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Language orientations in early childhood education policy in Finland and Norway

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the language orientations in education policy documents for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland and Norway. Finland, an officially bilingual country, and Norway, a predominantly monolingual country, share similar views on ECEC. However, the ECEC field in both countries has undergone major changes in recent years: more children are attending ECEC, and the increasing number of children with diverse backgrounds and minority languages. The document analysis includes seven policy documents related to ECEC in Finland and Norway. The analytical approach is based on Ruíz' framework for language orientations, i.e. language as resource, language as right and language as problem. The analysis shows that the language orientation in ECEC policy is rather vague and open. On the one hand, multilingualism is seen as a resource. On the other hand, multilingualism is considered as challenging in terms of language diversity, facilitating multilingual and first language development. In both countries, there seems to be a monolingual ideology underlying the policy. We discuss these findings in light of policy implementations and finally underline the importance of critical multilingual awareness in early childhood teacher education.

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Introduction and background

This article is about language ideologies and orientations in early childhood education and care policies in Finland and Norway. As a result of global migration, linguistic diversity has increased in Western societies in recent years. At the same time, more government attention is being given to language issues in education (Bae, 2018), such as language rights (Sajavaara et al., 2007), regulations, and decisions about languages and how they are used in education (García & Menken, 2010). In recent years, one of the most significant political reforms worldwide concerning language teaching has been lowering the age of introduction to additional languages. This reform has been described as 'possibly the world's biggest policy development in education' (Johnstone, 2009, p. 33). The reform applies primarily to learning certain languages with high social status, such as English, and it underlines the point that both language policy and education policy are value-laden and oriented to ideologies and power in different ways (Aasen et al., 2014; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007).

Most research on language ideologies in education has been conducted in formal contexts like school, or in other contexts than the Nordic context. The two Nordic countries Finland and Norway share more or less the same traditions and values in ECEC. The

emphasis is on a play-based, child-centred approach, with the focus on children's holistic learning and development. Language and literacy learning are supposed to be integrated into a meaningful context in everyday situations, and no specific learning outcomes have been defined for children attending ECEC. However, the language situation and context in each of the two countries are different: Finnish society is built on bilingualism in legislation and society (Finnish/Swedish), while Norway is predominantly monolingual (Norwegian). At the same time, the ECEC field has undergone major changes in recent years in terms of immigration and linguistic diversity. The number of children attending ECEC is increasing, and there are more children with diverse backgrounds. In 2016, about 9% of all children participating in communal ECEC in Finland had an immigrant background (THL (The National Institute for Health and Welfare), 2017). Similarly, in Norway, the number of children from linguistic and cultural minorities increased from 6% of all children in 2003 to 18.3% in 2018¹ (Statistics Norway, 2019). The change has thus happened at different rates in the two countries, and there are proportionally more minority children in Norway.

Given these background facts, the purpose of this study is to make transparent the language ideologies in Norwegian and Finnish ECEC policy. Our research

question is, what characterizes the language orientations in government policy documents for ECEC in Finland and Norway. In order to answer this, we analyse seven government education policy documents published in the period 2008–2017. In the document analysis, we examine the terminology used and explore in detail how multilingual matters in ECEC are presented. We discuss the findings in the light of sociopolitical context, such as the broader educational and monolingual/bilingual context and immigration in each country. Finally, we discuss the implementation of the language education policies in the ECEC curricula.

Previous studies

The research field of language education policy has expanded in recent years, focusing on how education is implicitly and explicitly based on different views of languages, multilingualism and language practices, how languages are valued in education, and what aspects of language(s) are considered important to education (Hult & Hornberger, 2016). These studies have focused on different policy layers and spaces, such as implementations of language education policy in which teachers and students are regarded as language policy makers and negotiators, and the intentional policy level in political documents (Hornberger, 2006).

Most Finnish and Norwegian research on language education policy has been aimed at the policy practices of teachers and students in formal educational contexts like schools (i.e. Jinkerson, 2011; Sickinghe, 2013). The modest share of research on ECEC contexts has mainly been ethnographic studies involving teachers, parents and children. Studies on the language discourses and ideologies of ECEC practitioners and parents (Bergroth & Palviainen, 2016; Pesch, 2018) have highlighted the conflicts between promoting, tolerating and discouraging linguistic diversity, such as the emphasis, on the one hand, on the ideal that all languages are equal and, on the other, on the importance of adequate knowledge of the language of instruction. Some of these studies on language education policy in ECEC briefly mention national policy documents (mainly the curricula) as supportive of linguistic diversity, without any further elaboration or discussion.

