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Mediation in practice in an ESAP course: Versions of the Medical English student conference

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The Medical English course at the University of Oulu (Finland), which is compulsory for 200 first-year medical students, is designed to enhance professional English language communication focusing on work life relevance. The course design utilized the action-oriented approach promoted by CEFR CV (2018), to support the active use of language through various simulation activities. This paper describes specifically the final assignment of the Medical English course, which is integrated with the Clinical Psychology course. Having discussed topics in Finnish in groups, complementing the lectures in the Clinical Psychology course, students present in English what they have learnt in these discussions in the framework of a student conference. While preparing for the conference, the students create a poster presentation in teams. During the conference, they present the posters and, thus, practice communication relevant to work life. In this assignment, they must actively apply cross-linguistic mediation and use mediation strategies to explain new concepts and simplify the source text. Traditionally, the assignment requires students to participate in a simulated real-time face-to-face conference both as presenters and attendees. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we used an alternative solution: a hybrid conference of asynchronous presentations with real-time Q&A forums in online posts. The new design similarly provides students with stimuli to activate all modes of communication (production, reception, interaction and mediation) simultaneously.

This article reports on this novel solution for the assignment together with its context and the course design in relation to mediation scales and descriptors. Moreover, an analysis of the self-assessment forms between the student cohorts in 2019 and 2020 allows an insight into the learners' experiences. The results show that students perceive the assignment as an authentic communication task, which enhances their engagement and autonomy in the learning process.

Keywords: cross-linguistic mediation, mediation strategies, pandemic, pedagogical solution, online teaching, curriculum development, CLIL

1 Introduction

Foreign language education at tertiary level enjoys a special status in Finland; all degree programs contain compulsory language courses provided free of charge at the undergraduate level. The law regulating university education stipulates that apart from the official national languages, which are Finnish and Swedish, graduates must attain proficiency in at least one foreign language to an extent that enables them "to monitor progress in their own field and operate in an international setting" (section 6 of Decree 2015). According to the Official Statistics of Finland, for 95% of students in upper secondary schools this foreign language (FL) is English (OSF 2019). As FL teaching in Finland starts at an early stage of primary education (in some schools in year one, while the majority start in year three), students entering university have a solid FL skill foundation. Thus, the expected level of students'

proficiency at the start of the compulsory FL course in their undergraduate studies is B1 on average. However, in certain fields where the competition to gain admission is higher, such as veterinary surgery and degree programmes in medicine, the language competence of undergraduates is commonly B2[1]. This high entry level of language proficiency explains why English language courses at tertiary level in Finland can indeed be customized to prepare students for their future careers.

While undergraduate compulsory English courses focus on professional communication (ESP), in certain disciplines and specializations, the students' future profession requires lifelong use of academic skills for keeping pace with research in the field (Zrníková and Bujalková 2018), among others, in medicine, biomedical engineering, biochemistry. This double mission of professional and academic needs can be served in the enhanced *specificity*[2] of English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) (Hyland 2006: 9-12). This is the case of the Medical English course, which is compulsory for first year students of medicine and dentistry at the University of Oulu. The course follows the ESAP principles, and is designed to support students in developing skills and strategies that will allow them to follow in English current developments in medical research and medicine in general. In this article, we will discuss the course design, the course activities which provide practice in applying mediation skills and strategies, and will focus on the final course component, which is a simulation of a scientific conference.

1.1 English for Specific and Academic Purposes in the medical curriculum

The curriculum of the degree program in medicine and dentistry at the University of Oulu was reformed in 2017. The new curriculum, introduced in academic year 2017-18, places a special emphasis on the importance of teamwork in both pre-clinical and clinical studies. Training students for working in a team, for example when discussing patient presentations with colleagues to establish the diagnosis, has been a traditional element of medical teaching (Kopel et al. 2019; Blackmore et al. 2018; Ziv et al. 2006). The new curriculum, however, also aims to address the challenges of an ever-expanding, globalized workplace, where such teamwork may have to be carried out in English. This recognition led to a novel solution: the integration of certain subject courses with the foreign language course, namely the Medical English course. Two subject courses in the first-year degree program were chosen for this purpose: the cell biology course and the clinical psychology course. Both courses are compulsory for first year students of medicine and dentistry. The cell biology course was chosen because students in this course must research a current topic (different every year) and summarize their findings in an essay in Finnish, which is the language of instruction for the course. Much of the literature students must process, however, is only available in English. Similarly, the clinical psychology course uses source materials in English. Clinical psychology is a subject course where medical students learn the aspects of psychology relevant to their profession (working with patients as general practitioners or dentists). Complementary to lectures in the course, students are assigned to groups to discuss certain topics in depth. The language of groupwork is Finnish, which prompted the integrated assignment (discussed below). Identifying the built-in English components in these two subject courses marked the first stage of the integration process. Clarifying the aims and the design of the integrated assignments was the task of the ESAP teachers.

While the aim of the integration was to create synergy between the chosen subject courses and the ESAP course, due to institutional considerations, the Medical English course was preserved as a separate

1. The degree program in medicine at the University of Oulu is the second most difficult to get admitted to: in 2019 only 14.6% of all applicants gained admission. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education, in 2020, only 198 students out of 1335 were granted admission https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/en-gb/Reports/Haku-%20ja%20valintatiedot%20-%20korkeakoulu%20-%20yo%20-%20koulutusala_EN.xlsb.
2. Hyland explains specificity, "a concept fundamental to most definitions of ESP" as this "ESP involves teaching the literacy skills which are appropriate to the purposes and understandings of particular communities" K. Hyland/English for Specific Purposes 21 (2002) 385–395, 386.

