

Örebro Studies in Education 73



Jeanette Koskinen

**Reframing Language Teaching in ECEC Through
Academic Linguaging**

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Title: Reframing Language Teaching in ECEC Through Academic Languaging

Publisher: Örebro University, 2026

www.oru.se/publikationer

Print: Örebro University, Repro 03/2026

ISSN: 1404-9570

ISBN: 978-91-7529-761-3 (print)

ISBN: 978-91-7529-762-0 (pdf)

Abstract

This thesis investigates academic language teaching in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, with a particular focus on multilingual children's academic language development. Academic language is more complex and abstract than everyday language, and recent research emphasizes the need to foster children's academic language skills in early education. The study contributes insights into teachers' perspectives on language teaching and how language teaching that aims to develop children's academic language can be organized and carried out.

The thesis advocates a shift from traditional, implicit stimulation to intentional academic language teaching to better support multilingual children. The study's combination of theories of language, multilingualism, and teaching offers a foundation for explicit academic language teaching.

A mixed-methods approach was used, in which two interconnected studies were undertaken. A survey study identified four teacher profiles, demonstrating differences in teaching strategies, multilingual awareness, organizational conditions, and perceptions of being a linguistic role model. A practice-based study developed an empirically grounded, theoretically informed teaching model. Seven teachers tested and refined, in two iterations, the six-step model *Academic Languageing*.

Keywords: Academic Languageing, ECEC Teacher, Language Diversity, Multilingualism, Language Teaching, Didaktik, Teaching, Learning, Language Awareness.

Tiivistelmä (Abstract in Finnish)

Tämä väitöskirja käsittelee akateemisen kielen opetusta varhaiskasvatuksen konteksteissa, erityisesti monikielisten lasten akateemisen kielitaidon kehittämisen näkökulmasta. Akateeminen kieli on rakenteeltaan abstraktimpaa kuin arkikieli, ja viimeaikainen tutkimus korostaa tarvetta tukea lasten akateemisia kielen taitoja jo varhaiskasvatuksessa. Tämä väitöskirja tuottaa tietoa opettajien näkemyksistä kielenopetuksesta sekä siitä, miten lasten akateemisen kielen kehittämiseen tähtäävää opetusta voidaan jäsentää ja toteuttaa.

Väitöskirja esittää muutosta perinteisestä, implisiittisestä kielen tukemisesta kohti tavoitteellista akateemisen kielen opetusta monikielisten lasten oppimisen paremmaksi tukemiseksi. Kielen, monikielisyyden ja didaktisten teorioiden yhdistäminen tarjoaa perustan tietoisien suunnittelun akateemisen kielen opetukselle.

Tutkimuksessa käytettiin monimenetelmällistä lähestymistapaa, ja se koostui kahdesta toisiinsa liittyvästä osatutkimuksesta. Kyselytutkimuksessa tunnistettiin neljä opettajaprofiilia, jotka osoittivat eroja opetuksen strategioissa, monikielisyystietoisuudessa, organisatorisissa edellytyksissä sekä käsityksissä omasta roolista kielellisenä roolimallina. Toimintatutkimuksellinen osatutkimus kehitti empiriisiin pohjautuvan ja teoreettisesti informoidun opetusmallin. Seitsemän opettajaa testasi ja tarkensi kaksivaiheisen prosessin aikana kuusivaiheista *Academic Languageing* -mallia.

Avainsanat: Kielen opetus, Varhaiskasvatus, Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja, Kielten moninaisuus, Akateemisen kielen opetus.

To the loves of my life: Måns, Arvid, Eino.

Acknowledgements

Finally, this is coming to an end. I remember when I began my PhD education in 2020. Everyone kept telling my colleagues and me that we were about to embark on a journey. I disagreed. I assumed it would be an education leading to a specific degree, much like any other. But I was wrong. Now, six years later, I can say with confidence that it has indeed been a journey—one that has been painful and demanding, yet deeply rewarding. I could never have imagined how much work, dedication, emotion, and personal growth a PhD would entail. I can promise that I am not the same person today as I was six years ago. This has been the most challenging undertaking of my life—and this comes from a woman who has given birth to two boys, just to put things into perspective.

Completing this PhD education would, of course, never have been possible without the help of so many talented, intelligent, and incredible people. Therefore, I would like to extend my most heartfelt and humble gratitude.

First, my warmest thank you to every ECEC teacher and child who participated in the studies. Without participants, there would never have been a thesis to write. I am so grateful for your time, interest, and dedication. Thank you!

Behind every great thesis is a team of even greater (woman) scientists. I will be forever grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from the best. My most heartfelt thank you goes to my principal supervisor, Ann Quennerstedt. Words can never describe how much your support and guidance have meant to me. You believed in me when I hesitated. You cheered me on when I was lost and tired. You were always there, just a knock on the door, a Zoom, or an email away. *Tack för allt du gjort!* I also want to thank my supervisor, Martina Norling. Thank you for being someone with whom I could talk about anything and everything — all that happens around an ongoing thesis, behind the scenes. Colleague to colleague, mother to mother, friend to friend, thank you! The final star of the team, a shining star, is Josefine Karlsson. You came as a saving angel when I felt helpless and lost. You are not only a great researcher, but also

highly pedagogical in the way you guide a PhD student through your wisdom. I have learned more about quantitative research methods from you than any course ever could. Thank you for your endless guidance and support, and I am truly grateful that we will continue to do research together.

This thesis has been strengthened through careful reading and review by knowledgeable members of the research community. Thank you to Marianne Skoog for commenting on the 10% paper. A special thank you to Joseph Siegel for commenting on the 50% paper. The seminar was a game-changer, and the potential you saw in my work gave me much needed confidence and hope. Thank you to Polly Björk-Willén for commenting on the 90% paper. I truly enjoyed our conversation. Thank you to Andreas Bergh and Thomas Barow for their comments and review of the final version of the thesis. I would also like to thank the members of the research environment ReCEL for their thorough reading and sharp comments during the process.

During these years, it is not only a thesis that has taken shape. I have been fortunate to be surrounded by wonderful people who, in different ways, have contributed to the fact that I am now able to write these acknowledgments.

Thank you to my partners in crime, the UVD research school crew, especially Anna Sjö Dahl, Robin Lindgren Fjellner, and Linda Eriksson. God, we are good! Thank you to my colleagues at the Department of Education at Örebro University. A special thank you to Linnea Waldekranz; you definitely made the time much more interesting and fun. Thank you for being you!

Some people have truly left an imprint on my heart and deserve every bit of recognition.

Thank you to **Hanna Thuresson**, who was my mentor. Later, we came to teach together over all these years in courses connected to what we value most—language and multilingualism. She is humble and always ready to help. Thank you for all our conversations, thank you for being a role model, and for your understanding of the frustration and sorrow one can experience during the process.

A warm thank you to **Franziska Primus**, the definition of intelligence. What a wonderful woman you are! I have truly enjoyed our discussions, and I admire your ability to twist and turn perspectives, your courage to question, and your incredible rhetorical skill. Not to mention what an amazing mother you are, fashionista and modern philosopher. You are fierce, woman!

A heartfelt thank you to **Ricardo Goncalves de Sousa**, my beloved, forever, BFF. We did it! We have been through it all, for better and for worse. I had no idea that when I opened the door to Örebro University, I would find a friend for life. We made this journey (almost) together. We have created memories for life, we have been there for each other, and now it continues in freedom. Thank you, darling! Make sure to iron your shirt and put on your party shoes. Nothing is stopping us now!

Six years is a long time, and during this period I have had the privilege of spreading my wings beyond the borders of Örebro. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my beloved team at the University of Helsinki, a.k.a. the MonimuotoCrew. Thank you to Laura Niemi, Silja Lamminmäki-Vartia, Susanna Isotalo, Monika Haanpää, Arva Simolin, Emma Kurenlahti, and especially Margita Sundstedt and Jonna Kangas; thank you for believing in me, supporting my ideas, and for offering such an inspirational environment. I am honored to be part of something so incredible.

Finally, there are the people who are closest to me and who make me who I am, those who truly stand by my side through thick and thin. **These are the words of gratitude that come from the deepest place in my heart.**

My beloved, yet so irritating, family: *Mamma, Tori, Etta*. There are indeed very few things we agree on, yet we are the only people who truly know what it is like to walk in our shoes. It was undeniably comforting to have an ocean between us for 7,5 years, but it is certainly even more comforting to once again find myself on the same side of that ocean with you. *Tack för att ni finns!*

The silver lining in every cloud of mine: *Kata, Ida, Eve, Emma*. Thank you for allowing me to share life with you, wonderful women. Each one of you holds a special place in my heart. Thank you for giving me the chance to think about other things, and for allowing me to call you my friends.

Finally, I must write words I cannot without tears. To those I dedicate this work—my family: my two sons, **Arvid and Eino**; **my husband Måns**, my soulmate, better half, anchor, and harbor. You are my safety. I am nothing without you. Together we are everything. You are the first I think of when I wake up, and the last I see before I fall asleep. I never imagined I would be blessed with someone as wonderful as you.

Arvid and Eino, you are my pride and greatest achievement; being your mother is my greatest joy. You have taught me more than life, and each day you help me improve. You are too young to understand now, but I did this for you. I hope that as you grow, you will see this thesis as my way of teaching you to believe in yourself, trust your intuition, and never give up. *Äiti rakastaa teitä aina ja ikuisesti*.

My love, Måns. There is no one I would rather share my life with. There is no one whose closeness I long for more than yours. Your love, your care, and your closeness have healed me. Thank you for choosing me, supporting me, and simply being there. *Jag älskar dig*.

The very last words will be written in my beloved mother tongue. I will quote the Finnish band KUUMAA, a passage from a song that captures the time that has passed.

*Oon ollut tosi surullinen
Mutta tänään mä luotan tulevaan
Ei pimeys oo lopullinen
Vaik se koittaaakin satuttaa
Niin mä luotan tulevaan (Luotan tulevaan, 2024).*

Helsinki, February 2026

Jeanette Koskinen

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, philosopher, 1889 -1951)

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1 Introduction

It is well established that early childhood education and care play a vital role in children's overall development, and particularly in relation to language (Sheridan et al., 2009; Sylva et al., 2004). For this reason, early education is often regarded as a crucial arena for language growth. During a child's years in education, two different language registers develop: everyday language and academic language (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 1984). These registers vary in characteristics and serve different purposes. Everyday language is highly contextualized and concrete, relying on non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions. It tends to be immediate and present-oriented, characterized by simple words and short sentences. Academic language, by contrast, is decontextualized, abstract, and more complex. It involves more complex structures and the ability to discuss and reflect on ideas beyond the present moment (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 1984).

In the past, early childhood education and care were assumed to focus mainly on developing children's everyday language skills (Wedin, 2011). This perspective suggested that mastery of everyday language is a prerequisite for later acquisition of academic language. However, distinguishing between the two registers is not always straightforward. Schleppegrell (2004) notes that everyday and academic language are not two separate languages. Academic language is built upon everyday language, and in practice, children do not consciously separate the two. When children engage in languaging, these registers intertwine rather than exist in isolation.

Nowadays, researchers argue that, even in early childhood education and care (ECEC), children need to begin developing their academic language (Barnes et al., 2016; Björk-Willén, 2022; Cummins, 2017). However, there is limited knowledge about how teachers can foster this development during the early years of education (Sandell Ring, 2021), creating a gap in both practical and scientifically supported knowledge about how to plan and organize academic language teaching. The importance of gaining a deeper understanding of language-teaching strategies that enable children to acquire academic language within everyday ECEC practices has therefore been emphasized

(Björk-Willén, 2022). This thesis addresses the need for more knowledge about early academic language teaching by contributing insights into teachers' perspectives on language teaching and how teachers can organize and implement language teaching that aims to develop children's academic language.

A particular interest of the thesis is directed to multilingual children's academic language development. Our societies and educational institutions are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of languages and cultures. Multilingualism, the ability to speak multiple languages, is generally seen as an asset (Baker & Wright, 2017), but language diversity—i.e., the presence of multiple languages within an early childhood education and care institution—also poses some challenges for teachers. There is a risk that educational institutions struggle to accommodate diversity, and that the language teaching does not sufficiently support children who do not speak the language of instruction as their mother tongue, or who are in the position of being a minority language speaker (Bunar et al., 2021; Mansikka et al., 2024). The thesis seeks to shed light on the challenges associated with language diversity in the context of academic language teaching for young children, and incorporate multilingual children's situation in such teaching.

But why do young children need to develop academic language skills, and how does this relate to language diversity and ECEC contexts with challenging conditions? In modern society, language skills are highly valued at an early age. Language is vital in children's learning and knowledge development (Conner et al., 2014). Children benefit from everyday and academic language skills when expressing their thoughts, communicating with others, and learning in ECEC settings (Barnes et al., 2019). Developing academic language skills is a question for the future for young children and an issue in their present. It has also been raised that children from a minority language group or children who do not speak the language of instruction as their family language struggle with developing academic language skills. These children often have insufficient vocabulary and word comprehension, which negatively affects their possibilities to develop a more decontextualized and cognitively challenging language (Hoff, 2013).

Providing all children with access to academic language helps reduce educational disparities. Children who develop a rich language from an early age often have an advantage in school and later life, and strengthening academic language for all children creates more equal conditions. A rich and nuanced language helps children become thinking, reflective individuals in our society.

A question is how well-prepared teachers are to meet children with diverse linguistic backgrounds and in contexts where language is intertwined with multiple complex factors. Previous research sheds light on the matter. Studies have highlighted that teachers feel insecure about managing language diversity in their classrooms. Teachers further report a need for more training and knowledge about second and multilingual language development, as well as methods to support children's multilingualism (Fredriksson & Lindgren Eneflo, 2019; Sopanen, 2019). The increasing language diversity in ECEC settings places further demands on teachers and can limit their ability to support the language development of all children, particularly in the language of instruction. This highlights the need to examine both language-teaching practices and the traditions that currently shape their realization, meaning teachers' actions when applying a pedagogical model or language-teaching practices in their daily routines.

The study's broader context is language teaching in early childhood education and care in Sweden and Finland. These countries were chosen because they offer two distinct examples of how language diversity can manifest. Swedish is spoken in both countries and functions as the language of instruction in education in two distinct ways: in Sweden as a majority language, and in Finland as a minority language. There is no ambition to compare the countries; instead, to explore two different language environments facing the same challenge: supporting multilingual children in learning the language of instruction, Swedish.

In Sweden, according to the Swedish National Agency for Education (2022), 24% of children enrolled in ECEC have a foreign background, meaning they were born abroad or have two foreign-born parents. Due to residential segregation, language backgrounds are not evenly distributed across Swedish urban and rural areas (Novosel, 2024).

This means that some ECEC settings have a much greater diversity of family languages and cultures. There is a concern regarding children's conditions concerning the risk that these children do not develop good enough skills in the Swedish language before they enter school, and that, at worst, they become educationally excluded (Bunar et al., 2021).

Language teaching has a central role in children's language and identity development. Based on the national curricula of the two countries, teachers are responsible for serving as linguistic role models for children (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). This idea of role modelling stands out as significant, as it indicates a task involving substantial professional responsibility; for this reason, the thesis directs interest to teachers as linguistic role models from different perspectives.

Language teaching in the Nordic countries is characterized by a holistic approach that integrates language teaching into other activities, such as mealtimes, transitions between activities, and thematic work (Brodin & Renblad, 2020; Sapanen & Tomter Alstad, 2021; Kultti, 2013; Nordberg, 2019). The holistic approach has contributed to the teaching of language in a mostly implicit manner, meaning that language or languaging is not necessarily seen as a distinct content (Åkerblom, 2020). Instead, children's language development is stimulated simultaneously as they, for example, learn about forest animals or participate in music activities. Although evidence suggests that ECEC settings are most often language-developing arenas (Sheridan et al., 2009; Sylva et al., 2004; Sheridan & Gjems, 2016; Aronsson, 2019), the holistic approach presents some issues that need to be addressed.

Firstly, there are indications that teachers' implicit language teaching strategies tend to primarily develop children's everyday language skills (Cummins, 1979, 1981; Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa, 1976). This aligns with expectations in ECEC (Wedin, 2011). However, as mentioned earlier, recent research has emphasized the importance of developing children's academic language skills early. In light of this, it seems plausible that language teaching strategies, specifically

designed for young children and drawing on elaborated theoretical frameworks, can widen teachers' work with young children's academic language development. Secondly, how teachers view and understand language and language teaching will most likely affect how they organize their teaching (Åkerblom, 2020). If language teaching relies solely on implicit strategies, important opportunities to encounter academic language may go unnoticed or remain unaddressed. Considering a broader range of theoretical views on language and language teaching can likely help strengthen language teaching (Aronsson, 2019). This thesis will bring together theories on language, multilingualism, and language diversity with Didaktik teaching theory, thereby forming a foundation for explicit teaching of academic language to young children.

1.1 Aim of The Thesis

The thesis aims to expand the knowledge about language teaching in early childhood education and care (ECEC), with a particular focus on multilingual children. This is pursued through:

- developing knowledge about teachers' perspectives on language teaching practices, strategies, and their role as linguistic role models, and
- developing a teaching model, Academic Languageing, for intentional academic language teaching in ECEC.

The thesis features two interconnected studies: a survey and a practice-based study,

The survey provides insight into teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward multilingual children's language learning, as well as the practices and strategies they report using. The survey also provides an empirical foundation for the model development by raising awareness about teachers' perspectives and highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

The practice-based study, in collaboration with teachers, generates an empirically grounded, theoretically informed teaching model, Academic Languageing. The model evolves progressively through an

iterative process that integrates theory, analysis of empirical data, and improvements in practical application. The teaching model that is the result of the study offers a suggestion for how teachers can shift from traditional language stimulation to intentional academic language teaching.

1.2 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters. Following this introduction, chapter 2 provides a wider contextualization of the study. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framing: Part I defines and theorizes language, while Part II theorizes teaching. Chapter 4 gives an overview of previous research on teachers' language development strategies and practices in ECEC. Chapter 5 details the research methods. The findings are presented in chapters 6 and 7: chapter 6 reports on the survey results concerning four teacher profiles and teachers as linguistic role models, while chapter 7 presents outcomes from the practice-based study, including the final version of Academic Languageing. The final chapter, 8, clarifies the thesis's main contributions and discusses the main results in relation to earlier research. Further research directions concerning language teaching in multilingual and language-diverse ECEC contexts are also suggested.

2 ECEC Contexts of the Study

The chapter aims to clarify the structural, linguistic, and pedagogical conditions that shape teachers' work in Sweden and Finland. By outlining how early childhood education and care are organized, how language and communication, as well as multilingualism, are described in the curricula, and how the concept of teaching has been introduced and discussed, the chapter establishes the contextual foundations necessary for understanding the thesis's focus. This chapter draws on policy documents, authoritative curriculum texts, and previous research to situate the study within its Swedish and Finnish ECEC contexts.

2.1 Two Nordic Contexts

Sweden and Finland share common features, such as a strong emphasis on play-based learning and a child-centred pedagogical approach. Education, development, and care form a holistic approach that considers the child's well-being. Despite commonalities, ECEC continually develops a context-specific culture shaped by each country's unique social, political, and economic conditions. These different conditions are primarily reflected in the implementation of early education and the content of policy documents.

2.1.1 Preschool in Sweden

Sweden is officially a country with one official language, Swedish, and five recognized minority languages (Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, Romani Chib, and Sámi). Preschool is the first step in the education system, grounded in democratic values. The Educational Act (2010:800) and a national curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022) outline its purpose, emphasizing education and care. The main goal is to help children develop knowledge and values, fostering a lifelong desire to learn (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). The curriculum stresses respect for human rights and reflects values from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, highlighting children's participation in education in

accordance with their best interests (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022).

Swedish preschools strive to be both fun and educational, while prioritizing safety. Play is essential for learning, as it encourages exploration and discovery in a nurturing environment. Municipalities are required to provide preschool for all children from the age of one, depending on parents' employment or circumstances. Children of unemployed or leave-taking parents may attend preschool for 15-25 hours per week, depending on their age and needs (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). Starting at the age of three, children are entitled to at least 525 hours of free preschool annually, known as "general preschool" (allmän förskola), regardless of their parents' employment status. Both municipal and private options are available. Municipalities under the Act on National Minorities and Minority Languages (2009:724) are required to offer Finnish, Meänkieli, or Sami preschool options upon request; however, this does not apply to Yiddish or Romani chib (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022).

The preschool curriculum includes goals and guidelines for staff to follow. Goals outline educational direction, while guidelines specify teachers' responsibilities to achieve these goals (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). The curriculum's goals and guidelines focus on six areas: norms and values; care, development, and learning; child participation and influence; preschool and home; collaboration and evaluation; and improvements.

2.1.2 Kindergarten in Finland

Finland is bilingual, with two national languages—Finnish and Swedish—and one minority language (Sami). Legally, both national languages are equal, but statistically, Swedish is a minority since only 5% of the population speaks it. This leads to two school systems—one Finnish and one Swedish (Mård-Miettinen et al., 2018)—both following the same national curricula and regulations, but using either language for instruction. The systems cover kindergartens to universities.

Early childhood education and care is systematic and goal-oriented, focusing on development, teaching, and care, with an emphasis on pedagogy and play. Kindergarten marks the initial step into schooling and supports lifelong learning. The ECEC plan includes three levels: the core national curriculum, local curriculum plans, and the individual child's education plan (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022).

Municipalities must provide ECEC to all families, which can happen through kindergartens, family daycare, clubs, or playground activities. All children under school age have a right to ECEC for development, equality, anti-marginalization, and support for parents (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). Families can choose various language enhancement programs, with immersion most common, available in Swedish, Finnish, or Sami, starting in kindergarten and extending through primary school, depending on the municipality. There are also programs where 25% of education occurs in a non-statutory language. 'Language nest kindergartens' (språkboverksamhet) help children learn their culture and endangered indigenous languages.

The national core curriculum sets central goals for ECEC, guiding staff in planning and delivering teaching. Learning areas include languages, forms of expression, community, environment, and personal growth. A multi-professional ECEC team includes teachers, nurses, and social workers, with the teacher holding primary responsibility (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). Families can choose between municipal and private kindergartens, usually based on the child's registered mother tongue (Finnish, Swedish).

2.2 Language, Communication, and Multilingualism

The countries' curricula serve as a framework for teachers' work and guide *what* teaching in ECEC should cover. In Sweden and Finland, the curricula (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022) are normative, meaning that curriculum goals and content are not optional. A teacher's autonomy, therefore, is expressed in *how* teaching that considers these goals and contents is implemented. When studying language teaching in ECEC,

it is essential to understand what is stated in the curricula, as they form the basis of the teaching that children are expected to receive. The following describes how language and communication, as well as multilingualism, are presented in the countries' curricula.

In the Swedish curriculum, teaching goals are outlined in bullet points. Goals related to language, communication, and multilingualism include listening to and reflecting on others' views, expressing one's own beliefs, applying concepts, recognizing connections, and exploring new perspectives. Children should express and communicate their thoughts and experiences through various forms, such as images, drama, music, and movement. They are expected to engage with stories and texts across different media, interpreting, questioning, and discussing them. Goals also include a nuanced use of language, wordplay, articulating arguments, and communicating in diverse contexts. An interest in written language, symbols, cultural identity, and understanding diverse societies is emphasized, along with an appreciation of local culture and proficiency in Swedish and any minority or family language (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 14-15). Additionally, teachers should encourage each child's language and communication development (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 16), though the curriculum does not explicitly address teacher responsibilities in multilingual development.

The Finnish national core curriculum defines the key goals and content for early childhood education and care. These goals and content are presented as transversal competencies and learning areas. Six interconnected areas of transversal competence are described. Language, communication, and multilingualism are explicitly addressed in the area of 'cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression.' It is noted that children grow up in a culturally, linguistically, and ideologically diverse world. Consequently, there is a need to emphasize social interaction skills and cultural competence (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 26-27). Furthermore, it is emphasized that children are encouraged to become familiar with other people, languages, and cultures, and that ECEC staff serve as models

for children in experiencing diversity through interaction with others and exposure to various languages and cultures.

The national core curriculum identifies five learning areas, outlining objectives for pedagogical activities, which aid ECEC staff in planning diverse activities. Areas focusing on language, communication, and multilingualism are ‘Rich world of languages’ and ‘Diverse forms of expression.’ The ‘Rich world of languages’ area emphasizes ECEC’s role in enhancing children’s linguistic skills and identities (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 44). Language is both a learning goal and a means, necessitating a rich language environment for development. It highlights the importance of supporting all children in the language of instruction, while acknowledging their varied linguistic backgrounds to facilitate simultaneous language development. ECEC staff should recognize that they are linguistic role models, impacting children’s language development and understanding. Language use in ECEC should encourage descriptive conversation and storytelling (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 45). The ‘Diverse forms of expressions’ area indicates ECEC supports children’s musical, visual, craft, verbal, and physical expressions while introducing various art forms and cultural heritage (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 46).

Special notes about language and culture apply to every child in ECEC. Children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are positively enriched. Language awareness pervades the operational culture. The statement highlights national bilingualism, “[t]here are children who speak Finnish and Swedish as their mother tongue. It is important for developing these children’s language skills and identities that both languages are supported, and the children are encouraged to use them” (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 53).

Based on how language and communication are described in Swedish and Finnish policy documents, language encompasses both verbal and non-verbal expressions. Children are encouraged to express themselves in various ways, integrating both verbal and physical means. The definition of language includes internal processes and communication (Aronsson, 2019). Attention is also given to emergent literacy skills, which involve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes

children develop regarding reading and writing in early childhood (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The extended definition of language in the curricula of both countries aligns with recent research on children’s language and literacy development (Novosel, 2024; Thuresson, 2021). It is crucial to support children’s verbal and nonverbal communication, recognizing that emergent literacy skills apply to all children.

The thesis’s core focus – children’s acquisition of academic language – is not explicitly addressed in Swedish or Finnish policy documents. However, academic language can be inferred from descriptions. For instance, the Swedish curriculum states that “[t]he preschool should provide each child with the conditions to develop a nuanced use of spoken language and vocabulary” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 14-15), suggesting its inclusion of academic language, which is nuanced and often involves specific vocabulary. Similarly, the Finnish national core curricula emphasize the use of descriptive and exact language in ECEC, encouraging storytelling, explanation, and discussion. Since everyday and academic language are not explicitly mentioned, interpretations may vary among teachers, potentially resulting in an insufficient focus on academic language.

An extended understanding of languages challenges language norms in teaching and society. Allowing multimodal expression includes all children in the learning process, promoting social justice. This raises the question of whether academic language is merely verbal or encompasses multimodal communication, a topic that will be further explored in later chapters.

Both countries’ curricula emphasize the importance of developing the language of instruction and multilingualism. Researchers note that multilingualism has gained significant policy attention due to the increasing number of children in early childhood education who do not speak the language of instruction as their first language (Björk-Willén, 2018). The Swedish curriculum emphasizes stimulating the Swedish language, providing children with an environment to develop and use it. Children with a mother tongue other than Swedish should develop both their mother tongue(s) and Swedish. The

Finnish national core curriculum emphasizes cultural diversity and language awareness, noting that visible multilingualism fosters overall child development. The modern concept of national bilingualism recognizes that children can have multiple mother tongues, and supporting this is crucial for their identity development. Descriptions of multilingualism can be vague, leading to uncertainty among teachers on managing diversity (Puskás & Björk-Willén, 2017). In Finland, emphasizing national bilingualism is vital given the country's linguistic context, but there is a risk that multilingualism may be interpreted as limited to Finnish and Swedish (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020). Both countries' curricula link language and identity; the Swedish curriculum states that language, learning, and identity are interconnected (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 8) while Finland's curriculum highlights language's central role in children's development and societal participation (National Agency for Finnish Education, 2022, pp. 34). Although connections between language and identity are prevalent, governing documents often lack specificity regarding the development of multilingual identity. Consequently, teachers may interpret curriculum writings differently.

2.3 Sweden and Finland as Examples of Diversity

This thesis focuses on academic languaging in language-diverse ECEC settings. Sweden and Finland are illustrative examples of how language diversity manifests differently across countries. Sweden is characterized by a multilingual immigrant context, featuring a rich diversity of languages and cultures, while Finland presents a bilingual environment with a more limited cultural diversity. In this study, Swedish serves as the language of instruction in the participating ECEC settings. However, it captures contrasting roles. In Sweden, it is the majority language, whereas in Finland, it is a minority language. This distinction has a profound impact on how the language is perceived and utilized in educational settings.

In diverse linguistic environments, language hierarchies naturally emerge. Some languages are given a higher status than others. This is done either explicitly or implicitly. Despite being officially monolingual with Swedish as the majority language, Sweden recognizes five

minority languages: Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, Romani chib, and Sámi (2009:600). This illustrates an explicit acknowledgment of varied language statuses. Historically, Sweden has been a multilingual country, yet its educational policy has an assimilationist tradition (Wedin, 2017). In other words, Swedish remains the normative language, particularly in educational contexts. ECEC settings exhibit rich language diversity; however, children quickly learn that Swedish is the default language necessary for becoming a part of the community (Kultti, 2013). A notable phenomenon in Swedish preschools is the increasing use of English as a lingua franca among children (Larsson et al., 2023). The use of English challenges the position of Swedish as the language of instruction and raises questions about the appropriate role of English in multilingual educational contexts.

Given the normative status of Swedish, educational settings are to provide equitable opportunities for all children to develop their Swedish language skills, particularly for those for whom it is not their first language. The difficulty in the Swedish context is that many children, often living in suburban areas, do not develop adequate Swedish language skills during their time in early childhood education and care (Novosel, 2024). This is a consequence of societal segregation. Despite Swedish being the majority and normative language, some children do not have sufficient access to it. The role of accessibility becomes evident in how opportunities for community participation are formed. There may also be a risk associated with the language of instruction being a majority language. It is easy for teachers to believe that, since “language is everywhere”, no structured measures are necessary in language teaching. This can become particularly challenging if language teaching is based on the needs of the whole group rather than addressing the individual prerequisites and needs of each child.

In Finland, where Swedish is a minority language, challenges vary. Teachers, aware of limited access to Swedish, often prioritize its preservation. They perceive other languages as threats (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020), which can impede children’s bilingual identities if these languages are not evident. The teachers’ drive to protect minority languages stems from the belief that these languages require more

support than majority languages (Baker & Wright, 2017). The Finnish-Swedish imbalance reinforces these sentiments among educators in Swedish-medium ECEC. The language teaching dilemma in these contexts is intricate. While there is a trend of Swedish-Finnish students underperforming in Swedish (Harju-Luukkainen & Nissinen, 2012), this is linked to limited access to the language, underscoring the need for favorable conditions for the development of Swedish. Conversely, many children in Swedish-medium ECEC are bilingual. The National Language Strategy (2021) emphasizes the importance of fostering bilingualism and ensuring the visibility of the second native language in early childhood education, but implementing this remains an issue (Sopanen et al., 2024).

In Finland, maintaining Swedish is crucial for preserving the country's cultural heritage and ensuring its bilingual status. Education must support future generations who identify as Swedish speakers and want to maintain their language skills. It is vital to recognize the diversity in ECEC, as many children come from Finnish-Swedish homes or other linguistic backgrounds. Teachers should highlight this diversity and integrate various languages and cultures into their teaching, rather than focusing solely on Swedish (Bergroth & Palviainen, 2016). This approach fosters multilingual identities and curiosity about diversity from an early age. While the language of instruction is important, leveraging children's linguistic resources can enhance learning.

The difficulties in both countries differ. Teachers in Sweden and Finland face the challenge of delivering high-quality language instruction to all children in a diverse and increasingly globalized world. Examining language teaching in these contexts offers a comprehensive understanding of how various conditions influence teachers' work in developing children's language skills. It also emphasizes the complexity of language diversity in institutions such as early childhood education. Investigating the Swedish and Finnish contexts deepens the understanding of how cultural settings shape languages and education, yielding insights for adapting language teaching to different environments. Exploring how educational systems address similar issues empowers teachers and researchers to find inspiration and refine their

teaching methods, making language teaching more inclusive and responsive to diversity.

