

OSLOMET

Princess Fadimatou Yenwongfai

How Norwegian multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity:

Teachers approach/practices of diversity using the Framework Plan
for Kindergartens



Masteroppgaven i Barnevern
OsloMet - Storbyuniversitetet
Fakultet for samfunnsvitenskap
November 2018



DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis, with exception of sentences referred to other literature, towards the award of the Masters in Social Science (Child Welfare) is entirely my own research. I also declare that the material has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part fulfilment of the award named above.

Princess Yenwongfai

Oslo, November 2018.

SAMMENDRAG

Målet med denne oppgaven er å undersøke hvordan norske multikulturelle barnehager håndterer mangfold. Flere og flere barnehager i Norge er i ferd med å bli multikulturelle. Kunnskapsdepartementet har laget en rammeplan for hva de ønsker at barnehager skal inneholde og tilby i Norge. Rammeplanen har de siste årene understreket viktigheten av å møte utfordringer knyttet til multikulturalitet i barnehagen, som et resultat av et mer multikulturelt samfunn. Denne oppgaven ser på læreres perspektiver og praksis rundt mangfold. Hovedtemaet vil være hvordan rammeplanen er forstått, implementert av barnehagens ansatte i forhold til målene knyttet til mangfold.

Feltarbeidet har blitt utført i to multikulturelle barnehager over en 4-ukers periode. Hoveddeltagerne er 11 barnehageansatte. Kvalitative metoder ble brukt til å generere den nødvendige dataen for å svare på forskningsspørsmålene. Det ble brukt en kombinasjon av intervjuer og deltakere observasjon til å samle inn empiriske data. De teoretiske begrepene adressert i denne studien vil være (i) mangfold, (ii) kulturelle forskjeller, (iii) religion og tro, (iv) demokrati og likestilling (v) begrepet barndom, (viii) samarbeid med barnets hjem og (ix) kommunikasjons og språk, og (xi) inkludering. Disse er konsepter som ligger i rammeplanen, og noen er faktorer av mangfold.

Funnene fra studiet avslører flere perspektiver på mangfold blant lærere og hvordan de forholder seg til rammeplanen. Lærerne identifiserte flere metoder og aktiviteter som relevante for de flerkulturelle barna i deres respektive barnehager. De mener flerkulturalitet er en naturlig del av deres arbeidshverdag med barna. Derimot så opplever de språk som en utfordring for noen av barna ved begynnelsen av skoleåret. Til en viss grad, de empiriske data tilsier at deltakerne setter pris på og respekterer barnas språklig, religiøse og kulturelle bakgrunn på et generelt grunnlag. Derimot, når de møter en situasjon hvor de kanskje mangler kunnskap, lener de seg på norske kulturelle verdier. I andre scenarier, engasjere de i dialog med familiene. Disse barnehagene håndterer mangfold ved å inkorporere de norske kulturverdiene med barnas kulturelle bakgrunn.

STIKKORD: Mangfold, lærernes perspektiver, barnehage Rammeplan

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand how Norwegian multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity. Kindergartens in Norway are increasingly becoming multicultural. The ministry of education and research laid down a Framework Plan (FP) for the content and tasks of all kindergartens in Norway. Over the past years, the FP has emphasized the importance of addressing diversity, because of the increasing diversity in kindergartens. This study therefore explores teachers' perspectives and practices of diversity. An evaluation of how the FP is understood and practiced by the kindergarten staff in relation to diversity is the central theme of the thesis.

The field work was carried out in two multicultural kindergartens in Norway over a four-week period. The key participants were eleven kindergarten staff. Qualitative methods were applied to generate the data needed to address the research questions. A combination of interviews and participants observation were chosen for collecting the empirical data. The theoretical concepts addressed in this study are (i) diversity, (ii) cultural differences, (iii) religion and belief, (iv) democracy and equality, (v) concept of childhood, (vi) collaboration with the child's home, (viii) communication and language, and (xi) inclusion. These are concepts located in the FP and some are factors of diversity.

The findings from the study reveal that teachers hold a variety of perspectives on diversity and a common understanding of the FP. The teachers identified various practices and activities that were relevant to the diversified group of children in their respective kindergartens. They believe that diversity is a natural part of their daily work with the children. However, they identify language as a challenge for some of the children at the beginning of the academic year. The empirical data suggests that the participants to an extent, value and respect children's religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds in general. However, in cases where they might lack the knowledge, they apply the Norwegian cultural values. Meanwhile in other scenarios, they try to engage in dialogue with the families. Therefore, these kindergartens deal with diversity by incorporating the Norwegian cultural values with the children's cultural backgrounds.

Key words: Diversity, teachers' perspectives and practices, kindergarten Framework
Plan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a hectic dissertation, but at the same time an educational learning process in several ways. I would like to thank my patient supervisor professor Randi Wærdahl for good guidance, availability and advice throughout this study. I will remember your generosity and interesting stories. I have gained a lot under your supervision.

I would like to thank the tutors of all the courses I attended, and all the staff of the social science department of HIOA that assisted me. I appreciate the knowledge you all shared, and I have learned much throughout the two years of study.

I am grateful to my parents, HRH Fon Chafah Isaac and Queen Meme Claire for their prayers and support. Appreciation also goes to my uncle Dr Tatangang Henry for your support and faith in me. Then I would like to thank my friend Renee Chinkwo for being there, and for proof reading my work.

I would like to thank all the research participants for sharing their perspectives for my research project.

Special thanks to my husband, Honore Yenwongfai. This would not have been possible without you, and to my children Adriel and Emerald for your patience, support and understanding.

ACRONYMS

Acronym

Description

FP	Framework Plan
UN	United Nation
PPT	Psychologist Pedagogisk Tjeneste
NOU	Norges Offentlige Utredninger
SSB	Statistisk Sentrabyrå
KTE	Kindergarten Teachers Education
ERP	Ethic Religion and Philosophy
KD	Kindergarten Act
NAFO	Nasjonalt senter for Flerkulturell Opplæring
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
OECD	Organization for Economic Corporation and Development
NESH	Forskningsetiske Komite for Samfunnsvitenskap og Humaniora
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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Chapter: 1 Introduction

The focus of this study is on how Norwegian multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity. The world is so globalized that the movement of people from one part of the world to the other has become so easy than decades ago (Gjervan et. al., 2006). Norway over the last years has gradually become more diverse. The surge is mainly because of the increasing number of immigrants in European countries throughout the last few decades and this has made the need for more effective and integrative education for all children an urgency (EACEA, 2009). Norway is regarded as a multicultural society, in which cultural diversity is becoming progressively evident and it encompasses many different culture that people bring with them (Parekh, 2006; Gjervan et. al., 2006). According to Statistics Norway (“Statistisk sentralbyrå”), the population of Norway at the beginning of 2017 include people with background from a total land of 221 countries and autonomous regions. Recent statistics shows that Norway has about 170 thousand inhabitants that are born to two foreign parents representing 16.8% of the entire population (Statistic Norway, 2018).

Subsequent to the new homogenous society, the Norwegian government has shown dedication to valuing diversity and encouraging inclusion and equality of all children in the kindergarten sector. There are different guidelines and documents relating to kindergartens that have been developed and modified over the past years addressing the critical importance of diversity in kindergartens. Among these documents, we the Framework Plan for the content and tasks for kindergartens established by the ministry of Education and Research with a chapter on diversity (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017); the Norwegian kindergarten teacher education (KTE) has gone through changes and one of the reforms has been to show more attention to multicultural perspectives (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2013); the Norwegian official document about kindergartens has also emphasized the importance of integration of immigrants (White papers, 2012); kindergarten Act-no.64 of June 2005 (Kindergarten Act, 2005) emphasis the importance of recognizing the Sami people and their language; and OCED (2015) policy review on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Norway, emphasized

the importance of diversity and quality education for all children ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2015](#)).

The different bodies especially the Framework Plan (FP) for the content and tasks for kindergartens emphasized the importance of taking into consideration the children's cultural, religious and linguistic diversity into their practices. This means that teachers have a responsibility to use diversity as resource and to ensure that the children cultural and religious backgrounds are incorporated and visible in kindergarten activities. Also, [UNESCO \(2005\)](#), pointed out that teachers' role in improving quality education is critically important. Teachers have a great responsibility in providing quality education, and having an inclusive approach and practices requires high competency and professional knowledge, in response to a diverse group of children and families ([UNESCO, 2005](#); [Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2013](#)). In addition to getting the teachers perspectives on diversity, their interpretation of the FP sections on diversity is critical for their practices and approaches of diversity. Indeed, the FP for kindergartens play a central role in how kindergarten teachers deal with diversity. The FP for kindergartens is open for interpretation and kindergartens teachers are to determine for themselves if they are a multicultural kindergarten or not ([Krogstaad, 2016](#)). The kindergartens where this study took place were regarded as multicultural because they had children across various culture, religion and language ([Fajerssen, 2005](#); [Knudsen, 2008](#)). Therefore, the kindergarten teachers' perspectives, approach and practices of diversity with the children and families could deviate from what is written in the FP based on the needs of the children and families.

1.1 Research questions

The research questions for this study are based on the topic: how Norwegian multicultural kindergarten teachers deal with diversity. The research attempts to answer the following questions:

- How do teachers understand diversity within a Norwegian multicultural kindergarten context?

- What are teachers' approach/practices of diversity based on the Framework Plan guide?
- What are teachers' perspectives on how children approach diversity

1.2 Aims and objectives of this study

This study is aimed at understanding how teachers deal with diversity in multicultural kindergartens. These research questions were answered by carrying out a fieldwork in two multicultural kindergartens in Oslo. It aims to show teachers perspectives, approaches and practices of diversity with the children and their families in their daily life's in the kindergarten. The objectives of this study are:

To explore and gain knowledge on teachers' perspectives on diversity as well as their approaches and practices of diversity with children and families of various cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds.

To understand teachers' interpretation of the Framework Plan based on what they regard as critical needs of the children and families with minority backgrounds.

1.3 Rationale, Importance and contribution to knowledge

The researchers' choice of topic emerged from her academic and ethnic background. The researchers interest in this study also stems from residing and having children in a different country. The difficulties the researcher encounter as an immigrant, and the researcher having children attending a Norwegian kindergarten. In addition, the stories about kindergarten practices from other immigrant parents all contributed to the researchers' interest in the critical importance of looking at diversity within the guidelines for kindergartens.

There are several factors as to why studying teachers' perspectives, approaches and practices of diversity is underscored. The Framework Plan for kindergartens in Norway and other research studies acknowledge the importance of multicultural practices, supporting children's cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds in the kindergarten

(Ministry of Education and Research, 2017; Gjervan et. al., 2006; Hylland, 2006). Although these different research literature and policies talks about diversity, it is left to the kindergarten teachers to figure out ways to implement them within their kindergarten daily practices. If teachers execute right practices and approaches, it will undoubtedly contribute to the development of a growing multicultural society like Norway.

Another important attempt to understanding teachers' perspectives and practices of diversity in a multicultural kindergarten setting is that it will shed light on some of the difficulties encounter by children, parents and teachers alike. Comprehensive study of teachers' perspectives will ease the identification of those areas in the FP that needs more explanations and clarity. It will also facilitate the identification of what the children, families and teachers really need in order to develop ethical practices that will embrace all culture and encourage dialogue between teachers, parents and children (Gjervan et. al., 2006). When children and families from culturally diverse background have the right encounter with the kindergarten, it can influence their sense of inclusion within the society.

One other important factor for understanding teachers' perspectives, approaches and practices of diversity is that their perspectives and practices can either lead to erroneous or correct conclusions. When teachers have the right perspectives, reflect on their practices and understand each child and family circumstances, child welfare services are more able to meet the learning, social and wellbeing needs of children and their families especially minority families (Backe, 2009). Child welfare services in Norway have contact with families from many different backgrounds and there is a need to develop cooperation between the kindergarten and the child welfare services (Backe, 2009). By understanding the needs and interest of children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds, mutual trust and respect might be built between the families, kindergarten and the child welfare services. Through such relationships, the child welfare can make a positive difference in the wellbeing of the families and the children. On the other hand, negative attitudes towards differences and making generalization can lead to wrong conclusion that could affect the child and the families' wellbeing. Teachers have long lasting, life time effect on children at their infant stage. Therefore, studying teachers'

perspectives on diversity, approaches and practices of diversity is of critical importance. Multicultural perspectives, practices and approach could reduce in great deal any misunderstanding between families and kindergarten, thus could limit conflict between child welfare and minority families.

The insight gained from this study would:

Contribute to knowledge and research in the Ministry of Education and Research work on quality development and inclusion of every child and family regardless of cultural backgrounds in kindergartens in Norway.

Add to the body of knowledge and research on diversity in kindergartens by listening to teachers' perspectives, approach, practices and challenges as well as opportunities in meeting children and families from various cultural backgrounds.

Chapter: 2 Background and Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and describe the background and context from where the research was carried out. The chapter starts with background information on the Norwegian kindergarten system. Then continues with a description of Norway as a multicultural society, followed by a description of the multicultural kindergarten in general with an introduction of the kindergarten where the research took place. Finally, the chapter extends to review the national guidelines for all kindergartens in Norway (The Framework Plan for the contents and tasks for kindergartens) with particular focus on diversity.

2.2 The Norwegian kindergarten as a system

The kindergarten is considered as an important arena for inclusion and language education for children. In the last four decades, the Norwegian kindergarten has been regarded as very important, and it has developed from being a possibility, to the universal right for children ([Ministry of Education and Research 2009a, 2009b](#)). According to the Norwegian statistical bureau, there were 282600 children in kindergarten in Norway in 2016 and out of this number, 46300 of them had minority background. Looking at the 2000 statistics, we realized that there has been an increase in the proportion of children with minor background from 6% to 20%, 53.5% in 2001 – 76.9% in 2016 ([Statistic Norway, 2017](#)). This shows how diverse the world is becoming and there is a need for inclusion.

Norway kindergartens are for children between 1-5 years. Enrollment in kindergarten in Norway is optional. According to the 2012 Norwegian statistical Bureau, kindergarten is viewed as beneficiary for all children, and as a consequence, nearly 96.5% of 3 to 5 years old attended kindergarten ([Statistic Norway, 2013](#)). The kindergarten is opened between 7am to 5pm and parents pay a monthly fee which is however subsidized by the state ([Statistic Norway, 2017](#)). There are two documents that make the basis for all the

practice in the kindergarten (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). These laws are the kindergarten Act and the framework plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). The framework plan provides guidelines on the values, content and tasks of Norwegian kindergartens (Norwegian ministry of education and research, 2011). It states that: “All kindergartens shall base their activities on the values established in the Kindergarten Act, and on the international conventions to which Norway is a signatory, including the ILO’s Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 7)

In contemporary Norway, most parents believe that infants under 1 year of age should be cared for by their parents and kindergarten is only best for children between 3 and 5 (Ellingsæter & Gulbrandsen, 2003). Though most parents see kindergarten as beneficial, not every child still attend kindergarten. Some parents choose not to send their children to kindergartens for several reasons most of which are often economical, or value based. (NOU 2012:1). Some are not ready to pay the monthly fees that parents are obliged to pay. Some believe that life is so stressful out there especially at an early age, and they prefer their children to stay home if possible. Some of these parents say that children between 0-5 should be with their parents all day. Despite the different opinions of parents about care and kindergarten teachers’ practices, the care and training the children all receive is enshrined in one Framework Plan established by the ministry of Education and Research. Kindergarten teachers are in an ideal position to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families.

So far as working in a Norwegian kindergarten is concerned, the kindergarten Act states that head teachers and pedagogical leaders must be trained pre-school teachers or have education that gives qualifications for working with children (Larsen & Slåtten, 2010). To be a qualified kindergarten teacher, one is also required to have a three years university college study with a bachelor’s degree. Those without this qualification must have a further education in teaching in kindergarten. As a regulation, there must be one pedagogical leader per 7-9 children under the age of three and 14-18 children over the age of three (Larsen & Slåtten, 2010). The high requirement for being a kindergarten

teacher led to a shortage of staff, and as a result, there has been no specific requirement to be an assistance, though some have child related lessons from high school ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2014](#)). Therefore, trained kindergarten teachers and leaders could have in-depth knowledge and skills when it comes to approaches and perspective on diversity. While assistants could have difficulties in understanding while they are asked to emphasize on some parts rather than in others.

The Norwegian kindergarten is considered as a pedagogical and social institution which contrasts with the Norwegian kindergarten decades ago which was considered for poor unmarried mothers in need for care. Acknowledging that kindergarten was more than just an arena for care, there has been frequent changes in the laws and framework relating to the kindergarten Act. The concepts of development, play, activity, learning & formation and participation is highly valued in the Norwegian kindergarten sector today ([Seland, 2009](#)). Adjustment has also shifted to incorporate the diverse group in the society. Diversity has been given greater focus as a key element of the value base for kindergartens ([Gjervan et. al., 2006](#)). Following the increase in the percentage of minority-language children, from 54% to 78% attending kindergarten in the period 2005-2015, the new FP has diversity as a section. The change has not just been in the FP. In 1979, 12 % of parents in a survey meant that the children should not attend a kindergarten ([Ellingsæter & Gulbreandsen, 2003](#)). A further research was carried out later in 1996 and this proportion has dropped to 2%. Some of these parents began to accept the fact that it was beneficial for their children to interact with other children and adult in a safe and secure environment. It is therefore worth examining how teachers and children approach and practice diversity in multicultural kindergartens.

