

Mediation as Intercultural Communication: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Written mediation is a critical skill that enables individuals from diverse languages and cultures to communicate with each other effectively. Developing written mediation skills is essential in language learning classrooms and is included as a component of the National Foreign Language Exam System (KPG) for advancing harmonious global societies. This narrative review explores written mediation as a form of intercultural communication in English language classroom contexts. The review provides insights into the nature and purpose of written mediation, the role of the mediator, and the competencies needed to fulfill the role with the objective of providing the information for language learning classrooms to develop and instruct written mediation skills effectively. This review goes beyond traditionally held views of mediators as interpreters primarily concerned with linguistic aspects and underscores the close relationship between and the need for a broader conceptualization of mediation that includes both language and culture. In particular, critical cultural awareness is emphasized as a primary driver of effective mediation, underscoring the importance of addressing cultural components within the English language teaching context. English language teachers have a vital role in promoting the development of learners' intercultural competence, ultimately ensuring they are competent mediators equipped to facilitate intercultural encounters.

Keywords: intercultural communication, mediation, English language learning, culture, cultural competence, critical cultural awareness

1. Introduction

Integrating mediation activities into English language learning classes enhances learners' intercultural skills and awareness. However, these essential mediation skills are typically not included when teaching English as a foreign language, which is a significant gap considering the importance of being adept at bridging the gap between two languages.

This narrative review aims to guide mediation instruction in classrooms by exploring the role of written mediation in intercultural communication based on the National Foreign Language Exam System (KPG) exam at the B2 level, which includes written mediation-related assessment tasks. With this objective in mind, we explore the concept and significance of mediation in the context of language-learning classrooms (Section 3), examine the connection between language and culture in general (Section 4), consider linguocultural aspects in the context of mediation (Section 5), and present the concept and role of intercultural mediators or speakers (Section 6), while considering English as a contact language for diverse communities around the world (Section 7). Finally, we delve into critical cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence as essential elements of mediation in a foreign language classroom (Section 8). We argue for the need to incorporate mediation as a fundamental component of language classrooms to support the development of written mediation skills in students learning English as a second language and promote their intercultural communication.

2. Methodology

The methodology for identifying research articles for this literature review was established using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of the sources reviewed. The criteria were developed to maintain a focused scope centered on written mediation within English language education and intercultural communication contexts and included the relevance of the language, publication date, source type of the research papers, relevancy of key concepts, and the category of the research papers.

Language: Since the paper focuses on written mediation as a tool within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, it was crucial to use English-language sources to align with the research objective of developing intercultural communication through English. Also, studies focusing specifically on English language teaching as a second or foreign language were considered to ensure that the findings were directly applicable to EFL contexts and their role in fostering intercultural understanding.

Publication date: The review considered literature published from 1983-2024. This timeframe was selected because many foundational works on intercultural communication and mediation emerged during this period, particularly in educational contexts, and thus allowed the incorporation of key theoretical frameworks that have shaped the field of mediation and intercultural language learning. The selected studies marked significant developments in understanding cultural competence, language mediation, and the role of intercultural communication in education.

Publications before the mid-1980s were generally excluded unless identified as critical foundational texts. This exclusion helped keep the

review focused on recent developments while ensuring that historically significant works were included when necessary. Publications presenting outdated perspectives that did not align with current conceptual frameworks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), were also excluded to ensure that the review focused on contemporary approaches that reflect current pedagogical practices and evolving understandings of intercultural competence. Studies that mainly focused on mediation outside the context of intercultural communication or language education—such as in legal, political, or business contexts—were excluded.

Sources: The literature reviewed used various primary and secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books or book chapters, institutional reports, conference papers, and other miscellaneous formats. Specifically, 45% of the 109 articles used in this literature were peer-reviewed journal articles, which provided rigorous and validated research. Books and book chapters comprised 33% of the sources, offering theoretical frameworks and in-depth explorations of key topics. Institutional reports, such as those published by the Council of Europe, accounted for 10% of the sources, providing influential policy guidance. Conference papers contributed 3%, and miscellaneous formats such as reports comprised (9%) of the sources.

Type of Research: Lastly, studies focusing on both empirical and theoretical research frameworks are included in this review. Empirical studies offered practical evidence of the effectiveness of various mediation strategies and their impact on language learning and intercultural communication. Examples of such empirical studies include Abdullaev (2021) on second language learning and Bećirović et al. (2021) on language learning strategies. On the other hand, theoretical studies provided foundational knowledge and explored theoretical concepts essential for understanding the role of mediation in language education. Notable examples include Byram (1989) on cultural studies in language education and the Council of Europe (2020; 2001) on the CEFR framework.

Figure 1 depicts the hierarchical representation of the methodological considerations for selecting studies for this review.

