



Present but silent? The use of languages other than Norwegian in mainstream ECEC

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Abstract

In this paper we present a survey-based study on multilingual practices in 47 ECEC (early childhood education and care) centres, mainly in eastern Norway. Our main concern was to investigate the languages known by staff and children and to explore the extent to which these languages are in active use in day-to-day activities. Our data showed that both staff and children in the selected ECEC groups spoke several languages in addition to Norwegian. Even so, a considerable proportion of the languages known by staff and children were never or rarely in use, and in many ECECs the use of languages other than Norwegian mainly took place when parents were present or when children played without staff interference. We discuss our findings considering theories of multilingual education, asking how ECEC staff can work in order to allow for languages other than Norwegian to be more explicitly considered part of the ECEC language learning environment.

Keywords: *early childhood education and care; language; linguistic diversity; multilingualism*

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Introduction

Immigration, migration and global mobility have led to increased attention towards cultural and linguistic diversity in Norway, as well as in many other European countries. As a result, early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions are meeting increasing demands to adapt their pedagogical approaches to multilingual contexts (Alstad, 2020; Duarte, 2020; European Commission, 2005). These demands are reflected in the Norwegian Framework

Plan for Kindergartens, which states that the staff¹ (teachers and assistants) shall ‘help ensure that linguistic diversity becomes an enrichment for the entire group of children and encourage multilingual children to use their mother tongue while also actively promoting and developing the children’s Norwegian/Sami language skills’ (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 24).

Literature on multilingualism in education stresses the need to take local contexts into consideration when developing adequate pedagogies for a particular school setting (Alstad & Mourão, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Schwartz & Palviainen, 2016), yet accounts of the current multilingual context in mainstream Norwegian ECEC are lacking. According to national statistics, 19 per cent of children aged 1–5 growing up in Norway are minority language speakers, defined as children with two parents who both have another mother tongue than Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Sami and English (Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). Importantly, this definition of minority language speakers only partly represents the number of (emergent) multilingual children attending Norwegian ECEC institutions: certain languages are excluded from consideration, the criteria set do not provide any information on either actual language proficiency or language use, and children from families where only one of the parents has a different mother tongue than Norwegian are excluded from the statistic (see Kulbrandstad, 2020; NOU 2010: 7). Further, linguistic diversity in Norwegian ECEC is not limited to the languages of migrants and their children: both Sami-speaking children and children who are deaf or hard of hearing may be multilingual, and they have particular rights to language support in Sami languages or Norwegian sign language respectively (Kindergarten Act, 2005, Sections 10, 38). In addition, children growing up in Norway are exposed to English language as part of popular culture and media, already at an early age (see Brevik & Rindal, 2020; Svendsen et al., 2015). In other words, there are reasons to believe that multilingualism among children aged 1–5 in Norway is a much broader phenomenon than what is captured by the statistics currently available.

Summarising two studies on multilingualism among Norwegian school children (Ipsos, 2015; Svendsen et al., 2015), Svendsen et al. (2020) conclude that language use in Norwegian mainstream classrooms is relatively homogeneous, in contrast to the language use of children outside school and, to some extent, in school breaks. Thirty-six per cent of the school children who participated in these studies reported using additional languages to Norwegian at home and 95 different languages were reported across the sample; yet languages that were not taught at school were rarely used in the classroom (Svendsen et al., 2020). There are no similar national studies on children attending ECEC centres, but a report from five ECEC centres in Oslo (Bratland et al., 2012) provides some data on the

1 Typically, ordinary ECEC staff fall into two categories, ‘teachers’ and ‘assistants’. The teachers hold a BA in early childhood education or its equivalent and some of the teachers function as pedagogical leaders for the ECEC groups. Among the assistants, some are skilled workers who have a specialised vocational diploma related to childcare and youth work for children aged 1–18 (see Bjørnstad et al., 2020).

linguistic diversity characterising their sample. In this group of 452 children, 37 per cent were multilingual and altogether the children were reported to speak 36 different languages (our calculations based on the data in Bratland et al., 2012). According to representatives from the City of Oslo, there are around 10,000 children in Oslo with other ‘mother tongues’ (our translation) than Norwegian, and more than 100 languages are registered, the most common languages being Urdu, Somali, Arabic, Polish and English (Øyvind Kaspersen, personal communication, 01.10.2021). To our knowledge there are no studies of how many or which languages are spoken by ECEC staff.