2.3 A multicultural Oslo, Norway

Oslo is the largest city and capital of Norway. In 2015, Oslo had a population of 658,400 and of this number, 163,300 were immigrant making 67% of the population ethnic Norwegian and 33% were immigrant ([Statistic Norway, 2017](#)). As per Jan 2016, 50900 of the population were Norwegian-born of immigrant parents. The city of Oslo has experienced a long period of growth in the immigrant's population over the past years

than smaller cities. This means that the experiences and challenges in dealing with cultural diversity may show great variations from region to region across Norway ([SSB.no](#)). The challenges of diversity are not unique to Norway but reports from survey in other countries shows that the complexity of diversity in institutions like as kindergarten is analogous ([Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008](#)). The Norwegian society that was regarded as culturally homogenous is now considered a multicultural society ([Gjervan et. al., 2009](#)).

These immigrants migrate from different parts of the world. Some comes from Pakistan, Poland, Somalia, Nigeria, Iraq, Iran, and Sweden just to name a few ([Statistic Norway, 2017](#); [Spernes & Hatlem, 2013](#)). The early migrants were motivated by opportunities in the labor market. They were in the geographical hubs of the labor market, Oslo. In contemporary Norwegian society, we have student migrant, labor migrants and refugees. As a result of the diversified Norway, there has been the need to emphasize on strong policies that will enable these immigrants and their children to become part of the society ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2014](#)). Recognizing the fact that Norway today is more diverse, the minister of education and research stated that “Kindergartens should highlight the positive aspects of the fact that we are different, while at the same time giving children the sense that they are part of a community. Kindergartens should also promote Norwegian-language skills among minority-language children, while at the same time focusing on diversity as a resource in pedagogical activities” ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017](#)). Kindergarten is one of those institutions with children from various background especially in the city of Oslo. There has been a need to assist these children in those activities that directly concern them such as Norwegian language skills, participation in play and so on. The multicultural kindergarten will be presented next for better understanding of teachers’ perspectives.

2.4 The multicultural kindergarten

The Norwegian official document about kindergarten, use the concept of multicultural in conjunction with government policy concerning the integration of immigrants from outside Europe ([white paper, 2012](#)). In trying to describe the concept of multicultural,

the FP emphasis on cultural diversity, religion and minority language backgrounds of kindergarten children and their families (Krogstad, 2015). The FP for kindergartens view culture and language diversity as resource oriented and should be a normality in the daily life of the children. The Framework plan regards diversity as one of the focus point for pedagogic practices in all kindergartens in Norway. Otterstad & Andersen (2012) argued that although multicultural perspective is introduced into the FP, it is still open to individual kindergarten to decide on how and what kind of practices are being done (Krogstad, 2016).

The strategy plan for equivalent upbringing defined a multicultural kindergarten as a kindergarten where the adults working there view the cultural and language diversity as normality and uses this diversity as a resource (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007). Although there are papers emphasizing the importance of diversity, it still varies how different kindergartens call themselves multicultural or if they have multicultural approaches and practices in their daily lives.

During the interview, the kindergarten leader mentioned that all kindergartens in Norway do have diversity because everyone is different. The question is how multiculturally diverse are these kindergartens in their approach and practices? According to (Gjervan et. al., 2006), a multicultural kindergarten is one where differences become a natural part of the daily life in the kindergarten and have multicultural pedagogic approach. The field work for this study was conducted in a kindergarten generally regarded as one of the international or multicultural kindergarten in Oslo. This was based on the cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of the children in the kindergarten.

Also, multicultural diversity has become a natural part of their life's in the kindergarten. More than half of the children have another language in addition to the Norwegian language. Though many of the children are born in Norway, either one or both parents originates from another country. In most Norwegian kindergarten, the staff are usually adults with traditional Norwegian background (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). This is the case for these kindergartens where the research was conducted. This means that some of the adult in these kindergartens have minority backgrounds and some ethnic

Norwegian. Kindergarten is a place for socialization and learning as [Singer and Haan \(2011\)](#) say, that both institutions (teachers and children) meet in the kindergarten with personal experiences from various cultural backgrounds, belief system and upbringing. Together, they create a multicultural diversified Norwegian kindergartens we see today. The official documents guiding all Norwegian kindergartens will be presented next.

2.5 The Framework Plan for kindergartens

All kindergartens in Norway are regulated by the Norwegian kindergarten Act no.65 of June 2005. In 2006 the ministry of Education and Research established the Framework Plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens under which all kindergartens in Norway must follow ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 7](#)). In 2011 the Framework Plan was revised and last year, the regulation on the Framework Plan set out supplement provision on the content and tasks of kindergartens which enter into force on August 1, 2017. The Framework Plan provides guidelines for the values, content and tasks of all kindergarten pedagogics in Norway ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017](#)). The old Framework Plan of 2011 describes diversity in this way:

The Norwegian society consist of indigenous Sami people, national minorities and minorities with immigrant background, in addition to the ethnic Norwegians. As a result of globalization, the Norwegian society is more diverse than decades ago. This cultural diversity shall be reflected in kindergartens pedagogy. The social, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences in the society mean that children and teachers come to kindergarten with different experiences. Kindergartens shall support children on the basis of their own cultural and individual circumstances ([Ministry Education and Research, 2011, p. 7](#)).

The revised Framework Plan of 2017 describes cultural diversity in this way:

The kindergartens shall promote respect for human dignity by highlighting, valuing and promoting diversity and mutual respect. Kindergartens shall use diversity as a resource in their pedagogical practices and support, empower and respond to the children according to their respective cultural and individual

circumstances. Kindergartens shall highlight differences in values, religions and world views. There must be room for a spiritual dimension in kindergarten which should be used to instigate dialogue and respect for diversity. Kindergartens shall allow cultures to meet, make room for the children's own cultural creativity and help all children to experience happiness and a sense of achievement in social and cultural settings (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 9).

This purpose clause of the FP can be interpreted in different ways as Krogstad (2016) wrote. The first sentence of both the purpose clause of 2011 and 2017 is central, when our focus is on how multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity. Also, the new and the old FP emphasize that, all values and distinctive features of the purpose clause must be accommodated as long as they do not conflict with human rights. In addition, the section on diversity also stipulates that kindergartens must counteract all forms discrimination, and counteracting discrimination on the basis of culture must be assumed to constitute a key element in this connection. This is followed up in the FP, where efforts to safeguard cultural diversity in kindergartens are made by insisting that linguistic, cultural and religious diversity enriches and strengthens the kindergarten as a community, and that kindergartens should facilitate dialogue and interaction between different groups on an equal footing (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

The FP of 2017 has laid a lot of emphasis on the critical importance of diversity. The FP has made cleared the importance of highlighting differences in cultural, ethnicity, religions and other values in the kindergarten. This study will try to find out how a multicultural kindergarten teacher highlight those values. There are some important themes that are repeatedly been mentioned throughout the Framework Plan, such as equality, cultural differences, language and communication, democracy, etc. These are different components of diversity and will be examined.

This chapter has provided a description of the Norwegian kindergarten system. The chapter has also provided insight in Oslo as a multicultural city, the multicultural kindergartens in general and a presentation of the Framework plan for kindergartens in Norway. A description of the Norwegian kindergarten system as a social and

pedagogical institution for every child no matter the culture, religion or language (Gjervan et. al., 2006). The chapter describes Norway and the city of Oslo as a multicultural city and consist of people with different language, cultural and religious background (Gjervan, et.al. 2006). 91.3% of all children between the age of 1 and 5 years of age in Norway attended kindergarten (Statistics Norway, 2018). The kindergarten used for this study has a cultural, religious, language and ethnical diversity, and defines itself as a multicultural kindergarten. The different theoretical concepts used for this study will be presented next.

Chapter: 3 Theoretical concepts reviewed

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the different relevant literature reviewed in the research. The chapter starts by discussing the concept of diversity from different theoretical perspectives and the Framework Plan for kindergarten stand point on diversity. Then the different factors of diversity are discussed. The concepts of diversity discussed are also found in the Framework plan for kindergartens in Norway. The components discussed includes: cultural differences; religion and beliefs; language and communication; democracy and equality. The concepts will be defined, described and discuss in light of how minorities and diversity has been constructed in Norway and will locate them within the Framework plan for kindergartens. These factors of diversity are chosen based on the research topic. Inclusion is a concept that has been introduced and discussed next in this study. This is because of the critical important of an inclusive education (approach and practices) for minority children and also because childhood development is considered a significant part of human development. The chapter ends with: the concept of childhood which describes how children and childhood is viewed in contemporary Norway and world at large. It also described how children should be active and not passive in their daily lives. This could be relevant when doing research that concerns children, because their views and how they are viewed could lead to better practices of diversity.

3.2 Diversity

Diversity is not a new phenomenon to many nation state, although the increase globalization in recent decades has made the need to address issues of diversity in education important (Miller et. al., 2009). According to Lindquist (2015), there has been a shift from using the term multicultural (Norwegian flerkulturell) to diversity (Norwegian mangfold) in the educational sector. Also, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research have written a pamphlet on linguistic and cultural diversity

emphasizing the importance of having a resource perspective on diversity (Ministry of education and research, 2017). In accordance with Hylland (2006) view, diversity is viewed as something positive and harmless in the Norwegian official and judicial documents. Thanks to the introduction of the national professional development program competency for diversity that was launched in 2013, diversity has been brought to the fore in Norwegian education (Burner & Biseth, 2016). The program was a subsequent of the White Paper, A Comprehensive Integration Policy: Diversity and Community (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2012), which claimed that teachers need to address diversity in order to decrease the accomplishment gap between children with a minority background and majority children.

Recent study in Norway on how teachers in kindergartens perceived and practiced diversity and how it is drafted in the FP, reveals significant gaps between perceptions, practices and policy documents (Burner & Biseth, 2016). This study on the other hand will be looking at the teacher's perception of diversity, their approaches and practices of diversity following the FP and finally I will explore the children's approach to diversity through observation. This study on diversity will not be unique, for there are many research that has been carried out on diversity in education from a Norwegian context. Phil (2010) for example carried out a research on diversity in education but with a focus on language learning and overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in special needs education. These are some of the important contributions to teachers practices and perceptions of diversity. There is still little knowledge on diversity in kindergartens.

The meaning of diversity is very important as they affect teachers' practices. Depending on the context, diversity have a variety of meanings. To some, it is a concept that encompasses respect and acceptance, not only on how people perceive themselves, but how they perceive others. In contemporary social theories, Winter (2007) referred to diversity as the collaborative efforts between parents, children, and teachers. This is to enable children respect differences, and learn about their backgrounds (Winter, 2007). To Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, "diversity is about differences, inequality, heterogeneity, change and something that is alternating or heterogeneous" (Gjervan et al., 2012, p. 26). The Norwegian public sphere in an attempt to distinguish diversity and

differences, defined diversity as something positive and differences as something negative following the public perception of the terms (Hylland, 2006). According to Hylland Eriksen's view, diversity is morally harmless and potentially economically profitable, while those with some sort of differences will be inferior. The view of Hylland can be seen today in our society as well as in education system (Burner & Biseth, 2016). The word diversity is used throughout. Therefore, diversity alone refers to variation, and it is used in many different contexts. In this study, I will limit the understanding of diversity to Gjervan, Bleka and Andersen (2006) and (Wardle, 2003a) definitions. A term that entails cultural, linguistic and religious experiences while focusing on children, families and teachers. The context will fit this research, as it concerns children and families with multicultural backgrounds and inclusion of the multicultural groups in kindergarten everyday practices. This means that children in multicultural kindergarten and least to say in all kindergartens are expected to learn about their own backgrounds, backgrounds of people who are different from them and see themselves, their families, represented throughout their practices (Wardle, 2003a). Wardle also writes that children learn to appreciate and seek differences, learn tolerance and understand that there are a whole variety of ways to answer a question or solve a problem or complete a task (Wardle, 2003a).

One can therefore say that diversity is an appropriate word to describe the composition of the contemporary Norwegian population. Understanding kindergarten teachers' perspectives, approach and practices might be a pathway to inclusion of every child and families with different backgrounds. Even if Norway was described as ethnically homogenous, the culture is not necessarily the same, meaning that people experience and interpret culture differently (Knudsen, 2008). For instance, not every Norwegian child likes Lutefisk or Kaviar as mentioned by the kindergarten leader during the interview, thus implying that every kindergarten will be described as multicultural no matter how many ethnicities it represents. The issue here is that people perceived the content of the term diversity as including merely the others (immigrant) instead of everyone. It is important that everyone is given an opportunity to define his/her own culture as it has been emphasis in the FP of 2017 with language being prevalent

(Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). As part of this study, I will be looking at how teachers perceive the concept of diversity in in their kindergartens.

With this background knowledge on diversity, this study would add to the knowledge on diversity by looking at the teachers' perspectives, approaches and practices of diversity in multicultural kindergartens. There are some key elements of diversity located in the Framework Plan for kindergartens which are generally regarded as factors of diversity. Those components will be described and discuss in light of this research study.

3.3 Elements of diversity

3.3.1 Cultural differences

Cultural diversity is one of those factors many people think of when they talk about diversity. It is a broad term with different meanings. Eriksen and Sørheim (2003) defined culture as that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, law, morals and habits acquired by man as member of a society. Spernes and Hatlem (2013) understands culture as those internal characteristics (such as attitudes and values) and as outer characteristics (such as dress codes and eating habits). They are expressed through different forms of communication, create our understanding of the world as well as community and distance between people" (p.89). Culture is not a static state. Eriksen and Sajjad (2012) claim that "on a general level we can say that all that is learned is cultural while everything that is innate is natural" (p.35). Furthermore, they state that culture is the thoughts, knowledge and skills the individual has acquired as a member of society. We carry the sum of all experiences, knowledge and values and act on the basis of these (Eriksen & Sajjad, 2012). This means the definition range from very specific to broader understandings of culture.

Most contemporary perspectives in social sciences share the idea that culture is a set of "socially transmitted values, practices and beliefs. Culture can be a value anyone want to grow and promote (Klausen, 1992). It is therefore important that everyone be given

the chance to define their own culture (Knudsen, 2008). In order ward, Culture is viewed as a critical aspect of human life, through which individuals become socialized, construct identity and a sense of belonging (Parekh, 2006). The kindergarten FP has put a lot of emphasis on the important of a culturally diverse environment for children from various background. This is an important subject area because through culture, people interpret and make sense of their experiences without being aware of them. In this study, I will be exploring how children cultural values are expressed in different kindergarten practices.

Cultural diversity is the cultural variety and differences that exist in the world, a society, or an institution, the inclusion of a diverse group. People sometimes misrepresent the concept of culture as a set of customs, beliefs, and traditions that are passed from generation to generation, whereas culture is something that can also be learned through socialization. One thing to remember here is that children with minority backgrounds will in most cases grow up with two or more cultures, the minority culture which is the child's original culture and the majority culture. The majority culture in this case will be the Norwegian culture. Saloe (2003) writes that there are several advantages of being in a multicultural environment as well as there are challenges that cannot be ignored. This study will find out some of those approaches and practices that could benefit the children, families and teachers alike. AS well as those challenges that makes teachers practices difficult.

The FP, like most laws, is concise on their point on cultural diversity. It explicitly states that "kindergartens must consider children's ethnic and cultural backgrounds". The crucial point of dealing with respect to cultural diversity is one of the kindergartens core values which states that:

"Kindergartens shall promote respect for human dignity by highlighting, valuing and promoting diversity and mutual respect. Kindergartens shall use diversity as a resource in their pedagogical practices and support, empower and respond to the children according to their respective cultural and individual circumstances. Kindergartens shall allow cultures to meet, make room for the children's own cultural creativity and help all children to experience happiness and a sense of

achievement in social and cultural settings” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, P. 9)

This means that the kindergartens are to promote basic values such as care, compassion, equality, participation, and religion, as well as ensuring and respecting the fact that everyone is different. This study will explore if these kindergartens incorporate these values into their practices, and if they are a normality as well as visibility in practice. The FP emphasis that some of these values will be visible and recognized in the kindergarten through dialogue between the staff, parents and children. Most social theories today stress human agency and view individuals as active members of a group (Lott, 2010). Also, the different cultural values and norms experienced are brought about by individuals in various ways, making culture changeable or in other words not uniform (Parekh, 2006). In this study, we will see how kindergarten teachers’ deal with the different cultures brought to the kindergarten by the children and parents. The discussion section will elaborate more on this. Apart from culture being the most spoken aspect of diversity, religion and belief is another element of diversity that will be discuss next.

3.3.2 Religion and beliefs

In kindergartens, children, families and teachers with different religious backgrounds meet daily. Hovdelien (2013) writes that in recent years, the Norwegian public institutions that have traditionally been rooted in Christian values, has proven increasingly problematic. This is as a result of the steadily declining proportion of the population having clear Christian affiliation. This strong emphasize on Christianity is because Norwegians have been members of a Christian religious community for over thousand years (Repstad, 2016:255-260). Religion plays a vital role in some societies for how the inhabitants live their lives than most traditional Norwegians (Singer & Haan, 2011). Religion and belief can be viewed as a way of life, though it is generally said that religion is connected to specific ethnical background, it is also a big part of people’s culture (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). Like all western societies, Norway is depending on striking a balance between freedom and institutional control.

