



Supporting Language Development of Children with an Immigrant Background in Early Childhood Education

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The purpose of this thesis was to study the linguistic development of children, especially the linguistic development of children with an immigrant background and how language development can be supported in early childhood education. The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of language development and acquisition, linguistic and cultural diversity in early childhood education, including the psychological perspective, bilingualism and multilingualism. The target group for this thesis was children in early childhood. The aim was to provide ways to support the language of children with an immigrant background for those working in early childhood education and others interested in supporting language development.

The thesis followed the form of a qualitative, descriptive literature review. The research questions that formed the basis of the thesis were: *What is the language development like in early childhood for children who have an immigrant background and what kind of means can be utilized in a linguistically and culturally diverse early childhood education to support language development?* Data search was done through Laurea Libguides social services databases. Five research articles created the framework for the analysis process. Literature review data was analyzed by data-driven content analysis.

The results provided an overview of how multilingualism, multiculturalism and immigration issues should be better integrated into early childhood education plans. Educating educators about multiculturalism and diversity is also important in supporting children's linguistic development. Another factor in the results was the importance of supporting the child's native language. Cooperation with parents was an issue that emerged and the substantial role of early childhood educators in supporting the language development of children with an immigrant background in particular; language support should be sufficiently frequent, regular and individual.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Immigrant Children, Language Development, Support

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1 Introduction

Children grow up in a culturally, linguistically and ideologically diverse world where the importance of cultural competence and social and interaction skills are emphasized. Such competence includes the ability to listen, identify and understand different views as well as the ability to reflect on your own values and attitudes. Interaction skills, the ability to express oneself and understand others are important for identity, functioning and well-being. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2018, 25.)

The aim of this thesis is to study language development of children with an immigrant background and how it could best be supported in early childhood. I chose this topic because it is current and interests me through my own experiences personally, studies and working life experiences. The purpose is also to emphasize linguistic and cultural diversity and how to integrate them into high quality early childhood education. I wanted to do research through a literature review on how to support both children and families. Quite a lot of research and theses have been carried out on language development and support in general and language development of bilingual children, but not so much about language support of children with an immigrant background.

It is especially important to support the language development and acquisition of children with an immigrant background in the early childhood education. Language development also supports other development and adaptation to a new environment. In addition, involving the whole family to the operation of the early childhood education could support integration of the whole family. Many things affect the development of language, such as whether a child of immigrant parents was born in Finland or a child has just immigrated. The favorable development of language helps the child in forming social relationships and communicating with others. Indeed, language learning is an important part of development, which is also connected to other developmental areas. Studies show that propitious language development in childhood promotes later development and learning. It often has a lifelong impact.

Early childhood educators operate on the basis of laws and regulations, in accordance with the criteria and plans of the early childhood education plan. The aim of this thesis is to study language development in early childhood of children with an immigrant background and the role of the early childhood educators in language education by means of a literature review. The goal is to get results that provide ways to support language development in early childhood. Knowledge of language development and the factors that influence it strengthens our professionalism when working with children.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will introduce the theoretical framework related to my topic. I will explain the key concepts of my research questions more specifically in order to create a clear picture of the subject. At first, I will present language development, acquisition, and psychology. Then I will discuss early childhood education in Finland, regulations guiding it and what kind of changes and development leaps it recently has gone through. In addition, I will also elaborate on bilingualism, multilingualism, cultural and linguistic diversity and children with an immigrant background. The topics are broad and I reflect on them mainly from the perspective of early childhood education.

2.1 Language Development and Acquisition

Language is a spoken, written, or signed form of communication based on a system of symbols. All the words and rules used by a community, as well as the rules for varying and combining them, constitute a language. A significant part of language processing takes place in the left hemisphere of the brain. In early childhood, the advances of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics is continuous. Phonology means the sound system of language and morphology refers to how words are formed. The way words are combined to form acceptable phrases and sentences is syntax. The appropriate use of language in different contexts is pragmatics. Semantics contains the meaning of words and sentences. (Santrock, Deater-Deckard & Lansford 2020, 268-269.) According to Pietilä & Lintunen (2014), language is a system of communication with which to express thoughts both orally and in writing. It is used in communicating or seeking to influence other people. In the context of language skills, the sum of four sub-skills is sometimes used: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Writing and reading are related to written language while speaking and listening are related to spoken language. (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014, 20-22.)

In general, a child's language skills develop in line with other social and linguistic-cognitive skills (e.g., memory, attention, mind theory, emotion recognition, reasoning, formal language subsystems) if a child does not have specific developmental challenges and is allowed to grow in a normal, sufficiently good environment of interaction and language. Language skills can be seen as a whole, influenced by different areas of development. Similarly, the development of language skills supports the development of other language-cognitive and social skills. Even before a child's own speech, basic language skills begin to develop (Table 1). Underlying this is the child's innate desire to interact with the adult caring for them. Thus, early conversation, reading books and playing situations between the child and the guardian lay the foundation for the development of language skills. The role of the parent as an expander of expression is important in the early support of a child's conversational and storytelling skills. (Loukusa, Mäkinen & Kotila 2020, 145-155.)

Age	Key developmental changes at different age stages
7 - 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Versatile babbling • Striving for contact with others and using gestures to support expression
1 - 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First words • The vocabulary accumulates individually • Understanding words more than is able to use • The child is able to follow brief instructions and prompts • Symbolic play functions
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiastic learning and producing new words and word combinations • The use of inflectional forms of words is expanding • The child also uses “self-invented” wordings and inflections • The vocabulary contains mostly nouns and verbs
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The speech is almost completely understandable • Linguistic awareness expands • There are command, prohibition, and question sentences in the speech • The child can express the place and location of objects • Use of adjective benchmarks • Use of auxiliary verbs, different tenses, inflection of verbs in different tenses
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words from different word categories in speech in the same proportion as in everyday speech by adults • Pronunciation in a standard language • Mastering the basic rules of word inflection and sentence formation • Expressions become more precise
6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child manages more than 10,000 words • Fluently names objects and symbols • The child's phonemic consciousness develops • The child acquires basic interaction skills

Table 1: Language development of 0-6 year olds (based on Lyytinen 2014, 65.)

Good interaction between a child and an adult is a prerequisite for the child's linguistic development. Interaction requires adult interest and activity towards the child. An adult should be aware of nonverbal communication role in interaction and learning. The expressions and gestures often have a bigger impact on a child than words. The adult should be sensitive to the child's various communication attempts (for example, eye contacts, gestures, facial expressions and acts) and to respond to them. The child gets a feeling that the adult is interested about them, wants to understand and respond to their needs. The child also needs adult support and guidance to get involved in activities such as playing and building relationships with friends. (Ota Koppi: Kulttuurinen moninaisuus ja kielitietoisuus Helsingissä 2020, 5.)

Reading success in school can often be predicted by early language proficiency and literacy skills. Many processes and activities that have already begun at birth are related to emerging literacy skills and their activation and stimulation depends on the interaction between adult and child. It is evident that when children experience sensitive and cognitively stimulating home, preschool and kindergarten environments, young children show more rapid development of language and emergent literacy skills. (Lerikkanen 2019, 413.)

The learning process for native speakers begins in the early childhood and the language is usually adopted from parents. The speaker knows the language based on intuition and is precise and creative when using the language. Learning a language always requires learner to hear that language spoken around them, whether it is their native language or a foreign language. (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014, 16.)

There are huge individual differences (Figure 1), many of which also affect foreign language learning. However, the language learning process involves almost the same steps for those learning the same target language. Nonetheless, the speed of learning and the level of language proficiency achieved vary. Some of the individual differences are unchanged and some can be changeable as needed. For example learning styles can be developed. (Pietilä 2014, 66.)



Figure 1: Individual differences that affect learning a foreign language (based on Pietilä 2014, 45)

2.1.1 Psychology of Language Development & Theories of Language Learning

At the beginning of development, the environment guides the child through language, structuring events and conveying expectations and rules to the child linguistically. When adopting the language, the child begins to remember and think in words, not just through the images made up by actions and feelings. Psychological functions such as selective targeting of attention, conscious recall, planning, conceptual thinking, and problem solving are enabled by language. According to Aro (2014), Vygotsky among others (1982) stated that this opens up a new dimension to self-regulation through language. By interacting with the community and culture, the child can acquire psychological skills that are central to self and environmental management, such as language, numeracy, writing, and strategies required for learning, remembering, and directing attention. In particular, Vygotsky pointed out the connection between language and thinking, emphasizing the psychological nature of so-called internal speech and the connection to the development of voluntary activity. The child's social environment and behavioral guidance play a key role in the development of self-regulation, according to Vygotsky's theory. (Aro 2014, 271.)