2.4 The Concept of *Teaching*

The concept of teaching (*undervisning*) was introduced into both countries' ECEC curricula in 2018. Although teaching has long been part of everyday practice, the curriculum revision marked an important shift by defining teaching as a formal part of early childhood education and care. This change further positioned ECEC as an educational environment in which teaching and care are viewed as interconnected. Since its introduction, however, the concept has been debated, and researchers and practitioners interpret its meaning and implications in various ways (Saebbe, 2019). Therefore, there is no single definition of what teaching involves in ECEC, nor of its importance in working with the youngest children.

To clarify how the concept is understood in this thesis, the section first explains how teaching is defined in the Swedish and Finnish curricula, then outlines the scientific debate that has arisen since the concept was formally introduced. The section concludes by situating the role of teaching within the thesis.

The Swedish curriculum describes early childhood education as blending care with teaching. Teaching is defined as activities that engage children and align with the curriculum goals, emphasizing children's development and learning. Teachers have a special responsibility for this work, which emerges from interactions between children and adults. Teaching is considered both planned and spontaneous and can happen during daily routines as well as in more structured activities.

Similarly, the Finnish curriculum states that early childhood education includes both care and teaching, emphasizing every child's right to both. While teaching is tailored to children's age and development level, it aims to enhance learning, self-awareness, and social understanding. The curriculum emphasizes children's curiosity and exploratory drive and stresses that teaching should build on children's prior knowledge, interests, strengths, and need for support. Care situations

are also seen as pedagogical opportunities that foster communication and the development of self-care skills.

The scholarly debate reflects these curricular formulations but also points to areas of tension. In Nordic ECEC, teaching has often been associated with school-like, subject-oriented practices, prompting concerns about schoolification and the risk that play, care, and children's own initiatives become less prominent (Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2022). At the same time, several studies argue that the concept needs to be reinterpreted to align with ECEC's holistic pedagogical mission.

Swedish research has challenged narrow understandings of teaching as short, goal-driven episodes in which the teacher steers the interaction toward predetermined outcomes. Nilsson et al. (2018) showed that such views risk obscuring established pedagogical practices and limiting the potential of teaching as a long-term, collective, and exploratory process. They advocate instead for a holistic ECEC Didaktik in which teaching is interwoven with play, inquiry, and thematic work, with children's initiatives and shared meaning-making as central components.

Other studies, such as those by Melker et al. (2018), have highlighted the importance of pedagogical awareness in teacher–child interactions. Drawing on concepts such as sustained shared thinking and scaffolding, teaching is described as a relational process in which teachers support, deepen, and guide children's engagement with content while maintaining the open, flexible character of play and exploration.

In Finland, the discussion has gradually shifted from defining the boundaries of teaching to examining the competencies required for holistic pedagogical work. Teaching is viewed as the integration of care and learning, supported by a broad understanding of pedagogical competence. Ranta et al. (2023) describe this competence as involving both meta-competencies and practical abilities ranging from decision-making to fostering interaction and supporting children. Studies emphasize teacher agency—understood as pedagogical, relational, and growth-oriented—positioning teaching as a situational process

grounded in professional judgment (Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2021). At the same time, teachers report increasing responsibilities, which can create uncertainties about expectations (Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2021; Ranta et al., 2023). Whereas Swedish discussions often focus on aligning the concept with long-standing ECEC traditions, Finnish discussions tend to highlight the competencies and autonomy required to enact teaching in practice.

Teaching is central to this thesis, as the overall aim is to develop knowledge about language teaching in language-diverse ECEC settings. Here, teaching is understood as a deliberate, situated, and reflective process through which teachers create opportunities for children to engage with academic language. Teacher preparation forms an important dimension of this work, but teaching is not conceptualized as separate from everyday ECEC practices. Drawing on sociocultural learning theory and the German–Nordic Didaktik tradition, teaching is understood as intentional guidance that supports children’s explorative, socially situated, and academically oriented languaging.

3 Theoretical Framing

This chapter presents the theoretical framing that underpins the thesis. It is organized into two complementary parts. The first part presents the thesis's theoretical stance on language, multilingualism, and language diversity, and clarifies what "language" entails from social, cultural, and communicative dimensions. It also situates the thesis within the complex linguistic environment of ECEC. The second part theorizes teaching through a Didaktik framework, outlining how teaching in ECEC can be understood as intentional, relational, and content-oriented.

Together, these constitute the theoretical basis for the thesis's understanding of language teaching in ECEC. The combined theoretical framing further informs the survey study's design and provides the conceptual and analytical foundation for the practice-based development of the Academic Languageing model presented later in the thesis.

3.1 Part I: Language, Multilingualism, and Language Diversity

Language is more than just a tool for communication. It helps us shape relationships, social structures, and identities. Through language, we negotiate power and status and connect with others. This thesis defines language in terms of its social, cultural, and communicative dimensions.

3.1.1 The Social Dimension

Vygotsky (1978) argued that social interaction is essential for children's language development and learning. Learning is a process in which social interaction and language play a vital role. In his understanding, a child must first learn within a social context with the help of others before they can master various types of knowledge independently, this is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The idea that there is a 'golden zone' between tasks and problems that a child can master independently and those that the child cannot solve is one of the most valuable elements of Vygotsky's learning theory, and one I bring to bear on academic languageing. The in-between

zone is where the most efficient learning occurs. In the early years of learning academic language, it is essential to identify this zone to support its development optimally.

In an educational setting, this highlights the importance of the interaction between teacher and child in constructing knowledge. According to Norling (2015), this interaction promotes the development of various skills within a social environment, where children's personal experiences are transformed into their thinking and growth. This demonstrates how effective learning conditions can be established for children in early childhood education and care. Sociocultural learning theory views the interaction between teachers and children as the foundation for language learning, and it sheds light on how everyday social interactions contribute to children's learning and support their development.

The thesis emphasizes the significance of social interaction between humans and the broader social environment (Vygotsky, 1986, 1997). Both the external learning environment and internal mental processes are regarded as playing a crucial role in human learning and development, as they are mutually interdependent. Vygotsky argued that learning occurs at two levels: first, through interactions with other individuals and the environment; then, knowledge is internalized and integrated into one's mental structures. He believed that language bridges external and internal processes and that human action (culture) is conveyed concretely (Vygotsky, 1978, 1982). By "means", he referred to the physical and symbolic tools we use to communicate and create meaning (Vygotsky, 1982; Harju-Luukkainen, 2012). Language is the most essential symbolic tool in language development, although verbal communication and body language are also crucial, physical, concrete tools.

Drawing on Vygotsky's (1986) perspective, children use two types of concepts in their speech: spontaneous concepts (non-scientific) and non-spontaneous concepts (scientific). Spontaneous concepts are acquired through everyday interactions, whereas scientific concepts are learned in educational settings. These ideas about spontaneous and scientific concepts can be linked to everyday and academic language.

Teachers' interpretations of language are greatly influenced by sociocultural theory (Aronsson, 2019). These interpretations align with the holistic approach to language teaching, characteristic of Nordic early childhood education and care. It is, therefore, understandable that social interaction in everyday, meaningful contexts is seen as an essential opportunity for children to develop their language skills. However, in educational contexts, it is not only the social interaction itself that contributes to language development. A learning environment that intentionally enhances language and communication supports literacy and learning (Snowling & Hulme, 2011).

Engaging in various activities during early childhood education and care allows children to interact with others and converse, contributing to their language development. Viewing language from an interactional perspective in research also deepens our understanding of language and how children use language in their interactions (Ahrenkiel et al., 2021). From simple conversations among peers to complex discourses that shape our societal and political contexts, language reflects the social structures that surround us.

Bourdieu (1991) discusses language as symbolic capital, in which language use serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for maintaining and redistributing power across various social fields. In a sociocultural context, language is viewed as a medium through which individuals express their thoughts and needs, construct and negotiate their social roles, and relationships. In this way, language is both a mirror of our social contexts and a tool that actively shapes these contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). The ability to master dominant forms of language, particularly those used in educational, political, and professional settings, is directly tied to social mobility. Bourdieu's (1991) theorization suggests that language proficiency, such as academic language, becomes a key determinant of one's social positioning and future success.

For children, early development of academic language skills is crucial because these skills are closely connected to their ability to navigate the structures of formal education and broader social systems. From Bourdieu's (1991) perspective, academic language, characterized by specialized vocabulary, formal syntax, and abstract concepts, could

reflect the language of power. Children who acquire these skills early are better equipped to engage with complex ideas and participate in educational and social discourses that can shape their life chances. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, children with a language associated with higher social status can capitalize on their linguistic competence, thereby gaining access to greater educational and social opportunities.

From this thesis's perspective, recognizing academic language as symbolic capital helps explain why it is essential for children to develop strong language skills from a young age. It is about mastering words and grammar and providing children with the linguistic tools to participate in, and potentially transform, their social structures (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, early childhood education and care that emphasize language development play a vital role in supporting children's future opportunities, as they help equip children with the language skills necessary for success in school and beyond (Snowling & Hulme, 2011).

3.1.2 The Cultural Dimension

Vygotsky (1978) viewed language as a cultural artifact that carries a society's values, beliefs, and worldviews. It is not solely a reflection of our reality; rather, it shapes how people perceive and interact with the world around them. Words, expressions, and language structures encode cultural knowledge and social conventions. For instance, certain languages may have multiple words for specific concepts or objects that reflect their cultural significance. Additionally, language is context-bound, especially in early childhood education settings.

Play is generally considered necessary for children's learning, and Vygotsky (1978) believed that children's needs can largely be met through play, suggesting that they do not play for sheer pleasure. Instead, in his view, play is a goal-oriented activity in which children create imaginary situations and assume and enact roles (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, play is a means by which children process and develop experiences and meaning through imagination and interaction with peers and cultural artifacts. This will nourish the child's inner mental processes, leading to their development. According to Vygotsky, as play is a powerful promoter of cognitive, social, and

emotional development, it should have a special place in early childhood education and care (Hostettler Scharer, 2017).

Svensson (2012) highlights, through examples, how play and multimodal communication makes language-learning context-bound in ECEC. Firstly, a teacher's communication may differ from how the child is accustomed to communicating at home. Svensson means that teachers may use words and expressions that children are unfamiliar with, and they may have different expectations for verbal communication. Suppose the communication pattern significantly differs from what the children are accustomed to. In that case, it can result in children not being able to interpret the teacher's communication and not knowing how to respond to these cues. Secondly, Svensson (2012) points out that many children start school with a communication pattern in their "backpack" typical of an ECEC environment. Play often serves as a means of communication, where children create meaning and express themselves through artifacts and bodily expressions (Norling, 2015; Thuresson, 2021). When children start school, different expectations for verbal communication are imposed on them, which can create difficulties for them, as they come from a daily life where play is central. Children have been socialized into a routine in which verbal expressions are not a prerequisite for understanding. These examples from Svensson (2012) illustrate that the different environments in which children find themselves—home, ECEC, school—also become cultural arenas where children are socialized into different linguistic contexts.

Language has a crucial role in transmitting culture across generations (Vygotsky, 1986). Language serves as a fundamental tool for internalizing and processing cultural norms, values, and historical experiences. Through language, children learn to understand and navigate the world around them, with linguistic expressions acting as carriers of the collective knowledge and experiences accumulated by society throughout history. Vygotsky (1986) believed that culture and thought are inseparable; language conveys cultural meanings from one individual to another. In this process, language serves as an instrument for socializing individuals into the norms and practices central to their society. Through social interaction, language allows

children to develop their cognitive functions, which are deeply rooted in the cultural and social contexts in which they occur (Vygotsky, 1986). Thus, language is not only a tool for communication but also the foundation for cognitive and cultural development.

Defining language in this thesis from a cultural dimension, emphasizing its connection to culture, clarifies the understanding that the cultural aspect is essential not only for defining language itself but also for understanding the role ECCEC, as an institution, plays in linguistic and cultural development, especially at the individual level. According to McKeon (1994/2013), whenever a minority group interacts with a majority school system, the relationship between language and culture becomes important. Furthermore, she notes that in multilingual educational contexts, children not only enter with a variety of languages but also possess diverse skills in their first language. Some children come from homes rich in linguistic stimuli and are, for example, accustomed to engaging in discussions and reading books. In contrast, others come from households with limited linguistic input. These children share the need to belong to the same community, where everyone has the opportunity to be socialized in an educational context that utilizes language, culture, and communication as essential tools for further knowledge development. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the teacher's important role as a linguistic role model. The teacher sets the tone in the classroom and plays a significant role in determining which linguistic, cultural, and communicative expressions are welcomed and allowed to flourish, and which, in the worst case, are denied and rendered invisible.

3.1.3 The Communicative Dimension

Vygotsky (1978) argued that children learn through participating in communicative processes with more competent individuals in a specific cultural context. Therefore, language is not a characteristic of an individual. Instead, it is a tool that develops in interaction with others. The communicative dimension, therefore, is not solely about transferring information but about creating meaning together through dialogue and collaboration. This makes language a

communicative tool where meaning is not static but is constructed and re-constructed in interaction.

From Vygotsky's (1987) perspective, the communicative dimension of language means that when a child engages in conversations and discussions with others, new knowledge is constructed through dialogue. Through communication, utterances are formed, and thought itself is shaped. This can be illustrated by a child solving a problem within the zone of proximal development, where the child cannot solve it independently but can with help from a more competent peer or teacher. Language serves as a communicative bridge in this interaction, facilitating the transfer of knowledge from the social to the individual level. Through these communicative actions, Vygotsky believed that the child develops inner mental processes and begins to manage thinking independently.

People shape themselves and others through communication (Säljö, 2000). Communication is more than just grammatical knowledge and advanced vocabulary. Although linguistic competencies, such as speaking and listening, are crucial, communication also encompasses social processes and the ability to negotiate with others. This idea of Säljö also aligns with how language and communication are interpreted in the curricula in Sweden and Finland – language and communication include both verbal and non-verbal utterances. Both verbal and non-verbal communication are essential in children's learning processes (Säljö, 2000).

Linguistic competence can be divided into communicative and strategic competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1982). Communicative competence is of interest when defining language in terms of its communicative dimension. Communication is not solely about transferring information, but also about creating meaning through dialogue and collaboration, as emphasized by Vygotsky (1978). Communication encompasses both verbal expressions and skills in conveying information accurately in various social and cultural contexts. Linguistic competence includes both grammatical and textual knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 1982). Grammatical knowledge includes word knowledge and knowledge of syntax, morphology, and phonology. Grammatical knowledge is about how to arrange words and phrases

into well-structured sentences. Textual knowledge encompasses both spoken and written texts, including rules for organizing language into coherent units to make the message comprehensible to the recipient. Textual competence is about how to tell a story, give instructions, or write a specific text (Wedin, 2017). Bachman and Palmer (1982) emphasize the importance of understanding and using language not solely at the grammatical level but also of adapting it to achieve its communicative purposes in a socially and culturally appropriate way.

From the perspective of this thesis, the communicative dimension is central to the relationship between younger children and their development of academic language. While both verbal and non-verbal communication remain essential, verbal communication deserves increasing attention as children grow, gradually becoming the primary mode of interaction. This is because verbal language reflects higher cognitive processes that enable children to express perceptions, opinions, and arguments with clarity and nuance. At the same time, non-verbal communication plays an important role in early childhood, as young children's verbal abilities are still developing. Therefore, they rely heavily on gestures and other non-verbal means to communicate. As verbal skills develop, expectations for children to use verbal language might also increase.

Communicative competence, however, involves more than grammatical correctness. Speakers need to adapt their language to social factors, such as roles and relationships, and contextual factors, including whether the interaction occurs in an academic or family setting. For example, in ECEC environments, children communicate differently with peers than with teachers. Contextual norms also shape communication; mealtime routines often include expectations of silence or turn-taking, which influence how children express themselves. In such cases, children learn to adjust their language to these norms, sometimes limiting their interactions to finishing the meal when silence is expected.

Supporting academic language development also requires attention to the cultural dimension of communication. Teachers play a key role in fostering children's communicative competence by addressing both

linguistic and pragmatic aspects of language. As children progress, they may not fully master grammar or nuanced expression, making it essential for teachers to act as linguistic role models. By using grammatically correct, contextually appropriate language themselves, teachers can guide children's attention to these elements and help them develop the ability to communicate effectively across different situations.

3.2 Everyday Language and Academic Language

Cummins' early contributions (1979, 1981, 1984) emphasized a conceptual division between context-rich conversational language and the more abstract language typically expected in formal learning environments. His work underscored how these two modes place different linguistic and cognitive demands on children. Children in ECEC are expected to develop everyday language skills, as these are believed to provide a foundation for later academic language acquisition in school (Wedin, 2011). Therefore, questions of academic language have mainly been a concern for schools. However, researchers have recently begun highlighting the need to support children's academic language development at a young age (Björk-Willén, 2022; Barnes et al., 2016; Cummins, 2017).

Several studies show that developing this linguistic skill early is essential for academic success in primary school and later stages (Schleppegrell, 2004; Townsend et al., 2012). Researchers and educators agree that academic language is necessary for receiving information and instructions, as well as for expressing thoughts and arguments. According to Nagy and Townsend (2012), academic language is specialized, both oral and written, that facilitates communication and thinking related to subject knowledge. It can be described as a language that employs sophisticated, academic vocabulary, extensive and complex syntax, and decontextualized discourse. According to Schleppegrell (2001), academic language assumes that the speaker and listener do not interact directly. This means that language is decontextualized and relies on children's ability to retell and describe situations, experiences, and subjects so nuanced that listeners can

understand and make associations even if they have not been part of what the narrator tells about.

Academic language includes both advanced vocabulary, such as subject-specific terms, and language skills, like using words in different contexts and for various purposes (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). Language skills related to academic language include, for instance, the ability to describe, tell, and retell stories; express oneself logically and systematically; and speak in complete, nuanced sentences (Schleppegrell, 2004). Not all words are academic, but an academic vocabulary consists of advanced words that are not commonly used in everyday situations and can include subject-specific terms. However, as important as vocabulary is, it is equally crucial to develop language skills.

That a child possesses academic language in their mother tongue does not automatically mean that they also have academic language in the language of instruction (Cummins, 2000). This suggests that multilingual children can have academic language proficiency across all their languages (García & Wei, 2014), but can also imply that a child only masters academic language in one of their languages. Schleppegrell (2004) shows that academic language is not a separate language. Instead, everyday and academic language represent two facets of a language. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that children can develop both concurrently (Gibbons, 2006). However, this requires the teacher's support and a thoughtful approach to language teaching, treating academic language as a content area.

3.3 Languageing and Translanguageing in ECEC

Wittgenstein (1968) distinguished between two understandings of the function of language: language as expression and language as structure. When language is understood as expression, the interconnection between saying and doing is emphasized, and language is seen as arising in practice (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). When language is understood as a structural system, the primary function of language is seen to be naming and describing (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018), and language is regarded as preceding practice.

This thesis primarily adopts the expressive interpretation and, in line with Harju and Åkerblom (2020, p. 154), language is understood “as activity and language meaning is seen as constituted in use rather than existing beforehand”. Hence, the concept of *linguaging* becomes fruitful. Linguaging refers to the activity of using language, making language dynamic and open (Swain, 2006; Åkerblom, 2011). Linguaging includes making sense, communicating, and shaping experience through language.

The notion of translanguaging also needs to be addressed when talking about linguaging. Language diversity is now the norm in early childhood education and care. Many children are raised in multilingual homes or learn multiple languages at an early age. Teachers’ views on language will influence their understanding of multilingualism and how multiple languages are learned and mastered (Harju & Åkerblom, 2020). While linguaging refers to language more generally, *translanguaging* denotes a polylingual perspective on language. Translanguaging is a pedagogical approach in which speakers combine various language assets to communicate (García & Wei, 2014). According to Wei (2018), translanguaging is a pedagogical practice that maximizes learning in multilingual settings. When children are translanguaging, they move between different linguistic structures and systems of meaning-making to communicate effectively. Translanguaging has been identified as a strategy for creating positive, multilingual classroom environments that contribute to children’s development of a multilingual identity (Schwartz & Asli, 2013). Translanguaging originated in bilingual environments, where one prerequisite is that both the teacher and the child understand both languages. Today, there are multilingual early childhood education and care settings in which up to ten languages can be represented among the children. Therefore, ideal translanguaging between teachers and children can be challenging, as a teacher cannot possibly speak or know all the children’s languages. For translanguaging to become a pedagogical practice, it requires mutual language skills (Wei, 2018). Translanguaging can, however, also be an approach that values children’s earlier language experiences and family languages with an ambition to make all children’s languages visible and to support multilingual development based on pre-existing knowledge and skills.

Drawing on the ideas of languaging and translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014; Harju & Åkerblom, 2020), a suggestion for academic languaging for children and teachers would be to explore and embrace academic language while ‘doing.’ Academic language is not something children are born with. Instead, it arises in educational contexts when children are *languaging* with the help of teachers and knowledgeable peers. That said, as academic language is not typically acquired incidentally, the structural dimension can be understood as one component among several in its development. Expressive and structural understandings of language complement each other.

Translanguaging becomes an important aspect of academic languaging as it often enables children to use all their languages (García & Wei, 2014). As Puskás and Björk-Willén (2017) show, teachers sometimes find it challenging as they do not fully master children’s languages. This could make it challenging for teachers to be translanguaging role models themselves. In a Swedish context, translanguaging seems to be establishing itself in education (Martín-Bylund, 2024). Based on studies on translanguaging and multilingualism in Swedish ECEC settings (Harju & Åkerblom, 2020; Novosel, 2024), it appears that translanguaging, or incorporating children’s home languages in teaching, is often regarded as the primary goal. This somewhat differs from the original concept of translanguaging. Williams (1996), who coined the term, originally proposed a systematic approach to language switching. His idea was that children should receive input in one language and produce output in another. In an ECEC setting, this could involve the teacher reading a book in one language and then leading a discussion in another. However, this assumes that both the children and the teacher are proficient in both languages in such a translanguaging scenario.

3.4 Language Diversity and Multilingualism – Why Both?

Language diversity and multilingualism are key concepts for understanding how language teaching can be implemented in a diverse ECEC context. These two concepts cannot be used interchangeably; instead, they highlight the complexity of diversity from two distinct perspectives – the societal and contextual, as well as the individual.

I have chosen to focus on the concept of language diversity, but to grasp what this concept entails, the idea of linguistic diversity must first be defined. Linguistic diversity is a sociolinguistic concept that describes the variety of languages, dialects, and other linguistic variations within a group or society (Martin-Jones et al., 2015). It signifies that different languages are spoken, along with their variations and forms. These variations can reflect factors like social class, ethnicity, and gender, indicating that people from diverse societal groups express themselves differently. In this sense, linguistic diversity can be viewed as a comprehensive concept.

Language diversity is related to linguistic diversity but is often considered a narrower concept. When discussing language diversity, it typically refers to the multiple languages spoken in a community or educational setting (Groff et al., 2023). For this reason, this concept aligns more closely with the thesis's aim and focus. I am interested in which languages are represented among children and how many languages they know and use according to their teachers. By using language diversity, the focus remains on the range of languages present in different educational settings. An important aspect of academic languaging is embracing this diversity, which involves incorporating the children's various languages into language teaching. Consequently, I have chosen to use the concept of language diversity.

Since the thesis emphasizes academic languaging, the concept of linguistic diversity could have been relevant. Assuming that everyday language and academic language represent two forms of language suggests a variation. It can also be inferred that in a group of children characterized by diversity, there are differences in language use related to factors such as social class and ethnic background. However, I have not investigated the language use of either the teachers or the children, as my interest and focus lie in the design and enactment of language teaching. For this reason, I do not find it necessary to adopt a broad concept such as linguistic diversity.

Multilingualism involves a person using and knowing more than one language. Often, individuals master different languages to varying degrees, especially for children developing multilingualism. According to Björk-Willén (2024), the concept of multilingualism encompasses

four components: origin, competence, function, and attitudes. Origin refers to which language or languages a person first acquires. Competence refers to the proficiency in mastering different languages, while function pertains to the languages used in daily life. Attitudes relate to one's beliefs about being multilingual and how others perceive one's multilingualism.

According to the understanding adopted in this thesis, I believe that in educational contexts, the components of function and attitudes are essential. Björk-Willén (2024) argues that function refers to the actual use of languages in everyday life. I want to emphasize that this function is closely tied to accessibility. A child's access to their language affects how well that language develops and how motivated they feel to use it. This means a child's actual language use heavily depends on the accessibility of the language and their motivation. If a child grows up in a family that speaks a language different from the majority language of society, it affects their access to that language. In the worst scenario, this can negatively influence the child's motivation to develop and use the family language, especially if education and society are based on monolingual norms with strong language hierarchies.

For teachers to create conditions that allow all children to participate in language teaching, it is not enough to acknowledge diversity; they also need to understand what this means on an individual level (Cummins, 2000). In practical terms, society and the ECEC have a responsibility to counteract dysfunctional structures. When children encounter positive attitudes, curiosity, and encouragement, it impacts their motivation. If multilingual children are allowed to use all their languages beyond the home environment, it enhances their access to and ability to use those languages in various meaningful contexts. However, it is important to note that merely allowing children in ECEC to use their languages does not in itself support language development. Language use gains developmental relevance when it is connected to purposeful activities, structured frameworks, and pedagogical interaction. Development emerges through mutual communication and interaction, rather than through language use alone.

As Björk-Willén (2024) notes, attitudes connect both to individuals' beliefs and to how others position a person's multilingualism. In early ECEC settings, the broader institutional environment—especially teachers—shapes which linguistic identities become recognized or stay invisible. In this thesis, I understand attitudes as part of the interpretive work through which teachers make sense of children's language practices, an understanding that aligns with the broader sociocultural orientation of Academic Linguaging. Young children, still developing their identities, often look to social belonging and adult responses, making adult feedback a key reference for understanding how their self-image matches the surrounding environment. Teachers' interpretations, including implicit attitudes, can influence whether children are categorized as multilingual and how multilingualism is valued within the setting. These interpretations affect how multilingual children are viewed, whether as linguistic resources or as deviations from perceived norms.

3.5 Language Awareness

The concept of language awareness is widely used but differently defined depending on the perspective taken, and it has also received policy attention (Sopanen, 2019; Eurydice, 2019). Language awareness is not an established notion in its own right; instead, it is a collection of neighboring concepts – all related to humanity's unique way of communicating – that have also been discussed (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020). A narrower interpretation of language awareness focuses solely on the linguistic features of a language, i.e., its form and structure. In this framework, language awareness is employed as a broad concept to theorize the aspects considered necessary in language teaching. I particularly want to draw attention to three aspects that are related to language awareness: (i) teachers' knowledge of languages, (ii) power structures, and (iii) the development of identity.

Several authors have emphasized the importance of initial teacher training in developing pre-service *teachers' knowledge of languages* in general and in providing strategies to make children more language-aware (Breidbach et al., 2011). It is considered beneficial for teachers to reflect on the meaning of language and explore their views and

beliefs about different languages. If children are allowed to discuss language diversity and prejudices, then the perpetuation of narrow views might be prevented. Language-aware teachers will be better equipped to provide equitable treatment for multilingual and monolingual children and view language diversity as a richness (Hawkins, 1999).

Language-aware teachers should also critically examine the underlying *power structures* related to different languages (García, 2017). Research shows that work on multilingualism is more likely to occur when a teacher speaks several languages or when the children are multilingual (Hansell & Bergroth, 2020). Further, in bilingual countries, minority and majority positions tend to arise, within which multilingualism becomes both a richness and a threat (Hansell & Bergroth, 2020). Hèlot (2012) emphasizes that language diversity in education raises numerous complex questions regarding language policy, language ideologies, educational history, and language teaching. She also suggests that language awareness should be addressed more deeply than simply acknowledging the languages spoken in the classroom. Language policies at both national and international levels tend to favor dominant world languages, making multilingualism more likely when a teacher speaks several languages or when different languages are treated unequally.

The relationship between *language and identity* is complex and multifaceted (Baker & Wright, 2017). For multilingual children, acknowledging their multilingual identity is vital to their learning in educational contexts. Baker and Wright (2017) discuss the complexity of the reciprocal relationship between language and identity. Language is often an important boundary marker and the most potent symbol of belonging. Our language or languages often identify our ethnic or geographical origin and cultural background. Therefore, Baker and Wright stress that identity is not static and that we continually rewrite and reconstruct our identity based on our sociocultural experiences and how we interpret them. For this reason, it is essential to understand how children can reflect their identity in relation to their teacher and the beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies constructed in the classroom. Stille and Cummins (2013) pinpoint that each child enters

school with their history and background. If teachers and schools do not acknowledge children's linguistic capital and linguistic capacities, some of these children's achievements will be shut down. According to Stille and Cummins, viewing multilingual children through a deficit lens can signal to them that they are incompetent. This complexity highlights how teachers' awareness of these dynamics can shape their work with multilingual children, particularly in relation to how multilingual identities are supported and made visible in practice. As an example of the complexity between language and identity: for a Swedish-speaking Finn, speaking Swedish in Finland is a crucial marker of belonging to a minority-language group. However, in a context where Swedish is the dominant language, this individual may emphasize other aspects of their identity, such as their Finnish linguistic roots. This example illustrates that identity is not static but fluid and context-dependent.

Baker and Wright (2017) argue that identity is socially constructed and continuously developed through language and intentional negotiation of meanings and understandings. Nevertheless, language alone does not determine how individuals perceive and express their identity. For instance, a person may lose proficiency in Spanish yet still identify as Latino. In this regard, Norton (2013) asserts that identity is constantly re-written, re-imagined, reconstructed, and performed, shaped by the contexts in which individuals find themselves, the people with whom they interact, and the experiences they encounter. It is beneficial for teachers to recognize this fluidity of identity, as they frequently engage with children in situations where meanings are negotiated and reconstructed.

Cummins (2017; 1994) also underscores the interplay between language and identity, emphasizing its relevance in educational contexts. He contends that children's identities are shaped by what the curriculum includes and excludes. Consequently, teachers can either reinforce or limit the expression of particular identities. For example, in many educational systems, curricula tend to protect dominant national, cultural, or religious identities. However, Cummins highlights that power dynamics are integral to constructing identity, both within society at large and within educational institutions. A valid

example is the implicit messages children internalize regarding the legitimacy of their language and cultural practices within the educational setting. Identity negotiations occur in every interaction between teachers and children. This process tends to be relatively straightforward when there is cultural, linguistic, and social class congruence between teachers and children (Cummins, 2017; 1994). However, when such differences become pronounced, these situations illustrate how teachers' practices can involve recognizing and engaging with children's prior experiences and identities.

Part 1 of the account of the thesis's theoretical framework has outlined the theoretical foundations for the stance taken on language, multilingualism, and language diversity.

3.6 Part II: Teaching and Didaktik

To create a solid theoretical basis for language teaching in ECEC, the theoretical perspective on language, multilingualism, and language diversity needs to be connected to a pedagogical framework. *Part 2* shifts the focus to teaching theory, elaborating on how the German-Nordic Didaktik tradition supports the conceptualization of the principles and structures of intentional language teaching in practice. It is essential to clarify the Didaktik term in an English-language text like this, given the misleading similarity between Didaktik and the English term didactics: the meaning of Didaktik is closer to the English concept of *pedagogy* (Hamilton, 1999). I utilize two key elements of Didaktik theorizing, specifically (i) the pedagogical relationship between the teacher, the child, and the content, and (ii) the Didaktik analysis, which focuses on teachers' preparation and selection of specific teaching content.