Norwegian kindergarten managers states that ethic, religion and philosophy (ERP) as the subject area of learning perceived as demanding in terms of how they work (Gulbrandsen & Eliassen, 2013). They are some previous research done in this area for instance Kari Krogstad (2014), and Tina Dykesteen Nilsen (2012): Nilsen (2012) has investigated how 48 kindergartens use religious and philosophical texts and narratives. She finds that "no kindergartens use texts or narratives from the scriptures of either Buddhist, Islam or other religions and philosophies" except Christians (p. 252). Nilsen wonder if one reason may be that parents "especially from foreign backgrounds want their children to have it as Norwegian as possible in kindergarten". Krogstad (2014) has investigated how 250 kindergarten employees work with high quality celebrations. She finds out that most kindergartens rarely celebrate other religious festivals outside of Christianity, even though the staff considers such celebrations as relevant. Both Krogstad and Nilsen (2012) view the aspect of celebrating other religions in the kindergarten as possible through parents-teachers cooperation. Krogstad, however, thinks that the lack of parents- teachers cooperation can absence of sufficient attention to minority religions. In her study, only 15-16 percent of the participants state that they cooperate with parents about holidays related to religion (Christianity and Islam). These and other research carried out in Norwegian context that clearly shows that Christianity is emphasis in Norwegian kindergartens and mostly Christian traditions are celebrated. These are interesting and conflicting findings because one of the reasons why institutions such as kindergartens were created was to promote social integration of representatives of different cultural and religious beliefs affiliation (Stark & Bainbridge, 1996). This research study reveals that the Framework Plan requirement are unclear to the teachers, and the participants expressed that they are uncertain about the working methods associated with celebrations Christian traditions and poor cooperation between then the parents are contributive factors

The Framework Plan and the kindergarten Act lay emphasis on Christianity in some parts of the content, section 2 of the kindergarten content, third and fourth paragraph states that:

“Kindergartens shall reflect and respect the diversity represented by groups of children. At the same time the kindergartens should also include values and traditions from Christian and humanist cultural heritage. The ethical guidance provided by kindergartens must take into account the circumstances of children and their cultural, religious and ideological backgrounds” (Kindergarten Act, 2011:3, 4).

The Framework Plan (2017, P. 9,54) also emphasizes the importance of religion and belief by introducing some learning areas how religion could be made visible and valued in the kindergarten.

“There must be room for a spiritual dimension in kindergarten which should be used to instigate dialogue and respect for diversity. Kindergartens shall introduce the children to the stories, traditions, values and holidays of different religions and world views and to discover how cultural expressions are valuable in their own right”

These are explicit guidelines for the kindergarten to take into account the child’s ethnic, cultural and religious background. Also, the parental mandate implies that the parents’ upbringing of their children, which will be influenced by various cultural factors including religious view of humanity, and values, should be supported in the kindergarten regardless of the background of the child. This means that the kindergarten should reflect and respect the diversity represented in the children’s group, and help the children become familiar with religion, ethic and philosophy as part of culture and society. The justification for changing the purpose of the kindergarten Act in 2010, was towards a more secularized religion in a multicultural society (Nou, 2007:6, Rev. No.18). More or less the same reason for bringing into force some new supplementary provisions on the content and tasks of kindergarten.

According to Sødal (2009:19) the wordings in the FP on religions and belief can be interpreted differently. It can be read as a list of values that are rooted in equally ranked religious and philosophical traditions (including human rights). Based on this interpretation, Sødal writes that in practice, this will mean that the values that should

apply in the kindergarten would be the values that are common to those religious and beliefs if these comply with human rights (Sødal, 2009). This also means that children religious festivals and traditions should be expressed in kindergarten field of learning. The teachers will facilitate the child's knowledge and socialization so that the children can recognize and relate to the practices and life of others as they meet them in the kindergarten and society at large. Through the festivities, the children can gain experience of religion as part of society outside the kindergarten fences and the children will also develop interest, tolerance and respect for diversity. Achieving these are based on teachers' perspectives, approaches and practices of diversity with respect to religion which will be explore in this study.

3.3.3 Democracy and equality

Increasing diversity in Norway and subsequently in kindergartens demands an understanding of democracy, equality and respect for differences. This means that kindergarten teachers ability to ensure equality and participation will be grounded on their interpretation of those concepts. Parallel to many other countries, kindergartens in Norway are founded on democratic values and principles. The children's right to participate is enshrined in Article 12 No. 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the child. Also, section 1 and 3 of the kindergarten Act, declares that "kindergarten shall promote democracy and equality and counteract all forms of discrimination, it further emphasis the children's right to actively participate in all kindergarten activities on a regular basis" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, P. 27). The Framework Plan for kindergartens further emphasis that "the children's participation in everyday life in kindergarten lays the foundations for continued insight into and participation in a democratic society" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 55). Looking at all the documents, democracy and equality are linked and they all counteract all forms of discrimination against children with other backgrounds other than the majority. These documents also encourage children to participate, to be active, to be responsible to express their views about their daily activities. The children's opinion shall be given due weight with regards to their age, individual circumstances, experiences and needs

(Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.27). Kindergarten teachers then have a responsibility to listen to what the children say and to ensure that the child is not excluded from participation or that the child is an active participant (Sandberg,2016, p.93).

The concept of democracy and equality can be defined at different levels. Gole and Billard defined democracy as recognition and representation of differences, a mode of being in the world, a form of living together, which is more than a form of government (Gole & Billard, 2012, 116). To them, democracy is an ethical way of relating to self and others, and it should pervade all aspects of everyday life. Democracy to Biesta, is about dialogue, quality of participation, making meaning and generating meaning (Biesta, 2014, P.42). According to Moss (2011), democracy is operated at different levels, at the national level, the local government level and at the kindergarten center level. Each level has responsibility, but we are concerned with the activities at the kindergarten level (i.e. the national level). All these perspectives on democracy boils down to participation, equality, rights, solidarity and responsibility. How teachers approach and practice democracy and equality in a multicultural setting will be dependent on their perspectives about democracy.

In addition, a research has been carried out in Norway on teachers understanding of democracy and the significance for children's democratic participation (Pettersvold, 2013). Pettersvold identified three types of democracy being used in the said kindergarten: She spoke of liberalistic democracy, which is characterized by setting the individual's freedom high. In the context in which the research was conducted, this means that children can have freedom from adult control and make independent choices. The second type, democracy based on majority, is reflected in a participation practice where it is considered valuable for children to experience to renounce their sovereignty in favor of the community. In the kindergarten context, it means that the majority will decide. The third type, deliberative democracy, is regarded as a practice that emphasizes having children communicate, listen to the views of others, and understand that it is possible to reach an agreement despite differences in viewpoints (Pettersvold, 2013, pp.

133– 136). Democracy is an important concept because it gives children room to experience participation as a loyalty to friendship (Pettersvold, 2013, p. 142).

Democratic practices at the kindergarten will require that teachers and children will be regarded as citizens engaging in different activities. At the core of those activities will be respect for diversity, recognition of multiple perspectives and diverse paradigms, welcoming curiosity, subjectivity and uncertainty (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). The different activities include: decision making about the purposes, the practices and environment of the kindergarten. The Framework Plan further declares that children are active constructors of their own learning and producers of original points of view concerning the world, and the evaluation of early childhood work through participation and so on. Here is an example of every day kindergarten activities where teachers are expected to be democratic and fair.

James and John playing with a particular set of blocks for the past two days and does not want to include any other child and refuses to let other children take turns with the blocks. Mary (struggling with the Norwegian language) insist she must be part of building the blocks, fight broke out and Mary who cannot express herself well broke into tears. A teacher step in and told James and John to either include Mary or let her take turn in using the block. (observation)

The teacher expresses democratic values, encourage the children to learn to share, take care of each other and unfair to treat someone bad because the person cannot express herself. One can argue here that teachers' interaction with the children in their everyday activities have a great influence in the children's democratic understanding. The Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens, states that early experiences with peers are of great importance for children's ability to interact well, and this makes kindergartens important arenas for social development and the building of friendships (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). All children regardless of their communication and language skills must be given equal opportunities to participate in meaningful activities with their peers. This takes us to another concept equality, which is closely linked to democracy.

Equality means unifying different ethnicities, culture and language (Gole & Billard, 2012, 116). One of the core values of the Framework Plan is state that:

“Kindergartens shall promote equity and equality irrespective of gender, functional ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, culture, social status, language, religion and world view. Kindergartens shall combat all forms of discrimination and promote compassion. Everyone shall have the same opportunities to be seen, heard and encouraged to participate in all shared activities in kindergarten. Staff must reflect on their own attitudes in order to best convey and promote equity and equality” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p 10).

Therefore, equal opportunities are a part of the Norwegian kindergarten value base. Nurturing equality and democracy is critical in children and equality is regarded as a basic for democratic values. From the material gathered, the anti-bias approach does not necessarily focus on additional supports, special love and attention for children from minority groups. They are focus on changing the mainstream practice so that the uniqueness of every child is recognized, supported and differences should be respected and valued. The question is how a multicultural kindergarten strife for equality without imposing uniformity or how they manage to unite seemingly opposite individuals? Examining how teachers understand, practice and promote democracy with the children will be investigated in this study.

3.3.4 Language, communication and text

Like in many other countries, kindergarten is an arena for many different languages and culture. Early childhood is the fundamental period for the development of language. In meeting the needs of diverse learners, an appropriate and high quality developmentally early childhood curriculum can be more effective. Most importantly, support for each child’s home language should be encouraged (Tabors, 2008;). In Norway, the official language spoken is Norwegian. Therefore, the main language in kindergartens is Norwegian. Though it will not be surprising to have children born and raised in Norway

that starts Kindergarten without being able to speak the Norwegian language (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). It is also important to note that in a multicultural kindergarten, you could find children who speak Norwegian, others with another language, some even have two other languages in addition to the Norwegian language. This is very common with children whose parents speak two different languages. Some children start kindergarten with a good mastery of both Norwegian and their native language (Gjervan et al., 2006), while others develop their language competency late.

A kindergarten with a large proportion of children with a mother tongue other than Norwegian has their main focus on communication and language. The Framework Plan for kindergartens recognizes that many children do not have Norwegian as their mother tongue and learn Norwegian as a second language at the kindergarten. It is important that these children are understood and get the opportunity to express themselves. Kindergartens must support them in the use of their mother tongue, whilst working actively to promote their Norwegian language skills (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). This will mean that staff should be mindful of their understanding, practice and use of language and communication in a multicultural kindergarten.

The Framework Plan (2017) further states that:

“Kindergarten shall introduce the children to different languages, vernaculars and dialects through rhymes, songs, literature and texts from past and present. Kindergartens shall encourage children to play with language, symbols and text and stimulate their linguistic” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 47).

This document stresses on the critical importance of language, communication and text in kindergartens especially the minority children with a native language other than the majority language (in this case, the Norwegian language). Encouraging a child's native language or language in which a child feels more comfortable in, can affect the child's feeling of identity (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). No matter a child's age, language is an identity marker and can affect a child either negatively or positively depending on how the child is met. During my field work:

Sandra came over to me and asked which country I came from, I replied, and she said one of her parents comes from that same country. She went ahead to ask me if I speak French because her parent taught her. When I said yes, she felt safe, proud, happy, comfortable and felt belonged around me.

Children feeling of identity is dependent of the adult's reaction towards the child's expression of her native language. The Framework Plan emphasis that children shall receive appropriate language stimulation, be able to participate in activities that promote communication and comprehensive language development. The Framework Plan also stresses that teachers have to understand the importance of children native language; encourage children with minority language background to be linguistic active while helping them gain experience that builds their understanding of concepts and vocabulary in Norwegian ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017](#)). While the child native language is to be supported and encouraged, the teachers should work more actively with the second language, especially with the vocabulary. However, there is no specific guidelines for how the work on neither the native language nor the second language should take place. The Framework only set general guidelines for the teachers. Application is left for the different kindergarten to find out ways they think the children native language and Norwegian language are encouraged. This study will find out if the children's native languages are supported and encouraged in these kindergartens and how it is done.

Communication and participation in kindergarten activities are closely linked. Having playmates and being included in kindergarten activities is a prerequisite for being linguistic active ([Lllemyr, 2011](#)). The question is how can teachers really know that minority child is included in play or not? It takes a lot for teachers to be aware of how children in the kindergarten are actually feeling, if they feel included, and whether they can participate in play with others. In 2012, NAFO conducted a project on bilingual assistance in kindergarten and few of the participating kindergartens chose language in play as a specialization project. Together with observation, the kindergarten found out that some of the children with minority in play moved from activity to activity, without actually being participants in any of the play. The kindergarten themselves were amazed

at what they found out. They realized it was necessary to take some steps to ensure that all the children were included in the kindergarten activities (NAFO, 2012). This study will seek to find out teachers practices that promote minority children language skills both their native language and the Norwegian language.

The Framework also emphasize the important of conversations related to text. Ankrust (2005) developed a knowledge survey on assignment from the Ministry of Education and Research, where she went through a series of studies to illustrate the importance of increase vocabulary or vocabulary for children's reading comprehension. She writes that:

book reading strategies with children that promote conversation about the text and invite the child's input and questions to the text, promotes the child vocabulary development (Ankrust, 2005:37).

Talking to children about the text is also emphasized in the FP. The staff must create an environment where children experience excitement and joy in daily reading, narration, singing and conversation (Kindergarden Act, 2006a:35).

Therefore, through language, communication and text, children not only develop knowledge about what is read and what is in the literature, but also the cultural competence and knowledge is grasp (Solstad, 2008). Looking at the different languages spoken among the children group as a resource will not only benefit the multicultural children but also the ethnic Norwegian. In all, it is very important that teachers consider Minority children Norwegian language acquisition a main focus in their learning areas. This is because language and communication have a significant impact on the social nature of the learner. Spernes & Hatlem, 2013), assumed that learning a new language involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being.

3.4 Inclusion in the early years

Over the past years, the view of an inclusive education for children with minority background has gradually increased. Many European countries at their policy level has

emphasized the importance of inclusion of ethnic minority children in kindergartens. Many regard this as an opportunity for addressing cultural and social inequalities from the earliest stage (EACEA, 2009). The term is linked to democratic values and ideals, with emphasis on diversity as a value that should be recognized in kindergartens. EACEA (2009) stresses the importance of accepting people and including them no matter how different they are. This means that to have an inclusive children kindergarten, one need to be patient and sensitive to the children needs and difficulties (EACEA, 2009). The data in this study shows that teachers demonstrated a level of patient with children who were slow with eating, language and in other activities.

Inclusion is a sense of belonging, feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others, feeling valued and respected for who you are (Miller & Katz 2002). Booth, Ainscow and Kingston defined inclusion in early years and childcare as much concerned with the participation of teachers as with the involvement of children and families. Participation implies playing, learning and working in collaboration with other. More deeply, it is about being recognized, accepted and valued for ourselves' (Booth, et al., 2006, p.3). This understanding is related to Woodhead and Brooker (2008) perception about sense of belonging. In their study, they apply Bourdieu's framework of cultural and social reproduction. They also draw knowledge on Honnett's theory of recognition to young children's participation, emphasizing, love, rights, and solidarity" to be critical for children to participate in any social setting. These theories and definition of inclusion and crucial importance of children having a sense of belonging and identity concurs with what is written in the FP for kindergartens.

"Inclusion in kindergarten is also about facilitating social participation. Kindergarten content must be administered in a way that allows different children to participate according to their respective needs and circumstances. Play is the single most important arena for socializing in kindergarten. For some children, early intervention could mean that staff have to work methodically and systematically – over shorter or longer periods – to include these children in meaningful social relationships" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

The document emphasizes the importance of teachers having to engage in pedagogical practices and approaches to suit the children's needs and circumstances. The kindergarten content and tasks stress on play as an important arena through which inclusion is more visible. In this study, we will be finding out from teachers the approaches and practices that were carried out to have an inclusive play. An environment where every child no matter your background, can participate accordingly in all kindergarten activities is critically important in this study.

Inclusion is attached a great importance in this study because early childhood development is considered a significant part of human development (UNESCO, 2005). In order to have a diversified environment or kindergarten, teachers have to be engaged in culturally responsive approach and practices in education. Those practices will support each child's identity, sense of belonging and development in the arena. This is important because the following years of the children is determined by the quality of education provided to them in their early years (Bruce, 2005). Woodhead and Brooker (2008) also outline the importance of sense of belonging in the development of children. To Woodhead and Brooker, is a critical stage in children's life because those children with different cultural backgrounds other than the majority background may be challenged when kindergarten approach and practices are contrary to what is customary to them. They further write that when approach and practices advantage some children at the detriment of others, it could undermine the children's sense of belonging and appreciation of their own cultural identity (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008).