Against this background, we set out to explore the presence of languages other than Norwegian as this was manifested in a selection of ECEC centres, mostly in eastern Norway.² We hoped to provide insight on what the possibilities are for supporting multilingual development in Norwegian ECEC, in line with the requirements presented in the Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Multilingualism and multilingual education in ECEC

The multilingual turn in education (see May, 2013) underlines the importance of using children’s multilingual language resources as a foundation for teaching and learning. Traditional models of bi- or multilingual education rely on children receiving support in their home languages from home language teachers (Baker, 2011; García & Lin, 2017; Schwartz & Palviainen, 2016; Wright & Baker, 2017), and the child groups are typically linguistically homogeneous. However, when many different languages are spoken in the same classroom, it is unlikely that the teachers speak the same languages as the children do, which may require alternative pedagogical approaches to teaching (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2013; Vandenbroeck, 2018). Sierens and Van Avermaet (2013) suggest that responding to the linguistic diversity present in educational settings requires work at several different levels: with language policy, language awareness and functional multilingual learning. Even if the international literature presents general approaches to multilingual education, Alstad (2020) underlines that there is an urgent need to develop suitable pedagogical models that can support ECEC staff working with multilingual children in mainstream majority-language-dominant educational settings. A similar conclusion is presented by Duarte et al. (2020). In that study, experts on multilingualism in education from five European countries highlighted important topics for future research, and the features of multilingual didactics were among the three topics that received the highest ranking.

According to Cenoz and Gorter (2015, p. 2), multilingual education ‘refers to the use of two or more languages in education, provided that schools aim at multilingualism and

2 See Method section for a more detailed description of the sample.

multiliteracy'. At the same time, they propose that education may be multilingual irrespective of the aims put forth in the educational policy: 'the diversity of multilingualism can also be found in many schools and programs that cannot be considered multilingual because they only aim at developing communicative competence in the dominant language'. In other words, multilingualism is brought to the classroom by the children 'even if the school is not aiming at multilingualism' (Cenoz & Gorter, 2010, p. 10; see also Svendsen et al., 2020). The ways in which multilingualism is represented in educational settings depends on several factors, for example the background of the children and teachers, the language policy of the school and the sociolinguistic context (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015).

Although multilingualism seems to be generally acknowledged at the level of policy documents for education in many European countries, multilingual language policies in education tend to focus on high-status languages and official minority languages, whereas the home languages of children with immigrant backgrounds are frequently devaluated (García & Li Wei, 2014; Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2013). The case of English in Norwegian mainstream education illustrates this. English is not an official national language in Norway. Even so, first language speakers of English are excluded from the statistics on minority language speakers, English is taught as an additional language already from Grade 1, and English is widely represented in the media and public spaces. Brevik and Rindal (2020) suggest that in Norway, the status of English is closer to being a *second* language than a *foreign* language. Importantly, in primary and secondary education, English is widely accepted in classrooms, but there is little focus on how children's knowledge of languages other than English can support their learning (Svendsen et al., 2020). In a study on multilingualism in school, Beiler (2021) distinguishes between majoritised and minoritised translanguaging practices, illustrating how majoritised translanguaging, i.e., using Norwegian and English, was considered an unmarked choice and a desirable option for promoting multilingualism, whereas minoritised translanguaging, involving immigrant children's home languages other than Norwegian and English, was positioned as an obstacle to inclusion and marked as undesirable in school.

The requirements in the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 24) for supporting home languages and promoting Norwegian in ECEC, as well as making linguistic diversity an enrichment for all children, are discussed in a recent study by Giæver and Tkachenko (2020). The authors claim that there is room for different interpretations of this curriculum. On the one hand, the Framework Plan acknowledges multilingual competence, while on the other hand, it emphasises the importance of promoting language skills in the majority language. Schools and ECECs in Norway, as in many other European countries, are considered important arenas for integration and majority language learning (see Bråten et al., 2014; Karlsen, 2014). Substantial responsibility is therefore placed on ECECs to ensure that all children speak Norwegian when they start school, as this is considered a prerequisite for their learning and inclusion in a predominantly

monolingual Norwegian school system. If the dual aim of the Framework Plan is subject to varying interpretations, it may allow some ECECs to pay less attention to children's home languages than what was originally intended.

