



Supporting Multilingual Children's Language Development in Early Childhood Education

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**Supporting multilingual children's language development in
early childhood education**

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Monimuotoisuus varhaiskasvatuksessa. Katsaus monikielisten lasten kielenkehitykseen helsinkiläisessä päiväkodissa

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli löytää tapoja niin opettajille kuin vanhemmille tukea monikielisten lasten kielenkehitystä. Opinnäytetyön aiheen toimeksiantajana toimi kunnallinen varhaiskasvatuslaitos ja koulutuskeskus Helsingissä.

Monikielisten lasten kielenkehityksen ja erityisesti suomen kielen viivästyminen kuuden vuoden ikään mennessä herätti huolta. Sekä vanhemmat että varhaiskasvattajat olivat asiasta huolissaan helsinkiläisessä päiväkodissa. Yksikkö halusi aiheen käsittelyllä löytää mahdollisia tapoja auttaa opettajia ja vanhempia sekä vielä enemmän lasta, joka hyötyisi erityisesti.

Teoreettinen tausta keskittyy kielen ymmärtämiseen, monikielisyyteen, ympäristöön sekä toimitakulttuuriin, jotka vaikuttavat useamman kielen oppijoihin. Lisäksi se paneutuu Suomen perusopetussuunnitelmaan, lainsäädäntöön sekä kunnan perusopetussuunnitelmaan kielikysymyksen osalta.

Teen kvalitatiivista tutkimusta; aineisto kerätään puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla, joissa haastattelen neljää ammattilaista, jotka työskentelevät kyseisessä yksikössä tai läheisesti sen kanssa. Myöhemmin analysoin aineiston temaattisen analyysin avulla. Aineiston tarkastelu tapahtuu semanttisen lähestymistapaa noudattaen.

Tutkimus osoitti, että monialainen tiimi, arkipedagogiikka, oppimisympäristö, käytetyt välineet ja huoltajien rooli olivat tärkeitä tekijöitä monikielisten lasten kielenoppimisessa.

Mary Matheri

**Diversity in Early Childhood Education. A look at language development among
multilingual children in a Day care centre in Helsinki**

Year	2023	Number of pages	33
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The aim of the thesis topic was to find out methods for both teachers and parents in supporting multilingual children's language development. The thesis topic was commissioned by a Municipal early childhood and education centre in Helsinki.

There was an arising concern of delayed language development and Finnish language in particular among multilingual children by the age of six. The concern was raised by both early childhood education teachers and parents in a Helsinki day care unit. By commissioning this thesis, the Unit sought to find possible methods to help the teachers and parents and more so the child who is the beneficiary.

The theoretical background focuses on understanding language, multilingualism, environments and operation cultures that impact learners with more than one language. It further explores the Finnish National core curriculum, legislations and municipality curriculum on the issue of language.

I conduct qualitative research; data is collected through semi-structured interviews where I interview four professionals working in or closely with the unit. I later analyze the data through thematic data analysis. Data review is done through a sematic approach.

The study found out that a multidisciplinary team, everyday pedagogy, the learning environment, tools used and guardians' role were important factors in the language learning of multilingual children.

Keywords: Language development, multilingualism, early childhood education

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1 Background of the Thesis

Due to immigration, globalization and media, the presence of many languages among communities has increased. Consecutively, the number of children speaking more than one language has increased. This has also led to a rise in the number of children whose home language is different from the language of instruction in schools. Learners learning a new language not only learn the language, but they also learn through the language.

There was a concern of delayed language development and Finnish language in particular among multilingual children by the age of six years. Teachers and parents in a Helsinki day care unit which is the working life partner in this thesis had been concerned about reasons causing the delay and how they can help solve the situation. This concern led the working life partner to commission this thesis with an aim of identifying possible methods that could be applied to the daily activities of the child and to help parents and teachers in supporting multilingual children's language development.

I will conduct qualitative research, the theoretical background will be done through literature review of earlier research with a focus on understanding language, multilingualism, environments and operation cultures that impact learners with more than one language. I will also observe the Finnish National core curriculum of early childhood and education on the subject of language. This research attempts to answer the question: Are there ways that could be applied to day-to-day activities of the child to boost language development? Based on this research question, I will formulate semi-structured questions for the interview.

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews where I will interview five professional working in or closely with the unit. I will later analyse the data through thematic data analysis. Data review will be done through a sematic approach. I will discuss the results in the findings and relate them with the research in the theory as well as my own view of the issue. I will conclude by writing a summary of the important methods and clues learnt from the interviews and through the thesis process.

1.1 Working Life Partner

The working life partner is a Municipal early childhood and education centre in Helsinki, with a capacity of about one hundred children, operating in six groups, the children are diverse and multilingual, aged between one and a half to six years. The institutions activities are based on creating a safe everyday life for families with children in the surrounding area. These activities are guided by the National core curriculum of early childhood education (ECEC) as well as the Helsinki city curriculum. I will give an overview of early childhood education and care

operations in Finland and the National core curriculum of ECEC. I will focus on rich world of languages as a learning area as stipulated in the core curriculum.

1.2 Objective

The aim of this thesis is to identify possible methods that could be applied to the daily activities of the child and to help parents and teachers in supporting multilingual children's language development.

2 Research Framework

In this chapter the Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) approach will be introduced. The general principles of providing ECEC, the goals and implementation of ECEC with high quality and the ECEC philosophy will be discussed to give an overview of the ECEC prerequisite in inclusivity, equality and structure.