3.5 Concept of childhood

Having a common ground on the understanding of children and childhood is important when carrying out a research with/concerning child. According to James and Prout (1997) the construction and reconstruction of childhood is something which is inevitable. Childhood is an integral part of a person's life and must be viewed in relation to variables such as gender, culture, ethnicity, race and class (Corsaro, 2011). Societies may have different culture and these facts of culture and its impact is what is an integral part of the social construction of childhood. Childhood is not a fixed factor but part of a

society. Each society carries its own norms and values, and children are only a blend of the various societal norms and values in society (James & Prout, 1997). Recognizing childhood as a social construction and not a natural phenomenon (James & Prout, 1997) is a rational and new approach. ‘Children therefore are active, creative, social agents who produce their own unique children’s culture while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult society’ (Corsaro, 2011, p.4). King (2007) stated that, children as they exist are constructions of the society in which they live;

What the society expects of children, the way that they are perceived, what is seen as good or bad for them and what they are competent or incompetent to perform depends upon the particular concept of childhood that the society has constructed (King, 2007, p. 196)

Traditionally, the Norwegian kindergarten stood for a holistic view of the child and for a pedagogical thinking where upbringing, play, care and continuous learning are integrated into each other (Lillemyr, 2011). James, Jenks and Prout (1998) write that people view childhood, as something to be found in the form of play. Some researchers viewed children’s play as a strategy to learn about future roles as adults. Play and learning is an important value in the concept of childhood in Norwegian educational system. The FP section on childhood states that:

The children shall be able to develop their creative zest, sense of wonder and need to investigate. They shall learn to take care of themselves, each other and nature. The children shall develop basic knowledge and skills. They shall have the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities. The Kindergartens shall meet the children with trust and respect and acknowledge the intrinsic value of childhood. They shall contribute to well-being and joy in play and learning and shall be a challenging and safe place for community life and friendship. The Kindergarten shall promote democracy, diversity and mutual respect, equality, sustainable development, life skills and good health (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, section 1 core values)

The FP can be interpreted as an expression of awareness and important of childhood. One can argue here that the FP recognizes children as fully members of the society, and

not just children preparing to be. Corsaro (2011) argued that it is however hard to see children as fully members of the society. He further explained that children are creative, social and active agents who produce their own unique children's cultures while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult societies" (Corsaro, 2011, p. 4). It therefore means that children must be regarded as active in the construction and determination of their daily activities together with those around them and the society in which they live in (James & Prout, 1990). This study will therefore show if teachers approaches and practices portrays diversity because if children opinion are asked when planning for activities that concern them, it means that they recognize children as active in their own lives. On the other hand, if teachers approach and practices does not reflect diversity, it will clearly show that children do not think for themselves when it comes to facing diversity. This will concur with Spernes and Hatlem (2013) perspective that children's attitudes are affected by parents, adults and the environment in which they live in.

This chapter discusses the different theoretical concepts which will be used to interpret and analyze the empirical data from the research project. The factors of diversity discussed in this chapter are also found in the FP for kindergartens. The different perspectives are: Cultural differences; democracy and equality; religion and belief; Dialogue with the minority families; and Language, communication and text. Key concept like diversity and inclusion have also been presented and examined. The underlying idea here is that these theoretical concepts could be practiced or executed in a range of different ways, based on how teachers understand and practice them. Does teaching in a multicultural kindergarten challenge teachers' perspective of these concepts?

Chapter: 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The chapter present and describe the research methodology and tools applied in this study. The qualitative (ethnographic style) has been chosen for this study. The chapter includes a detailed account for reasons underlying my choice of study site and informants. The different methods used in collecting the data for this study has also been described below. The different techniques employed includes face to face interview and participants observation. Presentation and reflection of ethical issues will be described, and limitation of this study will conclude the chapter.

The basis for choosing to employ qualitative design in this study was in accordance with the research questions and choice of participants. [Silverman \(2005\)](#) writes that qualitative design is the systematic plan we make regarding our research topic, the various steps adopted for data collection and analysis, and the logic behind them ([Silverman, 2005: 99](#)). The analysis of this study is positioned within an ethnographic study, with focus on how multicultural kindergarten teachers understand and practice diversity. [Sidky \(2004:9\)](#) defined ethnography as simply a detailed study of peoples' everyday life and practices in their own environment using methods such as participants observation and face to face interview which are the methods used in this research. Using this method, I was able to understand kindergarten teachers' perspectives, approaches and practices with regards to the research topic. Information was obtained through interviewing the teachers and observing the children in their own environment. To validate and enrich what was said in the face to face interview, participants observation was employed as another method. [Mills \(2014\)](#) argues that implementing multiple methods in qualitative research to validate participants expressed perspectives, by carrying out an actual life occurrence in that environment was a great idea.

4.2 The study sites

This study was conducted in two multicultural kindergartens in Oslo, Norway. Oslo was the best choice for this study because it has the highest number of immigrants. The kindergartens where the study took place were referred to as a multicultural kindergarten based on the diverse cultures represented in the child group and the teachers. To be called a multicultural kindergarten, [Gjervan \(2006\)](#) said it needs to apply a multicultural approach in their activities. It is important that the researcher respect culture, traditions and customs of everyone involved when conducting research in a multicultural kindergarten ([Gjervan, 2006](#)). Based on my day to day experiences with teachers in my children's kindergarten, I was able to convince some of the participants to take part in the study. Having children in a similar kindergarten gave me more knowledge and understanding on how to approach people from various backgrounds. Another advantage is the fact that I could communicate with participants both in English and Norwegian. Therefore, the language, the Norwegian kindergarten system, the Framework Plan, the culture, values and views on children and minority families would all be known to me.

However, it is very important not to take the known advantages for granted and stray away. I still had to be aware of some challenges that will be encountered. Language, culture and availability was going to be an issue and it was a challenge with some of the participants. This was one of the reasons while I agreed to applying email interview method. [Fangen \(2008\)](#), said, empirical studies regarding immigrants has often been describe as a minefield in which the researcher must be cautious not to contribute stereotyping an ethnic group or some society. In this sense, I was careful with my choice of words and cultural differences. I experienced an interesting situation on my first day of interview. I saw two children playing around with scarfs on their head in the form of "hijab". They went around asking every child to have one of those scarfs on. I smiled and ask one of them why should everyone wear that, and she said they miss teacher A and wanted to be like her. One of the teacher then told me teacher A is on holiday and she wears hijab. This is to say that being an immigrant and a mother never meant I will

understand every culture, language, customs and every child's play. Contact with the kindergarten was made after concluding on my choice of site.

4.3 Choice of informants

The participants for this study were selected from two multicultural kindergartens in Oslo, as mentioned earlier. The research main topic "how Norwegian multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity" influenced my choice of participants. Kindergarten teachers and children were the selected sample. It was interesting getting teachers' perspectives on how they deal with diversity as well as observing the children during their daily activities. It might have been a difficult task carrying out interviews with children between the age of 1 and 5. When the topic for this study was decided, I started having discussions about the topic with teachers from my children's kindergarten. The teachers advised me to talk to the kindergarten leader about having interviews with them.

I contacted the kindergarten leader through a phone call and we booked an appointment so that I could explain the aim of my research. The kindergarten leader told me she oversaw three kindergartens including the one my children attended. Ethically, it was unwise to conduct an interview in the same kindergarten where my children were, so she recommended the other two kindergartens. Following procedures, I sent in the information letter and the consent form for teachers to the kindergarten leader. Myself and the kindergarten leader agreed on a day when I should visit the kindergarten premises. On arrival, the kindergarten staff had already received the message of my coming.

The process became easy as I recognized one of the pedagogic leaders and two assistants in the other kindergarten. The leaders from the two kindergartens agreed that I could only have one kindergarten for the interviews, since they have the same values and practices. I agreed, and we decided on one of the kindergartens but after visiting the kindergarten, most of the participants were not going to be available for interviews. I went back to the kindergarten leaders with the situation at hand and they agreed I could

use both kindergartens and observation in one of them. Appointment to conduct the interview was done face to face. In one of the kindergarten, most of the teachers complain of time and they suggested sending me answers via mail if I explain to them what is required of them, and I could do a follow up if necessary. Out of the 6 participants who agreed to participate, 4 replied to the email. Days and time were planned at their convenient, and some honored when the time came while others complained of availability and language problem.

In summary, 11 participants were involved in this study. It represented a reasonable heterogeneous sample in terms of ethnicity and sex. [Kvale \(2001\)](#) writes that, the number of participants a research needs depends on the objectives of the study. In addition to that, [Kvale \(2001\)](#) suggested that if there are few participants in qualitative interview studies, it would be hard to do statistical generalization, and if the sample size is too large, interpretation of result will be a problem. This explains my number of participants for this study. The number of participants decreased because two of those who agreed to the email did not send their responds and some of those who agreed to participate in the one on one interview ended up not having time. The good news is that the interview included the kindergarten leader, 3 preschool teachers and 7 assistants.

4.4 Methods used in this study

4.4.1 Interview

Before the actual interview took place, some participants volunteered to answer the researchers' questions and send via email. To encourage volunteered participants to deliver, I had to solicit participants individually. I spent at least 30 to 45 minutes with each participant explaining what is required of them and to leave out what they do not understand or do not feel comfortable answering. I explained to them that I will still like to have follow up interviews in order not to misrepresent their perspectives. There was multiple email exchange between the participants and the researcher over a period of time. Using this method, the information volunteered by the individual participants is not shared with, viewed or influenced by other participants ([Schneider et. al., 2002](#)).

[Dillman \(2000\)](#) writes that this technique shows potential participants that they are important, thereby encouraging them to participate. The participants provided a good breadth of information although more clarity and follow up were required in order not to misrepresent information. Out of six participants who received the interview guide, four replied. All four agreed for follow up interview and in this follow, in-depth information was collected for over 45 minutes.

After giving out the interview questions to those who volunteer to send via email, the face to face interview was in motion with the other participants. Face to face interview was the best method to gather information on teachers' perspectives, approaches and practices on how Norwegian multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity. [Lene & Svend \(2015\)](#) writes that Interview is the most optimal method for collecting data on individual personal histories, perspectives, practices and particularly when sensitive topics are being explored. This method allowed the researcher to gain insight on various themes related to diversity in multicultural kindergartens. The participants were able to share a variety of views on their understanding of diversity and their interpretation and implementation of diversity following the FP for kindergartens in Norway. [Kvale \(1997\)](#) writes that, if you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them as was done in this study. The interview questions were developed based on the themes prevalent in the theoretical concepts. One can therefore defined interview as verbal conversation between two people with the objective of collecting relevant information for research purposes. [McNamara \(1999\)](#) emphasized that interviews are particularly useful for getting information behind a participant's experiences. Using interview, I was able to get in-depth information around the research topic. In-depth interview gives respondent the freedom to answer within the boundaries of the topic of interest. Participants in this study were given the opportunities to expatiate on their perspectives with examples from their daily practices.

So far as interview was concerned, the semi- structured interview was the preferred style. This means the interview guide was not highly structured, nor was it unstructured. The interview guide did not strictly follow a formalized list of questions but ask more open-ended questions with a purpose to obtain descriptions of the life world of the

interviewee with respect to the research top question (Kvale, 2001). Using this method of inquiry, one will be free to ask follow-up questions with probes to get in-depth information on the main topic as mentioned earlier.

Before conducting an interview, one needs an interview guide that will help direct the conversation toward the main topic and issues I am interested about. An interview guide is a list of questions you will ask your respondents during the interview (Kvale, 2001). In this research, a set of interview guide was generated for the teachers and participants observation was done with the children. Some minor changes were made during the interview (rephrasing questions) and some possible probing questions where it was necessary. Interviews took place either in the kindergarten premises or in the university as suggested by the participants. Two of the interviews lasted for 1 hours 15 minutes but averagely, the interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 1 hour. With permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded. The interview was conducted only with the teachers and participants observation was employed to confirm what participants said concerning children's' approach to diversity. Participant observation with the children was conducted after the interviews.

4.4.2 Participant Observation

To enrich, complement and validate the quality of the overall data that was collected from the face to face interview, participant observation technique was selected. Observing and participating in children's practices in the kindergarten, I was able to sharpen my knowledge on how Norwegian kindergarten deals with diversity. Løkken and søbstad (2013) said participant observation is about gaining understanding of what life is like as an "insider" while remaining inevitably an "outsider". In other to try and supplement the information gathered on how teachers deal with diversity using the FP, I had to become a student. The aim of using participant was to understand the social, cultural and relationship between the children, how the children played together, what they choose to play with and with whom they played with.

In the observation process, the researcher positioned herself more as an observer. This positioned allowed her to observe the relevant practices of the children that was related to the research question (Mukheji & Alboni, 2010). The observation guide included observing children play with each other as well as visual images of the environment such as paintings, photographs, toys etc. which are culture related resources in the kindergarten used by the teachers. Observing how the kindergarten reflect diversity is important for children's experience with diversity (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). By using observation as a method, I was able to capture how children approach diversity in the kindergarten, and how the teachers deal with the diverse group of children.

Participant observation was carried out in only one of the kindergarten. Observation took place both inside and outside activities. I had different time for observation and interviews depending on my agreement with the administration and the participants. The first part of observation took place outside during their playing time, between 12 noon and 2 pm. No changes were made because of my presence. Some days, I had interviews between 10 am and 12 noon, after which I dived into observation. The observation was geared toward one of the preschooler's department age between 4 and 5. In their play activities, I participated by joining their play, joined their long forest tour, and in joined activities, I participated by singing along on some of the songs. Some of the songs I was familiar with them, since I had two children of similar ages and similar kindergarten, they usually sing those songs at home and fitting in for me was easy. That was an easy blend in for me. I realized that typical Norwegian children songs was a part of the child culture in the kindergarten. I also saw that some of the children played incredibly in English. This tells us how much you can gather from a research with children, Alderson (2004, p. 109) writes that: "Researchers who, with children's consent, observe and talk with them find that children are far more competent in their real everyday lives than they are in labs".

What was observed was written down during breaks. I wrote down key notes and quickly describe any story that could be relevant during data analysis. As we all moved inside, the children continued to play while the adults set the table for meals. I participated in setting up the table, after which I quickly went into a quiet place to write down what I

had observed. This gave me time to think and reflect on my observations. “Reflection is a vital part of the research process and is one way in which researchers can develop their expertise and advance their research” (Lewis, 2004, p.2-4). After their meals, we had another time to play inside. Inside, I was more of a passive participant for about 30 minutes after which I wrote down my observation and prepared for the follow up interviews I had planned with some of the teachers. The observation and the interview time were all chosen by the participants. One of the participant decided to have the interview at the university and the rest decided to have it in their offices and classrooms when they children were out playing.

4.4.3 Ethical reflection

In qualitative studies, the basis for the development of theory is based on interpretations of the meaning of the data material. When doing a social science research project, ethical requirements are imposed on the researcher. As mentioned earlier, I had to be aware that my understanding can affect the findings. The researcher is the one responsible for the interpretation of the material gathered. I took the responsibility and did not interpret the teachers’ perspectives to fits the research problem. Nilssen (2012) said one needs to be neutral when interpreting data even when they did not agree with the participants. During the analysis and interpretation of the data, it was also important that I did not add my own views in the presentation of the participants perspectives. This was also central during the interview because one must be neutral in order not to influence the interviewer's own interpretations of a phenomenon (Thagaard, 2009). It was pertinent that participants were treated with respect and the focus of the participants should be on hearing participants thoughts and experiences and not looking to evaluate their skills. This procedure is in line with the Norwegian national research ethics committees’ guidelines (NESH).

In the email method, participants were provided with easy-to-understand information, which help them gain insight and understanding of what to write about. The balance of this process was somewhat challenging, because giving too much information about the study could affect the responses and thinking of the participants (Thagaard, 2009). This

could further affect the credibility of the study. In order to create a balance and ensure reliability of this study, a follow up interview was conducted with probing questions to those who preferred the email method.

4.4.4 Consent

I filled a prerequisite form to confirm as to whether Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) approval was required for the study. Due to the nature of the data collection, it was determined that I did not need to submit to NSD for confirmation. Also, the fact that no personal information was to be collected, and names of participant and kindergartens were coded. Also, I sent a consent form and information letter to the kindergarten leader weeks before I started the interviews. She later gave me the green light to commence my interview. When I arrived the kindergartens, the participants told me they were already told by the leader about my coming. In addition to the information letter and the fact that the leader had told them about the consent form, I again showed the consent form to the participant to read and sign to ensure clarity. I explained to the participants that they are entitled to withdraw from the study at any time. I also asked the participant if it was ok to record the conversation and none of them objected.

In one of the kindergarten, many of the participants were interested but complained of no time. The requested email method which I agreed to. I took at least 30 minute each with the four participants who wanted to send their answers by email, explaining in detail what was required of them. After receiving the mails from them, I asked for follow up and they all agreed to it. The participants chose the time and place for the follow up. During the interviews, we basically went through each question as it was done with those for interviews.

Because part of the study involved observing the children, a consent form was handed to parents by the kindergarten leader explaining the aim and procedures of the study. The parents were asked to speak up if they do not wish their children been observed and none of the parents objected. Before the day of my observation, the kindergarten leader explained to the children about my coming. I was introduced to the children and some

of the children were shy, and others immediately wanted me to be part of their play. The teachers asked the children if it was ok for me to be watch them and they all said it was ok with them. As mentioned earlier, observation was not going to be focused on individual children behavior, but gathering information on the environment, activities and how the children play together. This information was relevant to understanding how children approach and practice diversity in their daily activities in the kindergarten.

4.4.5 Confidentiality

In this study, confidentiality and anonymity was emphasized. This implies that you do not disclose personal information about revealing the identity or workplace of persons (Thagaard, 2009). Names of participants and places have been changed to ensure anonymity. This is for the integrity of the participants being protected. This is an important principle for maintaining good and sound research practice. I also made sure that personally identifiable information was not given other than on the consent statement. Therefore, it was not possible to find names or other personal information in any other material.

All data from this study will be deleted or shredded after the master thesis has been completed. Recordings will also be deleted. All this were carefully explained to the participants before and after my interviews. Throughout the interviews, I received a lot of good empirical data that was useful to my task. Some of the participants during the follow up interviews had the opportunity to change their statements to make it clearer for me. This means they had an opportunity to review the information they gave measuring ensuring that their perspectives were accurate. The interviewees were engaged and eager to share their perspectives with me. All participants pointed out that, this was an interesting topic and an opportunity for them to reflect on their work with the children and how they interpreted the FP guide on how to deal with diversity.

