



Partnerships in multicultural ECEC settings in Norway: Perspectives from parents and professionals

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Abstract

Partnerships between parents and professionals in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are well established as being important for children's well-being and learning, and may be especially significant for children with immigrant backgrounds. The present study uses data from the *Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society* (ISOTIS) project to investigate perspectives from parents and professionals regarding their mutual partnership as well as their views on multicultural and multilingual education in culturally and linguistically diverse ECEC settings in Norway. The findings indicate positive partnership views among the parents and professionals, but also suggest the opportunity to create a more shared understanding of the child's behaviour and potential. The findings further suggest that both parents and professionals value educational practices that promote cultural diversity. However, beliefs regarding multilingual education diverge, indicating that although ECEC may play an important role in children's multilingual education, there is little agreement on how this role should best be played.

Keywords: *multicultural ECEC; partnership; parents; professionals*

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Introduction

Partnerships between parents and professionals are well established as an important part of high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Wolf, 2018) and have been

linked to children's well-being and learning (Aghallaj et al., 2020; Epstein, 2018). For many children, their home and ECEC constitute two of their main social contexts, and bridges between these two are regarded as significant for the child's positive development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For children with cultural and linguistic differences between their home and ECEC, these bridges may matter even more (Aghallaj et al., 2020), and partnerships between parents and professionals may provide increased coherence in these children's everyday lives as they learn to navigate between different cultures and languages. Today, European ECEC provisions are becoming increasingly multicultural,¹ and establishing partnerships in diverse contexts is an essential task for professionals. However, international research suggests that parents with immigrant² backgrounds and professionals working in multicultural ECEC settings experience barriers in their relationships with each other, especially concerning language, asymmetrical power relations and cultural disagreements (Norheim & Moser, 2020). These barriers are intertwined and might be related to differences in beliefs about childrearing and education, between parents and professionals. In Norway, few studies have investigated partnerships in multicultural ECEC settings, and thus, there is a need for knowledge about these relationships. Moreover, less is known about how parents and professionals navigate between differences in beliefs about childrearing and education, especially multicultural and multilingual education (Pesch, 2018). The present study aims to approach this subject by investigating how parents and professionals in multicultural ECEC settings in Norway view their partnerships, as well as their beliefs regarding multicultural and multilingual education.

Theoretical framework

The current paper uses the term *partnership* to denote a specific type of relationship between parents and professionals, in which two (or more) parts acknowledge each other as equals, with shared responsibility for the child's development (Epstein, 2018). According to Epstein (2018), a partnership requires mutual trust, open communication, and a will to work closely together with the child in the centre. Epstein's (2018) theory of overlapping spheres of influence draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and emphasizes that children live their lives in multiple environments (e.g., home and ECEC); the overlap between these spheres is influenced by the experiences, philosophies, and practices of both parents and professionals and develops over time. According to Meads' (1934) symbolic interactionism, children develop their values, beliefs, personalities, and

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- 1 For the purpose of this paper, we use the term *multicultural* to describe contexts with cultural and linguistic diversity due to immigration, although we acknowledge that the term can be used more broadly (see e.g. Banks & Banks, 2019).
 - 2 This paper uses the definition provided by the Oxford Migration Observatory regarding immigrant/migrant, where a migrant is someone who temporarily resides in another country (could for example be a student), whereas immigrants are "people who are or intend to settle in their new country" (Anderson & Blinder, 2011), where the latter group is the focus of this paper.

self-concepts through interactions with their environments (i.e., home and ECEC). Thus, parents and professionals who do not familiarize themselves with the other environments in which the child develops may lack information to adequately interpret how expectations from these environments also influence the child. This may, in turn, result in a pivotal lack of keys to interpret the child's development and behaviour and to be responsive toward the expectations the child meets in the other contexts. When the beliefs and values between the different spheres of influence in which the child navigates are greater, the interaction between the contexts may matter even more.

Epsteins's (2018) theory of overlapping spheres of influence differentiates between two levels of interactions, namely, interactions between family and school, which comprise organizational practices aimed toward all families, and interactions between parents and teachers, which entail direct individual communication. However, these levels are also closely linked dependent on the amount and quality of interaction between parents and professionals. As meso-level processes are highly contextual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), educational partnerships are likely to be influenced by exo-, macro-, and chrono-level factors, such as policies, culture, and ideologies in society. Thus, there is a need for contextualized knowledge about how parents and professionals view their partnerships and their beliefs about multicultural and multilingual education. The current study explores perspectives from parents and professionals from the Norwegian context and discusses their perspectives in relation to the Norwegian ECEC system and policies.