2.1 Early childhood and care in Finland

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a goal-oriented and systematic unit, that emphasises on pedagogy in education, care and upbringing of children. The Ministry of education and culture provides guidance, planning and monitoring while the local authorities have the mandate to provide ECEC services to meet the needs of children and families in terms of time and language. ECEC activities are provided in three forms namely; centre based (commonly known as day care centre), family-based and open supervised activities. Private service providers can also offer centre and family-based activities. (OKM 2023)

Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 2022 gives every child an equal right to access ECEC services. It implies that the child of a parent on childcare leave or unemployed is entitled to fulltime early childhood education and care, neither will financial aid for private care fees be based on family situation. The decision of taking the child to ECEC or raising them at home until the age of five is done by the child's guardian. (OKM 2023)

Guardians and parents can take care of their children at home where they get various allowances, the child should however join free compulsory pre-school at the age of six or in some cases at the age of five depending on the support a child needs. The pre-primary school consists of a minimum of 700 hours and lasts for one year. The pre-primary is provided in school or care centre premises. In municipality ECEC services, clients fee is based on the size and income of the family and the number of hours the child participates in the ECEC unit. It is free for low-income families. Families can get a private childcare allowance to assist in covering the costs. (OKM 2023)

2.2 National Core Curriculum of Early Childhood and Education

Implementation of early childhood and education is directed by The National Core curriculum, to meet the child's and family's needs, local authorities further draw up their own curriculum based on the national core curriculum. In early education centres and family day care centres, a personal early childhood and education plan is drawn for every child. The guardians must be involved in the drawing of this plan, it must also put into considerations the child's wishes during the planning, implementation, and assessment. Decisions on the ECEC core curriculum are made by the Finish National Agency for Education in accordance with the Early Childhood Education and care Act. Provisions for the pre-primary education are guided by the Basic Education Act. (OKM 2023)

2.2.1 The Aim of ECEC in Finland, mission and general goals

Early childhood Education and care is a public service whose mission is promoting holistic growth, development and learning of children in partnership with their guardians. It also promotes equity and equality among children thereby preventing social exclusion. Children acquire knowledge and skills that strengthen their active agency and participation in the society. ECEC supports the conditions for the child's learning and promote lifelong learning in line with the principles of inclusion. It further aims at ensuring Child's participation and influence in matters concerning them is upheld. Children are guided to develop mutual respect, sustainable living, interpersonal and interaction skills. (National Agency for Education 2022, 11, 13)

2.2.2 Core Values of ECEC

The best interest of the child forms the basic consideration of the core values. Secondly, the child's right to care protection and well-being, the child's voice, equal and just treatment. Thirdly, the principle of inclusion and protection from discrimination in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (National Agency for Education 2022, 17)

2.2.3 The Concept of Learning

The view of the child as an active agent and play form the pillars of the conception of learning in ECEC. The National core curriculum of ECEC is based on a model of learning where the child is viewed as an active agent and through interaction with the environment and other people, the child grow, develop and learn. It views learning as holistic and happening everywhere, the child's curiosity, desire to learn new things and repetition are utilized. Actions, emotions,

sensory perceptions, bodily experiences, knowledge, skills, language and thinking are combined. (National Agency for Education 2022, 19)

Play is an integral medium of learning in ECEC, it brings joy and motivation and simultaneously allow children to acquire knowledge and skills. Children's interests and previous experiences are the starting point for learning, connecting the new knowledge and skills to their cultural backgrounds, developing competences and the world they experience is important. (National Agency for Education 2022, 38)

2.2.4 Pedagogical emphasis on education, instruction and care

The National core curriculum of ECEC defines pedagogy as systematic and goal-oriented activities based on multidisciplinary knowledge (mainly in the fields of early childhood and education and educational sciences) that are professionally managed and implemented by professional staff intended at supporting children's learning and well-being. The pedagogy of the national core curriculum for ECEC is built on the core values, the conception of the child, childhood and learning. The concept of education, instruction and care are an integrated entity in practical operations of ECEC. (National Agency for Education 2022, 19, 20)

Care consists of both physical basic needs and emotional care aimed at creating a positive feeling of value and acknowledgement in children and experiencing a connection with other people. Care situations are also educational and instructive, the child learns skills such as taking care of oneself, time management, good habits and interaction. (National Agency for Education 2022, 20, 21)

Education encompasses activities that help transmit, model, and revise customs, norms and cultural values. It also guides children in forming opinions and to critically evaluate the existing ways of thinking and acting including sustainability and to use their competence for the good of others. The children are guided in forming personal identities and being responsible citizens. Instructions are aimed at promoting learning and helping the children to understand themselves, others and the environment. Children are encouraged to learn new things and are also guided to use different ways of learning. The instructions support and utilize the child as an active agency. Interests, strengths, developing skills and needs for individual support are put into account. Furthermore, the instruction is based on the pedagogical activity, transversal competences and objectives set for learning environments. (National Agency for Education 2022, 20)

In all activities of the child, pedagogy is emphasised, the figure below illustrates the framework for pedagogical activity in ECEC.