entity in the curriculum. This solution follows the recommended practices of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at the tertiary level (Anderson 2014: 197). Consequently, the Medical English course is divided into three modules, which run in the first year and must be completed consecutively (Figure 1). The first module focuses on scientific writing: students write an English summary of their own cell biology essay written in the Finnish language. The second module focuses on the traditional contents of medical English courses, doctor-patient communication and doctor-doctor consultation. To build their professional vocabulary for this purpose, students process medical topics on anatomical systems and disorders using authentic texts and give team presentations in class. The main assignment of the third module is integrated with the clinical psychology groupwork. Each group of students, led by a clinical psychologist, explores one particular topic in Finnish, for which students also read some literature in English. The topics include, among others, regulation of emotions, coping with pain and trauma, and the well-being of medical practitioners. The integrated assignment in the Medical English course is based on the same topics. Regarding language skills, this assignment builds on the summary writing activity in Module 1. Using skills of scientific reporting succinctly, students in the ESAP course work in the same groups formed in the clinical psychology course. The groups create a brief presentation on their own topic and explain it using a multimodal medium, a poster as such, in a simulated conference. In the course design, this conference assignment is identified as scientific reporting (Figure 1). In addition to using English for professional and academic purposes, this assignment supports transferable skills such as leadership skills, time management, creativity, analytical reasoning, and critical thinking, among others, which they will need in their future working lives.

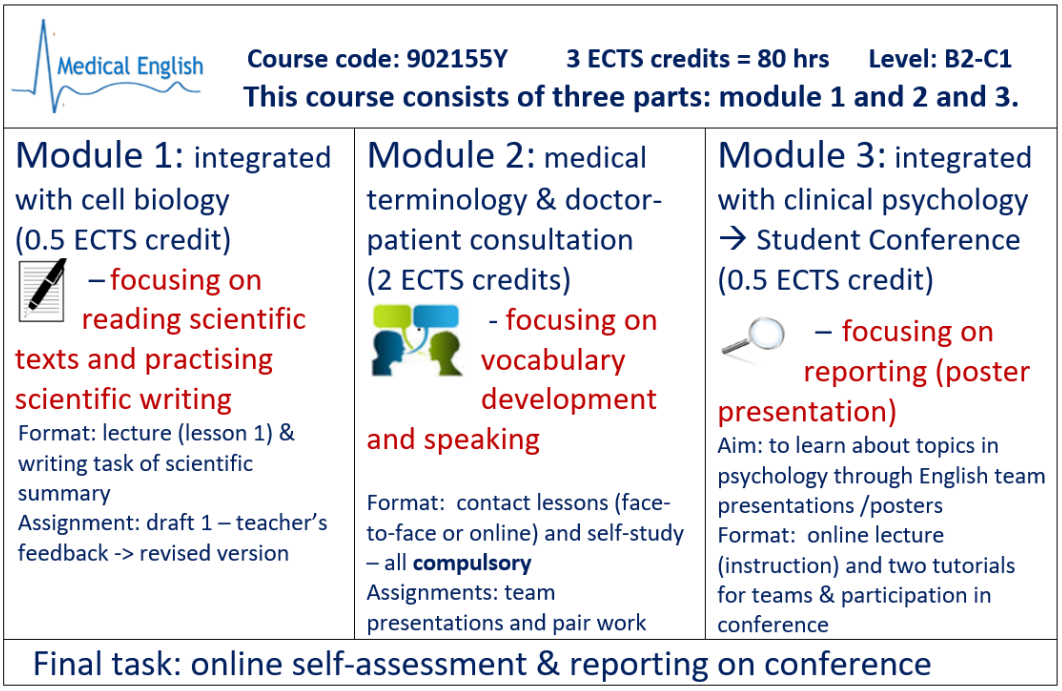

Figure 1. Course design of Medical English: extent, level, aims and components.

These assignments in the Medical English modules (Figure 1), which have been created as a follow-up to the Finnish medium subject courses, are grounded in the CLIL approach. The model is what Bentley identifies as soft CLIL, which is a language-led approach to content learning, where "some curricular topics are taught during a language course" (2010: 6). The model is based on finding certain areas and assignments in subject courses which students can revise and extend in the foreign language and, thus, enhance their learning of the subject. Enhancing subject knowledge while using English is particularly relevant in Module 3. Integrating the clinical psychology group discussions, which are carried out in

Finnish, in other words, Language A [3](LA), with an assignment in the Medical English course boosts students' subject knowledge. The reporting in the ESAP course on their psychology topic in English, which is Language B (LB) in this case, and the various language and communication skills applied in the process enhance students' learning and will lead to higher level cognitive processes identified in Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al. 2001); see Figure 2. Switching from LA to LB is the core element of these activities, and are clearly tasks based on the use of cross-linguistic mediation.

The CLIL approach used in the ESAP course creates the framework for supporting students' higher-level learning. The assignment is to prepare a poster presentation in groups on a pre-selected topic. Preparing a presentation and participating in the conference, requires the use of various learning strategies including mediation and communication skills. Figure 2 demonstrates the various stages of learning students accomplish when reporting their work in English in the simulated conference. Stage 1-remembering: preparing for the conference starts with recalling subject knowledge acquired in the subject course. Stage 2-understanding: what does the assignment mean? What is the purpose of the conference? How do we structure and convey information in a conference? How can we work on this as a team? How can we divide the workload? To answer these questions, students use support provided by the teachers: model example posters, analysis of English conference posters, text structure, design features, presenting a poster, relevant vocabulary, style guide, etc. In Stage 3, students apply language skills while mediating the content acquired in Finnish and English to the genre of the poster. They use mediation skills corresponding to the CEFR mediation scales, described explicitly in Figure 3. In Stage 4, while preparing the poster presentation students need to analyze the communicative situation: what is the difference between the text of the poster and the presentation of the poster? In other words: mediating between written and spoken production and referencing visual data. Additionally, they must also consider the aim of the conference: to learn about clinical psychology topics other than their own. Thus, in Stage 5, they will have to evaluate the affordances of the medium (poster and its presentation) and their own knowledge of the psychology topic. Once they have followed this process, they reach the ultimate goal, Stage 6, which is creating a poster presentation, when they can demonstrate their higher-level learning. Figure 2 also presents a list of the scaffolding tools teachers use to support students in this process.