3.6.1 Didaktik

Didaktik has a long history, with Comenius regarded as a key figure, mainly due to his 1657 publication, *Didactica Magna*. Through this work, Didaktik was established in Europe. Comenius' work and interpretation of Didaktik also laid the foundation for defining Didaktik as *the art of teaching*. Therefore, Didaktik can be understood as the study of teaching, connecting content analysis, instruction planning,

actual enactment, and subsequent reflection (Wahlström, 2019). Didaktik theorizes the relationship between its three components: the teacher, the learner (in this case, a child), and the educational content (Klafki, 2006). All three parts must be present for a situation to be considered a teaching situation.

In the Didaktik tradition, practice and theory are given a place that can be understood as intertwined: Didaktik addresses what happens in practice but is also an independent field of research (Hjälmeskog et al., 2020). By drawing on the definition of Didaktik as the art of teaching, Hjälmeskog et al. (2020) highlight that it is more than just about methodology – it also involves a particular kind of expertise. A teacher with Didaktik competence has the ability to transform theoretical knowledge into practical action, but also translate children’s individual needs and interests into teaching. The key is to formulate a clear purpose for the teaching and create meaningful interactions between children and the content being taught.

The Didaktik triangle is a well-known model that illustrates the central ideas in Didaktik, and illuminates the complexity of teaching (Hjälmeskog et al., 2020). The triangle consists of three components: the teacher, the content, and the learner. What is unique about Didaktik theorizing is that the relationships between these components are in the center of attention. Even if the object of study focuses solely on one of the corners of the triangle, that component cannot be fully understood without considering the other components and their relationships. This thesis takes a teacher-focused perspective, meaning that language teaching is understood and approached from the teacher’s standpoint. However, placing the teacher in the spotlight does not mean that the learner, the content, and the various relationships between the teacher, the learner, and the content are disregarded in the thesis’s examination.

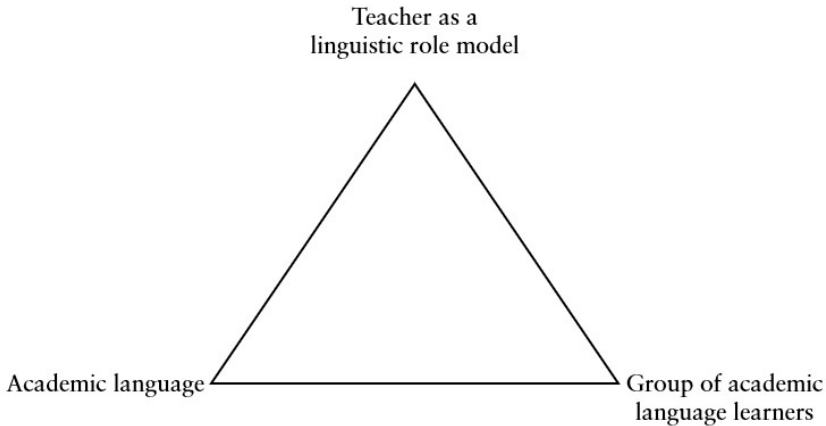


Figure 1. *Didaktik triangle of academic language teaching.*

Figure 1 illustrates the Didaktik triangle of academic language teaching, a conceptual model that captures the three key relationships underpinning academic language teaching in an ECEC context.

In Figure 1, the teacher is placed at the top of the triangle for two reasons. The first reason is that the thesis focuses on the teacher's perspective. The second reason for placing the teacher at the top is the teacher's role in ECEC and as a linguistic role model and expert in the teaching process. In ECEC, it is crucial for teachers to recognize their role as linguistic role models, not only in formal situations but throughout the entire day. A teacher's language use is reflected in children. If a teacher uses correct, precise, nuanced, and descriptive language, children will gradually learn and adopt it. The teacher's linguistic role model responsibility is not limited to interaction between teacher and child; it is also essential in planning language teaching. A teacher who functions as a linguistic role model acts in accordance with this role but also plans teaching based on it.

The teacher-academic language relationship concerns the teacher's knowledge of academic language, personal connection to the content, and pedagogical competence in adapting it to suit the children involved in the academic language teaching. Wahlström (2016) refers to

this relationship as presentation, while Lyngsnes and Rismark (2017) call it representation.

The group of academic language learners-academic language relationship refers to children's connection to academic language as content, as well as their actual and potential levels of linguistic knowledge. This relationship is referred to as *experience* (Wahlström, 2016; Lyngsnes & Rismark, 2017).

The group of children-teacher relationship is often referred to as *interaction* (Wahlström, 2016) or *communication* (Lyngsnes & Rismark, 2017). I want to emphasize that this relationship is crucial for effective teaching. From the thesis perspective, this relationship concerns the teacher's theoretical knowledge of how children learn, including the most suitable methods for specific content and the importance of creating a safe, caring environment between the teacher and children.

In academic languaging, the teacher's role serves as the entrance point, but the relationships with the child and the educational content are strongly present. The teacher-child side of the triangle is considered the teacher's knowledge of each child's language development and zone of proximal development, which serves as one of the bases for planning and undertaking the teaching. The teacher-content side of the triangle highlights the importance of viewing academic language as a means of teaching content in early childhood education. A strength of Didaktik's theory is that it provides a structure for maintaining attention to educational content; the content can never be removed from the equation. Academic language is not to be taught separately from the everyday life of the preschool (Bunch & Martin, 2021); however, it is to be understood as a distinct content area.

Instructional preparation is Didaktik theorizing considered one of the most critical aspects of teaching. Klafki's *Didaktik analysis* develops theoretical support for this (Klafki, 2006). The analysis is intended both for use by teachers as a tool in their everyday preparation for teaching (Klafki, 2006), and as an analytical tool in the academic study of pedagogy, teaching, and learning. The analysis consists of

five main questions that the teacher should ask herself while preparing for a teaching situation (Wickman et al., 2018):

1. *What general ideas does the content include?*
2. *How does the content matter to the child's actual intellectual life?*
3. *How is the content important for the child's future life?*
4. *How should the content be structured based on questions 1-3?*
5. *What actual cases, phenomena, situations, or experiments can be used to make this content available and exciting for the child?*

The questions help the teacher discern central aspects, structure the teaching, and create meaningful teaching for children. Over time, Klafki's original questions have been condensed into central questions to guide teacher preparation. These are what (content), how (should this content be taught), and *why* (should this content be taught and these methods be chosen).

The Didaktik analysis helps teachers view language as content, while also critically examining it and elaborating on the content and methods that support children's development. Klafki's model emphasizes content by acknowledging children's existing knowledge and encouraging teachers to consider how the content and teaching may support the child in the future. It also provides a tool to raise awareness of each child's actual level of development and the next step.

The thesis's understanding of teaching and its constitutive elements is grounded in Didaktik as a science and theory of teaching (Gundem, 2011). Within this tradition, teaching is viewed as a socially legitimized and professionally organized activity, where decisions about content, methods, and purposes are always situated within a wider educational and societal context. When applied to academic language teaching in ECEC, this perspective foregrounds teaching as an activity embedded in children's social worlds, where play, interaction, and participation structure the conditions for learning. From this vantage point, academic language is treated as a form of content that becomes accessible through the socially organized practices in which teachers and children engage.

3.6.2 Positioning in the Field of Subject-Didaktik

In Didaktik research, a distinction is often made between subject-Didaktik, general Didaktik, and theme Didaktik (Gundem, 2011). This thesis is positioned within the field of subject-Didaktik. Although the concept of teaching is evident for ECEC at the policy level and in practice, it is still more common to discuss children's learning and language stimulation than teaching of language. Therefore, this thesis highlights language and communication from a subject-Didaktik perspective in early childhood education and care. A subject-Didaktik perspective makes it possible to identify how linguistic content is selected, shaped, and embedded in social activities, thereby providing a framework for analysing the opportunities children have to encounter and use more complex forms of language.

Subject-Didaktik research engages in the study of how teaching and learning can be designed within a specific subject area. It involves understanding and developing the pedagogical methods, theories, and strategies that are most fruitful for teaching a particular subject. Subject-Didaktik combines subject knowledge with Didaktik principles to create content-rich teaching adapted to children's needs and conditions (Gundem, 2011).

Björklund and Pramling Samuelsson (2017) argue that subject-Didaktik is essential in ECEC, although the term is rarely used. They suggest that the lack of a subject-Didaktik discussion and terminology is most likely due to the association of subjects with the school system, timetables, and a school-like curriculum. However, Björklund and Pramling Samuelsson contend that by defining what subject-Didaktik means within ECEC (and perhaps redefining what is meant by subjects), subject-Didaktik can also be associated with early childhood education and care. When discussing subject-Didaktik in ECEC, the "subjects" do not necessarily have to be linked to traditional disciplines, such as the natural sciences, but can be seen as more open, transdisciplinary areas of knowledge. Using the term "knowledge areas" instead of "subjects" opens a new understanding of subject content, illustrating the diversity of subject-Didaktik within ECEC.

Sustainable development and aesthetics are not traditional disciplines, but they are important knowledge areas that could be regarded as subject Didaktik areas in ECEC. Although language constitutes its own discipline and subject in school, the subject Didaktik related to language and communication in ECEC should not be associated with a school-like view of teaching. Instead, language and communication should be considered a highly critical knowledge area. Discussing language and communication in terms of subject-Didaktik may support teachers to focus on language and communication teaching, plan and choose methods aimed at enhancing children's knowledge in these areas. It may also enhance systematic reflection on how the difficulties and complexities associated with the knowledge area—such as language diversity and multilingualism—are systematically and continuously addressed and supported in teaching.

When discussing Didaktik, terms such as *subject*, *content*, and *learning object* are prominent. Björklund and Pramling Samuelsson (2017) clarify a distinction between these terms. According to the researchers, the *subject* encompasses a broader and more specific area of knowledge. This thesis addresses the broader field of *language and communication*. Traditionally, early childhood education does not follow a subject-oriented approach. Instead, it is subject-integrated, meaning that a single teaching activity encompasses various subjects and areas of knowledge. For example, it is less common to have a teaching activity specifically planned and intended to develop children's language. Instead, children's language is often stimulated during music activities, in various exploratory theme projects, or through everyday discussions as they dress the children to go outside and play (Charles, 2014; Nordberg, 2019). The *content* question is particularly challenging in ECEC because it is not approached in a subject-oriented manner. The preschool curriculum does not guide teachers by pointing out content in subject areas. Instead, play constitutes a central element through which children experience and develop various skills and abilities (Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2022). Björklund and Pramling Samuelsson (2017) argue that content is a defined area within a subject that children focus their attention on. The content becomes the object of communication, exploration, and creation. In academic languaging, academic language becomes the teaching

content. However, since “academic language” encompasses a broad field of knowledge, a clear pedagogical purpose can guide children’s attention toward specific activities, such as retelling a story or describing objects in a bag.

Björklund and Pramling Samuelsson (2017) use the concept of a *learning object*, which refers to the knowledge that the teaching aims to impart. In academic language teaching, the concept of “purpose” is used instead. It could be viewed as beneficial if language teaching were based on children’s linguistic needs and interests. In this way, conditions are created for children to engage in meaningful learning in the present moment and in learning that will be purposeful for their future. Furthermore, this approach enables children to develop their language skills by promoting progression. Formulating a purpose for the teaching also helps the teacher break the teaching goals into smaller parts, directing the children’s attention to a specific focus. Defining a purpose is an important step, yet also a challenging task, especially when linguistic needs vary greatly.

Taken together, this chapter has established the theoretical foundation of the thesis in two interconnected parts. The first part accounted for the linguistic perspectives that shape the understanding of language, multilingualism, and language diversity in ECEC. The second part specified the Didaktik-based approach to teaching, which offers concepts for describing and analyzing teaching as an intentional and relational activity. Together, these theoretical frames constitute the theoretical core of the thesis’s focus on language teaching in early childhood education and care. The framework does not prescribe specific practices but defines the conceptual landscape for the empirical studies and clarifies the underlying assumptions regarding language and teaching throughout the thesis.

The theoretical framework is applied in different ways across the two studies. In the survey study, it serves as a conceptual guide for designing the survey and shaping its themes. In the practice-based study, the framing guides both the analysis of data from ECEC practice and the development of the Academic Languageing model. These applications are detailed in the method chapter, where the connection between theory and empirical design is explained thoroughly.

4 Research Overview

It is well established that early childhood education and care significantly benefit children's early language development. ECEC, as a language-developing environment, is a field of research dedicated to studying children's language development within the ECEC context, from both learning and teaching perspectives. This overview summarizes previous research in the field with a relatively strict focus on two key aspects seen as most relevant to the thesis and its aim: **teachers' language-teaching strategies and multilingualism**, and **teachers' perspectives on multilingualism**. The overview gives most room to teachers' strategies for increasing children's language skills. Multilingualism is viewed here as a natural part of ECEC, prompting the inclusion of studies on the language development of multilingual children. Although some research is not solely about language teaching, it provides valuable insights into multilingualism within ECEC. In the Nordic context, specific terminology like 'language teaching' is uncommon. However, I intentionally use these terms to highlight that early childhood education and care is a setting for teaching young children.

The databases ERIC and Nordic Base of Early Childhood Education and Care were used to search for previous research. The first version of the search was conducted in 2020, and an updated search was conducted in 2025. Many of the included studies were also identified through snowball searching. The following keywords were used: *language development + ECEC + instruction; language learning + ECEC + pedagogy; second language learning + ECEC + instruction; language learning + ECEC + teaching strategies; multilingualism + ECEC*. These searches yielded hits on 180-1060 studies. The number of included studies was limited by focusing primarily on those conducted within the last 15 years. Additionally, the selection criteria included only studies that focused on children aged 1-6 years old, the ECEC context, and language development. In some cases, older studies have been concluded due to the limited availability of new research.

4.1 Teachers' Language Teaching Strategies

Research on teachers' language-teaching strategies has focused on teachers' communication patterns (Nasiopoulou et al., 2022), the importance of play for language development (Blum-Kulka & Gorbatt, 2014), read-aloud (Kirsch, 2024), and direct vocabulary instruction (Chaplana & Vasileiou, 2024). These earlier studies often take a normative, monolingual perspective, assuming that all children speak the language of instruction as their first language or that language development is a linear process for most children. Language is viewed as a prerequisite for learning and an effect of learning. Thus, it is both about internal cognitive processes and communication (Norling, 2015). Research on teachers' language teaching strategies is extensive. Studies conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries tend to focus on teaching, while those in Northern Europe and the Nordics tend to focus on learning. This can be explained by geographically differing views on ECEC, teaching, and learning.

A substantial portion of research on teachers' language-teaching strategies focuses on *read-aloud and its potential for language development*. Many intervention studies have been conducted to develop teachers' reading strategies, as reading strategies are a strong predictor of the effectiveness of read-aloud (Alatalo & Westlund, 2021; Hindman & Wasik, 2012; Hofslundsengen et al., 2023; Pramling & Samuelsson, 2025). Dickinson and colleagues' (2019) intervention study examined how teachers can teach vocabulary to children during read-aloud sessions. The results of the study indicate that when teachers use explicit instruction, such as asking specific questions about the story and introducing new words clearly, children can develop their vocabulary in both breadth and depth. Wasik (2010) explored how teachers' reading strategies can be enhanced by conducting an intervention study to increase children's vocabulary. By participating in a development program, teachers had the opportunity to learn various reading strategies. Among other things, teachers were taught how to select meaningful words from the story that needed explanation and how to use artifacts to support children's understanding of the narrative.

Despite scientific evidence supporting the importance of reading aloud, several studies have highlighted the difficulties of reading

aloud in an ECEC context in recent years. Damber et al. (2013) conclude that this is primarily because reading aloud is rarely used for language development, and that there is a lack of established methodologies and goals for reading. Alatalo and colleagues (2024) examined the reading and writing practices of ECEC teachers in Sweden, Finland, and Norway, focusing on how these activities were planned and organized, as well as their purposes. Most teachers reported regularly reading aloud, but it was rarely planned. The primary purpose of reading aloud was to promote learning and development, foster a sense of community, and manage the group of children. Fassler (2014) examined the impact of book conversations on multilingual language development. The study was conducted in an American ECEC setting, where English served as the lingua franca, although there was significant variation in the children's family languages. Fassler demonstrates that interactive book conversations contributed to children's successive bilingualism, but completion can be challenging for teachers. Fassler highlights that by giving children the opportunity to retell the story, connect the content to their own experiences, and use all their languages, these book conversations can be very fruitful. However, it is challenging for a teacher to ensure every child's language development, as their language backgrounds and needs can vary.

Extensive research on teachers' *communication patterns* has also been conducted. One area of interest is what opportunities teachers give children to engage in discussions, challenge children's narration, and what kind of communication patterns are revealed in the interaction between teachers and children (Downer et al., 2024; Henry & Pianta, 2011; Nasiopoulou et al., 2022; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008). The overall results indicate that teachers often respond to children's utterances but do not sufficiently deepen children's narratives. Paatsch, Scull, and Nolan (2019), as well as Gjems (2012), examined teachers' communication patterns that support children's language development and how teachers facilitate children's verbal expressions during the transition from ECEC to school. These two studies primarily conclude that children develop their language primarily through interactions with adults and peers. Conversations are emphasized as crucial for language development. While teachers consistently ask questions

and respond to children, they tend to favor closed questions, which are not advantageous for children's language development because they limit opportunities for long, meaningful conversations (Gjems, 2012).

A research overview by Langeloo and colleagues (2019) concluded that teachers tend to modify their language more when interacting with multilingual children. The authors found that teachers utilize simplified language and other communication resources, such as images and artifacts, to enhance their instruction. Langeloo et al. (2019) highlight that teachers recognize everyday interaction as essential for multilingual children's language development. However, by using simplified language, there is a risk that multilingual children will not receive the same linguistic input in these interactions (Hofslundsengen et al., 2023; Langeloo et al., 2019).

Research on *the importance of communication during routine situations for children's language development* has primarily examined how adults and children interact in these situations (Ree & Emilson, 2020) and how teachers can support language development in routine situations (Evensen Hansen, 2018). Most studies have examined mealtime situations in ECEC (Bae, 2004; Ødegaard, 2006, 2007). Research has shown that mealtimes are important pedagogical moments when adults and children gather to discuss various topics. Kultti (2013) assumed in her study that children's development occurs through interaction and participation, which can happen, for example, during routine situations. Her study aimed to examine how mealtimes in ECEC can contribute to the development of multilingual children's languages. Results mainly indicate that mealtimes are crucial situations for the language development of multilingual children. However, a prerequisite is that all children feel involved and can be involved in the discussions. For children to engage in discussions during mealtimes, the topics should relate to everyday experiences (Kultti, 2013). Nordberg (2019) also examined routine situations in her study. Her study aimed to examine how teachers can support children's language development in the 'tambour situation'. By observing this situation, teachers could see for themselves what they could do to make the tambour experience more language-developing. For example, it

was highlighted that teachers must pay attention to how they interact with children and that the classroom environment could be more language-stimulating.

Several studies have explored *the connection between play and language development*. Generally, play and interaction are found to be language-developing (Cekaite et al., 2014), and play has long been considered an important component of early learning (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). Research conducted within this theme has been interested in the effects of play on children's language and literacy development, teachers' understanding of play and how they use play to support children's language development, and how children verbally interact with peers in play (Conner, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls & Friehe, 2014; Craig-Unkefer & Kaiser, 2002, 2003; Pyle et al., 2024). The primary result is that play provides children with numerous opportunities to develop their language skills through interaction with others. The question is what kind of language skills are developed, and research does not address this. Research also highlights that, since play is multifaceted, it provides teachers with opportunities to support children's language development in various ways.

An interesting contradiction exists between the potential of free play and the need for adult-led play. In an extensive study by Markova (2016), she concludes that free play is more language-developing than other structured activities. Schwartz et al. (2021) are in the same vein and highlight the importance of providing space for free play, as it allows a kind of languaging that is beneficial for those learning the language of instruction as a second language. On the other hand, teacher-led play has garnered considerable attention in recent research (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Weisberg et al., 2016). Adult-led play consists of two key elements: child autonomy and adult guidance. A teacher can build a play context for specific purposes, and by participating in play, the teacher can offer more advanced language support than peers (Erdemir & Brutt-Griffler, 2022). Norling and Lillvist (2016) examined how ECEC staff supported children's concept development during play. This study reveals that different forms of play, including spontaneous and adult-led play, provide children with opportunities to develop an understanding of various concepts. Hagen (2016)

examined the connection between different language activities and language comprehension. She was interested in what language activities Norwegian children participated in and whether these activities could predict children's language comprehension. Her results, interestingly, show that, unlike several other studies, play and language games do not predict children's language comprehension, whereas more explicit language activities, such as daily book reading, do.

Research has also focused on *additional instructional strategies, namely direct vocabulary training*. Within a Nordic context, this research interest is relatively small, but in an American context, there is extensive research on direct vocabulary instruction. Studies on this theme have primarily focused on the effects of this teaching method on children's language development (Biemiller, 2001; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Beck & McKeown, 2007; Bonnes Bowne, Yoshikawa & Snow, 2017). According to these studies, there is a connection among vocabulary, reading comprehension, and academic success. Longitudinal studies indicate that direct vocabulary instruction at an early age predicts later reading comprehension. As research has underscored the importance of vocabulary instruction, scholars have emphasized the need for explicit teaching strategies.

Rogde, Melby-Lervåg, and Lervåg (2016), along with Auleear Owodally (2014, 2015), have explored how direct vocabulary instruction can enhance the language development of multilingual children. Second language learners generally possess a weaker vocabulary than their monolingual peers. Findings suggest that direct vocabulary instruction increases children's vocabulary. However, Auleear Owodally's results indicate that if the language environment in ECEC settings is deficient, the impact of direct vocabulary instruction is diminished. Previous research has revealed that language teaching is often integrated into other activities. Consequently, Saunders, Foorman, and Carlson (2006) aimed to investigate whether children learning English as a second language in an American context require separate English language lessons. The researchers found that children who participated in standalone language lessons, characterized by a more formal and systematic approach, demonstrated greater linguistic

expressiveness and literacy skills than those who engaged only in integrated language instruction.

In summary, research on teachers' language teaching strategies has unpacked the details of both implicit and explicit strategies. In a Nordic context, using read-alouds and direct vocabulary training may be considered explicit teaching strategies; however, research suggests that read-alouds are rarely used explicitly. Explicit teaching strategies seem to be more commonly employed by teachers in an Anglo-Saxon context, while implicit teaching strategies are more prevalent in a Nordic context. This can possibly be attributed to differing views on teaching across geographical contexts. A curriculum tradition characterizes Anglo-Saxon countries, whereas Nordic early childhood education and care emphasize an implicit approach to language learning, drawing from a German-Nordic Didaktik tradition. Teachers in a Nordic context value opportunities that arise naturally during the day in ECEC. Everyday situations are especially significant for language learning, as they involve interaction and daily conversations during routine activities. In contrast, teachers in Anglo-Saxon contexts prioritize formalizing language teaching and providing children with guidance in specific educational scenarios aimed at specific linguistic goals, such as direct vocabulary instruction. A defining feature of the Nordic context is that play is accorded a special status and recognized as crucial for children's language development. However, there is ongoing debate over whether free play or adult-led play is preferable. It is also important to note that play has increasingly garnered attention in geographical contexts where it has traditionally been absent from teaching and learning. Nordic research is gradually becoming interested in exploring and discussing complementary alternatives to the implicit tradition. This trend indicates that Nordic and Anglo-Saxon research have much to learn from one another.

4.2 Multilingualism and teachers' thoughts about multilingualism

Research on *teachers' thoughts about multilingualism* has recently attracted interest among researchers. Research focusing on multilingual aspects has approached the question of multilingualism by examining how teachers reason and discuss multilingualism in early childhood

education and care (Haukås, 2016; Kirsch et al., 2020; Kultti & Pramling, 2020; Sawyer et al., 2017). A Finnish study by Bergroth and Hansell (2020) examined how early childhood education and care staff reason about language awareness, a concept incorporated into the Finnish curriculum. The staff members who participated in the study all worked in Swedish-speaking ECEC settings in Finland. Results indicate that the use or visibility of languages other than the language of instruction depends on the staff and children's language backgrounds. Multilingual staff or a group of multilingual children tends to foster multilingual teaching approaches. In Sweden, a similar study was conducted by Fredriksson and Lindgren Eneflo (2019), who explored how ECEC staff discuss their work in supporting children's first languages and the language of instruction. A notable aspect of this study is that multilingualism is viewed as a resource, and ECEC staff play a significant role in addressing these issues. The results show that the staff expresses an ambition to make all languages visible and employ various strategies. For example, the staff attempts to learn individual words in the children's first languages and shows interest in various cultural expressions. However, the results also reveal that ECEC staff feel uncertain whether they are doing 'the right thing' regarding multilingual children's language development.

There is also research about *language policies and norms within early childhood education and care*. Studies have primarily focused on examining the connections between the language policy expressed and used by teachers and how children respond to it. Studies have shown that a common tendency among adults is to maintain a language policy, either to separate languages or to foster an accepting and encouraging climate towards multilingualism (Boyd & Huss, 2017; Cekaite & Evaldsson, 2017; Masny & Bastien, 2018). Boyd and Ottesjö (2016) examined how an English-speaking ECEC setting in Sweden implemented its two-fold language policy. The ECEC staff spoke only English to the children, as expected. Children had different language backgrounds; some used English at home, while others did not. The staff's language backgrounds also varied. The overall results indicate that the staff maintained an almost monolingual policy, speaking only English to the children. Although the staff was generally consistent in their language use, there were occasions when they applied

a bilingual policy. This usually happens when correcting children's behavior. The results also indicate that children tended to use a broader bilingual praxis within an explicitly monolingual English context. Bergroth and Palviainen (2016) found similar results in their study. They examined bilingual children's communicative actions in a Swedish-speaking ECEC setting in Finland. The researcher could reveal that, despite a top-down monolingual language policy, children are their agents who construct their bilingual policy in various ways.

Research has also focused on the *strategies teachers employ to create a multilingual classroom climate*. Research has shown that fostering a favorable, multilingual classroom climate benefits the identity development of multilingual children (Puskás, 2017; Ragnarsdóttir, 2019; Hofslundsengen et al., 2020). Palmer, Martínez, Mateus, and Henderson (2014) investigated the strategies employed by two ECEC teachers to promote children's bilingualism. The researchers concluded that these teachers created a dynamic bilingual environment, recognizing children as bilingual and positively acknowledging their language use, for example, through translanguaging. Rajendram (2014), like Schwartz and Asli (2013), also emphasizes that translanguaging offers a new perspective in ECEC classrooms that strengthens the language and identity development of multilingual children.

In summary, Research on multilingualism and teachers' perceptions of it has increased due to the multilingual turn in ECEC, both nationally and internationally. Results indicate that the multilingual backgrounds of staff and children often shape multilingual ECEC environments. When children or adults speak different languages, these languages are utilized and made visible in the teaching. However, despite their aspirations, many teachers feel uncertain about how to address language diversity. It also appears that teachers in multilingual environments either attempt to separate the different languages or strive to cultivate an inclusive multilingual environment. The children either seek to challenge the prevailing language policies or develop their strategies. Although multilingualism is not a new concept, it seems to be gaining prominence in an educational context. Much emphasis has been placed on how children's family languages can be integrated and made visible in the environment. Conversely, little

research systematically examines how to support multilingual children's language development, giving attention to both their family language and the language of instruction.

4.3 Conclusions

This research overview has examined teacher-focused research on language teaching in ECEC, drawing on both international and national studies. While policy in countries such as Sweden and Finland emphasizes teaching, the research has primarily focused on learning. This imbalance highlights the need for studies that explicitly address language teaching in ECEC.

Previous research provides three main contributions:

- (I) The significant role of interaction and play in language development,
- (II) The importance of reading aloud for oral language growth, and
- (III) The challenge of multilingualism and the need for equitable language-teaching practices.

Interaction and play have shown to be central to language development, with teachers acting as linguistic role models. However, not all interactions are equally meaningful, quality matters. High-quality interactions should be linguistically challenging and responsive, which can be difficult for multilingual children. The research demonstrates that teachers tend to simplify language in these cases. Play seem to offer rich opportunities for language learning, yet research lacks clarity on which types of play are most beneficial and what language skills they foster. There is also debate about adult-led versus free play, indicating a need for further investigation.

Reading aloud is widely recognized as crucial for oral language development. Both quantity and quality matter, including teachers' strategies and use of books as pedagogical tools. Despite this, studies show that teachers report increasingly using reading for purposes other than language development, such as calming groups, and plan fewer

read-aloud sessions. This trend is concerning, given declining literacy rates and calls for research into teachers' choices and practices.

Multilingualism in ECEC is growing, yet the research highlights that teachers often feel uncertain about managing it. Although research provides strategies for promoting multilingualism, realization in practice remains limited. This matter underscores the need for practice-based studies and deeper exploration of factors behind teachers' uncertainty, including organizational conditions.

Research regarding language teaching in ECEC is relatively unified, with few debates. I have nevertheless identified a knowledge gap: in scientific discussions regarding language and language development, researchers increasingly emphasize the importance of children, as early as in the ECEC stage, developing academic language skills. The question of everyday and academic language has its roots in linguistics. When teachers in ECEC contexts are expected to focus on academic language, this question also becomes relevant to ECEC research, as it serves as a language development arena. To this day, studies addressing academic language development in ECEC is almost non-existent, especially in the Nordics. Research is needed that examines what academic language means to children under school age, how such teaching is conducted, what content this type of teaching entails, and what effects it has.

The research overview further shows that ECEC research often leans towards sociocultural perspectives focused on learning, and that most studies are qualitative. Broadening theoretical and methodological approaches in research into the complex issues of language teaching can provide deeper understanding and nuances.

5 Method

Chapter five outlines the research methods and choices regarding the research design, execution, and ethical considerations of the thesis. First, a brief overview of the thesis's mixed-methods approach and the rationale for choosing this design is presented. Next, the quantitative and qualitative methods used in the thesis are described.

5.1 Mixed-Method Approach

Studying a complex phenomenon, such as early language teaching in contexts characterized by language diversity, requires examination at multiple levels. This thesis employs a mixed-methods design. The survey study (quantitative strand) develops knowledge about teachers' perspectives on language teaching practices, strategies, and their role as linguistic role models, providing foundational information for developing the model. The practice-based study (qualitative strand) uses insights from interviews and planning frameworks from participating teachers undertaking teaching according to the model at hand. The theoretical framing (see Chapter 3) underpins both strands but is operationalized differently. In the survey, it informs instrument construction; in the practice-based study, it guides analysis and development.

The thesis's empirical material originates from both studies. The survey data were analyzed quantitatively, while the empirical material from the practice-based study was analyzed qualitatively. Thus, the quantitative and qualitative material have been treated separately, each serving its own purpose. The purpose of the survey study was to contribute to the development of knowledge about teachers' teaching strategies for multilingual children, thereby providing an important empirical foundation for designing and implementing the practice-based study. The purpose of the practice-based study was to develop knowledge about how academic language teaching can be organized. The two strands, thus, build on each other: the quantitative strand provides breadth and patterning across settings; the qualitative strand gives depth in enactment, mechanisms, and iterative refinement. The

thesis's research design, therefore, supports a cumulative logic from mapping to development.

Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) say research is mixed when it combines both methods at one or more stages. Johnson et al. (2007) describe mixed methods as blending elements from both approaches to increase breadth, depth, and understanding. This integration can happen within a single study or across related studies.

Mixed methods were chosen for two reasons. The first reason is to gain a broader, deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward their work with multilingual children across two national contexts. The second reason is to contribute to ECEC research by incorporating quantitative methods, which are relatively limited in the Nordic context.

