



Mediation and Innovation in Language Teaching: Integrating Digital Tools and Emotional Engagement

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Abstract

In the era of pervasive technologies, the role of the language teacher as a mediator has acquired -and is constantly acquiring- new dimensions. Mediation no longer concerns only the linguistic and affective needs of learners, but also the interplay between these needs and the growing presence of digital tools in teaching and learning practices.

This contribution presents a reflection based on teacher training experiences with Italian L2/LS teachers, developed within the framework of professional development projects (Futura-Mondadori Education; ClubAlumni PostMasterTALS, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice). The focus is on how teachers can help develop mediation competences by designing digital tasks that integrate affective factors, intercultural awareness, and collaborative learning. Through examples of practice, the paper illustrates strategies that enable students to move across languages, codes, and semiotic resources, thus reinforcing their autonomy and engagement.

At the same time, the teacher is presented as a double mediator: between learners and their linguistic and affective needs, and between learners and digital environments, while ultimately mediating between these two spheres themselves.

The proposal highlights the potential of combining emotional awareness and digital literacy in order to shape language education that is inclusive, adaptive, and responsive to contemporary challenges.

Keywords: *Language mediation, digital tools, emotional engagement and affective factors, language teaching innovation, learner needs, Italian L2/LS, teacher training.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the growing pervasiveness of digital technologies has reshaped the landscape of language education, requiring teachers to re-think their professional roles and pedagogical approaches. Within this evolving context, the concept of *mediation* -originally framed as the ability to facilitate understanding and communication between individuals- has gained renewed importance and expanded meanings: mediation includes not only linguistic and cognitive processes, but also social and affective dimensions that enable learners to connect, negotiate, and co-construct meaning.

The growing integration of digital tools has further expanded this concept. Teachers are increasingly required to mediate not only between learners and language, but also between learners and digital environments for learning and collaboration. This evolving role calls for new professional competences that combine emotional sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and digital literacy.

Building on experiences from teacher training in Italian as a foreign and second language, this paper explores how mediation competences can be developed through digital practices that foster affective engagement, collaboration, and reflection. The goal is to highlight how integrating emotional and digital dimensions can strengthen teachers’ mediating role and contribute to more inclusive and adaptive learning contexts.

2. Theoretical Background: Mediation and Affective-Digital Integration

2.1 Mediation as Key Dimension in Language Education

Mediation has become a central construct in contemporary language education, redefining how learning, communication, and interaction are conceptualized. In the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* [1] mediation is described as the ability to create bridges between individuals, texts, and contexts in order to facilitate understanding and co-construction of meaning. It



includes both cognitive and socio-affective dimensions, emphasizing the learner's capacity to interpret, transform, and transmit meaning within dynamic social environments.

As Piccardo, North, and Goodier [2] argue, mediation connects the linguistic, intercultural, and collaborative aspects of communication, representing a shift from an individualistic to a *co-actional* model of competence. Similarly, Kramsch [3] views mediation as a symbolic process through which learners negotiate identities and values across linguistic and cultural boundaries, while Byram [4] situates it within intercultural competence as the skill of "relating and interpreting". This framework positions the teacher not as a transmitter of knowledge but as a facilitator of meaning-making processes that are dialogic, negotiated, and context-sensitive.

2.2 The Affective and Motivational Dimensions of Mediation

Affective factors play a decisive role in language learning and in the development of mediation competences. Emotions influence attention, memory, motivation, and engagement, thus shaping how learners experience learning [5, 6]. Within this perspective, mediation requires teachers to deeply understand learners' emotional landscapes and to design learning environments where empathy and motivation can flourish.

Research on "emotional intelligence and emotional literacy" in education [7, 8] has shown that awareness and regulation of emotions enhance not only well-being but also performance and cooperation. When integrated into teacher education, these dimensions enable teachers to mediate between cognitive goals and affective dynamics, promoting safe and inclusive learning spaces. As Cipriano [9] notes, digital competence frameworks such as *DigComp2.2* [10] *DigCompEdu* [11] increasingly intersect with emotional competence, outlining a profile of the teacher as both technologically and emotionally literate.

2.3 Digital Environments and New Forms of Mediation

The digital shift in education has expanded the range of mediating actions. Online learning platforms, collaborative tools, and multimodal resources have created new semiotic spaces where meaning is constructed through diverse channels [12, 13]. In these contexts, teachers mediate not only between learners and content, but also -and at the same time- between learners and the technological ecosystems that shape communication and access to knowledge.