4.4.6 My role as a researcher

As a researcher carrying out field work in a kindergarten, for the first time, I experienced some challenges. Because of my background I had to create cultural bridges to effectively communicate with participants. Bourdieu (1996) in one of his essay titled 'Understanding' suggests that research may inflict 'symbolic violence' through misunderstanding or misrepresentation. I asked participants before the interviews to specify what language of communication they preferred. All reported that they preferred the interview to be done in Norwegian. They welcome the fact that I was an immigrant and agreed that they could explained in English when necessary. I was aware that Norwegian was my third language and had to be very clear and where the language proved tight, I elaborated in English to avoid any misunderstanding between myself and the participants. The participants also agreed to recording, as I explained to them that I will have to listen to the recorder again and again for better understand as my Norwegian language was not the best.

Having access into the field was easy because the kindergarten leader was also in charge of the kindergarten my children attended. This greatly facilitated my entering into the field and recruitment of participants. Two of the participants had worked in the kindergarten where my children attended, and they immediately volunteered to be part of the study. All participants were very receptive and cooperative after I reached out to them explaining who I was and that I had two children in a similar kindergarten. They were more than willing to share their experiences and perspectives with me.

Having a part of my research with children between the age of 1-5 was also a challenge. There were moments during observation that I found myself torn between a caring adult and my role as a researcher. According to Punch (2002, p.32), adult fears, attitudes and assumption affects their behavior towards children. During play for example, there was one of the children who asked me where I came from and I told her. She told me one of her parent is from the same country as me and immediate, she found comfort around me and became a little possessive of me. There was also another boy who got into a disagreement with another child and it resulted into him crying. As an adult, I comforted him, and he immediately became so attached that he wanted me to play only with him.

I tried to involve every child that was interested in that play and at the same time, keeping an eye on those children that were parts of the study.

My background in child welfare and having children of my own with similar ages made me view the children as active participant. [Clark \(2005\)](#) writes that researchers view on children will influence communication. Because I was more of a passive observant, I had very limited communication with the children and focus more on their actions. Though I tried as much as I could, to be aware of my position as a researcher, still my experience and earlier knowledge played a role on how the research played out.

4.4.7 Limitation of the study

Due to time and resources constraints, this study focused more on teacher's perspectives and observation of children on how they approach and practice diversity. This thesis is written based on empirical data in a qualitative study, where 3 pedagogic leaders, 7 assistants, and the kindergarten leader were interviewed. This is a small sample size and a larger sample size would probably have given us a more diverse perspective and a more generalized conclusion. Also, another limitation of this study is that the researcher was not able to observe some of the practices that were mentioned in the interview. For example, the religious practices and how the children and parents reacted to it.

Despite the limitations, the study provides insight on teachers and children approach and practices of diversity in Norwegian multicultural kindergartens. This study is trustworthy and reliable as I was conscious of my experience and position as an immigrant mother with children in a similar kindergarten. [Brinkmann & Kvale \(2015\)](#) writes that researchers ought to be aware of their experience and knowledge when carrying out research. Also, the researcher addressed credibility and reliability of this study by constantly checking and rechecking the pieces of data within same interview and observation dataset. [Flick \(2009\)](#) argues that reliability in qualitative research is concerned with two main issues: making it possible to delineate participants' views from those of the researcher's interpretations and ensuring systematic and thorough approach in application of the research methods. In this study, actual participants voices

are represented by frequently using their quotes. In addition, thorough selection of the methods and the process of interview and observation was scrupulously assessed.

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Chapter: 5 Findings and discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings in light with how Norwegian multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity. The findings are organized in themes that will be presented below. I start by discussing teachers' perspectives on diversity, looking into patterns that are most common to the participants, as well as the differences. This will be done by discussing the *cultural aspect of diversity, diversity as a natural part of the kindergarten, and personality diversity*. The second part will focus on teachers approach and practices of diversity using the FP for kindergartens. Under this section, teachers practice of diversity will be presented. This part *includes: inclusion and exclusion in relation to play; language and communication; religion and beliefs; democracy and equality; dialogue between kindergarten and the child's home*. Then teachers' perspectives of how children approach diversity will be described. The main themes presented are: *focus on friendship and differences beyond skin color*. The findings under each theme are discussed based on the empirical data collected and theoretical concepts reviewed, at the same time maintaining the uniqueness of participants perspectives.

No distinction has been made regarding the kindergarten because they were both private multicultural kindergartens, led by the same leader and collaborated at all levels. Their practices and settings were therefore similar in all ways. They all had children from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, participants differed in their perspectives on diversity and how it should be practiced. There has been clarity on whether the participant is an assistant, pedagogic leader, kindergarten leader or a Pedagogisk-psykologisk tjeneste (PPT).

5.2 Perspectives on diversity within multicultural kindergarten setting

5.2.1 Cultural aspect of diversity

During the interview, 95% of the participants view suggest that there is a range of understanding as to what is embedded in the concept of diversity. The participants understood and defined diversity along the following lines: as something personal, cultural, natural, and as a resource. One of the pedagogic leaders had a wider and inclusive understanding of diversity and others had a more specific description (e.g. linguistic and communication aspects). Most often diversity was viewed in the light of culture. The perspective of this pedagogic leader (PL1) was more extensive:

*“I look at diversity not just as something **cultural and linguistic**, but also **personal**. The children present a multitude of personalities, opinions, and interests. At the kindergarten, we experience that a large multicultural diversity is **a resource** for the kindergarten, and we work towards an inclusive community where each individual is in focus. Language, cultural, and religious differences are **a natural part of our everyday life**. We work for everyone to learn to be proud of themselves with respect to their background and culture, and we want the children to develop a positive curiosity in dealing with inequalities and similarities”*

The pedagogic leader (PL1) has a complex approach to the concept of diversity. While specifying cultural diversity, PL1 understanding runs through linguistic, personality, resource and normality. She goes ahead to expand her understanding of diversity with examples:

“We have flags from all countries represented in the kitchen, so we often talk about where we come from. We have many multilingual children and they like to teach each other words in different languages. In my children's group, the biggest children play incredibly much in English, even if it's not their native language”

Unlike PL1, the PPT who was there to help children with language difficulties had a more specific confined view. PPT emphasized the linguistic and communication aspect of cultural diversity. PPT views on diversity could be based on her educational and professional background:

“This kindergarten is so diverse. For example, a child from Ghana who is brought to the kindergarten after just a couple of days or weeks in Norway will have a challenge with the language. Both the parents and the children will have difficulties in the beginning understanding the Norwegian kindergarten system and will need help to kick off” (PPT).

When the PPT was asked if there were other aspect of cultural diversity that could be relevant to their kindergarten, she said her colleague could say more about that because she was more for language development. She however mentioned that the children are from varies cultural and religious background and that make the kindergarten a multicultural one. Her colleague on the other hand, a pedagogic leader (PL2), identify some facets of diversity that made it cultural (Halloween, Carnival etc.) and some religious activities that were marked in the kindergarten such as Christmas, Santa Lucia, and Easter. She also mentioned FN dag (UN day) celebration, international food day and to her, all these made them diversified. To her, diversity was the different religious and cultural background represented among the children group and celebrating some of those differences.

In many cases, the participants understanding of diversity were more narrowed towards culture and they all presented a variety of what was ascribed in the concept of diversity. Mostly in terms of ethnicity and nationality. For example, they talked of children from Ghana, Ethiopia, Somalia and other countries in Europe and Africa that are present in Norway and in their country. Unlike these participants, assistant 1 and the kindergarten leader understanding of diversity was in terms of differences in itself and not related to culture: The assistant said:

“I do not really think diversity is just about culture, race, gender, color, religion that everyone will talk about. To me, everyone is different and unique in their own

way and respecting and making that differences visible is all that matters to me. We all have differences and similarities and that is diversity to me”.

Findings from this study suggest that participants understanding of the concept of diversity varies. Being teachers in a multicultural kindergarten setting, participants focused on the need of the children rather than the FP for kindergarten guide. Interestingly, [Robinson and Diaz \(2006\)](#) found that kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices are shaped by multiple discourses available to them, in their professional field. This means that participants practices were related to the diverse nature of the children. This does not mean their perspectives and practices are far from the FP, but they lay more emphasis on the section of the FP that talked about diversity. The kindergarten leader pointed out that; *“The FP has everything we need to work with the children, but certain parts of the contents is more important to us working in a multicultural kindergarten setting”*. Their objective is addressing issues related to every single child’s needs in the kindergarten. This view is similar to PL1’s understanding and view on diversity where she said, *“We work towards an inclusive community where each individual is in focus”*. Meaning that though they had the document guiding them on what to do, they had to select those sections that emphasis the importance of diversity.

Findings also suggest that though participants hold a broad spectrum of meaning regarding the concept of diversity, they were inclined to look at the cultural aspect of diversity as a minority related thing. Such narrow view about cultural diversity in multicultural kindergartens was criticized by [Cannella and Viruru \(2004\)](#), where they pointed out that it could led to inequality. Despites such views, just one of the participant was prone to agree that everyone is different, and culture is learned. [Larsen \(2006\)](#) argued that culture is not something we are born with, but we learn different cultural aspects through socialization between the home and the kindergarten. Children bring cultural aspects from home to the kindergarten and from the kindergarten to their homes ([Howes, 2011](#)). One of the participants illustrated this through an example of an Indian child in the Kindergarten. This child preferred eating certain types of food with the hands. When asked if that is how it is eaten at home, the child confirmed. This Indian child took cultural aspects from their home to the kindergarten. This child was very

much aware of how that type of food should be eaten, and this is a good example of cultural diversity. Though the kindergarten might have a different way of eating that type of food (i.e. with spoons). The kindergarten in this example is influenced by cultural diversity. In addition, the child will also learn and benefit from different cultures expressed in the kindergarten. This is an interesting and complex finding, though they described cultural diversity in terms of minority group, they also view it as a norm in their kindergarten. Again, some of the practices that were carried out and regarded in the kindergarten as norm, [Tholin \(2008\)](#) viewed them as exotic activities. This bring us back to the fact that participants were viewing majority culture as a normality and minority culture as exotic. Section 5:3 will elaborate on those practices that will confirm that minority cultural activities were exotic while majority culture was a normality. Interestingly, the FP for kindergartens emphasis the importance of teachers in the kindergarten recognizing the different cultural background of the children and making it a natural part of their everyday life in the kindergarten ([Ministry of Education of Research, 2017, P. 9](#)).

5.2.2 Diversity a natural part of the children's daily life

The kindergarten leader (KL), PL1 and two other assistants described diversity as a natural part of the children's daily life in the kindergarten. When the (KL) was prompt to elaborate, she said her understanding is based on the multiple cultures represented both among the children and the teachers. With such representation, the KL pointed out that they are bound to apply multicultural approach in their activities. This view is in line with how [Spernes and Hatlem \(2013\)](#) description of multicultural kindergartens as applying multicultural approach in their practices. The question here is what were those practices that prompt participants to view diversity as a natural part of their life? PL1 elaborated this point with an example:

“You know, this is a multicultural kindergarten and we do not really think so much about some of this thing.... diversity is visible and we kind of feel and see it, as I said earlier the children speak different languages especially English in my department”.

PL1 said English was widely spoken in her department while assistant 1 said the children in their outdoor activities, play incredibly in different languages. Meaning that everyone in the kindergarten were exposed to different language and they all benefited from it. To participants, having the multicultural children group and regarding it as a natural part of their lives was a great resource to them. PL1 and some other participants said they (teachers) and the bigger children have learned different words in various languages. Viewing diversity as resources is also emphasis in the FP:

“Kindergartens shall use diversity as a resource in their pedagogical practices and support, empower and respond to the children according to their respective cultural and individual circumstances” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, P. 9)

However, it might be normal for these children and teachers to hear different languages spoken every day, but this will not be normal in a non-multicultural kindergarten. In this sense, one could say that the teachers’ perspectives on diversity was influenced by the present of multiple cultural background present in the kindergarten. The teachers and the children got used to hearing the different language which naturally became a part of their lives. This is in line with Knudsen, 2009; Parekh, 2006 view that different cultural values and norms experienced are brought about by individuals in various ways, making culture changeable. These children as young as they are spoke these languages without knowledge of the fact that they live in a multicultural society. Had it been they were aware of their society, differences might not have been a natural part of their daily lives. What is really regarded as norm to these children could be those aspects of their lives they are familiar with, and do not see as something different. Why do we talk about diversity in the first place if it is a natural part of the society? *Do teachers see diversity as a natural part of their daily life with the children because they are in a multicultural kindergarten, or because they are blind to differences? Would teachers view, and practices of diversity influence the children’s experiences and approach to differences in the kindergarten and the world at large (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013)?*

Finding suggest that participants viewing diversity as a natural part of their life was not because they were blind but because they were in a multicultural kindergarten. We have

discussed different languages that were spoken among children and adults in the kindergarten which was later viewed as natural part in the kindergarten. Another way through which diversity was expressed in the kindergarten and regarded as natural was having flags of all the children on the wall. They had flags representing the different countries hanging in their kitchen. PL1 said:

“We have flags from all countries represented in the kitchen, so we often talk about where we come from”

This was a good way to represent diversity (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013) because it portrays the children’s different backgrounds. On the other hand, imagine a situation where the children identify themselves as Norwegian, the flag might not be a good representation of diversity. About 90% of these children were actually born in Norway, though having different backgrounds, Knudsen (2008) says that children sometimes do not necessarily identify themselves with everything connected to their family background. One could argue that in a situation where there is no dialogue with parents and children, this good diversity representation (flags hanging in their kitchen) could turn out to be a bad experience for the children. Knudsen (2008) writes that children need to be involved in these activities such that they would be able to define what is part of their culture.

Findings also reveals that, there were other means through which diversity was represented in the kindergarten. For example, through cultural events like the UN day, international disco days, and talking about differences brought diversity to a normality. With all these practices in the kindergarten, diversity was appreciated and viewed as normal in the eyes of the teachers and the children. Though it could be argued whether or not diversity was a normality in these kindergartens, the children’s different backgrounds were not seen as misfit and different from the Norwegian culture (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). There were so many different backgrounds coming together in the kindergarten, that it did not seem as one majority culture. Norwegian culture and language was still the common language in the kindergarten. Although some of the multicultural activities were occasionally marked, diversity was still a natural part of their life in these kindergartens. Maybe what is seen as normal to the children and teachers, are the majority culture, i.e., the Norwegian culture. Besides looking at

diversity as cultural and natural part of their lives, personality diversity was mentioned by some participants as differences that people often ignore.

5.2.3 Personality diversity

The interview with the kindergarten leader (KL) and two other assistants suggest that diversity is more than just language, race, ethnicity and cultural attributes. Unlike the other participants, these three participants ascribed an interesting meaning to the concept of diversity. They also view diversity in light of personality rather than just cultural differences. KL during the interview said:

“In my opinion, diversity is all about differences and should be visible. We all are different not only in terms of culture, language and so on but every one of us is unique in their own way and we have to learn to respect that differences. It all about learning from each other, be proud of who we are”

The KL have an open and wider understanding of the concept of diversity. KL and these assistants do not only stress on the obvious differences, but they even go deeper to talk about “individual uniqueness”. When KL was prompted to expand on what she meant by uniqueness, she pointed out the fact that we all have personality traits that is unique to every one of us. Some of the personal differences mentioned are: *children’s ability to eat, speak, dress up, ability to talk, relationships with peers (cooperative play)* that are unique in every child and should be visible, respected and taken into account when meeting these children.

What do we mean when we talk about personality differences. [Allport \(1961, p. 28\)](#) writes that personality is how we organized patterns of behavior that make each person’s unique personality emerge over time. Findings on personality differences suggests that diversity also encompasses intelligence, emotion, learning, abnormality, cognition, social interaction and even motivation ([Mcleod, 2017](#)). This might imply that people of same race or gender may not share same thought, actions or even ability. KL and assistant 2 emphasize that one other thing that make us unique is our personality and this uniqueness should be valued and respected. Some of these personalities we

mentioned above are either inborn or early childhood experience especially from parents and adults around them. [Allport \(1937\)](#) believes that personality is biologically determined at birth and shaped by a person's environmental experience. Just as the participants highlighted, children's ability to eat or to learn something (e.g. language acquisition) is either inborn or childhood experience. Participants said during meal time, some children are generally very slow and take longer time to eat than others. Through dialogue with the parents, if this ability is inborn, they will have to recognize and respect them by giving the child extra time to finish up. The FP for kindergartens also stresses that *"kindergartens shall make allowances for the children's differing abilities, perspectives and experiences and help to ensure that the children, together with others, develop a positive relationship with themselves and confidence in their own abilities"* ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017](#)). Since we say some personality traits are learned, the attitudes of teachers, parents and siblings could be copied by the children and practiced both in and out of the kindergarten. The participants in this case regarded themselves as role models for the children. They practiced respect and tolerant for all and the children see and sometimes will be aware of those attributes. They will mimic them over time. One may say that acceptance, respect and recognition of individual uniqueness is important for an inclusive arena.

