

Multilingualism, Peer Interactions, and Play

A Multi-Methods Investigation in Early Childhood Education and Care in the Netherlands

This dissertation is about multilingualism in early childhood education and care (ECEC), with a focus on the peer interactions and play of multilingual children. In many Western countries, including in the Netherlands, linguistic diversity in ECEC has increased. There are indications of language-based inequity in the literature: multilingual children in ECEC might not always experience many peer interactions and play of high quality, but it is unclear which factors might explain these findings. Our aim therefore was to investigate the peer interactions and play of multilingual children in ECEC in the Netherlands, and to examine which individual and situational language factors relate to them.

We conducted a literature review study, a teacher study based on surveys and interviews, an observation-based social network study, and a video observation study. Our results shed a positive light on multilingualism in ECEC. Children could learn multiple languages in ECEC, multilingual children could have many peer interactions if they played with peers with a similar language background, and they could have high play quality if they used their home language. Bayesian analyses showed no negative effect of multilingualism on peer interactions or play quality. Instead, situational factors, such as group composition, pedagogical practices, and language policy, seemed to relate to peer interactions and play in our studies. In terms of practical implications, this dissertation suggests that the use of home languages in ECEC might have positive effects on peer interactions and play. Teachers seemed to play an important role in creating opportunities for peer interactions.

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