Harju-Luukkainen et al. (2022) advocate mixed methods in research, highlighting their potential to enrich the field of ECEC. The authors hypothesize that the dominance of qualitative research in Nordic ECEC is rooted in long-standing traditions within Nordic early childhood research. The limited presence of quantitative researchers in ECEC creates barriers to adopting quantitative or mixed-methods approaches that could provide greater depth and breadth in exploring research phenomena. This restricted methodological diversity may hinder efforts to support children's learning and development on a larger scale, as policy decisions often rely on large datasets.

5.1.1 Survey Study Design

The survey aimed to increase understanding of teachers' perspectives on language teaching practices and strategies, and on their role as linguistic role models in their work with multilingual children in Sweden and Finland. It identified teachers' valued strategies, offering insights into teachers' reported practices and potential areas for improvement. The study highlights how academic language can be integrated, especially in language-diverse settings, providing a basis for developing a teaching model for academic languaging in early childhood education.

de Leeuw, Hox, and Dillman (2008) mean that the survey method is chosen when there is an interest in collecting data from a specific group of people to understand what that group does and thinks. I conducted a survey study to examine how teachers report implementing language teaching for multilingual children and the difficulties they face when planning and implementing this approach. The advantage of survey studies is that they can be sent to large numbers of people. In this case, a web survey design was chosen. This allowed data collection from as many teachers as possible, including teachers in both Sweden and Finland.

5.1.1.1 Designing the Survey

Several factors need to be considered when designing a survey, ranging from formulating practical questions and designing the survey effectively to determining how the sampling process will be conducted and how the distribution will be implemented (de Leeuw et al., 2008). The survey was designed using Örebro University's ORU-survey tool. Survey questions aimed to examine reported language teaching strategies and conditions in ECEC across Sweden and Finland. A web survey was distributed to qualified ECEC teachers. Items were organized into themes that reflected the main findings in prior research and the thesis's theoretical definitions and understanding of language, multilingualism, language awareness, and Didaktik. The survey's themes included **book reading, interaction and everyday discussions, play, other language activities and planning, teachers' professional knowledge and thoughts on multilingualism, and work conditions** (see the complete survey in Appendix 1).

A small pilot study with six participants, including ECEC teachers and researchers from Sweden and Finland, was conducted to ensure survey clarity and relevance (Campanelli, 2008). Feedback led to minor revisions, mainly in the background section.

5.1.1.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent via municipal principals to reach qualified teachers in multiple municipalities. In the sampling process, consideration was given to the fact that in Swedish

ECEC settings, there are typically 1–2 teachers per department, whereas in Finland, there is usually 1 teacher per department. For this reason, the survey was distributed to all ECEC settings in 16 municipalities in Sweden and seven in Finland to increase the likelihood of receiving responses. It was also clear from the outset that the number of responses would differ between Sweden and Finland, as there are significantly fewer Swedish-medium ECEC settings in Finland than in Sweden. In Sweden, municipalities were selected based on statistics from the Swedish National Agency for Education (2021), which reports the number of children in preschool classes who do not speak Swedish as their family language. The selected municipalities have a significantly higher proportion (26% or more) of children with a mother tongue other than Swedish compared to the national average. In Finland, municipalities were selected based on statistics from the Association of Finnish Municipalities (2021), with a focus on officially bilingual municipalities. These municipalities have a minority Swedish-speaking population, ranging from 2% to 29% of the total population. The survey was sent to municipalities where Swedish is a significant minority language to reach ECEC settings that children from multilingual families likely attend.

The survey was open for three weeks in which two reminders were sent. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants provided consent by checking a box; afterward, the survey opened, and they could answer the questions. In Finland, a research permit from the municipality was required to complete data collection. In total, 233 responses were received from Sweden and 42 from Finland.

5.1.1.3 Data Analysis

The dataset is extensive, as the survey encompasses teaching practices, teachers' professional conditions, and their perspectives on multilingualism. Two factors influenced the choice of analytical methods.

First, the entire dataset could not be used in a single analysis, as the results would not be presented logically and concisely. This necessitated using different analytical methods to approach the data in a versatile manner. Second, it became evident that data from Sweden and Finland could not be combined in the same analysis due to

differences in dataset sizes. Consequently, two quantitative analyses were conducted, with data from Sweden and Finland analyzed and presented separately. The survey data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.

Before selecting the analytical methods, I explored the dataset to better understand it. This meant conducting descriptive analyses using the SPSS software (Pallant, 2007). The descriptive statistics present the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each variable. Additionally, frequency distributions were examined to understand how respondents' answers were distributed across the different response options. Through descriptive analyses of the data, an initial understanding of the teaching strategies teachers reported using, as well as their professional knowledge and perspectives on language teaching for multilingual children, was gained. After analyzing the descriptive data, the responses to the open-ended survey questions were reviewed. Descriptive statistics important for understanding further analyses are reported in sections 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 of the results. Additionally, Appendix 8 reports descriptive statistics regarding teacher profiles.

Choosing an analytical method requires clearly defining the dataset's possibilities. Different methods serve various purposes and must be suited to the data (Pallant, 2007). Since the Swedish dataset was larger and could support more techniques, I started with it, expecting the insights to guide my later analysis of the Finnish data. To provide insight into several perspectives of the 233 teachers on language teaching and multilingualism in ECEC, analytical methods for understanding different groupings in the data were explored. This resulted in choosing a two-step cluster analysis to define teacher profiles.

The analysis resulting in *teacher profiles* (see Chapter 6) uses the Swedish dataset. It employs the following analytical methods: a two-step cluster analysis and a one-way ANOVA for group comparisons. A two-step cluster analysis is a statistical method to identify natural groupings (clusters) within a dataset based on similarities or differences across multiple variables (Pallant, 2007). It is particularly useful when working with larger datasets, including categorical and

continuous variables. This analytical method was appropriate since I wanted to understand the participating teachers as a professional group. A one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) between groups is a statistical test used to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the means of three or more independent groups on other key variables (Pallant, 2007). By using this statistical test, I gained a deeper understanding of how the teacher profiles differed from one another and how they related to specific conditions in language teaching. Thus, the results of these tests helped me better understand the various teacher profiles.

As part of the survey analysis, an additional exploratory step focused on teachers' perceptions of themselves as linguistic role models. This aspect was important because the idea of language modelling is central in Nordic ECEC traditions, and it provided a way to deepen the understanding of how teachers see themselves in relation to reported language teaching practices.

The analysis that generated an understanding of *teachers as linguistic role models* (see Chapter 7) uses the Finnish dataset and employs chi-square tests. A Chi-square test is a statistical test used to determine if there is a significant association or difference between categorical variables (Pallant, 2007). It compares the observed frequencies across categories with the expected frequencies, calculated under the assumption of no association between the variables. The chi-square test of independence was used to examine the relationship between teachers serving as linguistic role models and other survey variables. In this way, I could understand how teachers' perceptions of themselves as linguistic role models related to the teaching strategies they reported using.

5.1.1.4 Detailed Description of Data Analysis Regarding Teacher Profiles

First, each theme of questions was assessed on its quality as a scale. To do so, negatively worded items were reverse-coded to ensure equal consistency in the interpretation. An example of a negatively worded item is: "I do not have enough time to plan language teaching." The scale's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to determine

internal consistency. A Cronbach's alpha value of approximately .70 is often considered an acceptable threshold for research purposes; however, this value should not be interpreted as a universal standard. As several scholars emphasize (Cortina, 1993; Field, 2024), the interpretation of alpha must take into account the number of items in the scale, the construct's conceptual breadth, and the early-stage nature of the measurement instrument. Cronbach's alpha tends to underestimate reliability in scales with few items, and values below .70 can therefore still be considered adequate when the construct is multifaceted or when item numbers are limited. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the six themes of the questionnaires concerning language teaching. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .518 for book reading, .444 for interaction and daily conversations, .646 for play, .750 for other language activities and planning, .623 for teachers' professional knowledge and beliefs about multilingualism, and .165 for work conditions. The variable "home languages and language of instruction should be separated" stood out when inspecting each variable for its contribution to consistency. When this variable was removed from the theme of teachers' professional knowledge and beliefs about multilingualism, Cronbach's alpha was .706. Based on the scale's reliability, the themes of *play*, *other language activities and planning*, and *teachers' professional knowledge and beliefs on multilingualism* were deemed sufficiently reliable for further analysis for two reasons. First, the constructs in question—particularly teachers' knowledge and beliefs—are theoretically complex and multidimensional, making perfect internal homogeneity neither expected nor desirable (Cortina, 1993). Second, the survey was designed for exploratory purposes, and slightly lower reliability thresholds are then commonly accepted (Field, 2024). Based on these considerations, the scales reaching values around .70 were judged to demonstrate sufficient internal consistency for use as index variables in the subsequent analyses, including the play index, language activities index, and knowledge and beliefs index.

A two-step cluster analysis was used to find meaningful subgroups within the data based on three index variables (play index, language activities index, and knowledge and beliefs index). Two-step clustering combines hierarchical and partitioning methods, making it especially suitable for larger datasets. First, a hierarchical pre-clustering

step explored possible cluster structures, followed by a partitioning step to refine the cluster solution. This method enables the algorithm to automatically evaluate various clustering options and select the optimal number of clusters using statistical criteria such as Schwarz's Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) (Blashfield & Aldenderfer, 1978; Hair et al., 2019).

The two-step algorithm employs a log-likelihood distance metric for continuous variables, assuming they follow a multivariate normal distribution, and evaluates the probability that cases belong to the same cluster. This metric is especially useful for educational datasets where underlying constructs are not necessarily linear, and it remains effective even with moderate deviations from normality. Selecting an appropriate distance measure is essential, as different metrics can lead to significantly different results.

The hierarchical step detects initial cluster seeds by identifying increases in distance between merged clusters. The partitioning step then refines these assignments by maximizing the homogeneity within each cluster. This combined approach overcomes some limitations of purely hierarchical or partitioning methods, which typically require the number of clusters to be set in advance (Blashfield & Aldenderfer, 1978). Consequently, this method is well-suited for educational research seeking to discover naturally occurring teacher profiles rather than imposing predefined categories.

The analysis identified four clusters. The silhouette score for cohesion and separation was 0.40, suggesting a fair quality of the clusters. Values between 0.25 and 0.50 indicate the structures exist but are not distinctly separated, which is typical in complex datasets of human behavior where participant differences are often subtle. The modest silhouette score was anticipated due to the conceptual similarity among the three indices and the overall uniformity of teacher practices in the sample. This limitation is recognized, and the clusters are seen as representing tendencies rather than sharply distinct profiles (Hair et al., 2019).

The index play was the most significant predictor of cluster membership, with other language activities, planning, and teachers'

professional knowledge and beliefs about multilingualism also playing roles. This sequence shows that differences in how teachers use play for language teaching primarily helped to differentiate the sub-groups.

Finally, four separate one-way ANOVAs were performed to examine differences among the identified clusters on key variables. Post hoc tests (e.g., Tukey's HSD) were applied to identify specific group differences where applicable. The key variables included the statements: "I get enough time for planning language teaching"; "The size of the child group is too large, which causes challenges"; "It is difficult to plan language teaching due to children's different linguistic backgrounds"; and "There are significant differences in the children's proficiency in the language of instruction". Cluster membership was included as an independent variable, whereas the key variables were included as dependent variables in the ANOVA analyses.

Before conducting one-way ANOVAs, assumptions were checked. Homogeneity of variances was tested with Levene's test. Levene's significance value for the four ANOVAs is as follows: "I get enough time for planning language teaching" ($p = .004$), "The size of the child group is too large, which causes challenges" ($p = .242$), "It is difficult to plan language teaching due to children's different linguistic backgrounds" ($p = .446$) and "There are significant differences in the children's proficiency in the language of instruction" ($p = .632$). This means that the first variable violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance. Therefore, I consulted more robust tests (Welch and Brown-Forsythe) in accordance with Pallant (2007). Both tests delivered similar results. The figures reported in the results section are from the Welch test. The other ANOVAs did not violate the assumptions of homogeneity of variance. Tukey's HSD was used for post hoc comparisons when assumptions were met.

The descriptive analyses and results from the Swedish dataset indicated that the teacher plays a crucial role in children's language development in ECEC. However, this role may have been somewhat unconscious. This guided me in how to approach the Finnish dataset. Therefore, I decided to explore how the teachers in the Finnish dataset perceive their role as linguistic role models.

5.1.1.5 Detailed Description of Data Analysis Regarding Teachers as Linguistic Role Models

To conduct Chi-square tests, it was necessary first to formulate hypotheses for the various tests, as the purpose of Chi-square testing is to test a specific claim. Six hypotheses were formulated based on previous research regarding language teaching in ECEC. The hypotheses are as follows:

1. Teachers who consider themselves linguistic role models also prepare for the reading-aloud situation by choosing words and expressions they believe must be explained in advance (Blewitt et al., 2009; Walsh, 2016).
2. Teachers who perceive themselves as linguistic role models use dialogic reading strategies (Blewitt et al., 2009; Walsh, 2016).
3. Teachers who consider themselves linguistic role models also use simplified language in interactions with multilingual children, with the idea that this facilitates the understanding of multilingual children (Gjems, 2012; Sheridan & Gjems, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2015).
4. Teachers who consider themselves linguistic role models also believe that daily conversations contribute to increased vocabulary and language comprehension for multilingual children in the language of instruction (Gjems, 2012; Sheridan & Gjems, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2015).
5. Teachers believe play is vital in children's language development, such as learning new words and expressions while interacting with peers, regardless of how teachers view their role (Conner et al., 2014; Craig-Unkefer & Kaiser, 2002, 2003).
6. The sixth hypothesis is twofold. A) Although teachers feel they are linguistic role models, they value adult-led play less than children's free play, which would follow the play tradition in Nordic ECEC. B) Teachers who perceive themselves as linguistic role models and possess knowledge of previous research on play and language development tend to value

adult-led play highly (Conner et al., 2014; Craig-Unkefer & Kaiser, 2002, 2003).

The analysis was conducted at the item level. In addition to the question concerning ECEC teachers' perception of themselves as linguistic role models (item 1 in Table 9), six other items were selected based on themes identified as significant in prior research. Teachers were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with various statements about language instruction for multilingual children, using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for the seven selected items (see Table 6). To explore the relationship between teachers' beliefs about their role as linguistic role models and their language-teaching practices, chi-square tests were used. Given the ordinal nature of the data and the relatively small sample size, non-parametric methods were deemed appropriate. A chi-square test of independence was used to assess associations between variables. The chi-square p-value and the Gamma statistics were interpreted. This is suitable for analyzing relationships between ordinal variables, such as those derived from Likert scales.

Gamma values were interpreted according to Goodman and Kruskal's guidelines (1959): 0.00 indicates no association; ± 0.01 – 0.09 suggests a weak association; ± 0.10 – 0.29 a moderate association; ± 0.30 – 0.99 a strong association; and ± 1.00 a perfect association. Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the subsequent analyses.

5.1.2 Practice-Based Research Design

The practice-based strand developed and refined the Academic Language model for ages 1-5 through two iterations with ECEC teachers. The theoretical framing presented in chapter 3 and condensed in a theoretical visualization in chapter 7 provided the analytical lens, and insights from the survey informed the choice of contexts and focal practices.

The practice-based study was conducted through two iterations. Each iteration included five steps (see Table 1). The participating teachers were introduced to Academic Language, after which they enacted teaching in accordance with the model over a three-month period. The teachers carried out the teaching either during read-aloud or during mealtimes. After three months, the teachers participated in individual interviews, and these interviews served as the basis for further development of the model. The purpose of the first iteration was to evaluate and refine the initial version of the model, whereas the purpose of the second iteration was to develop the model into a final version based on the teachers' experiences.

Persson (2020) states that practice-based research involves systematically generating knowledge using proven scientific methods. This type of research should transparently explain how the results were produced, thereby distinguishing it from simpler developmental work. Practice-based research emphasizes proximity to educational professionals, such as teachers, and their work. Persson (2020) further highlights that practice-based research requires a balance between closeness and distance throughout the research process. He introduces the concept of double closeness and distance as follows:

Closeness 1: Practitioners' (e.g., teachers') closeness to their practice, where they reflect on their work.

Distance 1: Practitioners' meta-reflection creates distance from their professional activities.

Closeness 2: The researcher's closeness to the practice being studied is necessary to understand what occurs in the professional setting.

Distance 2: The researcher's scientific detachment during data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Persson emphasizes the importance of integrating practice-based research into both practitioner relevance and scientific rigor. In my study, I alternated between closeness and distance throughout. The teaching model tested helped teachers stay close to their work and reflect systematically. As a researcher, I offered weekly opportunities for meta-reflection and data collection. Closeness did not mean physical presence but regular contact with teachers, while distance was

maintained by adopting a professional researcher role and following systematic methods. I designed the model to be usable independently by teachers, based on their context, not researcher support. This independence supports a sustainable model for professional teachers.

The data consists of teachers' voice recordings, individual interviews, a group interview conducted via a digital meeting, and teachers' written materials. The following sections present the study's design and realization in detail.

5.1.2.1 Design of the Study

The first step in developing the model was to specify its theoretical framing. This meant that the broader theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 needed to be condensed and brought even closer to the context. From previous research and the insights from the survey study, I identified a need for language teaching to benefit from more systematic approaches, teacher preparation, and language teaching that systematically considers children's multilingualism. For that reason, I decided that the condensed theoretical basis of the teaching model would be grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) view of learning, Klafki's (2006) Didaktik analysis, and language awareness (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020). A theoretical visualization of the model's theoretical triad is presented in chapter 7.

Table 1 below presents the two iterations and their stages.

Iteration 1

Stage 1

The researcher developed an initial model of Academic Languageing.

Stage 2

The recruitment of research participants was completed.

Criteria for participation: trained ECEC teacher, working with children aged 1-5 years.

Stage 3

The researcher visited the ECEC settings to introduce Academic Languageing. Teachers implemented the model during mealtimes and taught accordingly for 3 months.

Teachers reflected on their teaching using a voice recorder. Teachers could meet with the researcher online weekly for support.

Stage 4

The researcher visited the ECEC settings to conduct interviews.
The data was transcribed.

Stage 5

An initial evaluation assessed which part of the teaching model needs strengthening, and the model was further developed based on experiences from iteration 1.

Iteration 2

Stage 1

The recruitment of research participants was completed.
Criteria for participation: trained ECEC teacher working with children aged 1-5 years.

Stage 2

The researcher visited the ECEC settings to introduce Academic Language. Teachers implemented the model during mealtimes and book-reading sessions and taught accordingly for three months.
Teachers used a reflection form to reflect on their teaching. They could also meet with the researcher online weekly for support.

Stage 3

A joint online meeting was conducted to exchange experiences and discuss the model. The meeting was voice-recorded.
The researcher visited the ECEC settings to conduct interviews.
Data was transcribed.

Stage 4

The data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. A final version of Academic Language was developed based on experiences from iteration 2.

Table 1. *Overview of practice-based model development.*

5.1.2.2 Participants

The study targeted teachers with early childhood education degrees working with children aged 1-5 years, where Swedish was the official language. Seven teachers completed the study: two in iteration 1 (one from Sweden, one from Finland). Initially four teachers (two from each country) were recruited but two dropped out. In iteration 2, five Swedish teachers participated; initially, six from Sweden and one from Finland were recruited, but two withdrew. The aim was to balance participants from both countries, but recruitment proved difficult, and Finland was not represented in iteration 2.

Participants were recruited via emails sent to principals of various ECEC settings, who then forwarded the information to teachers. Due to recruitment difficulties in Finland, an announcement was also posted in a Facebook group for Swedish-medium ECEC teachers, resulting in one Finnish participant. Settings were selected based on ease of access. As it became evident early on that participant recruitment would be difficult, it was not feasible to impose extensive inclusion criteria. All teachers worked in multilingual environments; one had two multilingual children, while others worked where most children were multilingual. All teachers spoke Swedish fluently. In Sweden, settings were in multicultural areas with diverse families, while the Finnish setting was in a middle-class area with parents eager to support multilingualism.

5.1.2.3 Data Collection Process

After initial contacts with participants before the summer, iteration 1 commenced in the autumn of 2022. Before starting, I visited each teacher individually in their ECEC setting. This served as a Kick-off for the study, during which teachers received an introduction to the language-teaching model of Academic Languageing.

Teachers were instructed to teach Academic Languageing at least twice a week, but were free to do so more often if they found it appropriate. As a researcher, I provided teachers with a framework for language teaching, including a theoretical framework, guidelines on when and how often teaching was expected, and tools for preparatory work. Teachers were responsible for planning how the content would be presented and organizing the teaching. The initial model of Academic Languageing, tested in this first iteration, consisted of three repeated stages.

The first stage entailed the teacher conducting a **Didaktik analysis** and answering five questions regarding the content and organization of language teaching. These five questions were based on Klafki's Didaktik analysis (2006) but were modified to better fit into an ECEC context.

1. What more general thoughts about academic language does language teaching need to have?
2. How does the content impact the child's daily interaction and learning at ECEC?
3. In what way is the content significant for the child's future life?
4. How should the teaching be organized/implemented based on questions 1-3?
5. What real-life cases, experiences, or situations can be used to make the content accessible and engaging for children?

Teachers conducted a Didaktik analysis for every Academic Language session.

In the first iteration, all teachers employed Academic Language during mealtimes. The teachers decided which mealtime to use, and teaching did not have to be carried out during the same meal each time. The teachers selected 4-10 children to participate in the teaching over these three months, ensuring the same children consistently participated throughout the study. The following instructions were given to the teachers:

- Academic Language takes place during the whole mealtime.
- The teaching content is planned and structured based on the Didaktik analysis.
- Mealtime should involve the teacher asking *open-ended questions, listening to children's narratives, social interaction, and playing with languages.*
- Make sure that *all* children can participate.
- Consider whether, for example, play materials or pictures can be helpful during mealtime, which now takes on a more planned and structured form.

After each Academic Language session, teachers were asked to **reflect** on their teaching. Teachers voice-recorded these reflections by using a recorder. They reflected by answering the following questions:

1. What teaching content had I planned for?
2. How did the teaching go?
3. What was good?
4. What was less good?
5. How did the children (generally) receive the teaching?
6. What should I think about for the next session?

Over three months, teachers could meet with me online once a week at a fixed time for support and brainstorming. It also showed that they were not alone and that I was available when needed. Meetings were voluntary; I always asked in advance if a meeting was wanted. These meetings were rarely used, so I regularly checked in via email. Midway through, I conducted individual reconciliations with each participant to discuss the study and their experiences.

Iteration one was completed in mid-December 2022. In this regard, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participating teachers. I visited the teachers in their settings to conduct interviews, all of which were voice-recorded. The interview guide consisted of 12 questions and focused on planning, enactment, evaluation, and general experiences with Academic Language (see Appendix 4). The interviews were 51 and 42 minutes long.

Data from iteration one – voice-recorded teacher reflections and individual interviews – served as a basis for evaluating the model’s further development. The teachers’ experiences from testing and implementing the model in iteration one generated several important insights that helped me develop the model for iteration two. The following outcomes became relevant for iteration two:

- Importance of repetition and time.
- Written materials for teachers to clarify the planning.
- Play needs to be integrated more clearly into teaching.
- Aspects of multilingualism need to be integrated more clearly into teaching.

Both teachers emphasized the importance of repetition and noted that language learning takes time, highlighting that children require multiple encounters with content to feel secure and learn effectively.

They also stated that conducting a Didaktik analysis for each session was too challenging due to its extensive questions and long-term focus. To meet children's needs and allow repetition, the same session was planned twice in the second iteration. The Didaktik analysis was divided: questions 1-3 were answered monthly, and questions 4-5 were answered weekly. Since teachers requested planning frameworks, separate frameworks for monthly Didaktik analysis and weekly planning were developed (see Appendices 5 and 6). Assessment of iteration one showed that play and multilingualism received less attention; play's near invisibility might partly relate to mealtime teaching, as teachers found it hard to incorporate children's family languages, making this aspect almost invisible. Therefore, in the second iteration, play would be emphasized more in the introductory phase, and multilingualism should be addressed systematically in planning frameworks.

In iteration two, the recruitment process and study employment followed the same procedure as in iteration one. The study started in mid-January 2024. The further developed model of Academic Language, tested in the second iteration, followed five repeated stages.

This first stage, **identification**, was added to clarify that teachers needed to formulate a linguistic purpose for their teaching based on the children's linguistic needs. In this stage, teachers assess children's language skills and needs. This stage was part of the Didaktik analysis but was presented as its own initial stage to show that everything starts with the individual child. The teachers used a Didaktik analysis framework with questions as support (see Appendix 5). The teaching model lacked a specific framework for conducting this linguistic mapping. Instead, teachers applied different approaches based on their knowledge and established practices.

Teachers used two different planning frameworks: one for the **Didaktik analysis**, conducted once a month, and another for **weekly planning**, which focused more on organizing teaching (see Appendix 6). In iteration two, four teachers implemented Academic Language during read-aloud and one teacher during mealtimes. The

instructions given to those who implemented it during read-aloud were as follows:

- Choose a book that suits the purpose of the teaching and the planned content and is challenging.
- Conduct a read-aloud in small groups.
- Plan the read-aloud (e.g., words to explain).
- Reading should be dialogic and focus on social interaction and mutual communication.
- After the reading, a play activity is conducted, focusing on processing the story and retelling it. The play activity should be connected to the book chosen.

After each Academic Language session, teachers **reflected** on their teaching. In iteration two, teachers were provided with a reflection framework consisting of seven questions, which they answered in writing (see Appendix 7).

This final stage entailed teachers making minor **modifications** to their teaching based on their reflections. These modifications included, e.g., changing the book or reminding them to ask more open-ended questions.

The weekly meeting procedure followed the process described in iteration one. Approximately two weeks before the study concluded, a joint digital meeting was held with all research participants to exchange experiences of working with the teaching model. I acted as a moderator, prepared some opening questions, but the participants' input guided the conversation. This joint digital meeting was voice-recorded and used as data. The joint meeting lasted for one hour.

At the end of the study, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. I visited four teachers in their settings to conduct the interviews, and one interview was conducted online at the participant's request. All interviews were voice-recorded. The interview guide consisted of 11 questions and was themed after planning, enactment, evaluation, and teachers' perceptions of working with the model. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and one hour.

The complete final version of Academic Linguaging is presented in Chapter 6.

5.1.2.4 Transcription

In the first iteration, I collected 25 teacher reflections recorded as audio and two interviews. I transcribed the data to evaluate the teaching model's usability and inform its development for the next iteration. The transcription focused on capturing the meaning, excluding words, pauses, and hums. The data was transcribed in standard Swedish, ignoring dialectal variations. To safeguard participant confidentiality, I anonymized the data by labeling teachers as Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 upon downloading the audio files to secure storage. This approach ensures a structured data processing process while maintaining participant anonymity.

Iteration two produced five voice-recorded interviews and one voice-recorded digital meeting. Transcription was performed to facilitate data analysis. A transcription company was hired to transcribe the five interviews, and I manually transcribed the digital meeting. To protect participant confidentiality and maintain data integrity, I anonymized the data. Instead of using the teachers' real names, I labeled them as Teacher blue, Teacher pink, and so on as soon as I uploaded the audio files to the secure storage space. To verify the accuracy of the transcripts, I listened to the audio files while reviewing the transcripts simultaneously.

5.1.2.5 Data Analysis

The data analyzed consisted of interviews with teachers, their teaching reflections, and their planning materials. In iteration one, evaluation questions were used to evaluate and adjust the teaching model for iteration two. The first steps in qualitative content analysis were undertaken (Bengtsson, 2016), but a final categorization and condensation were not made. The thesis's theoretical framework guided the evaluation. Using the theoretical framework ensured that all essential parts of the teaching model were evaluated at this stage. Based on the theoretical framework, 11 evaluation questions were formulated and posed to the data. These questions involved learning, teaching, and

language awareness, which are central components of the teaching model. The evaluation followed these steps:

1. Each question within a category (teaching, learning, language awareness) was evaluated separately, and answers were gathered from the entire dataset (reflections and interviews).
2. In the second step, I reviewed the answers to all 11 evaluation questions. The answers were then grouped into larger categories. For example, answers to the question “What strategies do teachers employ to help children engage with the teaching content?” were grouped into categories such as *using multi-modal resources* and *using support questions*.
3. The final step was to review all categories to discover what needed to be adjusted in the teaching model for the next iteration.

Table 2. Overview of the evaluation questions used in iteration one. Data consisted of teacher interviews and voice-recorded teaching reflections.

TEACHING	LEARNING	LANGUAGE AWARENESS
1. How do teachers implement AL?	1. What challenges do teachers identify when implementing AL that relate to children’s current linguistic level?	1. What reflections do teachers have regarding language, multilingualism, power, or identity?
2. What is the purpose of AL?	2. Which communication patterns do teachers identify in social interactions?	2. In what way is children’s multilingualism part of AL?
3. What content did the teachers choose?	3. How is play displayed in AL?	3. What challenges do teachers highlight regarding multilingualism?
4. What strategies do teachers employ to help children engage with the teaching content?	4. What do teachers believe children learn through AL?	

The purpose of the analysis in iteration two was to refine and validate the teaching model by examining its functioning in practice and identifying necessary adjustments. The interviews and voice-recorded teaching reflections were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). A latent analysis approach was chosen, as its purpose is to uncover deeper structures of meaning (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Teachers may struggle to use the correct terminology or clearly explain the purpose of their teaching, even if they are experienced educators. For this reason, latent analysis enables the researcher to seek meaning in what has been said and interpret the underlying implications (Gray & Densten, 1998). Given the researcher’s extensive experience teaching language to children, the researcher is considered well-equipped to make such interpretations within the data. The theoretical foundation of this study guided the analysis to enhance the quality of the latent analysis. The evaluation questions in iteration one were developed into an analytical tool to guide the analysis process in iteration two.

Table 3. *The analytical tool used in iteration two. Data consisted of teacher interviews and planning frameworks.*

TEACHING	LEARNING	LANGUAGE AWARENESS
1. What strategies do teachers employ to help children engage with the teaching content?	1. What linguistic needs do teachers identify in children that relate to children’s current level of development?	1. What reflections do teachers have regarding (academic) language, multilingualism, power, or identity?
2. What is the purpose of AL?	2. Which communication patterns do teachers identify in social interactions?	2. In what way is children’s multilingualism part of AL?
3. What methods have the teachers selected?	3. How is play or playfulness displayed in AL?	3. What challenges do teachers highlight regarding multilingualism?

4. What do teachers believe that AL contributes to language teaching?	4. What do teachers believe children learn through AL?	
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Using the analytical tool ensured that all components of the teaching model were thoroughly analyzed. The analysis was conducted in five steps.

1. The interviews and planning frameworks were coded based on the questions in the analytical tool. Each question was analyzed separately, and utterances were identified throughout the material. The same utterances may be coded as responses to multiple questions. Utterances that did not qualify as answers were coded as “Other”.
2. The data coded to the analytical questions were compiled and categorized into themes. Utterances with similar meanings or expressions were placed into a single theme. For example, all utterances for the question “What do teachers believe that children learn through AL?” were summarized into learning themes. Each analytical question consists of 4 to 7 themes.
3. The third step of the analysis involved a third categorization. The different themes were categorized according to the teaching model, Academic Linguaging. Each theme was categorized based on relevance to a particular part of the teaching model (e.g., Identification, Teaching). Some themes fit multiple parts and were categorized accordingly. Each part of the teaching model consists of 5 to 13 themes.
4. The fourth step of the analysis involved identifying areas for development. Each part of the teaching model was reviewed to determine if adjustments or additions were needed.
5. In the fifth analysis step, steps 1-4 were reviewed. Utterances categorized as “Other” were examined to determine whether they qualify as answers.