On the other hand, some children eat slow because they have seen other adults/children eat slow or cultural belief. For example, some parents feed their children even at the age of 6 said assistant. The participants stress that in such cases, they do have rules and regulations (FP) that every child no matter your background will have to adhere to. Being in a multicultural kindergarten, children might turn to bring some cultural aspect of their life from home to the kindergarten and vice versa. [Larsen \(2006\)](#) writes that these are personality traits learned through socialization. Findings suggest that in situation where those abilities are learned through socialization, the FP specification makes the work of teachers easier. The FP emphasis that teachers are to foster the children's ability to care for themselves, others and nature with limited assistance from adults around them ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017](#)). For the teachers to achieve this, participants emphasize the important of dialogue with the parents. For example, they encouraged parents to allow children from two years old feed and dress

themselves with limited help. Hence, not all personality traits seen in children should be encouraged and those traits such as trust and respect should be fostered as stressed by (Gjervan, et al, 2006). Therefore, one may be tempted to say that religion, race, gender, ethnicity, language and cultural backgrounds are not the only factors of diversity, but, personality diversity is something we often ignore.

In this project, participants view the children's cultural, language and personality differences as a resource. Participants mentioned that some children were aware of the abilities in some children and they encouraged them to learn from each other. Viewing diversity as a resource could also encourage the children to see differences as something positive (Gjervan, et al. 2006). The children knew which child was best at tying shoelaces, pull up zippers and so on. Åberg and Taguchi (2006) point out that rather than children doing everything by themselves, they could help out each other using their different abilities. To see diversity as a resource, one would also need to put a focus on the differences, showing that each child has their own knowledge and abilities. For example, participants also said some children have interesting stories, phrases in their languages and knowledge that they all shared with each other. Åberg and Taguchi (2006) said children are usually very much interested in comparing their differences and similarities in their thinking and ways of doing things. These differences put together became a resource for them all in the kindergarten. Participants referring to children cultural, language and personalities differences means there were engaged in many different diversity practices in the kindergarten. The next part will discuss how multicultural kindergarten teachers deal with diversity by looking at their approach and practices of diversity.

5.3 Teachers approach/practices of diversity using the FP

5.3.1 Inclusion and Exclusion in relation to play

Findings suggest that participants emphasized play as an important area through which they deal with diversity in the kindergarten. Participants believed that play is very

relevant and have a self-written place in the kindergarten and in the life of the children. Mouritsen (2002, p. 22) writes that play is often associated with children. Participants perspectives on the relationship between play and diversity were consistent. These perspectives were all in relation to the requirement in the 2017 FP for kindergartens, which says that:

“Play shall be a key focus in kindergarten, and the inherent value of play shall be acknowledged. Kindergartens shall make good provision for play, friendship and the children’s own culture. Play shall be an arena for the children’s development and learning and for social and linguistic interaction” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.20)

All participants emphasized the important of play, but the KL started by establishing the relationship between play and diversity.

“there is a rapidly growing number of young children from culturally diverse backgrounds entering the kindergarten every year. We the adults must ensure that every child is part of a play because play is a way for these children to learn about the world around them and to learn different cultural values. They not only learn about themselves but also about differences in other people. We work to enhance a positive awareness of individual differences and cultural diversity. Play experiences may serve as an excellent way to help teach children about the differences in other people and that being different is not a bad thing” (kindergarten leader

According to KL, play encompasses everything a child needs to survive in a multicultural society. To KL children may learn about themselves, people around them, different cultural values and the world at large through play. Lillemyr (2011) also emphasized the important of play, as being a pertinent element of childhood across culture, as well as in the development and learning in children. To lillemyr (2011), children learn to know themselves alongside developing trust and respect in relation to themselves and those around them. Participants emphasized that at the same time as focusing on play and learning, they also ensure inclusion in play. KL said *“Lek er en vei for inkludering”* meaning play is a way of inclusion. PL1 explained that they work so

close to the children that they know who play with who and who does not play well with who. Unlike other participants, PL1, PL3 and one assistant acknowledge several times on the need for improvement on cultural diversity in the FP for kindergartens. When PL1 was encouraged to explain further, she opens her view about the FP for kindergarten, that it should not only state things that should be done but should include examples on how and what type of material to be used. Though they criticize the guideline in that area, they believed that the guideline has helped them ensure that no child is excluded in play.

Finding from this study also suggests that children usually like to choose who to play with and when they get so involved in a play, they don't want someone else to join. The teachers pointed out that the children are allowed to focus on their play without interference from other children. They (teachers) help the other children either join the play in a peaceful way without destroying or disrupting the already existing play or they find a different thing to play with, which is in line with the FP for kindergartens. The teachers shall guide the children if the play results in unhealthy patterns of interaction. They shall initiate play and work proactively to involve all the children in it because it is the single most important arena for socializing in kindergarten ([Ministry of education and Research, 2017](#)). In a study carried out by [Singer and Haan \(2011\)](#) children were told to let everyone be welcomed into play, but also that newcomers should not disturb already playing children. During my observation, I noticed two boys playing together with Lego blocks and there was this little girl who wanted to join the play. She received a clear rejection from the boys and when she tried to insist, she was pushed away by one of the boys. I immediately went to the boys and asked if they could allow the girl to be part of the play and the answer was no. She was sad, and I decided to help her form a small play group with two other girls who also were interested in Lego blocks. [Spernes and Hatlem \(2013\)](#) writes that children that for some reasons are excluded or choose to withdraw from play opportunities, will also miss out on developing social interactions and relationship skills with peers. Also, children's play can stimulate all aspects of their development ([Lillemyr, 2011](#)).

All participants emphasized the important of having every child be part of play as emphasized in the FP for kindergartens. Assistant 3 goes ahead to elaborate on the importance of play with relation to language and the fact that for children learning to be a friend is complex and difficult. He further stressed the important of having an adult present when children are playing because positive social skills do not necessarily come without the guidance of teachers. Partly because those children with Norwegian language difficulties might always be left out, and children are expected to communicate at several levels during play. The present of an adult makes the participation and turns taking possible. Lillemyr (2011) writes that in play children will be required to understand the role of interaction and the present of an adult is important. Language to an extend is an important part of play and play is one of the best way through which children learn different languages emphasized by all participants. Assistant 3, when prompted to elaborate more, highlighted the aspect of democracy and equality in play, whereby children are given the right to choose where and what to play with, as well as learning to take turns. He said,

“Children have a mind of their own, and we respect their choices and allow them to decide as long as it does not go against any rule and regulations laid down for their interest. Our kindergarten is an inclusive arena for everyone”.

Assistant 3 further explained that children are given opportunities to make choices but that does not necessarily mean every choice will be accepted. The teachers are there to make decisions that are for the best interest of the children, because children make choices and play wildly without regards for side effects and usefulness (Lillemyr, 2011). During my observation, I noticed that children decided for themselves who, what and where they wanted to play, and the teachers help to coordinate. There were different indoors and outdoors activities such as playing with Barbie dolls, action figures like spider man, playing dress up, puzzle, making bead pictures, coloring activity, sitting on adult laps, laying on the floor, simply running around, playing with Legos and climbing. Outdoor activities include, playing with sledding boards, playing with sticks, playing red light lead by children, playing on the swings, taking turns standing on their hands on a small hill, playing with bucket and spade, climbing on a fence, laying on the ground,

sliding down the slide, playing catch the ball led by an adult. The children in all these activities made their preference of what type of play to engage in and the teachers were present to ensure that every child was included.

Findings also suggest that the children cultural background were taken into consideration during play. Taking into account children's own culture in play was also emphasized in the FP for kindergartens. Apart from learning role play and taking turns, the children were given the opportunity to introduce their own play. Some of the games that were played in the kindergarten were initiated by the children and teachers alike. According to [Howes \(2011\)](#) most children with older siblings usually bring cultural aspect of play from home to the kindergarten and vice versa. Giving children the opportunity to display their culture through play might also help them recognize, respect and see different cultures as something positive. With such activities, children might also become proud of their cultural identity and this could also encourage positive awareness in children. Although there seems to be an awareness among kindergarten teachers that they are in a multicultural kindergarten with children of various backgrounds, my evaluation is that some participants simultaneous openness towards involving multiculturally activities were out of fear for making stereotypical assumptions about culture. However, the participants perspectives on how they address diversity in relation to play was influenced by the Framework Plan emphasis on inclusive play, children individual needs and enforcing their sense of belonging.

5.3.2 Language and communication as central

Findings suggest that teachers emphasized language and communication as an important subject area of cultural diversity in a multicultural kindergarten. Besides play, participants regarded this area as central in relation to cultural diversity. So far as language and communication was concerned, the teacher's perspectives seemed to be consistent and closely related to what is stated in the Framework Plan. For example, the kindergarten organized language group activities which is aimed at supporting Norwegian language acquisition which according to participant was beneficial to all the children in that group.

During the interview, all participants emphasized the importance for children to learn Norwegian language as well as their native language. All the participants mentioned that a large proportion of the children admitted into their institution has a native language and they encourage the parents to keep speaking those languages at home. The reason being that the children will acquire the Norwegian language from the kindergarten. To support the children's native language, assistant 2 said:

“You know this is a multicultural kindergarten and we are not here to deprive the children of their culture. Sometimes we ask the parents what language they speak at home and a majority will say their native language, and that they are struggling with Norwegian language. We tell them not to worry about that but should continue speaking their native language with the children at home if they want. We ask them to leave the Norwegian language to us in the kindergarten”

The assistant and other participants, mentioned that they encourage immigrant parents to continue to speak their native language at home because those are languages the children will not learn from the kindergarten. Though the children native languages were not spoke in the kindergarten, the kindergarten leader, PL1 and two assistants expressed their commitment to respect and value the children's native language by making them visible in their activities. Gjervan (2012) emphasized the important for the children in the kindergarten to experience their native language as a resource and the importance of the adults recognizing the child's mother tongue. PL1 explained further that:

“In my department, the bigger children play incredibly in English, this is because one of the children is more fluent in English than Norwegian and through her almost all the other children play mostly in English”

To support language learning, different languages were spoken by the children in the kindergarten. The participants encouraged the children to express themselves in whatever language they felt comfortable with. This suggest that teachers interest in linguistic competency in these kindergartens coexisted alongside the FP value which states that

“the teachers shall create a diverse linguistic environment in which the children can enjoy using language and communicating with others. Highlight linguistic and cultural diversity, support the children’s different cultural expressions and identities and promote diversity in communication, language and other forms of expression” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.47).

This is also in line with what (Tabors, 2008;) writes about encouraging the children to speak their native language.

Apart from encouraging the children to express themselves in different languages, the pedagogic leader (PL2) discussed the challenge they encounter with some of the children at the beginning of the school year and how they address this difficulty. The participant points out the fact at the beginning of the school year, some of the children come to the kindergarten with no knowledge of Norwegian language nor culture. Gjervan (2012) outlined that teachers in kindergartens can ask families the importance and meaning of words in their native language in order to have smooth communication with the children. They usually ask the parents to translate some day to day words (eat, sleep, play, toilet and so on) into their native language for them to start with at the kindergarten. The participants expressed that this was just one of the informal way for them to be able to communicate with the children in the beginning. Participants response to the researchers question on how they address matters related to lack of Norwegian language were central. They mentioned informal methods such as reading books, telling stories in Norwegian, drawing/painting, small group play supervised by an adult, during meal time, reading books with pictures of animals for example, when out for walk especially in the woods, and be concrete when talking to the children. These are important interactionist activities and Bae (2009) postulated that interaction is a medium through which children express themselves freely and learn from each other. To the kindergarten leader:

“language is learned throughout the day in the kindergarten and it is a central part of the kindergarten daily life with the children and teachers communicating their wishes, opinion, and needs to each other. You know. Language is everywhere,

when the parents bring the children and when they collect them, in dressing, in small gathering”.

The kindergarten leader perception about language describe her many years of experience with working with children from various background and having language difficulties. Her point of view also tells us that language exist all around us, in different forms, and is a part of our daily life. Besides the informal method mentioned, participants talked about the only formal method used in the kindergarten called “Samlingstund” which means “circle time”. During the circle time, participants said lots of Norwegian songs were sang, short story telling, recognizing children with birthday and giving children the opportunity to say/do something of their choice and so on and so forth. This was the only moment participants could recognize as formal for language learning and only in extreme cases that they work with the parents to get extra help for the child. Recognizing that language acquisition by fun activity was important, participants also acknowledge that getting help from educational psychological services (PPT) was also necessary. PPT is a municipal advisory service that serve as an expert body in issues about children, youth, adult education and special needs. The PPT interviewed was positive about her work and she stress the important of group learning for children, one on one conversation, reading loud as well as simply playing with the children.

Finding suggest that although the minority in the kindergarten had Norwegian as their only language, Norwegian was still the common language spoken in the kindergarten. As a result, language was therefore referred to as an important aspect to address in the kindergarten. Empirical data point to the fact that participants had some challenges with communication with families and the children at the beginning of the school year. This conforms to [Murray \(2012\)](#) research carried out in South Africa where participants also identified language as a critical challenge with families from other cultural backgrounds. Despite the challenges identified, it was not a big deal for them and besides children express themselves in many ways. [Johannesen \(2002\)](#) writes that children sometimes express themselves by imitating actions of people around them in skillful ways. Also, having the different languages in the kindergarten was a natural part of the children’s

daily life. They mentioned that children at kindergarten age usually don't care about cultural backgrounds but the other children's play competency.

Though participants had a central perspective on how they deal with language problem, through the informal and formal methods which was mostly group play, PL1 and assistant 2 believed that more could be done. They emphasized that providing a linguistically rich environment was important. Rather than focusing more on Norwegian language skills, they could also have books and other materials representing various languages and children's culture in the kindergarten. This could provide opportunities for the children to hear their native language through those activities. With a smile on her face, she said *"this is a multicultural kindergarten you know, and it does not mean that the children will vigorously start speaking their native language in the kindergarten, ignoring the Norwegian language"*. Findings from the observation and interview data shows kindergarten teachers were very much aware of the need to incorporate various cultures in their kindergarten practices and environment. Participants were also aware that more could be done to achieve a more diverse and resourceful kindergarten environment for the children.

5.3.3 Religious practices in the kindergartens

Participants had some common perspectives on the various religious tradition and how it was practiced in the kindergarten. In both kindergartens, participants express that the children had different religious belief and traditions. For example, not all the children celebrated Christmas or the Muslim id. Some of the participants were satisfied with the religious activities celebrated while others express their dissatisfaction and wished more could be done. The idea to do more is in line with the requirement in the FP for kindergarten which states that

"kindergartens shall introduce the children to the stories, traditions, values and holidays of different religions and world views and to discover how cultural expressions are valuable in the own right" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 54).

The FP further emphasized that for differences to be recognized and respected, the kindergarten staff must apply field of Ethics, Religion and Philosophy [ERP], meaning that they must mark Christians and "other religious, philosophical and cultural traditions represented in kindergartens" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 54). Participants named various religious beliefs that were marked in their kindergarten. The various religious activities celebrated are Easter, Christmas and Santa Lucia. Participants tried to justify how and why the above-mentioned activities were celebrated and PL3 said,

“We do not carry out any mass service to tell stories to the children about Jesus. We do it the Norwegian traditional way. We do not think of this period as an opportunity to preach, but as an opportunity for the children to experience something different”

Participants said on Christmas advent for example, kindergarten sections lit the four candles, and the children learned or listened to traditional Christmas songs, decorate a Christmas tree, and adorned the windows with red hearts as a part of the Christmas calendar. During this activity, no explicit religious content such as readings of biblical tales, gospel explanations are told. They also had a Santa-day when Santa arrived with presents (candy and fruit), some of the children dressed in red costumes and all circled the Christmas tree singing Christmas carols before eating the Norwegian traditional porridge. During Advent, all the children made gifts for their families, and these gifts are not called ‘Christmas gifts ’but referred to them as ‘kalendergift’. It could be customized to other religions. Then there was Catholic Santa Lucia Day on 13 December, when almost all the children are dressed in white clothes and the oldest children had to parade through all the sections in the kindergarten singing the Lucia song with electric candles in their hands. On this day parents are welcome to participate in the celebration. After the parade, each section served cakes provided by some of the parents. The activities and learning during this period is all about spring and nature. Again, they do not talk about Jesus and the resurrection nor do they preach the Easter gospel to the children emphasized participants.

The findings suggest that the Kindergarten activities related to religion and belief centers around Christmas, Catholic Santa Lucia and Easter combined with secular traditions. The kindergarten ways of dealing with diversity was quite interesting considering that they were in a multicultural setting. One could interpret that practicing only Christian festivals was not alongside the learning areas stipulated in the FP content and tasks. The Framework Plan emphasized the important of introducing the children to and observe important dates, holidays and customs in the Christian tradition and those of other religions and world views represented in the kindergarten. Sødal (2009:19) writes that the wordings in the FP on religious can be interpreted differently. It can be read as a list of values that are rooted in equally ranked religious and philosophical traditions (including human rights). This means that the kindergartens could chose to focus on just the Christian festivities, even in a multicultural kindergarten. Unlike other participants who remained silent and contented with what was celebrated, assistant 3, PL1 and PL2 raised concerns about celebrating majority culture at the expense of silencing minority cultures. These festivities are celebrated without taking into consideration the sensitivities of those families that are affiliated with different religion. Assistant 3 expressed that some Muslim parents on these days chose to keep their children at home and that it is not a problem for them. She further explained that maybe they need to dialogue more with the parents on religion and belief.