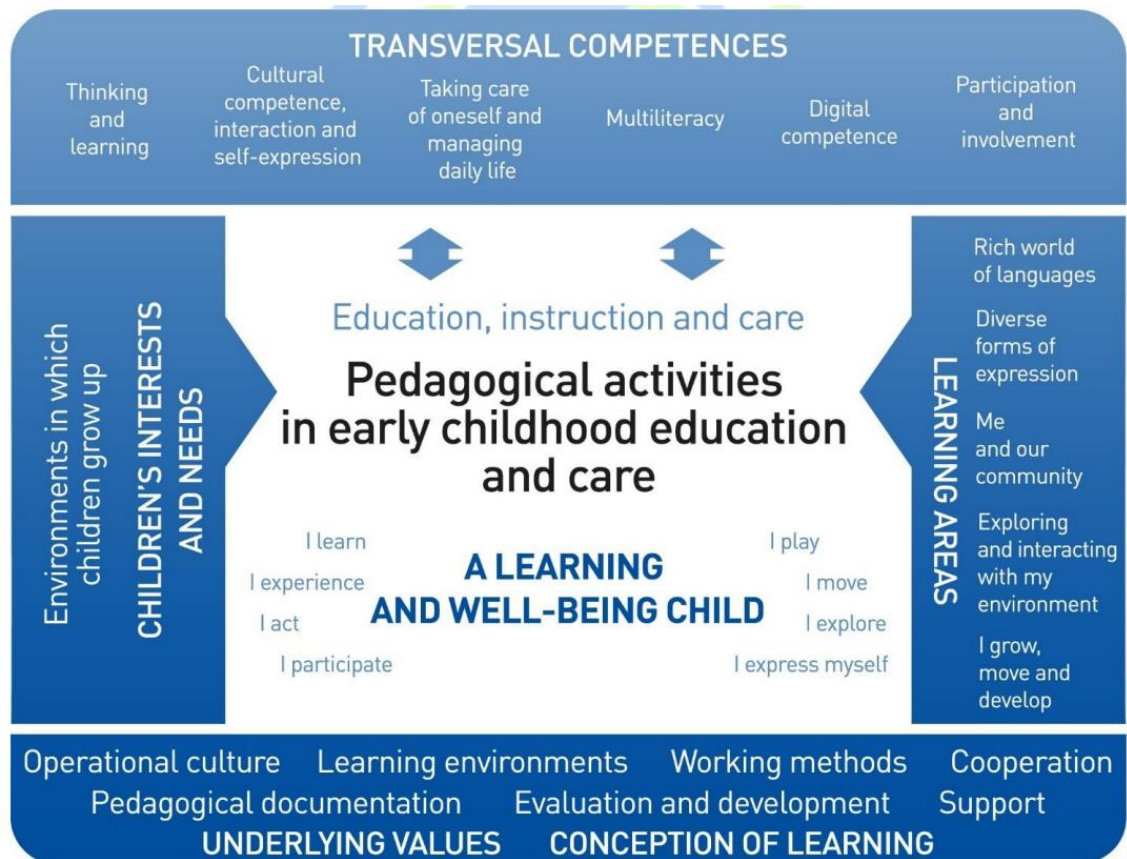


Figure 1: The framework for pedagogical activity in ECEC (National Agency for Education 2022, 35)

Planning and implementation of pedagogical activities in ECEC requires a holistic approach, although this thesis focuses on language development, it would be impossible to focus on this area alone. I will therefore take a closer look at rich world of languages in connection to culture.

2.2.5 Culture and language in ECEC

The National Core curriculum of ECEC perceives children's different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and capabilities as a positive enrichment to the community. Therefore, perspectives regarding language and culture apply to every child in ECEC. Cultural traditions of children are supported through the cooperation of various cultural communities, guardians and personnel. Municipalities are also mandated to provide ECEC services in the child's mother tongue if Finnish, Swedish, Sami or Roma language. Other languages can also be used in ECEC if they do not affect the objectives of Finnish or Swedish learning. (National Agency for Education 2022, 48)

2.2.6 Rich world of languages

According to the National Core Curriculum (National Agency for Education 2022, 40) ECEC has a mandate to support the expansion of children's linguistic skills, capacity and identities. The linguistic development is supported in six areas namely, interaction Skills, language comprehension skills, speech production skills, language use skills, language awareness, linguistic memory and vocabulary.

It is worthwhile noting that, linguistic development in children of the same age may vary, they may be going through different phases. Supporting and guiding children in the main areas of linguistic skills and capacity assist them in developing linguistic identities.

Interaction skills: ECEC acknowledges the importance of children's experiences of being heard and getting responses to their initiatives, both verbal and non-verbal messages are answered to sensitively. ECEC supports the development of interaction skills through encouraging the children to communicate with each other and the staff. (FNAE, 40)

Language comprehension skills

In supporting language comprehension skills, sufficient linguistic modelling where children are constantly engaged in discussion activities develop their vocabulary. Accurate and descriptive language is used in various situations, gestures, images and objects are used for support when needed. (FNAE, 41)

Speech production skills

Speech production skills is monitored and guided, to help children understand and use spoken language, they are encouraged to speak in different situations with both adults and other children. Gradually, the children's attention is drawn to different tones of voices and emphasis. (FNAE41)

Language use skills

ECEC aims at strengthening the children's language use skills through situation awareness, the use of language in different situations is reflected on together with children. They practise explaining, narrating and speaking in tunes. Learning good manners, use of humour, empathy and familiarisation with different texts to strengthen competence in language use. Exposure to different texts also helps the children in noticing the difference between written and spoken language. (FNAE, 41)

Linguistic memory and vocabulary

As the children's linguistic memory and vocabulary expand, they diversify their linguistic expressions. Employees have a duty to support this development in an unhurried atmosphere that provide opportunities for considering the meanings of words and texts and learning new concepts in their contexts. Linguistic memory is supported for instance through nursery rhymes, playing with language, naming things etc. (FNAE, 41)

Language awareness

Children's language awareness is supported by observing different languages in the immediate surroundings. The workers have a duty to attract and encourage children's interests in spoken and written language and gradually to read and write in a playful manner. Here children's attention is directed from words to the shape and structure of language. (FNAE, 41)

3 Language development in childhood

The word language is captured as an abstract set of grammatical rules, it is also often understood in terms of a national language, referring to it as a single entity, and a closed system effectively. (Aro 2011, 110) Language is also described as a systematic and conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols for the purpose of communication or self-expression (Crystal, 1995). As child who learns a language acquires the means to express their thoughts and feelings to others and the skill to do so in a different way with various people around them. (Hoff E. 2014, 4)

Language development entails acquiring adequate language skills required by a society, studies in language development therefore seek to identify the best practices in helping children to acquire these language skills. (Hoff 2014, 8)

It is important to understand normal development in order to optimise it, to understand the unavoidable threats and to identify the occurrence of breakdowns. This understanding also helps us to learn how to prevent, repair or avoid the breakdowns. (Oller 2014, 12, 13) This chapter explains stages of language development from birth to when children are six years old.

3.1.1 Language Milestones

Oller (2014, 12) observes that the most general and abstract linguistic signs are words, phrases, sentences and other forms of discourse that form language. The figure 2 below is a summary of children's language development capacity from conception to six years.