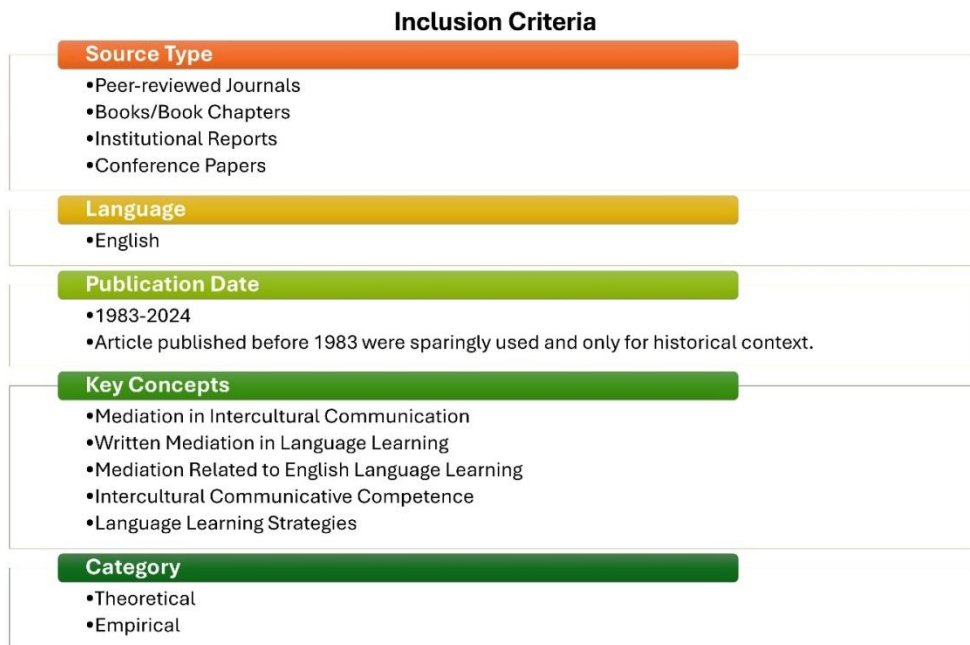


Figure 1. The methodological framework of the selection criteria for mediation narrative review

3. Written Mediation and Language Learning Strategy

Mediation requires the transfer of information from a source to a target, with the mediator serving as a bridge to ensure that the information is effectively relayed and understood by both parties and that any misunderstandings are resolved. Here, we consider how written mediation skills are developed in language classrooms.

Mediation was included in the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* (Council of Europe et al., 2001) and the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* (Beacco & Byram, 2007). Subsequent interest in mediation strategies increased, with researchers exploring its impact on learning and cultural understanding (Corbett, 2020; North, 2021). However, there are few resources and often limited instruction on mediation in language learning classrooms—although an exception is the inclusion of mediation activities in the Greek English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum from as early as 1983 (Dendrinis, 2006). Dendrinis (1992, 2006, 2013) argued that the lack of mediation activities is linked to the politics of English didactics, which kept the first language (L1) out of the EFL classroom. Notably, excluding mediation activities in English language teaching promulgates the ideology that English native speakers are the ideal instead of empowering second language (L2) speakers.

The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), an updated version of the original CEFR (2001), included mediation as the fourth mode of communication along with reception, production, and interaction. Learners engage in one or more of these activities as they exert their agency in social settings. Mediation—meaning-making and facilitating communication across linguistic and cultural barriers

through collaborative processes—is divided into three categories: mediating a text, mediating concepts, and mediating communication. Detailed descriptors are provided for each category, giving educators a framework to develop learner competencies. However, as a framework, the CEFR does not prescribe specific pedagogical approaches, and the mediation descriptors are presented as questions (rather than answers) to inspire learning goals (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021).

Given the general lack of explicit instruction and materials focused on mediation, language learning strategies, which comprise individuals' conscious or unconscious thoughts and actions to learn new information, are key in developing mediation skills in the language learning environment. In addition, language learning strategies play an important role in learners' language use (Bećirović et al., 2021; Chamot, 1994, 1998; Cohen, 2011; Habok & Magyar, 2017; Oxford, 1996; Wenden & Rubin, 1987) and involve "*specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that learners (often intentionally) use to improve their... L2 skills*" (Oxford, 2002, p. 124). As foreign language learning moves from teacher- to learner-centered instruction, language learning strategies help learners control their learning with efficiency, motivation, and independence (Chamot, 1999; Cohen & Henry, 2019; Nikoopour et al., 2012). The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) views language learners as social agents, taking responsibility for their learning and carrying out language learning activities as part of collective and collaborative action.

Strategy instruction to facilitate written mediation abilities involves incorporating reading, writing, and mediation strategies while considering the nature of KPG written mediation tasks. Reading skills enable learners to understand, summarize, and adapt information from the source to the target text, directly impacting the quality of mediation text production. In this context, reading skills can include analyzing tasks, identifying targets, and devising strategies for predicting words, note-taking, and summarizing (Bimmel & van Schooten, 2004). Reading comprehension may be effectively developed by strategic activities such as using prior knowledge, interpreting artwork accompanying the text, self-questioning, skim reading, making inferences, and identifying the features that give the text its structure (Bimmel & van Schooten, 2004). Experienced readers employ various strategies to handle complex texts while engaging with learners and planning reading flexibly and contextually.

Strategy instruction for written mediation also includes goal-oriented writing activities. Language learners must be aware of the purposes of writing and the processes involved, such as planning, proofreading, and rewriting. Wong (2005, p. 31) conceptualizes writing as a strategic action where writers "*juggle with the constraints of composing*," making choices about language and rhetoric. The stages of composing include planning, rehearsing, rereading the text produced, rereading the assigned topic, revising, and editing (Wong, 2005). Important information must be distinguished from less critical information, and inferencing, paraphrasing, using synonyms or functionally equivalent terms appropriate for the context, re-ordering and grouping information, adding or deleting information, and avoiding word-for-word translation are all essential techniques. Texts are socially specific, and thus, outputs should be aligned with the target text conventions. The text's purpose influences decisions regarding the relative importance of semantic content versus relevance criteria (Karoubi, 2016; Shreve, 2006)—a cognitive ability termed "relevance judgment" (Endres-Niggemeyer & Endres, 1999). Thus, the relevance criteria guide which semantic elements to keep or omit while summarizing for translation (Shreve, 2006). The target audience must also be considered in the writing process to produce mediated text effectively. Audience consideration is paramount because writers produce texts to communicate with diverse audiences for many purposes. Language mediators must understand their target audience's views, values, expectations, knowledge base, and the effect of the text on the reader (Wong, 2005). Mediation is always "*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, 2020, p. 91).

