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Creating early language education affordances in two pre-primary education classrooms

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ABSTRACT: Recently, interest in language education in the early childhood education context has increased in research, curricula, and practice. This study contributes to this field by examining what kind of early language education (ELE) affordances are provided in Finland in two pre-primary classrooms, with two teachers, one using English and one using Swedish as a target language in the classroom. The data consist of video recordings of teaching, observation notes, and interviews with the teachers. The analysis using qualitative reflexive thematic analysis is informed by van Lier's (2004) and Aronin and Singleton's (2012) theorisation of affordances. The findings suggest that material affordances included using songs, stories, and pictures. Pedagogically, the teachers combined other curriculum contents with ELE and both shared the objective of implementing playful and action-based ELE, although neither teacher actively collaborated with their team of educators in planning or implementing ELE in practice. The social affordances provided for children by the teachers included promoting a positive atmosphere, pedagogical translanguaging through the teachers' own use of languages, and creating opportunities for the children to become familiar with and learn the target language. The teachers also enabled social affordances produced by the children in form of their active participation, sharing ideas, and inventing novel ways to approach language education and peer collaboration. The findings offer insights into practices in ELE, the importance of varying ELE affordances for children's learning and the value of integrating pedagogical translanguaging with whole-day pedagogy.

Keywords: *early language education; language learning affordances; pedagogical translanguaging; pre-primary education*

Introduction

In many countries, emphasis is placed on providing rich language learning opportunities in early childhood education (Alstad, 2022). Interest has grown in early language education in government institutions (e.g., Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023), research (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023; Schwartz, 2022a) and early childhood education practice. As a result, many early childhood education institutions and teachers have emphasised the ‘developing the role and presence of languages in earlier stages of education’ (Moate et al., 2021, p. 8). In the present article, we use the concept of early language education (ELE) to refer, in a broad sense, to children and teachers engaging with language(s) in the context of early childhood education (Moate et al., 2021). As Schwartz (2022a) outlines, ELE can be considered crucial for children’s development and well-being as well as a basic right. Due to various societal changes (Alstad, 2022), in many early childhood education curricula, the importance of children’s early introduction to languages in general but also of achieving bilingual and multilingual goals has been strengthened (e.g., Palviainen & Curdt-Christiansen, 2022). For example, the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education¹ highlights utilising children’s sensitive period for language learning, increasing children’s language awareness, and supporting their bilingual or plurilingual identities (Finnish National Board of Education [EDUFI], 2016b). Thus, the Finnish curriculum supports children learning the two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, as well as other languages (EDUFI, 2016b; also Mård-Miettinen et al., 2023; European Commission, 2023). In Finland as well as in the Nordic countries, a special emphasis is placed upon the countries’ own languages, as people consider them crucial for ‘their cultural heritage, their present-day identity, and their continuing distinctiveness’ (Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006, p. 2). It is important to bear in mind that in addition to official languages, many Nordic countries have also regional or minority languages which require protection (cf. European Commission, 2023).

The present study explores ELE in two Finnish pre-primary classrooms in which children are introduced to a new language, English or Swedish, before it is mandated in the first grade of primary school. In the present article, we have selected to use the concepts of ELE and bilingual education instead of early foreign language education. The reason for

¹ In Finland, early childhood education and care (for children until they turn six years) is part of the Finnish educational system. All children before school age (age seven) have the subjective right to early childhood education. The year before school, at age six, is called pre-primary education, which is compulsory for all children (cf. Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI], 2022). As pre-primary education follows its own curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b), it is typically arranged in separate groups comprising only children aged six years. Sometimes, however, a child group might include, for example, the composition of children aged 3-to-6 or 5-to-6 years.

our choice is that Swedish, used in one pre-primary education group, as an official Finnish national language, cannot be considered a foreign language. Moreover, ELE better aligns with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (EDUFI, 2016b), which emphasises increasing children's language awareness, advancing linguistic development, interactive skills, and interest in languages, instead of more "formal" language learning goals. In the present study, the early childhood education teachers did not follow a structured programme for ELE although they had previously participated in a professional development programme aiming to expand the scope of ELE in pre-primary education.

This study explores the early childhood education teachers' perspectives and practices in ELE through the lens of language learning affordances (van Lier, 2004). In this study, we investigate language education affordances (Aronin & Singleton, 2012) in ELE in early childhood education. By language affordances we are referring to the different language learning opportunities within the social, cultural, and material environment (van Lier, 2004), such as the flexible use of different languages in multilingual ELE contexts (pedagogical translanguaging, Cenoz & Gorter, 2020), which children can respond to in pre-primary classrooms. Opportunities only be considered affordances, however, if they are taken up by the participants in an environment highlighting the 'in-between' nature of affordance as a concept. In other words, affordances are created through the actions and responses of both teachers and child participants. The extensiveness of an affordance, that is the extent to which it promotes language development, therefore is co-constructed by teachers and children. Affordances can support and promote language learning but also lack of affordances can act as a hinderance or restriction for ELE. Thus far, the theory of affordances has not been extensively used in studies on ELE. We believe that the exploration of ELE affordances in early childhood education can provide valuable insights into ELE and the interactions occurring in a given context (Aronin & Singleton, 2012; Kordt, 2018). By exploring diverse ELE affordances, we can tap into the relationship and interactions between children, their social relationships, and their environment in the context of ELE, and this knowledge can help to better support children's language education goals and opportunities. Therefore, the aim of the qualitative study reported here is to answer the research question: *what kind of early language education affordances are available in the two pre-primary classrooms examined in the study?*

Language learning affordances in early language education

The concept of affordance is drawn from studies of ecology and particularly theorisation by American psychologist James Gibson, and it was adapted to language education by Leo van Lier (van Lier, 2004; Paiva, 2011). Affordances are constituted in 'the relationship between the person and the physical, social and symbolic world' (van Lier, 2004, p. 79).