Norwegian ECEC context

A large expansion of the ECEC sector in Norway in past decades has resulted in universal access for children starting from the age of 1 through a statutory right that guarantees education availability for all children within their municipality (The Kindergarten Act, 2020). Attendance rates are high, with 97.1% of all 3- to 5-year-olds and 84.4% of all 1- to 2-year-olds attending ECEC (Statistics Norway, 2020). Among children of parents with an immigrant background, attendance rates are also relatively high, at 83.9% for children aged 1 to 5 (Statistics Norway, 2020). Like other Nordic countries, the Norwegian ECEC model has a holistic approach toward childhood, education and care (Greve & Solheim, 2010), with a strong emphasis on play as the foundation for learning (Karlsen & Lekhal, 2019).

In Norwegian ECEC centres, cooperating with families has formally been a requirement since the first Kindergarten Act (1975). Today, professionals' responsibility to facilitate partnerships with all parents in their child group is regulated by The Kindergarten Act (2020) and the Norwegian framework plan for ECEC (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The framework plan states that the kindergarten is responsible for facilitating cooperation and ensuring good dialogue with the parents and that parents and staff share responsibility for the child's well-being and development. The staff in ECEC

provisions in Norway comprises 40.7% ECEC teachers, who are required to have a 3-year bachelor's degree to work with children from 0–5 years old, whereas 27.9% of the workforce holds a vocational degree to work with children in general (Statistics Norway, 2019). The rest of the staff do not hold any formal education to work with children (Statistics Norway, 2019). The staff-child ratio for children under 3 years old is 1:3, and 1:6 for children between the ages of 3 and 6 years old (The Kindergarten Act, 2020). One ECEC teacher can be responsible for up to seven children under the age of 3 and 14 children between the ages of 3 and 6 (The Kindergarten Act, 2020). Within the ECEC-teacher education program, working with families is stated as one of the competencies that students shall develop through the program and is specifically addressed through several courses (Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagelærerutdanning, 2012).

Parent-professional partnerships in Norwegian ECEC

As parental involvement and open communication between parents and professionals is a clear aim in Norwegian ECEC (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), several practices are applied to facilitate partnerships. The partnership practices in Norwegian ECEC comprise practices at an individual level as well as at a group level and mainly include daily communication in the mornings and evenings (see, e.g., Drugli & Undheim, 2012), phone calls, communication through digital platforms, parent-teacher conferences, parent meetings, parent councils, and more informal gatherings (Glaser, 2014; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2018).

Although annual parental surveys convey general satisfaction with Norwegian ECEC among parents (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021), research on how parents and professionals experience their relationships within the Norwegian context has been scarce (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2018; Wolf, 2019). The little research that has been done so far suggests that most parents and professionals are satisfied with communication but that they still consider there is room for improving the exchange of information about the child's experiences both at home and in ECEC (Drugli & Undheim, 2012; Sønsthagen, 2020). Newly educated teachers report experiencing general self-efficacy in their work with parents and emphasize that they have been prepared to work with parents through their ECEC-teacher program (Bjerkestrand et al., 2017). However, in situations where the child appears to have problems in ECEC or at home or where parents are dissatisfied with their work, professionals report being challenged (Bjerkestrand et al., 2017).

Some studies indicate that partnerships between parents and professionals in ECEC are related to parents' educational, social, and cultural backgrounds (Rognan, 2004; Wolf, 2019). As Norwegian ECEC traditions largely draw upon values and beliefs of middle-class culture (Stefansen & Skogen, 2010), Wolf (2019) suggests that professionals may limit contact with parents who differ from themselves to avoid conflict and maintain harmony,

leading to unequal access to attention and warmth from professionals. Parents with immigrant backgrounds have further expressed concern for how professionals follow up norms from their home culture (Djuve & Pettersen, 1998). With different cultural and linguistic backgrounds than many ECEC professionals, parents with immigrant backgrounds may differ from professionals in their beliefs about educational aspects that are relevant for their children, such as multiculturalism and multilingualism. In a small-scale qualitative study of parents' and professionals' views on multilingualism in ECEC, findings suggest that parents and professionals may experience and view multilingual practices quite differently, which in turn may relate to their partnerships, as language and culture are a part of the power structures in their relationship (Pesch, 2018). To our knowledge, no previous studies have specifically investigated how parents and professionals view their partnerships in multicultural ECEC provisions in Norway and the extent to which they share beliefs on multicultural and multilingual education.