The recent literature on self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies and their impact on L2 learning aligns closely with the existing understanding of mediation in language education, particularly in developing written mediation skills. As discussed by Teng and Zhang (2024), integrating SRL strategies—such as goal setting, strategic planning, elaboration, self-evaluation, and help-seeking—aligns well with the principles of mediation, as both aim to facilitate the effective transfer of information from a source to a target through the strategic regulation of learning processes. The study emphasizes the positive influence of SRL strategies on L2 writing performance and is crucial in written mediation. These strategies enable learners to develop awareness and proficiency in bridging linguistic knowledge, helping them connect prior knowledge with new information. This process is akin to the purpose of written mediation, which is concerned with effective meaning-making across different contexts. Integrating highlighted multimedia tools facilitates this process by allowing learners to engage with diverse forms of input, ultimately enhancing their mediation abilities.

Besides, Shen and Bai (2024) showed that SRL strategies, such as metacognitive, cognitive, social, and motivational/affective regulation, enhance written mediation skills in L2 learning. This aligns with the CEFR's emphasis on learner agency and social collaboration in developing language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2020). Metacognitive strategies, for instance, enable learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing, facilitating the effective mediation of texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Integrating social strategies, such as peer feedback, supports the collaborative processes that the CEFR framework identifies as central to mediation.

In addition to SRL, the role of language learning strategies (LLSs) in enhancing learners' written mediation skills is evident. Esmaeil Nejad et al. (2022) underscore the importance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in improving writing performance, particularly in organizing thoughts and expressing ideas effectively. This perspective aligns with the CEFR's view of learners as social agents who take responsibility for learning and carry out activities collaboratively. The connection between SRL strategies and LLSs suggests that a strategic, learner-centered approach to language education can enhance learners' written mediation abilities, allowing them to better engage in meaning-making and bridge linguistic gaps.

Yapp et al. (2021) also contribute to this discourse by emphasizing the impact of explicit reading strategy instruction on L2 learners' comprehension abilities. Their findings highlight the importance of strategies such as skimming, scanning, and making predictions—fundamental techniques also relevant to written mediation. Explicit strategy instruction, combined with teacher modeling and collaborative practice, significantly enhances comprehension and metacognitive awareness, both essential for successful written mediation. Teng et al. (2022) further reinforce the relevance of SRL strategies in written mediation, such as planning, monitoring, evaluating, emotional control, and memorization. These strategies help learners develop metacognitive awareness and gain control over complex writing tasks, which is crucial for mediating language effectively. The predictive effects of these strategies on writing performance underscore the value of explicit SRL strategy instruction in the classroom, consistent with the principles outlined in the CEFR framework regarding learner autonomy and agency.

4. Language and Culture

Language is the embodiment and representation of culture; thus, culture provides the framework for communication to occur by the transfer of meaning through language. Lochtmann and Kappel (2008) argue that the close link between community members and culture is represented by language, which constitutes an important social force and an individual tool of communication and thought.

The twin concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, now key concepts of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020), connect the ideas of language, culture, and intercultural awareness. However, these concepts were innovative ideas when first included in the CEFR (Council of Europe et al., 2001) and were typically mentioned together because the two concepts are interlinked but have dramatically evolved since the publication of the first CEFR. North (2021) noted that plurilingualism and pluriculturalism were mentioned only briefly in the first CEFR publication because further research and development were required to extend and deepen the concepts. The subsequent updated CEFR Companion Volume (2021) drew on an established body of neurolinguistic research to actively promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as educational goals. The CEFR Companion Volume (2021) distinguishes between multilingualism as the coexistence of language at the social or individual level and plurilingualism as an individual's dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire. The key difference is that plurilingualism involves a single, interrelated repertoire that individuals combine with their general abilities to accomplish tasks.

Intercultural language learning evolved from "*an acknowledgment and understanding of the links between language and culture and an understanding of how communication works across cultures*" (Crozet & Liddicoat, 2000, p. 1). Culture is learned through communication when interacting with other members of society; therefore, individuals interpret reality within a given community by processing norms, rules, expectations, and cultural standards. On the other hand, learning a foreign language entails comparing languages and cultures, thus enriching the intercultural awareness of the learner; in this process, each language's linguistic and cultural competencies are modified by the knowledge of the other. Culture combines social and communicative aspects, deriving its force from situations where communication and interaction occur between individuals with shared meanings within a community (Kaikkonen, 1997, 2014). Therefore, intercultural language learning emphasizes the interdependence of language and culture and the significance of intercultural understanding as an objective of language education. Learners are supported to become intercultural and linguistically competent (Timpe, 2014). In this sense, interculturalism and pluriculturalism are interrelated concepts; the former promotes interaction, dialogue, and mutual understanding between cultures, while the latter acknowledges the existence of multiple cultures within a society and emphasizes the coexistence and recognition of cultural diversity (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021).

Several scholars have debated the challenge of teaching English without transmitting culture in the language classroom (Buttjes & Byram, 1991; Celik & Yildiz, 2019; Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Kramsch, 1993; Valdes, 1986), concluding that language is not "*an isolated phenomenon... but an integral part of culture*" (Wu, 2008, p. 123). Buttjes and Byram (1991) observed the social and symbolic nature of culture through which symbols and meanings are learned and shared by members of a community, emphasizing the inextricable link between language and culture. Risager (2005), however, challenged this view of an inseparable relationship between language and culture in foreign language teaching, with reference to cross-national processes. According to Bhasin (2008), even though languages may be psychologically associated with a particular culture, they are sociologically detached from other cultural phenomena. Risager's views concern the study of English as an international language, and she maintains that "*languages – and especially English – should be seen as flexible instruments of communication that may in principle be used with any subject matter by anybody anywhere in the world*" (Risager, 2005, p. 189).