The notion of affordance can be described as a ‘between’ concept, a link between what the teacher offers and how a child responds as well as a link between the present and the potential, between what is and what can be. An affordance, therefore, refers to relations, possibilities, opportunities, immediacies, and interactions, that is, ‘*action potential*, and it emerges as we interact with the physical and social world’ (van Lier, 2004, p. 92). van Lier continues: ‘an affordance expresses a relationship between a person and a linguistic expression (a speech act, a speech event); it is *action potential*; it is a *relation of possibility*’ (van Lier, 2004, p. 96). Hence, affordances can be considered to enable the language learning possibilities of the learner in a given context as ‘language affordances, whether natural or cultural, direct or indirect are relations of possibility among language users’ (van Lier, 2004, p. 95). In multilingual educational contexts, language learning possibilities can be enhanced by pedagogical translanguaging, i.e., ‘instructional strategies which integrate two or more languages’ (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020, p. 2). Kirsch and Mortini (2021, p. 944) highlight that teachers who implement translanguaging pedagogies ‘expose children to multiple languages through input, activities and the curriculum, and flexibly adjust their teaching to adapt to the children’s needs’. Affordances are not endless possibilities, however, and while they are constituted by potential that needs to be taken up in action to be realised, affordances also have limitations or boundaries. A chair, for example, provides an opportunity to sit but this is only an affordance if someone sits on the chair, the potential is realised through action. This affordance, however, is also limited by the height or size of the chair, by the conditions surrounding the chair and whether someone wants to sit in the chair. Affordances, therefore, also have limitations.

Affordances have been categorised in the literature to include, for example, social language affordances (i.e., affordances provided by the community for the acquisition of languages) and individual language affordances (i.e., the individual’s ability to interact or take advantage of language) (cf. Aronin & Singleton, 2012). Aronin and Singleton (2012, p. 318) conceptualise the concept of language affordances to entail these two dimensions of social and individual language affordances, highlighting that ‘language affordances are affordances through the realization of which communication via language or languages or the acquisition of language or languages is possible. Hence, as van Lier (2010) and Paiva (2011) outline, language affordances are linked with action and social practices in a certain community or context. Furthermore, affordances can be considered to be linked with perception, that is, how individuals perceive the physical, social, and symbolic world. These individual perceptions about the environment also contribute to individual experiences and the affordances exploited and ultimately to language learning (van Lier, 2010; Paiva, 2011). Kordt (2018, p. 141) explains: ‘Affordances emerge in the interaction between the individual and his or her environment, and motivation emerges in the interaction between the needs and interests of the individual and those affordances’.

However, individuals also need to learn how to use these language affordances effectively (van Lier, 2010).

Another dimension to the exploration of affordances is introduced by de Haan and colleagues (2013, p. 7), who differentiate three dimensions of affordances: 'width' (i.e., the different affordances an individual perceives in a context), 'depth' (i.e., whether an individual is able to perceive future and possible affordances that are not yet present), and 'height' (i.e., the relevance and attractiveness of the affordance to an individual). These three dimensions highlight the individual's perspective regarding the significance of affordances in a given context: despite perhaps an ample variety of affordances provided for children in ELE, it is ultimately the individual who perceives and is motivated to choose certain affordances, which perhaps are most attractive or useful from the perspective of the child's own goals and aspirations. The role of teachers is to scaffold language learning and to be 'affordance visionaries' as 'scaffolding leads to the emergence of new affordances' (Kordt, 2018, p. 141). Although the present article focuses on exploring ELE affordances in general and at the group level, this individual dimension of affordances is important to bear in mind.

The described definitions of affordances (de Haan et al., 2013; van Lier, 2004, 2010; Kordt, 2018) highlight the active role of individuals, in the present study teachers and children, in creating, shaping, selecting, and exploiting different affordances in a given context. Thereby, these notions of individuals actively utilising the affordances available share points of contact with the concept of agency. According to Raithelhuber (2016), agency can be understood not only individually but also collectively and socially; it relates to the potentials or capabilities of individuals doing (collectively) different things in a context. Hence, agency is regarded as relational and distributed between different actors and objects interacting in an environment as 'agency can be seen as a realised, situated, permuted capacity that can be accomplished through the combination of various, interconnected "persons" and "things"' (Raithelhuber, 2016, p. 98). In the present study, thus, the different affordances explored are linked with the agency of individuals, both the teachers and the children, interacting in this social and material environment of pre-primary education.

Language-enriched education

According to the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (EDUFI, 2016b), children have the basic right to learn new things through playing. Within the Finnish context play is a broad notion, which incorporates different forms of play such as social, parallel, object, sociodramatic and locomotor play with peers and objects (cf. e.g., Smith, 2023). Through play children encounter and explore different aspects of the world, constructing their views about themselves and the world. In the Finnish curriculum this

playful exploration explicitly includes languages as in early childhood education children's language awareness is supported, and they are encouraged to express themselves. Language is considered the object and means of learning, and the aim of pre-primary education is to enable and support the development of children's language skills and to foster their interest in languages and cultures (EDUFI, 2016b). To reach these aims, teachers and their knowledge, beliefs and assumptions about language and language learning (cf. Alstad, 2022; Sopanen, 2022) and ELE play a crucial role.

The Finnish pre-primary education curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b) encourages children, in addition to the main language of instruction, to observe other languages, and as part of this aim, the curriculum introduces bilingual education, which can be either large scale (over 25% in the target language) or small scale (less than 25% in the target language). The curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b, p. 45) states that 'the aim of small-scale bilingual pre-primary education is to stir interest in and positive attitudes towards language in children'. Small-scale bilingual education is labelled language-enriched education and 'refers to pre-primary education in which less than 25% of activities are regularly and systematically provided in a language other than the language of instruction laid down in the Basic Education Act' (EDUFI, 2016b, p. 46). Therefore, the idea is to introduce children to a new language and to multilingualism. Hence, the curriculum implicitly promotes the use of multiple languages in ELE (cf. García, 2009). In the present study, which takes place in institutions aligned with the small-scale approach to bilingual education, the languages introduced to the children were Swedish (the second national language in Finland) in one classroom and English (the most common first foreign language studied in school) in the other. The following year in primary school, the children will start to study their first foreign language. The first foreign language is most commonly English. In some schools, the children can start studying as their first, new language the second national language Swedish, as well as some other foreign language, e.g., German, or French (cf. EDUFI, 2016a).

The Finnish national curriculum of pre-primary education (EDUFI, 2016b) emphasises that language-enriched education provides children with versatile opportunities both to use and learn languages functionally during different learning activities and through play. The general aim is to advance children's linguistic development, interactive skills, and interest in languages. Moreover, the aim is to support children's language awareness and bi- or plurilingual identities. The curriculum encourages teachers to use multiple languages in instruction and daily activities as well as in enacting the learning module contents of pre-primary education (EDUFI, 2016b). Hence, in language-enriched education, language learning is strongly intertwined with the child's overall development (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013). However, a perspective that is not explicitly stated in the curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b), and is understudied in research as well, is the importance of other children and their role in promoting language development. For example, Chen

et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of peers as language learning resources in general and found that children's access to these peer language resources may vary within the classroom.