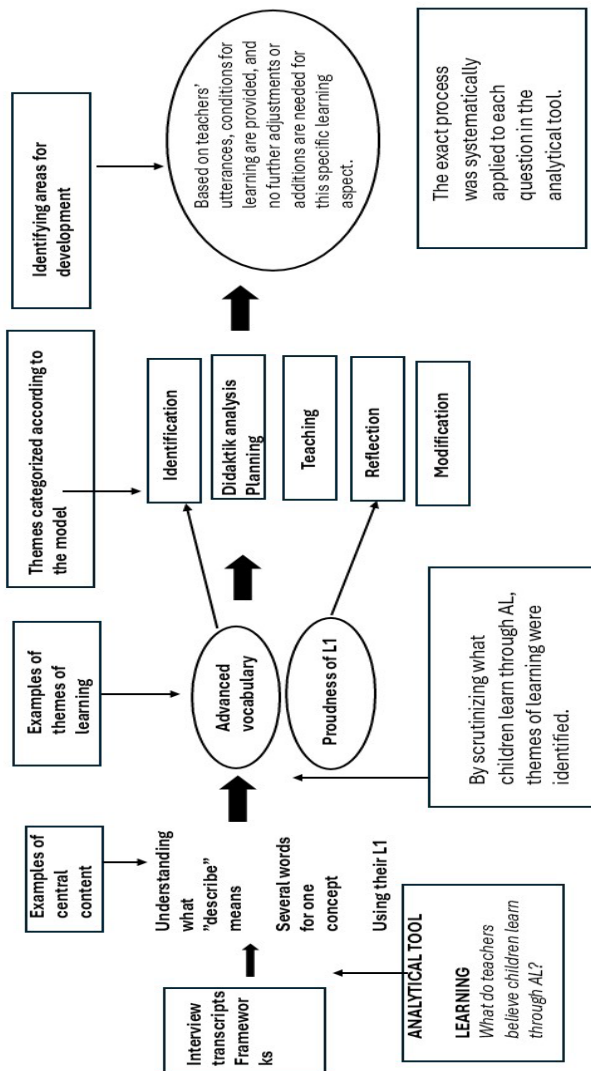


Figure 2. Illustration of the analysis process in iteration two, with one learning question serving as an example.

This systematic approach ensured that the analysis was both comprehensive and grounded in theory, enabling a nuanced understanding of how the Academic Language model functions in practice and where improvements are needed. The analysis resulted in important adjustments: Didaktik Analysis and Weekly Planning were separated into distinct steps within the model, and the time perspective was revised so that the Didaktik analysis is performed once every three months. Additionally, the findings showed that the model's language-aware approach requires greater teacher effort in future employment to fully harness its potential.

5.2 Credibility, Generalizability, and Transferability

The clarity with which a researcher explains how the research was conducted and how the results were obtained is crucial to the study's quality (Patton, 2015). Credibility becomes an important aspect in determining this. Credibility refers to the extent to which results accurately and reliably reflect participants' reality. It is about ensuring that data and interpretations are credible. Various strategies can be used to achieve the highest possible credibility.

Triangulation has helped me increase the credibility of the thesis. This was achieved by collecting data of different types at different points in time. Thus, I have utilized several different data sources as the basis for the results presented, which can be considered to enhance the credibility of the findings. The thesis results are presented in two chapters, each of which serves to fulfill the thesis's aim.

Credibility can also be enhanced through a systematic, thorough account of the study's design, analysis, and decision-making. In the method chapter, I provide an overview of the realization process, the analysis procedures, and the decisions made. I include separate descriptions of the quantitative and qualitative parts of the thesis to clarify how the different studies within this thesis were conducted. My goal has been to be as clear and transparent as possible, enabling readers to form their own opinions about the thesis's quality.

Another aspect of assessing research quality is generalizability. This refers to the expectation that research findings can be applied and

generalized to similar contexts (Denscombe, 2009). In quantitative studies, the goal is to achieve this generalizability. That is, the results should apply to a larger population than the one directly studied. This is achieved through careful participant selection and statistical analysis. For results to be generalizable, the participant selection must represent the population the researcher aims to reflect (de Leeuw, Hox & Dillman, 2008). The survey study aims to provide insights about ECEC teachers and their language teaching, which was also the target group for this research. When surveys are conducted online, there is no guarantee that those intended to respond will do so. Nonetheless, based on the responses of 275 ECEC teachers, it is assessed that the results represent the targeted group. The sample size also influences generalizability. A larger sample reduces the risk of random error and boosts the study's statistical power, thereby enhancing generalizability. Based on this, the survey results are likely to be generalizable.

Achieving generalizability in qualitative research is challenging because studies are often small and specific to particular contexts. Research on language teaching and children's language development is especially sensitive to sociolinguistic factors, making broad generalizations difficult. Therefore, I prefer to use transferability when discussing qualitative research. Transferability means that the results should be applicable to similar settings. In practice-based studies, it is important to clearly describe how and where the study was conducted. Consequently, in the method chapter of this thesis, I have detailed the study's context as thoroughly as possible while safeguarding the research participants. I also included specific details in the method chapter on how the practice-based study was conducted and what was involved in the two phases. Additionally, I explained to the participating teachers what they were expected to do and what my role as a researcher entailed. This helps support the potential transferability of the findings.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

In this section, I discuss the thesis's ethical considerations and highlight key research principles relevant to the studies conducted.

It was agreed that the survey study did not require ethical review because it fell outside the scope of the Swedish Ethics Review Act (Etikprövningslagen). However, the practice-based study aimed to intervene in the teachers' context, so it was considered potentially eligible for formal ethical review. The project was sent to the Swedish Review Board Authority (Etikprövningsnämnden), but the Board decided that the study was not subject to formal review, and no objections were raised against it (decision no. 2022-02823-01).

In Finland, obtaining a research permit from the municipality is necessary to conduct research. Each municipality has its own application form, but the process is generally similar across municipalities. For the survey study, seven research permits were applied for and approved. Data collection was permitted to begin upon receipt of an approved research permit. For the practice-based study, one permit was applied for. However, the decision stated that it was unnecessary because the study was conducted in a private ECEC setting and could be carried out without one.

Data were handled following ethical principles regarding confidentiality and anonymity (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024). Örebro University provides guidelines under the General Data Protection Regulation to ensure one's right to privacy and the protection of personal data (Örebro University, 2021). The data handled includes audio recordings and teachers' written planning and reflection frameworks. The written materials have been scanned for digital storage. Research interviews and voice recordings were de-identified prior to analysis. All research materials are stored on the university's internal secure servers, which unauthorized persons cannot access, and are archived in accordance with the Archives Act (1990:782).

Information about the study and informed consent procedures was handled following research ethical principles (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024) for research participants. The research participants received information about the study both in writing and orally on multiple occasions. The information letter sent out as a request via email was designed in accordance with Örebro University's guidelines. All research participants gave informed consent. In the survey study, this occurred when participants clicked a consent box while answering

the survey. In the practice-based study, this was achieved by having participants sign a consent form at the outset (see Appendix 2).

When studies in an educational context are conducted with teachers, there is always a risk that participants may end up in a position of dependence. Even though it is the teacher who should give their consent and voluntarily decide to participate, the teacher may still be influenced by the principal. In my case, ECEC teachers were participating in the study. However, I still had an obligation to inform the principal about the study since the principal is ultimately responsible for what happens in the setting they oversee.

All initial contact was made with the ECEC principal because the teachers' contact details are not publicly available. Not having individual teacher contact details available gives the principal a position of authority right from the start, as they can either inform their staff about the study, provide additional contact information for various teachers, or ignore the request altogether. The survey was sent via email to the ECEC principal, including all necessary information and a link to the survey. The principal was asked to forward the email to the teachers in their unit(s). This method is commonly used in studies of this type, where surveys are distributed across multiple settings and municipalities. One risk of this approach is that the survey may not reach the intended target group.

Previous research has highlighted several challenges with language teaching in language-diverse ECEC settings. Participation in the study has strengthened professional practice, as teachers have had the opportunity to reflect on their practice and engage with others' experiences in language teaching and multilingualism. Participating in the development of a teaching model for Academic Language contributes to the field's systematic development and enhances the quality of ECEC. A practice-based study contributes to the cornerstones of ECEC – that teaching must be conducted scientifically and with proven experience. The benefit of the thesis in offering tools to address the challenges of language teaching for multilingual children extends beyond the participating teachers. However, it can be applied by teachers in different contexts.

6 Understanding Language Teaching in Language Diverse ECEC Through the Lens of Teachers

This chapter presents the survey results. First, four teacher profiles of language teaching are introduced, followed by teachers' beliefs about being linguistic role models. The findings presented here contribute to the thesis's aim by expanding knowledge about teachers' perspectives on language teaching practices and strategies, and on their role as linguistic role models. The findings also provide an empirical basis for identifying key considerations when developing a teaching model that encourages intentional language teaching in language-diverse settings.

6.1 Four Teacher Profiles of Language Teaching Practices

Based on the survey answers from 233 ECEC teachers in Sweden, four teacher profiles were identified: **implicit**, **explicit**, **positive**, and **challenged** teachers. These four teacher profiles were identified based on teachers' views on play, language teaching strategies, planning, and multilingualism. Through cluster analysis, patterns emerge that reveal how different profiles relate to organizational factors and pedagogical strategies, providing insights into variations in teaching practices and support needs.

To obtain a more comprehensive picture of the teaching profession and current language-teaching practices, a cluster analysis was conducted on the Swedish survey data. These profiles differ in how teachers value play, language activities, preparatory work, and knowledge of multilingualism. Table 4 below gives an overview of the four identified teacher profiles.

Table 4. Overview of the four distinct teacher profiles for language teaching practices and their characteristics.

Teacher Profile	Characteristics
<p>1) Implicit teachers</p>	<p>Value play and daily interaction as central for language development, pay less attention to family languages, and perceive themselves as having somewhat limited knowledge about multilingualism.</p>
<p>2) Positive teachers</p>	<p>Combine implicit and explicit language teaching, experience sufficient knowledge about multilingualism, and good organizational conditions for language teaching.</p>
<p>3) Explicit teachers</p>	<p>Prefer structured language teaching, focus on the language of instruction, and deprioritize family languages.</p>
<p>4) Challenged teachers</p>	<p>Do not value play as language development, have limited knowledge about multilingualism, and have poor organizational conditions.</p>

The results indicate that both pedagogical beliefs and organizational factors, including planning time and group size, influence teacher profiles. These teacher profiles offer insights into the competencies and support structures required to meet the needs of multilingual children.

Figure 3 below shows the four teacher profiles side by side, along with their alignment to the selected indexes. Profile 2 (positive teachers) scores low overall, indicating they recognize the importance of play and language activities and believe they have good knowledge of their work. Conversely, Profile 4 (challenged teachers) has high scores across the board, indicating disagreement with the importance of play

and language activities. They perceive themselves as having limited knowledge. The two middle groups still differ in their positions on the indexes and are categorized as implicit and explicit teachers. Each profile will be explained in more detail below.

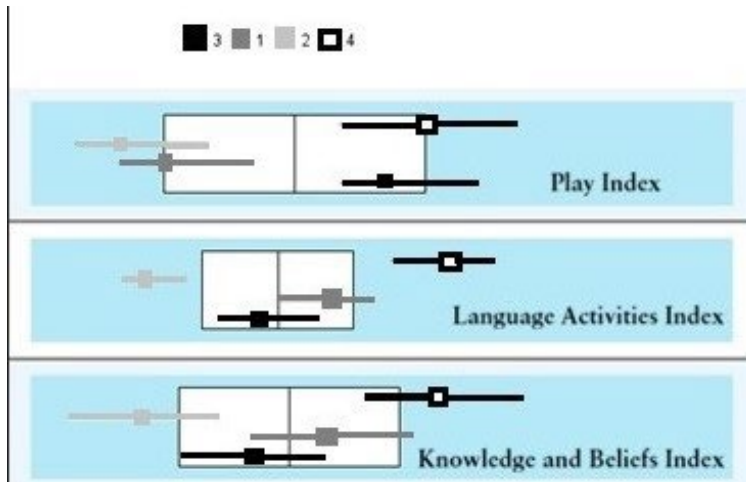


Figure 3. The four teacher profiles are illustrated side by side, along with their alignment with the selected index variables.

6.1.1 The Implicit Teacher Profile

Profile 1 refers to *implicit teachers*. This profile consists of 64 teachers, representing 27,5% of the total number of participants. When the individual survey questions for the implicit teachers are examined separately, it shows that implicit teachers highly value play and consider it a central part of children’s language development. Children’s spontaneous and adult-led play serve as key focus areas for these teachers. Implicit teachers do not necessarily see themselves as the main linguistic role models for instruction; instead, they believe that children can learn new words and expressions through play with more skilled peers. These teachers often avoid traditional teaching methods, such as direct vocabulary instruction or pre-made language materials. However, they do include elements of planned language activities and

singing sessions in their teaching. A defining characteristic of implicit teachers is their tendency to adopt instructional strategies that emphasize interactions between children and adults as central to language learning.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of implicit teachers. 1 indicated that the respondent highly agreed with the statement, whereas 5 indicated that the respondent highly disagreed with the statement. The minimum, maximum, mean, and SD are presented for each variable.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Through play, children acquire academic language	1	4	1,64	,743
I strive to integrate children's family languages into the teaching.	1	5	3,02	1,091
I have sufficient knowledge about children's multilingualism.	1	5	2,75	1,113
The teacher is the primary linguistic role model in the language of instruction.	1	5	2,16	1,237

Table 5 illustrates the relationship between the implicit teacher profile and the specific survey variables. The variables listed in the table were chosen due to their key relevance to the thesis topic and because prior research indicates that these issues are important in multilingual settings (see Chapter 4).

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the implicit teachers mostly agree that children also learn academic language through play. However, the teachers seem less likely than the other teacher profiles to incorporate the children's family languages into their teaching. They also appear less confident in their knowledge of children's multilingualism.

6.1.2 The Positive Teacher Profile

Profile 2 refers to *positive teachers*. This profile comprises 45 teachers, representing 19.3% of the total participants. Compared to other teacher profiles, positive teachers are distinguished by their strong support for play, language activities, and planning, as well as their approach to multilingualism. When the individual survey questions for the positive teachers are examined separately, it shows that they value play highly as a key area for language development, while also appreciating more structured methods, such as planned singing and language sessions. These teachers seem to strike a balance between using implicit and explicit language teaching, maintaining a positive outlook on both. They agree that the teacher acts as the main linguistic role model in the language of instruction. Additionally, they hold a positive view of children's diverse linguistic backgrounds and value language diversity.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of positive teachers.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Through play, children acquire academic language	1	3	1,53	,694
I strive to integrate children's family languages into the teaching.	1	5	1,89	1,005
I have sufficient knowledge about children's multilingualism.	1	3	1,58	,690
The teacher is the primary linguistic role model in the language of instruction.	1	5	1,49	1,014

Table 6 shows that the positive teachers are highly consistent across most questions. They agree that children acquire academic language through play and aim to incorporate children's family languages into their teaching. Additionally, teachers in this profile believe they possess adequate knowledge about children's multilingualism.

6.1.3 The Explicit Teacher Profile

Profile 3 refers to *explicit teachers*. This profile comprises 85 teachers, accounting for 36.6% of the total number of participants, making it the largest teacher profile. Unlike implicit and positive teachers, explicit teachers value play less. They tend to believe that adult-led play enhances language development, but see spontaneous play as lacking

those same benefits. When the individual survey questions for the explicit teachers are examined separately, it shows that these teachers prefer traditional, transmission-based teaching methods over interactive and supportive approaches, resulting in more structured language activities. They also tend to hold a more traditional view of language, emphasizing the language used during instruction over the children's family languages.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of explicit teachers.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Through play, children acquire academic language	1	4	2,26	,875
I strive to integrate children's family languages into the teaching.	1	5	2,35	,960
I have sufficient knowledge about children's multilingualism.	1	4	2,20	,768
The teacher is the primary linguistic role model in the language of instruction.	1	5	1,71	,843

Table 7 indicates that explicit teachers generally hold more negative opinions on various questions compared to implicit and positive teachers. They are more doubtful about multilingual children acquiring academic language through play. Additionally, these teachers report paying less attention to incorporating children's family

languages into their lessons. They also often feel they lack enough knowledge about children's multilingualism. Despite this, explicit teachers agree that they serve as the main linguistic role models for the language of instruction.

6.1.4 The Challenged Teacher Profile

Profile 4 refers to *challenged teachers*. This profile consists of 39 teachers, accounting for 16.7% of the total participants, making it the smallest profile. Challenged teachers differ from other profiles primarily due to their negative outlook on questions related to play, language activities, planning, and multilingualism. When the individual survey questions for the challenged teachers are examined separately, it is revealed that while they acknowledge and value play's potential, they do not see it as crucial for language development. Teachers who are challenged tend to avoid using planned, structured language activities and do not emphasize either the language of instruction or the children's family languages. Additionally, these teachers partly disagree with the idea that they serve as the main linguistic role models in the classroom.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of challenged teachers.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Through play, children acquire academic language	1	4	2,49	,644
I strive to integrate children's family languages into the teaching.	1	5	3,05	1,050
I have sufficient knowledge about children's multilingualism.	1	5	3,44	,882
The teacher is the primary linguistic role model in the language of instruction.	1	5	2,59	,966

Table 7 shows that teachers in this profile generally disagree with several statements. They somewhat disagree with the idea that multilingual children acquire academic language through play. They also indicate that they do not aim to incorporate children's family languages into their teaching and appear to feel they lack enough knowledge about children's multilingualism.

6.1.5 Understanding the Organizational Conditions of the Four Teacher Profiles

In addition to the cluster analysis, a series of four one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the differences among teacher profiles on

four dependent variables of organizational conditions: I get enough time to plan; the size of the child group is too large; it is difficult to plan language teaching due to differences in linguistic backgrounds; and there are differences in the children's proficiency in the language of instruction. These analyses aimed to understand better the factors that differentiate teacher profiles. The results of these ANOVAs are presented below.

6.1.5.1 Variable: I get enough time to plan

This variable sought to determine whether teachers have sufficient planning time to prepare language teaching. The analysis revealed significant differences among all four teacher profiles, $F(3, 110,978) = 8,900, p < .001$. Post hoc tests indicated that challenged teachers differed significantly from implicit teachers $p = .046$, positive teachers $p < .001$, and explicit teachers $p = .001$.

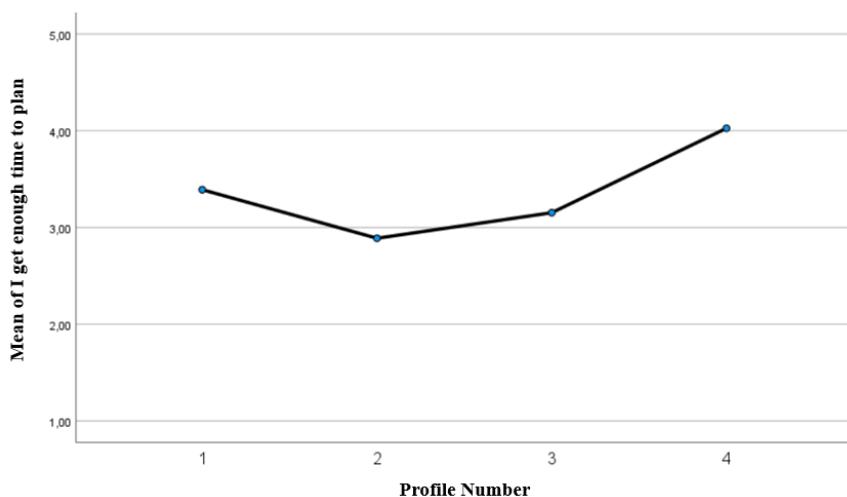


Figure 4. Mean value for planning time for all four teacher profiles.

Figure 4 shows that challenged teachers perceive having significantly less time for planning language teaching compared to other teacher profiles. The other profiles scored around the medium range, suggesting they neither agree nor disagree about having enough planning

time. These findings highlight that the time allocated for planning is a key factor influencing the quality of language teaching within ECEC.

6.1.5.2 Variable: The size of the child group is too large, which causes challenges

This variable aimed to determine whether teachers perceive the group size as too large, resulting in challenges in their work. The analysis revealed no significant differences between the teacher profiles, $F(3, 229) = 805, p = .492$.

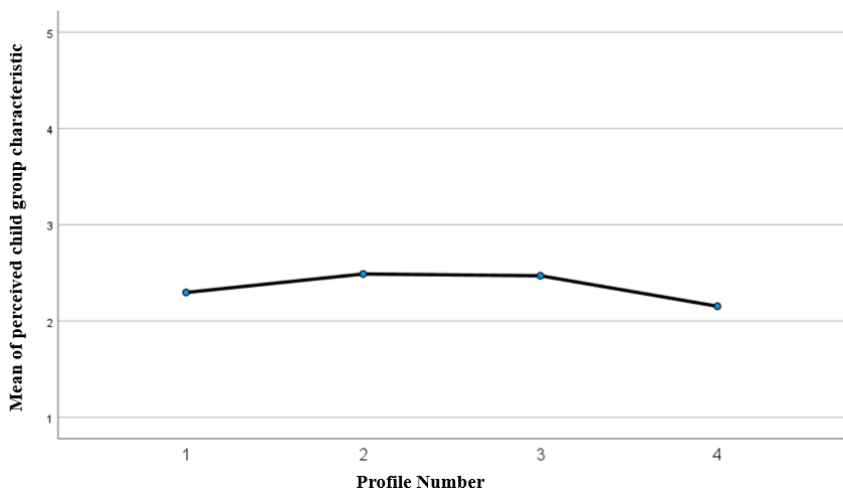


Figure 5. Mean value of perceived child group characteristics for all teacher profiles.

Figure 5 shows that there are no significant differences among teacher profiles; all teachers agree that the child group size is too large and relatively consistent.

6.1.5.3 Variable: It is difficult to plan language teaching due to children's diverse linguistic backgrounds

This variable aimed to determine whether teachers perceive it as challenging to plan language teaching in contexts where children's

linguistic backgrounds and competencies vary. The analysis indicated differences between the teacher profiles, $F = (2,546)$, $p = ,057$. Post hoc tests revealed significant differences between implicit and positive teachers, $p = 033$.

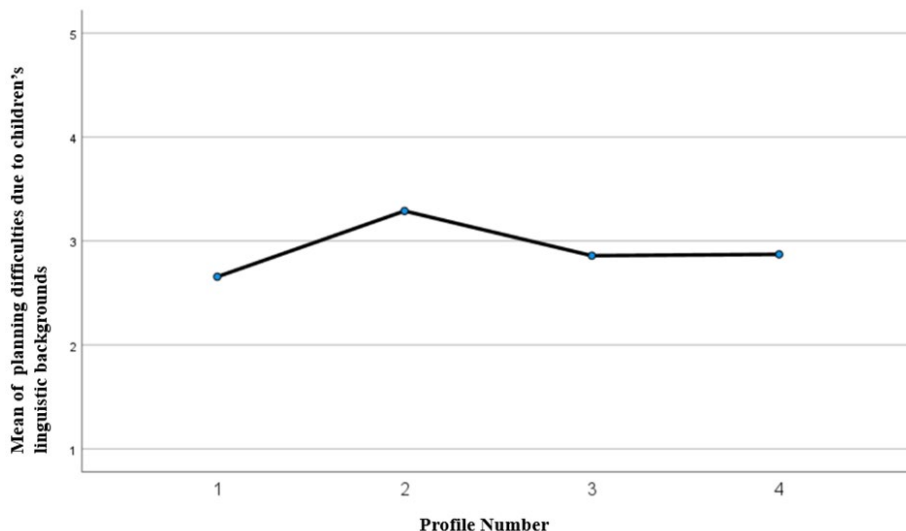


Figure 6. Mean value of planning difficulties due to children's linguistic backgrounds for all teacher profiles.

Figure 6 shows that positive teachers find it easier to plan language teaching, even though children's linguistic backgrounds vary. In contrast, implicit teachers find it the hardest of all four teacher profiles.

6.1.5.4 Variable: There are differences in children's proficiency in the language of instruction

This variable sought to determine whether teachers perceive differences in children's proficiency in the language of instruction. The analysis revealed no significant differences between the teacher profiles, $F (3, 299) = 2.153$, $p = ,094$.

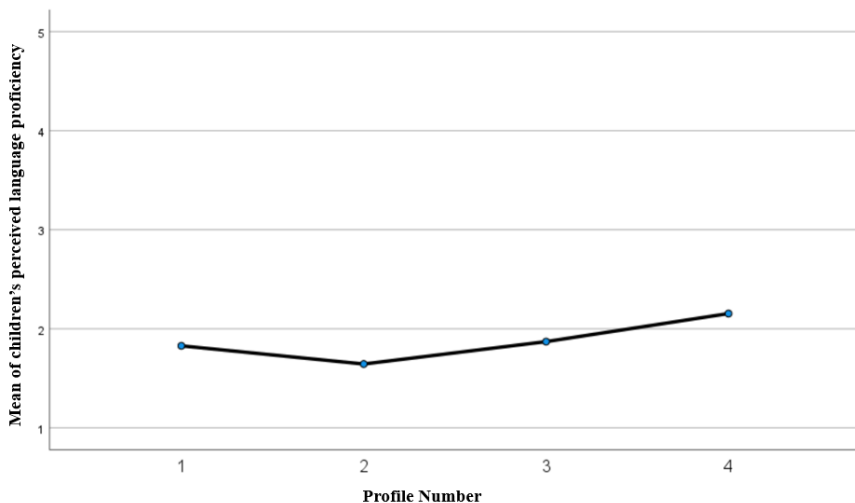


Figure 7. Mean value of children’s perceived language proficiency for all teacher profiles.

As illustrated in Figure 7, there are no statistically significant differences between teacher profiles. All teachers acknowledge variations in children’s language proficiency.

In summary, the two-step cluster analysis revealed four distinct teacher profiles: implicit teachers, positive teachers, explicit teachers, and challenged teachers. These profiles were characterized by their approaches to play, language activities, planning, and multilingualism. To better understand the differences among these profiles, four one-way ANOVAs were performed. The findings highlight correlations between planning time, child group size, language diversity, children’s language skills, and teacher profiles. The analysis offers insights into the factors that shape language teaching in early childhood education and care, and this topic will be further discussed at the end of the chapter.

6.2 Teachers as Linguistic Role Models

Based on survey responses from 42 ECEC teachers working in Swedish-medium settings in Finland, relationships between teachers’

beliefs about being a linguistic role model and the use of language development strategies, such as dialogic reading, interaction in daily routines, and play, were depicted. ¹ Overall, teachers view themselves as linguistic role models; however, when it comes to tasks such as planning language teaching, there are no clear links to that role.

To further enhance understanding of language teaching in language-diverse settings, chi-square tests were conducted to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of being linguistic role models and the language-teaching practices they report using. The results are presented below.

6.2.1 Descriptive Results of Language Teaching Practices

The variables presented in Table 9 below represent the highest- and lowest-ranked variables for the various language-teaching strategies examined: shared book reading, interaction and daily conversations, and play. Each question was evaluated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (totally agree) to 5 (totally disagree). A mean close to 1 indicates strong agreement. A slight standard deviation (SD) suggests responses are tightly clustered around the mean, while a larger SD indicates more varied answers. For instance, the question “Daily conversations contribute to increased vocabulary and language comprehension in the language of instruction for multilingual children” has a mean of 1,07 and an SD of 0,261, showing that nearly all ECEC teachers strongly agree. Conversely, the question “I prepare the read-aloud situation beforehand” has the lowest mean, indicating the least agreement, but also the highest SD, reflecting the greatest variation in responses. Regarding the main question, “As a teacher, I am the primary linguistic role model in the language of instruction”, there is a relatively high level of agreement and consistency in responses.

¹ The results regarding the Finnish quantitative data have been published in Koskinen, J. & Karlsson, J. (2025). Teachers as linguistic role models: Language teaching in multilingual ECEC. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 14(2), 140-168.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of variables from the web survey concerning language teaching practices. Mean value and standard deviation reported.

Variable	Mean	SD
As a teacher, I am the primary linguistic role model in the language of instruction.	1,76	,726
I prepare the read-aloud situation beforehand.	2,88	1,194
I use dialogic reading while reading aloud.	1,93	,867
I use simplified language when interacting with multilingual children.	2,45	1,017
Daily conversations contribute to increased vocabulary and language comprehension in the language of instruction for multilingual children.	1,07	,261
Children learn new words and expressions during free play when interacting with peers.	1,48	,594
Adult-led play contributes to the development of the language of instruction.	1,55	,670

6.3 Linguistic Role Model Related to Language Teaching Practices

Chi-square tests were used to examine ECEC teachers' beliefs about being linguistic role models and how these beliefs relate to the language-teaching and language-developing work they conduct with multilingual children. Chi-square tests examine associations between variables, and in this case, the main variable, "As a teacher, I am the primary linguistic role model in the language of instruction", was tested against variables related to various teaching strategies. The results of the calculations are shown in the cross-tables below.

6.3.1 The Linguistic Role Model Related to Book Reading

Table 10. Statistics illustrating the relationship between the variables 'teachers as linguistic role models' (vertical axis) and 'preparing the read-aloud situation' (horizontal axis). Both variables used answer options ranging from totally agree to totally disagree.

		Preparing the read-aloud situation				Total	
		Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree		Totally disagree
Teachers as linguistic role models	Totally agree	2 (4,8%)	5 (11,9%)	4 (9,5%)	2 (4,8%)	3 (7,1%)	16 (31,8%)
	Agree	3 (7,1%)	5 (11,9%)	3 (7,1%)	10 (23,8%)		21 (50%)
	Neither agree nor disagree		4 (9,5%)				4 (9,5%)
	Disagree				1 (2,4%)		1 (2,4%)
	Totally disagree						
	Total	5 (11,9%)	14 (33,3%)	7 (16,7%)	13 (31%)	3 (7,1%)	42 (100)

The relationship between "Teachers as linguistic role models" and "Preparing the read-aloud situation" was not statistically significant.

The weak negative Gamma value does not clearly indicate a connection between these variables, $\chi^2 (12, N = 42) = 19,82, p = ,070$ Gamma = -.088. Nonetheless, the p-value suggests a trend worth further

exploration in the cross-table. Most ECEC teachers either totally agree or agree that they serve as a linguistic role model (vertical side). In contrast, responses regarding planned reading situations vary more widely (horizontal). For the options “Totally agree”, “Agree”, and “Neither agree nor disagree” regarding preparing reading situations, ECEC teachers are relatively evenly split in their beliefs about being role models. No clear relationship has emerged between these variables so far. However, among those who disagree about preparing reading situations, 23% show less agreement about being role models, and one teacher outright disagrees. Considering the cross-table and the p-value trend, it is likely that more data with diverse responses would reveal that teachers who do not see themselves as linguistic role models also tend not to prepare for reading situations. Still, these findings alone do not lead to definitive conclusions.

Table 1. Statistics display the relationship between the variables ‘teachers as linguistic role models’ (vertical axis) and ‘using dialogic reading’ (horizontal axis).

	Using dialogic reading				Totally disagree	Total
	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree		
Totally agree	7 (16,7%)	8 (19,0%)	1 (2,4 %)			16 (38,1%)
Agree	6 (14,3%)	10 (23,8%)	3 (7,1%)	2 (4,8%)		21 (50%)
Neither agree nor disagree	1 (2,4%)	2 (4,8%)	1(2,4%)			4 (9,5%)
Disagree				1 (2,4%)		1 (2,4%)
Totally disagree						
Total	14 (33,3%)	20 (47,6%)	5 (11,9%)	3 (7,1%)	0 (0%)	42 (100%)

The relationship between “Teachers as linguistic role models” and “Using dialogic reading” was not statistically significant, but the p-value showed a strong trend: $\chi^2 (9, N = 42) = 16,47, p = ,058, \text{Gamma} = ,409$. The relatively high positive Gamma indicates a strong association between the variables; combined with the trend, this warrants examining the cross-table. The table illustrates teachers’ self-perceived role as linguistic models (vertical axis) and their reported use of

dialogic reading during read-aloud sessions (horizontal axis). Most responses (73,8%) clustered around “Totally agree” and “Agree” for both being a linguistic role model and employing dialogic reading as a language teaching method. Fewer responses appeared in other categories, and where disagreement existed about using dialogic reading, there was also less agreement about being a linguistic role model. Based on the Chi-square test and the cross-tabulation, a cautious conclusion can be drawn that teachers who perceive themselves as more linguistic role models tend to use dialogic reading more frequently, supporting Hypothesis 2. Overall, the high number of ECEC teachers who agree or strongly agree with both statements suggests that acting as a linguistic role model and using dialogic reading are both considered essential in early childhood language education.