The present literature on the use of home languages in ECEC is mixed. Some studies have suggested that children's home languages receive limited attention and support in Norwegian ECEC. For example, Andersen et al. (2011) present survey data from 525 pedagogical leaders in rural Norway, showing that despite the presence of multilingual children in almost all the child groups included, the absence of minority languages in use was striking. In a more recent study, Lindquist (2018) observed selected interactions between teachers and young multilingual children, and he never observed the teachers using languages other than Norwegian. There are also case studies describing teachers working towards activating children's home languages and how these efforts are met. For instance, Pesch (2020) describes translanguaging practices in Norwegian ECEC during mealtime conversations, in a literacy activity led by one teacher and in conversations with parents. Sadownik (2018) describes how Norwegian ECEC teachers meet Polish immigrant children, painting a picture where most children are met with Norwegian only, but where some children receive extra support by Norwegian language teachers or bilingual assistants. Additionally, initiating metalinguistic conversations, organising language groups for children speaking minority languages, introducing English to the whole group of children, hiring interpreters, arranging activities that encourage home language use, and involving children, staff and parents as language experts, are examples of practices that have been described in existing studies (Alstad, 2013; Fodstad, 2018; Kibsgaard, 2018; Tkachenko et al., 2021). There are also a few studies of researcher-led activities in ECEC that involve the use of multiple languages, including book reading (Sandvik & Spurkland, 2012), folk tales on digital devices (Jæger, 2019), songs and music (Kulset, 2015, 2019, pp. 86–87) and the use of interpreters as part of the introduction programme for children (Kanstad 2015; 2018). With the exception of Andersen et al., (2011), the above studies target fairly small and often pre-selected groups of children, thus little is known about the extent to which home languages are included more broadly in Norwegian mainstream ECEC.

Alstad (2013) described three ECEC teachers and their strategies for supporting language development in multilingual children, and how these strategies relate to the language competence of the teachers: (1) introduction of activities in a foreign language, English; (2) the use of a bilingual assistant; and (3) metalinguistic conversations throughout the day. While the first two strategies depend on staff proficiency in certain languages, the third strategy is independent of this. Another way to link the linguistic competence of the staff with multilingual practices is to consider the function of the language choice. Duarte (2020) claims that the use of multiple languages in a 'symbolic' way (acknowledging home languages by indexing them) or with a 'scaffolding' purpose (connecting knowledge

between children's different languages) is available to staff who have little or no proficiency in the children's home languages. If multiple languages are used with an 'epistemological' function (enhancing both content and linguistic knowledge in the home languages), however, this requires that the teacher is a proficient user of the children's home languages.

In addition to Alstad (2013), several studies from Scandinavian mainstream ECEC settings have explored the role of bilingual assistants in supporting the children's home languages and multicultural identities, concluding that bilingual assistance can be an important resource for supporting multilingual children (see, for example, Bratland et al., 2012; Puskás & Björk-Willén, 2017; Tefre et al., 1997; Tkachenko et al., 2015). Even so, the employment of bilingual assistants in Norwegian ECEC is decreasing (Giæver & Tkachenko, 2020; Rambøll Management, 2006; Skoug, 2008), and studies from Sweden have shown that even when designated staff are employed to support children's home languages, this can also be complicated. Puskás and Björk-Willén (2017) report on a Swedish ECEC group which specifically aimed at supporting Romani and Arabic-speaking children's use of home languages. When using designated staff for supporting specific languages, the staff worried that children speaking *other* minority languages did not get the support they needed (Puskás & Björk-Willén, 2017). Fredriksson and Lindgren Eneflo (2019) argue that ECEC staff need to be supported in their professional role in scaffolding children's language development in linguistically diverse contexts. Specifically, the staff needs support in understanding how they can go from just positively indexing home languages (i.e., Duarte's 'symbolic' function) to making active use of the children's linguistic resources. According to Fredriksson and Lindgren Eneflo, the staff found it particularly challenging when the children's repertoires were different from their own. As the use of designated multilingual staff is decreasing, it is likely that this particular challenge is present in a number of Norwegian ECECs.

Research questions

As highlighted by Cenoz and Gorter (2010), ECEC teachers must understand their own specific contexts for multilingual education in order to develop appropriate pedagogical approaches. In Norwegian ECEC, the teachers need to understand the curricular requirements set forth in the Framework Plan, the nature of the linguistic situation in Norway, as well as the multilingual context of their own ECEC group. However, few studies have attempted to quantify the presence of languages other than Norwegian in a larger set of ECEC groups, and we have not been able to find studies addressing the language repertoires of ECEC staff. In this article, therefore, we aim to explore linguistic diversity in ECEC in Norway as it is manifested in the use of multiple languages in a selection of 47 Norwegian ECEC centres. Our point of departure is the following research question:

Which languages are known by staff and children, and to what extent are these languages in active use in day-to-day activities?