Even though the Finnish curriculum outlines general, 'language-friendly' (Alisaari et al., 2019; Mård-Miettinen et al., 2023; Sopanen, 2022) guidelines for ELE, it lacks more detailed objectives and instructions for the implementation of ELE and states that these should be specified in the local curricula (EDUFI, 2016b). The challenge in this approach is, therefore, that the responsibility of interpreting the general guidelines and language policies and transferring them into the practical implementation of ELE relies heavily on the expertise and agency of the teachers in the local early childhood education centres (Alstad & Sopanen, 2021). As Bergroth and Hansell (2020) and Sopanen (2022) found, difficulties may exist at the operational level: for example, teachers need to raise their awareness of language policies, their own agency, and their actions as language educators to develop a language-aware operational culture. Similarly, Palviainen and Mård-Miettinen (2015) showed that as early childhood education teachers adopt novel bilingual practices, they need to renegotiate their previous professional and personal beliefs, e.g., regarding translanguaging practices and language separation. Alternatively, teachers are relied upon in the Finnish system to bring ELE policy into practice (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020), and the lack of more specific curricular guidance 'allows teachers to position themselves as key change agents for bi- and multilingual pedagogy' (Hansell & Björklund, 2022, p. 182). However, there is a lack of studies focusing on the critical role of teachers and their agency in relation to their practical construction of early (bilingual) language education practices in the classroom.

In practice, ELE pedagogies require from teachers theoretical epistemic (know-that) knowledge regarding ELE and practical knowledge (know-how) on how to implement ELE in early childhood education (Alstad, 2022). As Schwartz (2022b) highlights, teachers need to act as proactive agents and intentionally create conditions for children's ELE. Hansell and Björklund (2022) found in their case study on language-enriched early childhood education in Finland that ELE occurred in practice through teacher-led activities, routines, and play (cf. Kirsch, 2021; Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021 for international research). The teacher-led activities include 'circle times' in which children and teachers discuss, for example, the days of the week, numbers, colours, and the weather. In addition, songs, rhymes, reading, or playful activities are typical teacher-led activities/circle time activities (cf. Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). Moreover, teacher-led activities can include a variety of other pre-planned activities for children. Play, however, is typically based on children's own initiatives and interests. In the context of language-enriched education, the teachers' role can be, for example, naming objects in the target language or responding to children's interactions and in this way introducing the target language even into child-initiated play. Our particular interest in this study is to explore how

teacher-led activities and the initiatives of children come together to generate affordances for ELE in early childhood education.

Research methods

Data and participants

The data were gathered in spring 2019 from two pre-primary education contexts in which ELE was implemented: a classroom where English was used besides Finnish, and a classroom where the languages were Swedish and Finnish. Participants were recruited by an open call invitation, and the teachers volunteered to participate. The data were collected as part of a larger project: 'A Map and Compass for Innovative Language Education (IKI)' (cf. Moate et al., 2021) by the second author. The IKI project focused on innovative ways of implementing language education in early childhood education and schools (cf. Moate et al., 2021). The present qualitative case study, therefore, has features of exploratory study, as we strive to identify novel practices in ELE by approaching them through the theory of affordances (Aronin & Singleton, 2012; van Lier, 2004).

The data used in this article consist of video recordings of teaching, observation notes, and interviews with two early childhood education teachers who were responsible for the ELE in their groups. Group 1/EN had one teacher (T1EN; target language English) and 12 children, of whom all provided research consent and Group 2/SW had one teacher (T2SW; target language Swedish) and 13 children, of whom 11 gave research consent. In Group 2, a visiting language teacher (T3SW) was also involved and visited the group on one occasion. T3 also gave informed consent as part of the study.

The city, in which the data were collected, had emphasised the importance of ELE in their curriculum. One of the researched early childhood education centre (Group 1/EN) had drafted an ELE year-plan for learning English in pre-primary education. This plan included learning objectives and planned activities for each month, and links to YouTube materials. Both teachers had previously participated in an ELE project organised by the city. This approximately one-year professional development training project, referred to here by the pseudonym 'the Lingua project'. was referred to by both teachers as an important source of collaboration. As part of the Lingua project, the participants had jointly planned and prepared a variety of materials for ELE. During the Lingua project, they had received training and learnt collaboratively through discussion. The Lingua project also provided some funding for activities, such as visits by a language teacher and a dog in Group 2/SW's classroom. The authors of this study were not involved in the Lingua project.

The dataset for the study includes observation notes and video recordings, photographs of the ELE environment and teacher interviews. The observations and video recordings were completed over three mornings (altogether around 9 hours; 6 hours in the Swedish group (Group 2/SW) for two mornings, and 3 hours in the English group (Group 1/EN) for one morning). The observations focused on how the teachers used languages with the children. Due to practical reasons transition situations and everyday situations (e.g., lunch situations) were not video recorded although observation notes were maintained during these moments, as well. All other activities during observation were recorded on video and through observation notes. Photographs were taken of the environments. One thematic interview was conducted with each teacher in Finnish. One interview lasted 40 minutes (T2SW) and the other 27 minutes (T1EN). The interview themes included, for example, principles and goals regarding ELE, collaboration, and the development of ELE pedagogy. In all data collection stages, guidelines from the Finnish National Board for Research Integrity (2012) were followed, including obtaining research permission and consent from the participating teachers and children. The teachers' and parents regarding their children gave written consents and the children were informed orally.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis was led by the first author, who transcribed the dataset and conducted the analyses. The first step of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) entailed becoming familiar with the data by reading the transcripts multiple times and reflecting on the content. Next, the data were initially coded and interpreted. In this phase, guided by the research question, relevant sentences from the interviews and descriptions from the observation transcripts were identified and were given initial codes, such as positive attitude, motivation towards language learning, hearing children's ideas, and using activity-based learning methods in language learning. The third step was to generate initial themes based on the codes. These included, for example, the teacher's role, children's active participation, use of the target language, materials used in ELE, and collaboration. In this phase, van Lier's (2004, 2010) and Aronin and Singleton's (2012) theorisations of affordances were used as a lens, and initial themes were compared and analysed against these theories. Hence, theoretical and conceptual knowledge were utilised to reach the next step of the analysis: defining and naming the themes. In this phase, the research team discussed the initial findings and decided to focus the analysis of observations on the children's active responses to indicate that an opportunity offered by a teacher was viable from the child's perspective. The final analytical stage focused on the kind of affordances provided within the contexts. Regarding the ELE affordances, two main themes were identified: pedagogical and material ELE affordances and social ELE affordances. Pedagogical ELE affordances included, for example, integrating possibilities for ELE into different activities and teaching different curriculum contents. Materials for ELE

included, for example, including the support and guidance provided by the teacher and the role of peers in promoting ELE. These different kinds of affordances are described in detail in the following section.