However, this new ecology also introduces challenges: technological overload, fragmentation of attention, and the risk of reduced emotional connection. To counterbalance these effects, mediation must be reinterpreted as "digital-affective mediation", a practice that integrates empathy, relational awareness, and critical digital literacy. This implies guiding learners in navigating online interactions, managing cognitive load, and maintaining meaningful -and authentic- interpersonal engagement [14].

2.4 The Teacher as "Double Mediator"

Bringing together these theoretical perspectives, the teacher emerges as a "double mediator" between learners and their linguistic, as well as affective needs, and between learners and digital environments. This role requires flexibility, reflective competence, and the ability to orchestrate learning experiences that balance human interaction and technological mediation.

Within language teacher education, this approach translates into the design of activities that connect digital tools with emotional engagement and intercultural awareness. As will be illustrated in the following sections, initiatives such as *ClubAlumni PostMasterITALS* and *Futura-Mondadori Education* provide concrete frameworks where these principles can be explored and implemented in practice.

3. Methodology and Context of Practice

3.1 Research Approach

This paper adopts a qualitative and reflective approach, based on the analysis of professional development experiences for teachers of Italian as a foreign and second language (LS/L2). The reflections presented here proceeded from two interconnected frameworks: the *ClubAlumni PostMasterITALS* network, promoted by Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and the *Futura-Mondadori Education* training projects in Italy. Both initiatives are focused on teacher agency, collaborative inquiry, and innovation in digital pedagogy.

Rather than relying on quantitative data, this study focuses on pedagogical narratives, design-based reflections, and teachers' self-reports. These sources highlight how mediation competences can be



promoted through the integration of emotional engagement and digital tools in language teaching. The methodological stance is interpretive, emphasizing professional growth and contextualized practice over experimental measurement.

This approach is in line with principles of “reflective practitioner research” [15, 16], where teachers act simultaneously as learners and co-constructors of knowledge. It also reflects the “action-research” tradition in language education [17], which prioritizes transformative practice and collegial reflection as instruments for sustainable change.

3.2 The ClubAlumni PostMaster ITALS Network

ClubAlumni PostMasterITALS is a professional community that collects graduates of the Master in Teaching Italian as a Foreign and Second Language at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. The network functions as a platform for lifelong professional development, exchange of practice, and research-based reflection.

Within this framework, teachers collaboratively explore issues of mediation, plurilingualism, and digital competence, following the theoretical orientation of the *ITALS Centre* and the *Council of Europe’s* action-oriented approach. Activities include monthly online seminars (“*Sabati con PostITALS*”), collaborative projects, and thematic workshops on *curriculum* design, assessment, and digital literacy. From a methodological perspective, *PostMasterITALS* promotes reflective digital mediation. Teachers are encouraged to share not only their design practices, in order to discuss them proactively, but also to express reflections and critical issues within a network that shares common pedagogical values. One of the main strengths of this professional community lies in the possibility of having an external observer who supports *action research* whenever teachers step outside their established teaching routines and comfort zones. In this respect the support provided by the *PostMasterITALS* network is particularly significant: virtual yet tangible and emotionally engaging. Through Moodle, the newsletter, the website and social media channels, the network offers not only resources and materials, but also a space for continuous reflection, dialogue, and mutual growth among language education professionals.

Preliminary observations show that this approach strengthens both teachers’ digital confidence and their sensitivity to learners’ affective needs. It also encourages peer mentoring and co-construction of materials, in line with the CEFR-CV descriptors for mediation and collaborative learning [1].

3.3 The Futura-Mondadori Education Projects

The *Futura-Mondadori Education* initiative represents another significant context for innovation in language teacher education. Developed for Italian schools across different levels, the program supports educators in designing digital *curricula* that integrate active methodologies and transversal competences.

In this framework, mediation is interpreted as a dynamic process connecting disciplinary learning, digital citizenship, and socio-emotional education. Teachers are trained to construct *Unità di Apprendimento* (Learning Units) where technology serves not as an end in itself, but as a means to promote inclusion, creativity, and emotional engagement.

The workshops emphasize models such as the *SAMR* framework [18], the *Padagogy Wheel* [19] and *Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy* [20] to guide the integration of digital tools with cognitive and affective goals. Reflection and peer collaboration are essential components: teachers plan, test, and evaluate digital tasks collectively, sharing feedback through virtual platforms.

