

**Visual Manifestations of Racism and Antiracism
in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care**

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ABSTRACT

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This research explored visual manifestations of racism and antiracism in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) learning environments and in their pedagogical materials in order to develop understanding of issues related to power hierarchies between, and representations of, different cultures and "races", and to reveal ways in which these everyday surroundings indicate contributions to the antiracist agenda. This study was guided by a question "How are racism and antiracism manifested in visual learning environments of Finnish early childhood education and care?"

This critically oriented, qualitative research utilised visual methodology when aiming to answer the research question. Photo-documentation was used as a data collection method. Data collection took place in five ECEC centres in the city of Jyväskylä. The learning environments were systematically observed and photographed in order to understand the type of antiracist and racist representations in the learning materials and objects on the walls. The visual data was examined by applying theoretically approached visual thematic analysis, in which theories on racism and antiracism were used as analytical lenses.

Results of this study showed that subtle emergences of prejudice and exclusion in objects and pedagogical materials can be found from ECEC learning environments. Results also indicated the lack of overt antiracist commitments expressed in the ECEC settings, but addressed endeavours to promote equity, equality, and diversity. However, the data set demonstrated that despite good intentions, those efforts can also unintentionally reinforce discriminative ideas.

Keywords: antiracism, racism, Finnish early childhood education and care, learning environments, visual methodology

SUOMENKIELINEN TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tässä tutkimuksessa selvitettiin, millaisia rasismin ja antirasismien visuaalisia ilmentymiä varhaiskasvatuksen oppimisympäristöissä sekä pedagogisissa materiaaleissa esiintyi. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli rakentaa ymmärrystä siitä, millaisia etnisyyteen, rodullistamiseen ja kulttuureihin liittyviä representaatioita sekä antirasistisia pyrkimyksiä varhaiskasvatuksessa käytettävät materiaalit ilmensivät. Tutkimusta ohjasi kysymys ” Kuinka rasismi ja antirasismi ilmenevät suomalaisen varhaiskasvatuksen visuaalisissa oppimisympäristöissä?”.

Tutkimus toteutettiin visuaalisia tutkimusmenetelmiä käyttäen. Aineistonkeruumenetelmänä käytettiin valokuvausmenetelmää, joka toteutettiin viidessä eri jyvaskyläläisessä päiväkodissa. Kuva-aineisto analysoitiin teorialähtöisen visuaalisen temaattisen analyysin avulla, jossa hyödynnettiin rasismin ja antirasismien teorioita.

Tuloksista selvisi, että varhaiskasvatuksen oppimisympäristöistä löytyi hienovaraisia rasismin ilmentymiä valkonormatiivisuuden ja rasististen representaatioiden muodossa. Tutkimukseen osallistuneiden päiväkotien oppimisympäristöistä ei löytynyt visuaalisia ilmentymiä varsinaisen antirasistisen työtteen toteutumisesta, mutta pyrkimyksiä yhdenvertaisuuden ja moninaisuuden tukemiseen löytyi. Kuitenkin osa näistä hyvää tarkoittavista pyrkimyksistä sisälsi myös rasistisia piirteitä, mikä korostaa kriittisen reflektoinnin tärkeyttä varhaiskasvatuksen ympäristön rakentamisessa ja pedagogisten materiaalien valinnassa.

Asiasanat: antirasismi, rasismi, suomalainen varhaiskasvatus, oppimisympäristöt, visuaaliset tutkimusmenetelmät

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1 INTRODUCTION

As Finland is increasingly becoming a multicultural and multiracial country, diversity has become a new societal norm. For example, according to statistics communicated by Arvola et al. (2020), there were about 10% of all 1-6 years old children with “foreign” background in Finland in 2017, and this number is increasing. These demographic shifts have been noted also in the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care that determines support of children’s ability to interact with, and respect for other people and diverse cultural backgrounds, worldviews, and languages as one goal of Finnish ECEC (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022).

Finnish education at all levels is founded on pillars of equality and equity, and curricula texts and educational discourses sustain the discourse that “all pupils are equal”. These concepts are often related to equal access and provision of the same high quality of education for all individuals nationwide. (Hummelstedt, 2021; Juva & Holm, 2017.) While applying several obligations arising from Finnish legislation, such as the Non-Discrimination Act and the Act on Equality between Women and Men, Finnish education also comprises an idea that all individuals should be equally treated within its institutions despite their sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, and disability (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2016; 2022).

Davis & Harrison (2013, p. 24) addressed the profound distinction between the concepts of equity and equality in terms of promoting social justice: while equality suggests that everyone should be treated uniformly, equity addresses historical disadvantages, human diversities, and potentially unique needs of individuals. Bell (2017, pp. 1-2) articulated the following definition for social justice:

“Full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure ... The process for attaining the goal of social justice ... should be democratic and participatory, inclusive, and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change.”

While Finnish education in all its levels reflects democratic values such as equity and equality, the issues of social justice have been considered being solved by applying multiculturalism, the practice of acknowledging and respecting various cultural backgrounds, and overt discourses on racism tend to be avoided or marginalised (Alemanji, 2021; Holland et al., 2007; Souto 2011), especially in early childhood education and care contexts where children are often (mistakenly) perceived as being vulnerable and innocent, outside of racist realities (Armila et al., 2018; Lappalainen, 2006b). As racism and racialisation, phenomena existing in Finnish society (Keskinen, 2021; Seikkula, 2020), are not adequately addressed in Finnish educational policies nor in teacher education, educators often repeat racist practices and discourses in their work, usually unintentionally (Alemanji, 2021; Armila et al., 2018), producing a discrepancy between equity-driven policies and everyday realities.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) plays a remarkable role in the socialisation process of children. Research evidence have demonstrated that learning environments of ECEC have a significant impact on development of children's racial attitudes and identities, as children learn and interiorise unspoken values, ideas, attitudes, and perceptions from pedagogical materials (toys, books, pictures) and from words and behaviours of their peers and caregivers (Boutte, 2008; Escayg 2019; Lenox, 2000; Nguyen, 2022). Furthermore, as all educational institutions exist as "microcosms of the larger society" by representing and echoing cultural values and beliefs of the society in their ideologies, policies, and practices (Husband, 2012, p. 366), the issues of power and ideology should be overtly considered within ECEC centres. In earlier research, elements contained in definitions of racism, for instance, cultural hierarchical power imbalance, were found in Finnish early childhood education and care environments (Armila et al., 2018; Lappalainen, 2006b; Layne, 2023). Moreover, Finnish early childhood educators rarely identified practices and interactions maintaining cultural hierarchies in structures and practices of their own working environments (Armila et al., 2018). The survey conducted by The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (2018) indicated that nearly one in five of the

297 respondents, who identified themselves as being of African background, had experienced discrimination in early childhood education and care. These concerns, as well as paucity of recently conducted research on topics of racism and antiracism in ECEC, highlight a need for raising racism to educational discussions and addressing issues at the heart of the Finnish education system.

Considering the crucial role of ECEC environments to the socialisation of children, this research explored visual manifestations of racism and antiracism in Finnish ECEC learning environments and in their pedagogical materials in order to produce understanding of issues related to power hierarchies and representations of different cultures and “races”, as well as ways in which these everyday surroundings indicate contributions to the antiracist agenda. The research question guiding this study was underpinned as follows: “How are racism and antiracism manifested in visual learning environments of Finnish ECEC?”

When pursuing an antiracist society, the first step to take is to recognise how power relations are raised and maintained in society (Puuronen, 2011). This research aimed to contribute to that agenda by producing scientific knowledge from the field of early childhood education and care. This was done by exploring photographs that were produced by a researcher in five different ECEC environments as a part of the research project. Photographs were examined by applying theoretically approached, deductive visual thematic analysis, in which theories on racism and antiracism were utilised as analytical lenses.

Before looking deeper at research implementation, it is necessary to expound main concepts and approaches of this study. To provide background for this research, I first clarify the underlying interpretive paradigms of this study and my own position as a researcher, and then explain concepts of multiculturalism and racism in Finnish education, especially in the context of early childhood education and care. I then continue by defining my understanding of everyday multiculturalism, racism, and antiracism.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Underlying interpretive paradigms

Underlying assumptions of study, i.e., paradigms of viewing knowledge (epistemology) and reality (ontology), guide the entire research project design (Tracy, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to clarify these elements in the context of each research because they assist in a reasonable interpretation of research results by revealing researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality, legitimacy of knowledge and rationality of researcher's choice of methods (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

My understanding of epistemology and ontology follow the definitions provided by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) and Guba (1990). Ontology responds to the questions about the nature of reality and human beings, while epistemology concerns the relationship between the researcher and the known. These beliefs about the world and study of it shape and guide the way a researcher acts when aiming to gain knowledge about phenomena. Next, I will clarify the paradigms that structured this research.

In my thesis research, a critical paradigm was employed. Hence, an epistemological assumption that knowledge is mediated and produced through communication and historical power relations based on "race", gender, socioeconomic background, sexual preference, or ability of human beings, was embraced in this study. Nature of knowledge was thus perceived as subjective. Moreover, ontological belief that reality is constructed and shaped through power relations - privilege and oppression - was applied. (Lincoln et al., 2018; Tracy, 2020.) Critical research assumes that power hierarchies between racial groups unfold through everyday interactions in society, and all the daily practices have ideological backgrounds (Kilgore, 2001). Consequently, the objects in the learning environments and on the walls, under scrutiny of this study, were expected to reflect values, norms, and ideologies of an ECEC institution and society that is based on a struggle for power.

Critically oriented research aims at promoting positive change in society, typically by dismantling inequitable social structures that oppress particular groups of people, most commonly by their “race”, class, gender, or sexuality (Winkle-Wagner, Lee-Johnson & Gaskew, 2018). This way, critically oriented research can benefit research participants as well as communities by the development of critical consciousness, community empowerment and collective actions (Carspecken, 2018). From my epistemological viewpoint, I assumed that the knowledge that my research produced could change existing power structures and decrease oppression (Merriam, 1991, as cited in Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 116) that occurs in educational settings. In that way, my research aimed to have action stimulus. The aim of my critically positioned research was to produce knowledge of existing social power struggles in ECEC settings in order to promote educators’ awareness and understanding of racism and guide them to produce actions towards antiracist early childhood education and care. This aim affected my choice of methods: I decided to collect visual evidence to demonstrate prevailing issues, and then identify, analyse, and report themes by deductively approached visual thematic analysis.

As critical research requires uncovering a researcher’s social status and stances (Honkasalo et al., 2014, p. 103), I discuss and reflect on my own background and position during the research process and clarify them in the next section of this thesis. Throughout the research process, I questioned my own thinking and took responsibility for my power and unearned advantages. These actions were necessary from an epistemological viewpoint of mine, because as a researcher who was producing knowledge, my power and subjectivity affected the entire research process while I was using my authority when collecting, managing, and analysing data, and building a literature review.

2.2 Researcher’s position

In this section, I discuss my own background and position during the research process.

I am a White Finnish female with over six years of experience as a teacher in early childhood education and care (ECEC). I have worked mostly in the multicultural settings, and during those years, I started to question taken-for-granted mission and value statements of ECEC while I became aware of social injustices within everyday ECEC environments. After regularly witnessing discriminative discourses and exclusive practices, I realised that there is a huge need for improving understanding of these issues in order to change the system for the better. When I started my master's degree studies, I wanted to contribute to that agenda through my thesis research. I wanted to contribute to the conceptualisation of racism in the context of Finnish early childhood education and care in order to cause actions towards change.

As I have a White racial identity, some might doubt my capacity to undertake an interrogation of racism. Lack of experiential knowledge of racism may be one limitation of this study, but I believe that extensive research that I made on theories that reflect the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) developed my thinking and supported my intentions to recognise and analyse racism. Consequently, I am aware of the fact that I am privileged as being White, and I acknowledge that the society and institutions where I have grown up and been socialised into have been penetrated by White supremacy. Hence, both my conscious and unconscious mind have been affected by ideological hegemony, which requires me to constantly reflect and question my own thinking and biases, and to take responsibility for my power and unearned advantage when striving to be an antiracist. Taking responsibility for these matters meant for me in the context of this research considering methodological and theoretical choices carefully. When selecting theories that guided the conceptualisation of racism and operated as analytical lenses in my study, I paid attention to ones produced by BIPOC scholars. These theories provided meaningful insights into racial inequities and by applying them, I made a conscious, ideological choice to privilege voices of oppressed groups. My motivation to rely mostly on scholarly literature created by BIPOC scholars derived from a desire to challenge systemic racism in academia by elevating

voices and perspectives of minorities who are the ones with experiences of racism.

I was also aware that my background as a Finnish ECEC teacher might have caused bias or personal projections when collecting data from the field or analysing and interpreting it. Considering this aspect throughout the research process supported me in decreasing the effect of my personal background, for example, by choice of methodologies.

This entire research process undoubtedly developed my professionalism as an ECEC teacher and researcher, as I built up a lens to interrogate early childhood education and care from a more critical perspective. Moreover, readings and reflections on racism and antiracism enhanced my personal growth as well, and I am now able to contemplate my own position, identity, thinking and emotions more easily and recognise ways to act as antiracist. Being an antiracist means to me a continuous and dynamic path that requires commitment on a daily basis when I am acting as a member of society. Yet, I recognise that despite our best intentions, all of us are holding inherent racism and implicit biases absorbed since our early years, and thus we may nonetheless unintentionally reinforce racism by our behaviour and words. The most important means to solve this problem is to create safe spaces where we can become aware of these biases and start unlearning them.