As 22% of all children in Norwegian ECEC have immigrant backgrounds (Statistics Norway, 2021), facilitating partnerships with parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can be seen as a facet of professionalism for professionals working in ECEC and may be pivotal to ensure that all children and their families have equal access to high-quality early education (Wolf, 2018). Furthermore, the current globalized context in which children grow up today requires multicultural competence for all children. Hence, the framework plan establishes that cultural and linguistic diversity should be used as a resource in pedagogical work in ECEC to facilitate reflection on similarities and differences between cultures (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Based on the previously summarized literature, we believe that Norwegian ECEC constitutes an ideal setting to study partnerships in the provision of ECEC in multicultural settings for three reasons: (1) Norway provides universal access to ECEC, with a high level of outreach to immigrant groups; (2) creating partnerships with all parents is an important part of both the curriculum and teacher education program; (3) Norwegian ECECs are required by the curriculum to promote cultural and linguistic diversity and mutual respect (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Research question

The purpose of this study is to provide contextualized knowledge about the views of parents and professionals on their mutual partnerships and their beliefs about multicultural and multilingual education in ethnically and culturally diverse ECEC settings in Norway. To approach this, the present study is guided by the following research question:

How do parents with immigrant backgrounds and professionals working in ethnically and culturally diverse ECEC provisions (1) view their partnerships, and (2) what are their beliefs about multicultural and multilingual education?

Methods

Sample and procedure

For the present study, we used data from the collaborative European research project *Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society* (ISOTIS). Funded by the European Union,³ the ISOTIS project aimed to combat educational inequalities and increase inclusiveness. The data from parents and professionals in Norway were collected in 2018.

Data from the parents were collected through a face-to-face interview using a questionnaire (Broekhuizen et al., 2018). In the present study, we specifically selected the parents of children aged 3 to 6 years old with a Turkish immigrant background living in Norway ($n = 32$),⁴ mainly in Oslo, Drammen and Trondheim (Broekhuizen et al., 2018). Parents with a Turkish immigrant background were sampled for the ISOTIS structured interview study in multiple countries (Norway, the Netherlands, Germany and England) because they constitute the largest single-origin immigrant population in Europe (Huschek et al., 2012). In Norway, Turkish immigrants represent one of the first immigrant groups from a non-Western country, and on average, this group has low levels of educational attainment, employment and income (Henriksen, 2007). While second-generation Turkish immigrants have higher participation rates in higher education than first-generation immigrants, they still have lower participation rates than those of average non-Western immigrants in Norway (Henriksen, 2007). Thus, providing insights into Turkish immigrant parents' experiences with early education can be useful to develop inclusive educational practices. Parents were interviewed in the language of their choice (i.e., Turkish or Norwegian) by trained interviewers who had a Turkish immigrant background themselves. The interviews were conducted in locations where the parents could speak freely and lasted for approximately one hour. Parents were given a gift card worth 100 NOK as a small incentive to participate. The mean age was 34 years, and 96.9% of participants were female. The majority of the parents had attained a high school or vocational program level of education (59.4%), almost a third of the parents had attained higher education (28.1%), and some parents had attained a primary or secondary school level of education (12.5%). A total of 78.9% of the participating parents were first-generation immigrants, whereas 28.1% of the parents were second-generation immigrants.

Data from the professionals ($n = 56$; 24 teachers and 32 managers) were collected through an internet survey. This survey targeted professionals working in formal and informal education in European countries (Slot et al., 2018). For the purpose of the current

3 This project received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No. 727069.

4 This sample size is small, as the target population is small and challenging to reach. However, the participants are still estimated to represent approximately 10% of the total population of Turkish immigrant mothers with children in the right age group in these areas (as described in more detail in Broekhuizen et al., 2018).

study, we used the data provided by professionals recruited from the same areas as the parents. However, although the data are collected from parents and professionals from the same areas, the data are not clustered at the centre level. The professionals selected for the present study worked in ECEC provision in which 25% or more of the children had an ethnic-cultural background other than Norwegian.⁵ The majority of the teachers (85.7%) had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, whereas all managers (100%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. All but one of the professionals were born in Norway and reported Norwegian as their home language and none had parents born in non-Western countries.

Table 1. Description of the parents' and professionals' background characteristics.