Culture learning is defined as the dynamic process of acquiring culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures through cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement (Lawrence, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). This definition emphasizes the dynamic nature of culture in contrast with static views that ignore the developing nature of culture. The dynamic view considers learners' active engagement in culture learning—experiencing and acquiring cultural facts across time, regions, and countries. Language, culture, and nation (nation-states) are independent variables that partially converge. Language and culture may be considered in terms of 'flow' through social networks and linguistic and cultural flows that partially overlap within and across national boundaries. In this context, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are natural and inherent states of language and culture (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; North, 2021; Romaine, 2017; Yamada, 2014).

Immigration, tourism, and globalized communication have led to the global spread of languages, especially English, creating cultural complexities. However, it is crucial to recognize the difference between using a language as a mother tongue (L1) or a second/foreign

language (L2). The foreign language context is a non-congruent macro context where "language and culture are separated but reunited" in a new setting (Larzá, 2005, p. 31). Ergo, language, and culture can be separated through the recontextualization of languages set into new contexts and situations (Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2017; von Mengden & Kuhle, 2020). Non-native speakers apply the foreign language in micro-context situations, bringing their norms and values while disconnected from the native norms and values. The relationship between language and thematic content represents another dimension because any language can be linked with any discourse (Risager, 2005). Risager argues that the subject matter does not necessarily need to focus on the target country's culture.

Foreign language teaching appears to be moving in an intercultural, culture-comparative direction, including "*texts and themes... related to the students' own society*" (Risager, 2005, p. 169). This view of culture is similar to teaching English as an International Language (EIL). The updated CEFR encourages teachers to develop an intercultural environment in EIL classrooms that promotes gaining valuable insights into one's culture, which the learners can then share during cross-cultural encounters (Council of Europe, 2020). Therefore, incorporating local culture into the EFL course materials enables foreign language learners to express their culture and beliefs in English, adjusting to the local communicative needs (Mckay, 2003). Global scholarship has evaluated how learners achieve this expression (Azizah et al., 2021; Gunantar, 2017; Mahmud, 2019; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020).

5. Language and Culture in Mediation

In the school context, learners exchange opinions and negotiate meanings between source and target languages and cultures. This diverse linguistic and cultural interaction helps them to develop mediation strategies and intercultural understanding—objectives of language education (Council of Europe, 2020). Hence, it becomes imperative that learners develop mediation skills while learning a foreign language to meet their communication and social needs (Byram, 2020; Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021).

Learning a foreign language involves a learner's own culture, irrespective of whether the learner reads or writes a foreign text or interacts verbally with a linguistically and culturally different interlocutor. Thus, integrating intercultural awareness in foreign language teaching enriches learners' identities. The interpretation of meaning plays a significant role, demanding interpretation of a text's meaning and interpretation of oneself (Fenner, 2017). Mediators must negotiate and interpret meaning using their understanding and awareness of the culture as well as the linguistic knowledge they gained as foreign language learners. Risager (2006) notes that skills in interpreting texts, films, and images from various cultural and historical contexts are essential for understanding one's own experiences and forming a hermeneutic view of intercultural competence. Mediators should act as 'intercultural diplomats,' mindful of the relevant cultures. Lochman and Kappel (2008) view intercultural sensitivity as a complex, long-term process that depends on extensive contact with native speakers in many situations.

Language is used within socio-cultural contexts for purposeful communication, and learning a new language is not simply the body of knowledge to be discovered, that is, how to use words and rules of constructing sentences, but a social practice (Shohamy & Pennycook, 2021). It is viewed as the dynamic social practice of meaning-making (Shohamy, 2007), with interpretation needed to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationships. Thus, culture lies at the very core of language teaching. The Council of Europe (2020) considers language learners as social agents and suggests a socio-cultural or socio-constructivist perspective where the verb 'languageing' (Piccardo et al., 2019; Swain, 2006) indicates the activity of language learning and language use. Language learners should be encouraged to actively explore, analyze, and discover language rather than passively receive information. Communicating in a foreign language necessitates creating and interpreting meaning within the learner's culture and the foreign one, which emphasizes the mediation of values, beliefs, and behaviors between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The need to mediate between any two languages, cultures, and their associated identities expands as the individual's knowledge of those languages and cultures grows. These concepts reiterate the significance of developing intercultural competence as an integral component of language learning (Risager, 2005).

Such intercultural competence aims to train the language learner to become a mediator who can serve as a bridge between cultures and mitigate the communication gaps arising from unfamiliarity with other languages and cultures, including their own. Intercultural language teaching involves developing the language learner's ability to negotiate meanings across languages and cultures, which is essential training for a multicultural society. Thus, including mediation and intercultural awareness in the language classroom marks a pivotal shift toward appreciating global cultural and linguistic diversity. As a follow-through effect, mediation activities can facilitate mutual understanding and help prevent misunderstandings (de Abreu & Elbers, 2005; Gutiérrez et al., 2009; Kim, 2020).

The intercultural speaker or mediator must interact with others, accept other perspectives on the world, mediate between perspectives, and be conscious of their evaluations of differences (Byram et al., 2001; Byram & Zarate, 1997). Additionally, mediation involves the ability to look at oneself from an external perspective when interacting with others, analyzing and adapting one's behavior and underlying values and beliefs (Byram & Zarate, 1997). The development of intercultural competence and intercultural mediation are potential goals of language teaching, facilitating plurilingual individuals' ability to live in multilingual contexts (Beacco & Byram, 2007). Hence, teaching goals should focus on developing the ability to perceive how cultures relate to each other in terms of differences and similarities and being able to serve as mediators.