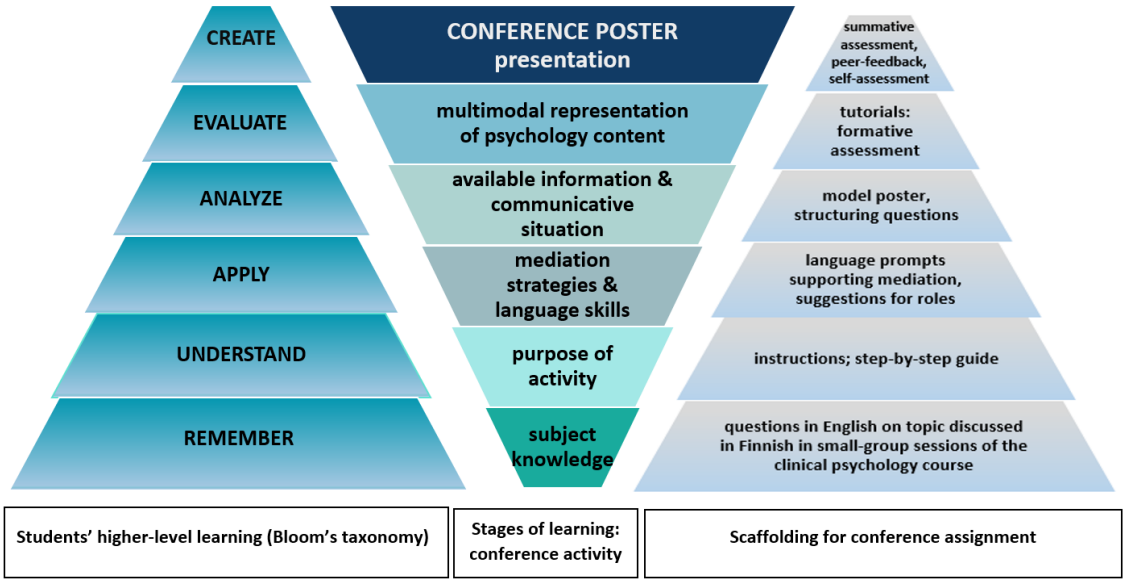

Figure 2. Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001) adapted for the Medical English conference assignment (Module 3)

3. The terms 'Language A' (source language) and 'Language B' (target language) are used in accordance with CEFR CV (2018).

1.2 Medical English as situated social practice: the role of mediation

The concept of mediation was briefly introduced in the Common European Framework in 2001 (Council of Europe 2001). The Companion Volume (CV) (2018) expanded the concept and introduced three categories with scales and descriptors: mediating a text, mediating communication, and mediating concepts. Moreover, five scales of mediation strategies were presented: explaining a new concept by linking to previous knowledge, breaking down complicated information, adapting language, and strategies to simplify a text by either amplifying and/or streamlining it.

The Medical English course draws upon various pedagogical traditions; Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, the concept of social negotiation and scaffolding, and Bandura's social learning theory. As Piccardo, North and Goodier (2019) point out, the complex concept of mediation which sees the learner as a social agent, also draws upon these socio-cultural theories. In this course, students simultaneously practise mediation activities from all three categories. The conference assignment provides an authentic experience through simulation of a real-life event, which is a training method commonly used in medical education. Participating in the conference, "the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning" (Council of Europe 2018), sometimes within the same language [especially during team collaboration], sometimes from one language to another.

The simulated conference follows the traditional conference structure: 20-minute presentations followed by 10-minute Q&A discussions. Each team member can choose from various duties and roles: presenter, team leader, design expert, script writer, researcher, editor. Prior to the conference, each team must participate in two tutorials, which serve as the scaffolding for this student-led activity. In the tutorials, the teams present the first and second draft of their posters and rehearse the presentation. They get informal feedback both on their poster and the presentation from the teacher as formative assessment of the assignment. On the conference day, the students give electronic peer-feedback to the presenters in English, while the posters and the presentations are assessed by the psychology and ESAP teachers, who monitor the conference and give overall feedback at the end of the conference. In addition to the initial collaboration in planning the integration, the teachers cooperate each year in formulating the conference assignment; they identify the psychology topics to be used for the conference activity, and then at the end, when they evaluate the conference.

In the annual revision of the course design, the Can-Do descriptors offered in the CV were taken into consideration and adapted when we formulated the conference assignment. We analysed the Can Do descriptors of "relaying specific information", "processing text", "explaining data", "translating a written text", and "note-taking" mediation scales both in speech and writing. As the level of our medical students is B2-C1, we used the B2+ statements when available to specify the objectives of the assignment (Table 1). In this process, we also acknowledged that some scales are more permanent, *dominant scales*, e.g., "relaying information in speech/writing" and "processing information in speech/writing" than others, the *supplementary scales*, such as "explaining data", "translation" and "note-taking", due to the variety of materials students had to process.

Table 1. ***Medical English Course (Module 3) – Can Do mediation statements***

Relaying specific information in speech / writing (dominant mediation scale)
Based on the selected clinical psychology topic, students can:
• relay relevant academic points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups to an academic poster from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
• relay relevant academic points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups to a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
Processing text in speech / writing (dominant mediation scale)
Based on the selected clinical psychology topic, students can:
• summarize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in an academic poster from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
• summarize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
• compare, contrast and synthesize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in an academic poster from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
• compare, contrast and synthesize the main points of presentations and materials discussed in the Clinical psychology groups in a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
• explain various viewpoints presented in the Clinical psychology groups through a cientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
• explain the main viewpoints presented in the Clinical psychology poster through a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
Explaining data (e.g. ingraphs, diagrams, charts etc.) in speech (supplementary mediation scale)
Based on the selected clinical psychology topic, students can:
• interpret and describe diagrams/graphs/bar chart discussed in the Clinical psychology groups during a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
• interpret and describe visual data included in academic research during a scientific presentation from Finnish and/or English (LA) to English (LB).
Translating a written text in speech / in writing (supplementary mediation scale)
• Students can translate the key terms of the Clinical Psychology course from Finnish (LA) to English (LB).
Note taking (supplementary mediation scale)
• Students can take notes on points which strike them as important during the two tutorials from English (LA) to Finnish and/English (LB).