		Parents	Professionals	
			Teachers	Managers
N		32	24	32
Sex	Male	3.1%	14.3%	4.8%
	Female	96.9%	85.7%	95.2%
Age	M	34.41	45.15	50.10
	SD	5.64	11.52	10.37

Measures

To investigate the views of parents and professionals in multicultural ECEC provision on their partnerships, we measured the parents' *perceived discrimination* by the teacher, both parents' and teachers' *partnership* views, and the beliefs about *multicultural* and *multilingual* education of parents, teachers and managers. The items used were translated from English to Turkish and Norwegian by researchers involved in the ISOTIS project. This translation was double-checked by native speakers in Norwegian and Turkish who were external to the project. The data were collected in different languages (i.e., Turkish or Norwegian), and all items reported in this paper have been translated back to English by the authors.

Perceived discrimination

The absence of perceived discrimination among parents is a prerequisite for a partnership between parents with immigrant backgrounds and professionals in ECEC. Parents were asked to report how often they felt discriminated against or unfairly treated because of their ethnic-cultural background by the teachers in the ECEC centre of their child, as well as how often they thought their child had felt discriminated against or unfairly treated because of their ethnic-cultural background by the teacher. Parents were asked to respond

5 The professionals included in our sample reported working in ECEC provision with the following proportions of children with a different ethnic-cultural background: 25% (35.1%), 50% (22.8%), 75% (12.3%) and almost all (29.8%).

to these two items on a 4-point Likert scale, with never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3) and often (4) as the possible response options.

Partnerships

Partnerships were assessed using two scales specifically developed for the parent structured interview study (Broekhuizen et al., 2018) and the internet survey of professionals working in formal and informal education in 10 European countries (Slot et al., 2018), inspired by the Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (Petrogiannis & Penderi, 2013). For the purpose of the present study, a subset of items was selected, resulting in two sets of corresponding items for the group of parents and teachers. These items revolve around understanding each other and sharing beliefs about the child's behaviour and about what the child can achieve, as well as their perception of problem-oriented contact between parents and teachers. Additionally, parents were asked to report whether they trust the way their child's teachers work with the children. As trust is valued as a key ingredient in partnerships (Epstein, 2013), we included this item from the parental survey in our analysis, although there was no corresponding item in the teachers' survey. For all partnership items, both parents and teachers were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale with the following possible responses: disagree (1), slightly disagree (2), undecided (3), slightly agree (4), and agree (5). As managers often do not work directly with families in the same way as teachers, they were not asked to answer the statements regarding partnerships.

Multicultural beliefs

To assess multicultural beliefs, parents and professionals were asked to respond to four different statements about multicultural education, adapted for the parent structured interview study (Broekhuizen et al., 2018) and the internet survey of professionals working in formal and informal education in 10 European countries (Slot et al., 2018) from the Teacher Cultural Beliefs Scale (Hachfeld et al., 2011). Statements concern sensitivity toward differences between children from different cultures, seeing similarities between children from different cultures and learning to respect other cultures as early as possible. Both parents and professionals were asked to respond to the statements on a 5-point Likert scale with the following possible response options: disagree (1), slightly disagree (2), undecided (3), slightly agree (4), and agree (5).

Multilingual beliefs

Parents and professionals were asked to respond to four common statements regarding multilingual beliefs, adapted for the parent structured interview study (Broekhuizen et al., 2018) and the internet survey of professionals working in formal and informal education in 10 European countries (Slot et al., 2018) from the Monolingual Beliefs in Education Scale (Pulinx et al., 2017). Items included concern about the support multilingual children should receive

for their home language in ECEC, whether children should be allowed to use their home language in ECEC, and whether using their home language in ECEC will result in less sufficient development of their Norwegian language skills. Parents and professionals were asked to respond to the statements on a 5-point Likert scale with the following possible response options: disagree (1), slightly disagree (2), undecided (3), slightly agree (4), and agree (5).

Analysis

To investigate parents' and professionals' views on their partnerships and their beliefs about multicultural and multilingual education, descriptive analyses were conducted, including medians, means, and standard deviations for all items for parents, teachers, and managers. To investigate whether there were differences between parents and professionals in partnership views and multicultural and multilingual education, we conducted independent sample Kruskal-Wallis tests. Kruskal-Wallis was chosen over t-tests and ANOVA due to the measurement level of our data, which is at an ordinal level. All analyses were conducted in the statistical package IBM SPSS Statistics 26 for Windows.