“though these activities could be fun for the children, I also think that instead of revolving around gifts, Santa, porridge, food, they should at least dare to talk about Jesus and a little bit more of the background in a child friendly stories. If other religions are also celebrated, it would have been great” (assistant 3)

Finding shows that participant all had a strong belief and respect for various cultures in their own way but assistant 3 expressed that, it would have been her the greatest joy if all religious festivities were recognized. She believed that the children deserve more than just having a fun period. Maybe their inability to talk to children about what is actually celebrated on these days were due to lack of knowledge about Christianity. Participants stressed that they focus on a middle way, which was normal and is the Norwegian old traditional way of celebration. They do this because private celebrations

are different depending on the culture. Most of the participants agreed that the status quo of doing it the Norwegian way is better, rather than having to celebrate all religions in the kindergarten. In trying to deal with the multicultural group represented in the kindergarten, all participants expressed that:

“We have tried to be as neutral as possible when it comes to religion. We almost don’t know parents’ religious affiliation unless we can tell from their clothing, and we don’t ask them about it. It is a sort of privacy. My experience is that immigrant parents do not expect to get questions about religion, sometimes the parents say all they want is for the children to fit in and that they live in Norway and they don’t see the point”

Participants perspectives here is that, they do not think talking about religion is a good idea, because it could be offensive, and they do not intend to offend anyone. Maybe the Kindergarten is thinking for the best interest of the children by not explaining the religious background stories regarding the festivities. Well imagine what parents would think if all the religious festivals are marked and the creepy background stories and activities are performed in front of their children. Religious topic is raised with the parents only in relation to dietary restrictions, for example, not eating pork, meat and cow milk. [Eriksen \(2006\)](#) writes that culture is a decisive factor for what, how, what and when we eat certain foods. In some societies for example it is forbidden to eat some food such as pigs, cow meat and egg. Due to these cultural rules for food, there are many variations in relation to food, which are beyond nutritional requirement. These kindergartens had a different interpretation of what was required of them on the section on religion and ethics. In a democratic country, a more democratic practice in all aspects of their activities might be expected but this was not the case in the two kindergartens.

Although participants pointed out that they do not tell the children stories about Jesus, they however were ready to respond to some of the queries of the children. For example, questions such as, why child A does not eat pork, meat, or drink milk and why teacher A or girl A is having a hijab on and so on). Assistant 4 gave an example that a child came up to her and asked if she knew God and if she loved God. The assistant said they do not try to convert the children while answering religious related questions. To all

participants this was a means of sharing religion knowledge and tradition rather than spreading the gospel. This was also a channel through which they help the children develop tolerance and respect for cultural differences. Though participants marked only Christian festivals, they were open and spontaneous to addressing cultural diversity, while enhancing the children sense of belonging. Participants also said they recognized other religion in their own way, for example when Muslims are celebrating Id Mubarak, they congratulate Muslim parents and their children and even talk a little about it with the parents. In the participants defense, not all parents want to talk about their religion. To participants, children with minority religion might be at risk of being single out, and every parent will want their child to have a normal life. Nilsen (2012, p.253) claims that kindergartens do not teach children about other religions other than Christianity because some parents want their children to be as "Norwegian" as possible and that highlighting minority's holidays will support the child's "differently. The Kindergarten emphasized they only know parent's religion maybe through their dressing. This means that minority religions are not marked in the two kindergartens based on assumptions and cultural sensitivity. The PL2 pointed out that she is very much aware that more really have to be done and they need to start talking to parents about religion. Based on the analyzed material, there is reason to shadow Krogstad's (2014) hypothesis that lack of cooperation between kindergarten and parents can be a reason why kindergartens do not mark minority religions' holidays. The sample and information on this is limited but one can get the pattern.

5.3.4 Involving families in kindergartens daily happenings

Besides understanding how the kindergarten teachers deals with children's aspect of play, language, and religion, the aspect of collaboration with the families was central in the kindergarten. Participants all shared the idea that it was important to value and respect family cultures. To answer the researcher's question on how they understand and practice the FP section on communication with the child's home, the pedagogic leader (PL1) said:

“Working with parents to create the best everyday life for their children is very important. Those who work in kindergartens must make sure that they create good relationships with the parents as well as the children. Both because this contradicts their own and parents' relationship with the child, parallel processes, but also because they must be able to understand where the child comes from to understand the child. It also requires close collaboration to succeed in helping those children who have additional challenges, whether in language, trauma or other difficulties home situations. The kindergarten is also required to report suspicion of abuse or domestic violence, and it also requires us to dare to care and raise difficult issues with the parents. Immigrant Parents must be met with respect, recognition and tolerance for who they are, in line with the children”

The FP on this section emphasized that; *“kindergarten shall work in close understanding and agreement with the home to safeguard the children’s need for care and play and promote learning and formation as a basis for an all- round development”* (*Kindergarten Act, Section 1, Purpose*). Participants perspectives on collaboration was in line with the FP purpose which emphasis on good dialogue between the parents and the kindergarten for the best interest of the child. An example was brought up by PL1 where she emphasized the importance of understanding family history and culture. She pointed out that with good dialogue, issues related to child abuse or language competency could easily be resolved with the right help. Also, in case of language difficulties for the children, they will need the approval of the parents to be able to get the PPT. Still stressing on the important of dialogue between the parents and the kindergarten, assistant 3 explained;

“I think that collaboration is built on respect, and genuine interest, as well as exchange of sufficient information. Parents know their kids as nobody else, while teachers have experience and knowledge that is why such collaboration is of utmost importance for kids”

Participants further emphasized the importance of respect, recognition and tolerance towards parents without discrimination. They provided a broad spectrum of information on how they could better promote learning and formative development for the children

through communication. All participants emphasized that both parents and teachers have specific responsibilities to play in the children's life and it is important for both institutions to be honest and genuine with each other. So far as dialogue was concerned, Bø (2002) writes that it is the ability to listen, respect and show recognition in respectful manner, both through the way questions are asked and answered, and through this the real interest of both parties are reviewed. Meaning that teachers must show real interest in the parents and the children. To better understand the parents and work well with them and their children, respect, openness, humility and trust are vital (Grythe & Midtsundstad, 2002). While other participants stress the importance of mutual respect between them and the parents, the kindergarten leader and others talked about respect as one sided. In the sense that they (teachers) were to show respect to the parents and many never mentioned parents respecting them. She said;

“our top priorities as teachers is to meet all parents with respect, openness and humility such that they can feel confident raising issues concerning them as well as the kindergarten. We become better at our work with the children through great collaboration”

Participants emphasized that dealing with minority parents, it was important that the aspect of respect, trust, recognition and openness was visible to them. Participants were conscious of the different family backgrounds in the kindergarten and viewed mutual respect between the kindergarten and the parents as central.

For respect, openness and humility to happen, parents and teachers needed to understand each other during communication. Participants emphasized the importance of sharing information about the children to their parents and language was identified as an issue with some immigrants' parents. Participants mentioned that they dealt with this by employing some communicating strategies to facilitate understanding: using visual images such as showing them the appropriate winter clothing, the right shoes and the right swimming clothes. Pasting information on doors, children's wardrobe and depending of the type of information, they will have to translate to English hoping many will be able to read. The different measures through which communication between the teachers and the parents took place were individual parent's meetings, general meetings

for all parents, when bringing the children and when collecting them, and frequent kick off meetings (oppstartsamtale). The participants mentioned that most of these meetings are conducted in Norwegian language and some in English. They mentioned that some immigrants' parents usually meet them after the meetings in Norwegian to ask for clarity and if they (teachers) cannot express themselves well in English, they ask for help from colleagues. Participants mentioned that most parents in their kindergarten can at least understand some English.

Unlike other participants, PL1 had no experience with language issue with the parents. She pointed out that the parents of all the children in her department could understand English and she can express herself well in English as well. She said sometimes we meet in the corridor and the discussion usually starts with the child's daily activities which diverged from other participants. Apart from the general parents' meetings, some participants pointed out that starting a dialogue with immigrant parents can sometimes be a challenge. To PL1 it was an issue but to others, language and family cultural background could be an issue. Just as PL1 spoke of using the daily activities of the Child's life in the kindergarten, [Becher \(2006\)](#) developed a theory on trust, where he says that chatting in everyday life with the parents, where the pedagogy shows interest in both the child and the parents is a great way to establish trust. This again take us back to respect, trust, openness and confidence in both the parents and the teachers that can help create a good dialogue

Findings suggest that Participants held a variety of communicative channels and solutions on how to dialogue with immigrants' parents. This runs through the different creative strategies to involve and inform parents about their children (for example parents meeting), meetings where teachers had to advisors on what was good for the child (for example what type of wool to wear in winter) and so on. However, most of these meetings took place on rare occasions and were formal while the informal or the most common means of communication was during the drop-off and pick-off time and meeting in corridors. Research suggests how various strategies of working with parents can promote positive communication and facilitate cultural understandings. For example, [Linn and Bates \(2010\)](#) suggest that strategies like home visiting supports better

communication between kindergartens and families, increases teachers' awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences and helps teachers to better plan activities and modify environments in response to children's and family's needs. Poor dialogue occurs when parents know little about what is happening in the kindergarten, when teachers know little about the child's relationship at home and lack of social gatherings (Bø, 2002)

The Framework Plan for kindergartens emphasize the importance of collaboration with families for ensuring regular exchange of observations and evaluation concerning their children's wellbeing, experiences, development and learning (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.29). The importance and benefits of collaboration between the parents and the kindergarten is found in many research: Drugli and Nordahl (2013) stated that when parents are actively involved in collaboration with the kindergarten, it leads to better learning outcomes, fewer behavior problems good relationship with peers and teachers with regards to the children. In same article, Drugli and Nordahl further emphasis equal partners in relation to collaboration between the parents and the kindergarten, meaning that they should know each other's values, interest and discuss ways to improve on mutual flow of information. Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2006) research on cultural diversity in kindergarten suggest that dialogue must be based on reciprocity, respect and having an insight into each other's thoughts and values. Gjervan further explains that, when this happen, the teachers are able to think the same as well as differently from the parents while working together to give the children the best education possible. The goal of the dialogue is to create understanding, and not necessarily unity. Bø (2002) for this to be successful, parents and kindergartens must have a common activity that they do together, knowing something about each other, the environment and communicating issues that are important and related to the child's life. Through such forums (FN- café, dugnad dag, Easter breakfast etc.) where it's the obligation of teachers to facilitate cooperation, both parties build mutual trust and confidence that will be important for the child wellbeing in the kindergarten. The Framework Plan emphasis that the kindergarten shall facilitate co-operation and good dialogue with the parents (P.29).

Participants acknowledged that for them to cooperate and dialogue well with immigrant parents, they had to recognize the importance of trust and respect between the two parties. They also acknowledged the importance of sensitivity to cultural backgrounds of the parents. However, there were instances where language was an issue and the kindergarten leader pointed out that this was something they were still working on and having their information both in English and Norwegian will be beneficial and eliminate any misunderstanding between them and the parents. These findings have implications for policy and practice as it may be assumed that participants, despite their respect and trust towards immigrant parents, still lack the language competency which sometimes were sources of misunderstanding. It could be frustrating for both the teachers and the parents not being able to share relevant information about the child with each other.

5.4 Perspectives on children's approach to diversity

5.4.1 Focus on friendship

Emphasis on friendship and inclusion in play as opposed to cultural background seemed to be very important to participants. All participants mentioned that children are more focused or interested in friendship than on cultural differences. Participants shared the idea that encouraging friendship and togetherness in children is one way of dealing with diversity. This could eliminate racism as well as help those children with language difficulties learn faster. The Framework Plan for kindergartens also mentioned that teachers have the obligation to ensure that all kindergarten children can enjoy a good childhood with well-being, friendships and play should be essential ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017](#)). To answer the researchers question related to religion, PL2 pointed out that;

“Well we don't really celebrate every religion here in the kindergarten but what is most important is encouraging the children to play together, to build friendships through play. It's all about play, even in the religious activities celebrated, it mostly playing and experiencing something different”

With the exception of one assistant, the idea of play was good but focusing on just play and friendship should be all about it. The PL2 and others pointed out that play and inclusion was what they should focus on in the kindergarten because children in kindergarten age are cognitively immature to grasp issues related to diversity. The ideas of these participants are somewhat shared by [Knudsen \(2008\)](#) that what matters to child is not the cultural background of the other children, but rather the other children's competency in child culture and play. Participants in their argument, emphasize that friendship and together would mean meeting and playing with other children with high Norwegian language competency, learning about differences and similarities. The idea here is that when children begin to view each other as having a lot of similarities and accepting the differences, the children will continue into the world making friends with different language, religious and cultural background as well as having an open mind to differences. Just as my 4 years old daughter see differences, she will say her friend in the previous kindergarten loved to fight and play while her new friend with same name love to play and she likes playing. In the same way these children could learn to associate new people with their previous friends. In a study carried out in Ireland by ([Devine et al, 2008](#)), they emphasized that there were other aspects other than culture and language that are more important for children's friendship.

In my observation, though the teachers talked to the children about playing together, I realized that cultural background was still visible. This shows that children cultural background still matters in whom they chose to be friends with. I notice that there were two children (say Sam and Samuel) who played a lot together while outside. The children were in different departments. During indoor play, I still noticed that Sam will try to come to the other child's class just to play with him. When I asked one of the teachers about their cultural backgrounds, they both came from same country and speak same language. This was an exception because I also noticed that bigger children played outside in pairs and from what I observed, the pairs were either a black + white child, white +white, brown + white and brown + black. [Larsen \(2006\)](#) writes that though similarities might create friendship and togetherness, and children also play together despite differences and this might work against racism.

Besides just the pairs, the children seemed to focus on gender differences than on cultural differences. In my observation, I noticed that children with same gender played together as well as children of same age, same language and cultural background. It was very common to see children of the same gender playing together than to see children of opposite gender playing together. You could even see children as young as three years of age would prefer to play with another child of same gender and this aligns with [Corsaro \(2009\)](#) qualitative studies on play. [Singer & Haan \(2011\)](#) also emphasized this in their study in the Netherlands that children with the same gender had a greater chance to becoming friends than children with different gender, and that children's cultural backgrounds did not play a part in this.

Participants pointed out that for them to build friendship and togetherness in the children, it was their role to pose positive image of difference. [Larsen \(2006\)](#) pointed out that creating positive image about differences could prevent fear of what is unknown. For example, in their response to children's queries about other religions, God and color, they give positive responses and not an answer that will make a child hate another religion or another child. Some of the friendships are built through the teachers, encouraging group activities and play. Teachers paired some of the children such that they can all benefit from each other and sometimes ignoring children's opinion, elaborated the PL1.

In summary, participants believed that one good way to deal with diversity is to focus on friendship which was a means to inclusion. On the other hand, children had their own way of approaching differences without the obvious help from the teachers. Children care about play competency and gender differences in other children. This means that diversity was a resource in the kindergarten although it was not represented every day in the kindergarten. Therefore, the aspect of adults' culture (influence), gender aspects, play competency in other children and other cultural aspects such as language, influence child culture and how they approach diversity.

5.4.2 Differences beyond skin color.

Apart from the fact that children focus on play competency in other children, accompanied with teachers' assistance to help them create friendship and togetherness, participants mentioned that some children are color blind. The kindergarten leader mentioned that over her past years in the kindergarten, she seems not to be aware of differences in appearance. They mentioned that in most cases when the bigger children do see the color differences, they normally do not care much. An example of a child who visited the kindergarten more than twice and had interacted with some of the kindergarten teachers. The next time this girl visited, she asked about a teacher and the way she described her was through the teachers' hair texture. This teacher was black, but the child did not ask for a black teacher which would have been easier to identify. Instead the child noticed the teachers' African silky hair texture instead of the skin color. According to [Spernes & Hatlem \(2013\)](#) experiences with children and adults in culturally diverse kindergartens, children are usually referred to as "color blind children".

Participants constantly pointed out that they were role models for the children in the kindergarten. Participants specified that how they speak to each other and to every child is important because the children will mimic after them. Posing a positive image of differences would help push away any unknown ideas/ thoughts that children usually have ([Larsen, 2006](#)). Having different appearances in these kindergartens was plus and a negative thing and besides the children do not look at physical appearance. Spernes and Hatlem pointed out that if someone wants to look at the physical appearance, it should be based on the type of clothes the person chooses to wear ([Spernes & Hatlem, 2012](#)). This means that the concept of culture is usually misunderstood, as some people sometimes refer to visible characteristics like skin color, when skin has absolutely nothing to do with people's cultural, religious and ethnic background.

In my observation, the two kindergartens had children with one or both parents that come from another country other than Norway. Dark and light skin color were the most common appearance. The teachers emphasized that they have tried to wipe out the boundaries between black and white and instead teach the children the benefit of being

in a multicultural kindergarten. I noticed that skin color was absolutely not an issue for the children, for children played incredibly together. Lauritsen (2011) support the idea that, the boundaries between dark and light skin children can be wiped out with the support of adults. The feeling of being different can be tough. The participants stressed that they encourage friendship. With little effort, children were rather more interested in other children play and friendship competency in other children other than culture, language and ethnicity. Spernes and Hatlem (2013) writes that “Kindergarten children can experience that it is hard to stand out from the group she or he is or wants to be part of”. Being in a kindergarten where everyone has a white skin will be ok but, in a situation, but if few had say black skin then the search for identity and wellness of the child will start (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). Participants idea of joint activity was how they try to eliminate the feeling of loneliness or break through color boundaries.