We will discuss this question in light of pedagogical implications for Norwegian mainstream ECEC, asking how the multilingual makeup of different ECEC groups informs the broader discussion of what knowledge ECEC staff need in order to support the language development of children with diverse language backgrounds. Following this introduction, we present the methodology of the study before we present our results. In the final section, we discuss the implications of our findings.

Method

Data collection

The data was collected by means of an online survey filled in by students enrolled in the ECEC education programme at Oslo Metropolitan University between 2017 and 2020. The survey was distributed within different courses related to language or multilingualism. We estimate that around 320 students were invited to participate, resulting in a response rate of roughly 15 per cent. Prior to the first round of data collection, the survey was reviewed by a group of students and revised according to their comments and questions. Our analysis is based on reports from 47 ECEC groups, pertaining to 41 different ECEC centres. Fifteen of the groups included children aged 1–3, 24 groups included children aged 3–6 and 8 had an alternative group structure. In total, the groups included 726 children. The participating students were predominantly based in the Oslo metropolitan area, thus most of the participating ECEC groups were located in Oslo or in the surrounding counties. The average proportion of multilingual children in our sample (defined in the survey as ‘children who regularly hear more than one language in their surroundings’) was 56 per cent (range 11–100 per cent).³

All the ECEC centres that were involved received information about the data collection, and no personal or sensitive information was collected from children, staff or parents in the ECEC groups. The data collection was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), and participating ECEC students provided written consent for their participation.

Participants

The participants in the study were students in the ECEC program who reported on the ECEC groups they were connected to, either through work or in-service training. The

3 Note that the definition used for multilingual children in our dataset is wider than the definition of minority language speaking children reported by Statistics Norway (2021).

participating students spent time observing the ECEC group on which they reported and were encouraged to talk to staff and parents in order to obtain the information required. The majority of the students studied part time alongside their work in ECEC centres. Most of the participants therefore knew the group they reported on well: 18 had worked in the group for less than 3 years, 11 had worked in the group between 3 and 6 years and 12 had worked in the group for more than 6 years. Five participants reported from ECEC centres where they spent their practice placement training.⁴

Survey

The survey combined multiple choice questions where alternative responses were provided and open-ended questions where the participants could add text freely. The first section concerned background information about the ECEC group, including the relationship between the participant and the ECEC group, the language backgrounds of the children and staff (ECEC teachers or assistants) in that group, as well as the organisation of the group (age-divided, age-mixed, etc.). The next section concerned languages known and used by staff and children respectively. Below the question on ‘knowing’ a language, we specified that we assume ‘a wide definition of “knowing” a language, such as being able to have a simple conversation’. Below the question on using a language, we specified, ‘for example, using some words or phrases, singing or having conversations’. The next section included a list of activities or situations that are common in ECEC, such as being picked up, meals, music, circle time, etc. For each activity, the participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which that activity involved the use of multiple languages, with the four options of ‘daily’, ‘weekly’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’. On the form we also asked whether deliberate attempts were made to place staff and children who speak the same languages in the same group, with the response alternatives ‘yes, often’, ‘yes, sometimes’ and ‘no, never’.

Analyses

The reports were submitted using the online platform *Nettskjema*, developed and hosted by the University of Oslo, and the data was exported to spreadsheets. Because the dataset included text responses (i.e., the registering of certain languages), the data had to be cleaned up to correct spelling and ensure a uniform coding of languages. The data processing was conducted using Excel, summarising selected responses using graphs. Norwegian language is excluded from all reports, as this language was taken for granted by some, but not all, participants, thereby rendering the results unreliable.

4 One hundred days of placement training is an obligatory part of the Early Childhood Education programme. During this period, the students work in ECEC groups with supervision from designated members of staff. Placement periods range from 1 to 3 weeks and take place once or twice per year.