Ethical considerations

Both the structured parent interview study (Broekhuizen et al., 2018) and the survey with professionals (Slot et al., 2018) received ethical approval from the Ethical Advisory Committee of Utrecht University. Both the European General Data Protection Regulation (Reg. EU 2016/679), relevant Norwegian legal and ethical requirements, and the standards described in the ISOTIS data management plan were fully met and respected. All participants gave informed consent in accordance with the demands of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The data were collected through the survey software LimeSurvey for both parents and professionals and stored at a protected central data server at Utrecht University (Broekhuizen et al., 2018; Slot et al., 2018).

Results

The present study aims to provide knowledge about parents' and teachers' views on their partnerships, as well as their beliefs about multicultural and multilingual education, from ethnically and culturally diverse ECEC settings in Norway. First, parents were asked whether they perceived discrimination by their child's teacher against either themselves or their child, assuming that the absence of discrimination is a prerequisite for a partnership. The findings suggest that the parents participating in our study answered an average of never or rarely for both themselves ($M = 1.34$, $SD = .70$, range 1–4) and their child ($M = 1.34$, $SD = .70$, range 1–4), with 8 out of 32 participants reporting such experiences happening between rarely and often. This suggests that experiences of discrimination by

the teacher are rare but do exist. Next, parents and teachers responded to statements about their educational partnerships.

Table 2. Partnership views of parents and teachers.

	Parents (n = 32)			Teachers (n = 24)			Independent samples Kruskal- Wallis test
	Mdn	M	SD	Mdn	M	SD	<i>p</i>
I trust the way my child's teachers work with the children.	5	4.75	.44	–	–	–	–
My child's teachers understand me. / I feel that parents understand me.	5	4.72	.52	4	4.18	.90	.01
My child's teachers and I have similar beliefs about my child's behaviour. / I have similar beliefs as the parents about the children's behaviour.	5	4.72	.45	4	3.45	1.26	.00
My child's teachers and I have similar beliefs about what my child can achieve. / I have similar beliefs as the parents about what the children can achieve.	5	4.69	.64	4	3.73	1.07	.00
My child's teachers communicate with me not only when there is a problem. / I mostly talk to parents when there is a problem. ⁶	5	4.68	.83	5	4.33	1.19	.00

Note I: Possible responses include disagree (1), slightly disagree (2), undecided (3), slightly agree (4), and agree (5).

Note II: Mdn = median; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; *p* = *p*-value

For partnership views, the findings indicate that the parents participating in our study report positive views of their partnerships with the teachers. Parents trust the way teachers work with their child, and they experience that teachers understand them. They also report having similar beliefs as their child's teachers about their child's behaviour, as well as what their child can achieve. They also experience that the teacher does not communicate with them only when there is a problem. However, there are significant differences between the partnership views of parents and teachers on all items. The teachers still have quite positive views, although they on average answer between undecided and slightly agree in regard to having similar beliefs about the child's behaviour and about what the child can achieve. For these items, there are also larger variations in the responses of the teachers.

For multicultural beliefs (Table 3), the parents, teachers and managers agree that practices emphasizing sensitivity toward differences and similarities across cultures, as well as respect for other cultures as early as possible, should be adopted in ECEC. There are only a few significant differences in the responses both between and within the groups, indicating that parents, teachers, and managers are mainly in agreement in regard to beliefs about multicultural education. However, teachers and managers appear to value the importance of emphasizing similarities across cultures significantly higher than the parents do.

Multilingual education is the topic with the largest variation in responses, both between and within groups (see Table 4). Parents seem to be undecided, or even agree,

6 For comparison, this scale was recoded, to match the positive scale given to the parents.

Table 3. Multicultural beliefs among parents, teachers, and managers.

Multicultural beliefs	Professionals									Independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test
	Parents (n = 32)			Teachers (n = 24)			Managers (n = 32)			
	Mdn	M	SD	Mdn	M	SD	Mdn	M	SD	<i>p</i>
It is important that professionals are sensitive to differences between children from different countries and cultures.	5	4.53	.76	5	4.56	.81	5	4.66	.54	.84
It is important for children to learn that people from other cultures can have different ideas on what is important to them.	5	4.66	.60	5	4.69	.47	5	4.78	.60	.12
It is important that children of different countries and cultures see the ways in which they are all similar.	5	4.47	1.04	5	4.94	.25	5	4.87	.33	.04*
It is important for children to learn to respect other cultures as early as possible.	5	4.72	.58	5	4.87	.35	5	4.94	.24	.20

Note I: Possible responses include disagree (1), slightly disagree (2), undecided (3), slightly agree (4), to agree (5).