The conference as a course activity is designed as an induction into professional life, in line with the law on language education in HE in Finland. However, at the planning stage we were unaware that the replication of work life experience, namely the conference setting, would pose a significant challenge in the Covid-19 pandemic. The following sections discuss our solution and students' reactions.

1.3 Solutions during the Covid-19 pandemic

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face teaching was cancelled, and courses transferred to online meetings in the second week of March 2020. This meant that the conference, scheduled for 8-9 May 2020, was in danger of being postponed or cancelled. While the traditional components of the Medical English course, Module 2 (language of doctor-patient consultation) were adopted to the online mode relatively smoothly, this was not the case for the group discussions in the psychology course. Since the psychologists leading the group discussions work in the clinical setting, and as hospitals were restricted

to essential patient care, they had to cancel the lessons. Consequently, the teachers in the Medical English course resorted to a solution that drew upon the mediation strategies and skills students had already practiced in Module 1. Since students did not get instruction in the subject course, we requested relevant materials from the psychologists for the students to use. These texts were a mixed bag of Finnish and English articles, web-based sources, and recordings in Finnish made by the psychologists. This time when preparing for their conference presentation, students had to use all the mediation strategies mentioned above. We hoped that this 'repetition' of all mediation strategies and activities they had practiced in previous modules of the course would lead to a better understanding of the topics and improved competence in professional communication.

In addition to securing appropriate source texts, organizing a conference in a virtual setting posed another challenge. The solution we found was a hybrid method: asynchronous presentations followed by synchronous Q&A forum in Moodle. This meant that the students had to create their posters and record their presentations, which had an added value: participants could listen to the recorded presentations at their own pace, several times if needed. The conference presentations were available within a given time frame over two afternoons. During that time, the presenting teams took turns in 'manning their stations' and answering online in real-time as they were posted to the forum attached to each poster. ESAP teachers monitored the process and intervened when needed (called for answers). This hybrid model allowed participants to learn about specific clinical psychology topics within the ESAP course framework, which they otherwise would not have known.

2 Methodology

The scope of this article is students' perceptions of the mediation tasks (team presentations, conference poster creation and poster presentations) included in Module 2 and 3 during the 2019-2020 academic year. This research paper builds on a previous research report of the 2018-2019 student cohort, presented at the EALTA 2019 conference. A comparison of the two cohorts is presented in the Discussion section. In this study, we set out to investigate the following research questions:

1. How did students perceive the mediation activities (team presentations, conference poster creation and poster presentations) completed in Module 2-3 in the 2019-2020 academic year?
2. How did students cope with these mediation activities during the Covid-19 pandemic?

To address these research questions, a mixed-method design was chosen as the most suitable for a multi-purposed research study (Bryman 2012; Thomas 2009). We prepared a self-assessment questionnaire, which students answered at the end of the Medical English course. The course participants (2019-2020 student cohort) submitted the answers following the conference in May 2020. Including both question types (Likert-scale and open-ended questions) was meant to enable self-reflection and provide a deeper understanding of the tasks, a strong asset of mixed methods in social research (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). While answering the questions, students reflected on their learning progress through the course modules and the unique circumstances caused by the pandemic.

Regarding the analysis of the first research question, descriptive statistics were used to report students' perceptions of the tasks (Module 2-3) and the acquired skills. Potential correlations of the opinions regarding face-to-face team presentations (Module 2), the conference conducted online due to the pandemic (Module 3), and the acquired skills were investigated through Pearson Chi-square tests, a measure of association between two variables. Chi-square tests can also indicate how strong the relationship is between the variables to some extent (Blaikie 2003). Similarly, to answer the second research question, descriptive statistics and Pearson Chi-square tests were used for the same reasons. We correlated the difficulty posed by the online mode of the conference with the students' perceptions of the mediation tasks in Module 3 and the perceived acquired skills. The current case study falls into the category of explanatory design, "where the prime purpose is to provide causal explanations of phenomena" (Robson 2011:525). The open-ended questions allowed the participants to elaborate and

subsequently enrich the numbers extracted from the quantitative part of the questionnaire (Creswell and Plano 2011; O'Leary 2010). Thematic text analysis of the open-ended questions provided further answers to the research questions. Acknowledging that the findings could be contradictory and the analysis time-consuming, especially when a large number of responses are involved, double-blind coding of the data by two researchers enhanced the internal validity of the study and minimized the risk of subjectivity by promoting investigator triangulation (Bryman 2012; Thomas 2009; Wellington 2000).

3 Analysis

The sample was based on 188 first-year medicine and dentistry students (94% of the overall sample). Of these, 135 students were females (72%) and 53 males (28%).

3.1 Research Q1: Quantitative analysis

In the first part of the analysis, we present the quantitative data collected for the first research question. Particularly, the focus is on students' perceptions regarding the mediation activities (e.g team presentations, conference poster creation and poster presentations) in Module 2-3. Table 2 demonstrates that team presentations on medical topics carried out face-to-face in class (Module 2) were perceived as a useful task by many students (M=3.79, SD=1.32); similarly, presentations in the conference, were perceived positively by most (M=3.2, SD=1.056).