Findings²

Language education affordances in the two pre-primary classrooms

The language education affordances in the two pre-primary classrooms comprised pedagogical and material and social ELE affordances.

Pedagogical and material language education affordances

Regarding the ELE affordances provided by the teachers, the pedagogical and material choices were closely associated. For both teachers, increasing children's interest in and positive attitude towards languages in general and more particularly regarding the target language were important pedagogical aims in ELE. The teachers wanted the children to have fun while learning the new language:

Probably the biggest aim (...) would be that all [children] would have the kind of positive attitude towards [language learning] and that language learning is fun and easy.

(T1EN)

I wish that I can create this kind of enthusiastic, joy for learning Swedish (...) and that it [the joy] prevails in the future, as they can choose the Swedish [in school for second language]

(T2SW)

In the excerpts, both teachers highlight the importance of joy in ELE as it makes language learning feel fun and easy. In practice, the teachers planned some language education opportunities beforehand, and some occurred more spontaneously during the day:

[I have taught English] during circle times (...) and then in transition situations, when we have waited for others to dress or when we stand in line, we have counted how many we are [in English]. And then in some play situations we have pondered with pairs or small groups, what are these [words] in English. (...) and then as we sing together, we always sing part of the songs in English. In fact, you can [teach language]

² Note: In the findings, the excerpts from the interviews with both teachers have been translated into English. Teacher teaching with English is coded (T1EN) and teacher teaching with Swedish (T2SW). In the observation excerpts entailing discussion, Finnish is not translated directly into English to be able to distinguish the use of the foreign language; however, we have included the English translations in brackets. The classroom using English as the target language is coded (Group 1/EN) and the classroom using Swedish as target language is coded (Group 2/SW). Swedish is distinguished from Finnish with italics. English words are underlined.

all the time (...) For example, during lunch you can say 'do you like it' or 'do you like potatoes'.

(T1EN)

When we have circle time or we look at the calendar, we also include Swedish, for example, a song, weekday song (...) and when we go to sleep or eat (...) then we might have had these Swedish words. When we go to eat in line, we can ask [words] and you can take songs and play in different occasions.

(T2SW)

As the examples show, both teachers actively include ELE throughout the day, thus illustrating whole-day pedagogy, which means utilising different daily events as opportunities for teaching and learning (Lämsä, 2021). Whole-day pedagogy is not explicitly mentioned in the Finnish curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b); however, it is nonetheless a common pedagogical principle in Finnish early childhood education, as well as in other Nordic countries (Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006). Hence, ELE could be included into organised circle times, as well as into other activities, such as free play, dining, or transitioning from one activity to another (cf. Mourão, 2018). This kind of pedagogical practice enabled many affordances for ELE on a daily basis. As T2SW states: 'that you all the time add it [ELE] to activities is something I find important'. T1EN stated, similarly, that 'basically everything you do [i.e., pedagogical activities], you can translate those into [target] language teaching'. This importance of different activities in ELE has also been highlighted in previous studies (cf. Alstad, 2022; Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023). Further, the examples show that pedagogical translanguaging is implemented by both teachers as they systematically use two languages in different daily activities. Strategic use of pedagogical translanguaging has been found to be a beneficial language learning affordance in foreign language classrooms in school (Rajendram, 2023).

In the following example T1EN describes implementing a game with pinecones in the forest:

In the game the child was instructed to throw one cone and say: 'I'm good'. Next, the child would throw another pinecone a bit further and say: 'I'm great' and lastly, the third cone would be thrown as far as possible, and the child would say: 'I'm wonderful'. T1: 'and you can connect practicing throwing and English and, lastly, how are you feeling today.'

(T1EN)

By combining language learning with other learning objectives from the curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b), the teachers were able to increase activity-based learning and connect language learning to different learning modules. Incorporating ELE into larger entities (e.g., including other skills and competencies), which necessitates both epistemic and

practical knowledge (cf. Alstad, 2022), was observable in both classrooms. The teachers blended ELE, for example, with practicing mathematics, physical education, coding, drawing, writing, and music. They emphasised that learning through activity (not by sitting in lessons) is a central pedagogical principle.

Combining physical education into (...) this language [education] has been, in my opinion, good, because we have had also physical education as a specific goal. (...) And play, in which you jump from one colour to another, so in that there is the movement at the same time, and then you can practice your memory. (...) and we have combined [language learning] with music and all kinds of skills, and coding. In my opinion, coding is fun with colours (...) the adult can say, for example red, red, yellow, green, and then the child writes, [or] draws the colours and after that, you can play with the piano, what kind of song came out of this [coding]. That has been great.

(T1EN)

As much as possible activity-based teaching. (...) I made a game, in which they had to combine the right picture with the right word. But of course, you need to know how to read a bit, but in that you can also think about what the first letter is.

(T2SW)

The songs, rhymes and such are the ones from which children learn [language and words] the most. For example, we have had *Björnen sover* [the bear is sleeping – song and game] in which playful actions are included. Weekdays have been learnt through song.

(T2SW)

As the examples show, ELE was blended with other curriculum contents with an emphasis on activity-based learning. The teachers relied most often on using versatile play and games as a means for ELE and secondly on stories and riddles as learning materials for ELE. They found that songs and stories were very useful in learning words, and these affordances were used very frequently (cf. Hansell & Björklund, 2022). This is in line with the curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b), which states that children should be read a variety of texts, and these should be discussed together. Moreover, children's story crafting was encouraged. The following example describes using the story Pippi Longstocking as an affordance for ELE.