There is a relationship between cognition and language, which led Chomsky (1968), theorize a "language acquisition device" according to Biddle et al. (2014). This device makes early childhood an optimal time for learning one or more languages. Some people believe the device means a young child's cognition. According to Biddle et al. (2014), Case (1985) stated that, also other researchers such as Piaget and the neo-Piagetians recognized that there is a relationship between language and cognition. These researchers regard that before language can be produced and understood, a certain level of cognitive development is required. (Biddle et al. 2014, 126.)

Biddle et al. (2014) recall that Piaget is considered a prominent theorist in the field of developmental psychology. According to his theory, all children's cognitive processes proceed in the same sequential way: For a child, it is not possible to miss a stage or to regress to an earlier stage of reasoning or cognitive functioning. When learning occur, Piaget believed that unobservable changes in an individual's cognition appears as well. Piaget refers to as schemes the tendency that people have to organize knowledge of their environment. Schemes are mental structures in the brain that underlie an individual's intelligence. Language greatly facilitates, as children develop, their schemes expanding to include a variety of mental functions, concepts, and theories. (Biddle et al. 2014, 88-89.)

Biddle et al. (2014) state that Piaget's theory however has some limitations according to researchers. One major issue with Piaget's research technique is that researchers find it highly subjective and the small sample size problematic. Despite the criticism, Piaget is considered a significant developmental psychologist. (Biddle et al. 2014, 96-97.)

The Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, which also emphasizes on how children construct knowledge, is distinctly different from Piaget's perspective. In Vygotsky's theory, learning first occurs between people and then learning is internalized. Piaget however focuses more on individualism in learning. (Biddle et al. 2014, 98-99.)

Behaviorism is a concept of conditional learning. According to it, in learning it is important to have a similarly repetitive stimulus, to which the same permanent reaction is gradually conditioned. However, the behaviorist conception of learning proved to be an insufficient explanation for learning creative language. Both the cognitive conception of learning and Noam Chomsky's conception of biological learning supplanted behavioral way of thinking. The constructivist ideas that previous knowledge influenced the adoption of the new replaced the mechanical, superficial notion of learning. Psycholinguistic theories assume that language learning is an internal process of the individual, whereas sociolinguistic theories assume that language is learned primarily through social interaction. Both theories are being researched continuously and more information data is needed. (Järvinen 2014, 68-88.)

2.1.2 Challenges of Language Development

Challenges of language development may occur, for example, in the pronunciation and inflection of words, the formation of sentences, understanding of the meaning of words and sentences, and the use of language. Difficulties in language development are often initially observed in kindergarten-age children as a delay in pronunciation and speech development. However, there is a lot of individual variation in the progress of development. Difficulties in comprehension of speech may be more difficult to detect than problems of production, therefore mild comprehension problems of speech may remain unnoticed in everyday life. If a child has language-focused (pragmatic) difficulties, they appear to be non-linguistic lack of resources and lack of reciprocity in different social interaction situations. In many developmental disorders, there is an overlap of difficulties. The most common problems with language development difficulties are motor developmental disorders, attention deficit disorders and emotional and behavioral disorders. (Siiskonen 2018, 2-5.)

It is likely that many language-learning difficulties, that have a negative impact on a child's development and learning, remain unidentified. For example, multilingualism poses a new differential diagnostic challenge for those working with children, especially when children have only recently moved to a new culture and are learning a new language. However, multilingualism does not in itself cause a particular risk of specific linguistic difficulties. (Ahonen, Aro, Siiskonen & Ketonen 2014, 374.)

If a child has language development difficulties, they appear in all languages of a multilingual child, but their manifestations vary according to the adopted language. It is not a disadvantage for language development to adopt more than one language. However, the

language development of a multilingual child is different from that of a monolingual child, so identifying child's language difficulties is not easy. In addition, many external factors such as the environment and culture, as well as the intended uses and ways of using different languages, influence the development and use of language. (Siiskonen 2018, 6.)

A child who is at risk of language development difficulties or an already identified disorder needs the best possible interaction in everyday situations. It would be important to identify the risk of language difficulties as early as possible in order to make support as effective as possible. It is extremely crucial to have early, sufficiently intensive and long-term monitoring and support for development. Extensive and individual support is important, as difficulties in language development are often accompanied by challenges in other areas of development as well. (Ahonen et al. 2014, 373.)

Learning a new language is not easy even for small children, it always takes its own time. After an unspoken period, language acquisition usually takes place in such a way that the child begins to repeat words, and then often practices them quietly or in their own mind in sentence contexts, and only then begins to communicate with others in the new language. It is good to note that immigrant children have selective speechlessness or mutism multiple times over other children. It is especially prevalent in children whose temperament is very restrained and timid and they are anxious in social situations. In this case, it would be good to guide the child to a more detailed assessment. (Ahonen, Määttä, Meronen & Lytinen 2014, 83.)

2.1.3 Linguistic Specificities of Bilingual and Multilingual Children

The term that describes the process, whereby children acquire two languages is bilingualism. Multilingual children are those who learn more than two languages. The learning process, where children acquire two or more languages from birth is called "simultaneous", while other children acquire additional languages in a "sequential" manner. (Biddle et al. 2014, 325.)

The definition of multilingualism depends in many ways on the frame of reference. The definition can be based on either the level of proficiency achieved, the use, or the time of onset of language exposure. In general, the language development of a multilingual child follows the language development of a monolingual child and the child has the ability to learn more than one language. However, the level of proficiency achieved and the use of language are influenced by many individual factors. Finding the best ways to support the acquisition of the language of the majority population, as well as the maintenance and development of the child's other languages and cultures, is a challenge for families and early childhood education as multilingualism and multiculturalism increase. (Smolander 2020, 337.)

Most people develop into single language speakers in their growth environment in Finland. Globally, however, this is exceptional, as most of the world's children grow up in a bilingual or multilingual environment. In recent years, Finland has also learned to work in multilingual environments, and quite a lot of research has been done on bilingualism and multilingualism. (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014, 11.)

There has been a lot of research on the link between multilingualism and general cognitive abilities. It is known from extensive research that multilingualism and general intelligence have no connection in one direction or the other, but cognitive skills, especially those related to linguistic awareness, develop earlier in multilingual children than in monolinguals. The special difficulties of language learning are not exacerbated by multilingualism, but support for language development must, of course, be available in all the child's languages. (Martin 2016.)

Multilingualism is closely linked to human identity, as it inevitably changes with linguistic experiences. Thoughts and ways of structuring the world travel with language. Today, linguistic identity is seen as situational and constantly changing. New concepts such as human agency and inclusion are added to it. In addition to language skills, multilingualism also includes opportunities to use them and to participate in the life of the community, as well as to decide on one's own linguistic identification. The relationship between multilingualism and identity is thus quite complex and volatile. (Martin 2016.) An inherent part of our identity are our languages. Children's home languages are important to their developing identities, confidence and self-esteem. It is clear that the preservation of children's heritage languages is essential to holistic development if their home languages are different from the majority language of the country. (Nutbrown 2018, 219.)

The age of onset of exposure and the amount and quality of exposure are often considered the main factors influencing language development in bilingual children. Cooperative action with the onset of exposure include, for example, the similarity of language structures and the amount and quality of exposure. When estimating the total exposure to a language, it is good to take into account the cumulative exposure that has accumulated over the years. (Smolander 2020, 346.) Children growing up in a bilingual environment generally start babbling, saying their first words and sentences on the same schedule as children growing up in a monolingual environment. In the early stages, a bilingual child may understandably confuse words from different languages in the same sentence. There may also be variation in language skills, with the other language being slightly more developed than the other. The vocabulary may be a little narrower at first, but both languages combined it is at least parallel to the average of children. Differences in vocabulary levels also appear to level off with age. (Ahonen et al. 2014, 83.)

Mother Tongue or First Language

The term mother tongue is challenging, although it is commonly used. Languages could be called the first languages. A bilingual person has two mother tongues or first languages, one of which perhaps learned from father. When a bilingual person learns languages at the same time, it is not possible to say which language is chronologically first. It is also important to deliberate the person's own emotion of what they consider their mother tongue and whether they identify with other speakers of that language. (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014, 15-16.)