Regarding the preparation for the conference (Table 3), an almost even number of students (roughly 14%) selected the two extreme options of evaluation (working on the presentation was very useful: worth it / working on the presentation was too time-consuming: not worth it). Half of the students (55.8%) considered that attending the conference and listening to the presentations was beneficial. This response was also highlighted in the students' comments on the acquired skills (open-ended questions); which is presented later in the qualitative part of this study.

Table 2. *Self-assessment questionnaire in Medical English – overall impressions*

Questions	Mean	SD	SE
What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates? (1: not useful at all- 5: very useful)	3.79	1.032	0.075
What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? (1: not useful at all- 5: very useful)	3.20	1.056	0.077

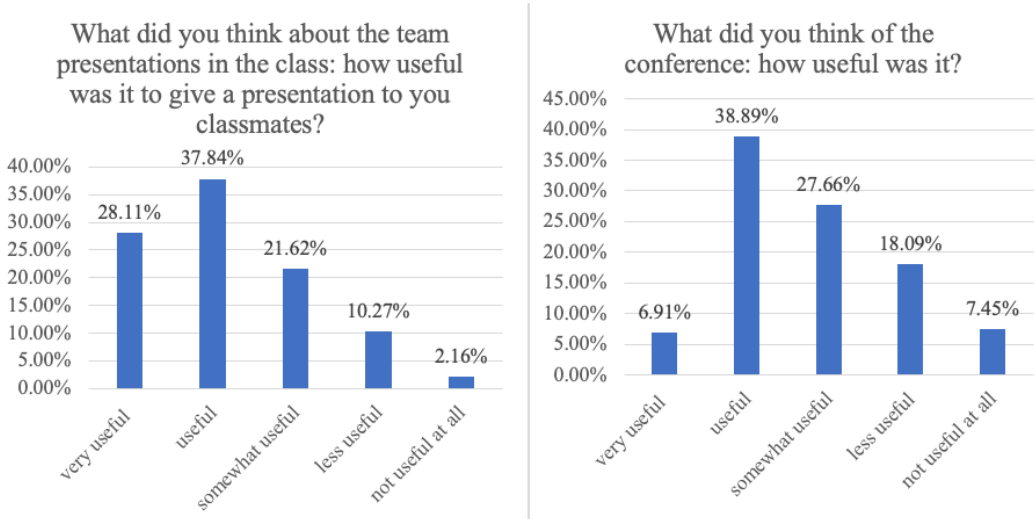

Figure 3. Illustrations of Table 2

Table 3. *Self-assessment questionnaire in Medical English – conference satisfaction*

Did you find:	**%**
the conference better than expected	38.8%
the conference not as good as expected	17.5%
the conference a good solution in the coronavirus situation	78.1%
the conference more demanding than expected but worth it	13.8%
participating in conference (Moodle) was too time-consuming: not worth it	9%
the tasks easier to do than first thought	43%
working on the presentation was very useful: worth it	14.8%
working on the presentation was too time-consuming: not worth it	14.3%
listening to the various topics was very useful	55.8%
listening to the various topics was not as useful as expected	17.5%
that the posters gave enough information: no need for the audio	16.4%
Other	7.4%

Pearson chi-squared correlations

Three Pearson chi-squared tests were applied to investigate a correlation between the students' opinions regarding the usefulness of face-to-face team presentations in Module 2 and the useful aspects of the conference (acquired skills). We found a positive correlation (0.027<0.05), between the aspects the students considered useful in the conference (Module 3) and the usefulness of the face-to-face presentations in Module 2 (Table 4). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The more positive responses students shared about the face-to-face presentations, the more useful they found the various skills they acquired from the conference assignment. Additionally, we used Pearson chi-squared correlations between the usefulness of the conference, the useful aspects of the conference (acquired skills), and the usefulness of face-to-face presentations in Module 2 (Table 5). As we can see, only the opinions regarding the usefulness of the classroom team presentations in Module 2 were correlated to the usefulness of the conference (Pearson chi-squared test: 0.000<0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Specifically, there was a linear relationship between the two variables since the Linear-by-Linear Association value was 0 (<0.05) (Table 5), which means that the relationship between the two variables would be presented as a a straight-line in a graph (Blaikie 2003).The students who found the conference useful also considered the team presentations in class useful.

Table 4. *Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses to the useful aspects of the conference (acquired skills) and team presentations in class*

Crosstab: Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology- What did you find useful in the conference? * What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates							
% of Total							
		What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates?					Total
		not useful at all	less useful	somewhat useful	useful	very useful	
Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology- What did you find useful in the conference?	language skills		2.7%	2.2%	4.3%		9.2%
	cognitive skills	1.6%	4.3%	16.2%	23.8 %	16.8%	62.7%
	learner autonomy			0.5%	1.6%	3.2%	5.4%
	transferable skills	0.5%	3.2%	2.7%	8.1%	8.1%	22.7%
Total		2.2%	10.3%	21.6%	37.8 %	28.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.113[a]	12	.027
Likelihood Ratio	27.023	12	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.544	1	.060
N of Valid Cases	185		

Table 5. *Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses to usefulness of and relevance of the conference (acquired skills)/ Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses to usefulness of the conference and team presentations in class*

What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? * Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology What did you find useful in the conference? Crosstabulation						**What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? * What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates? Crosstabulation**					
What did you think of the conference: how useful was it?	Module 3: reporting about clinical psychology-What did you find useful in the conference?					What did you think about the team presentations in the class: how useful was it to give a presentation to you classmates?					
	language skills	subject knowledge	learner autonomy	Transferable skills	Total	not useful at all	less useful	somewhat useful	useful	very useful	Total
not useful at all	1.1%	5.3%		1.1%	7.5%	1.1%	2.2%	2.2%	1.6%	0.5%	7.6%
less useful	1.1%	10.6%	0.5%	5.9%	18.1%	0.5%	3.2%	4.9%	5.9%	3.8%	18.4%
useful	4.3%	16.5%	1.1%	5.9%	27.8%		3.2%	6.5%	14.1%	4.3%	28.1%
somewhat useful	2.7%	26.1%	3.2%	8.0%	39.9%	0.5%	1.6%	7.6%	15.7%	14.1%	39.5%
very useful		4.8%	0.5%	1.6%	6.9%			0.5%	0.5%	5.4%	6.5%
Total	9.0%	63.3%	5.3%	22.3%	100%	2.2%	10.3%	21.6%	37.8%	28.1%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)			
Pearson Chi-Square	9.866a	12	.628			49.984a	16	.000			
Likelihood Ratio	11.232	12	.509			44.748	16	.000			
Linear-by-Linear Association	.089	1	.766			28.776	1	.000			
N of Valid Cases	188					185					