I have always had *Pippi Långstrump*, i.e., Peppi Pitkätossu [Pippi Longstocking], and *Herr Nilsson*, i.e., herra Tossavainen [Mr. Nilsson] with me. And then we have remembered, what we did last time in the Swedish session. And then we have had visual support, i.e., always pictures alongside. (...) And I always ask, *Hej, Jag heter XXX* [Hello, I am XXX], *Vad heter du?* [What is your name?]. And then they say: *Jag heter XXX* [I am XXX], and I always say hello. (...) And in the end, we have had a certain rhyme.

(T2SW)

In the example, the pedagogical practice of reading a story is combined with material affordances, such as the characters Pippi Longstocking and Mr. Nilsson alongside visual supports from pictures. Both teachers used a variety of different materials as supports for ELE (cf. Mourão, 2018). The following example further illustrates using songs as an aid in teaching and learning words during teacher-led instruction:

The children and the teacher are in the forest. The teacher asks in Finnish children to come and join a circle and wishes them in English 'Good morning', to which the children respond: 'Good morning'. In Finnish, the teacher asks the children to pick up different coloured scarfs from the basket. Next, she asks the children, in Finnish, to lift up the scarf, if the child has the colour in question. The teacher says, in English: 'red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink'. Next in Finnish again, she instructs the children to sing together a song called 'It's a Rainbow'. The song is already familiar to the children, and they have practiced it as they will perform it later during the Spring event. They start to sing in English and play the song according to the choreography. Next, they sing and do the actions for another song in English, 'You are my sunshine'. After that they, again, recap the colours of the scarfs in English, and start to play a different game, in which children are instructed (in Finnish) to take the coloured scarfs around the forest. Next, the children are allowed to take the lead. As one of the children shouts in English a particular colour, the other children are supposed to run to that coloured scarf. However, as the first child says the first colour in Finnish, the teacher instructs the children to say the colours in English.

(Group 1/EN)

This example shows how the teacher is recapping colours in English with the children by using scarfs and a song as an aid. Pedagogical translanguaging is realized in the use of Finnish and English while singing and naming colours. The example also manifests activity-based learning, in which language learning is combined with some other, often playful activities. This necessitates that the activities be carefully planned (e.g., Hansell & Björklund, 2022). However, it is important to note that the use of English is focused on greetings (Good morning) and naming the colours rather than on using English for routine phrases within the activity (e.g., for asking the children to come and join the circle time, to pick up scarfs, etc.). Using English for frequently upcoming elements, like e.g., routine phrases, increases opportunities to learning as they include productive target language frames for the children to recycle in their own production (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023; Björklund et al., 2014). It is also important to note that while recapping can be a useful pedagogical strategy, it can also restrict language learning if recapping dominates instead of learning something new. In the interviews and during the observation the teachers mentioned several times that the activity the children were participating in was already very familiar to them. Children often like repetitive and repeated activities, but the question arises, what is the action potential, that is the affordance (van Lier, 2004), of a familiar activity? Does pedagogical translanguaging through repeated use of the target language promote learning something new? Or is the

action potential of the affordance lost as the activity actually limits ELE by being less engaging and not providing novel opportunities?

In addition to the affordances of play, games, songs, and stories, pictures were also frequently used (cf. Mourão, 2018; Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2023). The teachers had, for example, picture cards with words in English or Swedish. In the Group 2/SW, the environment included a variety of pictures and words in Swedish posted on the walls. In the Group 1/EN, however, these kinds of visual supports were not posted; however, the T1EN stated that she could add pictures to the classroom next year.

The Lingua project both teachers had participated in was their key source for ELE materials. During the Lingua project meetings, the teachers gathered a readymade package that included a variety of different kinds of playful activities and games for language learning, also including pedagogical instructions on how to implement the activities. The Lingua project also enabled funding for a special affordance, an example of which was the visit from a language teacher and a therapy dog in the Group 2/SW:

T2SW guides children to gather in a circle around the dog and the visiting language teacher (T3SW). T3 counts in Swedish, how many children are present. T3SW: *'fjorton'* [fourteen]. Next, she greets the children in Swedish: T3SW: *God morgon* [Good morning]. Children: *God morgon* [Good morning]. T3SW introduces herself and the dog in Finnish. T3SW tells the children about the dog and his bark. She instructs the children in Finnish, how they should behave around the dog. Next T3SW explains in Finnish that they will read a story, which is familiar to the children, but not familiar to the dog and the dog might change the story a bit. T3SW teacher reads the story in Swedish and shows pictures to children. She also has some visual aids to accompany the story. The dog participates by fetching pictures or rolling a dice when asked in Finnish and receives treats as rewards. Through the story, words related to weekdays, fruit and numbers are being practised. Throughout the session, the teacher uses Swedish and Finnish fluently side by side, changing the language between the sentences and sometimes in the middle of the sentence. The children get to participate either in Swedish or in Finnish.

(Group 2/SW)

The excerpt above showcases the use of diverse affordances during the ELE session. First, pedagogical translanguaging was implemented throughout the session as the teacher flexibly used Swedish and Finnish and encouraged the children to follow the story and the activities and, at the same time, learn Swedish. The physical materials included in the session comprised pictures, a storybook, a puppet, and children drawing a picture based on the story. The dog acted as a central and special affordance, and it motivated the children to actively participate.

With regard to the pedagogical translanguaging practices used, T2SW explained how there are certain elements of the Swedish session that always remain the same. These

include having always visual aid through pictures and puppets, exchanging greetings in target language, having (familiar) songs and rhymes included, and also recapping what they were doing last time during Swedish circle-time. Thus, through repetition (e.g., greetings, songs, rhymes), the children can practice language, which, as previously stated, can manifest as an affordance but also limit possible affordances. To sum up, planned pedagogical translanguaging, learning words through songs, stories, play, games and participation in activity-based learning activities were the main affordances and pedagogical practices used in these ELE sessions.

Social language education affordances

Social ELE affordances refer to the affordances provided by social relationships and interactions between the teachers, the child, and peers for the communication via language and the acquisition of language (cf. Aronin & Singleton, 2012).