Participants have particularly valued the connection between emotional mediation and digital innovation, observing that learners’ motivation increases when tasks invite personal expression, empathy, and intercultural dialogue. The process also fosters teachers’ awareness of their mediating role between learners’ emotions and the technological means used to express them.

3.4 Ethical Consideration and Data Sources

All observations and examples discussed in this paper derive from publicly available training materials, personal reflections, and anonymized reports collected during workshops and seminars. No individual learner data or institutional records are used. The author’s position as trainer and participant-researcher ensures an *emic* perspective while maintaining ethical transparency and confidentiality.



4. Examples of Reflective and Mediatonal Practice

This section presents three examples of practice illustrating how emotional engagement and digital mediation can be integrated into language education and teacher training. The cases described are grounded in authentic practice, as the activities were implemented and observed by the teachers who designed them. Each case highlights a different dimension of mediation -pedagogical, intercultural and professional- showing how technology can support reflection, inclusion, and affective awareness in diverse learning environments [21, 2]. The author participated in these initiatives as a facilitator and observer, coordinating the design and reflection process within teacher-training contexts. Specifically, the first two cases derive from workshops conducted within the *Futura-Mondadori Education* teacher-training programme on digital *curriculum* innovation, while the third example draws on the collaborative practices developed within the *ClubAlumni PostMasterITALS* community, a professional network of Italian language educators originating from the Ca' Foscari Master's in "Advanced Planning of Italian Language and Culture for Foreigners," in which the author currently serves as part of the editorial and organizational team. Although no quantitative data were collected, the cases are grounded in authentic classroom practices and educators' feedback, offering insight into how mediation and emotional engagement can be fostered through digital tools.

4.1 Case 1: *Digital Storytelling and Emotional Engagement*

A first example demonstrates how digital storytelling can foster mediation between language, emotion, and creativity. During a *Futura-Mondadori Education* teacher-training workshop on digital *curriculum* innovation, participants designed a *Unità di Apprendimento* (Learning Unit) combining emotional awareness, active methodologies, and the use of multimedia tools. One group created a task, entitled "*Voices and Feelings in Italian Music*", aimed at secondary-school learners. Using *YouTube*, *LyricsTraining*, and *Padlet*, students analyzed short Italian songs focusing on emotional vocabulary and cultural context. The final output was a collaborative playlist annotated in Italian, where learners commented on how each song conveyed specific emotions. This activity promoted linguistic and emotional mediation: teachers guided learners in interpreting digital artefacts (songs, videos, lyrics) and reflecting on affective responses. The integration of digital tools facilitated accessibility and participation, particularly for students with diverse linguistic backgrounds or learning preferences. Methodologically, the task followed *Futura's* reflective cycle, in which teachers design, implement, discuss, and revise activities collaboratively [9].

4.2 Case 2: "*Cultural Bridges*": Intercultural and Digital Mediation

A second example, developed in digital teacher-training contexts, involved creating collaborative *Padlet* boards for intercultural exchange. Teachers designed a shared wall entitled "*Cultural Bridges*" where learners posted texts, images, or short videos illustrating cultural habits, idioms, or social norms from their countries. Each contribution was followed by peer questions and comments in Italian, aimed at clarifying meanings and exploring similarities and differences. Teachers moderated discussion through linguistic mediation strategies, drawn from the *CEFR Companion Volume* [1] descriptors (for instance, "*explaining a new concept to others*" or "*reformulating a message in accessible language*"). The activity activated mediation on three interconnected levels:

1. Linguistic mediation: through paraphrasing and simplification;
2. Intercultural mediation: through comparing values and representations;
3. Digital mediation: as students co-constructed meaning via an online platform.

Learners reported feeling valued for their cultural knowledge and linguistic repertoire, while teachers observed increased engagement and empathy. The collaborative, technology-supported environment created a "*safe semiotic space*" where affective and intercultural awareness could merge [21].

4.3 Case 3: *The PostMasterITALS Network: Continuous Reflection and Teacher Mediation*

A third example focuses on professional and affective mediation within the *ClubAlumni PostMasterITALS* network, an online community for continuous teacher education that extends the *Master ITALS* program of Ca' Foscari University of Venice. This network promotes lifelong reflective practice through digital channels: Moodle, newsletters, social, website sections, as "*Lo sapevi che...?*", and online meetings, alternating between expert talks and peer-discussion sessions. Teachers share classroom experiences, challenges, and new ideas, engaging in collaborative reflection that links pedagogy and emotion. The *PostMasterITALS* initiative exemplifies a "community of practice" [22], where digital



mediation supports both professional development and emotional wellbeing. It promotes an ongoing cycle of *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* [15], enabling teachers to mediate between their established practices and emerging educational challenges.