3.2 RQ1: Qualitative analysis

Four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the open-ended question "Reporting about clinical psychology: What did you find useful in the conference?": 1) subject knowledge, 2) transferable skills, 3) language skills, and 4) learner autonomy.

Subject course knowledge

Based on the responses, 'learning their subject' was the most prevalent benefit of the conference. The students mainly focused on the connection of the conference with the topics taught in the Clinical Psychology course. Since the students did not have the opportunity to learn about all the topics, they recognized that the conference was an alternative way to familiarize themselves with them intensively.

For example:

- "*Some of the presentations were really informative and useful. I got new information about really important topics*" (student no. 77)
- *"Great posters combined with the audio was great*." (student no. 159)
- *"Hearing about topics that maybe I wouldn't have dug that deep into on my own time."* (student no. 1)
- *"The posters were short and informative, so it was easy and interesting to study"* (student no. 5)

Some of the respondents were more specific on which presentations they appreciated the most, such as: *"Things about (doctor's) burnout, like risk factors and how to avoid it."* (student no. 160) and *"I learned about diseases, terms and some health conditions that are common with Finns"* (student no. 183). In both cases, they found the topics meaningful because they could relate to them. Moreover, some of the students also reflected on this year's exceptional circumstances acknowledging that they would not have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the topics otherwise. The responses of the following students can be seen as representative examples: "*I learnt a lot about our topic and found it very interesting. Especially since we didn't get the chance to participate in the psychology group teaching, I felt like this compensated for it a bit*" (student no. 34) and, "*I learnt about the topics that we didn't study at the psychology course due to coronavirus"* (student no. 72).

Transferable skills

Transferable skills have been described as "generic personal and interpersonal qualities which are independent of the field of study" (Jones 2013). On a macro-level, the students saw a clear link between the transferable skills which were acquired during the conference assignment and their future profession. They reflected on the authenticity of the mediation tasks by acknowledging that they could encounter a similar situation in their professional life. For example:

- *"preparing presentations and presenting medical topics to professionals"* (student no. 116)
- *"Learned how to participate in an e-conference"* (student no. 121)
- *"Learning how an online conference might work."* (student no. 123)
- *"It made me think about the different things I read and how they affect me in my life and/or future work."* (student no. 5)

On a micro-level, students identified the application of critical-thinking skills by making decisions about their own posters and scripts, evaluating others' posters and understanding the criteria of a good scientific poster. The students reflected on the procedures and the decisions that they had to make. Their answers echoed both the "mediation strategies to explain a new concept" and "to simplify a text". Some of the responses mentioned the special circumstances and skills they acquired thanks to the conference's online features. Some examples were the following:

- *"I learned how posters are made and how to get the most out of them by listening to all of them and comparing them between each other."* (student no. 3)
- *"It was useful to do the poster and put ONLY the most important things on it and then decide what more to tell in the script."* (student no. 22)
- *"It was good to learn what a good poster should be like."* (student no. 49)
- *"It was useful to learn how are the scientific posters look like and how can posters be made in English."* (student no. 185)
- *"I learned how to add a recording to a PPT, I have never done that before. A very useful new thing to learn."* (student no. 119)
- "*I think the students had cropped the topics really well. They highlighted the most important parts of each topic well*." (student no. 79)
- *"At the conference, it was good to note the presentation of the different students. Live performances would probably have been much more rewarding, but the situation was what it was"* (student no. 9)

A number of students also commented on the development of team-working skills and giving feedback as positive outcomes of the conference. For example, student no. 50 said: *"Overall, I think it was a great way of teaching us teamwork- related skills. I found it more useful in that aspect than in psychology's aspect. However, it was a good way to teach us the main points about other groups' topic in psychology. So, I'll give this thumbs up".* Regarding online teamwork, student no. 61 acknowledged: *"I learned how to work in a group better, even when we couldn't meet in person. Also, I learned a lot about my own topic, chronic pain."*

Language skills

Only a few students stressed the importance of the conference regarding language skills. They focused primarily on listening and then, vocabulary and writing. Some of the replies were general such as:

- *"listening comprehension developed"* (student no. 87)
- *"It helped me to listen and understand the spoken medical English."* (student no. 147)
- *"Audio listening was great."* (student no. 167)

Additionally, student no. 139 praised the speakers' diversity "*It was nice to hear many different kinds of speakers*". Student no. 144 emphasized the importance of activating their listening and oral skills *"I had to work with text and pronouncing"*. Regarding vocabulary development and writing, they pointed out the opportunity to learn more medical terminology. The following extracts are examples of their use of cross-linguistic mediation for the event. For instance:

- "*Really good idea to combine the [psychology] topics with the medical English course so that you can learn some new medical English terminology at the same time*" (student no. 7)
- "*I learned more about scientific writing*" (student no. 188)
- "*Learning to write very short texts*" (student no. 99)

Learner autonomy

A minor but still interesting theme that emerged was the independence the students enjoyed due to the pandemic. Due to the asynchronous online delivery of the conference, they could choose to listen to several presentations based on their interests. Students expressed their appreciation for this kind of flexibility. In their opinion, this mode of learning allowed them to control and adjust the pace of their learning, something that would not be possible during a traditional conference.