Methodological limitations

Even though recent developments in sociolinguistics and current theories of multilingualism (see, e.g., García & Li Wei, 2014; Jørgensen et al., 2016) challenge the view of languages as separate entities, we depended on some sort of categorisation for quantifying the linguistic diversity in the selected ECEC centres. We therefore asked our participants to write down the languages used; thus, our definition of linguistic diversity is constrained to so-called ‘named languages’ (see Makoni & Pennycook, 2006; Turner & Lin, 2020, for discussion). Our operationalisation of linguistic diversity thus excludes dialectal or accentual diversity, which can be assumed to be common in a Norwegian context. When processing the data, we decided to keep the language terms used by the participants, in line with Svendsen et al. (2015).

When developing our list of activities or situations we tried to be exhaustive in order to cover the use of languages other than Norwegian across a wide range of activities. In hindsight, we realise that many of the activities overlap, and we do not know how the participants interpreted these fuzzy and overlapping categories. There may also be a potential for confusion in the reporting when it comes to the absolute frequency of an activity versus the frequency of the activity involving multiple languages. We nevertheless interpret our results as saying something about the likelihood of different activities involving multiple languages, bearing in mind that we do not know whether our questions were interpreted as we intended them to be.

Our data cannot be assumed to be representative of Norwegian ECEC, as our dataset is small (only 47 groups) and as the recruitment was not random (students that volunteered to participate). Because we involved our own students, we were particularly conscious about making participation voluntary. This may have caused a bias in that students with a particular interest in multilingualism tended to participate, whereas students who did not have this interest declined, and we cannot know how this has affected our sample (see Garmann et al., 2021). This said, we believe our data constitutes a valid starting point to describe the linguistic variation as it surfaces in some Norwegian ECECs.

Results

Linguistic diversity among staff and children

Our data revealed that an impressive number of languages were known by children and staff in our selection of ECEC groups. In total, the staff was reported to know 51 different languages, whereas the children knew 71 different languages, excluding Norwegian. At group level, 14 of the languages known by the staff were not known by any of the children, and 34 of the languages known by the children were not known by any member of the staff. In other words: quite a few children attending ECEC speak languages not spoken by the staff. The most commonly reported languages known by the children were English (25), Arabic (21), Swedish (20), Somali (15), Urdu (12) and Spanish (12). For the staff, the most

commonly known languages were English (40), Spanish (19), German (17), Swedish (15), Urdu (10), Danish (10) and Arabic (10). According to available statistics on migration, the largest migrant populations⁵ in Norway come from Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Syria and Somalia (Statistics Norway, 2021), and this is at least partly reflected in our data.

In Figure 1, we present a graph representing the number of different languages known by staff and children for each ECEC group. As can be observed by the green columns being higher than the blue, in most groups, the children knew more languages than the members of staff. The average number of languages known by the staff in a group was 4.8 (range 1–13), while the average number of languages known by the children in a group was 6.5 (range 1–14). Interestingly, not a single ECEC group reported that Norwegian was the only language the children knew. This is in line with the background information reported for each group, where none of the groups reported including only monolingual children.

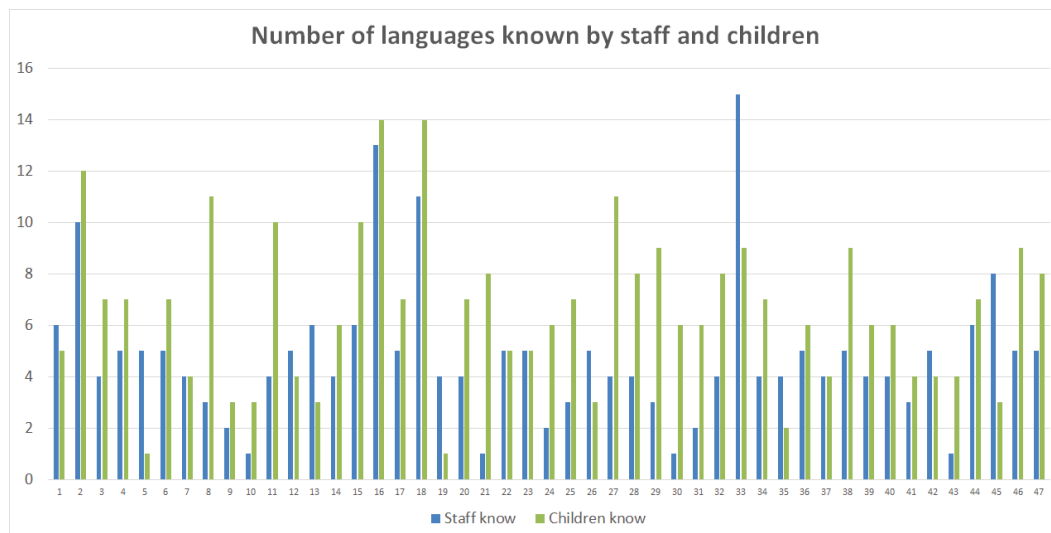


Figure 1. Languages known by staff (blue) and children (green). The Y axis shows the number of languages, the X axis the ECEC group IDs.