According to recent research on general language policy documents, both Finland and Norway recognize the benefits of linguistic diversity, although the diversity is considered Janus-faced in educational contexts: there are tensions between language diversity as a positive resource for individual learning and development, and diversity as a social problem (Nikula et al., 2012). Two parallel discourses around multilingualism can be identified: those that ‘seem to

undermine the multilingualism brought about by immigration’ and those that ‘acknowledge immigrant languages as a useful resource’ (Nikula et al., 2012, p. 60). Similarly, research on Finnish government policy documents shows that *language* is linked with Finland’s constitutional bilingualism instead of with the individual’s linguistic identity (Ihalainen & Saarinen, 2015; Pöyhönen & Saarinen, 2015). It has been found that in Finland in both government programmes and in language education policies and language policies related to formal school contexts, there is very little space for ‘other languages’ or for other kinds of bilingualism than Finnish-Swedish. Similar ambivalent discourses on multilingualism are identified in Norwegian policy documents. In a study of conceptualizations of multilingual children in two Norwegian official reports from 1995 and 2010, Bubikova-Moan (2017) found that multilingualism was considered less a resource in the later report. Despite some attempts at supporting multilingualism, the 2010 report mainly stresses the instrumental value of multilingualism in the international market, whereas the 1995 report emphasized multilingualism as an asset on both the individual and societal level. These reports have recommendations for the government, but do not necessarily represent the political orientations of the authorities. In her study on six government immigration policy documents, Kulbrandstad (2017) demonstrates that the political focus has changed over the years from a multilingual approach in education to a stronger emphasis on Norwegian as a second language. These recent studies reveal the increasing emphasis on second language learning and a monolingual ideology, with correspondingly less emphasis on linguistic diversity (Kulbrandstad, 2017; Nikula et al., 2012; Sickinghe, 2013).

Even if ECEC is generally considered to be a field with a high level of political involvement and progressive policies (Bae, 2018; Boyd & Huss, 2017), there has been less focus on the political intentionality in language issues in ECEC policy documents, often taking a supportive orientation to linguistic diversity for granted. This study aims to make more transparent the language orientations in recent policy documents for early childhood education and to discuss the implementation of these orientations.

Theoretical framework

Language ideologies in policy

Within policy research, a focus on language ideology has mostly been prominent in general studies of language policy. Woolard (1998) defines *language ideology* as systems of ideas, perceptions and beliefs, a way of seeing the world in a group, a society or

individual at a given time or time period. Language ideologies may be contradictory, but still they are not entirely random. In studies on multilingualism, language ideologies may be related, for example, to what is perceived as adequate language use, how multilingualism is considered, or how the languages involved are related to each other. The one-language-one-nation equation is an example of a language ideology (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994, pp. 60–61). Ricento (2006, p. 15) points out that language policy research can favour majoritarian interests in implicit and hegemonic ways that reflect ideologies. Some ideologies might be a manifestation of asymmetrical power relations based on social structures and ideologies that position groups – and their languages – hierarchically within a society.

A key aspect of language ideologies is the interaction between overall socio-political and cultural frameworks and the implementation of the ideologies. Woolard points out that the efficacy of ideologies – or the constructed practices – is consequential for both social and linguistic processes, “although not always consequential in the way its practitioners might envision” (Woolard, 1998, s., pp. 10–11). Hornberger (2002) and Johnson (2010, p. 63) refer to the windows of opportunity that might occur to educators/practitioners as possible *implementational* and *ideological spaces* in language policies: ‘Focusing on spaces in language policy offers a way to understand how macro-language policies relate to micro-language education practices and, particularly, how multilingual educators engage with language policy processes’ (Johnson, 2010, p. 63).

Language as resource, language as problem, and language as right

One analytical framework for examining ideologies in language policy is *language orientations*, based on Ruíz (1984). These orientations are defined as a set of values for languages and multilingualism (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ruíz, 1984). Ruíz distinguishes between three orientations in policies – *language as problem*, *language as right* and *language as resource* – which Ruíz refers to as ‘a complex of dispositions toward language and its role, and toward languages and their role in society’ (Ruíz, 1984, p. 16). The language-as-problem orientation emphasizes monolingualism and the majority language in both society and education, and sees language diversity as a social problem that needs to be solved (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ruíz, 1984, 1990). According to Ruíz (1984, p. 21), ‘this particular orientation [...] may be representative of a more general outlook on cultural and social diversity’. Linguistic diversity and minority languages are considered not to have value (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 33) or to be something

undesirable for the community, school curriculum or child (Ruíz, 2010, p. 166). In this orientation, language problems might be equated with social problems, minority language maintenance is seen as unnecessary, and language education is transitional (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 33). As regards the language-as-right orientation, Hult and Hornberger (2016, p. 35) explain that it ‘seeks to address linguistically-based inequities using compensatory legal mechanisms’. The right to use one’s own language and the right not to be discriminated based on language are mentioned as central to this orientation as well as to international conventions, treaties and human rights (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 33; Ruíz, 1984, p. 23). Some rights might be limited to specific groups such as different minority groups (Ruíz, 1984, p. 23). Ruíz (1984, pp. 24–25) sees this orientation as in many ways problematic, but highlights the need to discuss language rights in connection to language planning. According to Hult and Hornberger, language as resource is the antithesis of the language-as-problem orientation (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 38). This orientation values societal multilingualism, cultural diversity and linguistic minorities as resources, and promotes tolerance and acceptance (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ruíz, 1984). Language learning is seen as additive and language maintenance as valuable (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 33). Examples of this orientation might be considering multilingualism as a resource for everyone, not only for linguistic minorities and their communities, or as both a personal and a national resource.