2.3 Multiculturalism and racism in Finnish education

Despite of its multilingual (Finnish, Swedish and Sámi-languages) and multicultural (Finnish, Roma, Sámi) characteristics, Finland was considered as ethnically and culturally homogeneous country until 1990s, since when the level of diversity among population has been rapidly increasing due to immigration from outside the Europe (Holm & Londen, 2010). As societal change was recognised in Finnish schools and kindergartens, educational discourses of multiculturalism and tolerance began as a response to increased heterogeneity within classrooms (Killen et al., 1997; Lappalainen, 2006b; Layne & Dervin, 2016),

and multiculturalism and tolerance of different cultures were raised to the curriculum planning (Lappalainen, 2006b, p. 100;) and were perceived to solve issues of social justice (Alemanji and Mafi (2018, p.194). Until then, Finnish education had been based on the idea of cultural homogeneity produced by national pedagogy (Lappalainen, 2006b, p. 100).

However, while multicultural education has been implemented at all levels of Finnish education since the 1990s, it has failed in promoting equity within educational institutions and even contributed to the reproduction of inequitable power hierarchies. Lappalainen (2006b, p. 100) argued that the liberal multiculturalism has been enabling the dominant Finnish group to define the goals of multicultural education. According to Riitaoja (2013), the purpose of multicultural education has often been perceived as an aim of integrating immigrant children into the Finnish education system, and as Alemanji (2018, p. 5) argued, multicultural endeavours have been trying to help the Other to transform themselves to be more like mainstream people. Souto et al. (2013) and Layne et al. (2015) argued that multicultural education does not directly tackle racism and instead, it can lead to the discursive and physical othering by focusing on cultural contrasts and comparing diverse cultures to the mainstream. Furthermore, Alemanji and Mafi (2018, p. 194) pointed out that also the concept of tolerance, a key element of multiculturalism, includes a problematic power relation between tolerating and tolerated persons. I addressed these notions by Finnish scholars when conducting my research: it was not enough to explore whether or not diversity was affirmed in educational settings, but it was also necessary to examine the hidden power relations embedded in these efforts.

Teacher education's ability to respond to the challenges arising from increased cultural diversity and racism within Finnish education has been questioned as well (Alemanji, 2021; Alemanji & Mafi, 2018; Holm & Londen, 2010). One limiting factor in removing racism from the Finnish education system arises from teacher education, which does not prepare teachers to identify and intervene in power relations in their daily surroundings or to handle racist interactions they encounter. This leads to (often unintentional) reproduction of

ethnic hierarchies in the educational practices. (Alemanji, 2021; Armila et al., 2018; Layne, 2023.) In the teacher preparation of ECEC teachers, the need for ethically and interculturally competent teachers has been recently noted, and the specific programme for intercultural ECEC teacher education has been established. However, the program has been criticised for failing to promote student's skills of recognising injustices and challenging existing norms. (Layne & Dervin 2016.)

Another reason for challenges in tackling racism is a denial of it in Finnish society. For years, "racism" has been considered too difficult and harsh word to say aloud in Finland (Holland et al., 2007; Lappalainen, 2016; Souto 2011) which results in insufficient educational policies and avoidance of racism discourses (Alemanji, 2021; Alemanji & Mafi, 2018). According to Alemanji and Mafi (2018, p. 188), much of the denial and silence of racism in Finland revolves around the idea of Finnish/Nordic exceptionalism rooted in a self-perception that considers the country as "a global good citizen" and "a pioneer of equality, social justice, democracy, peacekeeping, and developmental aid". Keskinen (2021, pp. 69-70) argued that despite the denial of racism, colonialism and hierarchical categorisation of people based on their racial and cultural background are not only a part of Finnish history but still rooted in the society's everyday practices and structures. Alemanji (2021) addressed Finnish education reproducing those processes as being an echo of society. As such, the Finnish education system is apparently still far from reaching its goal of social justice.

According to Beach and Lunnebland (2010), "race" and ethnicity have been avoided in Nordic countries because of historical and political reasons, and instead, language, culture and diversity have been highlighted in the national policies. That is why there is also a lot of confusion between concepts of multiculturalism and (anti)racism among educators, which makes it even more difficult to tackle the issues of racism in education (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018).

As the review of previous research findings demonstrated, there is a need for developing the Finnish education system towards realisation of social justice. My research aimed to promote that change by producing knowledge on the topic

from the field of early childhood education and care. My research intended to conceptualise antiracism in order to help educators to transform their practices towards an antiracist agenda, and to shed light on the ways how inequity between racial groups is produced in everyday environments of ECEC.

2.4 Multiculturalism and racism in Finnish ECEC

Finnish education in its all levels is characterised by strongly valuing equality: equal opportunities and equal access to education are stated in various educational policies (Hummelstedt et al., 2021). Exploration of Finnish early childhood education and care policies demonstrated that values of equity, equality and diversity are embraced also in the framework for ECEC. The underlying values of National Core Curriculum for ECEC are “the child's right to well-being, care and protection, consideration of the opinion of the child, the requirement of equal and equitable treatment, principles of inclusion, and protection against discrimination” (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 17). As one mission of ECEC, National Core Curriculum for ECEC states promotion of equality and equity among children and prevention of social exclusion (p. 11).

National Core Curriculum for ECEC acknowledges the crucial role of ECEC as a part of Finnish society, which is culturally changing and increasingly diverse (p. 29). The document states ECEC is built on a diverse, constantly forming cultural heritage (p. 18), and one goal of early education is to pass on to children those cultural values, customs, and norms that are considered important to the following generation (p. 20). However, Kuusisto (2017) addressed that despite the increasing diversity, many customary practices of ECEC have not been reassessed because of lack of teachers' sensitivity to diversity or their incapability to support inclusion and social justice by streamlining practices.

In accordance with the National Core Curriculum for ECEC, early childhood educators are obligated to create an atmosphere that respects diversity of genders, origins, languages, cultures, worldviews, and religions in the ECEC

community (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 18), and to promote culturally sustainable development together with children (p. 29). Cultural, linguistic, and philosophical diversity in the ECEC community and in its environment is considered as a positively enriching resource in early childhood education and care (p. 29). These diversities can be utilised to develop children's capabilities of understanding of the local communities and practises acting in it (p. 43). The curriculum also obligates the learning environments of ECEC to make multilingualism and cultural diversity visible (p. 40), and the realisation of this requirement was one goal of this research.

Children's cultural competence is included in the transversal competence areas described in the National Core Curriculum for ECEC. Transversal competences are entities consisting of various knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will, that are considered essential to be acquired in the constantly changing world (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 21). Curriculum thus acknowledges the importance of children's ability to act and interact in a culturally, linguistically, and ideologically diversifying world in their future. Curriculum suggests play, meal breaks, and festivities as ways to provide children with knowledge and experiences of diverse cultural traditions and customs in ECEC, and states that this kind of acquisition of cultural heritage strengthens the child's ability to adopt, use and change culture, and creates a foundation for respect for other people and diverse cultural backgrounds, worldviews, and languages (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 22-23). This approach reflects "liberal multiculturalism", conceptualised and problematised in the next subsection.

The ideals of cultural diversity and equality are stated in the ECEC legislation to the same extent as in the national curriculum. According to Section 3 in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018, one profound aim of ECEC is to "provide all children with equal opportunities for early childhood education and care, promote parity and gender equality, and help the children develop their capacity to understand and respect the general cultural heritage

and each other's linguistic, cultural, religious and ideological background" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018).

The concept of racism is directly discussed in the National Core Curriculum for ECEC only once, by stating in the section of core values of ECEC that "bullying, racism and violence are not accepted in early childhood education and care in any form and not by anyone" (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 18). In the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018, racism is discussed indirectly in section 10 as follows: "The children shall be protected from violence, bullying and other harassment" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). Thus, ECEC policy documents perceive racism as something exceptional, a potential overt action of an individual rather than something that already exists systemically in structures of ECEC institutions producing racialisation. A statement of a zero tolerance to racism also expresses the perception that the issue of racism is already handled in the ECEC institution. However, as racism penetrates our entire society, any educational institutions cannot be separated from its influence, which requires active antiracist efforts to be made (Alemanji, 2021; Keskinen, 2021).

Therefore, despite embracing democratic principles, Finnish ECEC policies fail to promote the realisation of actual social justice in ECEC settings, because they focus on appreciation and acknowledgement of diverse cultures, languages, and ideologies, ignoring and therefore, often reproducing structural racism and the role of White supremacy in Finnish society. As a result, individual ECEC teachers are responsible by themselves of these issues - and that is why these issues often remain without attention. Layne (2023) addressed that ECEC teachers need tools and vocabulary to apply an antiracism pedagogy in their work and noted that there is not enough support provided for that in ECEC policies or in teacher education and training. Paavola and Pesonen (2021) highlighted the importance of clearly defining the concepts used in the curriculum text because otherwise individual teachers interpret (ambiguous) meanings according to their knowledge, attitudes, and impressions, and associate them with a variety of pedagogical practices, which damages the

quality of ECEC. Therefore, the concept of racism should be clearly conceptualised in ECEC policy documents: personnel's understanding of racism is crucial so that they can implement adequate pedagogy and avoid unintentional racist practices and discourses.

According to Hellman and Lauritsen (2017), research findings in all Nordic countries have revealed marginalisation and exclusion of preschool children with an immigrant background. Ethnographies by Lappalainen (2006a; 2006b) and Armila et al. (2018) offered valuable insights to the phenomenon in Finnish ECEC, in which racism has remained mainly an under researched topic. According to Lappalainen (2006b), Finnishness was conceptualised as a natural order in Finnish preschool context, and the liberal version of multiculturalism operated as an exclusive practice in ECEC, leading often to the nationalistic learning environments. Lappalainen (2006a) also pointed out how visual presentations were used to produce cultural dissimilarity in preschool education, and how this could result in excluding children with immigrant background from their peer group. Layne (2023), who has recently explored everyday multiculturalism and everyday racism in Finnish early childhood education and care, addressed that learning environments of ECEC do not always provide possibilities for children with diverse backgrounds to feel connected with learning materials, and noted that Eurocentrism dominates early education ideology.

Armila et al. (2018) addressed diverse perspectives of childhood to lead to different aspects of dealing with racism in early childhood education and care. If the pedagogical focus was on seeing children as innocent and in need of protection, racism was understood as something negative that does not belong to the children's life in any form. In contrast, when children were viewed as experience-oriented and thus prone to racist realities as well, educators were able to interpret racism in children's interactions. Armila et al. (2018) as well as Lappalainen (2006b) argued that the former pedagogical perspective of vulnerability has been more embraced in the Finnish ECEC context. However, Robinson and Diaz (2016) stated that multiple research evidence has

demonstrated how prejudice takes place also in young children's everyday lives, absorbed and repeated by children themselves, who actively negotiate diversity and categories such as class, gender, age, and "race".

In addition, Armila et al. (2018) noted that early educators rarely identify practices and interactions maintaining cultural hierarchies and nationalism in their own working environments. Moreover, their research's participants, early childhood educators, expressed their need for acquiring practical knowledge on how to work in environments that are becoming more culturally diverse. Kuusisto (2017) argued that in order to increase social justice in Finnish ECEC, it is essential to ensure that the ECEC personnel gain support and in-service training to learn how to continuously reflect their own values and construction of an educational approach in their work.

Armila et al. (2018) concluded that the obligated concept of tolerance had not been able to successfully improve the preschool realities with nationalism and microaggression in their everyday structures and practices. As most of the Finnish ECEC employees have grown up and been socialised into the White normative, ethnocentric Finnish society, they are often blind to these issues. However, as many scholars have demonstrated, ECEC settings act as a crucial socialisation arena for young children, because children interiorise values and ideologies of their social environment and develop long-standing beliefs and attitudes based on those absorptions (Boutte, 2008; Husband, 2012; Lenox, 2000). Also, neuroscience outlines that from birth, neural pathways of a human being begin to form and be strengthened and expanded each time a person engages in similar patterns around certain basic concepts, images, and ideas, starting and continuing to guide one's behaviour and attitudes (Winings, 2019). That is why issues of racism cannot be tabooed or ignored in ECEC settings, where our future doctors, police officers, government officials, and teachers are developing their long-lasting belief systems. Aim of this research was to explore whether everyday environments of ECEC reflected and put equity-goals of early education policies into practice, or in contrast, reconstructed and repeated similar racist elements identified by scholars of previously made research on the topic.

2.5 Everyday multiculturalism

Harris (2012, pp. 6–7) defined everyday multiculturalism as daily encounters between people with diverse backgrounds in the same social space, where ideas of cultural difference, national belonging and placemaking are constantly being constructed and deconstructed. Lentin (2005) suggested that culture has become a new “race” as culture has been increasingly used to explain human differences and organise people hierarchically in today’s world.

According to Hummelstedt et al. (2021), there are several theoretical approaches to multiculturalism: conservative, liberal, and critical. The conservative approach focuses on cultural differences, and its goal is adapting the multicultural Other into society. In contrast, the liberal approach appreciates diversity of cultures but does not pay attention to inequalities and discrimination within society. Critical approach, however, addresses and challenges imbalanced power relations and discriminative structures, and thus it should be embraced, for example, in teacher education. (Hummelstedt et al., 2021.)