Across our sample, there was a difference between the languages *known* by staff and children on the one hand and the languages reported to be *used* by staff and children on the other. For the staff, 56 per cent (range 0–100)⁶ of the languages known were reported to be in use, and for the children, 47 per cent (range 0–100) of the known languages were in use. In other words, only around half of the languages known by children and staff were in active use but, as can be seen by the range in percentages, the extent to which known languages were also in use varied substantially from one group to the next. Interestingly, there

5 The figures include both migrants and Norwegians born to migrant parents.

6 In one of the groups, the staff were reported to know one language in addition to Norwegian (Arabic), but they reported using both Arabic and Somali. This outlier was excluded from the calculation, as it would give the conclusion that 200 per cent of the languages known were in use, which is hard to process.

was only one instance where the staff was reported to use languages they did not know (see Footnote 6). Thus, it seems like singing or using single words in languages not known by the staff is relatively uncommon, and that when languages other than Norwegian are used, this is mostly because some member of the staff speaks the language in question. Alternatively, the participants might have accepted our wide definition of ‘knowing’ a language, for example, reporting knowing French because they sang the song ‘Frère Jacques’ (see Method section).

Even if there was a substantial overlap between child and staff repertoires in our dataset as a whole, as illustrated by the most commonly reported languages, the overlap in repertoire between children and staff was remarkably low when looking at each individual ECEC group, with an average of two shared languages per group (range 0–6) in addition to Norwegian. Unsurprisingly, when excluding Norwegian, the language most commonly known by both children and staff was English, followed by Swedish, Arabic, Spanish, German and Urdu.

In our survey, we asked whether the ECECs ever made explicit attempts at matching staff and children who speak the same language. Twenty-four respondents indicated ‘never’, 17 responded ‘sometimes’ and only 6 responded ‘often’. In other words, around half of the groups belong to ECECs that try to match children and staff who speak the same language, while the other half does not. Nevertheless, considering the substantial linguistic diversity present among children and adults, matching will probably be unrealistic for many uncommon languages, but for some of the more common languages, and in particular in larger ECEC centres, some deliberate language matching may actually be feasible.

Activities associated with the use of languages other than Norwegian

For each activity, reporters could indicate whether the activity involved the use of multiple languages ‘daily’, ‘weekly’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’. Since these four categories were mutually exclusive, we present (in Figure 2) the number of groups indicating that a given activity involved multiple languages on a ‘daily’ or ‘weekly’ basis. High bars thus indicate that more groups report an activity associated with the use of multiple languages daily or weekly, and low bars indicate that few groups report this to be the case.

‘Excursions’ refers to trips outside the ECEC centre, ‘dramatising’ refers to situations where children or staff act out plays and ‘language groups’ refers to pedagogical activities in smaller groups aimed at supporting children’s language development. ‘Wardrobe’ refers to activities taking place in the part of the ECEC where the children keep their clothes and change, for example, before going outside. ‘Transitions’ refers to any transition between activities, when instructions are typically provided. ‘Adjustment/settling’ refers to the period when a child is new to the ECEC group and is receiving extra support to get to know the group and setting. ‘Pick up/delivery’ refers to the time when children arrive at or leave the ECEC, usually accompanied by caregivers.

