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Linguistic mediation for higher education language instructors and students

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LINGUISTIC MEDIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS

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ENHANCING MEDIATION SKILLS IN THE VIRTUAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Keywords: mediation skills, interaction, virtual English language classroom, techniques, learning environment.

Introduction. In the current digital landscape, the role of effective communication and conflict resolution has become increasingly paramount. The advent of virtual classrooms has significantly transformed student interaction dynamics, necessitating the development of robust mediation skills among learners. This research investigates methodologies aimed at enhancing students' mediation capabilities within a virtual English language classroom context. By incorporating role-play scenarios into the educational experience, students can adeptly navigate conflicts utilizing appropriate language and techniques, thereby promoting a collaborative and inclusive learning environment. The rapid transition to remote and online learning precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the necessity of effective mediation skills for educators operating within the virtual English language classroom. As educational environments have undergone substantial transformations, language instructors have been compelled to adapt their pedagogical practices to the online context, presenting both challenges and opportunities for fostering meaningful student-teacher interactions.

Objectives. This research aims to explore the significance of mediation skills in enhancing the virtual English language learning experience, with a particular emphasis on strategies for cultivating an engaging and supportive learning environment.

Methods. This research is grounded in a comprehensive literature review of academic sources pertaining to the topic of mediation skills in the virtual English language classroom. The selected sources were rigorously analyzed to provide a thorough understanding of the current state of research in this domain. The paper follows a structured outline, beginning with an introduction to the topic and subsequently delving into key themes and findings from the literature. Proper adherence to citation rules has been maintained to ensure accurate referencing and integration of sources.

Results. The literature review indicates that the integration of communication technology in education has yielded both beneficial and adverse effects during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the positive side, virtual lessons have the potential to reduce language anxiety and improve the teacher-student relationship, as communication becomes more frequent and reciprocal. Conversely, the heightened reliance on computer-mediated communication has contributed to teacher fatigue and potential burnout, stemming from the blurred lines between professional and personal life.

To mitigate these challenges, language educators must be equipped with essential digital skills and pedagogical knowledge to effectively leverage online tools and create engaging virtual classroom environments. Fostering a sense of community and maintaining robust student-teacher relationships are also critical for addressing the challenges posed by the absence of physical proximity in virtual settings.

Mediation skills are essential for language teachers in the virtual classroom, enabling instructors to facilitate effective communication and collaboration among students, as well as bridge potential gaps or misunderstandings that may arise due to the online setting (Racheva, 2018). In the context of limited face-to-face interaction, teachers must utilize a variety of communication strategies and technological tools to engage students and foster a sense of community.

One key strategy for enhancing mediation skills in the virtual English language classroom is the effective integration of communication technologies. By leveraging a range of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools such as video conferencing, discussion forums, and collaborative whiteboards teachers can promote more engaging and personalized interactions with their students.

The integration of communication technology in education has proven to be a double-edged sword during the pandemic. While online tools have facilitated remote learning and enabled teachers to address the affective needs of students, the increased reliance on computer-mediated communication has also contributed to teacher fatigue and potential burnout due to the blurred boundaries between professional and private life. Nevertheless, research indicates that well-planned and executed virtual lessons can alleviate language anxiety and enhance the teacher-student relationship as communication becomes more frequent and reciprocal (Bui, Hung, 2021).

A potential key to overcoming technological barriers in virtual language teaching involves understanding the shifts in the educational context and how the affordances of technologies can contribute to an improved learning ecology (Stockwell, 2024). Educators must possess the requisite digital skills and pedagogical knowledge to effectively utilize online tools and establish engaging virtual classroom environments.

Furthermore, fostering a sense of community and maintaining strong student-teacher relationships are vital for addressing the challenges presented by the lack of physical proximity in the virtual classroom. Effective mediation skills such as conflict resolution, negotiation, and facilitation are essential for language teachers operating in the virtual learning environment. Instructors must be adept at facilitating productive discussions, managing online interactions, and mediating potential conflicts that may arise in digital spaces (Stockwell, 2024).

Moreover, language teachers should prioritize the development of their own communication and interpersonal skills to enhance their effectiveness in mediating within the virtual classroom. By honing these skills, educators can cultivate more inclusive, engaging, and effective virtual learning experiences for their students.

Conclusion. The enhancement of mediation skills within the virtual English language classroom is vital for fostering a positive and productive learning environment. Through the implementation of structured role-play scenarios, students not only developed essential communication and conflict resolution strategies but also built self-confidence in their ability to navigate interpersonal conflicts. The findings of this study suggest that interactive pedagogical methods can significantly strengthen students' mediation skills, leading to more effective and harmonious virtual classroom interactions. As educational paradigms continue to evolve within the digital sphere, equipping students with these critical skills will prepare them for success in both their academic pursuits and future professional endeavors. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of virtual and remote learning, highlighting the importance of mediation skills for language teachers in the online classroom. By comprehending the impact of communication technology, overcoming technological barriers, and refining their mediation abilities, language instructors can create more inclusive, engaging, and effective virtual learning environments for their students. The research presented in this paper emphasizes the need for further investigation into specific strategies and best practices for developing mediation skills in virtual language instruction. Addressing this gap will enable the field of language education to better support teachers in navigating the complexities of the virtual classroom and fostering successful learning outcomes for their students.

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