These orientations have been contested by, for example, Crawford (1998) and Ricento (2005). Hult and Hornberger (2016, p. 42) claim that they have limited utility as an analytical heuristic because language policy is often influenced by ‘an amalgamation of forces including extralinguistic social issues and political expediency such that “pure” orientations may be difficult to divine’. They argue, however, that the orientations are a useful guide in deductive analysis of the values that emerge from complex policy debate and negotiation, and in bringing to light situated understandings of ‘what is thinkable about language in society’ (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 43). By using Ruíz’ framework as the analytical starting point of our analysis, we aim to make the language ideologies in ECEC policies more transparent.

Research design and methodology

As language ideologies and orientations are closely related to the socio-political and historical context and belong in the specific written context of the document in which they appear, we applied

a qualitative case study design to gain a deeper, contextual understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014, p. 16). ECEC policy might be overt and covert in political debate, social discourse and in various official documents at macro, meso and micro levels (Baldauf, 2005, p. 959). Our focus is on policy documents on the macro level, the national level, because the "actual planning at the macro level is very much a political process" (Baldauf, 2005, p. 963) and it is there that official ECEC policy is stated. The data in our study are seven policy documents. The unit of analysis in each case is the policy documents of each country, and these are regarded as embedded in the respective national context. The analysis had two phases: first, identifying and sampling policy documents, then carrying out a summative content analysis of the selected documents, which involved counting and comparing key words, followed by an interpretation of the underlying context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In the first phase of the research process, we identified political documents at the national level that make reference to language issues in ECEC. We focused on intentional policy documents (policy-intention) and left outside policy-in-implementation documents (curriculum guidelines) and policy-in-experience documents (Wiley, 2015, pp. 173–174) so that we could focus on future development and compare documents of similar purpose and genre. We have chosen one language education policy document from each country as well as two ECEC policy documents from Finland and three from Norway (cf. Section 5). While the language education policy documents mention ECEC in separate sections, in addition to general principles for language education regardless of age, the ECEC policy documents mention language issues in separate chapters.

We identified seven relevant national policy documents published between 2008–2017. We selected policy documents that were proposed in the period after both countries transferred responsibility for ECEC from their family and social ministries to their ministries of education, i.e., after 2005 in Norway and 2013 in Finland. The Norwegian documents are white papers from the government to the Storting, so they are future government policy. Common to all documents is that they are all considered strategies, recommendations or action plans, and they all share the same purpose, to guide and give direction to policy. Although in every case the policy level is governmental and the documents all give guidance on future policies, the documents are not always comparable. Firstly, while the four white papers chosen in Norway are all the same type of document, the documents from Finland are more variable: action plans, roadmaps, and strategic documents. Secondly, the Norwegian white papers are

proposals for the Storting, while the Finnish documents are published by the Ministry of Education and Culture or their workgroups and function as guidelines on different levels. Despite these dissimilarities, we have chosen to compare them because they express national, governmental orientations and intentions at a given time.

Having identified the policy documents, we proceeded to a textual content analysis consisting of three steps. First, we read the documents in order to identify explicit terms related to ECEC language education policy in the texts, i.e., key words related to multilingualism and to language learning and teaching, terms that appeared to be relevant in the context of each individual document or the documents together. Six key words were chosen to examine term-based tendencies in the policy documents: *multilingual*, *bilingual*, *mother tongue*, *first language*, *second language*, and *language diversity*. *Multicultural/cultural diversity* was later added to the list because we found that cultural and linguistic diversity were often mentioned together. None of these terms in themselves necessarily reflect language orientations, but the text around them may show how they relate to the broader social context and orientations.

The second step involved quantifying the key words identified, using the advanced document search function. The search was conducted in the language of the document. We went through the results using the context of each search to delete irrelevant use, such as headings and reference lists. Since the documents vary in length, the numbers are not directly comparable from document to document, so the quantification is interpreted from the context in which the key word is used in the individual document.

Close analysis was the third step. In it we used the results of the quantitative analysis as a starting point. We interpreted the content based on formulations, such as word choices, as they were used in the documents. According to Woolard, there is a mediating link between social structures and linguistic practices or 'forms of talk' (Woolard, 1992, p. 235). In line with Woolard, Irvine and Gal (2000, p. 37) argue that linguistic features are considered to be expressions of cultural images of people or activities, and the connection between them is based on language ideologies. They refer to these indexicalizations as semiotic processes, in which linguistic features are associated with particular expressions and utterances. Certain terms or expressions might be associated with orientation problems, rights, or resources: for example, expressions like "strength" or "value" can be linked to a resource orientation, and text elements that question or problematize something in negative terms, as in the following example: 'It is demanding

to support L1 acquisition for all children', can be linked to problems.

Through this approach we aimed to catch the flows and possible changes or differences in the discourses over a period of time and in the two different contexts (cf. Yin, 2014). One way to demonstrate internal consistency is to show that the textual evidence is consistent with the interpretation. The excerpts² used to illustrate our points are, however, limited by their inattention to the broader meanings present in the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Language orientations in ECEC policy

Multiple views of multilingualism in ECEC – the case of Finland

The Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland (MEC) is responsible for drawing up guidelines and strategic definitions for education policy as well as for preparing legislation and government decisions on education policy in Finland, including language education. As a member of European Union, Finland follows the outlines of proposals and regulations formulated by EU both on the level of language policy and of ECEC. Therefore, these policies on national and European level can be seen as woven together. In 2013, Finnish ECEC became more strongly connected to the education continuum when responsibility for ECEC was transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Language policy in Finland is outlined in the Constitution (1999) and the Language Act (2003). In addition, in 2012 the Prime Minister's Office under Jyrki Katainen published *The Strategy for the National Languages of Finland*, which was followed by the *Action Plan for the Strategy for National Languages of Finland*, published in 2017 by the Ministry of Justice while Juha Sipilä was prime minister. Together, these acts and strategy documents give a solid basis for Finnish language policy, which acknowledges multilingualism in society but highlights the national languages, Finnish and Swedish.