4.4 Reflection across Cases

Across these three cases, digital mediation emerges as both a pedagogical tool and an affective bridge. The activities described illustrate how teachers can integrate technology not as an external add-on, but as a *medium* for reflection, inclusion, and meaning-making. From storytelling to intercultural exchange and professional networking, mediation enables participants to connect emotional, cognitive, and digital dimensions of learning. In all contexts, the teacher acts as a reflective mediator: facilitating access to content, guiding emotional awareness, and fostering collaborative knowledge construction. These practices suggest that the development of mediation competences is not confined to classroom interaction but extends to the expanded ecology of teacher education, where technology and emotion co-shape professional identity and pedagogical innovation [3,15].

5. Discussion and Implication

The examples presented above illustrate how the integration of digital and affective dimensions can reshape the teacher's role as a mediator in language education. This section discusses the broader implications of these findings for teacher competences, classroom practice, and professional development.

5.1 Mediation as a Transformative Framework

The notion of mediation, as developed in the *CEFR-Companion Volume* [1] proves particularly suitable for interpreting the evolving complexity of digital-age pedagogy. By viewing learning as a co-constructed process, mediation permits teachers to move beyond the instrumental use of technology and to consider it as a relational and symbolic environment.

In this sense, mediation is not merely a methodological tool but a *transformative framework*. It encourages teachers to reflect on how linguistic, digital, and emotional resources interact to shape learning experiences. This perspective redefines the teacher as a *knowledge design* who creates bridges between learners, languages, and technological environments [12].

5.2 Emotional Engagement and Inclusion

The emotional dimension, often neglect in digital pedagogy, emerges as a crucial factor in sustaining motivation and inclusion. The three cases showed that when learners are invited to express emotions, relate personal experiences, and collaborate meaningfully, they demonstrate greater autonomy and engagement.

Emotional engagement thus acts as a *mediational catalyst*: it supports linguistic development by anchoring new knowledge to affective memory and social connection [5]. This confirms the idea that language learning is not only a cognitive but also an existential process: an encounter between identities and values [21].

Moreover, emotional literacy contributes to inclusive education. By attending to learners' feelings, teachers can anticipate emotional barriers, such as anxiety or disconnection, that often accompany digital learning. Integrating reflective activities and multimodal tasks helps students to connect diverse linguistic repertoires or learning preferences to participate on equal terms.

5.3 Teacher Professional Growth and Reflective Practice

The evidences also have implications for teacher education. Both the *PostMasterITALS* and *Futura-Mondadori Education* experiences show that professional development should combine digital upskilling with emotional and intercultural reflection. When teachers design tasks collaboratively, they engage in a process of *co-mediation*, negotiating meanings and redefining their pedagogical identity. This is in line with Farrell's [16] concept of "reflective language teaching", where awareness of self and others is central to professional growth. Teachers learn not only to use technologies but to question their pedagogical impact, emotional resonance, and ethical implications.

Finally, mediation supports a culture of professional dialogue. Communities of practice such as *ClubAlumni PostMasterITALS* provide safe spaces for teachers to share failures, insights, and strategies, transforming isolated experimentation into collective knowledge.



6. Conclusion

The reflections presented in this paper highlight the pedagogical potential of integrating emotional engagement and digital mediation in language education. The teacher, redefined as a *double mediator*, bridges not only languages and technologies but also emotions and identities. This dual role requires the development of complex competences that combine digital literacy, empathy, intercultural awareness, and reflective thinking.

The examples drawn from *ClubAlumni PostMasterITALS* and *Futura-Mondadori Education* demonstrate that these competences can be cultivated through collaborative professional development and task-based experimentation. Digital environments, when designed with affective awareness, become inclusive spaces that enhance learner participation, motivation, and autonomy.

At a broader level, the intersection of emotional and digital literacy contributes to reshaping educational paradigms in line with the Council of Europe's vision of mediation as social responsibility. As future research and practice continue to evolve, it will be essential to explore how these integrated approaches can inform *curriculum* design, assessment, and institutional teacher education programmers.

In conclusion, embracing emotional engagement within digital pedagogy is not only a methodological choice but an ethical one: it reaffirms the human dimension of language learning in an increasingly mediated world.

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