Age	Stage	Language Milestone
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Foetus week 26	Language signs before birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Can show various facial expressions, yawn, smile, blink their eyes, cry. ➤ Respond to human voices; distinctively sensitive to own native language as contrasted with a foreign language. ➤ can distinguish the prosody (stress patterns, rhythms, intonations) of their mothers' language. ➤ Babies cry is turned to mothers' prosody at birth.
Third trimester to 0 years	Temporal Synchrony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Babies synchronize their own movements with those of more mature individuals who demonstrate how language is used.
0 years	First Pragmatic Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Linking an abstract with an entity, for example mothers voice with her face
3 months	Multimodal Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Able to involves all senses and intonation contours, rhythms and movements of persons that come and go from the child's experience.
6 to 7 months	Meaningful Productions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The baby begins to babble in repetitive syllabic sequences, they can say things like bababa or dadada.
1 year		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ First Spoken word
2 years	First syntactic milestone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ By the age of two the child will have attained the of two words.
3 years	Improved syntactic capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A child differentiates fictional acts in an imaginary world of play. ➤ The child will also be able to incorporate tenses and express contrary to fact conditionals.

Figure 2: Summary of Language Development stages (Oller 2014, 12 - 22)

Temporal Synchrony and the First Pragmatic Mapping

Entrainment, which is the movement aligned with words, phrases, sounds and rhythm is one capacity that has been demonstrated by human babies at birth and in the weeks following birth. Normal developing babies depend on the synchronization of their own movements with those of more mature individuals who demonstrate how language is used. (Oller 2014, 13)

Pragmatic mapping implies linking an abstract (a symbol) sign with some entity. The first pragmatic mapping milestone of a normally developing child is associating mother's voice with her unfamiliar face. Neonates observe the tempo of mother's syllabic utterances which are timed perfectly with the movements of her articulators (lips, tongue and jaw). Thereafter, the face takes on special pragmatic meaning. The child will quickly develop multimodal mapping which involves all senses and intonation contours, rhythms and movements of persons that come and go from the child's experience. At three months a normally developing baby can be cajoled into imitating the intonation contour of a brief utterance. (Oller 2014, 13)

Meaningful Productions

Between six to seven months old, the baby begins to babble in repetitive syllabic sequences, they can say things like bababa or dadada. At the age of one, the child will be able to produce a recognizable word commonly known as first spoken word. This word comes from the already repetitive vocabulary developed from hearing and looking or pointing to whatever is being referred to through a process of semantic generalization. After generalizing a proper noun to new instances of the person on different occasions, or common verbs to new instances, the child will be on the way or will have reached the semantic ideal of optimal generalization. This implies that the referring term in question logically embraces every instance of the object, event, state or person that might be referred to not only the one at hand. In this case for example, a child understands that a referring term like shoes can be applied to all the instances of shoes that may be encountered. The child can only generalize to instances that they can imagine or exist already in their vocabulary. The child can demonstrate comprehension of the meaning of words spoken by someone else, even though they may not yet be saying any words out loud. (Oller 2014, 20)

Syntactic milestone

By the age of two the child will have attained the first syntactic milestone of two words. At age three, a child can tell imaginary situations from representations of perpetual world, take up playacting roles, differentiates fictional acts in an imaginary world of play. Syntactic capacity will continue to advance by incorporating such elements as present tense vs past

tense. Later future tense and sharpening of the contrast between perfect aspect (such as went, fell) alongside progressive aspect (such as was going, was falling) and the differentiation of modality (like; can go, would go, should go, must go). The child will also be able to express contrary to fact conditionals incorporating complex strings of the forms, (for instance, if Y had not happened, Y would not have occurred). At the age of seven, syntactic capacity will plateau at the syntactic limit of diminishing returns, here the child. By age five, a child can understand the difference between an error and an imagination. and to correct an error of fact. (For example, That's not my dog!, that's mine over there!) Between age five and eight, a normally developing child is able to differentiate an error, a merely mistaken representation and a deliberate lie. (Oller 2014, 22)

4 Language Acquisition

To get an understanding of the cognitive perspective of language development, I look at Vygotsky law of structure and development of higher mental functions which he defines as a transition from direct, innate, methods and natural forms of behaviour to mediated, artificial mental functions that develop in the course of cultural advancement. (Vygotsky 1998, 168: Leontjev, D. & Poehner, M 2020,4.)

Vygotsky theory considers that a child's language is originally social because it occurred from an interaction between the child and others. The labelling process is also an important factor in the formulation of concepts. Similarly, he emphasises that in the development of abstract thought, language plays an important role. The child's language in this case results from and is part of social interaction. Vygotsky sees the experience of talking with adults about familiar everyday experiences as crucial, it helps them to build up knowledge of language and allows them to respond to particular ways of thinking and interpreting their own experiences. He further explains that talking becomes necessary in clarifying important points but also supports learning more about communication. Children solve practical skills mainly through their speech, eyes and hands. Childrens conversation observation is the unity of perception, speech and action which leads them to make sense of situations. To understand meaning, children react to words, interpret the context, facial expression and body language. (Vygotsky 1998, 168: Leontjev et al, 2020,4.)

4.1 Language and Culture

Study in various academic disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, second language acquisition and foreign language education has over the past few decades pointed to the intertwined nature of language and culture. Culture from a sociocultural practice perspective is also closely interrelated to interactional language use and processes. On the contrary,

acquisition of a language as a medium of communication, whether learner's first, a heritage or foreign language cannot take place in isolation, neither ignoring the culture or context in which the language or culture is learned and used. (Bhatt S. Chan W. Nagami M. & Walker I. 2015, 1.)

Bhatt (2015, 2) sites that the language Council of Europe (COE n.d., 1) emphasises that an individual's identity is formed through the formation of relationships with a wide cluster of overlapping social group. The main objective of language education in an intercultural approach is to foster "the favourable development of the learner's entire personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experiences of otherness in language and culture".