The language education policy document, *Multilingualism as a strength* (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017a), is the final report of an enquiry into the current state of the Finnish language reserve and levels of language competence and development needs. It concentrates on multilingualism, as its title suggests, and it states explicitly that its main focus is on languages other than Finnish and Swedish, because these two are discussed in language policy documents (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017a, p. 11). Although the document covers all stages of education, it has a specific section on ECEC, and ECEC issues are also discussed elsewhere in the document.

The two ECEC policy documents, *The history, present stage and developmental needs for early childhood education and care* (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2014) and *Roadmap on the developmental needs for early childhood education for 2017–2030* (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017b), were written by expert groups of different actors in the education sector. As the titles indicate, the focus is firmly on the future development of ECEC. The former (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2014) served as the basis of a reform of the legislation on ECEC, while the latter (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017b) discussed enrolment rates, the development of ECEC teacher education, and the needs of in-service education, inter alia.

All these documents were published in Finnish with short summaries in Swedish and English. The proposals for action put forward in *Multilingualism as a strength* and the reasoning behind the proposals were published as separate documents in Finnish, Swedish and English. These language choices for the publishing reflect the language situation in Finland, where Finnish occupies the majority position and Swedish the minority position, despite their equal status as national languages.

Despite the growing number of children with different language backgrounds in ECEC and the linguistically changing society, multilingualism and bilingualism are only barely touched upon, if at all, in the ECEC policy documents. In the language education policy document, these terms are more visible. It should be noted that in Finland bilingualism is mostly connected to bilingualism in the national languages and to societal bilingualism (Ihalainen & Saarinen, 2015; Pöyhönen & Saarinen, 2015) while multilingualism often refers to other languages or other combinations of languages. In the language education policy document, multilingualism is emphasized over bilingualism, which can partly be explained by its focus on other languages beside the national languages.

In the documents, the term *mother tongue* (or first language) refers to Finnish, Swedish and other languages. The term *second language* appears in different ways: it can refer to Finnish/Swedish as a second language for individuals with other first language(s), to Finnish/Swedish as the second language for those who are bilingual in Finnish-Swedish, or even to Finnish/Swedish as the other (national) language. Interestingly, the term language diversity/linguistic diversity is not mentioned at all. By contrast, the term multicultural/cultural diversity is found in all of the documents, getting most hits in the ECEC policy documents. The relatively low numbers and the lack of hits on multilingualism in these documents can perhaps be explained by the use of the term multicultural as a synonym for multilingual.

A closer look at the language orientations in the documents shows that they take multiple points of view to languages. The language education policy document discusses language education and learning and the importance of languages for both society and the individual. Overall, multilingualism is seen as an asset and recognized explicitly as a resource: ‘Multilingualism is dependent on context, and any kind of individual multilingualism should be recognized, accepted and seen as a resource’ (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017a, p. 16). This follows Ruiz’s (1984) original idea of seeing languages as a resource. However, it is not only the resource orientation that becomes visible. Multilingualism is discussed as a resource in society, as a right, and as challenging, but not as a problem in the way Ruiz (1984, 2010) sees it. It is written that multilingualism, linguistic diversity and language awareness (as a broad term, including e.g., multilingual awareness) should be seen as fundamental elements in all Finnish education. This is not necessarily considered easy for teachers. Although the document recognizes the benefits of multilingualism and explicitly takes the resource orientation as its starting point, it acknowledges that promoting multilingualism in less heterogeneous ECEC groups can be challenging.

Multilingualism on the individual level is discussed mainly under the themes of *Heritage language teaching* and *Finnish/Swedish as a second language*, referring to children or students with other first language(s) than either of the national languages (see also Gruber & Puskás, 2013). In the document, it is stated that,

[T]he present Curriculum for ECEC (VASU) [the curriculum] highlights language awareness and cultural diversity, but it is another matter whether pre-school teachers have the competence to promote this. According to VASU, the development of language skills in Finnish/Swedish of multilingual children must be promoted on the different aspects of language knowledge. (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017a, pp. 100-101).

The issues concerning ECEC that are discussed are not only related to children’s language learning but also to whether teachers have sufficient professional knowledge to promote language and cultural awareness in their teaching. The importance of second language development is also underlined. Here, different ideologies can be seen. On the one hand, it is important to highlight diversity in ECEC, but on the other, language skills in the national languages must be promoted. The document, however, also mentions the importance of supporting children’s mother tongue(s):

According to research, it would be good that ECEC supports all those languages that a child has. This support tells about respecting different backgrounds,

but it is also essential for the later learning and development of the child. (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017a, p. 106).