Native Language & Second Language

Learning a second language is a multifaceted phenomenon. Learners are different and the language is learned in different environments. Native language is adopted as a child. In schools, on the other hand, foreign languages are usually learned. The concepts of second and foreign language are not unambiguous. The second language is often the official language of the country or a language widely used in the country or around the speaker. For example, if an immigrant studies Finnish language in Finland, it is said that Finnish is spoken as a second language. The second and foreign languages are usually defined on a country-by-country basis, taking into account the official languages. Swedish and Sámi are called second languages in Finland, as is Finnish if studied as a target language. Other languages are foreign languages. The term target language refers to the language being learned without taking into account its position in the learning environment. A native language is a person's first language, which is adopted as a child. A person may speak many languages as their native language if they have learned more than one language as a child. (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014, 12-16.)

2.2 Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood Education

Finland has been a multicultural country for centuries. Finland's traditional cultural minorities are Finno-Swedes, Roma, Ingrian-Finns, Finnish Karelians, Jews and Tatars. The Sámi are a recognized indigenous people. National cultural minorities have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture based on the law. (THL 2021.) Also according to The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) article 30, "a child has the right to enjoy their own culture, to confess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language" (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989).

According to Kotimaisten Kielten Keskus (2021), the Constitution (731/1999) and the Language Act (423/2003) determine that the official languages of Finland, ie the national languages, are Finnish and Swedish. According to statistics from 2014, about 4.9 million people spoke Finnish as their native language and about 290,000 spoke Swedish. About 300,000 people have another native language. Finnish law does not specify which languages

are minority languages. Despite this in Finland, in addition to Finnish and Swedish, there are speakers of other languages, whose linguistic rights are regulated by different laws. The Sámi languages are the languages of the indigenous people, the Finnish Romani language, the Finnish and Finnish-Swedish sign language and the Karelian language are autoctonic, i.e. the language used in the country for a long time. Many other languages are also spoken in Finland. At the end of 2013, Finland's third largest language group was Russian-speaking native speakers. The next largest number were in Estonian, Somali, English and Arabic. (Kotimaisten kielten keskus 2021.)

Among the Finnish population that were born abroad, more than 200 native languages are spoken and more than half masters at least three languages fluently. The use of services, employment, study opportunities and adaptation are facilitated by proficiency in Finnish and Swedish. Poor language skills in Finnish and Swedish is also linked to early school dropout and unemployment. It is estimated that fifteen percent of first generation immigrants speak Swedish better than Finnish so services in Swedish should also be guaranteed. A significant part of integration is language skills. (Finnish Institution for Health and Welfare 2021.)

Language has adapted to the culture in which it is used and developed. Language tells about the culture of its speaker, embodies the way of thinking and worldview behind the culture, so words have no culturally independent meanings. Consequently learning a language is also learning a culture. Misunderstandings can arise due to a lack of cultural knowledge as well as a lack of language skills. (Pyykkö 2014, 189.)

Whether language is seen as a detached island of cognitive activity or as an integral part of behavior depends essentially on the language vision that guides the activities of day care educators. The view that language is part of behavior is an option that is easier to justify in the light of both practical observations and current theoretical literature. If both physical facilities and social activities are designed to support language awareness, kindergarten can be an ideal language learning environment. The fact that a child is not aware that he or she is learning Finnish does not mean that the educator should not be language-conscious and planned builder of text events. (Kela 2012.)

All members of the community should be empowered to meet people of different languages and from different cultures, religions and beliefs. In early childhood education, staff serves as a model for a positive encounter with diversity. Effective interaction with people from different cultural and ideological backgrounds requires an understanding and respect for one's own and others' views and cultural backgrounds. Experiences, knowledge and skills gained in early childhood education from cultural heritage strengthen a child's ability to embrace, use and change culture. For example, games, meal times, and celebrations provide opportunities to share experiences from different traditions and customs. (Opetushallitus 2021.)

According to the Early Childhood Education Plan (2018), a part of a Finnish early childhood education is the diversity of languages and cultures. Defined by the Early Childhood Education Act, the municipality must ensure that the child can receive early childhood education in their native language; in Finnish, Swedish or Sámi. A child using sign language can be given early childhood education in sign language. Early childhood education can also be provided in Romani language. Foreign language speaking and multilingual children's development in language skills, linguistic and cultural identities and self-esteem are supported in a variety of ways in early childhood education. In the areas of language skills and abilities, starting from the needs and preconditions of children, the development of Finnish or Swedish language skills is purposefully promoted. Every child in early childhood education is considered to be subject to language and cultural considerations in the framework of the early childhood education plan. The linguistic and cultural backgrounds and abilities that children have are seen as enriching the community in a positive way. Languages, cultures and views are integrated into the whole of early childhood education in language and culture-conscious early childhood education. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2018, 49-50.)

One example of how different languages and cultures are taken into account in early childhood education is *A Handbook on Language, Culture and View Conscious Early Childhood Education (2021)* that has been published by the city of Vantaa for the use of early childhood education in Vantaa. According to the handbook, the teacher of early childhood education is responsible for the practical implementation of Finnish as a second language teaching and preparatory education, the implementation of plans, assessment and documentation, and co-operation with the guardians. The entire staff is involved in creating a language-, culture- and view-conscious environment. Finnish as a second language is taught to bilingual and multilingual children and the construction of their identity is supported. The language and culture coordinator supports the head of the kindergarten in developing both the staff's competence and operating cultures' language, cultural and view awareness. The director of the kindergarten takes care of the staff's training and securing resources, as well as the adequate Finnish language skills of the early childhood education staff. (Kieli-, Kulttuuri- ja Katsomustietoisen Varhaiskasvatuksen Käsikirja 2021, 7-8.)

2.2.1 Early Childhood Education in Finland

Early Childhood Education is a unique period from a life cycle perspective. In childhood, both physical, mental, and social learning and development are faster than at any other stage of life. In recent years, Finnish early childhood education has changed in many ways. It has undergone political and structural changes. The most prominent examples of this are the new Early Childhood Education Act (540/2018) and the placement of early childhood education under the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013. With these reforms, the role of early childhood education in society has become clearer and more

established as a part of lifelong learning and the education system. (Koivula, Siippainen & Eerola-Pennanen 2017, 12.)

The Act on Early Childhood Education (540/2018) and Care and the National core curriculum for ECEC (2018) are guiding the early childhood education and care (ECEC). The National core curriculum for early childhood education and care is a national norm and the ECEC providers shall prepare the local curricula for ECEC based on it. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021.)

According to the Early Childhood Education Act (540/2018), early childhood education refers to a planned and appropriate entity for the upbringing, teaching and care of a child, with special emphasis on pedagogy. The Early Childhood Education Act defines the activities of early childhood education as kindergarten activities organized in kindergartens, family day care activities organized in family kindergartens, and open early childhood education activities organized in a place suitable for the activity. The Law emphasizes that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in the planning, organization or production and decision-making of early childhood education. (Early Childhood Education Act 540/2018.)

Early childhood education has indeed gained a solid position as a part of a lifelong learning during the last decade. In 2015, the Early Childhood Education Act (540/2018) replaced the old daycare law. The concept of early childhood education first became established in kindergarten teacher curricula and language use, and gradually as a concept describing the content of daycare. The foundations of the Early Childhood Education Plan create a framework for early childhood education pedagogy and practices by concretizing the goals set in the Early Childhood Education Act. The purpose of the principles of the Early Childhood Education Plan is to support, guide and promote the realization of high quality and equal early childhood education throughout the country. Pre-primary education regulated by the Basic Education Act (628/1998) is part of the early childhood education. The whole that promotes children's well-being, growth and learning consists of the basics of the early childhood education plan, the pre-primary and basic education curriculum. (Eerola-Pennanen, Vuorisalo & Raittila 2017, 21, 29.)

Local early childhood education plans are developed on the basis of national early childhood education plan criteria. The plan defines, guides and supports the organization of early childhood education locally. Local early childhood education plans are mandatory and need to be evaluated and developed. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2018, 8.)

According to the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018), early childhood education and care lays the foundation for children's transversal competences (Figure 2). Transversal competence is a whole, which consists of attitudes, knowledge, skills, values and will.

Competence also refers to the ability to apply knowledge and skills and act in a particular situation. Multiliteracy, taking care of oneself and other everyday skills are included in transversal skills. In addition, they include cultural competence and interaction skills, which are necessary in the increasingly diverse world. A strong foundation for the development of these skills and knowledge is gained through good ECEC. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021.)