Language education affordances enabled by the teachers. Fostering children's positive attitudes towards languages in general and establishing a positive atmosphere for language learning in the classrooms were foundational as, according to the teachers, such positive attitudes can facilitate language learning also in the future. In creating a positive atmosphere for ELE, teachers play a crucial role (Sopanen, 2022). Similarly, as stated in the Finnish curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b), the teachers emphasised the significance of increasing children's familiarity with languages but also talked about the ways through which children learn languages (cf. Palviainen et al., 2016):

That the language would become familiar somehow. That the children would hear the language, maybe learn some words. Or that it would be natural the language, the use of language somehow. And in my opinion, it shows, because the children use [English] like, in the same way that teenagers use, as they say OMG and like that [teacher laughs].

(T1EN)

This example describes the importance of a learning environment in which children have possibilities to hear languages but also to use languages as they choose (cf. Mård-Miettinen et al., 2023). As T1EN formulates: 'the principle is more important that it [language] is in the daily life as little moments [instead of long lessons], and the frequency is important'. Surprisingly, in contrast with the curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b), during the interviews, only one teacher explicitly used the concept of language awareness in a sentence; however, they both described some features associated with language awareness, such as getting to know the language, hearing the language, and learning to use the words of the target language. This might indicate a gap between the policy documents and the teachers' practical knowledge (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020) and epistemic knowledge (Alstad, 2022)

The teachers found that their role was to enable ELE affordances for the children and to support them, as the following examples illustrate:

In my opinion it is really important that adults do not correct all the time what the child says but ask more questions and give the child possibilities to talk about his/her own ideas and to invent stories.

(T1EN)

I have tried to vary the activities, so that I wouldn't always have the same ones. That would bore [the children].

(T2SW)

I have noticed that some children get the hang of it [language learning] quickly. This five-to-six years' age is a profitable age [for language learning] (...) I have always tried to write down the [Swedish] words, because now in the pre-primary classroom, there are already children that can read, so that they get excited.

(T2SW)

As the examples illustrate, both teachers viewed their task as enabling diverse and versatile language learning opportunities (Aronin & Singleton, 2012; van Lier, 2004, 2010) for the children based on their current developmental stage and providing affordances and support for using the target language (cf. Palviainen et al., 2016). The teachers' ability to support the children and to provide ELE affordances is connected with their epistemic and practical knowledge (Alstad, 2022). As the examples presented in the previous findings section indicate, the teacher is responsible for selecting not only pedagogical practices but also the materials and methods through which language learning opportunities are provided for children. In addition to these, one of the main ELE affordances provided by the teachers was pedagogical translanguaging, i.e., the way they used languages in practice, including in what situations and the extent to which the teachers use the target language.

In both classrooms, the dominant language used was the language of instruction, Finnish. The language of instruction and the target language seemed to serve different purposes. Typically, Finnish was used for giving instructions, which the children need to understand, and discussing different topics with the children. Alternatively, the target languages were used in a more contextualised (and simpler) manner, incorporated with, for example, singing, rhymes and naming words (cf. Mård-Miettinen et al., 2015; Palviainen & Mård-Miettinen, 2015). Hence, in both groups, the teachers mainly gave instructions in Finnish; however, T2SW also occasionally gave some short and simple instructions (often combined with gestures) in Swedish. Positive feedback and praise as well as greetings were given often in the target language in both groups. The following example describes these practices:

In the Group 2/SW, the teacher is giving instructions in Finnish to children to navigate an orienteering track with Swedish words. The children have trucks with which they go from one destination to another. At each destination they have to write the initial letter of one word on their papers.

T2SW: Muistaako kukaan mikä tää oli ruotsiks? [Does anyone remember what this [truck] is in Swedish]?

Child: *Lastbil*

T2SW: *Lastbil*. Ja ensimmäinen lähtee *lastbil* [And the first *lastbil* will go]. *Jättebra* [very good]. Noin ja me odottelemme vielä [and we will wait still].

T2SW chats with the children. One child says that her truck will next go to Sweden. However, she does not remember any Swedish cities. T2SW asks, what is the capital of Sweden.

Child: Tukholma [Stockholm].

T2SW: Joo, ja mikä se oli ruotsiks, me ollaan joskus puhuttu [and what is it in Swedish, we have sometimes discussed about it], se oli Stock, Stock [it was Stock, Stock].

Child: Stokolm

T2SW: *Stockholm*.

One child remembers another place in Sweden and T2SW says: se oli missä [name deleted] oli käynyt, se oli hänen favourite [it was where [name deleted] has been, it was her favourite] It was her favourite place in English, very good!

The example illustrates T2SW's use of Swedish as well as English while discussing with the children. Most of the spoken language is Finnish, but Swedish was chosen when the children were asked to name some words; and at the end of the example, English was also used as a result of first using the English word 'favourite'. The example also illustrates scaffolding as the teacher helps the child to remember Stockholm.

During the observations, both teachers also extended the children's utterances, and when a child said a word or sentence, the teachers might say the same in the target language. Through scaffolding (e.g., giving assistance to the child in remembering words), they also instructed the children in how they could express themselves in English or Swedish and offered support for them in language use when needed. However, in the observation data, this type of scaffolding did not occur very frequently.

Nevertheless, the teachers emphasised the significance of pedagogical planning and exploiting different situations to enable ELE. Planning was a means to ensure multiple and diverse ELE affordances for the children. T2SW stated: 'together we learn

[languages]'. Both teachers highlighted the importance of positive feedback for children regarding language use:

You must never laugh [at a child] if something goes wrong. The peers must not laugh, that is something where I intervene immediately. I also intervene if they start saying this is too easy and you can't [do that]. Every child must be allowed to believe that they can [do it] and you praise the child.

(T2SW)

The teacher highlighted that through positive praising and a 'playful, positive, patient and encouraging atmosphere' (T2SW), children learn language best.

Based on the interviews and observations, it seemed that implementing ELE was essentially up to the two teachers participating in the study. Both teachers only briefly mentioned collaboration with their own teams of educators (two other educators besides the teachers in each group) despite the strong emphasis on teamwork in Finnish early childhood education. It seemed that the participating teachers planned their ELE practices themselves, inspired by the different language learning materials provided by the Lingua project, and then implemented the planned activity. This, however, does not support the development of a professional learning community (cf. Bergroth & Hansell, 2020; Mourão, 2021). It can also be considered to limit children's ELE affordances as the teaching of the target language is not the responsibility of all the educators.