The ECEC policy documents only rarely mention languages, and then mostly just to acknowledge different languages. Mother tongues are discussed in connection with the legal rights of getting ECEC in Finnish, Swedish or Sami, or to second language teaching and mother tongue(s) other than these three. Multilingualism is mentioned only in the section on *Multilingual and multicultural children*, referring to Swedish- and Sami-speaking children, foreign-language-speaking children, and children with an immigrant background (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2014, pp. 77–79). In other words, all children except speakers of Finnish are counted as multilingual or as having a different cultural background. Compared with the language education policy document, one notices a tendency to see multilingualism or multiculturalism as touching only children who are not Finnish-, Swedish- or Sami-speaking, or even as excluding only Finnish speakers. This can create tensions or highlight otherness.

Even though multilingualism is rarely explicitly mentioned in ECEC policy documents, societal changes and linguistic and cultural diversity are implicitly present in discussions around the term multicultural. Here, multiculturalism refers to societal changes, multicultural education, and the changes necessary in teacher education and further education (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2014; Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017b). Although language learning and cultural knowledge are mentioned as important parts of future ECEC, and both ECEC policy documents acknowledge that there is a need for further education about multiculturalism, multiculturalism is also associated with challenges, pressure, demands and the need for staff professional development: ‘The situation brought about by recent immigration creates pressure to add content concerning multiculturalism to education’ (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2017b, p. 78). It is also said that multiculturalism in ECEC is an under-researched area, and that there are no explicit goals for it in the pre-school curriculum. The document (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2014, p. 163) sums up some results from two relevant studies as follows:

[...] Education in multiculturalism extends only to children with immigration background and it is carried through by the teacher of Finnish as a second language or the mother tongue teacher of the immigrated child. It does not involve the children of the majority culture. The purpose of education in multiculturalism is to integrate the child with immigration background to the majority culture and to support

her/him in the problems that may harm the integration” (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2014, p. 63) and

“Education in multiculturalism often just underlines the differences, because it has Finnish culture as its starting point” (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), 2014, p. 63).

Although these extracts highlight some problems around education in multiculturalism, they do not necessarily take a problem orientation as their starting point, but mention aspects that need to be solved in the future. Along with other examples from the ECEC policy document, these show that multiculturalism, or cultural diversity, is not directly seen as problematic, but rather as challenging for Finnish ECEC; it calls for professional development, changes in teacher education and changes in actual practices. The language orientation is not problem-oriented in terms of Ruíz’ conceptualizations (Ruíz, 1984, 2010), but rather as *challenging* (see also Rosén & Straszer, 2018). When considering the results from all the Finnish documents together, one finds multiple orientations towards languages in them.

Towards multilingualism as a challenge in ECEC policy – the case of Norway

In 2008, the Norwegian government introduced proposals for both a new language policy and a language education policy (*Languages build bridges*). The white paper on language education policy refers directly to the language policy document, and it is stated clearly that the language education policy outlined there is part of overall language policy. While overall language policy falls under the Ministry of Culture, language education policy falls under the Ministry of Education and Research (MER). After the 2008 language education policy, the Ministry proposed three white papers on ECEC policy (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2009, Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2013, and Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016). The background to this government involvement can be seen in various changes that were introduced in Norwegian ECEC in the mid-2000s. First, responsibility for ECEC was moved from the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Research and thereby officially became the first (but voluntary) step in education. In addition, a serious effort was made to expand ECEC to include all children, for which there was general agreement in the Storting. After that, however, the focus shifted from quantity and more ECEC institutions to quality and, consequently, the content of ECEC. The white paper *Quality in ECEC* (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2009) explicitly

signals a focus on the quality of the content. The other two papers, *ECEC of the future* (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2013) and *Play and learning* (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016), seek to develop the particular identity of ECEC in the future. Three of the four white papers were presented by a left-wing government under a Labour prime minister (Stoltenberg), and the fourth (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016) was proposed by the Conservative Party (Prime Minister Solberg) and a right-wing government. The four white papers are written in ‘bokmål’, which is the most widely used written language variety in Norway.

After identifying the documents, we identified and searched for key words. Table 2 shows the frequency of key words in each of the documents.

The findings demonstrate a shift in key words related to multilingualism. The terms *bi-/multilingualism* are present in all documents. There seems to be no strict distinction between *multilingual* and *bilingual*; the terms are used interchangeably. The term *multilingual* seems to be more widely used in the ECEC policy documents. The term *first language* (or mother tongue) refers mostly to linguistic or cultural minorities and their first language, and the term *second language* refers to Norwegian as a second language. Second language is more frequently used than any other term in the latest ECEC policy document, from 2016; it is not mentioned at all in the 2009 ECEC policy document. The term *linguistic diversity* is used in the language education policy document, but not in the ECEC policy documents, where the term *multiculturalism* or *cultural diversity* is used. The terminology used in the ECEC documents changes over time (with more focus on Norwegian as a second language), and one term (linguistic diversity) appears in language diversity policy but not in ECEC policy.