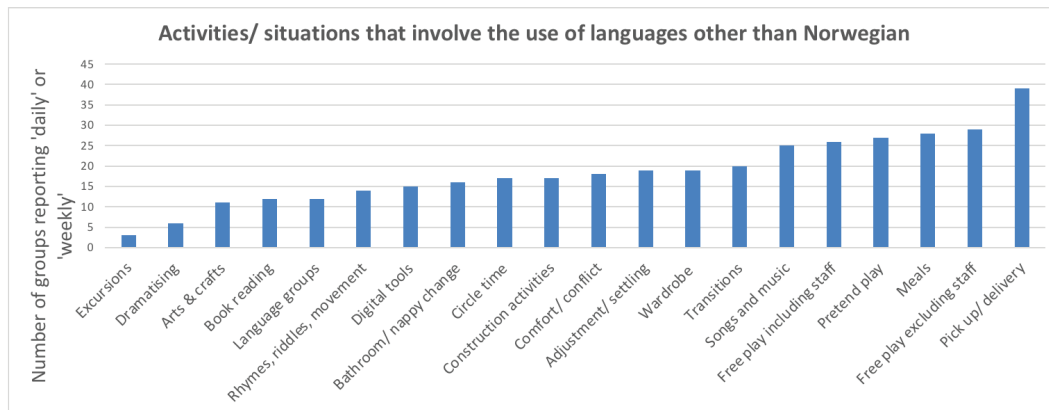


Figure 2. The use of languages other than Norwegian across activities.

Even if the data from this question may require careful interpretation (see Method section), we observe some interesting tendencies. First, all activities were listed by at least one group as involving multiple languages, suggesting that this potential is present across the activities listed in the survey. Second, the five activities most frequently associated with the use of multiple languages were ‘Pick up/delivery’, ‘Free play excluding staff’, ‘Meals’, ‘Pretend play’ and ‘Free play including staff’, involving multiple languages daily or weekly in around 1/3 of the groups. The five activities least frequently associated with the use of multiple languages were ‘Excursions’, ‘Dramatising’, ‘Arts & Crafts’, ‘Book reading’ and ‘Language groups’.

Discussion

Our results provide some interesting first insights into the presence of languages other than Norwegian in Norwegian mainstream ECEC. Firstly, we are struck by the linguistic repertoires present among children and staff in our dataset. All our groups involved at least one multilingual child, 51 different languages were known by the staff members and 71 different languages were known by the children participating in our study. Our findings are in line with the figures reported by Svendsen et al. (2020) and Bratland et al. (2012), thus we may well have captured a substantial proportion of the languages present in eastern Norwegian ECECs. Secondly, also in line with Svendsen et al., we observe that only some of the languages reported were actively used in the ECEC groups, which means that both staff and children had access to linguistic resources that, for some reason, were not visible or present in the ECEC language learning environment. Thirdly, some situations were more likely to involve the use of multiple languages than others, even if the frequency of using languages other than Norwegian was generally low across the situations we considered. Our dataset does not provide explanations for the trends we see, but below we will

discuss our findings and the pedagogical implications they entail for multilingual didactics in Norwegian ECEC.

Although there is some discussion as to whether Norwegian ECEC and the Framework Plan (Ministry of Education, 2017) can be said to aim at multilingual education (Giæver & Tkachenko, 2020), our data suggest that linguistic diversity is nevertheless brought to many ECEC groups by both children and staff (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Svendsen et al., 2020). Assuming that multilingualism is stated as a goal in the Framework Plan (Ministry of Education, 2017), we would argue that staff and child repertoires constitute a solid starting point for helping to 'ensure that linguistic diversity becomes an enrichment for the entire group of children.' The formulation from the Framework Plan also underlines how linguistic diversity is not to be understood primarily as an aim for children growing up in multilingual homes. Rather, the implication is that learning about language and languages is something that benefits all children growing up in Norway.

Considering the difference between languages *known* and languages *used* in our selection of ECEC groups, we believe there is a substantial potential in bringing more of the children's and staff's linguistic repertoires into active use in ECEC. Looking beyond the use of Norwegian and English, some languages are in use, but many are not, and there is substantial variation from one ECEC group to the next. An important question for future research is the pedagogical reasoning behind the different choices made. Changing language policies in ECEC may challenge pedagogical conceptualisations of inclusion, justice and participation in ECEC, thus more work is needed in order to understand the ethical and pedagogical arguments that may lie behind the variation we observe (e.g., Giæver & Tkachenko, 2020; Sadownik, 2018; Puskás & Björk-Willén, 2017).

Traditional models of bi- or multilingual education have relied on common linguistic repertoires between children and staff (Baker, 2011; García & Lin, 2017; Schwartz & Palviainen, 2016; Wright & Baker, 2017). In Norway, however, the use of designated multilingual assistants in ECEC is less common than before (Giæver & Tkachenko, 2020; Rambøll Management, 2006; Skoug, 2008). Our findings show that for many minority languages, the chances are slim that staff and children within the same ECEC group have overlapping repertoires, particularly if the groups are small. In other words, the way multilingual repertoires are put into motion in Norwegian ECEC cannot depend on shared repertoires between children and staff, and often also not on shared languages among children. This calls for pedagogical approaches where the ECEC teachers can provide language support to children regardless of whether they speak the same languages as the children in their group (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2013; Vandenbroeck, 2018).