4.2 Importance of Mother Tongue

Recognizing learners' home language as a valuable resource and utilizing their entire linguistic repertoire for learning is also linguistic responsiveness, for instance during group discussions and information retrieval discussions. (Cummins et al., 2005; Lucas et al., 2008) To enable learner's to build on the linguistic resources of learners, it is important for teachers to promote, support and build on their linguistic resources. (García & Hesson, 2015; Lucas et al., 2008). Cummin (2007) observes that when the students home language skills are strong, they are able to learn other languages better. (Alisaari & Heikkola 2020, 132)

4.3 Monologue view of language

Following the development of nation states, language was attached to a particular territory. This means that each language unit is regarded as internally solid but at the same time, independent in regard with other languages and separate from them. Nationalism draws a boundary between two languages horizontally and vertically by elevating one standard language. (Aro 2011, 110.)

National languages consist of various functionally and socially stratified usages, meaning that even in the case of a mother tongue, people do not learn a language. Instead, they learn a variety of ways to understand and use the linguistic by extension the semiotic resources around them. Learners there by gain a unique selection of where, why, with whom and by what channel to use language. (Bakhtin 1981: Aro 2011, 115, 116.)

The national language concept involves a monolingual stand, at all levels, both societal and national, the politics of standard language aims at minoritizing other languages and marginalizing different variants like dialects in the area in question. It has also led to a negativity ideology towards crossover phenomena between languages, mainly to guard a particular mother tongue from being corrupt by foreign influence. In similar context, exposure

to two languages is seen as a potential threat to a child's linguistic development. Today, the idea of language in the ideologies of nationalism is being challenged. (Aro 2011, 111.)

4.3.1 Dialogical view of language

This view stresses that language is heteroglossia, this means it's changing and dynamic in nature, dialogism is one of the efficient guidelines of language studies, primarily the analysis of meaningful and functional elements of language. It recognizes that language is essentially a multilingual phenomenon. Most language communities have become bilingual or multilingual, meaning two or more languages are used by the communities. Textbooks of historical linguistic and sociologists observe that encounter between bilingual communities has been and will continue to rise. Modern data also shows how languages travel globally through practices and institutions such as tourism, migration, working life and human relations. Although the presence of many languages in people's everyday lives involve slow face to face contacts, rapid virtual encounters are produced. As a result, many people grow to be multilingual and opportunities for multilingual usages increase. (Aro 2011, 115.)

Together with face to face and written language, today media provides different ways of language use. The constant exposure to the elements of change in semiotic resources triggers people's response in listening, consuming and producing language that is appropriate for the time. Aro therefore argues that what people do with language is from the beginning both multi-modal and multi-registered. (Aro 2011, 116.)

5 Teaching Language

Cummins (2001) notes that language learning is an intrinsic part of multilingual students' education, in addition to learning language, they are also learning through the language. Lucas & Villegas (2013) argue that in creating a linguistically appropriate environment for these learners, it is crucial for teachers to be responsive linguistically, and to actively advocate for their learner's language learning. This includes various topics like teacher's understanding of language learning processes and the role of language in learning, using language in a pedagogical context and the required pedagogical skills in supporting language learners during content lessons (Coady, de Jong, & Harper, 2011; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008.) (Alisaari 2020. 1, 2)

5.1 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion volume (2020, 30) CEFR (2020, 28) promotes the teaching and learning of language as a means of communication, it brings a new and empowering vision of the learner, it presents the language

learner and user as a social agent, who acts in the social world and exerts agency in the learning process. This action-oriented approach shifts away from syllabuses with a linear progression through language structures and pre-determined concepts and functions towards those based on analysed needs, aimed at real-life tasks and functions and concepts that are purposefully selected. This new approach is guided by can do descriptors rather than deficiency perspective of what the learner can't do.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion volume (2020, 30) distinguishing multilingualism as the coexistence of different languages at the social or individual level and plurilingualism as the learner's dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire. Coste D., Moore D., Zarate G. (2009, 11) identifies plurilingual and pluricultural competence which refers to the ability to use languages for the purpose of communication and participation in intercultural interactions, where a person (a social actor) has proficiency of varying degrees in several languages and experience of several cultures.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion volume CEFR (2020, 28) further promotes the teaching and learning of language as a means of communication, it brings a new and empowering vision of the learner, it presents the language learner and user as a social agent, who acts in the social world and exerts agency in the learning process. This action-oriented approach shifts away from syllabuses with a linear progression through language structures and pre-determined concepts and functions towards those based on analysed needs, aimed at real-life tasks and functions and concepts that are purposefully selected. This new approach is guided by can do descriptors rather than deficiency perspective of what the learner can't do.

6 Research Planning

We started off the thesis process with a meeting with the day care manager where I asked them for possible areas of study. They had two areas, language development and enriching play. I chose to research on language development because at the time, the parents' association of the unit had raised concerns about the low language levels of children when starting school. They were concerned that most children needed to continue learning in L2 classrooms in the first grade of their primary school education. The language development was in my opinion a timely topic through which I would learn more on the subject, the study literature and results would also assist in improving the children's linguistic development. The thesis would also help parents, early childhood education workers and others interested in education that is diverse linguistically.

I presented my thesis topic, after it was accepted, I proceeded with the thesis plan. The thesis plan lays the foundation of the aim of the study, research method and time frame. I chose the qualitative research method which according to Bogdan R., De Vault M., Taylor S. (2015, 15) is about collecting descriptive data, that includes people's own words and records of their behaviour. Together with literature review on the subject of multilingualism, language learning and development, I planned to Collect data through thematic interviews, I would interview a total of 5 professionals working directly or indirectly with the ECEC as follows: an early childhood education teacher, two L2 teachers, a speech therapist, a special education teacher.

This was followed by application of the research permit from the City of Helsinki. After the research permit was granted, I arranged for the interviews. In the following chapter I will review the concept of qualitative methodology and introduce the research question. I will also consider the ethics and reliability of the method.

7 Qualitative Methodology and its Reliability

Bogdan refers to qualitative methodology as research that produces descriptive data. It is concerned with people's own spoken or written words and observable behaviour. Unlike quantitative method which involves gathering data, qualitative research methods approach the empirical world, seeking to understand the meanings people attach to their lives and how they see things. (Bogdan et al 2015, 18.)