Harris (2012, p. 7) argued that in Western countries, dominant White ethnicity often represents the national identity while other ethnicities are being tolerated or even celebrated as ethnic others who accept the values and hegemony of the mainstream culture. This approach perceives children and youth as in a need for integration into the nation and its mainstream values. According to Hummelstedt et al. (2021), Finnish multicultural education tends to represent a mix of conservative and liberal approaches. The central idea of Finnish multiculturalism is an ambition to understand people with different cultural backgrounds, while the structural power imbalance between groups is not acknowledged (Alemanji, 2018). This approach is discussed and problematised in the subsection “2.3 Multiculturalism and racism in Finnish education” alongside a conclusion that applying antiracism education is a more adequate way to achieve a socially just education.

Vice and Velayutham (2021) conceptualised everyday practices attributing to multiculturalism, including material, structural and spatial conditions. They

argued physical environments represent human relationships, hierarchies, and tensions within and contribute to multiculturalism through many forms - by their underlying ethos and frameworks, furnishings, and other materials, as well as activities taken place. Moreover, Vice and Velayutham (2021) stated that when exploring diversity in the environment, acknowledging bigger factors in the background of everyday settings is necessary in understanding the maintenance of cultural hierarchies.

Everyday multiculturalism was used in this research as a background concept pointing out that learning environments of ECEC centres contribute to maintenance, construction, and deconstruction of racial hierarchies depending on which approach to multiculturalism they employ. An importance of recognising existing unequal and discriminatory structures within Finnish society and inefficiency of multicultural education implemented in Finnish education is discussed earlier in this research when aiming to shed light on the need and means of changing our education system for the better.

2.6 Racism and related concepts

“Race”. A concept of racism has roots in a term “race” which was created by Western scientists in 1700s to address biological traits of particular groups of people with the aim to prove by pseudoscience that different “races” have different psychological and social abilities. “Race” was then used to setting groups of people at precedence and justifying racialised inequalities, oppression, and exploitation, Whites being positioned on the top of the racial hierarchy (Miles, 1994.) Thus, “race” is a social construction, a learned social relation, that has shaped, and continues to shape, unequal intergroup power relations globally, differentiating White and non-White people (Mills, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1994; Leonardo & Grub, 2014) with a goal to produce, reproduce and maintain White supremacy (Lentin, 2022). I referred to this conceptualisation of “race” when using the term in this research. Keskinen (2021) pointed out that the pseudoscience of “race” was adopted also in Finland, and racial hierarchies were

produced, especially in relation to Russian, Sámi, Roma, and other underrepresented groups.

Nowadays, “race” is a debated term – what is the meaning of it, does it even exist, and should the term be used or not? The term “race” is employed differently in different countries (Banton, 2015), and despite its complex conceptual and practical status, it is often used as a resource in political debates (St Louis, 2005, pp. 29–31). Racism researchers, including me, tend to use quotation marks with the term in order to point out that “race” is social construction instead of biological fact (Puuronen, 2011, p. 49). Lentin (2022), among many other antiracism scholars, have articulated the importance of not denying or silencing the existence of “race”, as it indisputably continues structuring social relations and working as a template for racism in today’s societies. Antiracist scholars have also used the concept of intersectionality to address that besides “race”, also gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and ability are pillars of social oppression and dynamics of power relations (Golash-Boza, 2016; Omi & Winant, 2015). In this research, I acknowledged that “race” is not the only identity marker creating discrimination or privilege, but because of the focus point on racism, I paid most attention to racism through “race” and ethnicity.

Racialisation. Closely linked to “race” and racism is a process of racialisation. According to Gilroy (2002), racialisation refers to the practices in which a group of people is defined based on their physical characteristics and differentiated as a social group based on those characteristics. This process creates a social hierarchy in which one’s “own” group is defined as superior (Miles, 1994). The historical mode of racialisation attempted to account for the unequal development of different groups of people in the context of colonisation and slavery, and it formed the basis for racial thinking today (Banton, 2015, p. 51; Golash-Boza, 2016, p. 131). This established hierarchy of racial groups was conceptualised in this research as structural racism, operating within all sectors of society.

In the Finnish context, non-White people are racialised and excluded because the assumption about Finnishness is strongly attached to Whiteness (Keskinen, 2015). Although a skin colour is often dividing factor in constitution of Finnishness, “race” as a concept is rarely used in Finnish language, and culture and ethnicity are used to replace it in order to move away further from tabooed topic of racism (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018; Hummelstedt, 2022). Furthermore, the term “race” has slightly different meaning in Finnish than in English because it is translated as a synonym for the word “breed” (of animals). Therefore, the concept of racialisation is more often used instead of “race” in Finnish language when discussing racial relations and processes. In this research, I used the term “race” because I recognised it constructs intergroup social relations globally and within Finnish society and thus it must be articulated, not avoided, as a concept. When I discussed the skin colours in this research, I used only the categories of “White” and “non-White/People of Colour” because of the fact that in the Finnish context, white skin is so strongly a determining factor.

Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of racial formation stresses that racial categories and - dynamics are constantly shaped within social contexts (such as educational institutions) in which both macrosocial- and microsocial-level “racial projects” construct racial meanings and accordingly, develop racial organisations and social structures. Thus, “race” is “a template for the processes of marginalisation that continue to shape social structures as well as collective and individual psyches” (Omi and Winant 2015, p. 107). This assumption was embraced in this study by stressing the impact of representations of diverse cultures and “races” provided by ECEC settings on both the development of children and on power relations in society on a larger scale.

Nowadays, racialisation has multiple aims. It is used, for example, in demographics as a practical form of racialisation, and in political discourses with an ideological echo. Cultural characteristics (language, culture, clothing) have recently completed physical characterises in (new)racist discourses (Puuronen, 2011) and thus culture is nowadays universally used to categorise groups of peoples and explain human difference (Lentin, 2004). White normativity is an

essential part of the racialisation process, as it positions Whiteness as the norm that works as a standard by which other racial groups are contrasted and measured (Morris, 2016; Ward, 2008). White normativity naturalises not only higher appearance of White people but also justifies dominance of values, knowledge, habits, and ways of communication and behaviour most familiar to Whites in social and institutional life, sustaining other forms of normativity such as middle-class, heterosexual, and Christian norms. Thus, Whiteness and “White norms” may become determinant of predominant social norms for “normal” people and the “correct” way to live and produce racial inequality and racial hierarchy across a multitude of institutions and social settings. (Ward, 2008; Winings, 2019.) Morris (2016, p. 977) argued that White normativity accounts for discrimination not because of ill treatment of racial minority groups but because it fails to acknowledge them at all - which makes Whites and their practices and perspectives superior. White normativity was one of the key concepts employed in the theory-driven analysis process of this research to aid in interpretations, because I recognised how powerful yet an implicit tool it is in construction of unequal racial relations. According to Hummelstedt et al. (2021, p. 2), non-White and non-Western pupils were often racialised in Finnish education and prevented from accessing the position of a Finn. In addition, Puuronen (2011) argued that white-skinned, Finnish-born, and Finnish-speaking pupils were categorised as “Ordinary Finns” in schools with full rights of belonging in school communities, while racialised “immigrants” did not have equal possibilities for membership, and they were racialised through multiple racist structures and practices.

Racism. Providing a clear definition of *racism* is difficult, because according to Memmi (1999), instead of being a scientific theory, racism is an incoherent collection of opinions with a function. Alemanji (2018, pp. 5-7) emphasised the ever-changing nature of racism: the concept of racism has a variety of meanings and interpretations in different contexts. Memmi (1999, p. 184) summarised the concept of racism as follows:

Racism is a generalizing definition and valuation of biological differences, whether real or imaginary, to the advantage of the one defining and deploying them, and to the detriment of the one subjected to that act of definition, to the end of justifying (social or physical) hostility and assault.

That said, racist attitudes include an idea of one “race” being superior to others in social hierarchy, which attempts to justify one’s political and historical hegemony according to the “race” (Memmi, 1999, p. 188). In Finland, the White “race” is considered as the norm and increasingly considered in the public discussions being positioned higher in the racial hierarchy. As an example of this is the current refugee situation where the Ukrainian refugees (White) are getting empathy and support, while the racialised refugees are not accepted with similar hospitality.

Racism can be practiced through discriminative and prejudice discourses and representations focused on “otherness” as well as through a variety of violent actions (Balibar, 1991, p. 17). The concept of “otherness” refers to racist dynamic between different groups in which “we” (the mainstream group) and “the Other” (non-mainstream group) confront (Alemanji, 2021, pp. 205–206). The “Others” are often distinguished by their name, skin colour or religious practices (Balibar, 1991, p. 17).

Racism can operate at both micro and macro levels: practised by individuals or structures of society (Alemanji, 2021), which makes racism an even more complex concept. In the context of this research, central forms of racism explored were everyday racism and institutional racism - racism at the macro level. The essence of macro level racism is White supremacy. White supremacy refers to a hegemonic system that privileges Whites with a number of daily, invisible, unearned advantages, not available for People of Colour, in all areas of society, and differentiates distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits, rights and duties (Mills, 1997; Lawrence & Hylton, 2022). Pérez Huber et al. (2008) argued that White supremacy also normalises and legitimates dominance of White values, beliefs, and experiences (known also as Eurocentrism) and, by doing so, positions White superior to others. Mills (1997, p. 3) argued that because of globalisation, White supremacy has affected all societies. Seikkula (2020, p. 2)

addressed that racism is incontestably part of Finnish society and continues to shape it.

Essed (1991, pp. 2–3) emphasised the crucial link between everyday routine situations and racist ideologies in her explanation of everyday racism. Everyday racism thus involves systemic, generalised practices and socialised attitudes and behaviour in the system, operating especially through the hidden manifestations instead of overt racism. (Essed, 1991.) Huber and Solorzano (2021) used a concept of racial microaggressions to describe the forms of racism that systemically maintain the ideology of White supremacy in the daily routines and everyday environments of society. These assaults are either verbal or non-verbal, often subtle, and not always consciously represented. In the analysis process of this research, the theory of everyday racism was used to develop interpretations, for instance, when aiming to identify racist assaults and cultural values manifested in ECEC learning environments.

Furthermore, Essed (2016) conceptualised institutional racism as discriminative policies and practices integrated in the daily routines of systems and institutions that, systemically but not always meaningfully, reproduce racial and ethnic inequalities. This makes racism an everyday problem because cultural arrangements, norms and values create and reproduce unrecognisably power structures in the society. When society adapts and accepts these invisible injustices as ordinary, racism finds its way more deeply into culture. (Essed, 2016, pp. 234–235.) A fundamental, subtle form of racism is called colour-blind racism, which denies salience of “race” in institutions and discourses of a country, and by doing so, accepts and enables racial inequalities by dismissing systemic oppression and racialised social order existing in the structures of society and its organisations. Colour-blind racism is essentially related to White supremacy. (Bonilla-Silva & Ashe, 2014).

Forms of institutionalised and everyday racism tend to appear in educational systems, for example, through use of biased, White normative educational textbooks and other curricular materials, and by underrepresentation of People of Colour teachers in the schools (Essed, 1991;

Gulliver, 2011, Hahl et al., 2015). Furthermore, everyday racism comes visible in schools through peer relations (Souto, 2011). In this study, pedagogical materials, and objects of ECEC classrooms were the object of examination. Exploring power hierarchies in educational settings promotes addressing deep-rooted tensions within society on a larger scale (Sommier & Roiha, 2018, p. 108), and this research contributed to that agenda by exploring these issues in the physical learning environments of Finnish ECEC.

Nationalism. Closely linked to racism is the concept of nationalism. As Miles (1994) stated, there is only a thin line between nationalism and racism. Billig (1995) extended the traditional definition of the term nationalism to cover the ideological habits by which nation-states are reproduced on a daily basis. Thus, nationalism refers to the ideology that creates and maintains nation-states. Traditionally, the language, values, and culture of the dominant group create an identity of the nation. Banal nationalism refers to sustenance of homogeneous representations of the nation and use of dominant practices as the norm, which leads to reproducing existing hierarchical relations within society. (Billig, 1995.) That said, as Alemanji and Mafi (2018, p. 188) suggested, nationalism and racism need each other to sustain and reproduce their existence. Furthermore, Billig (1995) emphasised that not always nationalism is consciously practised: nationalistic behaviours and thoughts can also become unrecognisable routines.

According to Meyer et al. (1997), educational institutions have been considered playing an important role in the construction of national culture and identity and transforming pupils to nation's citizens. The concept of national pedagogy is used to describe school practices contributing to that agenda (Lappalainen, 2006b, p. 99). Finnish researchers Lappalainen (2006b) and Armila et al. (2018) addressed that nationalism operated in everyday structures and practices of early childhood education and care settings despite multiculturalism, which was applied rather as an exclusive practice. Layne (2023) also addressed how Finnish education tends to create dominating national narratives that become imperceptibly accepted by all. Because banal nationalism can maintain conflicting representations of culture, cultural practices, and cultural differences,

teachers should be aware of curricular materials and practices containing discriminative ideologies and provide alternative materials and cultural practices in order to avoid reproducing existing power dynamics (Sommier & Roiha, 2018, p. 115). Topic of interest in this research was exploring if ECEC environments were contributing to nationalism, and thus, reproducing existing hierarchical relations not only between racial groups but also between cultures.