Recent empirical research on language and cultural mediation has exposed significant gaps in English education. For instance, a recent study by Banaruee et al. (2023) showed that the lack of cultural representation and practical content in English textbooks in Iran inhibits the ability of learners to engage effectively in intercultural mediation, thus a crucial barrier to developing intercultural communicative competence. These findings underscore a need for enhanced curriculum design incorporating cultural elements, aiding learners in understanding and

bridging different cultural contexts, which is vital for achieving meaningful and effective mediation in language learning environments. This underscores the necessity for strategic curriculum improvements to equip learners for better intercultural communication. Further, Zhang-Wu (2022) provides insights into translanguaging in multilingual college composition classrooms, highlighting the challenges and opportunities of drawing upon multilingual linguistic repertoires. Despite the increasing linguistic diversity in educational settings, the study found that multilingual students often avoid using their home languages in academic contexts due to prevalent English-only ideologies. This reluctance hampers effective intercultural mediation. Such findings underscore the necessity for educational frameworks that recognize and integrate students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thereby supporting mediation to bridge diverse perspectives. This literature enriches our understanding of mediation as intercultural communication by stressing the importance of valuing multilingual practices in fostering cross-cultural understanding and competence. In addition, Kiramba and Oloo (2019) provide crucial insights into the experiences of African immigrant high school students navigating language, culture, and identity. Using narrative inquiry, the authors explore the emerging challenges and opportunities as these students strive to integrate into a new educational system. The findings reveal that immigrant students often face stereotypes and negative perceptions about their cultural and linguistic competencies, which impact their academic experience and identity formation. Despite these challenges, the study highlights the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, which values the students' multilingual abilities as assets rather than deficits. This aligns with the broader discourse of intercultural mediation, emphasizing the role of language as both a cultural marker and a bridge for fostering understanding and resilience in diverse classrooms, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive approach to education.

6. Role of the Intercultural Mediator or Speaker

Multilingual individuals in new linguistic surroundings may identify with other groups' values, beliefs, or behaviors and find themselves in situations where they must interpret one way of life and explain it to those who live another. The role of the mediator in such situations is to construct the social bond between cultures, using strategies such as explanation and negotiation (Zarate, 2004). Mediation in this context exemplifies intercultural competence and is conducive to developing mutual understanding of different groups. Intercultural mediators may be viewed as social agents occupying the intermediate space between cultures. (North, 2021, p. 12) notes that "*linguistic mediation inevitably also involve[s] cultural and social mediation.*" Intercultural skills require the assimilation of "*the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations*" (Byram, 2020, p. 88).

Mediation is culturally encoded, and individuals taking part in social events are primarily interpreting "*socio-cultural situated reality in [their] attempt to convey the meanings that [they] shape for each other*" (Dendrinos, 2006, p. 21). Socially constructed reality refers to how the environment and its meanings are socially influenced—a perspective explicitly adopted in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020). In intracultural mediation, the mediator's role is to relay information to someone who shares an ethnic background and L1 but belongs to a different cultural group or social network. In intercultural mediation between L1 and L2, the mediator relays information to a person from a different ethnic, linguistic, or cultural background. Therefore, the mediator must fill in information gaps for individuals who do not share the same L1, cultural experiences, and social habits.

Depending on the task and the context, mediators require different types of knowledge and awareness (e.g., world knowledge or cultural awareness), literacies (e.g., such as school and test-taking literacies), communicative competence, and cognitive and social skills (e.g., receptive or productive skills) (Dendrinos, 2006). Dendrinos (2006) described the role of the mediator as a facilitator, meaning negotiator, or meaning-making agent and noted that within the KPG context, mediation may be verbal, visual, or multimodal. Visual mediation occurs when the mediator relays the message of a visual text (e.g., pie chart, graph, or map) to interlocutors who may not fully understand that information without support. The mediator's role entails speech acts such as explaining, reporting, directing, and instructing.

Byram and Zarate (1997) introduced the concept of the intercultural speaker (i.e., someone who can interact with others) to accept other perceptions of the world, mediate between perspectives, and be conscious of their evaluations of differences. Intercultural speakers mediate between or within a language, a role that differs from translation and interpretation. While the first CEFR (2001) introduced mediation as a process exemplified mainly by translation and interpreting (North, 2021), the updated companion version of the framework (Council of Europe, 2020) moved beyond that narrow scope to a broader conceptualization. Mediation is related to social agents and the action-oriented approach (Piccardo et al., 2019). It is seen as a collaborative process of co-creation that may involve mediating a text, a concept, or communication. Byram (2008a) presents five dimensions needed to become an intercultural speaker: attitudes (e.g., curiosity and openness); knowledge of social groups and their practices; skills of interpreting and relating; skills of discovery and interaction; and critical cultural awareness and political education. The notion of the intercultural speaker emphasizes that language teaching does not need to take the native speaker as a model when teaching intercultural skills and knowledge. The term initially aimed at distancing the notion of intercultural competence from the cultural competencies of a native speaker. Language learners have complex, multi-faceted identities that extend beyond simple identification with nation-states, suggesting they are well-placed to serve as intercultural mediators or speakers. Kramsch (1993, pp. 233-234) notes:

...they may find themselves...in a 'third place' from which they must understand and mediate between the home and the target language and culture. Learners have to become mediators...who [can] manage communication and interaction between people of different cultural identities and languages, coming out from their own perspective and taking up another.

The intercultural speaker concept allows the language learner to retain their social, linguistic, and cultural 'baggage' (Jæger, 2001).