Although children were described as color blind, participants said it does not mean they don't see color. The pedagogic leader 2 explained that when bigger children usually talk about color when referring to racial resemblance in cartoon characters, they look like ‘Maya and Miguel’, Moana and so on. When they talk about languages, they sometimes will say ‘he/she can't talk’ or ‘she has a different accent’. This suggest that when children start being negative about appearances or culture in general, it surely an influence from the adults in the kindergarten or parents. Participants said they become concern when children make prejudicial statements. For example, where a child said Muslims are bad people, and confirmed the dad told her so. She said, “this was disappointing because adults are supposed to be role models and hearing this made me sad”. They had to talk to the parents and assisted the child reflect on her attitudes, words and behavior towards others and gave advice on alternatives. Therefore, participants focus on inclusion and friendship was important to keep the children's positive idea about color difference. Is being ‘color blind’ a good thing? It might be better to see the differences, recognize and then accept the differences rather than ‘being blind’ to cultural differences. Corsaro (2011) in a study carried out in school settings found that children choose to play with children with the same skin color. Meaning that color blindness is due to immaturity and will show ones they become mature enough and such virtual checkpoint could influence inclusion and exclusion in play and friendships.

Finding suggest that cultural, ethnic and physical differences in these kindergartens were obvious. Though the teachers saw and dealt with the cultural differences, most of the children did not see them. Being able to deal with differences could be because they were in a multicultural kindergarten and differences was a natural part of their life. But differences could be difficult to deal with in a non-multicultural kindergarten, for both the children and the adults. Lauritsen (ibid), pointed out that in some Kindergarten, black- hair children are categorized as demanding. It is argued that this is not due to behavior of these children but that they are placed in the category of demanding children based on their ethnic minority background. The finding from this current study show that the teachers treated everyone as equal and there was no categorization in their practices. The children play with each other despite the different languages, appearance, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds.

In light of this work, I have gained knowledge and understanding of the importance of facilitating dialogue with the parents and the best possible ways to do that. Thus, in meeting minority parent's kindergarten teachers must take with them the following values respect, trust, recognition and this should be reciprocated by the parents. Minority parents are very different and may need different support, help and time to be able to talk about their wishes and interest. Information regarding religion needs to be clear to the parents in order to avoid misunderstanding between the teachers and the parents. Talking more about religion with the parents was important as some parents excluded their children on certain religious practices. The pedagogic leader 2 emphasized that this is something they don't do and should probably starts doing. Through collaboration more religious festivities could be marked. Children can differ from each other in many ways, and an awareness of differences should include an understanding of differences based on all variables such as religion, language, culture and ethnicity. Also, negative behaviors of children towards difference could be eliminated or reduced with having skilled and confidence teachers as role models. Lauritsen (2011) illustrated an example that could help move boundaries. He describes where the adults in the kindergarten discuss Muslims and pork. It may seem that initially in this conversation there is a boundary between Muslims and pork, and an assumption that Muslim don't eat pork. After the teacher have been discussing this topic for a while, they arrive that there are

some children in the kindergarten that are Muslims and eat pork but that it is a child who does not eat pork. In this case, Lauritsen shows how employees move the limit from a general assumption that Muslims do not eat pork that it is about a single child who does not eat pork. As I see it, by means of a conversation in between, the teacher manages to eliminate the idea of Muslims and non- Muslims with regards to pork.

Chapter: 6 Implications and Conclusion

The research project was carried out in two multicultural kindergartens in Oslo with the aim to understand how Norwegian multicultural kindergartens teachers deal with diversity. Teachers approach, and practices of diversity was partially based on how they interpret the Framework Plan guideline on multicultural perspectives. Ethnography was applied as a research methodology to study teachers' perspectives in depth. One to one interviews and participants observation provided the empirical data that made it possible to answer the research question. Different theoretical framework relevant for this study and the research questions has been presented and discussed. The data has presented, analyzed and discussed teachers' perspectives based on relevant theories conceptualized within the Framework Plan for kindergartens.

The goal of this study has not been to look for a specific conclusion, but to understand how teachers in multicultural kindergartens in Norway handle diversity. The three main research questions for this study were: firstly, to understand teachers' perspectives on diversity. Secondly to analyze teachers' perspectives on how they approach/practice diversity within their kindergarten setting. Thirdly, to understand how children approach diversity in their daily lives in the kindergarten. These research questions have been discussed in the analysis and discussion section of this master thesis.

The findings suggest that teachers had a common and positive perspectives on how they interpret, approach and practice diversity in the kindergarten. However, their interpretation, approach and practices of diversity were indicative of the fact that the Framework Plan for kindergartens was not specific on how diversity should be implemented. The Framework Plan is clearly open for interpretation (Krogstad, 2016) and the teachers' interpretation is based on what they think is best for their diversified group of children and parents in their kindergarten. The Framework Plan only outline what multicultural perspectives entails, and it is left in the hands of the teachers to read, interpret and implement in the kindergarten. For example, one way through which they deal with diversity was by hanging flags in the kindergarten in order to show the

children's different backgrounds (Spernes & Hatlem, 2013). There is no doubt that it was a good way to show diversity, but more could still be done. For example, if there were more songs and books in other languages in the kindergarten, then children cultural aspects could have been more visible in the kindergarten. Reading books to the children in different languages and the children singing songs in their languages seem like a positive and important way to practice diversity as confirmed by Spernes and Hatlem, (2013).

More importantly, the findings suggest that the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) can do more to expand upon their definition of diversity. In addition, MER could elaborate and discuss alongside concrete examples on how diversity should be practiced in multicultural kindergartens. Working with minority parents and children can be challenging and the MER addressing some of the challenges could also be a good way to start and this could make the work of teachers easier. One can say that teachers' perspectives, approach and practices of diversity could influence the children perception of differences either negatively or positively. Devine (2004, p. 39) writes from the study in Ireland that: "The children's perceptions of inclusion, exclusion, sameness and difference influenced how they interacted with children who were ethnically different than themselves". This means that the teachers perceptions of those concept and how they practice them with the children would play a part in children's own perspectives.

In addition, the study found that the Framework Plan (2017) says that kindergartens must heed the children's cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. It also emphasizes that the kindergarten shall highlight diversity in family structure and ensure that the children see their family arrangements reflected in the kindergarten. This require the teachers to have a high level of skills and knowledge to interpret culture, religion and linguistic in a way that the children can experience diversity substantially. This knowledge, skills and cultural competency is what most of the teachers lacked. For example, celebrating only Christian religion in the kindergarten seemed important to the teachers, and not talking about the significant of what is celebrated seemed ok. The children had no problem with celebrating only Christian festivals, most of the children knew some children had other religion and it was enough for them. Participants

expressed that they were being neutral and doing it the Norwegian traditional way and the experience was enough for the children. Though the children were satisfied, it would have been much more better if other religion such as the Muslim Id was celebrated as well. Also, it would have been more positive if they children knew what they were actually celebrating and it significant. All participants were open to further training and acknowledged that possibilities for improving on culturally related practices was a necessity.

Finding points to the fact that there was little communication between the teachers and the parents on religion. Religious discussion was brought up only in relation to dietary restriction. Participants expressed that they need to improve on communicating more with the parents on religious practices. Findings also suggest that participants did not reflect on the fact that their culture and religious belief could be sources for possible biases on what religion was marked for example. Participants focus on certain aspect of diversity or some values as important when dealing with diversity may have been constructed based on Norwegian expectation of early childhood education. Also, participants holding different views on some aspect such as religion could have well been influenced by cultural backgrounds of participants.

In light of this work, I have gained knowledge on how Norwegian kindergarten deals with diversity in relation to religion and belief, democracy and equality, language and communication, tolerance; and dialogue with minority parents. This study has also thought me how teachers' perspectives, and practices of diversity could have an effect in the lives of the children both in their daily life's and to the society. Also, another interesting thing learned from this study is the important of dialogue between the kindergarten and the parents, the different elements both parties have to bring for cooperation to materialize. In addition, teachers better understanding of the different culture represented in their kindergartens and better cooperation with minority parents can reduce misunderstanding with child welfare services. I have also learned a lot about how children see differences and what is most important to children in kindergarten age. Last but not the least is that I have understood from this study that though we talk of

diversity in terms of color, race, gender, religion, ethnicity and cultural background, we are all different no matter where we come from.

6.1 Implications

The findings from this study have some important implications to policy and practice. In recent decades, the Norwegian welfare state has taken some important and extensive steps in reforming the kindergarten. Besides provision of available and affordable kindergarten places of high quality, recognizing diversity as a critical important issue has been among the reforms ([Ministry of Education and Research, 2017](#)). However, successful interpretation and implementation requires skills and cultural competency. Implying that the teachers may need further training to acquire the right skills necessary for putting in effect more cultural and religious practices in the kindergarten. It also requires that the teachers may need to be more open to the views of families, which sometimes might differ from their own point of view ([Howes, 2010](#)). This means that dialogue between the kindergarten and parents is of significant. Dialogue between the teachers and the parents does not only help the children and the teachers, but it also helps build parents feeling of belongingness. Parents feel respected and valued when their opinion and point of view are asked on things concerning their children. Therefore, teachers should conceptualize themselves as collaborative researchers, engaging with parents and children to construct a new understanding of how children see the world, and indeed, to be open to seeing the world differently themselves ([New, 1994](#)). Through dialogue and cooperation, the kindergarten staff, parents and children can learn, understand and share cultural values that could help the kindergarten understand the child and their culture better.

As mentioned earlier, a majority of the children in both kindergartens represented a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Most of the children arriving the kindergarten on their first day are relatively not equipped to meet the new environment. There is usually a disparity in terms of language and values between the kindergarten environment and the home experiences. With obvious knowledge about the differences, teachers need to be more ready and effective in bridging this gaps for the children

(Howes, 2016). Implying that more effective teachers training and knowledge focusing on teachers' awareness of kindergarten and home incompatibility would better equip them to make use of this knowledge in their multicultural children group.

The study reveals a level of competency and knowledge in the entire kindergarten sector, when it comes to addressing diversity. However, not all the participants especially assistants feel confident and certified to bring forth change when they envision it. This implies that a more systematic and long-term work on training kindergarten staff to be more skilled and competency is required. In an increasing multicultural society like Norway, suggestions that they can improve on multiculturalism in institutions may be a good idea for the kindergarten and the children's interest.

An implication for education could be looking at those practices that build an inclusive environment for the children rather than just respecting differences. Kindergarten approaches and practices must reflect cultural orientations. Findings from this study suggest that every child is different and may develop and demonstrate skills in different ways. It is important not to only say diversity is a resource, but it should be visible in practices. For example, talking about differences in everyday practices are ways that demonstrate respect and value for individual characters. This might help build an inclusive arena for the children. Howes (2016) write that engaging in practices that involves great interaction between the teachers and child and between the children themselves are important (Howes, 2016). Through these practices and relationships, understanding cultural differences and respect for differences could influence children's social relationships, learning and even their wellbeing.

In addition, findings show that a greater proportion of children in the kindergarten than ever before are immigrant children or children with two languages. The challenges associated to work with low language competence children requires a long process till the children are able to get the help needed. It is important that the state/policy makers make available language teachers in all multicultural kindergartens in Norway. It is necessary for multicultural kindergartens to have a language teacher (someone who can speak several languages with focus on Norwegian). The first prioritize group should be preschoolers, such that they become confident and ready in their Norwegian language

skills before they begin school. Also, the multilingual teacher will help bridge the gap between minority parents with different languages other than Norwegian and English.

6.2 Recommendations for further study

The focus of this study has mainly been on teachers' perspectives and practices of diversity in two multicultural kindergartens. For further study, it could be interesting to compare this study with a non-multicultural kindergarten and other multicultural kindergartens in smaller cities in Norway. In this way one will be able to get multiple perspectives on diversity in an increasingly multicultural society. As well as comparing other factors such as teachers focus on friendship, play, experiences with language, religion and so on. In addition, getting a multiple perspective will also mean getting the perspectives of children, and parents as well. Listening to the voices of parents and teachers in multicultural kindergartens is critically important in ensuring that the perspectives of everyone is considered. Most especially is listening to the voice of the children. [O'kane \(2008\)](#) talks about the important of having children involved in research that concerns them, by promoting interest in children's perspectives. Considering the fact that these children are from varies cultural, language and ethnic backgrounds, they could be torn between kindergarten lifestyle and home, just as [Brooker \(2005\)](#) wrote on the importance of getting these lived experiences.

An interesting finding from this study suggest that teachers try to adhere to the Framework plan for kindergartens when dealing with the multicultural group of children. Sticking so much to the Framework plan may be conflicting with their opinion on diversity. It could be interesting in the future to carry out a phenomenology research in multicultural kindergartens to study teachers' own perspectives and experiences in other to understand the practical challenges that teachers may be facing at work. With phenomenology approach, one will be able to study teachers experiences and perspectives in depth.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview guide to teachers

1. What do you understand by the concept of diversity?

- ✓ What do you do to visualize multicultural diversity in the kindergarten?
- ✓ In what way do you involve the children in visualizing multicultural diversity in the kindergarten?

2. Following the Framework Plan for kindergartens, what are those contents and tasks directly related to diversity?

- ✓ What are some of the major issues in the Framework Plan?
- ✓ Do you think FP address all issues that are important with regards to diversity?
- ✓ Are there any deviation from the FP or are there other document to supplement your practices in a diversify setting?
- ✓ Are there some areas of improvement in the policy?

3. Based on your experience, how is diversity reflected in your everyday activities (such as play, participation, spontaneous situations etc.) with the children and families?

- ✓ Can you describe any incident where you have striven for equality?
- ✓ What other resources have you used to promote diversity?

4. As a teacher in multicultural kindergarten, are there any challenges you have experience so far?

- ✓ How were the situation/problem addressed?

5. What are your experiences working with families of diversified background?

- ✓ How does communication occur and how frequent?

- ✓ Are there difficulties with communication (e.g. reciprocity, frequency, understanding, feedback on the child's well-being and development)?

6. Regarding religion and beliefs in your kindergarten, how was your attitude towards religion and how has it change?

- ✓ How do you ensure every child's religion and belief is respected in the kindergarten?
- ✓ Are all religious festivals celebrated in the kindergarten?

7. In order to ensure better opportunities for children from diverse background in your kindergarten, what are those things that can be implemented /introduced/change?

- ✓ Do you think there is a need for further training for teachers?
- ✓ Are you satisfied with the available resources or is there a need for more?
- ✓ Do you think there is enough collaboration on matters related to diversity between kindergarten?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix II: Observation guide

- How are the teacher's reaction to children's verbal and nonverbal expression?
- How does communication take place between teachers and children with no Knowledge of Norwegian?
- How are the children playing together?
- Are there factors that influence how/who they play with (such as color, religion, communication, age, gender etc.?)
- Relative to an average child, are some children regarded as maybe slow or say different treated different (in terms of over protection)
- How are teachers respond and interpretation of children's behaviors (similar behaviors)?
- How does the teachers react to children expressing some cultural differences?
- Are the teachers supportive of the children's preferred language of expression?
- What language is commonly spoken among the children?
- Are the children encouraged to learn and interact with different people out of their comfort zone?

Appendix III: Information letter to the kindergarten leader

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a student at the Metropolitan university Oslo, taking a master's in social science, major in child Welfare. I am conducting a research entitled "How Norwegian Kindertartens deal with diversity in Oslo". The objective of this research is to understand how the kindergarten staff interpret and implement the framework plan about kindertartens in relation to diversity. A multicultural kindergarten like your institution is relevant, because of the wide variety of diversity and languages among the children.

The informants for this research are teachers in the kindertartens. This involve observing children during activities and interview with teachers. Participation is voluntary and that participants can opt out at any time and can choose not to answer questions they find that they do not want to answer. Access to the interview transcripts is restricted to supervisor (Professor Randi Wærdahl) at HIOA.

I hope that the school administration allows me to conduct the interview. Approximate sample size for this interview and observation is 15. The preferred start date for the interviews will be 1st February, and specific interview days and time will be arranged with the individual participants in the different kindertartens. At the end of the project, the final thesis will be delivered to the kindergarten administration. This research is important because it will enlighten us on how the Framework Plan and teachers address diversity. The outcome of the study will benefit children, parents, teachers and the school administration.

Your approval to conduct the interview and surveys will be greatly appreciated. If you have any concerns and questions, please direct them to me or my supervisor using the contact information below. If approved, please sign and reply to the same contact information provided.

Yours Sincerely

Princess Yenwongfai; S306981@oslomet.no; TLF: +47 92547979

Supervisor: Prof. Randi Wærdahl; Fakultet for samfunnsvitenskap; Tlf: +4767238033; Email: Randwal@oslomet.no

Name..... Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix IV: Information letter to parents

Dear parent,

I am a student at the metropolitan university Oslo, taking a master's in social science, major in child welfare. I am conducting a research titled "how Norwegian multicultural kindergartens deal with diversity". One objective of the study is to understand how children approach diversity. I am also interested in teachers' perspectives and practices of diversity in the kindergarten. I will be in the kindergarten about 4 hours, 2 days a week over a period of 3 weeks

The study will be conducted in two parts: interview with the teachers and participants observation with children. In order to understand children practices of diversity, I would observe the kindergarten, activities and how the children interact with each other. Observation will not be focused on a particular child. Note will be taken during observation. Data collected during observation will be treated confidentially and will be destroyed at the end of the study. The children's names will not be used in the master thesis

Participation is voluntary, there is no consequences over the kindergarten if the child participates in the study or not. To also reduce discomfort, children will be asked at the beginning of the observation if they would like to be included or not. The study has been verified by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD).

Your consent to carry out this study will be greatly appreciated. Any question or concern about the study should be directed to me or my supervisor. If approved, please sign and reply to the contact information provided or the kindergarten administration.

Yours Sincerely

Princess Yenwongfai; S306981@oslomet.no; Tlf: +47 92547979

Supervisor: Prof. Randi Wærdahl; Fakultet for samfunnsvitenskap; Tlf: +4767238033; Email: randwa@oslomet.no

Name..... Signature.....
Date.....