2.7 Antiracism

Antiracism, such as racism, is a multi-layered concept with various forms and approaches (Bonnett, 2000; Essed, 2016; Lentin, 2004), and that is why antiracist efforts may even include conflicting points of view as a clear shared definition of antiracism on a conceptual or practical level is lacking (Seikkula, 2020). Most antiracism scholars have agreed that antiracism refers to a multitude of practices and forms of thought. To provide a definition for antiracism in the context of this research, I used intellectual plurality created by Alemanji (2018; 2021a, 2021b), Bonnett (2000), Essed (2016), Hage (2016), Lentin (2004) and Seikkula (2020) who all have contributed to the conceptualisation of racism and antiracism in Western European countries.

Lentin (2004, p. 114) argued that the definition of antiracism is fundamentally linked to understandings of its opposition: racism. Thus, as Sayyid (2017, p. 13) also noted, the meaning of racism provides the scale and structure of antiracism. That is why it is essential to understand various conceptualised forms of racism when aiming to analyse different antiracist strategies, i.e., aims and functions of antiracism (Seikkula, 2020), which was one goal of this research. Fundamental forms of racism in the context of this research are defined and discussed in the previous subsection.

Antiracism - in its multidimensionality - is a conscious, intellectual, and practical commitment to opposing racism in thoughts and actions of individuals or communities (Alemanji, 2021a; Essed, 2016). Essentially, challenging racism means challenging historically established racial power structures (Alemanji,

2021b), issues addressed under Racism-subsection of this thesis. Thus, antiracism differs from “non-racism”, that Bonnet (2014) conceptualised as performing self as “not racist” but without an agenda of promoting social and racial justice. Non-racism can be performed through colour-blindness (or universalism), which is an ideology denying race altogether (Bonnet, 2014), but which Bonilla-Silva (2006) identified as a subtle form of racism. Thus, Seikkula (2020, p. 6) suggested that antiracism should also be considered as a potential critique of colour-blind universalism. Antiracism scholars recognise the existence of “race” and the fact that all individuals are affected by living in a racialised society, where a skin colour works as the basis for social organisation. This was also a fundamental assumption in this research, as noted earlier.

Defining “antiracist practice” is challenging, as millions of individuals around the world have contributed to antiracism with a range of diverse actions (Bonnett, 2000). Hage (2016, pp. 124–125) highlighted six central functions of antiracism: reducing the incidence of racist practices in society at large (everyday racism) or within institutions (structural racism); fostering a non-racist culture in diverse forums and institutions; supporting the victims of racism; empowering people targeted by racism; transforming racist relations into better relations; and creating a society in which racial identification is no longer a relevant or significant mode of identification. Moreover, Bonnett (2000, p. 88) determined six forms of antiracist practice, including:

1. Everyday anti-racism, i.e., opposition to racial equality that forms part of everyday popular culture;
2. Multicultural anti-racism, i.e., the affirmation of multicultural diversity as a way of engaging racism;
3. Psychological anti-racism, i.e., the identification and challenging of racism within structures of individual and collective consciousness, the generation of ‘positive racial images’;
4. Radical anti-racism, i.e., the identification and challenging of structures of socio-economic power and privilege that foster and reproduce racism;
5. Anti-Nazi and anti-fascist anti-racism;
6. The representative organisation, i.e., the policy and practice of seeking to create organisations representative of the ‘wider community’ and therefore, actively favouring the entry and promotion of previously excluded races.

Bonnett (2000, p. 47) addressed that besides being based on resistance to racism, antiracism aims at creating sustainable states and political legitimacies. That is why antiracism works on multiple levels and within various forms of discourse. Antiracist groups are often either nationally or locally organised inputs aiming at a wider national antiracist effort (Bonnett, 2000, p. 53–54).

In Finland, antiracist discussions and activities began to increase societally in the 2010s, when racism was broadly acknowledged and problematised by several non-governmental organisations (Seikkula, 2020). First national, broad antiracist program, *Drivers of Equality*, launched by the Ministry of Justice, is currently in progress aiming to develop tools for authorities, education institutions and employers for carrying out equality planning and implementing the legislation on non-discrimination and equality. Another goal of the project is to raise awareness about equality and non-discrimination nationwide. The project promotes *the Action Plan for Combating Racism and Promoting Good Relations between Population Groups (2021–2023)* outlined in the Programme of Prime Minister Marin's Government. (Ministry of Justice, 2021.) The purpose of the government's action plan is to fight against racism and discrimination in all sectors of society through 52 measures implemented by different administrative branches (Ministry of Social Justice, 2022). This indicates that discourses of racism are increasingly rising in Finnish society, and actions to combat it have been initiated. As being so recent initiative, implementation of Action Plan calls for engaging various players, such as academic researchers, civil society, municipal authorities, education professionals, businesses, and employers in partnership to promote non-discrimination and antiracism in order to take first steps towards realisation of equality (Ministry of Social Justice, 2022).

As addressed earlier in this research, Finnish education in its all levels is struggling with racism in its structures and daily practices, and the endeavours towards social justice have failed because of deficient teacher training and tabooing racism in educational discourses. That is why antiracist education is needed. Also, the government's Action Plan (Ministry of Justice, 2022) outlined the need for enhancing the ability of teachers and other education workforce in

antiracist educational work. Layne (2023) addressed that ECEC curriculum or teacher education and -training does not provide adequate antiracism proficiency for educators, and therefore there remains a danger for unintended racism in everyday practices and discourses of early childhood education and care. According to antiracist scholar Alemanji (2018, p. 5), the starting point for antiracism is acknowledging the existence of racism and situating the issues of structural imbalance in the systems between different groups of people and moreover, recognising the history's impact on today's interactions. Therefore, the first step to take in the process is supporting educators' awareness and understanding of racism. This research aimed at recognising racist elements in everyday surroundings of Finnish ECEC and raising awareness of prevailing issues that way.

However, as Alemanji (2021a) pointed out, the understanding of racism and its complex nature does not promote change itself: educational policies and practices should be developed in order to aim at an antiracist society. Therefore, goals of antiracism in education are developing practices and policies that dismantle racism in educational structures (such as in legislation and curriculum) and producing racial equity in education through antiracist pedagogics, practices, and curricula. The guiding principle is that all practices and policies that are not producing racial equity are creating inequity. (Alemanji, 2021a, pp. 206–208.) This research aimed to produce actions towards antiracist early childhood education and care by unfolding prevailing issues and analysing and discussing existing antiracist endeavours used in ECEC settings. By producing evidence-based knowledge from the Finnish ECEC sector and conceptualising occurring racism and antiracism in the field, this research pursued enhancing ECEC personnel's awareness and knowledge, and promoting their work towards an antiracist approach.

3 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) defined qualitative research followingly:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

This definition successfully underlines the aims and means of this qualitative research, which were endeavours to depict and explain visual manifestations of racism and antiracism in educational settings by certain methods that I discuss in depth in this section. As Tracy (2020, p. 8) argued, qualitative research is particularly useful in the change-oriented research that aims to transform beliefs and habits of people in order to promote social justice. By demonstrating a certain case with qualitative evidence will be more likely resulting in consequential changes than offering facts and figures. In this research, a qualitative approach was selected over quantitative because of change-orientation and because it enabled capturing complexity of explored issues.

Methodology of research responds to the question of best means for gaining knowledge based on ontological and epistemological viewpoints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Tracy, 2020). I discuss these underlying interpretive paradigms in the context of this research under the subsection 2.1.

This research applied a case study approach when pursuing a multifaceted understanding of racism and antiracism in the everyday context they occur. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2012) pointed out that despite having been attempting to develop clear definitions for case study and its modes of working for over the last 30 decades, scholars in a wide variety of disciplines are still debating the characteristics of it. That is why each researcher should define a case study in the context of their own study - whether they use it as a method, genre, or an approach. Accordingly, a case study as an approach to this research is discussed next in this section. After that, research context and research data are

described. Furthermore, the methods of data collection and data analysis are presented precisely.

3.1 Case Study Approach

Crowe et al. (2011) conceptualised case study as a research approach that is used to explore an event or phenomenon in depth in its natural context to generate a multi-faceted understanding of a certain complex issue. The approach captures information on exploratory questions “how”, “what” and “why”, and can be employed with various epistemological viewpoints (Crowe et al., 2011). The case study approach was valuable for this research because it enabled in-depth investigations of multi-layered concepts of racism and antiracism to be carried out in real-life (early) educational settings. This research applied the “collective case study” design by exploring multiple cases simultaneously in order to generate a broad understanding, but not generalisation, of the studied phenomena (Stake, 1995), i.e., the occurrence of racist and antiracist indications. I discuss case selection under 3.3. Research Data - section.

Characteristics of “case study approach” in this research included employment of two perspectives on data (racist/antiracist), researcher’s own familiarity with observed settings and repeated data collections in various ECEC environments. These elements helped to triangulate the data and strengthen the legitimacy of the conclusions drawn (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012). Purpose of this research was not to compare individual cases to each other but to collect data from diverse environments to produce a multifaceted understanding of studied phenomena and identify prevailing tendencies related to them.

3.2 Research Context

The context of this research is Finnish early childhood education and care. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a part of the Finnish education system, and it provides services for families with 0-7 years old children. Mostly, early

childhood education and care service is provided centre based in ECEC centres (called also as kindergartens or day-care centres), but it also includes settings of the family day-care and open ECEC activities. ECEC services include implementation of goal-oriented pedagogical activities that promote children's holistic development and learning. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018.)

ECEC can be provided by either municipal or private service providers, and the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018 regulates all services with several obligations related to the provision and organisation of ECEC. The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care is obligatory to be implemented in all ECEC services as well, and it aims to promote provision of high-quality and equal ECEC nationwide. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018.) In this research, the learning environments of the municipal ECEC centres in the city of Jyväskylä were investigated.

3.3 Research Data

Five municipal ECEC centres from the city of Jyväskylä were selected as cases for this research. Sampling method was a theoretical construct sampling, which refers to recruiting certain types of participants based on their specific characteristics (Tracy, 2020, p. 84). Participating ECEC centres represented different levels of cultural and ethnic diversity among their customers. Two of the centres were located in an "all-white" area, while three were in strongly "diverse" neighbourhoods. This data sample was considered to be appropriate for answering the research questions. In 2022, city of Jyväskylä had a population of about 146 000 people, and the share of foreign-language speakers was 6,0% (Statistics Finland, 2023).

ECEC centre premises are arranged and equipped due to the purpose of early childhood education and care: nursing and educating children. Therefore, expected activities of ECEC determine the arrangements and equipment of the physical spaces of ECEC centres. For example, the dining room is arranged to serve the purpose of eating, the resting room is furnished with beds for sleeping,

and the entrance hall is organised for dressing and undressing. (Paju, 2005.) Because early childhood education and care is goal-oriented service, all its activities are expected to promote children's holistic development and learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). That is why nearly all spaces of ECEC centres also have room and equipment for playing (Paju, 2005) which is a central activity in Finnish early childhood education and care (Finnish National Agency for Education 2022). Important role of a well-planned and -organised learning environment for quality ECEC is noted in the National Core Curriculum for ECEC, which states that "Learning environments are designed and developed to strengthen equity and gender equality. This enables breaking away from traditional gender stereotypes. The learning environments promote children's linguistic development and language awareness and make cultural diversity visible" (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 31).

Many scholars have argued that the visual environment is central to the cultural organisation of social life in Western societies, constructing social categories of class, gender, "race", sexuality and able-bodiedness (Rose, 2012). As discussed in this thesis, ECEC learning environments and their learning materials have a remarkable impact on the development of children's racial attitudes and identities, also shaping children's perceptions of the world around them (Boutte, 2008; Lenox, 2000). These aspects justified collecting research data for this study from ECEC centres, as one aim of this research was to understand how power relations are raised and maintained in Finnish society.

Not all spaces of ECEC centres are open for children. There are rooms for staff only, such as the dressing room, the break room, and offices (Paju, 2005). In this research, the data was collected from spaces where children spend time: entrance halls, toilets, dining rooms, resting rooms, playrooms, and classrooms. Focus of research was on the objects in the physical learning environments, which means that social and psychic dimensions were excluded from exploration.

3.4 Data Collection

The data was collected by utilising visual methodology, more specifically, by applying photo-documentation in the observed learning environments. Aim of this data collection method was to elaborate the research focus and collect systemically visual evidence of things contributing to the research question.

Rose (2012, p. 301) described photo-documentation as a method that assumes that photographs are accurate records of visual reality and takes photographs systemically in order to produce data to be analysed by the researcher. As such, because visual data deliver more accurate and concrete information about certain phenomena than language can describe (Eberle, 2018, p. 3) and photographs are precise records of material reality (Collier, 1967, p. 5) reserving an immense amount of information in a single representation (Grady, 2004, p. 20), carefully planned photographing as a method of collecting data was selected, because the goal of this research was documentation and in-depth analysis of a particular visual phenomenon: expressions of racism and antiracism in physical learning environments of ECEC. As Collier (1967, p. 4) stated, photographing also extends possibilities of critical analysis as it “allows an absolute check of position and identification in a congested and changing cultural event”. That is why photography was also considered as a beneficial data collection method for this research. Furthermore, photographs extend our perceptions, allow us to see without fatigue and allow comparative observations (Collier, 1967, p. 1), which promoted credibility of the results of this study.

Visual data was captured in the ECEC learning environments in the city of Jyväskylä between May 2022 and September 2022. Photographs were researcher-produced, collected by myself, meaning that I visually documented the observed learning environments according to a shooting script. The relevant frames of the photography were chosen according to certain research motives and perspectives. Suchar (1997, p. 37) stated that shooting scripts ensure that “the information within a photo can be argued as putative facts that are answers to

particular (research) questions”, underlying the importance of the careful conceptualisation between the research topic and the photographs being taken.