Close analysis gives a more nuanced picture of the language orientations. The language education policy document explicitly states a resource orientation by using the word ‘resource’: ‘Mastery of multiple languages is a valuable resource for each individual and for society’ (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2008, p. 18). At the same time, a clear commitment to facilitating second language learning is also expressed. In the document’s conclusion and in the proposals for measures relating to ECEC, Norwegian as second language is stressed. This does not appear to be expressing opposition to multilingualism as a resource. We find the same tendencies in the 2009 ECEC policy document, underlining the importance of multilingual support: ‘A quality ECEC that recognizes children’s different languages and which stimulates them in different ways will be important in developing children’s

multilingual competence.’ (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2009, p. 95). Supporting and appreciating children’s multilingual competence is a quality characteristic of ECEC. The resource orientation is also present in the 2013 policy document, although with more focus on the benefits of each language:

“A child who gets the opportunity to further develop their first language while learning a new language will get support for good development of the second language. This is important for identity development and particularly important for the child’s learning” (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2013, p. 82).

The argumentation continues to be resource oriented, in terms of both aspects of identity and second language development. In 2016, the language orientation is apparently similar, still using the word ‘resource’ related to multilingualism: ‘Multilingualism can be a resource both for the individual and for society (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016, p. 49)’. However, while multilingualism as resource is clearly stated in 2008 (‘is a valuable resource’), this is modified (‘can be a resource’) in 2016. The modification is followed by questioning the importance of support for the mother tongue (‘it is argued by some that the mother tongue is of great importance for both language and identity development’ (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016, p. 50)), problematic issues related to the proficiency of ECEC staff in Norwegian, and the challenge to the language environment from the large number of linguistic minorities (‘ECEC with a high proportion of children with another language than Norwegian may be at risk of a poor language environment when it comes to Norwegian.’ (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016, p. 52)). Additionally, the 2016 document emphasizes the importance of adequate proficiency in Norwegian before starting school. The monolingual preference is clearly expressed: ‘The government underlines that it is crucial to provide good Norwegian language pedagogy in ECE. Efforts must be much more focused. It is practically and economically very demanding to support L1 acquisition for all children.’ (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016, p. 52). This tendency to challenge previous policies that supported first language assistance is justified by practicalities and economy: with the number of children from linguistic and cultural minorities increasing over the last ten years, the cost of bilingual assistants is huge, and the government sees no immediate benefits from the measure.

Another salient aspect is the research basis that supports the suggested policy. In the 2009 ECEC policy document, reference is made to studies that

show positive correlations between ECEC attendance and minority language children’s development:

“Research underlines the importance of the mother tongue in learning a second language, and international studies emphasize that it is important to support the development of multilingualism by recognizing the mother tongue and minority culture” (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2009, p. 18).

Thus, multilingualism is presented as a goal (‘important to support the development of multilingualism’) and the first language is said to be important in supporting second language learning. Later in the same document this is taken further, extending to possible learning outcomes and school performance: ‘Research also shows that bilingual children who have received mother-tongue support in ECEC and school have better outcomes than children who have not received this.’ (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2009, p. 94). In the 2016 document, however, the same knowledge base is questioned, along with the value of bilingual assistants: ‘Previously, emphasis has been placed on the employment of bilingual assistants in ECEC. However, it is difficult to determine whether this has had any positive effect on the children’s L2 development’ (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016, pp. 51–52). Reference is also made to more evidence-based research focusing on specific measurable aspects of transfer between first and second language, such as vocabulary comprehension, language awareness and reading skills:

“There is a relationship between language awareness skills and being able to read words in the first language and the second language. For the case of comprehension, there is only a small degree of correlation between mother tongue skills and second language skills. When it comes to reading comprehension, the ability to understand the meaning of a text, language understanding in the native language has little impact on the proficiency in the second language.” (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2016, pp. 50–51)

There is therefore a shift in the research base from previous policy documents; where reference was earlier made to research in pedagogy and language teaching, the foundation is now special needs pedagogy and more evidence-based research. Subsequently, two of the government’s proposals, their support for bilingual assistants and a suggested norm for the language proficiency of children entering school from ECEC, were voted down in the Storting.

Close reading of the policy documents shows that second language development and proficiency gradually come more to the fore than children’s first language and multilingual competencies. We also see that there is a gradual shift away from arguing for

identity perspectives in multilingualism to a narrower linguistic focus on measurable second language skills, such as vocabulary, text comprehension and language awareness. This tendency for Norwegian as a second language to dominate policies at the expense of first languages is in line with other findings in previous studies in the Norwegian context: Kulbrandstad (2017) and Bubikova-Moan (2017) both point out that focusing on the importance of the second language seems to have taken over the discourse about the importance of mother tongue education for speakers of languages other than Norwegian. Relating this to Ruíz's language orientations, it seems that there has been a shift from a more resource-oriented view of multilingualism to a narrower focus on multilingualism. Even so, there is little reason to categorize the policy as an unambiguously problem-based orientation; rather, it sees multilingualism as a challenge and puts more focus on difficulties with supporting the first language and language diversity.