Note II: Mdn = median; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; *p* = *p*-value

Table 4. Multilingual beliefs among parents, teachers and managers.

Multilingual beliefs	Professionals									Independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test
	Parents (n = 32)			Teachers (n = 24)			Managers (n = 32)			
	Mdn	M	SD	Mdn	M	SD	Mdn	M	SD	<i>p</i>
By speaking their home language in ECEC, children with other language backgrounds will learn to speak Norwegian less quickly. ⁷	4	3.28	1.61	2	2.31	1.25	1	1.81	1.13	.00**
Children with a minority language background should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language in ECEC.	5	4.00	1.41	4	3.38	1.36	1	3.26	1.52	.00**
It is important that children with non-Norwegian home languages develop a higher level of skill in the Norwegian language than their home language.	3.5	3.06	1.68	2	2.88	1.50	2	2.39	1.38	.31
Children with non-Norwegian home languages should be allowed to speak their home languages to each other at ECEC.	4	3.69	1.28	4	3.94	1.36	4	3.87	1.38	.63

Note I: Possible responses include disagree (1), slightly disagree (2), undecided (3), slightly agree (4), to agree (5).

Note II: Mdn = median; M = mean; SD=standard deviation; *p* = *p*-value

7 The wording of the item for the parents was slightly different: By speaking their home language at ECEC, children with other language backgrounds do not learn Norwegian sufficiently.

to a greater extent than teachers and managers that speaking the home language at ECEC will contribute to slowing the learning process of Norwegian. On average, parents agree slightly that children with a minority language background should be offered the opportunity to learn their home language in ECEC, whereas teachers and managers, on average, are more undecided on this matter. Parents, teachers and managers are, on average, undecided or slightly agree with the statement that it is important for children with non-Norwegian home languages to develop higher levels of skills in the Norwegian language than their home language. Somewhat surprisingly, parents report the lowest average mean about whether children with non-Norwegian home languages should be allowed to speak their home language to each other in ECEC, on average answering between undecided and slightly agree, whereas teachers and managers respond closer to slightly agree. It is worth noting that there are large variations in the responses within the groups on all items regarding multilingual beliefs.

Discussion

The current paper investigates the views and beliefs of parents with immigrant backgrounds and professionals working in diverse ECEC provisions on (1) their partnerships and (2) on multicultural and multilingual education. As partnerships presuppose two or more equal parts, the absence of parental perceived discrimination by the teacher is considered a prerequisite. The results from the present study indicate that the majority of the participating parents never experience discrimination from their child's teachers. However, the findings still demonstrate that a minority of the parents have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment against themselves or their child by their child's teacher because of their ethnic or cultural background. Although most parents do not report this, experiences of discrimination or unfair treatment may be detrimental for partnerships in ECEC in the few cases where it occurs and may also be harmful for the children (Adair, 2015). Therefore, ECEC provisions should implement strategies to combat all forms of discrimination and ensure fair and inclusive treatment of all families. Discrimination may exist both on a personal level and at a structural level and is connected to societal factors (Adair, 2015) at both the exo- and macro-level. For the minority of parents who report experiences of perceived discrimination by their child's teacher, it may further contribute to feelings of marginalization if there is a discourse among the majority suggesting that discrimination does not occur. The present study does not provide information on the type and nature of these experiences of perceived discrimination; thus, we suggest that future research should further investigate the types of discrimination experienced by a broader sample of parents with immigrant backgrounds in Norwegian ECEC to gain greater insight into parental perceived discrimination in ECEC.

For partnerships, findings from the present study indicate quite positive views, especially from the parents' perspective. It is worth noting, however, that some of these parents are second-generation immigrants (28.1%), which may influence their experience. These positive views somewhat contrast with findings in previous international research, which often state that parents with immigrant backgrounds face considerable barriers to creating partnerships in ECEC (Norheim & Moser, 2020). Although the professionals report their partnership views slightly less favourably than the parents do, their views are still quite positive. As the present study does not comprise any data from parents and professionals in more homogenous ECEC provisions, we cannot determine if these rather positive views differ from the views of parents and professionals in less culturally and linguistically diverse ECEC provisions. However, from what we know from previous qualitative inquiries in Norwegian ECEC (Bjerkestrand et al., 2017), which does not specifically target multicultural provisions, professionals in Norway in general seem to have quite positive views of their partnerships with parents in their daily communication. Nevertheless, Drugli and Undheim (2012) have shown that professionals also experience room for increased sharing of information. Hence, the findings from the present study add to these previous findings from the Norwegian context and show that positive views on partnerships are also dominant among parents and professionals in multicultural ECEC settings.

