" (RT4-P6). Data also revealed how the feeling of failure and emotional burden of not doing things properly influenced prospective teachers. Ahmet, from a critical lens, discussed how his deeply rooted idea of "let the kids who want to answer, answer" (RT3-P1) inevitably led him to a situation where the whole session was domineered by a few boys with girls remaining silent. Along with pedagogical dimension of managing delicate situations with care, emotional aspects of dealing with conflict need to be seen from different angles. Ali's experience makes a point in case. His extreme anxiety in the initial phases of his professional journey, which he defines as "a brain filled to the brim with what to do and not to do but a tongue that never had a chance to just, well do (RT4-P4)", gradually transformed to an inner voice, "in the back of my mind a little voice said 'They enjoyed your company, you did a good job!'" (RT4-P4). Nonetheless, in his model lesson he was faced with a dilemma when he had to act as a mediator in response to a student's rather provocative racist remark on migration during classroom discussion on urbanization (FN-P4-20.12.23). He managed to keep a distant position and suggested an alternative way of expressing things by avoiding racist

discourse. His suggestion did not receive any response from the class and he strategically let it pass in tune with school regulations in handling areas of conflict. In his post reflection on the practicum course, he recalled this experience as a frustrating moment and enquired whether it would have been better to develop resilience strategies against racist discourse than remain neutral. In this sense CEFR descriptors on mediation need to involve further specification for such cases where there is a blurred line between reconciling different perspectives and dealing with ideology-infected discourses especially with respect to teachers' positioning.

Discussion

Mediation in English language teacher education is addressed on a two-tier basis, mutually influencing each other; on one level mediation, as a praxis, building a trajectory of learning in a socio-constructivist understanding of professional identity development and on another level, translating learning to practice, a process which Johnson and Golombek (2018) define as "responsive mediation" (p.452). The analysis of thick qualitative data revealed that spaces for mediation created during the practicum course facilitated prospective teachers' self-inquiry to openly address how mediation navigated their sociocultural engagement in learning, and how auto-ethnographic, social, cultural and political processes inform their professional identity development. Nevertheless, research findings also indicated gaps in their conceptualization of mediation. While valuing mediation-based descriptors proposed by CEFR, these scales were generally conceived as enabling processes in gaining teaching expertise, rather than being target competencies to be attained by learners. As a consequence, many of the mediation concerned descriptors, and more importantly, descriptors on conflict resolution remained unaddressed in prospective teachers' practicum informed planning and applications. Except for the cases where they directly addressed the role of mediation in responding to literary texts, there was the tendency to consider mediation as an integrated process which informs every stage of student engagement. Mediation activities and strategies were assumed to be enacted when working on different dimension of communication (i.e interaction). The study showed that CEFR descriptors on mediation need further framing to save the concept from being a cross-linguistic instrumental tool for problem-solving and integrate deeper insight to its implications on teacher education.

The relevance of mediation goes beyond language education to inform policies and practices in wider educational contexts as well as workplaces which are becoming more and more diverse. Considering the diverse ecologies of communication, mediation becomes an overarching goal to facilitate understanding, collaborative work, and inclusion. There is the need for the development of teacher education mechanisms on mediation informed pedagogical moves with supportive instructional tools and resources to take more decisive steps for creating a more democratic learning environment. While practicum study offers abundant opportunities to see how mediation can become a point of interest in theory and practice, the concept of mediation needs to be re-envisioned as a versatile component of teacher education spanning across different courses. In doing so, it is equally important to go beyond a limited understanding of mediation as procedural knowledge to be gained by teachers to help them address the dynamics which influence their professional visions and approaches to mediation in a critical-reflective frame. Given the complexity of the concept of mediation, there is the danger of losing its explanatory power, nonetheless, a broader vision is required to recognize how policy, work ethics, regulations, and established routines in situated contexts of implementation influence mediation processes. This inevitably raises further questions: How will mediation be addressed in contexts where mono stances on language, culture, learning and teaching continue to prevail? How do historically established cultural norms and practices influence mediation processes? How can research-based findings on mediation in various disciplines inform the way it is conceived and enacted? How can mediation offer new paths for transformative action towards more social-justice informed practices in

various spheres of everyday life? These questions intend to offer a glimpse of a wide spectrum of possibilities which hopefully invite further thought, interdisciplinary research and open dialogue in the exploration of mediation.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the İstanbul University-Cerrahpaşa Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences Research (No. 21.11.2023-2023/421).

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study.