Collier and Collier’s (1986) guidelines for photography as a research method were employed in the data collecting process of this research to support examination of the learning environments. The instructions of mapping and surveying (Collier & Collier, 1986, pp. 29–44) were used in giving an overview of learning environments (general organisation, activity areas), and the cultural inventory (Collier & Collier, 1986, pp. 48–50) was used for indicating racist and antiracist manifestations in the settings.

Therefore, in the first stage of fieldwork, the researcher gathered general, descriptive information of the environment under study, oriented oneself to it and formed a frame of reference for goals of research. In this mapping and sketching phase, the camera worked as a tool for obtaining a general view of the observed environment and allowed the researcher to investigate and compare certain characteristics of communities, such as ecology and cultural geography. (Collier, 1967.) Mapping and surveying started by photographing ECEC centre-buildings from ground level in their ecological area. Cultural geography of ECEC centres was already known before arrival at the field. After entering the centres, learning environments were first photographed with panoramas of 180 degrees sweep.

In the second phase, the researcher reasonably narrowed the field work focusing on search of particular evidence relevant to research goals and continued from mapping to cultural inventory and sampling (Collier, 1967, p. 7). All the elements in physical environments (such as objects, pictures, pedagogical materials, toys) that manifested cultural norms, values, ideologies, and characteristics, were attempted to be recorded. Researcher’s prior knowledge of racism and antiracism was crucial in this stage in order to systematically recognise significant factors when selecting objects to be captured.

In the final synthesis phase, photographic evidence was abstracted, verbalised, and developed into conclusions (Collier, 1967, p. 7). This was done in the data analysis process described in the next subsection.

As Collier (1967, p. 1) stated, “an observer’s capacity for rounded vision is certainly related to the degree of his involvement with his environment”. My own background as a teacher in early childhood education and care made my orientation to observed environments easier because I understood designs, features, and functions - complex details - of learning environments.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by utilising visual thematic analysis (VTA) which has similar aims and stages as usual thematic analysis (TA), but it is centred around visual data. Briefly said, the aim of thematic analysis is to identify, analyse and report themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022). In this research, VTA was used for identifying themes on racist and antiracist manifestations captured in the photographs taken in the field of ECEC.

Applied analysis method was chosen because of its benefits for the particular research design of this study. Because the data was in visual form, visual thematic analysis appeared as a meaningful approach to the analysis. It was also most suitable for answering my research question. VTA explores latent and hidden dimensions of photographs, not only obvious and self-evident semantic content of them, like more popularly used “visual content analysis” does (Ball & Smith, 1992). That is one reason I decided to apply it - interpretation of racist and antiracist indications captured in the photographs required in-depth exploration, because especially racism tends to operate especially through the hidden and subtle manifestations instead of overt assaults (Essed, 1991). As such, it was essential to use theory-driven VTA in this research and lean on the concepts of, and theories on, racism and antiracism (see pages 20–30) in making sense of the data. For instance, recognition of indications of White normativity, an implicit form of racism, could have been disregarded without knowledge and understanding that scholars have provided.

What was also essential in terms of selecting VTA as an analytical method was that, as being a theoretically flexible method (Braun & Clarke, 2022),

thematic analysis allowed a critical paradigm to be applied in my research. As a critical paradigm was used in this research as an epistemological approach, influences of power and subjectivity of the researcher for the entire research process were acknowledged: I, as a researcher, used my authority when selecting which photos are of interest and identifying themes within data. Braun and Clarke (2013; 2022) addressed that in critically oriented research, thematic analysis often takes more researcher-directed interpretative frames where interpretation is not entirely determined by data-based meanings but is based also in different epistemological and ontological frameworks. I discuss these aspects of my research in the subsection "1.1. Underlying interpretive paradigms".

Furthermore, VTA did not set any boundaries for my aim of using critical theories on racism and antiracism as analytical lenses, but yet it allowed me to refrain from implicit theoretical commitments as the research aim was not to produce a fully grounded-theory analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, a deductive way of theme formation was conducted in the analysis process of my research, as my pre-existing theoretical and analytic interests aided the process of theme identification, and existing theoretical constructs on racism and antiracism were used in developing interpretations. Another option would have been the inductive approach, which means that themes were data-driven, not theory-driven. (Braun & Clarke, 2022.)

As Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 83) stated, determining the aim of analysis in relation to the data set is important, because thematic analysis can be used for various purposes. Instead of pursuing a rich overall description of the entire data set, the analysis process of this research aimed at providing a more detailed account of themes within data that were related to a specific research question of this study, i.e., focusing on racist and antiracist themes. That is why theory-driven VTA was chosen, as according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 84), it "tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall, and a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data", and therefore, fitted to the aims of this research better than contrasting inductive way.

Guest et al. (2012) explained that thematic analyses require more effort from the researcher in terms of involvement and interpretation, as these processes involve identification and description of both implicit and explicit ideas within data instead of focusing on explicit ones and counting them. I noticed this during my analysis when I was trying to make sense of both semantic and latent meanings of photographs. I discovered the importance of bringing identified ideas together with a theoretical framework to produce meaningful conclusions. By doing so, I acknowledged that some of the explored data extracts included both racist and antiracist elements at the same time.

The Visual Thematic Analysis process, as suggested by Ponnampalath and Dawra (2013), was employed in my research. In addition, guidelines for thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) were taken into account as well because Ponnampalath and Dawra (2013) had used Braun and Clarke's procedure as a basis for their own work. The process is described in detail next.

Familiarising with data. In the first phase, I familiarised myself with the entire data corpus. This began already in the field, during the collection process, which involved noting down initial ideas. When all data was collected, I moved back and forward between the entire data set, familiarised myself profoundly with data, and began taking notes about potential coding ideas. As Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86) stated, theoretically approached research requires engagement with the literature in the early stages of analysis as it enhances researcher's sensibility to find relevant features. Engagement with literature promoted the analysis of this research by providing prior knowledge and understanding of racist and antiracist principles. For instance, a theme of White normativity was easier to recognise already in the early stages of analysis because I had knowledge of the various layers and functions of it.

Initial coding and dataset generation. During the first phase of the analysis process, I had developed a deeper understanding of the research data and produced an initial list of interesting aspects within it. Next step was to produce initial codes that identified essential features of the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data extracts that appeared interesting were

first stored into a data extract file. Therefore, the final data set comprised data that was identified by an analytic interest in the topic. In other words, as the topic of interest was on expressions of racism and antiracism, the data set was composed of items across the entire data corpus that related to the topic. 88 data extracts were included into the final data set with initials codes “racism” or “antiracism”. Some extracts were assigned with both codes as they appeared to express both racism and antiracism.

Transcription of visual data. Visual research data must always be interpreted by verbal descriptions and be linked to theoretical concepts, in order to come to a relevant conclusive insight (Eberle, 2018, p. 7). Therefore, the next step of the analysis process was to transcribe visual data set to written descriptions. Contents of photographs were described verbally by giving an account of details of each photo, in other words, writing details of their semantic content, as Figures 1 and 2 show.

Figure 1

Monthly Calendar of May 2022. Semantic content: “In the calendar of May 2022, Finnish flag-flying days are highlighted with Finnish flags and represented with pictures that illustrate the meaning of the day, for example, Mother’s Day and J.V. Snellman’s day.”



Figure 2

A Poster of Home Languages and - Flags of Children. Semantic content: "A poster representing greetings in home languages of children of the ECEC class and flags of the countries of their origin."



Interpretive codes. Next step of analysis included "code generation" in which the stored data extracts were assigned with appropriate code names according to their latent, i.e., interpretive meanings (Ponnam & Dawra, 2013). Therefore, interpretative analysis first began with complementing all data extracts with latent meanings. In this practice, instructions for visual semiology by Rose (2012, pp. 105–148) were utilised in forming tentative interpretations. Visual semiology responds to the question of how images make meanings by providing analytical tools for unpacking images and then tracking how they work in relation to broader systems of meaning (Rose, 2012, p. 105). Thus, when the data extracts were supplemented with latent meanings, attention was paid, for instance, to symbols, written texts, and representations of bodies, manners, activities, and settings of human characters within visual data (Rose, 2012, pp. 112–135). Fyfe and Law (1988, p. 1, as cited in Rose, 2012) emphasised exploration of principles of inclusion and exclusion, various roles, and power hierarchies in critically approached visual research. Moreover, critical visual culture analyst Pollock (1988, p. 7, as cited in Rose, 2012) required a critical account to address both visual representations of images that produce social inclusions and exclusions, and their cultural meaning and effects. I considered these several aspects during the

interpretation process besides utilising theoretical constructs on racism and antiracism to develop my interpretation of the data.

Even though I used deductively approached analysis, I did not seek evidence to affirm that data fits into pre-existing theories on racism or antiracism, nor did I focus on the one-sided story of the data. Rather, I kept my interpretations tentative and engaged with data open-mindedly, which enabled me to notice that some data extracts had both racist and antiracist characteristics. For example, there was a picture containing both affirmation of diversity of ethnicities (i.e., an antiracist expression) and representation of racial stereotypes (i.e., a racist expression), which demonstrated the importance of not limiting the analysis with too strict use of a conceptual framework.

Eberle (2018, pp. 17-18) stated that a researcher's cultural and biographical knowledge influence each interpretation, which makes reflection of the epistemological assumptions, implicit theories, and cultural ideologies necessary. I discuss these aspects carefully in the previous sections to provide relevant information on background factors influencing the analysis process.

After that meaning-making process, code names were assigned with the purpose of reflecting the essence of the extracts in terms of the research question (Ponnam & Dawra, 2013). Data extracts with the same latent/interpretive meaning were assigned the same code name, resulting in a generation of 10 different code names. Table 1 shows how code names were generated from the basis of semantic content and the latent meaning of data extracts.

Table 1*Code Name Generation - Example*

Semantic content	Latent meaning	Code name
Monthly calendar of May 2022. Finnish flag-flying days are highlighted with Finnish flags and represented with pictures.	Valuing Finnish celebrations over others, as Eid Al Fitr-celebration in 2.5.2022 isn't represented.	Cultural nationalism
A poster representing greetings in home languages of children of the class and flags of the countries of their origin.	Recognition and appreciation of different linguistic and geographical/cultural backgrounds of children in the class.	Affirmation of diversity of languages and origins of children

From codes to themes. When the entire dataset was coded, it was time to sort the different codes into potential themes. I made this by analysing codes and their relationships and after that, by considering how they could be combined to a broader level of themes. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) In this phase also, theories on racism and antiracism aided the process. For example, as it is necessary to understand various conceptualised forms of racism when aiming to analyse aims and functions of antiracism (Seikkula, 2020), I pursued identifying strategies responding to both racism practiced by individuals and racism on a structural level when I was exploring antiracist indications. For instance, I identified that codes that constituted “classroom etiquette” - theme reflected the idea of “fostering non-racist culture” (conceptualised by Hage, 2016), that aims to prevent racist actions of individual people. Moreover, the identified theme of “multiculturalism” depicted “multicultural antiracism” (conceptualised by Bonnett, 2000) that pursues affirming cultural diversity and contesting White normativity on an institutional level.

Reviewing themes. This phase involved the refinement of candidate themes by exploring if there were separate themes that could have formed one theme because of their similarities, or themes that could have been separated into several themes because of distinctions within data extracts. This was done by reviewing all the collated data extracts within each theme and exploring their

mutual coherency. After that, a similar process was conducted to the entire data set by considering the validity of themes in relation to the data: whether they served it or not. Furthermore, additional data within themes that had been missed in earlier phases was coded after this re-reading. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) In this phase, I decided to bring the antiracist “Equal roles” - theme together with “Multicultural antiracism”, because I recognised that those antiracist strategies have similar aims to produce just and reliable representations to combat racism at macro level. Outcome of this phase was two thematic maps: one for racist manifestations in ECEC learning environments (Figure 3), and one for manifestations of antiracism (Figure 4), presenting different main themes, sub-themes, and their relations.