6.3.2 The Linguistic Role Model Related to Daily Conversations and Interaction

Table 2. Statistics depict the connection between the variable ‘teachers as linguistic role models’ (vertical axis) and ‘I use simplified language in interactions with multilingual children’ (horizontal axis).

		I use simplified language in interactions with multilingual children					Total
		Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree	
Teachers as linguistic role models	Totally agree	3 (7,1%)	8 (19%)	1 (2,4%)	3 (7,1%)	1 (2,4%)	16 (38,1%)
	Agree	3 (7,1%)	11 (26,2%)	4 (9,5%)	3 (7,1%)		21 (50%)
	Neither agree nor disagree.		1 (2,4%)	3 (7,1%)			4 (9,5%)
	Disagree				1 (2,4%)		1 (2,4%)
	Totally disagree						
	Total	6 (14,3%)	20(47,6%)	8 (19%)	7 (16,7%)	1 (2,4%)	42 (100%)

There was no significant relationship between “Teachers as linguistic role models” and “Using simplified language in interactions with multilingual children”, $\chi^2 (12, N = 42) = 16,67, p = ,162, \text{Gamma} = ,216$. The cross table depicts teachers’ self-perceptions as linguistic

role models (vertical axis) and their statements about using simplified language with multilingual children (horizontal axis). Although the relationship is not statistically significant, the positive Gamma value suggests a moderate association. Most responses (62%) cluster around “Totally agree” and “Agree” for both being a linguistic role model and using simplified language with multilingual children. Additionally, there is a decline in agreement in both categories among those who “Neither agree nor disagree”, indicating that an increased self-perceived role as a model correlates with more frequent use of simplified language. Nonetheless, since the pattern is not statistically significant, Hypothesis 3 cannot be conclusively supported.

Table 3. Statistics illustrating the connection between ‘teachers as linguistic role models’ (vertical axis) and ‘daily conversations enhance vocabulary and language comprehension in the language of instruction for multilingual children’ (horizontal axis).

		Daily conversations contribute to increased vocabulary and language comprehension in the language of instruction for multilingual children					
		Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree	Total
Teachers as linguistic role models	Totally agree	15 (35,7%)	1 (2,4%)				16 (38,1%)
	Agree	19 (45,2%)	2 (4,8%)				21 (50%)
	Neither agree nor disagree.	4 (9,5%)					4 (9,5%)
	Disagree	1 (2,4%)					1 (2,4%)
	Totally disagree						
	Total	39 (92,9%)	3 (7,1%)				42 (100%)

The link between “Teachers as linguistic role models” and “Daily conversations enhance vocabulary and language comprehension in the language of instruction for multilingual children” was not statistically significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 42) = 583, p = ,900$, Gamma = $-,062$. The cross-table indicates how teachers perceive their role as linguistic models,

showing that nearly all ECEC teachers (92.9%) believe that daily conversations help increase vocabulary and language understanding in the instructional language for multilingual children, potentially indicating a ceiling effect. Overall, the data reveal a strong consensus among teachers on the importance of daily conversations for developing the language skills of multilingual children, regardless of whether they see themselves as linguistic role models.

6.3.3 The Linguistic Role Model Related to Play

Table 4. Statistics illustrate the connection between the variable ‘teachers as linguistic role models’ (vertical axis) and ‘during free play, children learn new words and expressions when interacting with peers’ (horizontal axis).

		During free play, children learn new words and expressions when interacting with peers					
		Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree	Total
Teachers as linguistic role models	Totally agree	10 (23,8%)	6 (14,3%)				16 (38,1%)
	Agree	11 (26,2%)	8 (19%)	2 (4,8%)			21 (50%)
	Neither agree nor disagree.	3 (7,1%)	1 (2,4%)				4 (9,5%)
	Disagree		1 (2,4%)				1 (2,4%)
	Totally disagree						
	Total	24 (57,1%)	16 (38,1%)	2 (2,8%)			42 (100%)

The relationship between the variables “Teachers as linguistic role models” and “Children learn new words during free play from peers” was not statistically significant, $\chi^2 (6, N = 42) = 4,146, p = ,657,$ Gamma = ,142. The cross-table illustrates the extent to which teachers perceive themselves as linguistic role models (vertical axis) and their beliefs about children acquiring new words through peer interaction during free play (horizontal axis). A majority (83.4%) of responses fall between “Totally agree” and “Agree” that they are linguistic role models and that children learn language through peer interactions during free play. Five teachers do not explicitly see themselves as linguistic role models, yet they still believe that free play interactions support language development. Thus, free play remains important regardless

of teachers' self-perception as role models, which aligns with Hypothesis 5.

Table 5. Statistics illustrate the connection between 'teachers as linguistic role models' (vertical) and 'adult-led play supporting multilingual children's development of the instructional language' (horizontal).

		Adult-led play contributes to multilingual children's development of the language of instruction					Total
		Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree	
Teachers as linguistic role models	Totally agree	10 (23,8%)	4 (9,5%)	2 (4,8%)			16 (38,1%)
	Agree	11 (26,2%)	10 (23,8%)				21 (50%)
	Neither agree nor disagree.	2 (4,8%)	1 (2,4%)	1 (2,4%)			4 (9,5%)
	Disagree			1 (2,4%)			1 (2,4%)
	Totally disagree						
	Total	23 (54,8%)	15 (37,5%)	4 (9,5%)			42 (100%)

The relationship between “Teachers as linguistic role models” and “Adult-led play support multilingual children’s language development” was significant, $\chi^2 (6, N = 42) = 14,34, p = ,026$, Gamma = ,236. The cross-table illustrates how teachers perceive themselves as linguistic role models (vertical axis) and their beliefs about the contribution of adult-led play to language development in multilingual children (horizontal axis). The positive Gamma indicates a moderate association between these variables. A large majority (83.4%) of responses fall into the “Totally agree” and “Agree” categories, indicating that teachers perceive themselves as linguistic role models and believe that adult-led play supports the language development of multilingual children. However, teachers who agree that adult-led play contributes to development are not evenly distributed across those who consider themselves role models. Most tend to agree rather than totally agree. The Chi-square results and the cross-table suggest that teachers who perceive themselves as linguistic role models are more likely to believe that adult-led play benefits the language development of

multilingual children, thus disproving Hypothesis 6A. Conversely, Hypothesis 6B is confirmed.

In summary, most ECEC teachers in the Finnish data see themselves as linguistic role models, especially in dialogic reading and adult-led play. However, the results show no clear link between seeing oneself as a linguistic role model and preparation for the read-aloud situation, raising questions about the quality of their language teaching. Interaction and daily conversations are highly valued. At the same time, most teachers report using simplified language when speaking with multilingual children, suggesting that these children may not have equal opportunities to develop their academic language skills. Free play is highly valued regardless of how teachers view their roles. This aligns with the holistic tradition in Nordic ECEC and the special importance placed on play. However, adult-led play appears to be just as important and is linked to teachers' views of their linguistic role as models.

6.4 Informing the Development of a Language Teaching Model

The survey results reveal variation in language-teaching practices across different settings, influenced by individual beliefs and organizational factors. In the Swedish data, four profiles—implicit, explicit, positive, and challenged—capture this diversity. Meanwhile, the Finnish analysis indicates that many teachers see themselves as linguistic role models, though this self-perception does not always lead to planned, intentional activities such as dialogic read-alouds or working with academic vocabulary. Collectively, these patterns informed the development of the Academic Languageing model by highlighting three key design needs. First, academic language should be clearly distinguished as a specific pedagogical focus. Second, due to variations in strategies and limited planning time, short, repeatable planning cycles and reflection prompts are essential for routine activities like read-alouds, mealtimes, and play-based processing. Third, because of different levels of multilingual competence, the model requires clear conceptual guidance through language awareness.

In chapter 7, these insights are translated into the model outlining key design principles (intentionality, content focus, language

awareness, and feasibility), core components (Identification - Didaktik analysis and weekly planning - Teaching - Reflection - Modification), and specific tools (brief planning and reflection templates).

7 Academic Languageing – A Language Teaching Model for ECEC

This chapter presents the final version of the language teaching model developed in the thesis, Academic Languageing, including its components, functions, and usability in teaching language to young children. The findings here contribute to achieving the thesis's aim of expanding knowledge of language teaching in ECEC.

The presentation of Academic Languageing is divided into four parts. First, the theoretical triad is presented, emphasizing how different lines of theorizing interact within the model. Second, the structure of the model is described, together with empirical illustrations drawn from teachers' experiences of working with the model and their views on what it contributes to language teaching. The third part illustrates how the model operates in practice, supported by examples from teacher interviews. Fourth and final, the model's usability and future potential are discussed based on teachers' experiences.

7.1 The Theoretical Triad

The theoretical triad for Academic Languageing emerged as an outcome of the theory-building that took place during the development of the language teaching model. Rather than being derived from theory alone, the triad crystallized through the iterative process of connecting practice-based insights with the interdependent theoretical perspectives on language and teaching described in chapter 3. It therefore represents a packaged and visualized synthesis of the model's theoretical foundation, an integrated whole in which each perspective retains its distinct function while gaining meaning through its relationship to the others.

At the same time, the triad was designed to function as a practical and manageable heuristic for teachers, enabling the theoretical ideas of the model to be operationalized in everyday pedagogical work. In this dual role, the triad structures the logic and content of Academic Languageing while also serving as a concrete tool to guide educators in translating its underlying concepts into practice.

7.1.1 The Interaction of the Triad in Academic Linguaging

The theoretical *learning* perspective, based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, emphasizes the importance of social interaction, play, and the proximal zone of development. These concepts are put into practice through the design of teaching that supports children in developing their academic language skills within meaningful, social contexts. Often, this involves play or playful elements, where the teacher intentionally positions themselves within the child's zone of proximal development. An important note is that Academic Linguaging is primarily focused on language teaching, not play. However, given the vital role of play in children's learning, it is essential that teaching incorporates elements of play or playfulness to ensure the interaction between the content and children is as effective as possible.

The theoretical *teaching* perspective, inspired by the German-Nordic Didaktik tradition, provides the model with a clear Didaktik structure. Here, the relationship between teacher, child, and content is clarified through Didaktik analysis and planning frameworks. The model helps teachers determine what to learn (content), why it is crucial (meaning), and how to effectively implement it (pedagogical methods), with a particular emphasis on academic language as a content area.

The theoretical perspective of *language awareness* adds a vital, identity-forming aspect to the model. It is not just about teaching language, but about doing so in ways that recognize children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds, challenge power structures, and enhance children's linguistic identity. In the teaching model, language awareness is not treated as a separate or limited part. Instead, it is integrated into all aspects of the model and influences the entire teaching process—from planning and execution to reflection and adjustment. By emphasizing language awareness as an equal and integrated component of the model, the model creates conditions for teachers to intentionally and systematically focus on language awareness. In this way, language awareness becomes not an extra but a core principle that defines the entire Didaktik approach.

By synthesizing these three perspectives in the model, a holistic approach is created in which language teaching is not reduced to technical skills training but becomes a conscious, relational, reflexive, and inclusive practice. The model thus offers not only a practical tool for planning and reflection, but also a theoretically grounded foundation for understanding and developing language teaching in early childhood education and care.

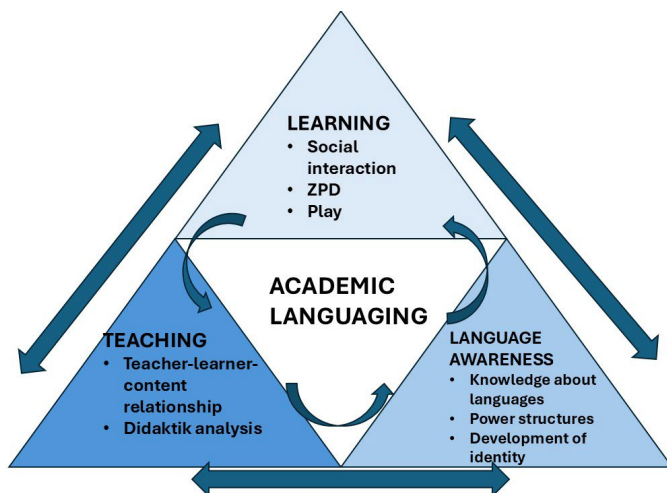


Figure 8. A visualization of the theory-building in the model development process. Illustrating the interaction between learning, teaching, and language awareness in Academic Languageing.

Figure 8 shows how learning, teaching, and language awareness combine to form an integrated and interdependent whole within the teaching model Academic Languageing. By arranging these perspectives in a triangle, their equality and the ongoing collaboration needed for the model to function are highlighted. The triangle also indicates the model’s holistic foundation, in which no part exists independently; instead, each influences and supports the others. At the center of the triangle, Academic Languageing is represented as the outcome of this collaboration—a Didaktik whole where children’s language development is systematically and intentionally supported.

7.2 The Structure of Academic Linguaging

This section presents the teaching model in its final form, with a particular focus on its structure and areas of application. Interviews with teachers, as well as their planning frameworks, underpin the development of the model. The different steps of the model are continuously illustrated with participating ECEC teachers' experiences of working with the model and its various components. The section clarifies how the different components interact to support children's academic language development in early childhood education and care. The model has been designed to contribute consistency, structure, and clarity to language teaching in ECEC, all while supporting a language-aware, child-centered, and playful approach.

The section first outlines the model's aim and scope. It then describes the model's components and their practical applications, supported by teachers' own experiences. It also details the teaching materials developed to support work with the model, and how these are used in preparation, enactment, and reflection. Finally, the section concludes with a summary of the model's expected contribution to language teaching in ECEC.

7.2.1 The Aim and Scope of the Teaching Model

The Academic Linguaging teaching model was developed to provide ECEC teachers with a clear, scientifically based tool to systematically support children's language development, particularly in academic language. The model aims to make academic language visible as a content area and to provide a structure for preparing, planning, implementing, and reflecting on language teaching in ECEC.

The model is structured to be integrated into the everyday routines of ECEC, such as shared book reading and mealtimes, and is based on a child-centered, playful, and language-aware teaching praxis. The model is explicitly designed for settings with rich language diversity and intended for children with typical language development. The model provides conditions for strengthening children's everyday language skills and for developing a more decontextualized, cognitively challenging language —academic language.

By combining theoretical foundation with practical application, the model is intended to support a shift from traditional language stimulation to more explicit and intentional language teaching. This change can occur without compromising the core principles of Nordic ECEC, such as play, children's participation, and interaction. The model is adaptable enough to be used in various teaching sessions and groups of children. It can serve as both a comprehensive Didaktik framework and as practical support in daily teaching activities. By providing structure and systematics, the model establishes conditions for language teaching to be inclusive and focused on the long-term development of children's linguistic knowledge and competencies, as well as teachers' pedagogical awareness.

7.2.2 The Model's Structure – Six Steps of Academic Languageing

The teaching model comprises six steps that together form a systematic, cyclical structure for language teaching. The six steps are designed to support teachers from identifying children's linguistic levels to planning, implementing, reflecting, and making pedagogical adjustments. Below, each step of the model is detailed, along with empirical evidence from teachers' experiences working with each step.

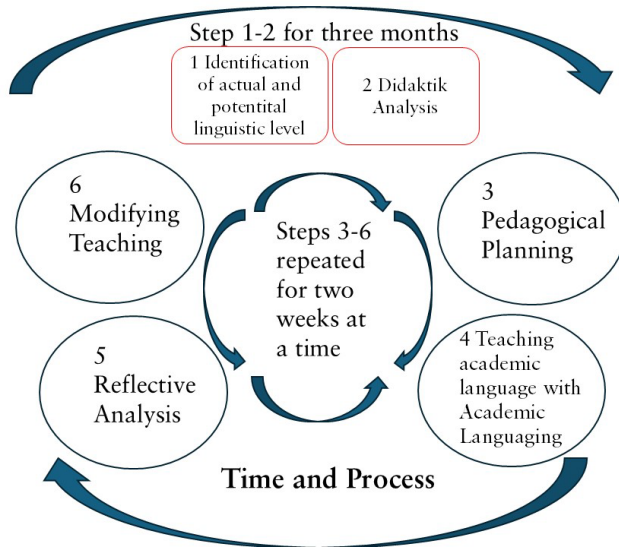


Figure 9. Illustrating six steps of Academic Languageing.

Figure 9 shows the teaching model and its six steps. Steps 1 and 2 are placed at the top to show that they are completed three months apart. Steps 3 to 6 are shown in circles to represent the cyclical process repeated several times during two weeks. Each step of the model is described below.

1 Identification of Children’s Actual and Potential Linguistic Level

The purpose of this initial step is to identify each child’s linguistic needs and use them as a basis for formulating a teaching purpose for the whole child group in the next step. The actual linguistic level refers to the language skills each child currently has. In contrast, the potential level indicates the level each child could reach with the teacher’s help and intentional language teaching. The teacher evaluates each child’s actual language skills in both the language of instruction and the child’s family language. The teacher maps each child individually, but language teaching is then carried out in smaller groups.

In this step, the teacher also evaluates each child's development of everyday and academic language skills in the language of instruction. The same assessment principles are applied as when evaluating a child's linguistic levels. This information helps identify the child's linguistic needs and determine their next stage of language development. The identified linguistic needs guide the teacher's preparatory work in designing the purpose of the language teaching.

The participating teachers worked with children aged 1,5 to 5 years, meaning their linguistic needs varied.

Participating teachers used various methods to assess and identify each child's linguistic needs. Although the model does not specify a standard approach for mapping a child's linguistic levels, participating teachers used methods they were familiar with. For example, one teacher used the Swedish pre-structured material TRAS (*Tidig registrering av språkutveckling*, Skappel Misund et al., 2014) while another observed each child's language skills in everyday situations, focusing on vocabulary, argumentation, and sentence length. To assess a child's linguistic knowledge in their family languages, most teachers sought assistance from parents, while others focused solely on the language of instruction.

As the teachers worked to identify each child's everyday and academic language skills, several teachers discovered, with the help of the model's first step, that the children's everyday language skills were not at the level they had initially imagined. Teacher pink reasons about this:

I thought they might be at a higher linguistic level than they appeared to be... However, I noticed that the language was perhaps not as good as I thought.

Teacher yellow follows and reflects on the underlying reason why the children's linguistic levels do not match what the teachers initially expected:

Our mindset has shifted because we think highly of children; however, we should consider what they actually need and what they are capable of expressing.

Sometimes we assume that if a child says ‘yes’ because they act accordingly, but they might not be verbally expressing it; their actions show meaning, and these are two very different things (Teacher, yellow).

The following linguistic needs were identified by the teachers:

- strengthen everyday language skills,
- expand vocabulary,
- develop phonological awareness
- develop syntactic competence
- develop semantic and narrative competence.

2 Didaktik Analysis

In the second step, the teacher conducts a Didaktik analysis using a specific planning template (see Appendix 5). The analysis is based on the linguistic needs identified in step one. Its goal is to establish a clear purpose for teaching and to reflect on how the content relates to the children’s current and future lives. The multilingual aspect is incorporated into the analysis, prompting the teacher to consider how children’s diverse languages can be made visible in language teaching. Additionally, the teacher reflects on how language diversity in the classroom is currently expressed and what it is expected to lead to in the future. The Didaktik analysis is conducted for a three-month period, meaning the purpose formulated by teachers remains the same during that time, while teaching methods may evolve. When conducting a Didaktik Analysis, the following questions are to be answered:

What should Academic Language include more broadly? What is the goal of teaching?

How diverse is the language within the group?

Why does the purpose matter for the child’s daily interactions and learning in ECEC?

Why is the purpose important for the child’s future life?

The fact that the analysis is issued for three-month periods was identified as an important aspect in developing the model. This relates to the participating teachers' experiences that language development takes time, and should take time. The time aspect is emphasized as especially important because many children do not speak the language of instruction as their family language, and teachers believe that the need for repetition and patience becomes even more crucial. Teacher grey explains:

Or for me, with my children who do not have Swedish as their family language, you need to repeat the same content many, many times before you can move on.

3 Pedagogical Planning

The third step involves the teacher developing a detailed two-week plan that clearly outlines content areas, teaching strategies, materials, and the organization of the teaching sessions. The weekly plan is created using a specific template (see Appendix 6). In this step, the teacher considers how the chosen content can relate to children's real-life experiences. Four key planning aspects were identified that seemed to contribute to the quality of pedagogical planning, strengthening not only the structure of teaching but also its relevance, inclusion, and language awareness.

Building bridges between Academic Language and other ECEC activities

Primarily focusing on the language of instruction

Collaboration with parents

Translanguaging

The teachers emphasized that language teaching should not occur in isolation but should be connected to ongoing thematic projects, children's interests, and other early childhood education activities. They believed that creating these connections helps children develop their language skills in multiple meaningful contexts. Teachers highlighted a clear focus on the language used as the language of instruction (in this case, Swedish) as an important aspect. They felt that the

reflections in step one helped them better focus on what teaching should involve when planning in step two. The teachers described how collaboration with parents became an important resource in the planning. By involving parents in the translation of focus words and concepts, the children's family languages could be concretely integrated into the teaching. The teachers planned how to use different languages strategically in teaching, both to explain focus words and to encourage children to use their linguistic resources. According to the teachers, the effect was that several children developed pride in their family language and began using it more actively on their own.

4 Teaching Academic Language With Academic Linguaging

In the fourth step, teaching is undertaken either during mealtime or during shared book reading. The teaching is well-organized but includes playful elements. During mealtimes, teaching can take place at breakfast, lunch, or afternoon snack. Teachers choose a suitable mealtime based on children's needs and their ability to be receptive to the content. The structure of the shared book reading is based on the teacher first reading a book for the children, followed by a planned play activity. The idea behind this structure is that children first encounter the content through the book and then process and deepen their understanding through play.

A variety of pedagogical strategies is to be used to engage children and keep them focused on the intended content:

Structured realization

Multimodal teaching

Pedagogical interaction

Translanguaging

A structured realization was identified in the analysis as a key factor in successfully organizing the teaching. The empirical data show that they had a well-thought-out plan for how the teaching session would begin, progress, and end. Teachers reported that a structured approach seemed to help children feel safe because it let them know

what was coming and what was expected of them. Multimodal teaching was also a well-established strategy used by the participating teachers. In teaching, two multimodal resources were primarily used to support children's encounter with the content: talking maps and picture support. Teacher pink describes how multimodal resources are a crucial part of the teaching:

That's a lot of support, I'd say. That's really what... Had I asked questions out of thin air, they couldn't have answered them. But it will still be framed somewhere as what we will talk about. They pick up immediately, want to take the picture, look, point, and show it. So it becomes very concrete for them that this is what we are talking about. This is what I am asking about.

Pedagogical interaction was identified as a key strategy. It refers to the teacher being sensitive to understanding what children need in the moment to participate and engage with the intended content. Using pedagogical interaction as a strategy to keep children engaged and focused on the intended content seemed to promote participation and collective learning, according to the teachers. It was noted that allowing children to participate in organizing the teaching session appeared to impact their motivation during the session positively.

The use of translanguaging was found to serve two primary purposes in implementing Academic Language. First, it helped multilingual children follow and understand the content. The second purpose of translanguaging was to visually showcase language diversity through speech. Children were allowed to use all their languages, and teachers took the time to learn words and phrases in the children's languages to incorporate into their teaching. The use of children's family languages in teaching was found to promote children's multilingual identity development, while also growing interest and curiosity among so-called monolingual children. Teacher blue explains:

They are [monolingual children] almost more interested in tapping this language panel to hear and listen than the Spanish-speaking kids. So it's more these non-Spanish speakers standing there pushing. Yes, they are

very curious. After all, they are the ones who stand there and feel that they want to learn; they want to hear.

The empirical data demonstrate that play was used in varying degrees and forms, ranging from general playfulness in the teaching situation to more structured and goal-oriented play. In some cases, play was integrated in accordance with Vygotsky's definition: children take on roles, create imaginative environments, process experiences, and interact with cultural artifacts. In other teaching situations, not all criteria for full play were met, but a playful approach still characterized the teaching. This playfulness directed shared attention to the teaching content and created a safe, engaging learning environment.

One example of a more goal-oriented approach to play was when children in an ECEC setting engaged in role-play as doctors after reading the book *Totte Goes to the Doctor*, illustrating how teaching content can be deepened through play. An example of a more playful approach was when a teacher hung pictures from the ceiling during mealtime, linked to the theme of emotions, serving as a creative method to spark curiosity and conversation.

5 Reflective Analysis of Teaching

After each teaching session, teachers conduct a reflective analysis of the teaching that was implemented. In this reflective analysis, they answer seven questions about the teaching outcome, how children responded to the content, and how the teaching can be improved for the next session. The following questions are included in the reflective analysis:

- 1. What intended content was planned, and what was the outcome?*
- 2. How was the teaching intended to be conducted, and what was the outcome?*
- 3. What was successful with the teaching?*
- 4. What was less successful with the teaching?*
- 5. How did children respond to the content and the teaching methods chosen?*
- 6. How was multilingualism incorporated into the teaching?*

7. *What needs to be thought of for the following teaching session?*

This step is crucial because the questions prompt teachers to reflect on what was intended and what actually occurred, and to look ahead to how teaching can be continued and improved. Recurrent reflections contribute to the quality of teaching.

The level of reflection among the participating teachers varied from shallow to in-depth analyses of the conducted teaching. Reflections made by teacher purple were characteristic of shallow and short reflections:

The material I took out helped children become more verbal. We sat on a rug on the floor so everyone could access the material easily.

The in-depth reflections were more detailed, considered several perspectives, and attempted to analyze the own teaching critically. An example of an in-depth reflection is made by teacher green when reflecting on how multilingualism was incorporated:

Joint teaching: very little focus on multilingualism this time. The child had difficulty translating forgotten words into Swedish independently, and the word list I had prepared did not help during our discussions. Only one word was used in Polish when the child forgot the Swedish word. Individual child: I named the words in Swedish and English. The child used translanguaging, and I repeated the sentence with all the words and also translated it into Swedish. I used translanguaging and gave instructions in both English and Swedish, reinforced with TAKK (Signs as Support). The child repeated words I said in both Swedish and English. The child used translanguaging in their sentences, and I repeated them in both Swedish and English.

6 Modifying Teaching

The sixth and final step involves teachers adjusting their teaching based on reflections from step five. These adjustments are made continuously to improve teaching and better address each child's needs. The changes teachers implement may include, for example, selecting new materials, such as a different book, reflecting on pedagogical interactions, and therefore reorganizing the teaching approach.

The analysis reveals that these adjustments are often minor, raising questions about whether the final step is frequently done hastily rather than through careful reflection and thorough adjustments.

Example of modifications in teacher templates:

I need to think about how I plan the enactment so that even the quiet child gets a chance to speak, regardless of how I have planned to implement the teaching (Teacher, green).

I need to try to interpret body language more, what does it say? Continue to focus on the emotional expressions and relate to the children's own feelings (Teacher, pink).

7.2.3 Concluding Reflections on the Model's Contribution to Intentional Language Teaching

In summary, the development of the Academic Languageing model offers a scientifically grounded, practice-based approach to transforming traditional, implicit language stimulation into intentional, goal-oriented language teaching in ECEC. The model provides specific guidance on how language teaching can be organized, planned, and undertaken with a clear pedagogical and linguistic purpose.

The model's cyclical design, based on teachers' experiences and reflections, emphasizes the importance of time and repetition as key teaching principles. This structure allows teachers to revisit and refine their plans at least four times during each cycle, highlighting that language development is a gradual process that requires consistent effort.

Teachers consistently stressed that children need multiple exposures to linguistic content to internalize and use new language skills. However, time also proved to be the biggest challenge. While teachers found the model's structure and practical use effective and supportive of intentional teaching, they all agreed that organizational constraints often hindered their ability to plan effectively.

To address this, teachers suggested planning every two weeks, which they found to be a practical and supportive way to stay intentional in language teaching. This change shows the model's flexibility and ability to adapt to real-world situations, while also highlighting the importance of structural support for ongoing pedagogical planning.

Looking ahead, the model's value lies not only in its design but also in its potential to spark a broader shift in how language teaching is understood and practiced in early childhood education and care. It urges educators and institutions to move beyond incidental language exposure and toward intentional, inclusive, and cognitively engaging language teaching.

8 Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to expand knowledge about language teaching in early childhood education and care, with particular attention to multilingual children. This was addressed by examining teachers' perspectives on language teaching practices and strategies, their role as linguistic role models, and the processes involved in developing a model for intentional academic language teaching. This chapter discusses the thesis's main findings and how they contribute to knowledge and to educational practice.

8.1 Expanded Insights on Variation in Language Teaching Practices in ECEC

The identification of four distinct teacher profiles related to language teaching: implicit, positive, explicit, and challenged, makes an empirical contribution highlighting differences in language teaching approaches in multilingual early childhood education and care settings. Past research indicates that Nordic ECEC primarily employs a holistic and implicit approach, integrating language learning into daily activities (Brodin & Renblad, 2020; Kultti & Pramling, 2020; Wedin, 2017). However, studies have generally examined practices in broad terms, without differentiating among teacher groups or identifying patterns of variation within the profession. By empirically demonstrating how teachers cluster based on their views on play, language activities, planning, and multilingualism, the thesis nuances the understanding of pedagogical landscapes in language-diverse ECEC environments.

The identified teacher profiles resonate with tendencies reported in earlier research. The predominance of the implicit teacher profile corresponds with studies showing that many early childhood educators perceive everyday interactions and free play as central to children's language development (Gjems, 2012; Downer et al., 2024). Likewise, teachers who fall within the explicit profile express views that align with research emphasizing the value of more structured and intentional approaches, such as dialogic reading or targeted vocabulary work (Reese et al., 2010; Snow, 2010). Furthermore, the positive

teacher profile, characterized by a combination of implicit and explicit strategies together with greater multilingual awareness, reflects earlier findings that teachers who hold favorable attitudes toward multilingualism tend to describe using, or being open to using, a wider repertoire of pedagogical strategies (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020; Fredriksson & Lindgren Eneflo, 2019).

Together, the four profiles offer a conceptual framework for understanding diversity in the teaching profession that extends beyond mere descriptions of strategies. They illustrate how teachers' methods regarding language, multilingualism, and teaching form recognizable patterns. Additionally, the profiles indicate that teachers' self-perception as linguistic role models does not correspond with the deliberate planning they report, a finding that enriches previous research showing that linguistic modelling is widely supported but not consistently implemented in practice (Björk-Willén, 2022). The thesis's findings empirically demonstrate variations previously suggested but not thoroughly documented. It adds new insights indicating how language teaching might be structured in multilingual ECEC settings and lays the groundwork for future research on how different pedagogical approaches influence children's exposure to both everyday and academic language.

In multilingual ECEC, organizational conditions are active mechanisms that shape language teaching practices rather than being merely neutral background factors. Previous research links interaction quality and the feasibility of goal-oriented pedagogy to structural factors such as planning flexibility and group size (Sheridan et al., 2009; Sylva et al., 2004). The thesis's survey findings expand on this by showing how reported organizational conditions correlate with different approaches to language teaching, helping explain why practices form distinct patterns in similar settings.