Author Contributions

The author solely conducted the review and wrote the manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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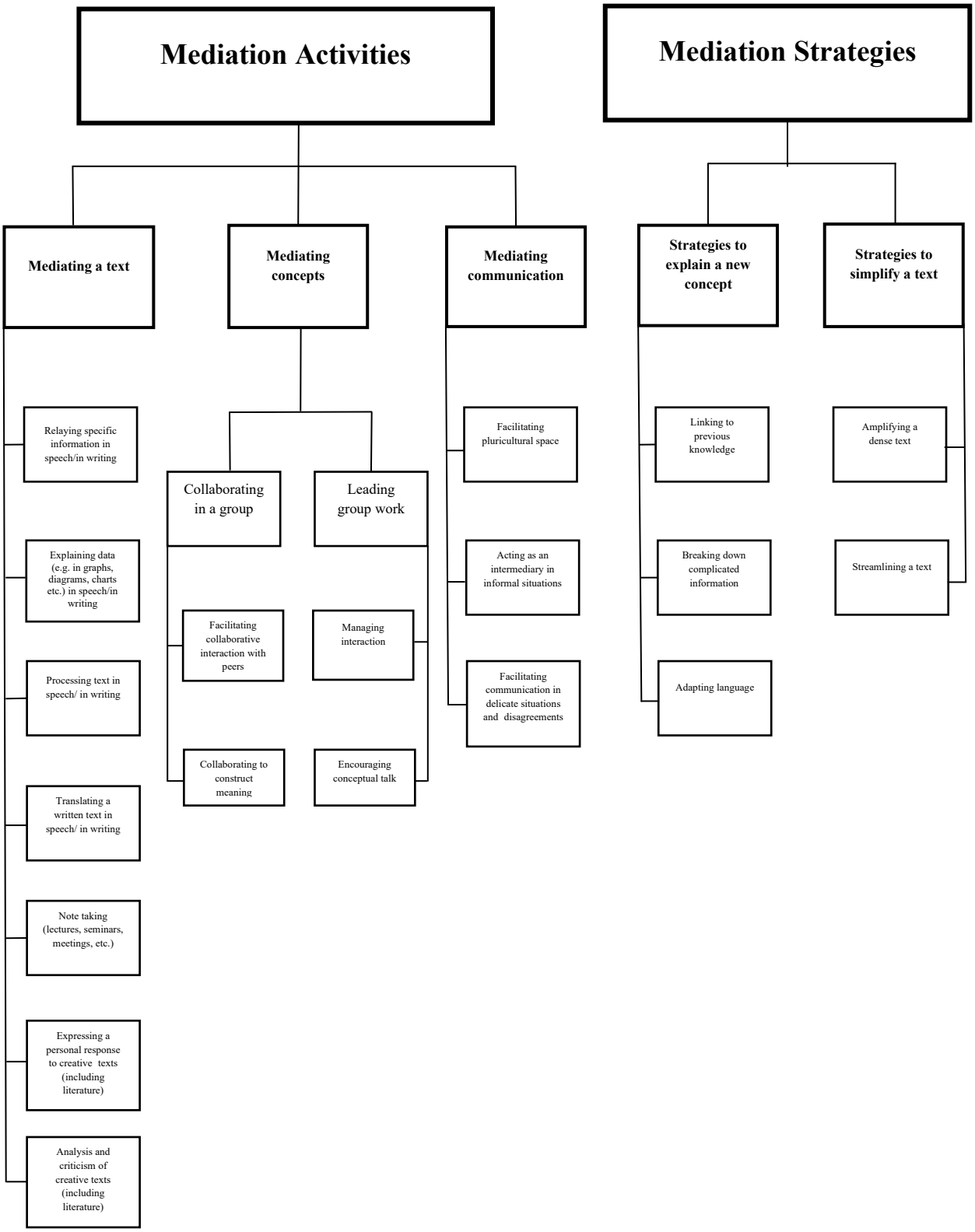
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Appendix A

CEFR New Descriptors on Mediation



Note. Council of Europe (2018). Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors, p.104

Appendix B

Overview of Reflective Tasks for the Practicum Study in English Language Teacher Education

Number	Topic	Summary of Reflection Reports	Examplary Questions Guidance
RT1	Teachers, teacher roles & teaching styles	*Part 1- Pre-observation: Autoethnographic approach* Describe your own linguistic and cultural resources and your own personal story of language learning. Based on your former experiences as a learner, reflect on teachers' behaviour you have witnessed and the styles that characterize their teaching.	• How do you define your connections with language(s) & your own cultural repertoire? • What do you drawn on for reflections on teacher roles & teaching styles? (i.e previous experience as English language learner, as a student teacher, as an instructor in private tutoring?)
RT1	Teachers, teacher roles & teaching styles	*Part 2- Post-observation reflection* Based on your observation in classes discuss how learning atmosphere is built, and what strategies are activated towards that end.	• Have you observed any recurring patterns underlying the use of different teaching styles? Do the learners seem to relate to it? • Did you witness any critical incidents/ any aspect of failure in communication? How are such cases handled?
RT2	Focus on learners	Collect instances of the teacher's classroom talk. How does teacher talk influence student engagement? How does learner interaction influence communication?	• How does the teacher manage the individual differences and variables among learners in the classroom? What mechanisms, in your view, will be useful for meeting students' needs?
RT3	Teaching Philosophy & Reflexivity	Make connections between what you know and what you observe to reflect on decision making with respect to the following aspects : Planning/ Practice/ Learners' agency/ Professional Development	• Did the school-based confirm or challenge any of your perceptions of learning & teaching? • How do you *feel about* becoming a language teacher as based on your practicum experience?
RT4	Post- reflection on model lesson: practice dimension	Offer a reflective report including your mentor teacher's feedback on the lesson and your own self-assessment	• What are the things you would change/revise (if any), if you had the chance to re-do your planning and teaching task
RT5	CEFR-companion volume (2018) with a focus on new descriptors	Review the CEFR companion volume for new descriptors to propose a new lesson plan. You may choose to focus on any target group (age/proficiency level/grade) but specify the level (i.e A2, B1, B2, C1)	• Why do you choose to focus on this particular descriptor? • In what sense is your lesson plan responsive to the new descriptor(s)?
RT6	Teacher Identity	Reflect on the influence of the practicum course on your professional identity development.	• How do you envision a good language teaching practice?

Notes

[i] The study draws on qualitative data optained from different sources For excerpts and longer pieces of data a coding system is employed : CR- Classroom Recording, RT- Written Reflective Task, and P stands for the participant.