Figure 3

Thematic Map for Racist Manifestations in ECEC Learning Environments

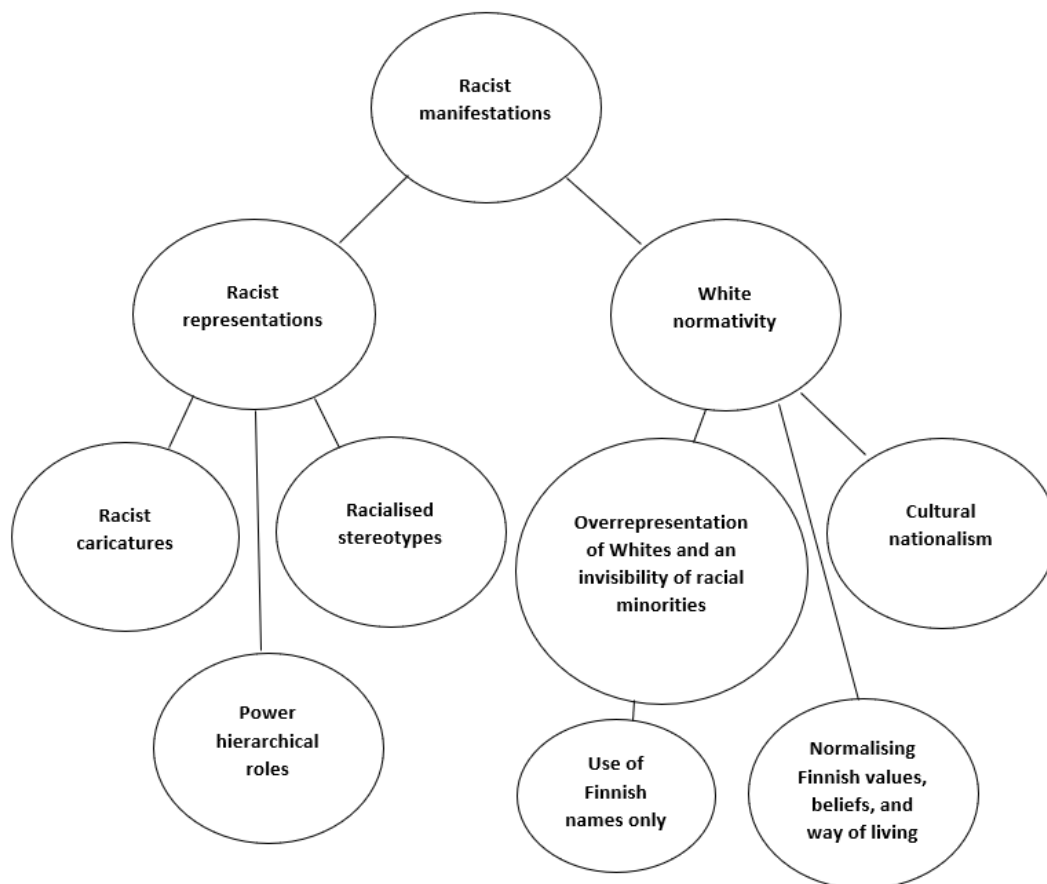
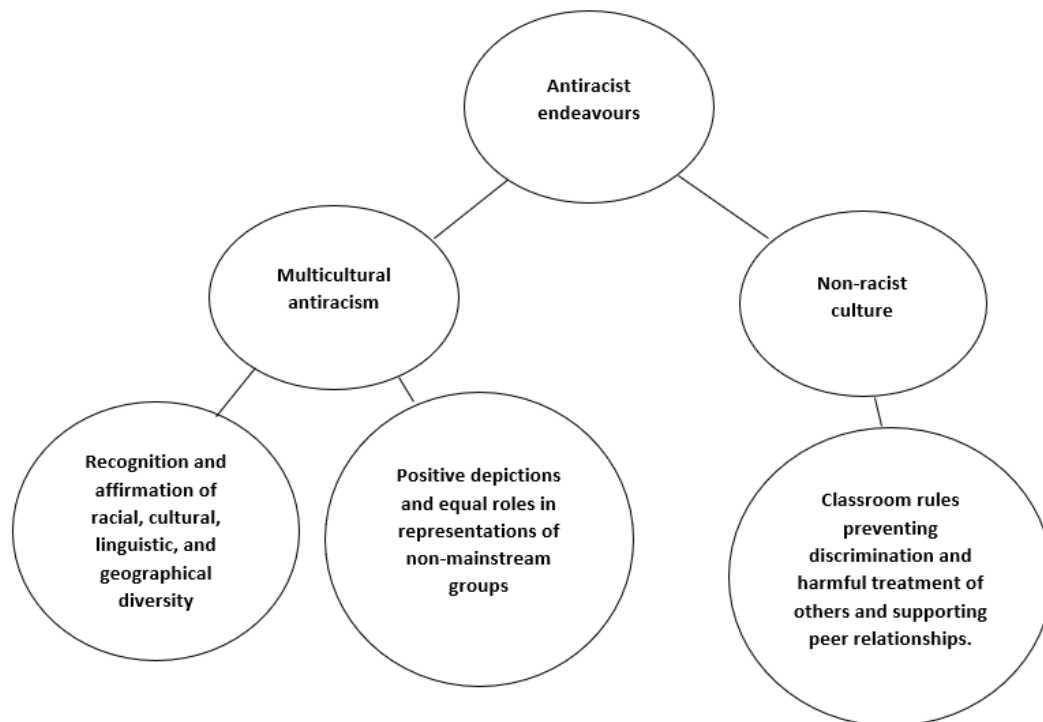


Figure 4

Thematic Map for Antiracist Manifestations in ECEC Learning Environments



Defining themes. The final stage of analysis included accompanying collated data extracts for each theme with narrative. This means that I wrote a detailed analysis for each theme, and then considered their relation to the broader story told by data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) From this basis, I produced the section 4 on research results.

3.6 Ethical Solutions

Ethical questions were considered throughout the research process. In his book "Research ethics", Byrne (2017) stated that ethical and safety planning and execution of research are of great importance, including issues such as confidentiality and identification of potential harm that participation in research can involve. Rose (2012) associated research ethics in the context of visual methodologies to concern especially issues of confidentiality, anonymity, and consent of participants, as well as potential copyright issues.

My thesis project acquired a research permit from the City of Jyväskylä's Early Education unit before beginning the data collection, and I informed participating ECEC centres of my research purpose before visiting them. I was committed to confidentiality regarding all sensitive information encountered during the data collecting process within ECEC spaces. I had familiarised myself with and took into consideration the valid legislation pertaining to the collecting and processing of research data. Thus, any photos were not taken of staff members, children, or parents nor their pictures or names on the walls of ECEC classrooms, and the collected data was stored in the secured place. I designated participating ECEC centres with code names, and they are neither discussed nor presented in this research in a way that makes recognition possible. The purpose of this research was not to compare, judge, or praise participating centres for their racist and antiracist expressions, but to raise awareness of these themes.

Byrne (2017) also determined researcher bias as an ethical issue, occurring either intentionally (producing and presenting false conclusions or outcomes of research) or unconsciously (researcher is not aware of impact of their own beliefs, values, or actions when they conduct research). I considered this ethical issue by reflecting constantly and profoundly my own position as well as my assumptions during the research process, and I take account of them also in this thesis report (sections 2.1. and 2.2.) by telling how I considered these matters when designing, conducting, and interpreting my study. Furthermore, I was also faithful to instructions that Collier and Collier (1986) developed for photography as a research method to reduce mistakes, disorganisation, and biased data generation during data collection process, and I tried to connect my interpretations to the several background theories on racism and antiracism in the analysis process to confirm and rationalise my conclusions. I have committed to presenting accurate and actual findings and interpretations of my study.

4 RESULTS

In this section, I discuss the results of data analysis and explain how racism and antiracism were expressed in visual ECEC learning environments. To provide illustrations for results and justifications for interpretations, several figures from the data are presented alongside verbal descriptions.

4.1 Racist manifestations in visual learning environments

Visual thematic analysis yielded two broad themes (Table 2) through which racist indications occurred in explored ECEC learning environments: racist representations and White normativity.

Table 2

Thematisation of Racist Manifestations in ECEC Environments

Theme	Verbal description
Racist representations	Creating and maintaining stereotypical and biased beliefs of diverse racial groups and constructing racialised social structures by visual representations
White normativity	Maintaining inequality between Whites and People of Colour by overrepresentation of Whites and their values, beliefs and way of living while ignoring racial minorities and their experiences and realities

These two themes are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

4.1.1 White normativity

Data analysis indicated that Whiteness, and White practices and perspectives were naturalised and normalised in many explored ECEC settings, reflecting the concept of White normativity (conceptualised by Morris, 2016; Ward, 2008 and Winings, 2019;). There emerged overrepresentation of Whites and disproportionate underrepresentation of People of Colour in children's books, puzzles and games, barbies, baby-dolls, Lego-figures, and other figures, as well

as in the pictures on the walls (Figures 5, 6 and 7), expressing and constructing an idea that being White is a norm or standard for children in ECEC.

Figure 5

Puzzles Representing White Characters Only



Figure 6

Classroom Rules with Pictures Representing White Characters Only



Figure 7

White-skinned Barbie-dolls



Moreover, White norms were embedded in daily ECEC settings by emphasising White culture, normalising White way of living, names and values, and prioritising Finnish language in visual materials. The monthly calendars (Figure 8) on the walls of the classrooms represented only Finnish cultural celebrations, while celebrations of different cultures and religions remained ignored. Dominance of Finnish cultural traditions, such as celebrations of Christmas and Easter, was visible also in other pedagogical materials, such as in children's books (Figure 9) and decorative arts of learning environments (Figure 10). These hegemonic elements reproduced banal, cultural nationalism in ECEC settings by sustaining homogeneous representations of the Finnish nation and using dominant practices as a norm, leaving children and families with diverse backgrounds without acknowledgement of their own cultural celebrations. As White normativity in ECEC settings provides children with an unrealistically narrow view of Finnish society, children may learn misleading and harmful perspectives regarding diversity and cultures and interiorise an idea of superior Whiteness.

Figure 8

Monthly Calendar of May 2022



Figure 9

A Book "*Heinähattu ja Vilttitossu Joulun Jäljillä*" (Nopola & Nopola, 1993)

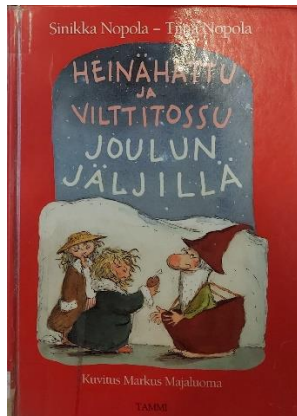


Figure 10

Easter Decorative Art on the Wall of an ECEC Classroom



These findings from explored ECEC learning environments confirmed the argument stated by Kuusisto (2017), who addressed that Lutheranism holds a strong sociohistorical presence in Nordic countries and their societal institutions, causing notable tensions of exclusion and otherness in ECEC settings. She pointed out that even though the National Core Curriculum for ECEC denies early childhood education and care to demand or lead to religious, philosophical, or political commitment, the presence of religious elements that are perceived as connected to Finnish national, cultural heritage, are yet allowed. Although the National Core Curriculum for ECEC emphasises cultural diversity of Finnish society and addresses it as an enriching resource to be utilised in ECEC settings and to be made visible in learning environments, my research data indicated that

diversity was yet neglected in some ECEC centres. This led to everyday realities, in which White, Finnish children can have their own cultural heritage affirmed and appreciated while those of minority groups keep marginalised and excluded.

In addition, toys and materials provided for children's household- and baby doll nursing-play (Figure 11) in ECEC learning environments emphasised Western way of housekeeping and childcare, for instance, by providing children with baby strollers and sitters but not any slings.

Figure 11

A Play-Corner for Children's Household- and Baby Nursing Play



Layne (2023) addressed that diversifying the ECEC learning materials can be difficult because there is a shortage of, for instance, toys that represent the variety of food objects and clothes in the catalogues from which teachers select the materials. This problem could be overcome by requiring diversified materials from companies or preparing such materials together with children, for example. National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care necessitates the planning and construction of learning environments to be done together with children, and notes that such practice can be done in collaboration with guardians (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 31–32).

White, Finnish way of living and values embraced by Eurocentrism were visible also in children's books and other materials (Figures 12 and 13) that represented lives of nuclear families and hobbies such as ice hockey and horse riding. Experiences and realities of, for example, non-White, non-middle-class, homosexual, and single parent - families were ignored in most of the materials. Instead of affirming and sustaining predominant social norms such as middle-class and heterosexuality, diverse socio-cultural contexts and intersecting identities of children and families should be acknowledged and represented in early childhood education and care settings.

Figure 12

A Puzzle Illustrating a Horse Farm

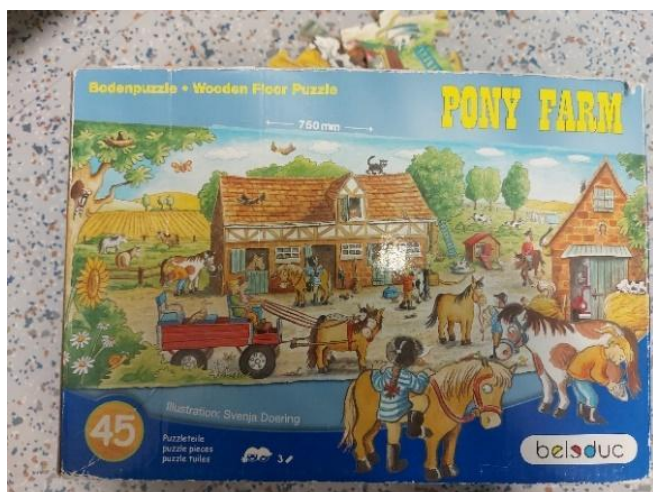


Figure 13

Books of "Eemun Tarinoita" (Nurmi, 2019; 2020a; 2020b) and "Eetu Pelaa Jääkiekkoa" (Ekstedt, 2015)



Moreover, only Finnish/Western names were found from children's books (Figures 14 and 15), even if books talked about non-White characters.

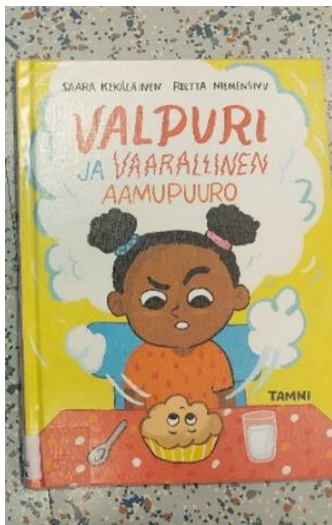
Figure 14

A Book "Isla Saa Kavereita" (original title: *Meesha Makes Friends*) (Percival, 2021)



Figure 15

A Book "Valpuri ja Vaarallinen Aamupuuro" (Kekäläinen & Niemensivu, 2022)



Absence of non-Western names in the materials could also have been interpreted to be affirming an idea that a person can be Finnish and non-White at the same time. However, non-Western names should be included into the pedagogical materials to deconstruct White normativity that normalises and standardises traditional Finnish names and strengthens exclusion and marginalisation of non-Western names.