Qualitative research is inductive, rather than collecting data to assess preconceived hypothesis, qualitative research develops insights, concepts and understandings from patterns in the data. In all settings and groups, there is something to be learnt, the researcher sets aside their pre-assumptions. The theory should fit the data and not the other way round. In a qualitative research, design is flexible, though research questions are prepared, the researcher does not know exactly the specific questions to ask until they are familiar with the setting. How the participants view their experiences also influences the interview questions. Settings are particularly important in qualitative research, the researcher is careful to retain the human side of social life while looking at people, settings or groups thereby taking a holistic approach. (Bogdan et al 2015, 18, 19, 20.)

This thesis attempts to answer the question: Are there ways that could be applied to day-to-day activities of the child to boost language development? Based on this research question, I then formulated semi-structured questions for the interview. I provided the interviewees with a set of interview questions in advance through email. I planned to conduct a group interview with the two L2 teachers and individual interviews with the others. The form of interview would be specified later depending on the interviewee's availability.

Interviewing the five professionals on their experiences in development of language in multilinguals and analysing their descriptions using data analysis method provides an insight on ways to help ECEC teachers and parents in supporting multilingual children or children in a multilingual environment in language acquisition. It also emphasizes on cooperation of multiprofessionals as guided by the National core curriculum of ECEC.

7.1 Interviews as a research method

An interview is one of the conversational practices aimed at producing knowledge. For decades, conversations have been used as a central tool to acquire personal and social aspects of life such as how others think, act, feel, develop and experience the world as individuals and in groups. Interview (inter- view) refers to an interchange of views between two people conversing about a subject of mutual interest (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008.) Conversation is a latin word meaning to dwell or wander with someone, dialogue on the other hand is to talk (logos) going back and forth (dia) between individuals Mannheim & Tedlock, 1995.) (Brickman 2013, 2,3)

Since qualitative research is concerned with peoples thinking and their everyday life, the interviews should be conducted in the most natural manner, researchers model their questions after a normal conversation and not a formal question-and-answer exchange. Naturally, study of human behaviour is exhausting and time consuming, one shortcoming of the qualitative research is that it's success depends on the ability of the researcher. Although this method gives the researcher a free hand in mounting the research, the flexible nature of the qualitative method makes it unstandardized unlike other methods. Moreover, it may be hard for qualitative researchers to distant their effects on the people their study, however, they should try to minimize or be aware of them while analysing the data. (Bogdan et al 2015, 18, 19, 20.)

7.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured qualitative research refers to interviews purposed at obtaining interviewees' descriptions of their life world to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008.) These interviews are staged and conducted to serve the researcher's goal of producing knowledge, other goals might be obtaining a degree, career progression or positioning oneself in the field. The staging of the interviews may be affected by these motives, the motives however are important in analysing the results. The researcher also seeks to acquire the interviewee's descriptions of how they experience the world, its events and episodes, rather than theorizations and reflections or speculations explaining why they have certain experiences. The primacy of the life world as experienced is key in qualitative interviewing. (Brinkmann 2013, 21, 22).

Interviews can be conducted individually or in a group setting. Together with the researcher's agenda, the number of interviewees is also key in the interview's interactions. The interviewer

takes the role of a moderator, introduces the topic and facilitates the interchange. The goal of the discussion is not to reach a consensus but rather, facilitate articulation of various viewpoints on the subject. Though the recommended number of participants in six, small groups of two interviewees have been seen to be easy to manage. Accordingly individual interviews are easy to manage and allow interviewee to express freely especially on issues that may be considered personal or taboo. Individual interviews may be conducted face-to-face, through telephone or internet messaging. (Brinkmann 2013, 27, 29)

7.3 Implementation

The research permit was obtained from the city of Helsinki, where the working life partner (the kindergarten) is situated in. Also, the manager of the kindergarten and the interviewees gave the permissions for conducting the research. For data protection reasons the names of the kindergarten and the interviewees remain unidentified. A number of four interviews were conducted with total of four participants.

Implementation of the interviews varied with the availability of the interviewees, participants one and three were interviewed during their working hours while other adults supervised the children. Participant two was interviewed while they were off duty. The duration of the interviews differed, interviews with participants one and three were approximately 30 minutes long. Interview two was slightly over one hour long. Participant four was interviewed through an online team's meeting for about forty-five minutes.

The interviewing timing was a challenge, most of the interviewees were very busy so adding the interview to their already busy schedule was a burden. For instance, Interview three was scheduled in the morning, but due to unavoidable circumstances the interviewee requested to change the time, we suggested the same day in the afternoon. Even so, the interview was disrupted shortly when the interviewee was called to attend to an important issue. The general interview plan was also disrupted, all the four interviews were conducted as individual interviews, the special education teacher was not interviewed, only one L2 teacher was interviewed, one ECEC teacher was added to participate.

Bogdan R., et al (2015, 40) recommends that new researchers in qualitative methods should avoid familiar settings, since there is a likelihood of having a preexisting identity and seeing things in their own perspective, thereby obstructing the participants' view. Bogdan R., et al (2015, 40) further adds that people know and see the researcher in a certain way which may affect what they say and act in the presence of the researcher. In this regard the familiarity of the interviewer may also have affected the interviews since at the time of the interview the interviewer was working as an ECEC educator. The interviewees' answers were shallow even when requested to expound in some areas, they may also have assumed that the interviewer

had some knowledge in the subject. In addressing the ethical issues, the anonymity of the day-care and that of the interviewees have been preserved.

7.4 Thematic Interview Analysis

According to Caulifield J. (2022) thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data mainly from interviews or transcripts, the researcher finds common themes, ideas and patterns of meaning that arise repeatedly from the data. There are different ways of conducting thematic analysis, in this thesis I will use the six-step process which consist of familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up respectively. Although it is a six-step process, there is constant reflection and interaction with the data, and this being a small amount of data, I will combine step 3. generating themes 4. reviewing themes and 5. defining and naming themes under the subtopic generating and naming themes. Writing up involves reporting which is covered in the implementation, results and outcomes and discussion.