There may be several explanations for why parents and professionals in multicultural ECEC settings in Norway report more positive views on their partnerships compared to previous findings in the international literature (Norheim & Moser, 2020). As meso-level processes, partnerships are influenced by contextual exo-, macro-, and chrono-level factors (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and are dependent on both the experiences, philosophies, and practices of both parents and professionals (Epstein, 2018). As such, several contextual factors may hold important keys to interpret the findings in the present study. First, policies ensuring universal access, as well as relatively high outreach among children with immigrant backgrounds, may provide professionals with a substantial amount of experiences in cooperating with diverse families. With these experiences, their self-efficacy relating to this task may increase, which influences their behaviours (Durksen et al., 2017; Romijn et al., 2020). Furthermore, Norwegian ECEC teachers are explicitly required to facilitate and create partnerships with all parents according to the framework plan (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), and they have been prepared to do so through their teacher education program (Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagelærerutdanning, 2012), which in turn may impact their philosophies and practices. This somewhat contrasts with the situation described in research literature from, e.g., the U.S., concluding that teachers are not adequately prepared to work with parents through their teacher education program (Epstein, 2018). Last, acknowledging cultural and linguistic diversity is emphasized as an important value in the framework plan (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), and the ECEC-teacher education program states that teachers shall attain knowledge

about multicultural and multilingual education and convey respect and tolerance (Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagelærerutdanning, 2012). This may influence how professionals interact with families with immigrant backgrounds. However, these mechanisms should be further investigated and compared to processes in countries with different policies in the future to inform policymakers.

Although findings from the present study suggest overall positive partnership views, they also indicate a potential to pay more attention to shared beliefs about the child's behaviours and about what the child can achieve, especially from the professionals' perspective. This may be seen in line with Drugli and Undheim's (2012) study, which finds that both parents and professionals see the need for improvement in regard to exchanging information. If the exchange of information is not sufficient between parents and professionals, the foundation for building a shared understanding of the child's development may be lacking, leading to deviant beliefs about the child's behaviour and about what the child can achieve. This may, in turn, result in a lack of coherence between the child's different environments and may make it more difficult for these children to navigate between the two contexts. One possible explanation for this finding may be that the exchange of information is time-consuming. When parents and professionals have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is often necessary to allocate more time to ensure communication (Norheim & Moser, 2020; Sohn & Wang, 2006). However, professionals will usually have the same resources independent of factors such as cultural and linguistic diversity within their group.

The present study finds that parents and professionals overall believe that culturally sensitive practices should be applied by professionals in ECEC. For professionals, these beliefs may be related to their mandate to implement inclusive practices in Norway, which requires them to facilitate reflection on similarities and differences between cultures as described in the framework plan (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). This may have been amplified through their teacher education program, as the program emphasizes inclusion and promotes multicultural competence (Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagelærerutdanning, 2012). The multicultural beliefs we investigated in the present study lie close to the requirements from the framework plan (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), and these findings suggest that the professionals have beliefs that are to a large extent aligned closely with the values they are required to implement. However, it is worth noting that the closeness between the investigated items and these requirements may also lead to a social desirability bias in the responses. For parents who already navigate between cultures in their everyday lives, it may not be surprising that they also value that their children acquire multicultural competencies.

Regarding multilingual education, the current study finds significant differences between the groups, as well as large differences within the groups. This is in line with previous research, which reveals inconsistent findings regarding parents' and professionals' multilingual beliefs (Aghallaj et al., 2020). Whereas some studies find parents advocating

for the promotion of their home language in ECEC (Rodriguez, 2015; Winterbottom, 2013) and professionals who emphasize the use of the majority language only (Rodriguez, 2015), other studies observe the opposite (De Gioia, 2013; Hu et al., 2014). In Norway, the discussion about ECEC as an arena for language learning is highly politicized (Alstad, 2015), and there has been a strong emphasis on all children learning sufficient Norwegian before they enter school (see, e.g., Meld. St. 6 (2019–2020)). Although both parents and professionals may see the benefits for children in learning the Norwegian language before they enter formal schooling, their beliefs about how to best equip children to achieve this vary considerably. This may be related to conceptions and misconceptions about early language learning, both among parents and professionals. Previous studies suggest inconsistencies in Norwegian ECEC policy documents regarding multilingualism (Giæver & Tkachenko, 2020) and points to vague and ambiguous documents which on the one hand promote a resource perspective, but on the other hand, strongly emphasize the challenges of multilingualism (Alstad & Sopanen, 2021). As such, the lack of shared understanding about how to provide multilingual children with a stimulating language-learning environment may be an expression of this contention. Very little research exists on how Norwegian teacher education programs equip teachers to work with multilingual children (Alstad, 2015), so this may be an important area for future research. Moreover, this seems to be an important topic for continuous professional development for all teachers, not only newly trained teachers.