4.1.2 Racist representations

Following Omi and Winant's (1994) theory of racial formation, ECEC institutions as social contexts participate continually in development of racial meanings (positively or negatively) as well as in production of racialised social structures by their everyday practices, such as organisation of visual learning environments. The data set of this research demonstrated how representations of different "races" worked as means of racial formation in ECEC learning environments, causing unequal racial power relations between White people and Non-white people.

Racial stereotypes, widely held beliefs of diverse racial groups, are the product of "racial projects". Morris (2016, p. 955) argued that stereotypes of Whites often reflect the White majority's belief about themselves as ideal representatives of the social system, and stereotypes of other racial groups represent imperfection or are tempered by self-interest of White majority. Golash-Boza (2015b) demonstrated how gendered stereotypes of non-Whites were produced and maintained in U.S. media, resulting in general perceptions of racial groups and even in justification of inequalities and foreign interventions. Golash-Boza (2016, p. 135) also pointed out that White people were usually represented to do better on nearly any social measure.

These notions became visible also in a poster found from one ECEC classroom (Figure 16) that provided children with tools to deal with anger. An only non-White child on the poster was represented in the context of "deal with your anger without harming yourself or others", i.e., expressing a perception that non-White boys tend to have issues with uncontrolled violence. At the same time, White children on the poster were presenting advanced ways of emotion management.

Figure 16

A Poster on “Emotion Management Tools” and a Zoomed Picture of a Non-White Boy



In addition, a poster of “Fairtrade Banana’s Journey” (Figure 17) that was found from several ECEC centres illustrated racial stereotypes and represented Whites in a role of “White saviours”. In the poster, a Finnish family bought bananas produced in Peru and the story told that “Fairtrade farmers are paid extra so they can build schools and clinics.” Accordingly, while the Finnish family was holding bananas, Peruvian children were carrying school bags. The poster positioned White family as a rich helper that lent a hand to a poor non-White family. Mkwesha and Huber (2021) argued that many aid-campaigns, such as those established by Plan International Finland, tend to reproduce harmful narratives of poor, non-White victims (usually living in Africa) who are passive receivers of help provided by White heroes. These narratives maintain racist stereotypes and power hierarchies between privileged Whites and disadvantaged non-Whites.

Figure 17

A Poster of "Fairtrade Banana's Journey"



Mkwesha and Huber (2021) addressed that acknowledgement of diversity in Finnish society has increased the appearance of non-White people in visual environments. However, non-White people are often represented beside White people and rarely as a main character, and they are also regularly presented in advertisements of aid organisations, stereotypically in need of help (Mkwesha & Huber, 2021). Number of pictures (Figures 18 and 19) were found to reflect that kind of "othering"-narrative, as these pictures represented non-White children in excluded roles, while White children around them had "a natural" right for membership of their peer group. Many pictured classroom etiquettes illustrating a rule "Take everyone along", aiming to support non-discrimination, repeated this stereotypical gap between "us" and "others" and strengthened a hierarchical social order between children according to their skin colour.

Figure 18

A Picture Illustrating a Classroom Rule "Take everyone along".

**Figure 19**

Pictures Illustrating Classroom Rules



In addition to former, more subtle racist manifestations, overt racist microaggressions were found too in the form of racist, ethnic caricatures. Ethnic caricatures constitute a form of discriminative action, as there is an explicit correlation between racial representation and psychological harm for racialised individuals. Originally, exaggerated racial images, i.e., caricatures, served as a type of humour in the entertainment industry and marketing, but after recognition of injuries they cause, these offensive and inflammatory visuals have been increasingly prohibited. (Bow, 2019.) However, this sort of element was found from one ECEC classroom.

Investigation of a world map hanging on the wall in one of the explored ECEC centres revealed grotesque caricatures of Africans that was interpreted as

racial-ethnic hatred (Figure 20). On the map, two white coloniser men were among Africans. Africans were illustrated as child-sized savages who were having enormous, red-tinted lips and wearing loincloths and bones in their hair. In contrast, colonisers were illustrated two times taller, and they were wearing traditional British coloniser uniforms, including safari hats. In addition, Africans were playing a passive role as exotic objects of photography practiced by White men. According to my interpretation, these illustrated differences in physical appearance as well as roles of African and European people reflected a narrative of contrasting biological and social inferiority/superiority and uncivilisation/civilisation between racial groups.

Figure 20

A Zoomed Picture from the World Map Illustrating Continent of Africa



Mkwesha and Huber (2021) explained that stereotypical and biased images disturb the development of society as they support power hierarchies between groups of people as shaming non-Whites and even leading to harassment. The historical map above could be used as an educational material with older students, but when used as an object on the wall of an early childhood education and care environment, it normalises racism, insults People of Colour, and has a negative impact on development of children's racial attitudes.

4.2 Antiracist endeavours in visual learning environments

Exploration and analysis of photographs taken in ECEC learning environments demonstrated that there were no overt antiracist commitments presented in ECEC spaces or materials: no posters with declarations such as “discrimination free area” or documentations of antiracism pedagogy used (handcrafts, discussions etc.) in the classroom. Visual thematic analysis yielded two broad themes (Table 3) through which antiracist endeavours in ECEC learning environments were expressed: multicultural antiracism and non-racist culture.

Table 3

Thematisation of Antiracist Endeavours Manifested in ECEC Environments

Theme	Verbal description
Multicultural antiracism	Deconstructing homogeneous representations and White normativity and fostering positive depictions and equal roles in representations of non-mainstream groups
Non-racist culture	Preventing discriminatory actions of individuals, and supporting peer relationships by classroom etiquette

These antiracist themes are discussed in the following two subsections.

4.2.1 Multicultural antiracism

Contributions to racial justice were performed in ECEC settings in an implicit manner, by multicultural antiracism, which Bonnett (2000, p. 93) suggested being one way of eradicating racism and affirming cultural plurality. Bonnett (2000) explained that the practice of multiculturalism is designed to achieve sustainable states and is related with traditions of relativism, cosmopolitanism, anti-colonialism, and the critique of Eurocentrism.

Bonnett (2000) presented three common elements of the “multicultural antiracism” - practice in educational institutions. Firstly, an institution reflects and engages the diversity of the nation both as a place and through its formal and informal curriculum, in which ethnic diversity is a focus and interest of knowledge. Secondly, a school confronts cultural exclusion and denigration by

employing educational materials designed to facilitate cultural inclusion by focusing on representativeness and representation of racial-ethnic minorities (roles, depictions). Finally, multicultural education exercises cross-cultural understanding and empathy among students. (Bonnett, 2000, pp. 95–99.)

Bonnett’s concept of multicultural antiracism resembles cultural relativist approach to antiracism, which, according to Lentin (2004, p. 73), “proposes both an explanation of ‘race’ and the means to combat racism that emphasises the promotion of the greater knowledge of different cultures through education”. As this approach does not acknowledge existing hierarchies between human groups based on skin colour differences and instead, focuses on valuing cultural diversity, it does not pose as adequate antiracist effort as such but has potential to support antiracism pedagogy by deconstructing homogeneous representations and White normativity, by fostering positive depictions and equal roles in representations of non-mainstream groups, and by generating solidarity.

Data analysis demonstrated that in some of the ECEC centres, there were material resources available that pursued creating learning environments that are representative of the “wider community”, i.e., diversified society. Most common way of contributing to multicultural antiracism was the provision of materials that recognised and asserted diversity of ethnicities, cultures, languages, and nations. Some of the children’s books, images of the wall, baby dolls, barbies, Lego-figures, puzzles, and games contributed to affirmation of diversity of ethnicities (Figures 21, 22).

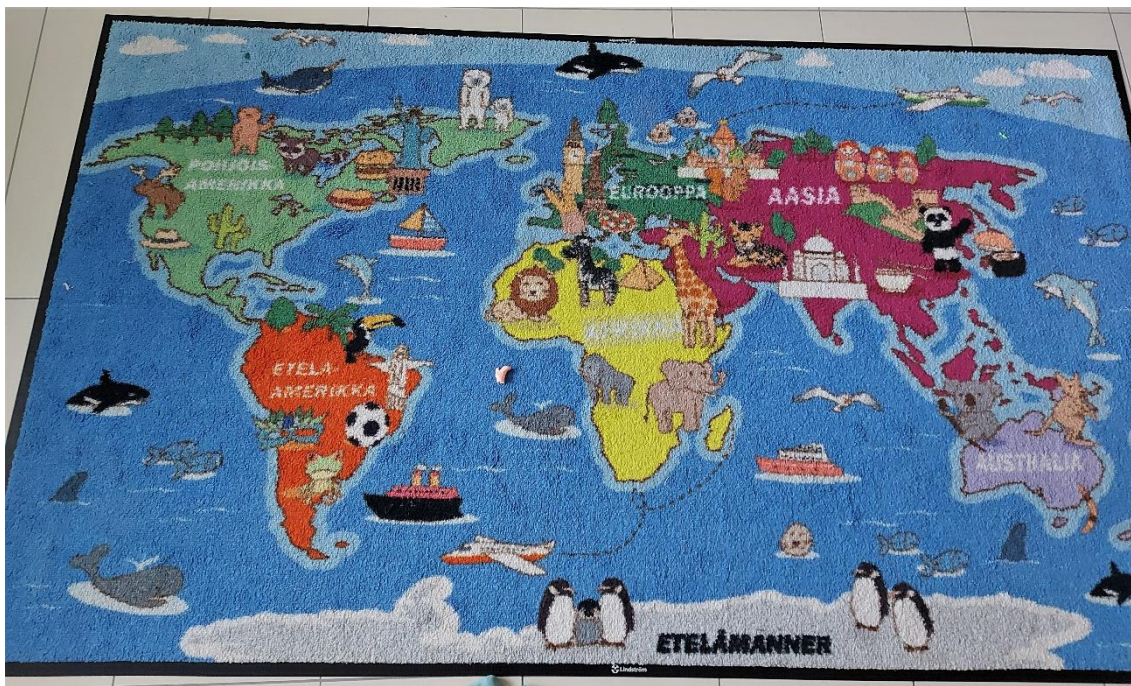
Figure 21

Baby Dolls Representing Various Ethnicities



Figure 22*Pictures of the Structure of a Day in ECEC*

In addition, material resources that contributed to deconstruction of a nation as a main cultural system by affirming and valuing diversity of languages, cultures, and nations were found from some ECEC learning environments. Pedagogical materials, such as world maps (Figure 23), flag-puzzles and -handcrafts, books and games in foreign languages, annual calendars on cultural celebrations (Figure 24), and a poster representing phrases in different languages (Figures 25) contributed to cultural relativist antiracism.

Figure 23*A Carpet Representing World Map*

mainstream groups in multicultural education materials. Some books, toys, puzzles, and other materials in explored ECEC classrooms were found to represent positive depictions of diversity of human identities and strengthen the narrative of equal roles. Most antiracist scholars have addressed that people are impacted by the various systems and forms of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism, etc.) based on their social positions and identities. In the book “Ihmeellinen keho” (Miraculous Body) by Yoon (2019) (Figure 27), all the children were playing active roles and taking part as equal members of the group despite of their “race”, gender, or disability level. As such, the book deconstructed conceptions of “normality” and challenged prevailing norms. Moreover, a puzzle illustrating ECEC classrooms (Figure 28) contributed to the same agenda as well. Lego-figures (Figure 29) that represented various “races” and genders in diverse uniforms deconstructed occupational stereotypes related to “race” and gender (for instance, White male as lawyer, non-White female as cleaner) in ECEC learning environments.

Figure 26

A Page from the Book “Ihmeellinen Keho” (Yoon, 2019)



Figure 27

A Puzzle Illustrating a Multicultural Preschool Classroom

**Figure 28**

Lego-Figures Representing Various "Races" and Genders



Bringing diversity of society visible in the ECEC classrooms promotes social justice and diversity in many ways. In learning environments that are representative of the "wider community", children learn to understand, accept, and respect people's differences (gender, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, disability, culture etc.), which prepares them for life inside a diverse society. Moreover, in the ECEC classrooms in which all differences are considered in the material reality, every child shares a sense of belonging, and

can find toys, books and other materials that serve as mirrors for them, providing opportunities to have their experiences affirmed and appreciated in the classroom and fostering the development of their intersecting social identities. Including “races”, experiences, histories, and cultures of diverse groups of people to material resources of ECEC also encourages questions to be asked and promotes the appearance of antiracism discourses among early childhood teachers and children. (Husband 2019.) As such, “multicultural antiracism”-materials should also be actively referenced in a natural way in daily discourses to truly contribute to antiracist agenda that values equally all languages and cultures. During the data collection, I noticed that a calendar on cultural celebrations was hanging on the wall in a lobby while a calendar focusing only on Finnish celebrations was on the whiteboard in the classroom where the child group had their daily gatherings. That indicated that daily pedagogics were centred around mainstream, Finnish culture (applying Ethnocentrism/cultural nationalism) while other cultures were marginalised. This referred to the use of multicultural elements as tools to “take credits” instead of using them intentionally as pedagogical tools. Ahmed (2012) argued that many institutions try to turn “diversity” to their advantage by utilising “wallpaper diversity” which means that they put effort into appearing diverse rather than being diverse. Diversity thus provides a positive image of an organisation that does not have an actual strategy for tackling existing inequalities.