7.5 Six step process of Thematic Interview Analysis

1. Familiarization

The process of analysing data calls for ample time and reflection, it takes the researcher closer to reflecting into the participants lived experiences. Throughout the qualitative research process the researcher reflects on the extent to which they are answering the research question. Some data may give an initial lead, other ideas may not answer the question but may provide crucial information to the study, it's important however to permit analytical possibilities. After the interviews, organizing the data to make it accessible for the analysis is usually the first step (Galletta A. 121). The data was collected through notes, in this step I read through the notes and translated them from Finnish to English language.

2. Coding

Coding involves labelling without attaching participant names to data-collection instruments and storing the data in a secure location, it should also adhere to the agreement of confidentiality with the participants. By maintaining accuracy and authenticity during the coding stage, the researcher builds conviction in the data analysis and findings. (Galletta A. 2013, 121). In this thesis, the interviewees are referred to as participant1, participant 2, participant 3, participant 4. The data provided different codes which were later sorted and combined to form the themes.

3. Generating Themes:

In the earlier steps of familiarization and coding, the researcher is already engaging in the early analysis where the themes are becoming evident too. The guidelines for searching themes should relate with the research question, the researcher decides on the themes to pick and their significance in the data. Another important factor is the frequency of the theme, connecting the themes may also give greater insight. (Galletta 2013, 123, 124, 127)

Participants were a small number, I used manual sorting of the themes, using yellow stickers and later compiling them in a word document. The themes from the data are multidisciplinary team, everyday pedagogy, the learning environment, tools used and guardians' role. Since the participants are professionals in their field, I am interested in their opinions about language acquisition especially among multicultural children, I will therefore review the data from a semantic approach which implies that I will analyse the exact content of the data.

8 Interview Results and Outcomes

In this chapter I will highlight the results of the interviews, the ideas are grouped in to four themes namely, multidisciplinary team, everyday pedagogy, the learning environment, tools used and guardian's role. The interviewees are referred to as participant 1, participant 2 and participant 3.

I. Multidisciplinary team

All the participants acknowledge that to help multilingual children's learning, a multidisciplinary team is essential. The group team which includes an early childhood teacher, a child nurse and sometimes a social pedagogue have the major role in helping the children's language development. Participant 1 reported that "the whole team can make an impact, the team thinks about how to support and promote." Participant 2 also agrees strongly that the ECEC teachers are a significant part of how the language progresses. They explain that the task of an ECEC teacher is to plan tasks that take into account all the children's skills, they should also plan the content and the learning environment. Participant 2 brings out the importance of everyday pedagogy, how the educators speak, how the language learning happens in the everyday life, and consulting with second language teachers as well as clinical teams.

Participant 3 and 4 expresses the employee's significant position because Finnish language exposure happens in the kindergarten. Availability of the work force was also brought up by one participant, the continuity of the work with children was affected by changing substitute workers. Active participation of daycare staff in consultant sessions with the child to avoid repetition of the instructions and reserving time for learning environment guidance was raised. They all recognized the importance of working together as a team, the guardians, health station Neuvola and speech therapist for situations that need special intervention.

II. Everyday Pedagogy

Participants 1 and 2 highlighted play and interaction with the children as an important way of practicing Finnish language, participant 1 used vocabulary games, organizing small group activities was reported by participants 2 and 3. Three participants noted the importance of using diverse language and abstract concepts like in mathematics such as more, less, above, below, opposites among others. Participant 1 reported to have been using naming of items and describing concepts. They all seemed to agree that language is learned everywhere. Participant 4 highlighted the use of repetition - doing or saying the same things many times and enabling room for success, for the child to have a feeling that they know or can do something. They also observed that breaking down instructions eg. by using first long sentences and later breaking it down as a good method.

III. The Learning Environment

The day care centre was highlighted by participant 2, how the facilities in the kindergarten are used to promote learning including learning outside the classroom (ulko-pedagogiikka). The values of the day care centre should create a sensitive work community that brings out the identity of the multilingual children. Participant 1 also felt that teaching language should be the day care's priority. Participant 3 agreed that the daycare centre plays a major role in exposing the children to Finnish language, but they had observed that children's needs were supported more where the day care centre had few multilingual children.

IV. Tools and Materials

All the participants reported to have been using tools and linguistic materials to support multilingual children's language learning. Participant 2 and 4 used pictures, participant 1 used Kielinuppu and Roihusten Materials (Kippin Family). In addition to Kielinuppu, participant 4 reported to have found sign language and a book called Eetu, litu ja kertomattomat tarinat Lapsen kerrontatäitoja kehittävä satukirja as useful. The following is a brief description of the linguistic tools and materials mentioned by the participants.

Kielinuppu Method

Kielinuppu is a Finnish term which refers to budding language skills which blossom later. The team produces songs and educational videos aimed at supporting Finnish language learning in multilingual children and children with language development challenges. These materials are published on YouTube and are therefore accessible to everyone. (Kielinuppu)

Roihusten Perhe Material/Kipping Family

It's a Linguistic support package consisting of topics from the life of Kippin family, ready lesson plans and instructions for activities, games, photos and picture cards etc. It is available as hard copies and as an electronic material. Kipping family materials help children in developing linguistics skills and also save teachers time in preparing study materials. (Kipinäkeskus 2023)

The story book Eetu, litu and the untold stories

It is a different story book that is aimed at strengthening the child's narrative and storytelling skills. It inspires children to talk about things and events, also allows adults to discuss feelings and thoughts with the child. (Mäkinen L. Suvanto A. Ukkola S.2019)

V. Guardians' role

Guardians were viewed as having an equally major role in supporting their children's mother tongue as well as the Finnish language. All the participant viewed reading and holding conversations with children as efficient methods for parents in supporting the children's home language. Participants 2, 3 and 4 discouraged parents from using languages that they were not competent in with their children an example was Finnish and English. Participant 4 also added that parents should also create a diverse and rich environment of language; by for instance playing with the child and involving them with home chores where the parents explain the items and have a conversation as they work together.