Discussion

Ambiguous language orientations in ECEC policy

Our analysis shows that the language orientations in the two countries' policy documents are ambiguous, but in different ways. On the one hand, the language education policy documents in both Finland and Norway basically have a resource orientation, shown in their titles and throughout the documents. On the other hand, in the ECEC policy documents, there seem to be differences. Compared to the Norwegian ECEC policy documents, the Finnish documents only rarely mention languages and mostly just acknowledge different languages. Although multilingualism and languages are not discussed in Finnish ECEC policy documents as explicitly and broadly as in Norway, questions of diversity are discussed under the topic *multiculturalism*. In Norway, multilingual issues are more explicit and more and more challenged all through the different documents. On the macro level, it appears that multilingualism is a much larger issue in Norway than in Finland, involving the highest political level in both scope and degree of detail. Whether or not to support the first language is an important and recurring issue, often treated in terms of purpose and effect. Another issue is the relationship between first and second languages and whether one language is foregrounded at the expense of the other. In both countries the challenges of multilingualism may appear to be more prominent than it benefits, but more so in Norway in the latest documents. In Norway, the resource orientation is problematized because of cost or practical questions, whereas Finnish policies stress the need for changes

in teacher education so that staff are able to work with cultural diversity. Rosén and Straszer (2018, pp. 168–169) point out that language planning always includes social, political and economic questions. Therefore, even though there might be a clear discourse of giving children the possibility of using and developing their language repertoires, as in Rosén & Straszer's study, there might not in practice be resources for this.

Although our analysis show that the resource orientation is challenged, there is little reason to say that either the Norwegian or the Finnish documents have a clear problem orientation, in Ruíz's terminology. Problems are not stated explicitly, and if there is an underlying, implicit understanding of the disadvantages of language diversity, this is mentioned after the more explicit resource orientation. Thus, it is a question of a challenge to the resource orientation. The monolingual norm is clearly present in both countries. In Norway, Norwegian as the second language comes to the fore. This can be attributed to Norway's overall language policy, where multilingualism is seen as a resource but still the overall goal is strengthening and promoting Norway's official languages and language varieties (Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, 2008, p. 64). While Norway is more monolingual in the first place, Finland is in a different situation because it has several official languages. Thus, one could expect that Finnish language policy would be more oriented towards multilingualism in the first place, and therefore more easily open to other languages. But although Finland is multilingual, multilingualism here is also based on a monolingual norm. Although the legislation and the country are built on societal bilingualism, societal bilingualism can be seen from the viewpoint of parallel monolingualism (Heller, 2006), as many scholars have mentioned (see e.g., Boyd & Palviainen, 2015; From & Sahlström, 2017). The more articulated challenges in Norway should probably be seen in the light of the increased number of children with a minority language background, and the larger amount of such children there. Also, Norway has a longer history of immigration than Finland. In general, there is also a greater degree of politicization in the integration debate and policy (see Kulbrandstad, 2017 for further discussion). From a political point of view, integration is expected to take place quickly, and this will primarily be through learning Norwegian as the second language.

There is a monolingual ideology underlying the policy that sees multilingualism as challenging, but still as a resource. This ambiguity implies an open ideological space. According to Johnson (2013), national language policies can work restrictively towards particular languages and their users. However, language policies also can and do open

up spaces for multilingual education in which educators can implement education programs that see minority languages as resources and therefore create implementations or practices that promote multilingualism (Hornberger, 2002). Even restrictive monolingual policies can leave spaces for their implementation that can be interpreted in local policies or in the field in a way that sees diversity and multilingualism as resources (see e.g., Johnson, 2010; Gort et al., 2008). Sometimes language policies and education policies might clash or take differing orientations to language on different policy levels (Bergroth & Palviainen, 2017; Hult & Hornberger, 2016).

As we have shown, sometimes a resource orientation in the documents is followed by discourses that challenge that orientation. Seeing multilingualism as an asset and resource can be followed by the juxtaposition of national language(s) and other languages, in which the national language(s) might dominate. Runfors (2013, p. 148) argues that failing to discuss conflicts, such as those between different cultural values, in official documents can be interpreted as politicians' and policymakers' reluctance to discuss the complex questions that come up in teachers' work in preschools. In this way, Runfors continues, these questions are left to the teachers to deal with, i.e., they create *implementational space*.

Open implementational spaces in ECEC language education policy

As we have shown, the ideological space created in the Finnish and Norwegian policy documents is rather ambiguous and open. The documents highlight multilingualism as a resource, but also recognize this orientation as challenging. The absence of a clear language education policy for ECEC creates an open implementational space for practitioners to fill. There is a dynamic relationship within and between the different layers in policy – the micro, meso and macro levels – related to new curricula and constantly changing practices. In both Norway and Finland we can identify a change in the language orientations in the curricula for ECEC. Compared to the previous curricula for ECEC dating from 2005 (Finland) and 2011 (Norway), the most recent curricula (Finland 2016, Norway 2017) highlight multilingualism as a part of ECEC for all children and discuss the possibility of supporting the mother tongue(s) of children with other home language(s) than Finnish/Swedish/Norwegian, as well as the development of these languages (see also Sopanen, 2018). In the light of our results, especially in the matter of ECEC policy documents, it seems that even though the macro ECEC policy documents do not discuss multilingualism or see it as unambiguously a resource, the

curricula take more of a resource orientation towards multilingualism.