Communication is a tool for developing learners' knowledge and understanding rather than testing their vocabulary and grammatical competence. To achieve this goal of 'linguaging,' foreign language education must extend beyond learning 'about' a culture's rituals and histories to reflecting on language and culture (Myers, 2006) and serving as social agents (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021). The KPG written mediation task involves interpreting Greek texts into an easily comprehensible target language that meets the target language's content, register, and genre requirements. Reading a document in one's own language and culture relies on inherent and assumed knowledge, including ethnocentric concepts, references, and perspectives that might not be fully comprehensible for individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Learners must know such limitations and develop skills to negotiate common ground to align the source and target texts (Byram, 2020). In addition, any presumed knowledge of one's own society comes into focus with growing awareness of another culture (Byram, 2008b). Hence, mediation is an interculturally demanding activity because it involves interaction between two parties on a path of discovery. Communicating in a foreign language requires creating and interpreting meanings within both foreign cultures and one's own. Therefore, English language learners should actively investigate, analyze, explore, and discover language; these aspects are vital when teaching mediation strategies.

The role of the intercultural mediator or speaker in multilingual and educational contexts is crucial for facilitating communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Li (2023) explores using L1 in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and translanguaging, positioning the intercultural speaker as a negotiator, mediator, encourager, and facilitator. In CLIL pedagogy, L1 is used to support meaning negotiation, particularly in identifying L2 learning objects and addressing the negative transfer of false cognates. Translanguaging, on the other hand, promotes the flexible use of all linguistic resources, enabling learners to affirm their multilingual identity and facilitating engagement in collaborative tasks. A study by Rajendram (2021) further supports the importance of L1 in empowering students, fostering multilingual competence, and challenging linguistic hierarchies in the classroom. This literature highlights the central role of intercultural mediators in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps, enhancing learners' ability to use their entire linguistic repertoire effectively in diverse settings. Mediation can enhance learners' plurilingual and pluricultural competence by leveraging their entire linguistic repertoire, aligning well with the role of an intercultural mediator or speaker (Pundziuvienė et al., 2023). Translanguaging, cultural mediation activities, and collaborative tasks foster learners' commitment and self-belief, enabling them to navigate cultural and linguistic barriers in their host countries. This approach emphasizes the mediator's role in bridging cultural divides, encouraging collaboration, and promoting sustainable multilingualism. These findings further support the importance of intercultural mediators in facilitating effective language acquisition and cultural integration.

Consistent with these recent studies, Liao and Li (2023) demonstrated that 14 culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in Chinese EFL classrooms helped learners gain openness, improved intercultural awareness, and better engaged with diverse cultural perspectives, highlighting the importance of equipping learners with intercultural competence through culturally relevant discussions and reflection. The CRT approach emphasizes the mediator's role in fostering a safe environment for sharing, thus enhancing learners' critical thinking and understanding of cultural nuances. This aligns with the function of an intercultural mediator who navigates between different cultural contexts, guiding learners to acknowledge and actively engage in cultural exchange, thus enhancing their ability to act as effective communicators and facilitators of intercultural dialogue.

Thus, EFL learners should become plurilingual users of languages who can mediate and negotiate between different languages and cultures. Attainment of this objective will require the EFL curriculum to expand beyond grammar, lexis, and phonology to include intercultural communication. This may be achieved through comparing and mediating cultural norms and the ability to evaluate critical perspectives, practices, and products across cultures (Byram, 2020). Learners must develop skills in accommodation, negotiation, cooperation, and linguistic and cultural awareness (Jackson, 2019; Jenkins, 2007, 2019; Kramsch, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

7. English as a Contact Language

In this section, we explore the concept of English as a contact language or Lingua Franca (ELF) (House, 2012, 2013; Jenkins, 2019; Kirkpatrick & Schaller-Schwane, 2022; Seidlhofer, 2005), considering how mediation occurs in a broader context encompassing multicultural communities and a radical reconceptualization of linguistic norms.

In the KPG written mediation task, English bridges the linguocultural gap between the text's producer and receiver. Learners are expected to read Greek texts and transmit the information in English to English-speaking people from non-Greek cultural/linguistic backgrounds, such as the target audience of a European magazine or a personal blog. In this scenario, English is used as an auxiliary language between people who do not share the same cultural or linguistic background. While cultural awareness is crucial for understanding a text, the challenge arises when the target audience is not from a native English-speaking community due to uncertainties around which cultural norms should apply, source, or target. English is used by diverse cultural groups intra-nationally (like in India) and internationally; thus, applying a set of cultural codes to ELF would be counterintuitive because ELF has no national identity and no definable groups of users.

House (2003) noted that ELF is already used in many cultures in conjunction with the local languages, with discourse norms shaping the resulting English rather than applying 'rules' of native English use. Thus, authors such as Seidlhofer (2005, p. 340) suggest that English language learning strategies should focus on

general language awareness and communication strategies [that may] have more 'mileage' for learners than striving for mastery of fine nuances of native speaker language use that are communicatively redundant or even counter-productive in lingua franca settings.

The English language community is heterogeneous, and teachers and learners should always consider multilingualism in terms of the linguistic implications for English as a contact language. Languages are not fixed to static social and cultural groups but are more dynamic and evolve based on their users' local needs and contexts. Every instance of communication renews the association between a language and its cultural references. Consequently, ELF reflects its users' local meanings and contexts, which are not always similar to those of a native English-speaking culture. These local adaptations are reintroduced globally, perpetuating a cycle of change (Pennycook, 2006) and, in the process, generating global and local tensions that fuel the dynamic nature of linguistic and cultural forms (Canagarajah, 2005). Therefore, it becomes imperative to move away from the norms of native English-speaking culture and consider increasingly multicultural, pluralistic, and dynamic linguistic and cultural contexts in which English is used while teaching it as communicative skills.

