



## Brief

# Resource and Deficiency: Teachers' Views on Complex Multilingual Practices in Early Childhood Education and Care

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This study explores teachers' experiences of multilingual practices in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The purpose was to gain insight into the underlying assumptions that shape ECEC teachers' multilingual practices. Linguistic diversity has become a reality in most mainstream ECEC centres in Norway, but teachers generally have little knowledge of the children's first languages. The Norwegian curricula and policy documents emphasize linguistic diversity as a resource and acknowledge and encourage multilingualism; however, the implementation of such multilingual practices is left to the practitioners. This study builds on the pedagogical concept of translanguaging, considering children's multilingual repertoires as a tool for interaction, learning, and cognitive development, where meaning-making is essential.

Previous research has shown that teachers' views about multilingualism may influence their practices. Our approach focuses on the functions of teachers' beliefs as filters for interpretation, frames for defining problems, and guides for action (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Beliefs can be identified through discursive storytelling and everyday theories that are taken for granted, shared, and passed on. A key assumption is that conversations among groups of professionals are shaped by narrative discourses and interpretative patterns that seem to be "natural" or "appropriate" but implicitly rely on the values and power structures of the wider social context.

Data were collected through four focus group interviews with 20 ECEC teachers. The analysis of the ECEC teachers' narratives identified four emerging interpretative repertoires:

resource-based, compensatory, monolingual, and feelings of professional powerlessness. All four interpretative repertoires appeared in all the interviews, which suggests a pattern of beliefs. The interpretative repertoires were not mutually exclusive, and contradictory views were expressed. One participant could, for instance, explicitly view multilingualism as a resource while simultaneously expressing feelings of powerlessness regarding how to practice multilingual didactics without sufficient resources. Similarly, monolingual Norwegian development was identified as the objective of planned activities while the teachers described spontaneous translingual activities. The participants in this study seemed to transfer experiences from special needs education to multilingual practices, conceptualising emergent multilingual children as “lacking language skills.” Overall, the results suggest that the participants were uncertain about how to organize and implement multilingual practices in a diverse ECEC context. The findings indicate varied and complex linguistic practices built on formal and experience-based competencies and personal beliefs. The results provide insights into ECEC teachers’ understandings of their own and the children’s positions within a complex multilingual ECEC context and have implications for further research-based multilingual development of ECEC teacher education and practices.

**Keywords:** *ECEC; multilingual; narrative; translanguaging*