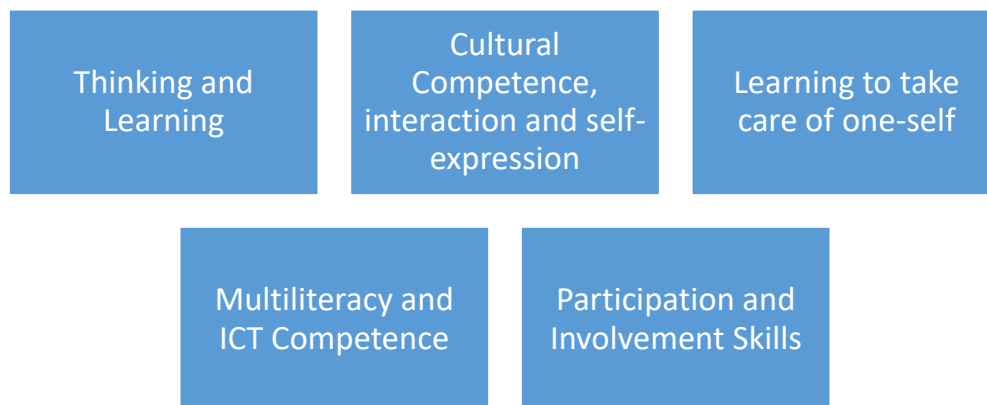


Figure 2: The basis for transversal competences in early childhood education (based on Finnish National Agency for Education 2021)

The quality of early childhood education consists of many different factors, the key ones being the training and competence of the staff. A strong early childhood education staff with different skills creates good conditions for the start of a child's learning path. The new law aims to raise the quality of early childhood education with more trained staff. The goal is that by 2030, at least two-thirds of kindergartens should have the qualification of an early childhood education teacher or bachelor of social services, of which at least half must have the qualification of an early childhood education teacher. Work tasks and job titles are also clarified between occupational groups. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2018.)

An important authority in relation to early childhood education is the National Education Evaluation Center (Karvi). Its role is to carry out national external evaluations of early childhood education and to support organizers and private actors in carrying out statutory self-evaluation. Law defines its tasks and it is an independent authority responsible for the national evaluation of education and training, covering the entire education system from early childhood to higher education. (Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus 2021.)

2.2.2 Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in National Core Curriculum for ECEC

Early childhood education is part of a society that is culturally changing and diverse. Cultural diversity is seen as a resource and the right to one's own language, religion and belief is recognized in the community as a fundamental right. Finnish cultural heritage and national languages, as well as the cultural, linguistic and visual diversity of the community and the environment, are valued in early childhood education. Staff in early childhood education are thus required to have knowledge of other cultures and different views, as well as the ability to see and understand things from multiple perspectives and empathy skills. Conversation about different ways of thinking and policies should be constructive and create new ways of doing things together. At the same time promoting culturally sustainable development. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2018, 31.)

The presence of languages constantly and everywhere, is recognized in a language-conscious early childhood education. According to the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018), Staff should understand the central role of language in development and learning, interaction and collaboration, and the building of identities and belonging to society. The development of children is supported by making multilingualism visible in a culturally diverse world. Staff in early childhood education should be aware that they are language models for children and pay attention to their own language use and children should be encouraged to use the language in many ways. Linguistic starting points should be taken into account, and give children time and opportunities for varying language use situations. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2018, 31.)

Areas of learning (Figure 3), that guide staff in Early Childhood Education in planning and using diverse and integrated pedagogical activities with children, describe the key elements of early childhood pedagogical activities objectives and contents. A rich world of languages means that the task of early childhood education is to strengthen the development of children's linguistic skills and abilities and linguistic identities. Children's curiosity and interest in languages, texts and cultures is strengthened in early childhood education. The development of a child's multilingual skills is linked to supporting language development. It is also linked to, among other things, children's wide-ranging cultural skills and interaction skills. New ways and opportunities for influencing open up for children with the development of linguistic skills, inclusion and active participation. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2018, 40.)



Figure 3: Areas of learning (based on Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2018, 40)

The development of the Finnish language should be observed regularly. Pedagogical documentation is essential to the assessment and observation of a child's language skills. The early childhood education teacher takes care of the multilingualism plan for each child as part of the child's early childhood education plan or pre- / preparatory education plan. (Kieli-, kulttuuri- ja katsomustietoisien varhaiskasvatuksen käsikirja 2021, 6.)

The role of early childhood education and care is to strengthen the development of children's linguistic skills, competences and identities (Figure 4). The child takes over different situations and things, expresses him- or herself and acquires information through language and interaction. The importance of languages is also reflected in the different chapters of early childhood education plan. For children, language is both a learning object and an instrument that supports the development of thinking and communication. In taking over the world around us, languages play a key role. Early childhood education and care should strengthen children's language use and curiosity, which encourages interaction with adults and other children. Versatile interaction and a language environment in which children are given encouraging feedback on their language and interaction skills support language skills and linguistic development. (Opetushallitus 2021.)

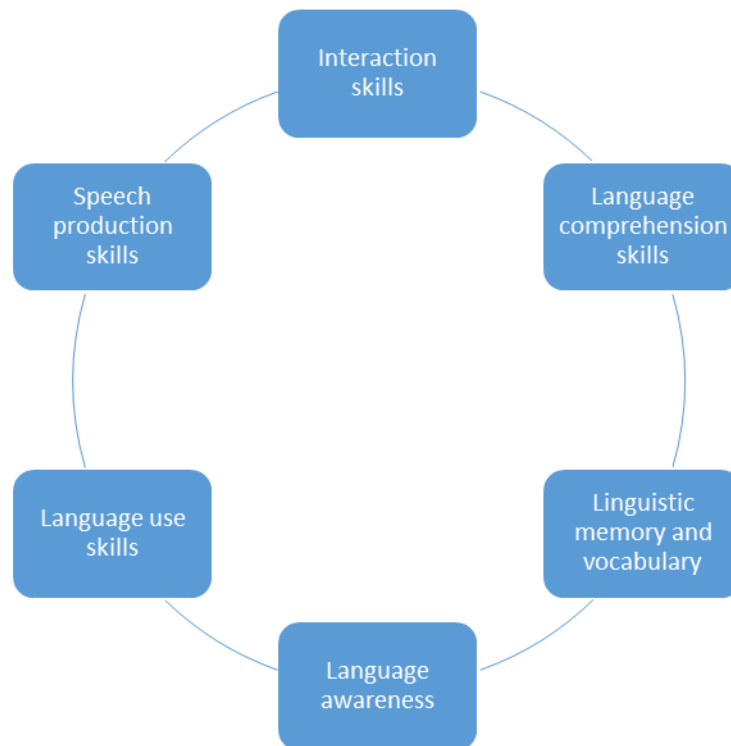


Figure 4: Key areas of language skills and competences (based on Opetushallitus 2021)

2.2.3 Children with an Immigrant Background in Early Childhood Education

The term immigrant or migrant means a person moving from one country to another. Asylum seeker is a person seeking protection and right of residence in a foreign state. A Refugee status is granted for the asylum seeker if they are granted asylum. Refugee is a foreign national who has a valid fear of being persecuted for reasons of ethnic origin, religion, nationality, political opinion or a membership in a particular social group. To a person who has been granted asylum by a state or is being considered a refugee by UNHCR may be granted a refugee status. A person moving to Finland who is of Finnish extraction or a person is a former Finnish citizen, a descendant of a person who is a Finnish citizen by birth or is otherwise Finnish in origin, for example an Ingrian Finn refers to as returnee. Emigrant or migrant means a person who moves from a country. (Finnish Immigration Service 2021.)

The number of people with a foreign background has grown steadily over the last two decades. In 2020, the number of people with a foreign background was 444,031. Of these, 83% had a first-generation foreign background and 17% a second-generation. According to Statistics Finland's classification, persons with a foreign background are those whose both parents or the only known parent were born abroad. (Statistics Finland 2021.)

When talking about children with an immigrant background, it should be remembered that it is not a homogeneous group. According to Halme (2011), the National Board of Education refers to immigrant children both with an immigrant background born in Finland and those who have moved to Finland. The Finnish Immigration Service, on the other hand, uses the term immigrant from a person moving from one country to another. (Halme 2011, 86-87.)

Immigration poses a huge challenge to language and communication teaching, especially in kindergartens and schools. When trying to integrate people from different cultures into a society that represents Nordic values, strengthening language skills is key. After all, language skills have a significant effect on early childhood education, primary school and studying in post-secondary education and later succeeding in working life. (Huotilainen & Linnavalli 2020, 368.)