To sum up, if we look at the environment of the classrooms, it becomes evident that during the day, teachers, as proactive agents (Schwartz, 2022b), provide the children with versatile opportunities to hear and practice the target language. However, these were typically focused on teaching words or singing songs and playing games, and there could have been more extensive possibilities to use the target language throughout the day by the teachers, especially through oral target language production. Previous studies show (cf. Schwartz, 2022b) that teachers' focus on receptive language may lead to children lagging in language production.

Language education affordances enabled by the children. Creating a positive and encouraging atmosphere was an important facilitator for the children's active participation in ELE activities as it supported the children's agency. For example, in the example from Group 1/EN mentioned previously in which the teacher organised an activity for the children in the forest with coloured scarfs, she also enabled the children to actively participate and shout out colours one by one. Therefore, the children had the opportunity to act as a social group. These kinds of fun group activities were important affordances in terms of strengthening the children's interest in ELE and their agency.

Both teachers stressed the importance of hearing the children's own ideas and initiatives and considered them important affordances in ELE, as the following examples illustrate:

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If a child mentions an English word during the circle time, I never say that now it is our task to practice Swedish. On the contrary, I then take up [the English word] from there. We have had a child who has introduced Estonian words (...) it is not just only this one right language, like Swedish, that we couldn't take other [languages] but it is important to use all means add joy to language learning.

(T2SW)

Today, when we played the colour game, for example. The game is familiar to the children, they know these [colours] (...) but there, for example, [child's name] invented, how you could play this differently (...). As you latch onto the child's idea and you practice and play the game once more, in a novel way, it is a meaningful way [to do it] for the child.

(T1EN)

Almost every second morning some [child] has read somewhere else a word, which the child has then brought to the group. Someone just had buttermilk, he/she had read from buttermilk can, like *surmjölk*, and another [child had] *lördagskorv* [a type of sausage cutlet]

(T2SW)

As the children introduced novel ideas or words during planned activities or discussions, both teachers wanted to utilise the children's motivation for language learning and were willing to adapt the course of their planned activities to include the children's perspectives and interest. Therefore, they considered the children to be active participants instead of passive recipients, which manifests support for the children's agency. The teachers stated that the children should also be involved in planning the learning activities, which is also encouraged in the curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b). T1EN stated: 'it can be even better [the child's idea than the adult's plan], and children come up with a lot of ideas, how a certain thing should be learnt'. The following example illustrates this kind of integration of children's ideas into the teacher's plan.

In Group 1/EN, the teacher [T1EN] instructs the children, in Finnish, to play robots in pairs. The children get to decide who is a robot and who is the instructor. They practice coding through this activity: the instructor advises the robot to move straight or turn without words, by touching the robot on shoulder. Next T1EN alters the game and instructs the children to construct a track using different coloured cubes. The idea is to instruct another child to jump onto a specific colour that is mentioned.

Child: minä en tiedä, mikä on ruskea englanniksi [I don't know, what is brown in English]

[No-one responds to the child]

Child: mene [go] red, mene [go] black

T1EN: sä voit sanoa go black [you can say 'go black'], Go

Child: go red, go pink, go blue, go red

T1EN to another child: Tartteetko muita värejä? Mä voin sanoa sulle sit. Sä tiedät niin paljon värejä, niin ota sä paljon. Tiedätkö sä kaikki? Brown. [Do you need other colours? I can tell you then [the colour]. You know so many colours so take many [cubes]. Do you know them all? Brown.]

The children do a series of jumps according to the instructions.

T1EN: nyt voi tehdä vaikeamman. Voi sanoa green, blue, yellow ja sitten pitää hypätä siinä järjestyksessä [now you can make it harder. You can say green, blue, yellow and next you must jump in that order]

Children follow these new instructions. One of the children suggests altering the game by removing one certain kind of block and the pair must come up with what block is missing and say it in English.

T1EN: hyvä idea! [Great idea!]

T1EN instructs the children to follow this newly invented way of playing the game and they begin playing.

(Group 1/EN)

This example describes the game and how the children first play it according to the rules of the teacher. Then, as the children develop novel ideas about how to play, the teacher responds to the children's initiatives and thereby strengthens their agency and motivation towards language learning. By taking up the children's ideas, the teacher shows appreciation towards children. Moreover, the children's ideas can be useful in developing the activities and creating new affordances for the children. For example, in the Group 2/SW, the teacher specifically asked for feedback from the children about the activities:

I asked the children to say what they think about teaching Swedish. Have you liked it and as much as you have liked it, draw that many smiley faces onto that paper (...) that way I get some assessment from the children, how they have liked it [learning Swedish], because that is important, whether they like it at all.

(T2SW)

The feedback and assessments from the children gave the teacher important information regarding whether the children enjoyed ELE; however, it remains inconclusive whether the feedback had an actual effect on developing practices.

Both classrooms also collaborated with a primary school. Pre-primary and primary school children were gathered to complete joint activities, such as story crafting:

We meet at least once a month. We have done tasks together regarding English, and language. And they [primary school pupils] have done story crafting with our children, and written them [pre-primary children's narrated stories] down. And it is excellent, for example, in story crafting, because if I try to complete story crafting with 16 children, it takes ages, but if these pupils do the story crafting, they get completed at the same time. And because they [the primary school children] are practicing writing, it is mutually beneficial.

(T1EN)

Story crafting together with pre-primary and primary school students offers mutual benefits of peer collaboration for the children: the primary school students practice writing and the pre-primary children practice narration and the oral production of stories.

Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to explore what kind of language education affordances were enabled by the teachers and the children in two pre-primary classrooms in which ELE in English or Swedish was implemented. We combined van Lier's (2004) and Aronin and Singleton's (2012) theories of affordances through our reflexive thematic analysis of the interview and observation data.

Our findings indicate that a plethora of pedagogical and material ELE affordances were available for the children even within a limited period of time. The pedagogical affordances included creating a motivating and positive atmosphere for ELE, fostering children's interest in language (language awareness), integrating pedagogical translanguaging to the principle of whole-day pedagogy in organising different possibilities to hear and learn languages throughout the day, and combining other curriculum contents with language learning. In practice, the teachers planned a variety of ELE situations as affordances. These findings are in line with the aims stated in the curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b) and previous studies (e.g., Alstad, 2022; Hansell & Björklund, 2022).