8. Intercultural Communication Competence

Scholars have stressed the importance of culture and its contribution to effective foreign language learning since the 1980s (Abdullaev, 2021; Alam, 2020; Brown, 1990; Byram, 1989; Makhmudov, 2020; Morgan, 2008). Hence, language classes began incorporating cultural content and language learning activities (Sercu, 2005). In the 21st century, intercultural language learning has become an essential focus of language education, with language and culture integrated into a single educational approach (Ho, 2009).

Cultural awareness or competence typically consists of knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of people from other countries or settings. The term 'intercultural communicative competence' significantly expands on the concept of communicative competence and refers to the *"ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and... interact with people... with multiple identities and their own individuality"* (Byram et al., 2002, p. 10). Drawing on the speech act theory and discourse analysis in language teaching, Byram's theory of intercultural communicative competence emphasizes the impact of L2 learners' social, cultural, and linguistic identities on their intercultural interactions. It asserts that communication is more than exchanging information; it establishes and maintains human relationships leveraging world knowledge and attitudinal factors. Knowledge and attitudes are affected by intercultural communication and the skills required, e.g., interpretation, establishing relationships between aspects of the two cultures, discovery, and interaction (Byram, 2020). Language learners must be adept in addressing complex plurilingual societies to thrive in a culturally and socially complex world. The companion version of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) explicitly incorporates Byram's intercultural communicative competence theory, for instance, in the 'Mediating Communication' section (p.114), with its strong focus on facilitating pluricultural space.

Language teachers have traditionally measured learners' linguistic abilities using L1 speakers as the benchmark. Although this approach helps develop learners' linguistic or grammatical competence, it is less relevant for socio-cultural competence. As a result, researchers challenged the native speaker model in the 1980s as a difficult-to-define and unattainable ideal (Byram, 2008a). For example, van Ek's model of communicative competence suggested that language learners should acquire the language the way native speakers speak it within their context van Ek (1986). However, developing socio-cultural competence based on van Ek's model requires aligning with the context and meaning assigned by native speakers in their local settings with a comprehensive familiarity with how those meanings are applied in that setting (Byram, 2008a). Rather, language learners should be regarded as social agents and complete individuals, as endorsed by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020; Council of Europe et al., 2001, p.9). Similarly, Aguilar (2007) argues that the intercultural speaker should replace the model of the native speaker within the foreign language context. While the intercultural speaker may be less linguistically skilled than the native speaker, they have a privileged vantage point regarding communication abilities and interaction with people from other cultures.

Recent studies by Rezai (2023) and Liu et al. (2023) show that informal digital learning of English by, for example, engaging in online conversations or gaming in English significantly increases learners' cultural awareness, motivation, and willingness to communicate across different cultures, thus fostering intercultural competence. Liu et al. (2023) observed that activities that promote informal digital learning of English improve students' knowledge of the self, others, and intercultural communication skills, contributing to effective communication in diverse cultural contexts. More formal English learning programs, such as digital storytelling in Thailand (Kahanurak et al., 2023) or the "English Corner" program at an elite language university in China (Nam et al., 2023), have been shown to enhance intercultural competence. Digital storytelling allowed multilingual students to connect their cultural backgrounds with the learning of English, improving linguistic skills through multimedia representation and encouraging inclusivity (Kahanurak et al., 2023). In the "English Corner" program, Chinese college students engaged in scholarly conversations about intercultural communication with foreign teachers from English-speaking countries, improving their linguistic and intercultural skills (Nam et al., 2023). In addition to highlighting the complex interplay of power, linguistic capital, and intercultural competence, the "English Corner" program underscores the importance of dedicated spaces for building intercultural capital beyond the classroom, positioning intercultural mediators as facilitators who bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, especially in formal and informal educational settings. The program's emphasis on collaborative learning supports the role of the intercultural mediator in enhancing effective

Intercultural communicative competence requires learners to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness necessary to communicate interculturally. The original CEFR (Council of Europe et al., 2001) provided pedagogical objectives concerning the teaching and learning of intercultural competence within the context of European mobility in language education. Learning objectives that focus on the concept of interculturality in language teaching are included, and the framework emphasizes that language learners should become plurilingual and develop interculturality. Sections related to mediation, the social agent in an action-oriented approach, and plurilingualism in the original framework (Council of Europe et al., 2001) were expanded in the updated

CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) to underscore the significance of “sociolinguistic competence” where effective communication with speakers of other languages necessitates both linguistic (for exchanging information) and intercultural competence (to know the language or register to use in that setting).

The connection between intercultural competence, the CEFR, and the incorporation of language learning strategies for mediation is underscored by the fact that effective mediation and interlinguistic communication require an appropriate strategy and a good understanding of the extent to which the source text should be adapted. Knowledge of specific cultures and awareness of how social groups (one's own and that of others) function is vital. However, no teacher can have (or anticipate) all the knowledge that learners might need, especially given that many teachers will not have the opportunity to experience the cultures their learners might encounter. However, skills are as essential as attitudes and knowledge, and teachers can concentrate on these as much as on knowledge.