Some of the children only become acquainted with Finnish culture and the Finnish language when they enter early childhood education. Early childhood education therefore plays a key role in integrating into Finnish society. It is important that the staff create a safe and trusting atmosphere in which the child has the courage to interact with others, even if there is no common language. (Kieli-, kulttuuri- ja katsomustietoisen varhaiskasvatuksen käsikirja 2021, 52-53.)

Language is not only a tool for learning and communication, but also a tool for the existence of culture and belonging to the community, as well as a central part of human identity. Language skills play a role in the formation of children's relationships. For example, if children with an immigrant background have a fluent knowledge of the Finnish language, then participation in the social activities of a group of children is natural and varies from situation to situation, as is the case for other children in the group. (Eerola-Pennanen 2017, 230.)

It is important for children to know their own cultural roots from the very first years. Identifying with both own and Finnish culture should be possible for the child and appreciate both. The opportunity to see one's own culture in early childhood education increases a child's awareness of their own roots, and seeing their own community in a positive light is strengthened. (Kieli-, kulttuuri- ja katsomustietoisen varhaiskasvatuksen käsikirja 2021, 67.)

3 Methodology

In this section, I present research methodology of the thesis. First, I present and review my research questions. Then I will explain the concept of literature review, which I used as a research method. I will go through the data collection process and the criteria on the basis of which I selected the articles under review. Next, I will go through the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the data collection process, and how the data was evaluated through qualitative

content analysis. Lastly, ethics and reliability is considered. I chose this research method because I am interested in what kind of research on the topic has been done in the past. In addition, the literature review as a method interested me because I have no previous experience with it and it seemed appropriate for my subject and me. I thought that this would give an overview of my topic and my thesis could benefit others interested in culturally and linguistically diverse education.

3.1 Research Questions

The purpose of the thesis was to find tools and means to support children's language development in early childhood education. With this topic, I formed the following research questions that serve as the core of the thesis:

- I. What is the language development like for kindergarten-aged children who have an immigrant background?
- II. What kind of means can be utilized in a linguistically and culturally diverse early childhood education to support language development?

3.2 Literature Review

A literature review is a method and research technique in which research is conducted. That is, in a way, research is done on research. Thus, the results of research are compiled, which are the basis for new research results. (Salminen 2011, 4.)

According to Stolt & Routasalo (2007), Kääriäinen & Lahtinen (2006) have stated that the literature review is a critical, concise review of previous research related to the research problem and based on which the researcher makes the synthesis. For the reader, a literature review shows why the research presented is important and how it complements previous research. The literature review provides a theoretical background for the research and presents it from which perspectives and how the issue has been studied in the past. It is important to keep in mind the goal and purpose set for the literature review. (Stolt & Routasalo 2007, 58.)

A descriptive literature review is one of the most commonly used basic types of literature review. Without strict and precise rules, it can be described as an overview. The methodological rules do not limit the choice of material and the materials used are extensive. Research questions are looser than, for example, in a systematic review. However, the phenomenon under study can be described broadly and the properties of the phenomenon under study can be classified if necessary. The descriptive review serves as an independent method, it is also considered to provide new phenomena to be studied for a systematic

literature review. (Salminen 2011, 6.) Since my thesis is a Bachelor's thesis, I am doing a descriptive literature review.

Choosing a topic is a process and a good research topic is the beginning of a good research. Once a topic is found, it usually needs to be narrowed down. The question is what you want to know or show with the collected material. After such reflection it makes sense to start collecting data. The selection of literature requires source criticism and judgment. Criticism must be sought both in the selection of sources and in their study. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 66-113.)

The analysis, interpretation and drawing of the collected data is a core issue in the study. In the analysis phase, the researcher finds out what kind of answers to the problems are obtained. After analysis of the study results, they should be explained and interpreted. The syntheses bring together the main points and give clear answers to the problems posed. The conclusions are based on these prepared syntheses. The researcher should consider the significance of the results obtained in the research area as well as the wider significance. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221-230.)

Niela-Vilén and Hamari (2016) examined the stages of the literature review based on previous methodological literature. They collected review articles in English from the PubMed database with the search terms "review" and "nursing". Based on these methodological sources, they defined the five steps necessary for each literature review (Figure 5). Regardless of the type of review, the literature review is carried out in similar steps. When planning a literature review, it is a good idea to become familiar with different types of reviews and choose an appropriate method to guide the different stages of a literature review. (Niela-Vilén & Hamari 2016, 23-33.)

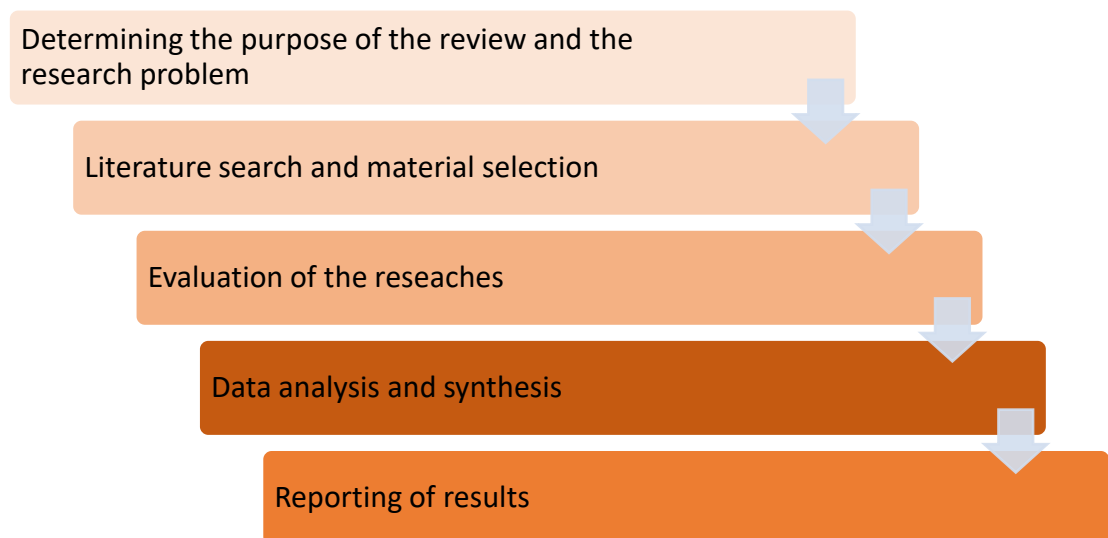


Figure 5: Steps of the literature review (based on Niela-Vilén & Hamari 2016, 23-34)

3.2.1 Data Search Process

For my data search, I used Laurea Libguides social services databases (Table 2). I selected the databases based on my topic and which are more suitable in the field of early childhood education. In addition, I received guidance from an information specialist in searching for information and articles for my thesis. As a limitation for my searches I had full text available, scholarly (peer reviewed) articles from 2011 to 2021 and in English. With my first searches I got too narrow or too many results so I expanded my search. For a start, I read the titles, then abstracts and finally I read the whole text.

Database	EBSCOhost combined	ERIC	ProQuest Central	Science Direct (Elsevier)	Total
Search words	early childhood education AND language development AND immigrants AND support	early childhood education AND immigrants AND language development AND support	early childhood education AND language development AND immigrants AND support	early childhood education) AND “language development” AND (immigrants OR immigrant OR dual-language learners) AND (support OR help OR guidance)	
Adjusted search words	kindergarten OR preschool OR early childhood education AND language development AND immigrants OR immigrant OR migrant AND support OR help OR guidance	kindergarten OR preschool OR early childhood education AND language development AND immigrants OR immigrant AND support OR help OR guidance	“early childhood education” AND “language development ” AND immigrants AND support	early childhood education AND language development AND immigrants AND support	
First search	1	2	296	284	583

Database	EBSCOhost combined	ERIC	ProQuest Central	Science Direct (Elsevier)	Total
Second search	5	24	61	130	220
Narrowing	3	1	8	26	38
In thesis	2	1	1	1	5

Table 2: Article searches from databases

3.2.2 Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

At first, I made test searches with words based on the key concepts of my thesis. Then I defined inclusion and exclusion criteria by considering my research questions. I searched for academic articles from the last ten years in English, full text available, peer reviewed and about preschool aged children as described in Figure 6.