However, our findings indicate that pedagogical translanguaging practices can also limit the affordances, e.g., if greater emphasis is placed on learning words in the target language, a practice both the teachers had adopted. By focusing on individual words, the communicative function of the language is left to one side. Words are important, but they are only part of language awareness and learning. Moreover, neither of the teachers used the target language as a means of communication to a considerable extent, which limited the children's daily exposure to ELE (cf. Mourão, 2018). They focused on receptive language learning instead of supporting the children's oral production (cf. Schwartz,

2022b), which can be regarded as partly a manifestation of the lack of guidance in the Finnish curriculum (EDUFI, 2016b) and the reliance on individual teachers' abilities and competence in implementing ELE (Alstad & Sopanen, 2021).

Communicative language use could be promoted by applying whole-day pedagogy in a broader sense, by incorporating phrases and expressions in the target language into everyday routines or in the children's play, to create rich, diverse and motivating ELE affordances (cf. Mourão, 2018). Here, the teachers' implementation of whole-day pedagogy for ELE was quite vague, with an emphasis on inserting target language songs and words into different situations instead of using target language phrases and expressions that naturally occur in these situations. This represents rather limited approach to ELE, which should be considered much more broadly from the perspective of constructing linguistic, cultural and communicative identities. For example, in the Nordic countries, as Wagner and Einarsdottir (2006) outline, there is an emphasis placed on preserving and cultivating Nordic languages and culture. In doing this, the use of Nordic languages in diverse daily events (whole-day pedagogy) play a key role. At the same time, English is being appreciated as 'an instrument for communicating with non-Nordic world' (Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006, p. 3). Through this kind of broad and inclusive thinking Nordic linguistic and cultural uniqueness can be merged with global citizenship (cf. Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006).

In addition to pedagogical practices, a variety of ELE materials were used, including play, games, songs, rhymes, pictures, and even a dog, which were used to motivate the children for language learning (cf. Hansell & Björklund, 2022). Therefore, regarding affordances and the potential for learning they offer (van Lier, 2004), the use of versatile materials can be considered an important means of delivering ELE. The materials enabled the children's active engagement in choosing and exploiting the affordances provided (de Haan et al., 2013; van Lier 2004, 2010). However, materials can also hinder ELE if the same materials are utilised repeatedly. Although the children might enjoy recapping as they gain a feeling of success and competence, novel ideas and materials are important to introduce to promote and challenge learning. A very familiar activity might be less engaging, especially if the children have already gained what they can from the affordances the activity has provided. Too much repetition can hamper children's interest in languages, and the learning objectives of ELE can be thus compromised or remain superficial.

Similar to Aronin and Singleton (2012), the present study also highlighted the importance of the social affordances provided by the teachers and the children. The social affordances provided by teachers included establishing a positive atmosphere for ELE, and pedagogical translanguaging practices by the teacher, i.e., the teachers' strategic use of the target language and Finnish accompanied with non-verbal scaffolds to enhance

children's participation. These were complemented by the social affordances provided by the children, which included producing novel ideas and initiatives, giving feedback, and learning together, such as through story crafting. Based on these findings, the children's active role during ELE turned out to be significant, as they were, at times, able to overcome the limitations of the ELE affordances provided by the teachers (e.g., recapping words and repeating same activities) and transform the activity into one that was more novel, engaging and fun. The teachers appreciated children's initiatives and adapted the activities accordingly. Both teachers highlighted that ELE is a collaborative process in which the teachers and children all learn together. Moreover, through scaffolding (Kordt, 2018), teachers can support children's developing language skills. Using pedagogical translanguaging consistently and intentionally in ELE is important to emphasise to teachers, e.g., in professional development training. However, as the findings illustrate, it was somewhat surprising that implementing ELE was essentially the sole responsibility of the two participating teachers and not that of the whole team of educators, as is typical in Finnish early childhood education. This indicates a lack of a professional learning community (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020; Mourão, 2021). This is also curious since both teachers highlighted the importance of participating in the professional development ELE the *Lingua* project and receiving material and collegial support from other participants. They felt the need for collaboration but did not use their own teams as a resource for ELE and thus were restricting their own as well as the children's ELE affordances.

As we consider the findings of the study through the concepts introduced by de Haan and colleagues (2013, p. 7), the 'width' of the affordances (i.e., the different affordances an individual perceives in a context) can be regarded as versatile, especially regarding the pedagogical and material affordances presented for the children. These are linked with the 'height' of the affordances (i.e., the relevance and attractiveness of the affordance to an individual). From the observations, it could be concluded that the children were enthusiastic and participated actively in the pedagogical activities planned for them. However, the limitation of the study is that the 'depth' of the affordances (i.e., whether an individual can perceive future and possible affordances that are not yet present) is not possible to assess with these research methods. Moreover, using these research methods, we were unable to assess, what the children actually learned through the use of ELE and pedagogical translanguaging.

Another limitation is that this exploratory case study includes only two teachers and classrooms as we investigated ELE practices through the theory of affordances. It would be important to gather qualitative data from several classrooms to be able to better assess the ELE affordances and practices used. This knowledge would be important for improving ELE policies. An important perspective that the present study fails to address concerns the teachers' epistemic ELE knowledge, which was not addressed in the interviews. Similar to Bergroth and Hansell's (2020) findings, there were observed

difficulties in ELE practices here. For example, it seemed that there existed a gap between teachers' practical knowledge regarding language awareness and their epistemic knowledge (cf. Alstad, 2022). Moreover, the teachers' use of pedagogical translanguaging practices could have been increased to provide richer ELE affordances. In a previous study (Koivula et al., 2022), we found that watching videos of the classroom practices with teachers was beneficial in terms of promoting their reflection on practices; this kind of approach would have also been fruitful in the present study. Moreover, it would be important to study teachers' knowledge and perspectives more in depth, such as teachers' own language content knowledge, language awareness, and awareness of language policies. A previous study with secondary school teachers (Skinnari & Nikula, 2017) suggested that curricular changes challenge teachers' language awareness, perceptions, and knowledge, yet we lack knowledge about how teachers in early childhood education have reacted or adopted to these curricular changes.

Despite these limitations, this study has identified a wealth of affordances for language learning that are both present and can potentially be generated within early childhood education. Moreover, the study shed light on how the early childhood education curriculum (FNAE, 2016b) and language policies can be transferred to practice. The insights from this study will hopefully encourage other early childhood language educators to expand the affordances for language learning during this sensitive stage of child development.

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