Alstad (2020) discusses teacher uncertainty related to language choices in linguistically diverse settings: teachers are insecure about whether it is appropriate to use the children's home languages and to what extent they can be used. Our results are in line with this:

members of staff do not typically use languages they do not know. Since the availability of speakers (native or not), as well as materials (songs, books, digital resources) are unevenly distributed across languages, we might also assume that considerations of justice, in the sense that some languages might receive more attention than others, may additionally influence the teachers' practices. The teachers in Puskás and Björk-Willén (2017) mention this as a particular problem in linguistically diverse ECEC groups, and such dilemmas may not be properly addressed in ECEC education. Tkachenko et al. (2021) report that staff, children and caregivers are sometimes involved as language brokers in ECEC. At the same time, this is not without tension: some members of staff experience that using their first language is unexpected and even considered inappropriate by their colleagues (cf. Garmann et al., 2021). Our finding that the use of languages other than Norwegian was particularly common in wardrobe situations or free play suggests that at least in some ECECs, the use of languages other than Norwegian is associated with more intimate settings where only few children or members of staff are present.

It is possible that many staff members consider activities involving the whole group to be particularly suitable for promoting Norwegian as a *lingua franca*, whereas activities that involve fewer participants allow for more individually tailored language practices. When the use of some of the languages is constrained to particular situations, for example, to smaller groups of children or to staff members who 'know' certain languages, this can indirectly imply that those languages or activities are less important or non-relevant for the rest of the ECEC group. This, in turn, may constrain the opportunities for some children to experience the language diversity present both in society and in their group. The inclusion of multiple languages more broadly in the linguistic environment may make the experience of exploring unfamiliar languages and navigating complex linguistic terrains something all children and adults can relate to, potentially creating valuable settings for developing children's language awareness (see Alstad & Tkachenko, 2018; García & Li Wei, 2014; Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2013).

As we have seen, the use of English may be considered a special case, both in Norway and in many other countries (Beiler, 2021; Brevik & Rindal, 2020; Kulbrandstad, 2020), and our study suggests that English is indeed an important additional common language in many ECEC groups. This form of majoritised translinguaging may thus be more common than minoritised translinguaging, in line with Beiler (2021). The use of English as an additional language in ECEC is also reported in other European countries (European Commission, 2011; Mourão, 2018; Prošić-Santovac & Savić, 2021). Although some scholars are critical towards the dominant position of English as a global language in educational systems (see, e.g., Macedo et al., 2015; Phillipson, 1992), Alstad and Tkachenko (2018) argue that the introduction of English in the ECEC linguistic environment may serve to challenge and expand the Norwegian language dominance, thereby creating new spaces for children's linguistic resources.

Based on our findings, we conclude that in order to adapt current pedagogical approaches to the linguistic reality of Norwegian ECECs, we need to move beyond educational models that rest on overlapping repertoires between children and staff. Teachers need to be linguistically aware in the sense that they understand how to create situations where children are linguistically active and where the children's linguistic repertoires represent a natural component of the ECEC language environment. When the teachers do not speak the children's languages, existing resources in the form of digital and physical materials in different languages can be included (e.g. NAFO, 2021). The use of languages other than Norwegian may also serve an important function even if these languages are not spoken by the children in the group. Further, multilingual children, members of staff and caregivers constitute important multilingual language brokers when languages are not shared between all members in an ECEC group (i.e., Duarte, 2020; Tkachenko et al., 2021), and our study shows that the ECEC staff have considerable linguistic resources at hand. We thus follow Alstad (2020) and Duarte et al. (2020) in encouraging more research on exactly *how* the staff can work in order to support multilingual language practices in ECEC, and we welcome discussions of the challenges and dilemmas that arise with such practices.

The current paper sheds light on linguistic diversity as it surfaces in our dataset, but more research remains in order to expand our understanding not only of *whether* multiple languages are in use in ECEC but also details concerning *how*, *when* and *why* this happens. We encourage colleagues to explore related questions in other, preferably larger, datasets.

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