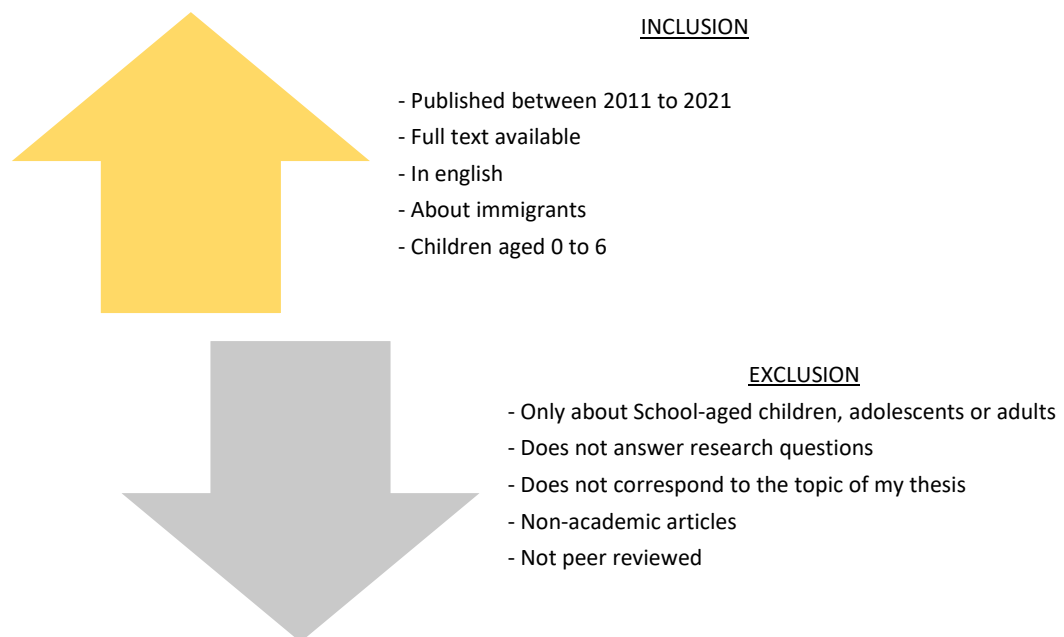


Figure 6: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

I read the abstracts of many articles. Selecting suitable articles and studies was not easy, especially because of their vast amount. At first I had five articles, but after consideration, I realized one of them was not suitable so I chose a new one more appropriate for my topic. Then I read the texts closely and especially focused on the abstracts and results. I highlighted

the parts that interested me and were relevant to my thesis. Then I combined the information by forming tables according to data analysis, which I used as a method in this thesis. On table 3, I have gathered data matrix of the articles I chose for my literature review.

The first search I did was in EBSCOhost. I found an article of a research by Gagné, Guhn, Janus, Georgiades, Emerson, Milbrath, Duku, Magee, Schonert-Reichl & Gademann (2020) under the title *Thriving, catching up, falling behind: Immigrant and refugee children's kindergarten competencies and later academic achievement*. The study was about whether developmental competencies and sociodemographic disparities identified in kindergarten forecast the academic achievement trajectories of immigrant and refugee children from childhood to adolescence. I chose this article, because I think it is relevant to be aware in early childhood education, how development and learning in early childhood has lifelong affects. In addition, the sample size was large and was about different groups of immigrants.

The second article I found from ERIC- database was by Lastikka & Lipponen (2016) with a title *Immigrant Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Practices in the Finnish Multicultural Context*. It is a qualitative interview study, to increase understanding of immigrant families' perspectives on ECEC practices. The study included thirteen parents whose children attended a daycare center. It addresses, among other things, linguistic diversity, which is relevant to my topic. I also chose it because as also stated in my theoretical part; the family is a primary factor in a child's language development in early childhood.

Third search I did was in ProQuest Central. I found an article by Alstad & Sopanen (2021): *Language orientations in early childhood education policy in Finland and Norway*. The research was about seven policy documents related to ECEC in Finland and Norway and specifically from a language perspective and multilingualism. I chose this article, because the Early Childhood Education Plans and other norms that guide early childhood education provide the basis for the everyday practices of early childhood educators.

From Science Direct (Elsevier) database I found a research by Winsler, Burchinal, Tien, Peisner-Feinberg, Espinosa, Castro, LaForett, Kim & De Feyter (2014): *Early development among dual language learners: The roles of language use at home, maternal immigration, country of origin and socio-demographic variables*. It is a research about dual language learners development and how and which demographic factors affect the development of dual language learners in particular. The study examined children aged between 9 to 65 months with only English, English and other language and only other language used at home. The reason I chose this article is that it is about how immigration and multilingualism affect language acquisition. By understanding which factors affect language development and learning, it is easier to figure out how to support it.

The final article I chose was from EBSCOhost database by Pham & Tipton (2018): Internal and External Factors That Support Children's Minority First Language and English. This research studied children aged 5-8 years, who speak Vietnamese at home and are in English school instruction. Although the study also covers elementary school-age children, the study was initiated in kindergarten-age children. I think it is important to know how language develops after kindergarten and how school success can be influenced as early as kindergarten age, which factors support the language development of children with an immigrant background.

Author, year, country	Purpose of the study	Participants (n)	Method	Analysis Method
Alstad, G. & Sopenan, P. 2021. Language Orientations in Early Childhood Education Policy in Finland and Norway. Norway / Finland	To investigate the language orientations in education policy documents for ECEC in Finland and Norway	7 policy documents	A qualitative case study	Document Analysis
Gagné, M., Guhn, M., Georgiades, K., Duku, E., Janus, M., Emerson, S.D, Milbrath, C., Magee, C., Schonert-Reichl, A. & Gadermann, A.M. 2020. Thriving, Catching Up, Falling Behind: Immigrant and Refugee Children's Kindergarten Competencies and Later Academic Achievement. Canada.	Do developmental competencies and sociodemographic disparities identified in kindergarten forecast the academic achievement trajectories of first- and second-generation immigrant and refugee children, from childhood to adolescence.	9216	Empirical, Longitudinal, Retrospective, Quantitative Study	Group-based trajectory modeling
Lastikka, A-L. & Lipponen, L. 2016. Immigrant Parents'	Immigrant parents' perspectives on ECEC practices in	13	Interview	Qualitative Content Analysis

Author, year, country	Purpose of the study	Participants (n)	Method	Analysis Method
Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Practices in the Finnish Multicultural Context. Finland.	Finland and an insight into good educational practices when working with immigrant families			
Pham, G. & Tipton, T. 2018. Internal and External Factors That Support Children's Minority 1L and English. USA.	To examine the learning climate for young children at the intersection of children's immigration status	69	Tasks for children, telephone survey for parents	Statistical analyses
Winsler, A., Burchinal, M.R., Hsiao-Chuan T., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Espinosa, L., Castro, D.C., LaForett, D.R., Yoon Kyong, K. & De Feyter, J. 2014. Early Development Among Dual Language Learners: The Roles of Language use at Home, Maternal Immigration, Country of Origin and Socio-Demographic Variables. USA / South Korea.	To examine children's outcomes and growth from 9 to 65 months as a function of language used in the home at 24 months, whether demographic variables moderated the effects of dual language learner status in predicting child outcomes.	9200	Direct assessments of the children, observations of parent-child interaction, interviews with the primary caregiver	Descriptive tables.

Table 3: Data Matrix

3.2.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis, which is a basic method of analysis, can be used in all traditions of qualitative research. Content analysis can be used to conduct a wide range of research and can be seen as a single method as well as a loose theoretical framework that can be linked to different sets of analyzes. According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2018), researcher Timo Laine has many years ago presented a framework for describing the progress of qualitative research analysis, which they have slightly modified; At first, decide what interests you in the material and make a strong decision, go through the material, separate and mark things that interest you and leave everything else out of the study. Then gather the marked items together and separately from the rest of the material. Then categorize, make themes or types of the material and finally write a summary. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018.)

Documents can be analyzed systematically and objectively by the method of content analysis. A document can be almost any written material. I used scientific articles in my thesis. Content analysis allows for certain conceptual freedoms, but requires the adoption of certain restrictions. In both Finnish and international literature, either inductive or deductive content analysis is most often discussed in the material of qualitative analysis. The distinction is justified by the logic of these two reasoning. The significance and guidance of the methodology in carrying out the research can be narrowly understood. The purpose of the analysis is to create a verbal and clear description of the phenomenon under study. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018.)

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018), Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the analysis of data-driven qualitative data as a roughly three-step process as described in Figure 7.



Figure 7: A three-step process of content analysis (Based on Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018)

In content analysis, the reduction takes place in such a way that everything irrelevant to the research is excluded from the data. In content analysis, the reduction takes place in such a way that everything irrelevant to the research is removed from the data (Table 4).