- *"I liked the fact that I got to choose which presentations I want to listen to."* (student no. 26)
- *"It was good that I could spend certain time for each presentation: some were more difficult to understand, so I used more time on those. So, what I am trying to say is that it was good that I could choose myself how*

much I spend on each presentation and quiz." (student no. 29)

- *"Maybe the fact that I could choose 4 most interesting topics to me."* (student no. 37)
- *"As the presentations were in Moodle, it was easy to watch them as you could pause them and watch again if some information was missed."* (student no. 104)

3.3 RQ2: Special circumstances (Covid-19 pandemic)

As presented in both Table 6 and Figure 3, the vast majority did not report significant difficulties (M=2.21, SD=1.151) regarding the special circumstances imposed by the pandemic. Only a small percentage of the respondents (13.83%) found the transition from face-to-face to online mode difficult. Moreover, in the multiple-choice option (Table 3) students revealed that they found the conference better than expected (38.8%) and only less than a quarter of the participants (17.5%) reported their disappointment. Overall, the vast majority acknowledged that the online conference was the right solution during the pandemic (78.1%), while very few found the conference too time-consuming and not worth participating in (9%).

Table 6. *Self-assessment questionnaire in Medical English – special circumstances*

Questions	Mean	SD	SE
How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings? (1: not difficult - 5: very difficult)	2.21	1.151	0.083

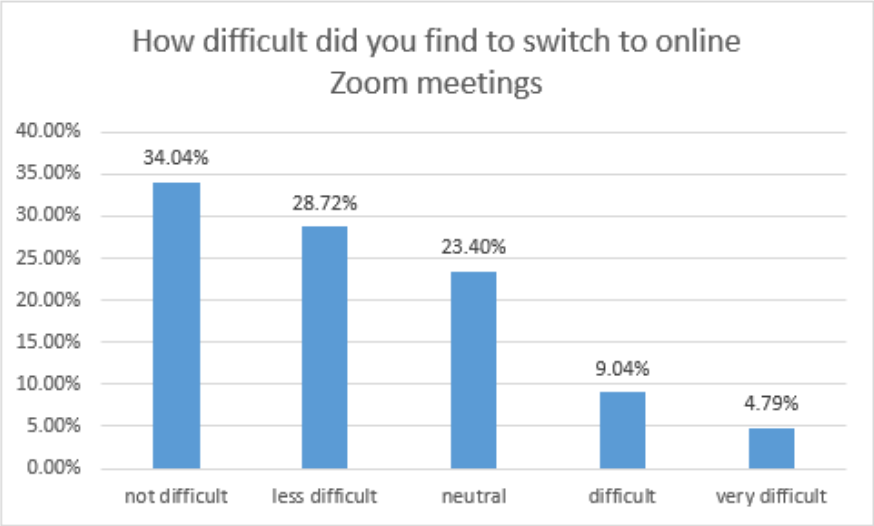

Figure 4. Illustration of Table 5

The combined results in Table 7 illustrate that there was no correlation between the difficulties caused by the online mode and the opinions about the usefulness of the conference or the aspects the students found useful in Module 3. In Table 7, the Pearson Chi-square values were over 0.05 (0.250> 0.05 and 0.337> 0.05). Taking these facts into consideration, the null hypothesis was accepted, and the values are considered independent.

Table 7. ***Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses regarding the special circumstances and usefulness of the conference / Pearson chi-Square analysis: responses regarding the special circumstances and useful aspects of the conference***

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES (coronavirus). How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings?* What did you think of the conference: how useful was it? Crosstabulation							**SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES (coronavirus). How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings?* Module 3: What did you find useful in the conference? Crosstabulation**				
How difficult did you find to switch to online Zoom meetings?	What did you think of the conference: how useful was it?						Module 3: What did you find useful in the conference?				
	not useful at all	less useful	useful	somewhat useful	very useful	Total	language skills	subject knowledge	learner autonomy	transferable skills	Total
not difficult	4.3%	3.7%	9.6%	12.8%	3.7%	34.4%	2.1%	20.7%	1.6%	9,6%	34.0%
less difficult	0.5%	4.8%	8.5%	13.3%	1.6%	28.7%	3.7%	18.1%	0.5%	6.4%	28.7%
neutral	1.6%	5.9%	6.4%	8.5%	1.1%	23.4%	2.7%	14.4%	2.1%	4.3%	23.4%
difficult		2.1%	3.2%	3.2%	0.5%	9.0%	0.5%	6.9%		1.6%	9.0%
very difficult	1.1%	1.6%		2.1%		4.8%		3.2%	1.1%	0.5%	4.8%
Total	7.4%	18.1%	27.7%	39.9%	6.9%	100%	9.0%	63.3%	5.3%	22.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.359a	16	.250	13.458a	12	.337
Likelihood Ratio	23.130	16	.110	13.242	12	.352
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.669	1	.196	1.009	1	.315
N of Valid Cases	188			188		

4 Discussion

Mediation, according to Coste and Cavalli (2015: 15), can be regarded "either as aiming to provide access to information and knowledge and to competence building (cognitive mediation) or as contributing to interaction, the quality of exchanges and the resolution of conflicts (relational mediation)". By analyzing the students' responses in the self-assessment questionnaire, we aimed to investigate how students on the Medical English course perceived various mediation activities (face-to-face team presentations, conference poster creation, and conference presentation) as part of their learning and development, and how the pandemic affected their perceptions.