Strengths and limitations

The present study has several limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the sample sizes are small and nonclustered, and the sample of parents is limited to parents with Turkish immigrant backgrounds. However, as recruiting participants with immigrant backgrounds for research often proves to be a challenging task (Lopez-Class et al., 2016), the present study provides unique insight into the perspectives of parents with immigrant background experiences and provides new knowledge on a topic that has not previously been investigated in the Norwegian context. As Turkish immigrants in Norway, on average, have low levels of educational attainment, employment and income (Henriksen, 2007), knowledge about their experiences with early education may be useful to develop inclusive educational practices. Second, the self-reported nature of our data may be sensitive to social desirability bias. However, the substantial variation found in most of the variables supports the validity of our data. Next, the partnership items presented in the present study are not exhaustive. These items do not account for all aspects of a partnership, and it is therefore worth noting that parents could still be experiencing other barriers in their relationships that are not assessed in the present study. One such aspect that the present study does not cover fully is the power structures between parents and professionals, which would be important for future research to further investigate, as partnerships require two (or more) parts who acknowledge each other as equal and who share the

responsibility for the child's development (Epstein, 2018). Last, a significant strength of the present study is the inclusion of perspectives from both parents and professionals. Previous literature has largely focused on the parents' perspectives (Norheim & Moser, 2020), but to understand relationships within a meso-system, it is important to gain insight into the perspectives from both sides and to see these in relation to contextual factors.

Summary and conclusions

The present study finds more positive partnership views among parents and professionals in multicultural ECEC provisions in Norway than suggested by previous international research (Norheim & Moser, 2020). However, there is still the potential to create a more shared understanding of children's behaviour and potential among parents and professionals, which may require more time for communication, as these parents and professionals often communicate across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, the present study finds that a minority of the parents still have experienced discrimination by their child's teacher. As experiences of discrimination may have severe consequences for both parents and children who are exposed to it, ECEC provisions should implement strategies to ensure equal and inclusive treatment of all families. Future studies should further and more closely assess the prevalence and nature of these types of experiences, as they may be pivotal for children's education.

The present study also finds that both parents and professionals value educational practices promoting cultural diversity and that these beliefs are aligned to a large extent with the values established in the framework plan (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). However, despite the important role ECEC may play in providing all children with a high-quality language-learning environment and the framework plans requirement to promote multilingualism as a resource (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), beliefs about multilingual education diverge both between and among parents and professionals. This may in turn be detrimental for multilingual children, as parents and professionals hold the potential to create a coherent and stimulating environment for language learning. The diverse beliefs about multilingual education among professionals may reveal a lack of knowledge about early multilingualism among some professionals, which in turn may lead to a lack of confidence to guide parents on this topic. Little is known about how professionals are prepared through their teacher education program to work with multilingualism in Norwegian ECEC, and teacher education programs, as well as continuous professional development, may hold the keys to better equip teachers for the task of providing all children with a high-quality language-learning environment in close cooperation with their parents. Although the present study finds several positive aspects in the partnerships between parents and professionals in multicultural ECEC settings in Norway, the findings

suggest the potential to pull these overlapping spheres of influence more strongly together to ensure the coherence of the learning environments for all children in Norwegian ECECs.

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Thomas Moser is a full professor of kindergarten research at the National Center for Learning Environment and Behavioral Research at the University of Stavanger. His current research interests focus on kindergartens' quality and effects, especially regarding bullying, inclusion and children's social development, well-being and learning. Furthermore, he has dealt with topics such as body and learning, space and materiality as well as curriculum issues and professional development.

Martine Broekhuizen defended here dissertation in 2015 in which she investigated individual and contextual differences to the effects of early child care quality on children's socio-emotional development. More in general, here research interests include ECEC quality, child temperament and socio-emotional development, educational partnerships in the early years, and inclusive (early) education.

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