Original phrase	Simplifying
<p>"There were several complex patterns of interaction, indicating that gender, parental education and immigration status may operate differently across different language groups for at least a few outcomes" (Winsler, A. et al. 2014.)</p>	<p>In different language groups gender, parental education and immigration status may affect differently.</p>
<p>"Literacy at kindergarten was found to be a significant predictor of both literacy and numeracy trajectory group membership. It was associated with an increased likelihood of membership in the highest literacy and numeracy groups as well as being associated with the decreased likelihood of membership in the lowest literacy and numeracy groups" (Gagné et al. 2020).</p>	<p>A significant predictor of both literacy and numeracy was literacy at kindergarten.</p>

Table 4: An example of simplifying sentences

In clustering stage, the coded original expressions are carefully reviewed. Concepts describing similarities and / or differences are searched for in the material. Concepts that describe the same phenomenon are grouped and combined into different categories, which then form subcategories (Table 5). Individual factors are included in more general concepts, thus condensing the material. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018.)

Simplified	Clustering	Subclassification
<p>Demographic variables had different effects in different home languages and immigrant groups.</p> <p>First language does not affect learning sequential second language.</p>	<p>Demographic variables effect language development</p> <p>Dual language learning</p>	<p>Language development</p> <p>Language learning</p> <p>Multilingualism</p>
<p>Cooperation with parents is important and respect for</p>	<p>Cooperation</p>	<p>Dialog</p> <p>Openness</p>

Simplified	Clustering	Subclassification
diversity as well as multicultural education for early childhood educators. Communication between parents and educators is important for language development.	Multicultural education Respect for diversity Communication	Tolerance

Table 5: An example of clustering and subclassification

Clustering is followed by the abstraction of the material, in which case the information relevant to the research is separated and theoretical concepts are formed on the basis of the selected information (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018). After subclassification, I connected the classes that I formed and I created headlines based on my topic (Table 6).

Subclassification	Connective classification
Language development Language learning Multilingualism	Language development of multicultural and multilingual children in early childhood
Dialog Openness Tolerance	Promoting cultural and linguistic diversity and language development in Early Childhood Education

Table 6: An example of connective classification

Figure 8 illustrates the findings and abstraction I made from the studies. Understanding language development of multicultural and multilingual children and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity and language development leads to means that support language development of children with an immigrant background in early childhood education.

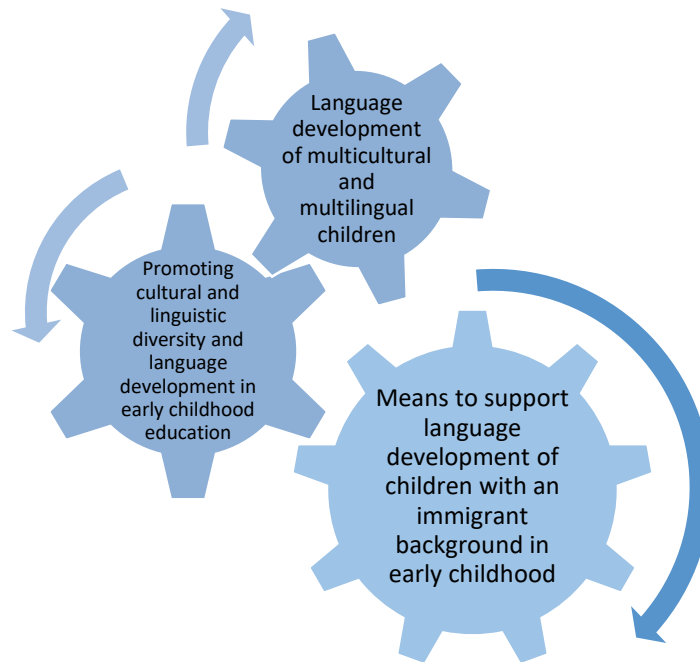


Figure 8: Concept formation

3.2.4 Research Ethics & Reliability

Ethical good practice should be followed in conducting research. Research ethics principles related to the acquisition and disclosure of information are generally accepted. The researcher must consider the ethical issues involved in conducting the research. According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2009), the following principles should be taken into account when conducting research; the text of others should not be plagiarized and the citations should be appropriate nor should the researcher plagiarize themselves or their own research. The results should not be forged, embellished or generalized without criticism and reporting should not be misleading or incomplete. The contribution of other researchers should not be underestimated and the funds allocated to research must not be misused. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 23-27.) In my research, I reported the findings and used the references appropriately. I did not copy the text directly and was critical of the research findings. Among other things, I took into account how large the samples were in the studies. I selected the most relevant results from the researches for my thesis, according to the nature of the literature review, and summarized them.

Consideration of ethics is a demanding task in order for research to be conducted adequately and correctly (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 27). In my research, I consider ethics by reporting accurately about the various stages and findings of the research. I made a precise plan and followed it as well as possible. I did test searches and researched different search servers. I took the time to search for articles and chose the articles that I thought were most relevant and compatible with my topic. I reported and recorded my findings properly and accurately. I

have been transparent which meant for me that I have followed good spelling and citation practices. Transparency is also reflected in the fact that I have told the information retrieval process and results thoroughly, honestly and consistently. The reliability of my research is enhanced by the fact that I processed five studies, they were peer-reviewed and scientific research articles. The results were partly similar and the research I did is reproducible. However, it should be noted that the studies were conducted in different settings and addressed the issue from different perspectives.

I think that it is good to be aware that the multi-stage nature of a literature review is challenging. The selection of appropriate articles, the clustering and abstraction steps, and the compilation and aggregation of research results are vulnerable for misinterpretations or excluding some important issues from the results. On the other hand, thorough processing of the material can also increase its reliability.

I would like to point out that all the articles I studied were in English. Misunderstandings or misinterpretations are unfortunately possible, although I think I understood the materials adequately. My original topic was “Early Childhood Education Supporting Language Development of Children who Speak Finnish as Their Second Language. Not enough articles were found with the keywords “Finnish as a second language”, so I changed the title to be more appropriate to the topic I wanted to study. This slightly slowed down the research process. Collecting articles for analysis and going through them took time. Spending more time searching and analyzing articles, the data research could have been more thorough. However, choices had to be made to select the most appropriate and relevant articles related to my topic and research questions. I think I found a wide range of studies that approached the issue from a slightly different perspective, but all the articles and research findings also had something in common.

4 Research Findings

In this section, I will share my research findings based on the research questions I had initially set. I have divided them into two parts according to my research questions and findings on the articles. In the discussion of findings part I will summarize the results and reflect on them.

4.1 Language Development of Multicultural and Multilingual Children in Early Childhood

In the article of Pham & Tipton (2018) the research findings suggest that exposure to minority first language does not interfere English gains in sequential bilingual children. Children are also learning English with or without familial support. The misconception remains among

many immigrant parents that the first language can hinder English acquisition. (Pham & Tipton 2018.)

Winsler et al. (2014) state that family demographic factors appear to play a larger role in early childhood development than does home language use. Dual language learner status does not appear to have large and broad effect on child development once other demographic variables are controlled. In their study, they found a pattern of differences in a few outcomes for immigrant and non-immigrant families. Native language had an effect on cognitive development. If the heritage language was not spoken at home, the child with an immigrant background had poorer cognitive outcomes. If, on the other hand, the mother tongue was spoken at least to some extent, the cognitive results were better. The study found some kind of preliminary evidence that the use of the heritage language at home by children with an immigrant background can have a protective effect. Gender, parental education and immigration status may operate differently across different language groups for at least a few outcomes, which were indicated by several complex patterns of interaction according to the study. (Winsler et al. 2014.)

According to the research by Alstad & Sopenen (2021), education policy documents should cover multilingualism better and provide clear guidelines for early childhood education professionals (Alstad & Sopenen 2021). This would support children's language development when there is consistency in language support. Also in the research by Lastikka & Lipponen (2016) emerged that interprofessional cooperation and support, which is aiding the whole family, also acts as a supporter of the child's development and well-being (Lastikka & Lipponen 2016).

Gagné et al. (2020) state in their study that immigrant and refugee children had a range of academic achievement trajectories from Grade 4 to Grade 10. Some children were thriving, some catching up and some falling behind over time. The things that influenced language development, among others, were many sociodemographic factors. Literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies in kindergarten played a significant and sometimes interacting role in subsequent academic success. (Gagné et al. 2020.)