4.2.2 Non-racist culture

The National Core Curriculum for ECEC announces a zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment in early childhood education and care and obligates ECEC personnel to support children in their peer relations and in acting in an ethically sustainable manner towards other people (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 18–20). Implementations of the obligation became visible in the data analysis of this research, as “classroom etiquette/rules” were found hanging on the wall in most of the explored ECEC settings.

Rules concerning children's behaviour and peer relationships indicated antiracist agendas as they were meant to prevent discriminatory actions and harmful treatment among children. Hage (2016, p. 124) conceptualised fostering a non-racist culture as one goal of antiracism, referring to the aim of ensuring that people are not racist in the first place. Figures 30 and 31 represent classroom etiquette and -rules that pursued preventing racist actions and developing children's empathy skills.

Figure 29

Classroom Rules. "Take everyone along"- rule reminded children that they should not exclude anyone from their games, and other rules such as "Don't hurt others" and "Don't be mean" instructed children to not violate anyone with their actions or words.



Figure 31

Classroom Rules. "Take everyone along"- rule reminded children that they should not exclude anyone from their games.



However, despite their good, (equity-driven) intentions, these materials also included problematic representations and positionings of "us" and "others", as

discussed under the subsection 4.1.2 “Racist Representations”, highlighting a need for a critical interrogation of all visual materials provided by ECEC learning environments. Layne (2023) addressed a risk of producing unintended racism or exclusive discourses in ECEC if teachers are not prepared enough through the curriculum and teacher education. Findings of this study indicated that ECEC personnel are not equipped with knowledge and skills needed to recognise and solve issues of racism in their working environments.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Examination of results

The purpose of this research was to identify how racism and antiracism were manifested in learning environments of Finnish early childhood education and care. The aim was achieved by exploring photographs taken in settings of five ECEC centres in the city of Jyväskylä, containing elements such as objects and pedagogical materials (toys, games, books, pictures) found in these environments. These indications were crucial to acknowledge and analyse critically, as research evidence has demonstrated the significant influence of everyday environments and visuals provided by them on the development of young children's racial attitudes and racial identities. In the deductively approached visual thematic analysis, theories on racism and antiracism were used to develop an interpretation of the data. Next, I discuss the results from categories of racism and antiracism and point out the importance of critical examination of pedagogical materials and adoption of active, organised actions to promote non-discrimination and the realisation of equality and equity in ECEC. After that, I consider the quality of this study and provide final conclusions.

5.1.1 Racism

In the context of this research, racism practiced at the institutional level was explored. As theorised in this research, institutional racism operates in both hidden and less obvious forms as daily routines of institutions that systemically, but not always meaningfully, reproduce power structures that have the effect of disadvantaging racial minority groups and privileging White majority (Essed, 2016), threatening the equity and fairness of the Finnish ECEC system.

Discriminative and prejudice representations provided by, as well as White normativity embedded in learning environments of ECEC were the key findings when exploring expressions of racism in this study. Especially White

normativity, as defined as covert and highly institutionalised, is a blind spot of Finnish education reproducing racist patterns in everyday environments. It is often subtle and unconscious to the White majority population who benefit from it and shapes the habitual practices and discourses within educational institutions to privilege Whites and their practices and perspectives while ignoring racial minority groups.

Earlier research on racism in Finnish early childhood education and care has demonstrated that ECEC environments with their learning materials tend to reflect White normativity and Eurocentrism while minority groups are left without a possibility of having a feeling of being included (Layne, 2023). Moreover, earlier study indicated that ECEC personnel rarely identified practices and interactions maintaining cultural hierarchies and nationalism in their own working environments (Armila et al., 2008), and that is why many of these customary practices have not been reassessed to support inclusion and social justice within increasingly diverse ECEC (Kuusisto, 2017). As such, without adequate knowledge and understanding of racism and its various forms, ECEC personnel may unintentionally construct and maintain racist expressions when organising learning environments and selecting learning materials.

Results of this research confirmed that racism showed up in early childhood education and care learning environments in many ways. Learning materials and objects manifested White normativity in many ECEC settings by providing overrepresentation of Whites and disproportionate underrepresentation for People of Colour, and by emphasising Finnish cultural traditions, language, values, and way of living. White normativity is a form of institutional racism that Essed (2016) conceptualised as discriminative routines of institutions that reproduce racial inequalities in society systemically, but often unrecognisably and unintentionally. Thus, White normativity can enact as collective “dysconscious racism”, which Joyce E. King (1991, p. 135) conceptualised as a form of racism that “tacitly accepts the dominant White norms and privileges” and “justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given”. Besides White normativity, racist representations were found in ECEC

environments, including gendered and racialised stereotypes, discriminative ethnic caricatures and racial, power hierarchical roles within pictures. These representations reinforced unjust discourses that worked to define Whites as superior to People of Colour in many ways, which led to the reproduction of existing hierarchical racial relations.

5.1.2 Antiracism

Another aim of this study was to identify manifestations of antiracism that was conceptualised in the context of this research as an intellectual and practical commitment to opposing racism in thoughts and actions of individuals or communities, which requires recognition and acceptance of “race” as a concept that constructs social order within society (Alemanji, 2021a; Essed, 2016). Data analysis indicated that any overt antiracist commitments were not expressed in the explored ECEC spaces or materials, but there were endeavours to promote equity, equality, and diversity. Earlier research on antiracism in Finnish ECEC indicated that Finnish ECEC teachers lack knowledge and skills needed to implement an antiracism pedagogy in their work (Layne, 2023), and results of this study supported those findings.

Some of the explored ECEC settings affirmed a diversity of cultures, languages, religions and ethnicities by their objects and pedagogical materials, and by doing so, applied “multicultural antiracism” which aims to contest homogeneous representation of society and deconstruct White normativity. Multicultural antiracism also pursues fostering positive depictions and equal roles in representations of non-mainstream groups and generating solidarity. (Bonnett, 2000.) Some of the explored pedagogical materials in ECEC settings aimed to produce just and reliable representations of racial minority groups and strengthen equal roles among people despite their “race”, gender, religion, language, sexual orientation, disability, or culture. However, as data of this research demonstrated, some of the multicultural elements (unintentionally) brought racism into ECEC environments in the form of racist stereotypes, caricatures, or unjust racial roles. That is why all pedagogical materials should

be exposed to critical examination. Weakness of multicultural education has earlier been articulated by many critical scholars (Alemanji, 2018; Layne et al., 2015; Souto et al., 2013), who have argued that instead of promoting equity and combating racism, it can result in “othering” by emphasising cultural contrasts and comparing diverse cultures to the mainstream, further strengthening unequal power relations between Whites and other racial groups in discourses and practices of educational institutions.

Data analysis indicated that another form of antiracist endeavour was established by “classroom etiquette”, found in several ECEC settings, that aimed to promote non-discrimination within early childhood education and care by determining rules for children’s behaviour. This endeavour reflected the antiracist function of “fostering non-racist culture” that pursues preventing racist actions of individuals (Hage, 2016). This approach perceives racism as something radical and exceptional but ignores structural forms of racism. However, picture illustrations of classroom rules were interpreted to also include problematic representations: non-White children were often situated in excluded positions, needing empathy of Whites. That, once again, demonstrates the importance of increasing ECEC personnel’s critical literacy skills and understanding of racism.

Implementation of “multicultural antiracism” and “fostering non-racist culture” are efforts that have the potential to support antiracism pedagogy in ECEC settings as they can provoke actions and discourses among children that can be utilised as juicy pedagogical arenas for antiracism education. However, they are not adequate measurements as such. Antiracism requires active efforts and organised inputs to be made to recognise and prevent racism, and to promote non-discrimination and realisation of equality and equity. It also requires explicitly naming racism and acknowledging racial injustices prevalent in the broader society and within the education system. Thus, the ECEC system should be reformed to recognise, challenge, and deconstruct existing power hierarchies between racial groups and the structures of “normality”.

5.2 Evaluation of the study

As the quality criteria for all qualitative research include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it is reasonable to provide a review of these aspects in the context of this research. I tried to ensure *credibility*, i.e., truth-value of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), by using photo-documentation as data collection method and by following a systematic shooting script when capturing visual evidence relevant to the research topic. To provide plausible information drawn from visual data, I utilised theoretically approached visual thematic analysis. In order to facilitate *transferability*, i.e., the degree to which the findings of this study can be adapted to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I describe the participants and the research process profoundly in this thesis report. Furthermore, to promote *dependability* that concerns the aspect on consistency of this research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I explain both the processes of data collection and analysis in this thesis to clarify how they were applied and lined with the standards for these methods to generate consistent results. Finally, I consider the aspect of *confirmability* that establishes that interpretations of the findings are clearly derived from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by providing information in this report on how I made interpretations during the analysis process and demonstration on how the data extracts evidence the analytic claims. Last, I facilitated *reflexivity*, the process of critical self-reflection about myself as researcher and the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), by reflecting my own background and position as well as underlying interpretive paradigms affecting research decisions through all phases of my research.

Careful and detailed description and reasoning of the decisions made during the entire research process are the *strengths* of this study. Moreover, as the findings succeeded to provide new research-based knowledge on visual forms of racism and antiracism in ECEC spaces, this research has potential to support ECEC personnel in critical evaluation and development of learning

environments and pedagogical materials to fulfil the mission of equitable early education.

Limitations of this study were related to the use of a single data collection method, although I employed it systemically and by following theory-based instructions. Complementing visual data with interviews or utilising a participatory method during data collection could have enhanced more profound and reliable interpretation and understanding of the explored themes. Even though I linked the analysis of visual data to relevant theories to reason the constructed interpretations, someone else could have interpreted the same data differently. Influential art critic Berger (1972, as cited in Rose, 2012) argued that people bring their own interpretations to bear on meaning and effect of visual materials according to their personal relations between things and themselves. That is why discussions with ECEC personnel might have facilitated analysis process and also provided information for questions I considered, for example, why the only black doll found from the playroom was sitting on the top shelf where children cannot reach it, and why a calendar on cultural celebrations was hanging on the wall in a lobby while a calendar focusing only on Finnish celebrations was on the whiteboard in the classroom where child group had their daily gatherings. It is also important to acknowledge that the data was collected from the municipal ECEC centres located in the city of Jyväskylä. In other contexts, the results might have been different.

Ethical issues, discussed in detail under section 3.6, were considered throughout the research process, which demonstrates the ethical quality of this study.

5.3 Conclusions

This study aimed to explore how the ECEC learning environments manifested the racist and antiracist elements through the photographs and visual thematic analysis. Results of this study confirmed that while there are good intentions to include diversity, subtle emergences of prejudice and exclusion in objects and

pedagogical materials can be found. Children were exposed to both narrow (White normative) and discriminative (racial stereotypes) representations within the ECEC centres. Moreover, research results indicated that antiracist commitments were not adequately manifested in ECEC settings, and despite their good intentions, endeavours trying to promote equity and diversity had potential to even reinforce problematic and prejudice representations, perpetuating “dysconscious racism”. These findings suggest that ECEC personnel are not equipped with knowledge and skills needed to recognise and solve issues of racism, and to act for social justice and equity for all children.

As such, this research pointed out the importance of conceptualising racism clearly in educational policies and raising ECEC personnel’s awareness and knowledge of racism, as limited understanding about structural racism and uncritical acceptance of social order in our society makes it difficult to fulfil the mission of equitable (early) education. Overuse of vague terms such as “diversity, equity and equality” in ECEC policies without provision of adequate definitions or framework for aligned actions does not promote ECEC personnel to succeed in recognition and deconstruction of structural inequalities and discrimination.

Data from this research demonstrated that there were differences between ECEC centres in terms of the level at which equity, equality and diversity were made visible in physical learning environments and thus integrated as part of daily pedagogics. As such, instead of being an individual commitment of employees who have an interest in these issues, tackling racism and contributing to antiracism should be the intentions of the entire work community in every ECEC setting. Action-oriented commitment to antiracism, articulated in action plans of ECEC units, would make these issues mutual responsibility of ECEC communities, which promotes collective, continuous reflections, critical analysis of daily practices, antiracist efforts and realisation of equity, equality, and diversity across Finnish ECEC. Offering training on antiracism education for all employees working in the field of early childhood education and care is a first step to take in this process so that achievement of curriculum objectives and

quality of pedagogy would be ensured nationwide. Because the early education field in Finland is currently dominated by White employees, inviting minority communities to continuous mutual negotiations, and bringing in differing perspectives and voices is necessary in order to succeed in this mission.

As underlined in this study, the phenomenon of racism should be more profoundly addressed in educational research to raise the understanding of its complex nature and its functions within institutions. In the future, more research could be done from the perspectives of children and families to gain a multifaceted understanding of those experiencing marginalisation and discrimination in their daily lives in ECEC contexts. Another research topic could investigate the development of antiracism pedagogics in early childhood education and care in order to actualise how to dismantle structural and institutional racism.

It is time to end the claim that racism is not today's problem and start working toward creating a more socially just society in which the same human value and same opportunities for all come true. Evident part of this process is educating our future citizens from an early age to value others and experience themselves as equal. To achieve this goal, we need to reform our ECEC system by utilising an antiracist approach.

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