As mentioned earlier, macro-level policies relate to and depend on micro-level practices (Johnson, 2010; Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003). When the field is largely politicized, the professional's voice is important in negotiating policy (Johnson, 2010). Teachers in different ECEC contexts navigate between different, even opposite, policies and discourses, which is not always an easy task (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020). As we have seen in previous research (Johnson, 2010; Palviainen & Mård-Miettinen, 2015; Palviainen et al., 2016; Puskás, 2018), professional practices may challenge the policy-of-intention layer, where teachers might exercise a different practice than the one the authorities articulate. In questions about constructing the local curricula, the two countries might take a diverging point-of-view. In her study on local curriculum work in Norway and Finland, Mølstad (2015) found that Finnish teachers may enjoy more extended teacher autonomy than Norwegian teachers when constructing local curricula. Mølstad (2015, pp. 455, 457) continues that in Norway, the local curriculum work is 'intended to deliver the national curriculum' whereas in Finland the local work with national curriculum is seen as a 'pedagogical tool, which is used for legitimizing local curriculum work'. This perspective on teacher autonomy in the two contexts might give another point-of-view to the possibilities to challenge and reformulate the policies on local levels, which in many times depends on the space that is left for discussion and implementation. The possible resistance of a policy on a local level may again lead to changes in policy documents, as Bae (2018) shows: the resistance to the ECEC policy in Norway in the 2009 white paper (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2009) resulted in more nuanced descriptions in the following white paper from the same government (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2013).

Puskás (2018) has investigated the interaction between the Swedish ECEC curriculum and teachers' implementation of the curriculum. As the curriculum offers no specific guidelines on how to manage the two-fold aim of maintaining Swedish as the institution's language and embracing a multilingual approach, teachers decide how to implement the policy. However, in the absence of an explicit language education policy, an implicit language education policy can prevail and either open or close doors on multilingualism. An open language education policy for ECEC on a macro level is not necessarily a disadvantage, but may be an opportunity to see multilingualism as a resource (see e.g., Alstad, 2013). Much research has focused on how curricula are implemented in teachers' practice. When we see differences between policy in intention and the

curricula, we should also find out more about the negotiations taking place at this intersection between political intentions and the policies that are adopted.

Conclusion

In this study, we have analysed seven policy documents related to multilingual issues in ECEC, respectively four documents from Norway and three from Finland. We investigated the language orientations in the policy documents by using Ruíz’ framework of language orientations as analytical approach. We found that the resource orientations in the two countries are rather ambiguous and consequently, the ideological spaces are open. In the case of Norway, where Norwegian has hegemony, the number of children speaking other languages than the majority language(s), is fast increasing. Multilingualism is addressed as a resource, but is recently challenged by both practical and economical issues and also by questioning the knowledge and research base for policy and practice. In the case of Finland, documents have a multiple point-of-views to languages. Multilingualism is seen as an asset in the language education policy document, but is vague and implicit in the education policy documents, mostly referring to multiculturalism rather than multilingualism. Although Finland is bilingual in Finnish/Swedish, it is still based on monolingual norms. The ECEC curriculum in Finland do not have the same degree of political involvement as in Norway, as Finnish teachers have more autonomy than in Norway.

There are ambiguous language orientations and thus open ideological spaces in ECEC policies in Finland and Norway. There are also increasing expectations to the teacher profession in general (Cochran-Smith,

2013). The resource orientation is not only an easy solution. Hult and Hornberger (2016) and Runfors (2013) call for critical theoretical thinking about language from a socio-political viewpoint so that the resource orientation does not serve the interests of the dominant majority and maintain power inequities. This calls for a critical multilingual awareness (García, 2008) in pre-service and in-service teacher education, which includes both knowledge of multilingualism as well as language teaching and understanding of the political understanding of the social, political and economic struggles related to multilingualism. Teacher education programs relate to both their own and ECEC framework plans (where applicable). In teacher education and training, and in particular ECEC teacher education, the range of language subjects – if any – vary greatly (Garton, 2019). More research on language orientations in framework plans and curricula for teacher education is needed, as well as on how teacher educators manage and understand language education policies and prepare their students.

Notes

1. *Linguistic and cultural minorities* In Norwegian statistics are defined as ‘children with ethnic languages and cultural backgrounds other than Norwegian, Swedish, Danish or English’ (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). In Finland, children with a registered first language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami are counted as *foreign language speakers* (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018).
2. All excerpts from the policy documents have been translated from the original language into English for the purpose of this article.
3. In the Finnish context, Swedish and even Finnish can sometimes be referred to as *the second language* or as *the other national language*. In Table 1 we have

Table 1. The frequency of key words in Finnish documents.

	multiling*	biling*	first language/ mother tongue	second language ³	language diversity	multicultur*/ cultural diversity
Language education policy						
Multilingualism as a strength	75	45	104	25 (15)	-	16
ECEC policy						
The history, present stage and developmental needs for ECEC	-	3	16	5	-	23
Roadmap on the development of ECEC for 2017–2030	-	-	-	-	-	13

Table 2. The frequency of keywords in the Norwegian documents.

	multi-/bi- ling*	first language/mother tongue	second language	language diversity	multicultur*/ cultural diversity
Language education policy					
Languages build bridges (2008)	79	29	51	17	21
ECEC policy					
Quality in ECEC (2009)	47	10	-	-	12
ECEC in the future (2013)	18	12	5	-	13
Time for play and learning (2016)	40	44	56	-	3

distinguished between hits in Finnish/Swedish as a second language (L2) and Finnish/Swedish as the other national/second language. Hits in the latter are marked in parentheses.

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