4.2 Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Diversity and Language Development in Early Childhood Education

All the chosen research has highlighted the importance of first language support for language development and other cognitive development. Raising multicultural and multilingual awareness in early childhood education is also important. Awareness raising can best support not only children but also the whole family.

Lastikka and Lipponen's (2016) study state that the support of language and culture provided in both the mother tongue and Finnish played an important role in the operation of the kindergarten. Immigrant parents, who were worried that the children would lose their mother tongue, but also wanted the children to learn Finnish, appreciated this approach. The parents appreciated cultural awareness of educators as well as openness and dialog. However, some parents felt that their own culture was not recognized enough. Multicultural personnel was highly appreciated. It helped the children understand each other and offered feelings of safety and confidence. (Lastikka & Lipponen 2016.)

According to the study by Alstad and Sopenen (2020) both in Norway and Finland multilingualism is seen as a resource yet there is a monolingual ideology underlying the ECEC policy. It also emerged that the language orientations of both countries policy documents are unclear. Compared to the Norwegian ECEC policy documents, in the Finnish documents, languages are only rarely mentioned and different languages are mostly just acknowledged. Multiculturalism is referred rather than multilingualism. The research concludes that awareness of multilingualism should be increased and understanding of the social, political and economic struggles related to multilingualism especially in ECEC teacher education. (Alstad & Sopenen 2020.)

According to Pham and Tipton (2018) collaboration with parents is important and there are multiple ways educators can support children's first language. Interaction with parents is beneficial to clarify misconceptions about bilingualism. Educators should support and value first language learning. The first language could also be brought into everyday life in classrooms communicates that learning a first language has value. (Pham & Tipton 2018.)

Winsler et al. (2014) state that rich exposure to at least one language that could build a strong linguistic foundation may be difficult for immigrant parents to provide if they speak only English to the child and are not fully fluent in English themselves (Winsler et al. 2014). This is why I think it is important for early childhood educators to support parents in speaking their native language to the child so that the language is sufficiently diverse and broad.

The study by Gagné et al (2020) revealed that early literacy and numeracy are interrelated. For example, storybook reading for children also supports the development of mathematical skills. Based on this study, literacy and numeracy skills learned in early childhood have a long-term impact. (Gagné et al. 2020.)

It should be noted that in the study by Gagné et al. (2020), refugee children were consistently in less successful groups than immigrant children were. This could be interpreted by their immigration status and the difficulties they may have experienced. The study result suggest that early support for refugee children in early childhood education is particularly important. (Gagné et al. 2020.)

4.3 Discussion of Findings

Support for language development and learning should be taken into account in all activities and can be well implemented in everyday early childhood education activities. This benefits both native speakers and second language speakers. When language orientations are clearly included in language education policy and the curricula for ECEC, it makes it easier to implement language support properly in everyday life of early childhood education. My main findings are described in Figure 9.

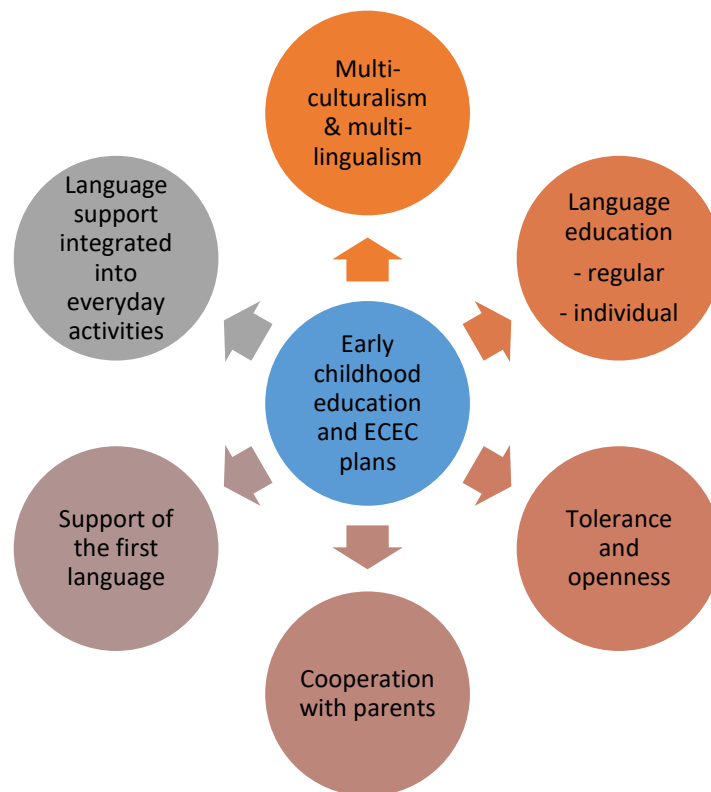


Figure 9: Main findings

Based on the researches I studied, the conclusion can be made that multicultural education and multilingualism should be included more broadly in the education of educators and early childhood education plans. Multilingualism should be taken into account in early childhood education in general and integrated into everyday activities. I think that language teaching and support in early childhood education should be planned and regular, and individual for each child, which is taken into account in the early childhood education plan. As diversity and awareness increase, I think that multiculturalism and multilingualism will be better taken into account in the future.

As research has shown, staff diversity is also a major asset in early childhood education. Awareness of different cultures and languages also increases along with the diversity of educators in kindergarten. However, it also has its challenges. The staff should support the development of children's language, so for example, a fluent Finnish language proficiency of an early childhood teacher or a caregiver in a Finnish-language kindergarten is important. However, if the educator knows the child's first language, it can be better supported and that also supports other language development. I think a child's first language could be included in, for example, morning circles or dressing situations, for a child to say in their own language what day it is or what to wear next. As found in the study, there is a link between mathematical skills and language learning, so for example, by illustrating things both numerically and linguistically, supports each other.

When considering immigrant children, the backgrounds of children and families should be taken into account. For example, the traumatic experiences of refugees can also affect language development and learning. This requires understanding and tolerance from educators. Most importantly, each child should be considered as an individual, regardless of background. The above-mentioned qualities would seem to be in the basic nature of those working in the early childhood education. However, it is good to be aware of, for example, which qualities to develop and what to pay attention to.

Incorporating parents more strongly into the daily life of the kindergarten could also serve to support language development and acquisition for the whole family and also for the whole group of children. For example, by presenting their own language and culture, it could strengthen linguistic and cultural development. As research has shown, openness and dialogue with parents are important in fostering understanding and, ultimately, the most important thing, which is the development and well-being of the child.

5 Conclusion

Now that my thesis writing is ending, it feels like it has been a long lasting, but instructive process. I have been thinking about this topic for about a year now. I was thinking of starting to write this thesis in the spring, but lack of time was a slowdown. I wanted to have enough time to focus on this thoroughly. I think that writing process was educational and beneficial. However, the method I used was challenging at first.

Understanding the method took time and I think I only understood this method completely in the end part of doing this thesis. This journey and method were definitely useful for learning. I think I now have a better understanding of research and this has taught me critical thinking about research. It gave me the idea that in the future, I could use this method in a new

study, which would certainly make the process different and progress smoother since I have this experience.

I participated in the supervision of the thesis and specifically the guidance about literature review, which were very useful and necessary. I also received support from the library services. In addition, I got support and good tips from my fellow students. Without support and guidance, I would not have been able to complete this thesis in such an instructive and fluent manner.

Doing the thesis gave me a lot of additional information about early childhood education, the factors that influence and guide it. My knowledge has deepened in language development and support, immigration, bilingualism and multilingualism as well as language and cultural awareness in early childhood education. Professionalism has strengthened and clarified.

The aim of this thesis was to study language development in early childhood and the role of early childhood educators in language education. In addition, the goal was to get results that provide ways to support language development in a culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood education. I think I achieved my goals well and the research findings supported the theoretical framework related to my topic.

I hope that this thesis would provide more information about language education and especially the language support of children with an immigrant background. I wanted to address the issue in a varied and comprehensive way. That is the reason I chose articles that deal with the topic from diverse perspectives.

I think the articles did not give direct examples of supporting language development but made one think concrete ways in which language development could be supported. For example, daily morning circles, music, and gymnastics sessions could be used to support language for both immigrant and non-immigrant children. Many creative means can also support language development, such as plays or art sessions.

There is a lot more to research on the topic in the future. For example, a long-term follow-up study on the language development of people with an immigrant background and its impact on the course of life would be interesting. Concrete ways could also be explored more, finding the best ways to support the language development of a child with an immigrant background.

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