Participant 3 noted that supporting one's own home language is the starting point for learning Finnish language, also viewed the kind of encouragement given to the children as important. Parents can support children to learn their own language through dialogue, reading, learning vocabulary and concepts like more, less. They noted that if the concepts were learnt in mother tongue, they would be easier to learn in another language. Participant 2 also viewed children's contact with relatives as an efficient language support network. Participant 2 advised that public library and online materials were resourceful in supporting home language, however, participant 3 did not view watching children's programs as a big contribution to learning Finnish language.

One of the participants noted that sometimes the parents undermine the challenges a child may have and think that the child will catch up with time. Parents were advised to take all the support given to them and cooperating in the process of helping the child.

Though the parents were viewed as the main pillars of the child's home language, participant 3 reminded that the kindergarten has a mission to show case and strengthen the child's identity which in turn encourages them to learn their home language. They highlighted singing and telling fairy tales in different languages as ways of promoting multi-literacy.

9 Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the interview results in connection with theory and personal view. All situations in the day care have been recognised as learning situations, and therefore educators' creation of a versatile language environment in ECEC has been seen to support learning. The National core curriculum for ECEC (2022, 41) also aims at strengthening the children's language use skills through situation awareness, adults and children reflect the use of language in various situations. These situations also help children to learn good manners, dialogue and interaction skills (FNAE, 41).

Play is an effective language learning method in strengthening spoken language, the different play area situations help children to expand their vocabulary, the interaction with other children and constant feedback and guidance from adults during play allow them to improve their skills in language use. Teachers' ability to connect the everyday pedagogy and the environment could enrich the play and interactions and multilingual children's language development. The National core curriculum for ECEC (2022, 37) advice that play promotes the child's well-being, learning and development, the personnel therefore have a responsibility to provide all children inclusively with opportunities that promote different kind of play and games.

ECEC aims at strengthening the children's language use skills through exposure to different texts also helps the children in noticing the difference between written and spoken language (FNAE 2022, 41). Reading books to the children was expressed as an important method of learning, it is a renown method in helping children with spoken language as well as building vocabulary and written language. It also helps children in noticing the difference between written and spoken language.

All the participants recognized the need for the use of different methods and combined effort from a multidisciplinary team in supporting multilingual children's language development. Alisaari and Heikkola also acknowledge that language learning is a complex phenomenon in that multilingual learners require a supportive pedagogical environment that considers psychosociolinguistic and socio-cultural processes. Different support in areas like dimension of language, promoting social interactions and importance of home languages may benefits learners. (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012: Alisaari & Heikkola 2020, 132)

The guardian role in supporting and encouraging the child in learning their home language was emphasised in the learning process. Participants noted that the home language gives foundation for learning the new language especially in learning concepts. The child's home language was also seen as strengthening their identity and as a result increasing self-esteem. The kindergarten has also a role to play in creating a safe learning environment where the multilingual children's identity is supported through showcasing the child's language and

culture. Children's language awareness can be supported by observing different languages in the immediate surroundings (FNAE, 41). The institutions and ECEC values like sensitivity were deemed important by participants.

10 Reliability and Ethical Issues

The research permit was obtained from the city of Helsinki, where the working life partner (the kindergarten) is situated in. Also, the manager of the kindergarten and the interviewees gave the permissions for conducting the research. For data protection reasons the names of the kindergarten and the interviewees remain unidentified.

11 Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to find out possible methods that would be applied to the day-to-day life of the kindergarten in supporting multilingual children's language development. The study found out that a multidisciplinary team, everyday pedagogy, the learning environment, tools used and guardians' role were important factors in the language learning of multilingual children. The choice of method depends on the need of the child, however, tools and materials used for one child could also benefit others.

Based on the participants explanations, the day care seems to have efficient tools and methods in helping multilingual children's language development. During the interviews, participants gave a list of the tools and methods they use, they did not explain their systematic approach in using them or how actively they used them. More research would however be necessary to find out the practicality and frequency of their use.

Multidisciplinary team is one pillar that came out in the interviews, there seem to be a disconnect between what the support team that is indirectly involved with the group expects from the group team and vice versa. Staff training would be necessary to enhance this cooperation. Other issues like the number of multilingual children which according to participant 3 affects the support given was also not researched in this thesis. Further studies would be required to determine the relevance of the matter.

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Interview Questions (English)

1. Have you in your line of duty encountered multilingual children with language development problems?

a. If yes, what kind of problems?

b. How have you helped them?

2. Do you think children speaking more than one language can have delayed Finnish language development?

3. Can early childhood educators impact the development of Finnish language for multilingual children? If yes, how?

4. Do you think a day care as a unit has a role in promoting language development for the multilingual children? If yes, how?

5. How can parents help children in learning all the languages they have been exposed to efficiently? (In this case, mother tongue and Finnish language)

Appendix 2: Interview Questions (Finnish)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
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1. Oletko työssäsi kohdannut monikielisiä lapsia, joilla on kielen kehityksessä ongelmia/haasteita?

a) Jos, niin millaisia

b) Kuinka olet auttanut heitä?

2. Uskotko, että lapsilla, jotka puhuvat useampaa kuin yhtä kieltä, voi olla kehitysviivettä suomen kielessä?

3. Voivatko varhaiskasvatuksen opettajat vaikuttaa monikielisten lasten suomen oppimista? Jos kyllä, niin miten?

4. Onko mielestäsi varhaiskasvatuksen yksiköllä rooli kielenkehityksen edistämisessä monikielisille lapsille? Jos niin miten?

5. Kuinka vanhemmat voivat auttaa lapsia oppimaan tehokkaasti kaikkia kieliä, joiden vaikutuspiirissä he ovat? (tässä tapauksessa äidinkieli ja suomen kieli)

Appendix 1: Interview Questions (English)

Appendix 2: Interview Questions (Finnish)