Two organizational factors stand out as particularly important. First, planning time distinguishes the four teacher profiles: the profile with the least reported planning capacity also reports the lowest ability to set clear linguistic goals, prepare vocabulary and discourse strategies for shared reading, and incorporate family languages beyond casual

references. Second, large group size is a common challenge across profiles, with no significant differences among them. The patterns found here suggest that planning time influences what is possible in daily pedagogy, while group size creates a baseline difficulty that increases the organizational challenge of promoting extended talk and differentiating input in language diverse groups.

Identifying a challenged teacher profile adds new insights to the field by demonstrating how the participating teachers themselves perceive organizational factors, especially planning time and group size, that shape their pedagogical opinions. While previous research has explored structural limitations in early childhood education and care (Sheridan et al., 2009; Brodin & Renblad, 2020), the survey findings deepen the understanding by showing how such constraints are reflected in teachers' attitudes toward language teaching. The challenged teacher profile, characterized by a lower reported use of both implicit and explicit strategies and reduced confidence in multilingual pedagogy, suggests an association between perceived organizational limitations and teachers' pedagogical beliefs. These findings indicate that educators' orientations toward language diversity need to be interpreted in relation to the organizational conditions they experience.

The imbalance in planning matches research on underplanned routines. For example, shared book reading is common in Nordic ECEC but often lacks detailed planning for vocabulary development or register work (Alatalo et al., 2024). Conversely, mealtimes have language potential when intentionally structured (Kultti, 2013). The survey findings support this pattern: when planning time is limited, rich learning contexts tend to be implicit; when planning time is available, these contexts are more frequently oriented toward explicit linguistic goals.

The broader research on interaction supports this conclusion. Studies show that while teachers often respond to children's utterances, extended, linguistically complex exchanges are less frequent without prior preparation and scaffolding (Downer et al., 2024; Gjems, 2012). Reviews of teaching in multilingual settings also note a tendency to simplify language, which can limit opportunities for decontextualized

talk unless supported by planned strategies (Langeloo et al., 2019). These findings, combined with the survey's profiles on planning time, suggest that preparation is a key factor in whether routine activities provide implicit stimulation or targeted, content-focused language work.

The analysis identifies where organizational constraints are most impactful, where they cluster, and where they have broader effects on practice. It also links these constraints to patterns in language-teaching orientations within multilingual ECEC. Thereby, variations in pedagogy within specific organizational parameters discussed in previous studies are situated (Sheridan et al., 2009; Sylva et al., 2004), and understanding of under-planned routines in Nordic contexts is expanded (Alatalo et al., 2024; Kultti, 2013) by showing how differences in planning scope relate to distinct practitioner profiles.

The variation found in how teachers see themselves as language models and how they report engaging in language-related activities demonstrate that although most teachers identify with being a role model, this self-view does not always align with intentional or structured language teaching plans. Teachers who see themselves as language role models also report more frequent use of dialogic read-aloud strategies and greater focus on adult-led play, indicating specific connections between self-image and teaching choices.

Evidence in previous research findings helps contextualize these patterns. Alatalo et al. (2024) show that read-aloud sessions occur regularly but are seldom intentionally planned, indicating that identifying as a linguistic role model does not automatically entail targeted language input during these activities. Dickinson et al. (2019) further demonstrate that when teachers employ deliberate reading strategies, read-aloud activities can strengthen children's vocabulary development. Taken together, these findings situate teachers' self-perceptions within a broader body of work and highlight how interpretations of the role model concept relate to the degree of intentionality teachers report bringing to language-related activities.

Similarly, research on daily interactions indicates that teachers usually respond to children's comments, but unless the interaction is

intentionally scaffolded, they engage in fewer extended, language-intensive exchanges (Gjems, 2012; Henry & Pianta, 2011; Paatsch et al., 2019). Intentional and scaffolded interactions are widely acknowledged as crucial for language development. Without prior preparation and a clear content focus, role modeling may only promote “here-and-now” language instead of academic language.

The strategies reported by teachers show varying levels of alignment with their self-perception as linguistic role models. A positive association is found between identifying as a role model and reporting the use of dialogic reading, consistent with earlier research highlighting dialogic techniques as beneficial for supporting children’s oral language development. In contrast, many teachers report simplifying their language when working with multilingual children, a tendency also noted in previous studies (Langeloo et al., 2019). Although such simplification might be intended to support immediate understanding, it can reduce opportunities to engage in more decontextualized or cognitively demanding talk. Teachers who see themselves as linguistic role models also report valuing adult-led play more highly, a pattern that matches findings by Erdemir and Brutt-Griffler (2022) and Norling and Lillvist (2016), demonstrating that guided, goal-oriented play can create space for concept discussions and narrative elaboration beyond spontaneous interactions. Overall, these findings suggest that diverse strategies relate differently to the role-model self-perception: dialogic reading and adult-led play tend to be associated with this perception, whereas language simplification, although frequently reported, aligns less clearly with the aim of fostering decontextualized language without additional planning.

Furthermore, the survey findings indicate that both implicit and explicit language teaching coexist in Swedish ECEC. In line with the implicit tradition reported in previous studies, for example, by Bae (2004) and Ødegaard (2006, 2007), teachers participating in the study report frequent use of implicit language teaching strategies, such as everyday routines and play. Routine situations, such as mealtimes, have language-developing potential when they are given a pedagogical structure (Kultti, 2013). Survey findings suggest that explicit teaching approaches are more prominent in language-diverse groups. This

may indicate that teachers in such contexts feel a stronger need to adopt explicit strategies. Given that the largest teacher profile was the explicit profile and that language diversity is constantly increasing, this could be a factor contributing to teachers in language-diverse environments seeming to prefer explicit language teaching. However, this relationship should be investigated further.

The survey findings indicate that pedagogical orientations are influenced by both personal ideals and organizational factors, as earlier noted by Kultti and Pramling (2020) who show that teachers' values underpin their pedagogical beliefs. Teachers of various profiles tend to value play and daily interactions. An interesting question that arises is whether implicit strategies are more frequently used because of limited time, since explicit teaching might require more planning.

8.2 Insights Into Academic Language Teaching in ECEC

The thesis's conceptualization of academic language teaching for children aged 1-5, and the teaching model developed on this foundation, contributes insights into what a shift in ECEC language teaching might mean, in theory and practice. By constructing an early childhood based understanding of Didaktik, the teaching of academic language is in the practice-study related to and embedded in the playful, child-centered characteristics of Nordic ECEC. Empirical examples are provided of how academic language teaching can be enacted in common ECEC routines, thereby illustrating how academic language may be approached as meaningful content for younger children.

In this thesis, academic language is defined as a complex and often de-contextualized form of language use that involves narrating beyond the immediate situation, describing objects and events, and explaining relationships. This definition draws on the distinction between everyday language and academic language described by Cummins (1979, 1981, 1984) and highlights the cognitive and contextual demands associated with such language use, as well as children's access to adult support and mediating tools (Cummins, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978).

In the context of early childhood education and care, academic language is understood not as a set of advanced vocabulary items but as ways of speaking and communicative strategies that enable children to refer to non-present events, work across multiple time frames, and express more abstract ideas. From a sociocultural perspective, these forms of language emerge in joint activities where adults make complex language available as part of the interaction (Säljö, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings of the practice-based study show that children's experiences with academic language are shaped by how everyday activities are planned and supported. Building on existing knowledge of situations perceived as fundamental to language learning (Alatalo & Westlund, 2021; Bae, 2004; Hindman & Wasik, 2012), the findings illustrate how these daily activities can serve as teaching moments for academic languaging. These ideas align with a sociocultural perspective, in which teachers facilitate language use through tools such as artifacts and visual supports, helping children progress from immediate participation to more abstract discussions (Vygotsky, 1978). Multimodality becomes essential to understanding academic language and how children express it. Images, objects, and bodily gestures help connect everyday experiences with more abstract forms of communication, especially in multilingual settings, where translanguaging practices enable children to draw on their full language repertoires as resources for participation (García & Wei, 2014).

Rooted in a Nordic ECEC tradition, the practice-based study explores how academic language is treated as meaningful within existing language practices, rather than as subject-specific lessons. It shows how Didaktik theory can be applied and integrated into settings with young children, offering practical examples of intentional language teaching that moves beyond a Didaktik view that focuses on formality and excludes care (Saebbe, 2019). This work highlights when and how ordinary situations evolve into contexts resembling academic language, particularly when teachers have time to plan and when teaching aims are explicitly linked to actual linguistic needs.

A common theme in both the survey and practice-based study results concerning academic language is that teachers act as key linguistic

resources. The findings suggest that teachers' linguistic behaviors and verbal expressions serve as models for children to imitate during their learning. This role modeling by teachers aligns with earlier research showing that teachers' own language use creates opportunities for children's linguistic growth in early childhood education and care (Norling, 2015; Norling & Lillvist, 2016). When teachers explain purposes, concepts, and structures during planning, they function not only as organizers but also as linguistic models demonstrating how language can be used in educational settings.

Given this context, planning time again appears to be a crucial factor in how participating teachers experienced their work. The practice-based study shows that limited time for teacher preparation is perceived as hindering the development of linguistic goals and the selection of meaningful content tailored to linguistic needs. Not being able to develop linguistic goals and choose content does not mean that teachers would lack the desire to prioritize academic language as a teaching goal; rather, it indicates that organizational factors influence how systematically pedagogical and linguistic decisions are put into practice. As a result, it may be suggested that linguistic role modeling is more spontaneous than preplanned.

The fact that teachers serve as key linguistic role models raises an additional question beyond the study's findings: how teachers' own language abilities may shape their modeling of academic language. The thesis does not empirically examine teachers' language abilities, and the study design did not include any assessment of teachers' access to or command of academic language. This means that the model work implicitly assumed that all participating teachers possessed the linguistic resources required to engage with academic language in the ways envisioned, even though this was not verified. The first indications that teachers' language use varied emerged during the transcription of data in the first iteration and became more noticeable in the second.

Considering the broader societal discussion happening during the study, where some Swedish municipalities introduced language tests for ECEC teachers and national stakeholders debated increased

language requirements for entry into teacher education, teachers' language skills are a sensitive yet relevant factor. Teachers' backgrounds vary across ECEC environments (Kultti & Pramling, 2020), and such variation may also entail structural differences in access to academic language. From this perspective, teachers' language abilities constitute a potential organizational condition that may influence the opportunities children have to encounter academic language. Attending more explicitly to this dimension would likely have provided a more nuanced understanding of the conditions under which the Academic Language model can be enacted.

8.3 Insights From Developing an Intentional Language Teaching Model for ECEC

The process of developing the Academic Language teaching model has generated details and nuances that enrich both theoretical and empirical understandings of intentional language teaching within Nordic ECEC (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2017; Björk-Willén, 2022; Klafki, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

The insights into teachers' approach to academic language teaching shed light on how sociocultural learning theory and Didaktik theory are translated into practice. Such translation is particularly evident with respect to social interaction, play, and children's zone of proximal development and pedagogical content. For instance, teachers employ pedagogical interactions, such as intentionally deciding where children are positioned during the teaching activity, and use cultural tools, such as picture supports and play figures, to facilitate deeper language learning. This practical application mainly happens through careful planning and preparation (Klafki, 2006). The findings show that teachers balance children's existing linguistic knowledge with meaningful contexts designed to help them reach their full linguistic potential, as evidenced by the focus words used during read-alouds and the thoughtfully crafted discussion prompts at mealtimes (Vygotsky, 1978). The teachers' descriptions and planning frameworks demonstrate how the difference between everyday and academic language is enacted in practice. They design language teaching that caters to children's linguistic needs by offering opportunities to retell,

describe, and apply subject-specific vocabulary, aligning with what researchers have identified as academic language (Schleppegrell, 2004; Snow & Uccinelli, 2009). In this way, the practice-based study demonstrates how theoretical ideas gain practical importance through intentional planning, engagement, and reflection.

The findings of the practice-based study and the participating teachers' use of the teaching model further show that, and how, explicit teaching of academic language can be integrated into existing early childhood education and care frameworks for children aged 1–5 years. This kind of knowledge has been identified as missing in previous research (Barnes et al., 2016; Ring Sandell, 2021). The model's structured approach, in which teachers follow a clear design and logic, seems to strengthen their opportunities to set linguistic goals for teaching. These goals include helping children develop the ability to describe, choose key words and concepts related to academic language, design activities, and select content that encourages them to use academic language in various pedagogical contexts. Such an approach is likely to support children's development of both the formal aspects of language and its functional use (Cummins, 2017), which are often considered primarily relevant to the school environment (Gibbons, 2006; Wedin, 2011).

Moreover, the study shows how explicit and systematic teaching in ECEC can harmonize well with play and care, and how play can be incorporated into a structured approach. The findings indicate that an explicit focus on language can be embedded in read-aloud activities and daily routines, such as mealtimes, where play becomes a meaningful and engaging way for children to process and explore teaching content. This adds to the understanding of what teaching, especially language teaching, can involve within ECEC—a topic discussed in both Sweden and Finland. Researchers have maintained that there is not a single, universal definition of teaching in ECEC settings (Melker et al., 2018; Nilsson et al., 2018; Sheridan & Williams, 2018). On the basis of the findings in this thesis, one possible definition of language teaching can be that it is a planned, situated, and reflective process with a clear purpose and content.

The realization process, however, highlights challenges that participating teachers face. The time factor identified in earlier research (Sheridan et al., 2009) and in the thesis's survey study reappears. The participating teachers describe difficulties in finding time to plan teaching intended for academic languaging, mainly due to what they describe as insufficient organizational support. While pre-made planning materials are viewed positively, the main issue lies in executing the actual planning. According to teachers in the study, inadequate planning leads to poorly formulated teaching goals and limited time to thoroughly prepare for language teaching. A cautious conclusion from previous studies and current findings is that also when supported by a teaching model, planning is crucial for high-quality language teaching, especially in language-diverse settings where multilingualism adds complexity and requires additional time and effort to implement (Haukås, 2016; Kirsch et al., 2020).

The participating teachers' work with the proposed model provides systematic insights into the challenges associated with the model's emphasis on supporting children's identity development. In the study, teachers were expected to use children's family languages as resources and to plan content and pedagogical activities that consider children's diverse backgrounds. The model's emphasis on family languages and children's backgrounds is grounded in existing knowledge, among other things, about the relationship between language and identity (Baker & Wright, 2017; Stille & Cummins, 2013). By making this visible, the model shows that identity is not just about language choice but also involves belonging and children's experiences of all their languages being valid; the teacher's role is thus to include these aspects in teaching. For the teachers in the practice-based study, this seems to be a challenge, likely because teachers are not always used to systematically integrating such elements into their teaching.

A further limitation concerns the model itself. The model assumes that teachers can systematically assess each child's language abilities in both the instruction language and their family languages. While the intention of tailoring language teaching to children's linguistic needs is central to the model, it is not accompanied by concrete guidance

on how such assessments should be carried out. As a result, the model presupposes that teachers have the knowledge and methodological tools required to identify children's linguistic needs. Although this competence is neither ensured through teacher education nor explicitly supported in the model. This omission increases the likelihood that teachers conduct assessments in different ways across settings. This raises questions of equity. If the criteria or methods vary, the foundations for subsequent pedagogical decisions may differ significantly between ECEC settings.

Moreover, it is a legitimate question whether it is reasonable to expect teachers to conduct such assessments. The model positions the first step as vital, yet it does not offer a procedure for carrying it out. Consequently, the thesis does not resolve how children's linguistic knowledge, across multiple languages, can be assessed in a reliable and pedagogically meaningful way in ECEC. This constitutes a central limitation of the model and represents an area that requires further development in future work on Academic Languageing.

So far, the discussion has addressed and highlighted the thesis's contributions to existing knowledge about teachers' language teaching practices, the role academic language appears to play in these settings, and insights from the model-development process. In the following, the input the thesis's findings offer to ECEC practice and professionals will be discussed.

8.4 Implications for Practice

The elaboration of early academic language teaching offered in the thesis includes several areas likely to be of value to early childhood education and care practices. Below some findings that can provide tangible support to ECEC teachers are discussed.

8.4.1 Collegial Learning and Professional Reflection

The four identified teacher profiles offer opportunities for collegial learning and professional reflection regarding variations in how language teaching and language-supportive practices are understood. By empirically demonstrating a spectrum of orientations, the profiles can

serve as a basis for professional dialogue about expectations, roles, and priorities in language-focused work in early childhood education. The survey findings may help ECEC teachers gain a deeper understanding of their own linguistic practices and provide insights into potential differences in how colleagues conceptualize language teaching. The profiles can also be viewed as an analytical framework for examining one's own practice, thereby making visible the linguistic opportunities that different approaches may afford children.

In addition, the survey findings show considerable variation in how teachers enact their role as linguistic models in everyday practice. This variation opens up questions about how linguistic modelling is understood, negotiated, and shared within teams, and how teachers' everyday language use shapes children's encounters with both everyday language and more academically oriented linguistic forms. These self-reported responses point to the pedagogical relevance of developing shared, collective awareness of how teachers' language use functions in practice.

Moreover, the results concerning teachers as linguistic role models extend beyond practice-level variation and point to a broader professional dimension. The analysis shows that ECEC teachers use language in different ways and with varying degrees of conscious intention, meaning they embody linguistic role modelling, whether or not they explicitly articulate it. This aspect, teachers' linguistic self-positioning as part of their pedagogical agency, is not commonly addressed in ECEC research or policy. The thesis, therefore, highlights that teachers' linguistic identity constitutes an essential dimension of their professional practice.

8.4.2 Organizational Support for Language Teaching

The Academic Languageing model, developed in collaboration with practicing teachers, may provide structure and clarity for language-focused work with young children. By following a systematic approach and underlying logic, the model can make visible how language teaching can be organized and carried out, especially when academic language is treated as teaching content. As noted in several parts of the thesis, ECEC teachers often work under time pressure and, at

times, under conditions that limit opportunities for intentional language teaching. In this context, an established structure may reduce the cognitive load associated with planning and support the maintenance of continuity, even in mixed teaching teams or when other organizational factors create challenges.

In the practice-based study, the proposed model was applied during shared reading and mealtimes. Although previous research identifies these situations as pedagogically significant, studies also indicate that shared reading is often unplanned and that language use during meals does not necessarily support more complex languaging. The planning procedure offered by the model makes two aspects visible. First, it highlights the teaching potential inherent in both shared reading and mealtime settings in early childhood education. These situations offer not only general linguistic benefits; when used systematically and planned in accordance with teaching principles, they can also create opportunities for more advanced language use among young children. Second, it clarifies how daily routines can be re-framed as teaching opportunities when supported by structure and clarity. Such routines could include dressing situations and transition moments when children wait for the next activity. In this way, the model creates opportunities to integrate academic language into established practices.

The structure and clarity that the model provides also help develop a shared understanding of what language teaching involves and how it can be conceptualized. As previously mentioned, researchers point out the lack of a unified definition or shared view of what teaching in ECEC entails. The model can add to this discussion by offering a shared reference point for how academic language teaching can be approached. In this way, it may help create a collective professional map of language teaching in ECEC settings. A clear, common approach to language teaching can also support professional dialogue about instructional conditions and opportunities, both locally and more broadly.

8.4.3 Enhanced Awareness of Children’s Diverse Linguistic Needs

The results of the practice-based study show that teachers view children’s individual linguistic needs as a key starting point for planning language-focused teaching. By beginning with an analysis of each child’s existing linguistic repertoire, the model makes the variation in children’s language use more visible and allows teaching to be aligned with children’s current abilities. This need-oriented approach may increase teachers’ awareness of the linguistic diversity within the group and clarify how different children participate linguistically in everyday activities.

In addition, the model distinguishes between everyday and academic language, which gives teachers an analytic lens for examining both children’s language use and their own linguistic choices in interaction. Making this distinction explicit brings attention to forms of language that are often implicit in early childhood settings. By specifying what academic language may entail for children aged 1–5, the model provides a vocabulary that helps teachers recognise linguistic demands that might otherwise remain unarticulated. This can support professional reflection on how different forms of language become accessible to children in routine activities.

8.5 Discussion on Method and Research Process

8.5.1 Choice of Method

The decision to use a mixed-methods approach was made early on. In my opinion, the greatest strength of this approach is that mixed methods offer the possibility of a deeper understanding of complex phenomena. This approach has allowed me to examine language teaching for multilingual children in breadth and depth. Despite the risk that quantitative and qualitative data may be contradictory, in this case, the survey and practice-based data complemented each other. They shed light on crucial aspects of language teaching, e.g., the time teachers spend planning. However, the approach has its limitations. Using mixed methods is more time- and resource-intensive than I imagined. Since two methods are used, more time is required to collect and analyze data. I did not find the data collection process troublesome, but

the analysis was time-consuming and took longer than I had anticipated.

The main challenge in conducting the studies has been recruiting research participants, which has created a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, new research is necessary because ECEC needs to be studied scientifically and grounded in proven experience. On the other side, conducting research depends to some extent on having willing participants. I believe there are two reasons for this difficulty. First, the study was conducted both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was carried out in fall 2021, amid the pandemic. During this period, ECEC settings in Sweden and Finland remained open, but the stress and strain of the situation likely made participation seem less urgent. The practice-based study was conducted in spring 2024, after the pandemic, when people were still carrying the lingering effects of those challenging times. The personnel may have continued to feel the effects of the long pandemic, and a possible caution in taking on new challenges may have felt too exhausting. Secondly, the difficulty of finding research participants, especially teachers, is, from my perspective, an illustration of the strained situation in the field of ECEC. In the last decade, the workload of ECEC teachers has increased drastically—the demands on what teachers should do have grown. The size of children’s groups has increased, and the needs of individual children have become more complex. However, the resources to carry out the various tasks have not increased. Participating in a research study is time-consuming for a teacher. Although the government encourages collaboration between practice and research and is interested in practice-based research, beneficial conditions for such collaboration are often not at hand. This is a dilemma that warrants more attention and discussion.

8.5.2 Reflexivity in the Research Process

Reflexivity involves the researcher’s awareness and critical analysis of their assumptions, values, and understandings. Addressing reflexivity is essential for transparency, as it considers how the researcher’s personal experiences and perspectives may influence the interpretation

and presentation of data. In this section, I describe how reflexivity has been integrated into the research process and the thesis.

My interest in language teaching for multilingual children started during my time as an ECEC teacher. I have taught both in Finland and Sweden. During my PhD, my professional identity evolved as I balanced emotional and professional growth. A challenge was transitioning from teacher to researcher—moving from “knowing” to “not knowing”. Embracing “not knowing” has, for me, fostered growth, challenging my understanding, values, and assumptions. My teaching background and experience in studied contexts have been beneficial. As part of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland and the Finnish-speaking minority in Sweden, I see my linguistic and cultural background as an asset, though it may limit critical examination.

Since I collected data in Finland and Sweden and shared findings from both, I was careful to critically examine my own assumptions. To ensure transparency in the analytic process, I actively sought diverse perspectives and critically reflected on my interpretations, including through peer reviews and discussions with colleagues. My aim has been to make the analytic process as transparent as possible while clarifying how my background may have influenced the research.

While I consider my teaching experience to be a strength, I recognize it may also introduce bias. Personal values and beliefs influence a teacher’s approach, leading me to favor certain methods. During my time as an ECEC teacher, I was especially interested in explicit teaching strategies, which affected my research focus and opinions on language teaching in ECEC. To counteract this bias, I actively pursued alternative viewpoints. For example, I initially aimed to develop a teaching model separate from routine activities and did not consider mealtimes suitable for explicit language teaching. After reviewing existing research, I revised my assumptions to develop a model appropriate for the ECEC setting. Developing a broader understanding and challenging previous beliefs have been essential steps in becoming a researcher.

8.6 Continued Research

Building on the findings and scholarly contributions of this thesis, there are still research areas that could enhance understanding of early academic language teaching in language-diverse ECEC contexts. One key area needing further exploration is the long-term impact of academic language teaching on children. This thesis focused on teachers and teaching, so it does not provide evidence on whether the proposed teaching model, Academic Languageing, achieves its goal of developing children's academic language skills. Consequently, longitudinal studies examining what happens over time when the model is implemented and to assess its actual effects on children's academic language development would be valuable. Additionally, this thesis offers limited insight into how well the model can be adapted to different language contexts, which would be an interesting area for further investigation. More knowledge is consequently needed about the contextual factors influencing whether the same teaching model can be used across various educational settings.

Moreover, the thesis's findings strongly point to the importance of organizational factors such as planning time and group size. Continued research could therefore examine how these structural dimensions interact with the quality of language teaching and what mechanisms constitute the variations of language teaching identified in the thesis. A third area of research regards teachers' language awareness. The thesis findings show the central role teachers play as linguistic role models and how their linguistic actions plant seeds for children's continued language development. Yet it remains unclear how language awareness is developed professionally and how it is translated into practice across various ECEC contexts.

It would also be valuable to draw attention to children's perspectives. Because this thesis focuses solely on teachers' perspectives and their teaching, children's voices are not addressed. Therefore, research focusing on children's views on language diversity and their experiences of academic language teaching would add important insights. To develop a deeper understanding of language diversity, multilingualism, and identity development, we also need to consider children's perspectives to illuminate these complex phenomena.

Finally, the findings raise questions about how teacher profiles relate to children's language development. The thesis indicates that teachers use language differently across contexts, but future research investigating how these differences directly influence children's linguistic development seems needed. Additionally, the role of technology in early language development is significant, especially as digital tools are now part of children's daily experiences, and the potential for digital support in language learning remains underexplored in ECEC settings.

In conclusion, across the two studies, the thesis has highlighted both the possibilities and the constraints that shape language teaching practices in multilingual ECEC settings. The results indicate that academic language does not emerge in isolation but is intertwined with teachers' orientations, everyday routines, and the organizational environments in which they work. By developing the Academic Languageing model and examining its application in practice, the thesis offers new perspectives on how academic language can be made accessible for young children. These insights may inform future research on language, learning, and pedagogical design in early childhood education and care.

Sammanfattning

Att Omformulera Språkundervisning i Förskolan Genom Akademiskt Språkande

Denna avhandling undersöker förskolans språkundervisning med ett särskilt fokus på flerspråkiga barns utveckling av ett akademiskt språk. Även om förskolan anses vara en central arena för utveckling av barns vardagsspråk är kunskapen fortfarande begränsad om hur förskollärare kan stödja barns akademiska språk på ett avsiktligt och systematiskt sätt redan under de tidiga åren. Avhandlingen avser att besvara denna kunskapslucka.

Akademiskt språk definieras som dekontextualiserat, abstrakt, komplext och kognitivt utmanande. Det akademiska språket anses även vara avgörande för barns fortsatta lärande och deltagande i samhället. Forskning visar att flerspråkiga barn ofta möter större utmaningar när det gäller att tillägna sig detta språkliga register. Detta beror bland annat på begränsat ordförråd men också på begränsad tillgång till språkligt rika miljöer. Av den anledningen behöver förskollärare verktyg som gör det möjligt att avsiktligt stödja akademisk språkutveckling, särskilt i förskolemiljöer som kännetecknas av en rik språklig mångfald.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att undersöka förskollärares perspektiv, undervisningsstrategier, syn på flerspråkighet, deras roll som språkliga förebilder samt att utveckla en didaktisk modell, Akademiskt Språkande, för att stödja avsiktligt akademisk språkundervisning i förskolan.

Två delstudier utgör avhandlingens empiriska grund:

1. En omfattande enkätstudie med 275 förskollärare som kartlägger strategier, uppfattningar och organisatoriska villkor för språkundervisning i språkligt mångfaldiga miljöer i Sverige och Finland.
2. En praktiktäna studie där den didaktiska modellen Akademiskt Språkande prövas och utvecklas genom två iterationer

tillsammans med en förskollärare i Finland och sex förskollärare i Sverige.

Sverige och Finland, som utgör avhandlingens studiekontexter, delar syn på förskolan som kännetecknas av en barncenterad, lekbaserad pedagogik där undervisning och omsorg sammanvävs. De språkliga landskapen skiljer sig dock och därmed utgör de bägge länderna exempel på språklig diversitet i denna avhandling.

I Sverige fungerar svenskan som majoritetsspråk medan den i Finland räknas som ett minoritetsspråk. I de svenska förskolorna finns många barn med annat modersmål än svenska, medan det i de finlands-svenska daghemmen finns många barn som har både svenska och finska som modersmål, trots att den språkliga mångfalden kontinuerligt ökar i Finland.

Båda ländernas läroplaner framhåller att förskolan ska fungera som en rik språkmiljö och att förskollärare ska fästa uppmärksamhet vid multimodal kommunikation, tidig litteracitetsutveckling, språk som identitetsbärare samt att förskolläraren och andra vuxna fungerar som språkliga förebilder för barnen. Däremot nämns akademiskt språk inte explicit varken som mål eller innehåll.

Avhandlingens teoretiska ramverk förenar tre perspektiv: sociokulturell teori (Vygotsky, 1978), didaktik (Klafki, 2006) och språkmedvetenhet (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020). Den sociokulturella lärandeteorin, framför allt Vygotskys idéer om den proximala utvecklingszonen och språkets funktion som kulturellt redskap, betonar betydelsen av social interaktion, gemensamt meningsskapande och lek som centrala för barns språkutveckling. Didaktisk undervisningsteori tillför begreppsliga verktyg för att analysera och organisera undervisning genom att belysa relationerna mellan lärare, barn och innehåll. Didaktiken betonar att undervisning behöver vara avsiktlig och innehållsrigt motiverad. Språkmedvetenhet används som ett paraplybegrepp och lägger till ytterligare en dimension genom att rikta uppmärksamheten mot maktrelationer mellan språk, barns språkliga identiteter och hur vissa språk får högre status eller blir osynliga i utbildnings-sammanhang. Syntetiseringen av dessa tre teorier leder fram till en förståelse av språkundervisning som något både relationellt, innehållsrigt och

identitetsstärkande, där barn ses som aktiva deltagare med varierande språkliga resurser som bör tas till vara i förskolans språkundervisning.

Avhandlingens empiriska grund består dels av en omfattande enkätstudie riktad till förskollärare i Sverige och Finland, dels av en praktisknära studie där en språkundervisningsmodell utvecklas genom två iterativa cykler tillsammans med förskollärare. Enkätstudien hade som syfte att kartlägga hur lärare beskriver sina strategier för språkutveckling, hur de ser på flerspråkighet och vilka organisatoriska villkor som påverkar deras arbete. Analysen av de svenska svaren resulterade i fyra tydliga lärarprofiler för språkundervisning: implicita, positiva, explicita och utmanade lärare. Den implicita lärarprofilen lägger stor vikt vid fri lek och vardagliga interaktioner och anser att språk utvecklas naturligt i samspel med andra barn och vuxna. Lärarna i den implicita lärarprofilen uppger att de integrerar i mindre utsträckning barnens familjespråk i undervisningen och uttrycker begränsad kunskap om flerspråkighet. Lärarna i den positiva lärarprofilen uppger sig kombinera implicit och explicit språkundervisning, känner sig kompetenta i frågor som rör flerspråkighet och upplever goda organisatoriska villkor. Den explicita lärarprofilen verkar föredra strukturerade, vuxenledda aktiviteter och fokuserar i högre grad på undervisningspråket, medan integration av familjespråk ges mindre utrymme. Slutligen kännetecknas den utmanade lärarprofilen av bristande planeringstid, osäkerhet kring flerspråkighet och negativa erfarenheter av att organisera språkundervisning. Dessa profiler synliggör variationer mellan olika lärarprofiler som tidigare forskning har antytt men sällan har konkretiserat.

Enkätstudien visar också tydligt att organisatoriska faktorer spelar en avgörande roll för lärarnas möjligheter att bedriva avsiktlig språkundervisning. Stora barngrupper upplevs som ett hinder av alla lärare, och bristen på planeringstid är särskilt framträdande bland lärarna i den utmanande lärarprofilen. Detta påverkar i sin tur hur undervisningen formas i praktiken. I de fall där planeringsmöjligheter är begränsade tenderar undervisningen att bli mer implicit och mindre språkmedveten.