Focusing on the first research question "How did students perceive the mediation activities (team presentations, conference posters creations and poster presentations) as part of Module 2-3 in the 2019-2020 academic year?", we found that students recognized the benefits of the activities. The responses were mostly positive for all mediation tasks. A positive correlation was found between the usefulness of the face-to-face team presentations of medical topics in Module 2, and the conference presentations in Module 3. An explanation for this could be students' familiarity with the medical and psychology topics, which gave the appropriate context for the students to select and present relevant information (Zrníková and Bujalková, 2018), as well as the scaffolding that promoted cognitive mediation in the Medical English course (Coste and Cavalli 2015:15). We also identified four main themes regarding the students' perceptions of the mediation tasks in the course: subject course knowledge (63.3%), transferable skills (22.34%), language skills (9.04%), and learner autonomy (5.32%). The findings appear to be in agreement with another study (Pavlovskaya and Lankina 2019), which highlights that mediation combines language proficiency with transferable skills associated with professional knowledge and future employability.

In higher proficiency levels (B2-C1), course activities generally involve a wider range of genres and discourses which students must mediate to complete the task (Stathopoulou 2020). This conference indeed is such a course component, which stimulates mediation skills. Most respondents recognized the mediation products (poster creation/presentation) as the most significant contributors to their

development, especially related to subject knowledge and transferable skills. Moreover, their responses seemed to focus primarily on the mediation products rather than on language learning. This clearly resonates with the action-oriented approach introduced in the CV, which emphasizes "purposeful, collaborative tasks, whose primary focus is not language" (2018: 27). The role of mediation in the course was multi-functional; creating a relationship between the learner and teachers, the learner with other learners, and with the materials (Beacco et al. 2016). No consensus was found regarding the most useful part of the conference. However, all students' responses regarding the presentations and posters can be clearly linked to the mediation strategies and scales and/or authenticity of the mediation task. Specifically, many examples of mediation strategies such as "linking to previous knowledge, adapting language, and streamlining a text" (COE 2020a: 90) according to the requirements of the poster as a new genre, were identified under the transferable skills theme. The students reflected on the procedures and the decisions they had to make. Many commented on the adaptation of language based on the audience and product. Their answers reveal that the students perceived the assignment as a combination of mediation strategies and tasks; which confirms that the task follows Stathopoulou's recommendation (2015) that the mediation activity and its strategies should be utilized simultaneously as they complement each other.

Regarding the second research question "How did students cope with the mediation activities during the Covid-19 pandemic?", our findings demonstrate that most students felt they benefited from participating in the conference and that the online solution was a successful alternative during the pandemic. Compared to the 2018-2019 student cohort about which we reported in the 2019 EALTA Conference, the views of the 2020 cohort were slightly more positive regarding the usefulness of the conference. The mean value of the 2019 cohort answers was 3.19, while in 2020, the value was 3.2. This demonstrates that the pandemic and its consequences did not negatively affect the students' perceptions of the usefulness of the mediation activities. Hence, we can conclude that the online solution achieved the original aim of the conference assignment: higher learning through mediation. This notion is supported by the Pearson Chi-square value, which showed no correlation between the aspects found useful in the conference and difficulties expressed regarding the online mode. Additionally, the low number (14%) of students who found it difficult to switch to online sessions and the high number (78.1%) of those accepting overall the online conference as a good solution during the pandemic indicate that students adapted quickly to the virtual model. This finding also emerged from the open-ended questions. This is in line with recent studies reporting the students' positive perceptions of the online teaching-learning offered during the pandemic (Mishra et al 2020). Another explanation for overall satisfaction with the online delivery could be a generational characteristic: Generation Z, the internet generation, displays a willingness and ability to communicate online and operate in a virtual environment from a young age (Yawson and Yamoah 2020).

5 Conclusion

This study has implications for designing language and content integrated courses in HE settings utilizing mediation activities. The findings of this research give voice to students' perceptions regarding the mediation tasks, a view that is often neglected in research. Additionally, this study can inform ESAP practice in medical education. Overall, students' responses regarding the usefulness of the conference assignment seem to highlight the benefit of mediation, which according to Dendrinos, is "a purposeful social practice, aiming at the interpretation of (social) meanings which are then to be communicated/relayed to others" (2006: 12). Respondents also acknowledged that participating in the conference clearly enhanced their subject learning and facilitated higher-level cognitive processes, which is obviously due to the soft-CLIL course design. Acknowledging the benefits to students' learning and their satisfaction, the teachers, however, experienced the solution as a considerable challenge with an increased workload, primarily due to the unprecedented circumstances. This contradiction is similar to the difficulties reported in another CLIL/ESAP course (Braidwood and Hirvonen-Kantola 2018). Compared to other

studies using an adapted version of the Can Do mediation statements in class (Saito 2020; Schmidt and Head 2020), we considered that applying open-ended questions in the self-assessment form would stimulate a deeper understanding of the students' experiences of the processes that mediation activities involve. However, in future we will include certain examples of Can Do mediation statements in the self-assessment form after the open-ended questions to facilitate further exploration of the conference assignment. Regarding the research methodology, one limitation we identified in the use of open-ended questions was that many students misunderstood the purpose of the self-assessment questionnaire and used it as a tool for providing feedback on the course design, which is possibly due to the widespread practice of giving feedback within HE and outside, particularly in Finnish healthcare. Therefore, we think that elements of self-assessment must be introduced at earlier stages of the course. Such tasks could complement peer-feedback, raise awareness of the benefits of self-monitoring the learning progress, and consequently the course will also foster students' metacognitive skills.

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7 Authors' Contributions

The authors have contributed equally to this study.

8 Biographies

Magdalini Liontou works as a PhD researcher focusing on language assessment at the University of Jyväskylä and as an ESP teacher at the University of Oulu. She is interested in the cultural perspective of assessment, language mediation and inclusive pedagogy. She has also co-authored the book "Scientific Communication in English" for an ESP course taught at Nanjing Institute of Technology (China). Currently, she is the communication member in the "Mediation in Teaching, Learning and Assessment" (ME.T.L.A.) project at the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) regarding cross-linguistic mediation and the "Fostering the doctor of the 21st century" (For21) Erasmus+ project.

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