Interpreting, relating, and discovering constitute fundamental skills closely connected with mediation, especially written mediation. The intercultural speaker can draw on translation and interpretation skills to reinforce their ability to act as a linguistic and cultural mediator between two interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. The skills of interpreting and relating were included in the CEFR under the description of “intercultural skills and know-how,” encompassing the ability to serve as a cultural intermediary by strategically communicating with people from different cultures with cultural sensitivity while relating one's own culture to foreign cultures and free from stereotyped relationships (Council of Europe et al., 2001, p. 104). Individuals interpret by applying general knowledge frames to discern the allusions and connotations in a document (Byram, 2020). Interpretation, from the viewpoint of one's own culture, reflects conscious and implicit knowledge that may conceal ethnocentric ideas, references, and perspectives that would be difficult for a person from a different background to understand. The learner should be able to establish relationships between the source and target by discovering common ground, such as “*easily translated concepts and connotations, and lacunae or dysfunctions, including mutually contradictory meaning*” (Byram, 2020, p. 43). The main aim of developing interpretation skills is to make the source text accessible to someone from another background (Byram, 2020, p. 37). The updated CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) expands the descriptors of mediation to include seven specific aspects needed for mediating a text, namely relaying specific information, explaining data, processing text, translating a written text, note-taking, expressing a personal response to creative texts, and analysis and criticism of creative texts. Unlike the original CEFR (2001) that focused on preparation for mediation, the companion volume focuses on the act of mediation itself, detailing that execution requires linking to previous knowledge, adapting language, breaking down complicated information, amplifying a dense text, and streamlining a text (Council of Europe, 2020). These descriptors are not new but represent a synthesis of findings from prominent researchers in the field mentioned in earlier sections of this review [e.g., Bimmel and van Schooten (2004), Shreve (2006), and Wong (2005)].

Byram and Zarate (1997, p. 52) note that intercultural speakers or mediators must be able to “*see how misunderstandings can arise, and how they might be able to resolve them. They need the attitudes of decentring but also the skills of comparing.*” The language learner should be able to put ideas, events, and documents side by side and perceive how each might look from another perspective. They must notice how people might misunderstand what someone with a different social identity says, writes, or does. The attitude of the intercultural speaker and mediator is a crucial determinant of their intercultural competence, especially for tackling communication issues emanating from the interlocutors' limited world knowledge (Byram, 2020). Thus, intercultural speakers and mediators must be adept at finding new knowledge, inquiring about the beliefs, values, and behavior of people from different cultures, and incorporating it with what they already know. Teaching these skills can be challenging as they are not always obvious or conscious. Also, effective relationships between individuals from different cultural backgrounds are determined by their ability to accept criticisms of the shared values of their social group. In any sociolinguistic contact, the interlocutors are seen as representatives of their country, values, and political ideologies; therefore, they must be equally responsible for accepting criticisms of the shared values of their social group.

Hence, in addition to becoming linguistically proficient, learning a foreign language should involve developing their personality and identity. The CEFR views foreign language learning as inseparable from the development of personality. Language learners are considered social agents involved in interaction with individuals from diverse social groups, resulting in the development of their identities as an integration of these relationships. A central objective is to “*promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experiences of otherness in language and culture,*”—thus endorsing an intercultural approach to foreign language learning (Council of Europe et al., 2001, p. 1).

An open and critical attitude toward one's culture is needed to communicate successfully with others. The conscious awareness dimension focuses on making learners aware of the similarities and differences between cultures and methods of comparison. This ability is directly related to the development of critical thinking concerning learners' own as well as foreign cultures. The intercultural speaker must develop critical thinking about their own and other cultures and their implicit values and practices (Fenner, 2017). The development of critical thinking is based on reflection, a meta-level of language learning, and an element often not present in foreign language classrooms where the teaching concentrates solely on the development of language skills (Fenner, 2017). The primary purpose of critical cultural awareness is to encourage learners to reflect critically on the values, beliefs, and behaviors of their own society and how the society appears to outsiders. Critical cultural awareness involves learners analyzing and reflecting deeply on familiar ideas, concepts, and other cultural phenomena without assuming that these are perceived or understood similarly by others. The intercultural speaker needs to demonstrate the ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document and explain their origin; identify areas of misunderstanding in an interaction, accounting for them in terms of the cultural systems present; and mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena

(Byram, 2020).

The CEFR (2001) was innovative at the time of publication and helpful for language professionals looking for an instrument to guide their language teaching. However, its developers acknowledged its shortcomings—some of which were detailed by Byram (2003, 2008b). Subsequent research in the following decades led to the companion version, which addressed many shortcomings (Council of Europe, 2020). The companion version views language learning in a more carefully contextualized way, expanding the role and scope of mediators and placing plurilingualism and pluriculturalism at its center—going some way to locating language teaching and learning in a broader educational context. The companion volume includes detailed supporting materials to help educators realize educational objectives. Nevertheless, it remains a theoretical framework to guide and support educators toward language learning goals rather than prescribing exactly how that should be done.

Foreign language learners need to understand different cultures, behaviors, and attitudes to interpret and connect ways of understanding the world. Leontovich (2003, p. 2) concurs that true intercultural competence cannot be accomplished only through the mastery of a foreign language; familiarity with culture is also required. Differences in values are usually encoded in the communicator's language and behavior. Effective intercultural communication requires individuals from different backgrounds to search for effective forms of communication, modifying parameters such as cognitive strategies, worldviews, and value orientations. Intercultural transformation involves intense changes but does not necessarily require full linguistic competence in all languages (Leontovich, 2003); a plurilingual mindset, cognitive flexibility, and cultural awareness are essential procedural elements.

9. Conclusion

Foreign language learners must understand the relationships between cultures to become effective mediators who can interpret and connect different ways of understanding the world. This paper has discussed written mediation in the context of English language teaching as an example of intercultural communication. The development of intercultural competence in the EFL classroom enables learners to become mediators, advancing communication between people from different languages and cultures. The components of intercultural language teaching highlighted in this review emphasize the close connection between language and culture and the need to equip language learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for cross-cultural communication. Critical cultural awareness is key to effective mediation and intercultural competence, and its development should be viewed as a central objective of foreign language learning.

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