En andra del av enkätstudien, baserad på lärarnas svar i den finlandssvenska kontexten, fokuserade på hur lärare ser på sin roll som språkliga förebilder. Här framkommer att lärarna i hög grad identifierar sig som språkliga förebilder, särskilt i samband med dialogisk högläsning och vuxenledd lek. Samtidigt verkar förberedelser inför högläsning mindre vanliga, vilket tyder på att lärarens självbild inte alltid motsvaras av systematiska och informerade undervisningshandlingar.

Den praktikinära studien syftade till att pröva och utveckla undervisningsmodellen Akademiskt Språkande. Modellen utformades för att erbjuda ett strukturerat, teoretiskt förankrat och praktiskt användbart verktyg för att stödja barns akademiska språkutveckling i förskolan. Den består av sex steg: identifiering av barns språkliga nivå, didaktisk analys, pedagogisk planering, genomförande av undervisning, reflektion och modifiering. Den första komponenten, identifieringen, innebär att lärarna kartlade barns språkliga färdigheter i undervisningsspråket och familjespråket samt i vardagsspråket och akademiskt språk. Många lärare upptäckte att barnen hade lägre språkliga nivåer än de först antagit och att behovet av språklig stöttning var större än de föreställt sig.

Den didaktiska analysen genomfördes för en tre månaders period åt gången och innebar att lärarna formulerade en konkret språkligt syfte för undervisningen, reflekterade över varför undervisningsinnehållet var viktigt för barnen, hur det relaterade till deras vardag och framtid, och hur barnens olika språk kunde synliggöras i språkundervisningen. Den pedagogiska planeringen fungerade som ett mer praktiskt steg där fokusord valdes, material bestämdes och undervisningsaktiviteter planerades i relation till barnens behov. Genomförandet skedde antingen under högläsning eller måltider – två vardagliga situationer som tidigare studier ofta lyfter fram som viktiga tillfällen för språkutveckling. Lärarna arbetade med multimodala strategier såsom bilder, artefakter och rollspel samt med transspråkande. Exempelvis genom att använda ord från barnens familjespråk för att förklara begrepp eller skapa ingångar till samtal. Den efterföljande reflektionen efter varje undervisningstillfälle gav lärarna möjlighet att analysera hur undervisningen fungerat och hur barnen tagit emot innehållet. Modellens sista steg, modifiering, handlade om att lärare gjorde

konkreta förändringar till sina ursprungliga planer, exempelvis val av ny bok, för att göra undervisningen med Akademsikt Språkande så meningsfull och relevant som möjligt.

Ett återkommande tema i lärarnas erfarenheter i den praktiktäna studien var betydelsen av tid och repetition. De konstaterade att barnen, särskilt de som inte hade svenska som familjespråk, behövde många återkommande möten med samma innehåll för att befästa språkliga färdigheter. Lärarna uttryckte samtidigt att de organisatoriska villkoren, framför allt bristen på planeringstid, gjorde det svårt att genomföra den omfattande förberedelsen som modellen egentligen krävde. Trots dessa utmaningar beskrev lärarna modellen som ett stöd för att göra språkundervisningen mer medveten, strukturerad och inkluderande.

Avhandlingens resultat visar sammantaget att språkundervisning i förskolan är ett komplext och mångfacetterat fenomen som formas av en kombination av individuella, pedagogiska och organisatoriska faktorer. Tillsammans pekar resultaten mot behovet av att omdefiniera språkundervisningens roll i förskolan, särskilt i språkligt mångfaldiga miljöer, där flerspråkighet inte längre är undantaget utan normen. De kunskapsbidrag som avhandlingen bidrar med fokuserar på tre centrala områden: I) variation i lärares undervisningspraktiker, II) akademiskt språk som ett meningsfullt innehåll i förskolan och III) de organisatoriska villkor som villkorar möjligheterna till avsiktlig språkundervisning.

Resultatet från enkätstudien ger en unik inblick i hur olika uppfattningar om språk, undervisning och flerspråkighet tar sig uttryck i förskolans undervisningspraktiker. De fyra identifierade lärarprofilerna (implicit, positiv, explicit och utmanad) synliggör hur språkundervisning formas av mer än enbart teoretisk kunskap. Språkundervisningen påverkas också av traditioner, värderingar, erfarenheter och resurser. Detta är betydelsefullt, eftersom forskning ofta talar om "förskollärarkåren" som om den vore en homogen profession, trots att lärares förhållningssätt i praktiken skiljer sig väsentligt åt. Resultaten visar att synen på lek, flerspråkighet, planering och språkets roll

varierar i grunden mellan lärarprofiler och därmed varierar också barnens möjligheter att möta olika typer av språkligt stöd.

Särskilt tydligt framträder motsättningen mellan den explicita lärarprofilen och den implicita lärarprofilen. Den implicita lärarprofilen sätter sin tilltro till barns spontana lärande i lek och vardagsinteraktion, i linje med förskolans holistiska tradition, medan den explicita lärarprofilen i högre grad verkar förespråka vuxenledda aktiviteter med tydligt planerat innehåll. Dessa skillnader speglar en större diskussion inom nordisk förskole forskning om balansen mellan undervisning och lek och om risken för ”skolifiering”. Samtidigt visar avhandlingens resultat att ett ensidigt implicit arbetsätt riskerar att osynliggöra nödvändiga didaktiska beslut, särskilt för barn som behöver mer strukturerat språkligt stöd för att utveckla ett akademiskt språk.

Den positiva lärarprofilen, som uppger sig kombinera implicit och explicit undervisning och uttrycker en stark språkmedvetenhet, framstår som den grupp som har störst potential att möta barns varierande språkliga behov. Den utmanade lärarprofilen framstår å sin sida som en viktig professionell kategori att uppmärksamma. Deras lägre grad av planering, lägre tilltro till sin kunskap om flerspråkighet och upplevelse av begränsande organisatoriska villkor visar att barnen i deras grupper riskerar att få en mer begränsad språkligt utmanande undervisning. Den ojämlikhet som därmed skapas är inte ett uttryck för brist hos lärarna utan en spegling av de strukturella ramarna som förskolan ger dem.

Avhandlingens kunskapsbidrag till förståelsen av akademiskt språk som innehåll i förskolan är särskilt viktigt. I stället för att se akademiskt språk som något som enbart tillhör skolan, argumenterar avhandlingen för att akademiska språkliga färdigheter är både möjliga och meningsfulla att stödja redan i förskoleåldern. Det framgår att akademiskt språk inte ska förstås som ett specifikt skolspråk utan som ett uttryck för kommunikativa resurser som gör det möjligt att beskriva, förklara, jämföra, återberätta och resonera – färdigheter som barn använder i lek, samtal, sagor och diskussioner med andra barn och vuxna.

Den praktikinrä studien visar att när förskollärare systematiskt planerar och stöttar barn i att använda sådana språkliga resurser, kan även små barn ges förutsättningar för att utveckla mer avancerade språkstrukturer. Detta gäller exempelvis när barn får återberätta en bok, beskriva känslor eller delta i en rollek med ett tydligt tema. Genom att kombinera multimodalitet, lek och dialogisk högläsning visar studiens resultat att akademiskt språk inte behöver introduceras på bekostnad av förskolans lekfullhet. Tvärtom kan lek fungera som en utgångspunkt för att utmana barn språkligt på varierande sätt.

Detta leder till en central slutsats: förskolans uppdrag att främja barns språkutveckling behöver breddas från att främja vardagsspråk till att också omfatta de kommunikativa former som barn förväntas möta i skolan och sedan ”växa in i”.

Ett av avhandlingens viktigaste och mest tydliga fynd är att organisatoriska villkor i hög grad påverkar kvaliteten på språkundervisningen. Planeringstid framstår som den mest avgörande faktorn för om undervisningen blir avsiktlig och systematisk. Bristen på planeringstid gör att även lärare med god teoretisk förståelse och positiva attityder till flerspråkighet saknar förutsättningar att omsätta denna kunskap i praktiken. Stora barngrupper nämns av alla lärarprofiler som en utmaning, men i synnerhet i språkligt mångfaldiga grupper får detta konsekvenser. När språklig variation är omfattande kräver undervisningen mer differentiering. Dessa förutsättningar saknas ofta i praktiken, vilket innebär att barnens möte med språkligt utmanande undervisning blir oregelbundet och ojämnt. Avhandlingen pekar därmed på en strukturell paradox: flerspråkiga barn, som ofta är i störst behov av avsiktlig språklig stöttning, befinner sig många gånger i miljöer med begränsade organisatoriska förutsättningar.

Det är därför rimligt att tolka resultaten som ett argument för att organisatoriska faktorer inte är bakgrundsvillkor utan aktiva mekanismer som formar barns lärandemöjligheter. Dessa villkor behöver ges större vikt i både forskning och policyutveckling.

Modellen Akademiskt Språkande utgör avhandlingens mest konkreta bidrag och visar hur språkundervisning kan göras systematisk och innehållsrik i förskolans vardag. Genom dess sexstegsstruktur skapas ett

ramverk som synliggör språkets roll som undervisningsinnehåll och som belyser positiva erfarenheter av mer explicit språkundervisning i en annars implicit undervisningstradition.

Lärarnas erfarenheter av modellen visar dock att den ställer krav på tid, kunskap och stöd. En modell som förutsätter systematisk kartläggning och reflektion riskerar att bli svår att genomföra utan strukturella förändringar i förskolans organisation.

Avhandlingen identifierar flera begränsningar med den utvecklade modellen. Den mest centrala gäller kartläggningen av barns språkliga nivåer: även om identifieringssteget är grundläggande, ges inga detaljerade verktyg för hur kartläggningen ska genomföras. Detta leder till variation i hur lärare bedömer barnens språk, vilket i slutändan blir en fråga om jämlikhet och kvaliteten på språkundervisningen. Det finns även en osynlig aspekt. Lärarnas egna språkliga resurser varierar och detta kan påverka deras möjlighet att fungera som språkliga förebilder, särskilt vad gäller akademiskt språk.

Modellen visar på potential men kräver vidare utveckling för att bli praktiskt hållbar. Det kan exempelvis handla om att utveckla tydligare kartläggningsverktyg, fördjupa stödstrukturer för transspråkande och tillhandahålla kompletterande exempel på hur akademiskt språk kan byggas upp genom lek och vardagsrutiner.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Q1



1 Age?

- 19-25 Years
- 26-30 Years
- 31-35 Years
- 36-40 Years
- 41-45 Years
- 46-50 Years
- 50+ Years

Q2



2. Education: Choose the option that best matches

- ECEC Teacher (bachelor's degree)
- ECEC Teacher (Unqualified)
- ECEC Teacher (master's degree)
- Social worker with a teacher qualification (University of Applied Sciences Degree)
- Social worker with a teacher qualification (master's degree from a University of Applied Sciences)

Q3

3. In case you are a qualified teacher, in which year did you graduate?

Q4

4. In which country did you take your teacher's degree?

Q5



5. Enter the number of years you have worked as a teacher (For example, 0,5 years, 3 years)

Q6



6. What is/are the official language(s) of the setting? The language in which activities mainly take place.

Q7



7. Which language(s) do you use in your activities with the children?

Q8



8. What age are the children you are currently working with?

- 1-3 Years
- 3-4 Years
- 3-5 Years
- Mixed ages (sibling group)

Q9



9. Describe the area where the ECEC setting is located (ex., Countryside, urban area, suburban residential area).

Q10

10. Is the ECEC setting municipal or private?

- Municipal
- Private

Q11



11. Which language(s) do you speak?

-- SIDBRYTNING --

Q12

MULTILINGUALISM IN THE CHILD GROUP

*The purpose of the questions in this section is to map the multilingualism in your group of children. In this section, you should tick the answer option that best matches your situation. By **multilingual children**, it is meant children who have spoken one or more languages since birth, or children who are learning one or more languages in ECEC in addition to their mother tongue. In this case, multilingualism is used synonymously with bilingualism.*

Q13



12. How many children do you have in the group?

- 10-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 25+

Q14



13. How many of the children in your group do you consider to be multilingual?

- None
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 20+

Q15



14. How many of the children speak more than one language at home?

- None
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 20+

Q16



15. Which languages do the children in your group speak?

-- SIDBRYTNING --

Q17

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING THE INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE OF MULTILINGUAL CHILDREN

The purpose of the questions in this section is to identify which teaching strategies early childhood educators use to develop multilingual children's instructional language and to what extent these strategies are applied. By teaching strategies, it is meant different approaches and activities aimed at stimulating language development. By instructional language, it is meant the language primarily used by the setting and in which teaching takes place. The questions are formulated as statements, and you will respond on a scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The section is divided into three parts: reading aloud, interaction and everyday conversations, other language activities and planning.

Q18



16. READING ALOUD

Totally agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Totally disagree

Reading aloud is carried out regularly for the whole group of children.



After the reading session, a book discussion is held, during which the book's content and message are discussed. In this case, a book discussion refers to a planned conversation about the book intended to take place after the actual reading.

I rarely or never prepare the reading session by writing down interpretive questions in advance to ask the children during the reading

I prepare the reading session by selecting in advance words and expressions that I believe need to be explained to the children.

I use performative reading aloud, meaning I read with different voices and intonations.

I use dialogic reading aloud, meaning I engage in a dialogue with the children about the book's content during the reading.

Reading aloud is not a suitable teaching strategy for developing multilingual children's instructional language.

Before the read-aloud session, the group of children is divided based on their linguistic level.

Before the read-aloud session, the group of children is divided by age.

The read-aloud session is conducted only in the language of instruction.

Q19



17. INTERACTION AND DAILY CONVERSATIONS

Everyday conversations are spontaneous, moment-to-moment exchanges between adults and children that cover various topics related to a specific situation or the participants' experiences and perceptions.

	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
Everyday conversations contribute to an increased vocabulary and improved language comprehension in the language of instruction among multilingual children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Everyday conversations help challenge and develop children's own storytelling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multilingual children are allowed to develop their home language(s) through everyday conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Child-to-child interaction does not contribute to multilingual children's development of the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult-child interaction contributes to multilingual children's development of the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use simplified language when interacting with multilingual children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use pictures or other supporting materials when interacting with multilingual children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not use children's home languages when interacting with multilingual children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Routine situations such as mealtimes and transitions are not language-developing situations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20



18. PLAY

	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
Free play contributes to the development of multilingual children's language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During free play, children engage in activities they have previously experienced together with an adult at ECEC, and this contributes to the development of the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When children interact with each other during free play, they learn new words and expressions from other children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult-led play contributes to multilingual children's development of the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Play in general requires the presence of adults to support and assist multilingual children in communicating with other children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multilingual children rarely or never use the language of instruction when playing with other children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Through play, multilingual children are given the opportunity to develop academic language.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's own spontaneous play is language-developing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21



19. OTHER LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES AND PLANNING

	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
Planned language sessions are used regularly, at least once a week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct vocabulary training is used regularly, at least once a week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planned singing sessions are used regularly, at least once a week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Structured language materials, such as Trulle, are used regularly, especially with multilingual children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language sessions for multilingual children are planned regularly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language teaching is integrated into the overall activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language documentation is used to monitor the development of multilingual children in the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The development of multilingual children's home language(s) is not regularly monitored.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When planning language activities, I base them on the children's existing language skills in the language of instruction and in their home languages.

I strive to integrate the children's home languages into the teaching

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q22

20. Is there anything else regarding teaching strategies that has not been addressed here but that you would like to highlight? Please write your thoughts below:

-- SIDBRYTNING --

Q23

ECEC TEACHERS' THOUGHTS ON MULTILINGUALISM

*The purpose of the questions in this section is to examine early childhood teachers' **work and thoughts on multilingualism**, as well as to explore their **conditions for conducting language teaching**. The section is divided into two parts: teachers' professional knowledge about language and their views on multilingualism, and the conditions in their work. The questions in this section are formulated as statements. You will be asked to respond to the questions on a scale from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree".*

Q24



21. ECEC TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ON MULTILINGUALISM

	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
As an ECEC teacher, I serve as the primary linguistic role model for the children in the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an ECEC teacher, I need to know how developed all the children's languages are.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As an ECEC teacher, my primary responsibility is to support the children in the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The language of instruction and the home languages should be kept separate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have sufficient knowledge of children's multilingualism to support the linguistic and identity development of multilingual children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have sufficient knowledge of second-language development to support children learning a second language in the ECEC setting. A second language does not necessarily mean a second language in a ranked order, but rather a language the child encounters only in the ECEC environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not have sufficient knowledge of different methods and approaches for working with multilingual children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q25



22. WORKING CONDITIONS

	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
I do not get enough time to plan language teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I receive sufficient support from the ECEC principal to develop language teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is challenging to plan language teaching because the children's linguistic backgrounds are so diverse.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are significant differences in the children's knowledge of the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The size of the child group is too large, which causes challenges in the work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is difficult to make the children's home languages visible in practice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ECEC setting does not have sufficient language-stimulating materials (e.g., books, visual aids).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The staff at my ECEC setting does not have sufficient knowledge of the language of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get sufficient planning time as an ECEC teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q26

23. Is there anything else regarding working conditions and views on multilingualism that has not been addressed here but that you would like to highlight? Please write your thoughts below:

Appendix 2

ECEC Teacher Consent

Consent to participate in the study “From language stimulation to intentional language teaching: ECEC teachers work with academic languaging”.

I have received information about the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I am allowed to keep the written information.

- I consent to participate in the study.
- I consent to the processing of my personal data as described in the information provided.

Place and date	Signature

Appendix 3

Information for ECEC teachers about a research study

My name is Jeanette Koskinen, and I am a PhD student in education at Örebro University. I am working on a thesis about language teaching for children aged 1–5 years, with a special focus on how multilingual children develop their languages. During the upcoming school year, I will conduct a practice-based study in preschools, and I am currently looking for preschools interested in participating. The principal investigator for the study is Örebro University. The term “principal investigator” refers to the organization responsible for the study.

What is the study about, and why do you want me to participate?

The purpose of this study is to develop a teaching model for academic language use. By academic language, we mean language that is more advanced, nuanced, and challenging than everyday speech. Children need to learn to develop this language early on, and preschools can provide important support for all children, especially multilingual children. The study will develop and test a new playful approach to language teaching. In the teaching model “Academic Languageing” children will have the opportunity to explore academic language through both spontaneous and planned teaching activities.

You are receiving this letter because you are an early childhood education teacher working with children aged 1–5 years. I have obtained your contact details either from the municipality’s website, through your head teacher, or another person at the preschool where you work.

How will the study be conducted?

The study will be carried out in preschools in two countries, Sweden and Finland. A total of 8–16 early childhood education teachers from Sweden and Finland will participate in the study.

The study will proceed as follows:

First, I will provide an introduction to all participating teachers about academic languageing and how it works. After that, you will teach

according to the model for 3 months. The teaching will be either spontaneous or planned. After each teaching activity, you will reflect on how the lesson was carried out and document your thoughts using a voice recorder you will borrow from me. You will then upload the recorded reflections to Örebro University's secure cloud service. Only you and authorized researchers will have access to these voice recordings.

When the teaching period is complete, you will take part in an individual interview about your teaching experience, using the model. You will also participate in a digital Zoom meeting with the other research participants, where you will have the opportunity to exchange experiences with early childhood education teachers from Sweden and Finland who also took part in the study. The digital meeting will only be documented through audio recording. The individual reflections, interviews, and the digital meeting will then be used to further develop the teaching model.

Once I have analyzed all the data, the research results will be presented as a tested teaching model for academic languaging in preschools.

All research material will be handled in such a way that no unauthorized person has access to it. This means that neither the municipality, the preschool, nor the teachers will be mentioned in the published material.

Possible consequences and risks of participation

We assess that participation in the study does not involve any direct risks for you as a participant. However, if early childhood education teachers experience a high workload, participation may be perceived as an additional burden.

Processing of Personal Data

The study will collect and record information about you through the consent you sign and the voice recordings. The audio recordings and their transcripts will not contain your name or any information that can be traced back to you. Neither the names of preschools, municipalities, nor teachers will be mentioned in the published material.

Your personal data will be processed during the study (2021–2025). In addition, the personal data will be processed after the project ends for research purposes. The data will not be transferred or disclosed to any unauthorized person or to countries outside the EU or the European Economic Area. Personal data will be processed and stored in a manner that prevents unauthorized access.

Under the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), you have the right to access the data collected about you free of charge and, if necessary, have any errors corrected. You may also request that your data be deleted and that the processing of your personal data be restricted. However, the right to deletion and restriction does not apply when the data is necessary for the current research. If you wish to access the data, don't hesitate to contact the principal researcher, Ann Quennerstedt (contact details at the end of this letter). Suppose you are dissatisfied with how your personal data is processed. In that case, you have the right to complain to the Data Protection Officer at the research principal (dataskyddsbud@oru.se) or to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection, which is the supervisory authority in Sweden.

Information about the study results

You can access information about the study results when they are published in the form of a thesis, which will be available on Örebro University's website (www.oru.se) or searchable via www.diva-portal.org. The thesis project is planned to be completed in 2025.

Insurance and Compensation

No special insurance is required for participation, and no compensation will be provided. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate or wish to discontinue, you do not need to provide a reason, and there will be no adverse consequences. If you want to withdraw from the study, please contact the principal researcher (see contact details below).

If you choose to participate in the study, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me. If you have any questions regarding the study, feel free to contact the principal researcher or me.

Best regards,

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Appendix 4

Interview Guide for ECEC Teachers, Iteration 1

Questions for semi-structured interviews with ECEC teachers after the teaching period.

Before the interview

1. Welcome the participant and remind them what the interview will be about.
2. Inform them that participation is voluntary and anonymous. Explain that everything said in the interview will be treated confidentially.
3. Tell them how long the interview is expected to take (about 45 minutes) and remind them that the interview will be audio recorded.
4. Start recording.

Planning the teaching

- How has it worked for you to plan teaching for academic languaging?
- How did the didactic analysis help you plan the lessons?
- What should be considered in planning to develop the model further?

Possible follow-up questions:

- Was there anything in particular that made planning challenging or easy?

- What would you need as a teacher to plan lessons according to the model?

Carrying out the teaching

- Tell me, what does it look like when you work with academic languaging?
- Which children do you think benefit most from this approach?
- What should be considered during application to improve the model?

Possible follow-up questions:

- What has been the best or most challenging part of working with academic languaging?
- What kinds of activities have you done when using this approach?

Evaluation

- In what way does academic languaging help you follow up on children's language development?
- How can language diversity be made visible with this model?
- What opportunities do you see in this model for multilingual children?

Possible follow-up questions:

- How could the model be developed to support teachers in evaluating language teaching?
- What could be done to make use of children's home languages when working with academic languaging?

General experiences of academic languaging

- Can you describe your experiences of working with academic languaging?
- Tell me, how did you plan language teaching before?
- In what way does academic languaging differ from other language-stimulating activities in preschool?

Interview Guide for ECEC Teachers, Iteration 2

Semi-structured interviews with teachers after the research study.

Before the interview

1. Welcome the participant and remind them what the interview will be about.
2. Explain that participation is voluntary and anonymous. Let them know that everything said during the interview will be kept confidential.
3. Tell them how long the interview will take (about 45 minutes) and remind them that the interview will be audio recorded.
4. Start recording.

Background

1. In what situation did you carry out academic languaging?
2. How many children were involved in the teaching, and what were their ages?

Planning

1. How did you go about planning academic languaging?
2. What role do you think the didactic analysis played in your planning?
3. What would need to change in the model to make planning work even better?

Carrying out the teaching

1. Tell me, how did you implement academic languaging?
2. What is important to keep in mind when carrying out academic languaging?

Evaluation

1. Has this model helped you follow up on children's language development? In what way?
2. How have you worked with multilingualism in academic languaging?
3. Which children benefit most from academic languaging?

Teachers' views on the model

1. Tell me, what has changed in your language teaching during the time you have worked with academic languaging?

Appendix 5

Didaktik analysis for Academic Languageing

Start by identifying the individual child's current level of development. The Didaktik analysis is conducted over three months at a time.

Analysis questions	Support questions
1. What should AL encompass more broadly? What is the purpose of the teaching?	<i>What is each child's current level of development regarding the language of instruction and other languages? How developed is each child's everyday and academic language?</i>
2. What does the language diversity look like in the child group?	<i>What languages do children speak? How can these languages be made visible and utilized in teaching? How does multilingualism manifest in our child group now and in the future?</i>
3. What significance does the purpose have for the children's interaction and learning in everyday life at ECEC?	<i>How will the overall purpose help children in everyday life?</i>

<p>4. In what way is the purpose significant for the children's future life?</p>	<p><i>How will this content affect children's language development in a month/after a term, and so on?</i></p> <p><i>Why do children need this content in the future?</i></p>
<p>Identified linguistic needs:</p>	<p>Purpose formulation:</p>

Appendix 6

Pedagogical planning for Academic Languageing

The pedagogical planning is done in two-week periods.

<p>How should the teaching be organized and carried out based on questions 1-4 in the Didaktik analysis?</p>	<p><i>Based on the purpose formulation, what specific content is planned for this period?</i></p> <p><i>Based on the selected content: how, where, and when should teaching be carried out?</i></p>
<p>What actual experiences can be used to make the content available and interesting for children?</p>	<p><i>How can this content be linked to the ECEC's broader teaching activities?</i></p> <p><i>How can language diversity be integrated into the content?</i></p>

Appendix 7

Reflective Analysis

After each AL teaching session, you reflect on the teaching. The reflections do not need to be very long, but they should be detailed and informative.

Questions to Reflect On:

1. What teaching content had I planned, and what was the outcome?
2. What was successful/good about the teaching?
3. What was less successful/good about the teaching?
4. How did the children receive the content and realization?
5. In what way did we work with the children's multilingualism?
6. What do I need to consider for the following teaching session?

Appendix 8

This appendix reports descriptive statistics for the index variables associated with the four teacher profiles.

1) Implicit teacher profile

Index	Variable	Mean	SD
Play	Free play contributes to the development of LOI	1,22	,519
	During free play, children use prior experiences that support the development of LOI	1,27	,512
	During free play children learn new words/expressions in LOI	1,09	,294
	Adult-led play contribute to the development of LOI for multiling children	1,20	,568
	Play requires adult presence	1,86	,957
	Multiling children use seldom LOI during free play	4,06	,906

	Through play multiling children develop AL	1,64	,743
	Spontaneous play is language developing	1,14	,393
Language activities	Planned language sessions regularly	1,72	,845
	Direct vocabulary instruction regularly	2,31	1,006
	Planned singing sessions regularly	1,69	,871
	Structured language material regularly	3,27	1,212
	1-1 language sessions for multiling children regularly	3,33	,944
	Language teaching integrated into other activities	1,62	,766
	Linguistic documentation for multiling children	2,89	1,143
	Not following regularly multiling children's language	2,86	1,233

	development in all languages		
	Planning builds on multiling children's existing knowledge in LOI and FL	2,67	,977
	Aims to integrate FL into teaching	3,02	1,091
Knowledge and beliefs	Teachers are linguistic role models in LOI	2,16	1,237
	I need to know how developed children's all languages are	1,66	,739
	My primary functions is to support LOI	1,84	,946
	I have enough knowledge on multilingualism	2,75	1,113
	I have enough knowledge on S2 learning	2,83	1,121
	Not enough knowledge on different methods and approaches for multiling development	3,08	1,059

2) Positive teacher profile

Index	Variable	Mean	SD
Play	Free play contributes to the development of LOI	1,20	,505
	During free play, children use prior experiences that support the development of LOI	1,07	,252
	During free play children learn new words/expressions in LOI	1,09	,288
	Adult-led play contribute to the development of LOI for multiling children	1,18	,442
	Play requires adult presence	1,56	,813
	Multiling children use seldom LOI during free play	1,7333	,86340
	Through play multiling children develop AL	1,53	,694
	Spontaneous play is language developing	1,20	,405

Language activities	Planned language sessions regularly	1,27	,720
	Direct vocabulary instruction regularly	1,29	,626
	Planned singing sessions regularly	1,09	,288
	Structured language material regularly	1,87	1,236
	1-1 language sessions for multiling children regularly	2,47	1,342
	Language teaching integrated into other activities	1,20	,457
	Linguistic documentation for multiling children	1,64	,957
	Not following regularly multiling children's language development in all languages	4,07	1,031
	Planning builds on multiling children's existing knowledge in LOI and FL	1,76	,679

	Aims to integrate FL into teaching	1,89	1,005
Knowledge and beliefs	Teachers are linguistic role models in LOI	1,49	1,014
	I need to know how developed children's all languages are	1,13	,344
	My primary functions is to support LOI	1,62	,960
	I have enough knowledge on multilingualism	1,58	,690
	I have enough knowledge on S2 learning	1,67	,674
	Not enough knowledge on different methods and approaches for multiling development	4,24	,981

3) Explicit teacher profile

Index	Variable	Mean	SD
Play	Free play contributes to the development of LOI	1,96	,747
	During free play, children use prior experiences that support the development of LOI	1,93	,669
	During free play children learn new words/expressions in LOI	1,78	,679
	Adult-led play contribute to the development of LOI for multiling children	1,87	,813
	Play requires adult presence	2,22	1,028
	Multiling children use seldom LOI during free play	3,64	,974
	Through play multiling children develop AL	2,26	,875
	Spontaneous play is language developing	2,12	,851

Language activities	Planned language sessions regularly	1,62	,771
	Direct vocabulary instruction regularly	1,99	,919
	Planned singing sessions regularly	1,64	,800
	Structured language material regularly	2,72	1,181
	1-1 language sessions for multiling children regularly	2,75	1,045
	Language teaching integrated into other activities	1,55	,627
	Linguistic documentation for multiling children	2,29	,924
	Not following regularly multiling children's language development in all languages	3,29	1,163
	Planning builds on multiling children's existing knowledge in LOI and FL	2,39	,757

	Aims to integrate FL into teaching	2,35	,960
Knowledge and beliefs	Teachers are linguistic role models in LOI	1,71	,843
	I need to know how developed children's all languages are	1,61	,692
	My primary functions is to support LOI	2,01	,957
	I have enough knowledge on multilingualism	2,20	,768
	I have enough knowledge on S2 learning	2,06	,761
	Not enough knowledge on different methods and approaches for multiling development	3,65	,996

4) Challenged teacher profile

Index	Variable	Mean	SD
Play	Free play contributes to the development of LOI	2,03	,778
	During free play, children use prior experiences that support the development of LOI	1,87	,615
	During free play children learn new words/expressions in LOI	1,85	,709
	Adult-led play contribute to the development of LOI for multiling children	1,82	,601
	Play requires adult presence	2,36	1,088
	Multiling children use seldom LOI during free play	3,56	,718
	Through play multiling children develop AL	2,49	,644
	Spontaneous play is language developing	2,10	,912

Language activities	Planned language sessions regularly	2,90	1,314
	Direct vocabulary instruction regularly	3,15	1,113
	Planned singing sessions regularly	2,18	1,023
	Structured language material regularly	3,92	,900
	1-1 language sessions for multiling children regularly	4,00	,827
	Language teaching integrated into other activities	2,15	1,113
	Linguistic documentation for multiling children	3,62	1,042
	Not following regularly multiling children's language development in all languages	2,36	,959
	Planning builds on multiling children's existing knowledge in LOI and FL	3,10	,968

	Aims to integrate FL into teaching	3,05	1,050
Knowledge and beliefs	Teachers are linguistic role models in LOI	2,59	,966
	I need to know how developed children's all languages are	1,95	,826
	My primary functions is to support LOI	2,41	1,229
	I have enough knowledge on multilingualism	3,44	,882
	I have enough knowledge on S2 learning	3,15	1,065
	Not enough knowledge on different methods and approaches for multiling development	2,38	,935

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